



## **BRYN COMPOST LIAISON GROUP**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON MONDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER 2016 AT 2.00 P.M.**

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**PRESENT:**

Councillor N. George - Chair

**Councillors:**

H.W. David, J.A. Pritchard

**Together with:**

Residents: Mr J. Cuthbert, Mrs G. Davies, Mrs A. Gray, Mr G. Mahony, Mr G. Reynolds, Mr J. Szura and Mrs C. Woods

Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm (Bryn Compost): Ms J. Morgan, Mr R. Thomas

Natural Resources Wales: Mr J. Goldsworthy, Ms C. Harvey, Mr A. Ward

Public Health Wales: Mrs T. Deacon

Environmental Health: Miss C. Edwards, Mr G. Mumford

Officers: R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Angel, D. Bolter, W. David, G.J. Hughes, M.P. James and S. Morgan, local resident representative Mr W. Griffiths, and Public Health Wales representatives Dr G. Richardson, Mrs M. Bowley and Mr Huw Brunt.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

#### **3. MINUTES – 21ST JUNE 2016**

Subject to it being noted that the data range for the overview of odour complaint data within Agenda Item 5 (Updates from Natural Resources Wales) should refer to 1st January 2016 - 31st May 2016, the minutes of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group meeting held on 21st June 2016 were received and noted.

#### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

Discussion took place regarding the Composting Best Practice Document which is being produced by DEFRA (the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and had been referred to at a number of previous meetings. A Member asked if there were any developments regarding a potential release date for the document and Adam Ward from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) explained that unfortunately there had been no further progress made on the matter.

Members of the Group expressed their frustration with the continual delay in the release of the document. They stressed the importance of the document and the significant public interest surrounding its contents. Officers from NRW explained that it is not a statutory requirement for this document to be produced, but offered to liaise with the Environment Agency to determine whether any similar best practice documents for composting have been released that may be of use by the Group.

A Member sought clarification on whether NRW had liaised with DEFRA on the document since the last meeting of the Liaison Group. Mr Ward explained that initially Natural Resources Wales had experienced difficulty in establishing the most appropriate contact point at DEFRA in regards to the document, but it was eventually determined that DEFRA's strategy department held responsibility for the document. However, sickness absence within the NRW Team dealing with the matter had led to a further delay in communicating with DEFRA on the progress of the document. Mr Ward explained that normal service had now resumed within the team and that they would chase up the progress of the document with DEFRA accordingly.

#### **5. MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

Members noted that Mr Malcolm Davies had recently tendered his resignation as a local resident representative of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group. A letter had been sent to Mr Davies to thank him for his valued contribution to the meetings. It was agreed that suggestions for a replacement local resident representative would be forwarded to the relevant Officer following the meeting.

It was also noted that Mr Rhys Hughes (Team Leader) had recently accepted a new position within Natural Resources Wales. Ms Catriona Harvey was welcomed to the meeting as his replacement.

#### **6. UPDATE FROM NATURAL RESOURCES WALES**

The Group were referred to the overview of odour complaint data for Bryn Compost between 1st June 2016 and 28th October 2016, which illustrated the number of odour complaint calls received each month by NRW and the number of instances where composting odours were substantiated. The majority of complaints (108 in total) were received from 26th August 2016 onwards with a total of 78 complaints received in September alone. 45 of these complaints were attended by NRW Officers, with 15 attributed to compost odours, 19 attributed to farming odours, and the source of odour for the other 11 complaints being unidentifiable.

Mr Ward explained that although an increase in odour complaints was expected during a period of increased landspreading in August and September, the figures are very disappointing as the waste operation has been continuing to move in the right direction by improving infrastructure and management procedures. Routine inspections and audits by NRW have not uncovered any major change or worsening of odours caused by the waste operation.

Despite the apparent high volume in complaints, NRW only substantiated 2 separate compost

related odour events in this period. The investigations have been dealt with using the formal regulation of the operation by scoring breaches against relevant permit conditions. As a result of these investigations and the overall increase in complaints, the operator has agreed to improve their internal investigation and reporting to NRW and the Local Authority.

It was explained that a change to the Council's collection and delivery arrangements for food and garden waste will result in increased volumes of food waste being diverted to anaerobic digestion (AD) and allow the operator to further improve the management of compost storage in the quarry. From November onwards, little to no food waste will be entering the composting process as it will be diverted to the AD Plant. Therefore, the operator will be aiming to compost green waste only in future. It may take several months before all food and green waste compost is removed from site, but NRW expects to see a further improvement in the next 6 months in terms of odours caused by the composting process.

Discussion of the dataset ensued and a local resident Member referred to the movement of compost product from the in-vessel composting system (IVC) to windrows located within the quarry at Bryn Compost. He asked why this product had been moved to the quarry, which is in closer proximity to Gelligaer village, instead of moved further away from the village. Mr Ward reminded the Group that compost product had always been moved to the quarry at some point in the process. The procedure was changed in Summer 2014, when it was decided to move the compost windrows directly to the concrete pad in the quarry for the final maturation stage. This change in process, together with the use of smaller windrows, had led to a decrease in odour complaints.

A local resident Member referred to previous meetings of the Liaison Group and reiterated that the Group had never been made aware that compost had been moved to the quarry. NRW clarified that a permit has always been in place to allow the storage of food and green waste compost as well as green waste only composting. The resident referred to the 2 recent breaches of permit conditions incurred by the operator and queried whether penalties would be imposed as a result. Mr Ward explained that a number of points are incurred for each breach, and that if sufficient points are accrued, then this could potentially lead to a drop in the compliance banding of the site, which could in turn have financial implications for the operator in the next financial year.

Discussion took place regarding the new treatment arrangements for food and garden waste. Mr Ward confirmed that garden waste would still be processed via IVC and the Chair explained that temporary arrangements are in place for Winter 2016 whereby garden waste is collected upon request.

A local resident Member referred to the farm's new slurry handling system and stated that residents are still experiencing a "bad egg smell", which had been attributed to the old process where the slurry pit crust was broken prior to it being stirred (which caused the release of odour-creating sulphide gases). Miss Edwards advised the Group that the slurry pit is part of Gelliargwellt Farm (and not the Bryn Compost facility) and therefore it is outside the remit of the Group. Mrs Edwards also reiterated that this was an historic issue in that the new slurry handling system means that the contents of the slurry pit are no longer agitated and stirred, and that this had been explained to the Group on several occasions.

The resident also sought clarification on a suitable course of action regarding the "bad egg" odour that he is still experiencing and Mrs Edwards explained that such odours should be reported to Environmental Health so that the matter can be investigated. She added that as the slurry pit is no longer being agitated, it is no longer a source of odour, and therefore it is important that any reports of similar odours are investigated promptly. The resident stated that he had reported this odour the previous week and Mrs Edwards confirmed that Environmental Health Officers had attended the site but could not detect an odour on that occasion.

Clarification was sought on the response time for an Officer to attend site once an odour is

reported to the Natural Resources Wales 24 Hour Incident Hotline. Mrs Edwards explained that composting odours should be reported to the NRW hotline and that farming odours should be reported to Environmental Health. Mrs Edwards explained that once the NRW contact centre receive a certain amount of composting odour complaints then this will trigger NRW officers to visit the site. Members of the Group explained it was difficult to differentiate between certain types of odours. Mrs Edwards provided guidance on the differences between compost and farming odours and explained that residents could telephone NRW or Environmental Health if they were unsure of the odour type.

Discussion took place regarding the old process involving the breaking of the slurry pit crust. The Group referred to an observation previously made by a NRW Officer who had described the odour being released as “offensive and strong”. Mrs Edwards explained that it had been established at previous meetings that such odours were released when the pit was first agitated. Additionally, she explained that the NRW Officer had been stood in close proximity to the slurry pit when the crust was broken and the observation was made. Mrs Edwards added that no odour complaints had been received by the public on that occasion. Debate took place on whether the remarks from NRW had been made in that context and the Chair reminded Members that the slurry pit did not fall under the remit of the Group.

Members of the Group reported that calls to the NRW Hotline are going unanswered or that there is a need to wait on the line for an extended period of time before the call is picked up. Mr Goldsworthy from NRW acknowledged that call volumes can be high and explained that there is occasionally a need for people to call back at a quieter time. Members were informed that lines are manned 365 days a year and that a separate contact number has now been developed, which will eventually supersede the old Hotline number that is shared with the Environment Agency. Mr Goldsworthy advised the Group that the new number is **03000 653000**, which will be publicised on the NRW website and included in the monthly update newsletters sent to local residents.

A Member expressed disappointment at the setback regarding the recent high volume of odour complaints and sought clarification on the process for non-composting odour complaints received by NRW. Mr Ward explained that if NRW attend site and farming activity odours are detected, this information is passed to Environmental Health. The Group were advised that the operator issues a schedule of notification of all farming and composting activities, which is a proactive mechanism to provide NRW with advance notice of situations that might cause odour incidents. Mr Ward gave assurances that decisions are not made solely on the basis of this schedule and that NRW consider all the information at hand when making a decision on whether to attend site to investigate the odour. The Member expressed concerns that the recent spike in complaints could be from a previously undetected cause. Mr Ward explained that there was nothing to indicate any particular cause and it was hoped that matters would continue to improve over the next 6 months.

Discussion took place regarding the substantiated farm odours included in the dataset from NRW. Ms Edwards confirmed that all such instances were referred to Environmental Health and that the majority of odours related to the spreading of manure, which is an accepted farming practice under UK law. The Group were reminded that farming odour complaints fell outside their remit and a Member asked why this information was included in the dataset if that was the case. Mrs Edwards offered to provide further information to the Group in relation to farming activity odour complaints outside of the meeting.

A local resident Member queried whether there is an out of hours contact number for Environmental Health in order to report farming odours. Mrs Edwards explained that this number is for emergencies only and that any odour events would be investigated in the daytime. The resident made reference to a “violent smell” constantly in the area which was causing residents to feel physically sick. Mrs Edwards explained that that farming activities such as slurry spreading take place in the daytime and therefore she would expect any odour complaints to be received at that time. The resident stated that the odour was being experienced in the evenings and night-time, and Mrs Edwards explained that Environmental

Health receive notification of farming activities (such as cowshed clear outs), which are daytime activities. She added that residents could telephone the out of hours number in order for the complaint to be logged but that Officers would not be able to respond to the matter until daytime.

A Member referenced the complaints he had received from residents in this regard and suggested that these odours were actually composting odours and were not being recorded accurately. Mr Ward explained that NRW also receive out of hours calls relating to odour complaints. He stated that NRW did not believe there was an error of judgement on their part in categorising the odours and suggested that other factors could be playing a part in the odours, such as wind directionality.

Mrs Edward reiterated to Members that farming activities are outside the remit and terms of reference of the Group. She reminded Members that they were welcome to contact her with any queries or concerns regarding farming activities at Gelliargwellt Farm outside of the meeting.

## **7. UPDATE FROM PUBLIC HEALTH WALES**

Ms Tracey Deacon from Public Health Wales summarised the briefing paper prepared for the Group, which was included in the meeting papers. The briefing was intended as an update for previous reports presented to the Liaison Group, which were compiled in response to residents' concerns expressed about the possible health effects of Bryn Compost.

The report compared data on disease prevalence for asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and depression across Wales, the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, and GP practices in Gelligaer, Nelson and Ystrad Mynach. Members were advised that the data previously presented to the Group has been replicated where available and that the disease prevalence for these illnesses across the Caerphilly GP practices are in line with regional and national trends.

The Group welcomed the update and thanked Mrs Deacon for her report. A local resident Member referred to the original report presented to the Group in 2009 and expressed concerns as to the long-term effects of Bryn Compost on the physical and mental health of residents. The resident also highlighted concerns regarding the more immediate psychological impact arising from the odours experienced in the area. She stated that although she had previously commended the site for improvements made, she felt that standards had now slipped again, and that she would wish to see a marked improvement in the future.

In response to a Member's query, Mrs Deacon stated that GPs did not receive payment to contribute data specifically for this report. She explained that the data is routinely collected by practices in order to meet their contracts (where they have to meet a number of performance indicators) and that this data is freely available. The performance indicators can change over time, which had happened with the depression indicator, thus preventing an analysis of the trend for depression.

## **8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Discussion took place regarding the quarterly bioaerosol monitoring conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University. It was confirmed that all recorded bioaerosol levels were below the appropriate levels set by the Environment Agency.

Members of the Group asked for a comment from Bryn Compost on the issues raised at the meeting regarding the farm odours. Mr Thomas of Bryn Compost stated that these matters were outside the remit of the Group.

Discussion took place regarding the reception building at the Bryn Compost site which houses the new AD Plant, and Ms Morgan of Bryn Compost summarised the layout of the inner and outer doors leading to the AD Plant. It was disputed by Members as to whether they had viewed the AD Plant on a recent site visit. A local resident Member claimed that he had detected an odour outside the reception building whilst attending the site visit. A Member queried the length of time that the inner and outer doors are left open for, and Ms Morgan confirmed that it takes 23 seconds for these doors to open and close.

Ms Edwards responded to the comments of Members and reminded them that they had viewed the AD facility during the last site visit. She explained that no odours had been detected during the visit and that the Group had commented on how well the facility was run. The local resident Member responded by explaining that although the reception hall was spotless, there was a "sickly smell" outside the premises and that he can smell it in Legion's Way in Gelligaer. He also commented that it is stronger in Legion's Way than it is at the site. Ms Edwards explained that in normal circumstances the odour is stronger nearer the source of the problem and gets progressively milder the further away it travels from the site. This is because the odour would be dispersed in the atmosphere and buffered around by the wind, thus diluting the odour.

The resident explained that he had also detected the same odour on a number of occasions in the Penybryn area, and expressed his frustration with the reporting process. He explained that the odour often disperses within 5 minutes, so it is gone by the time Officers attend, and suggested that Officers should knock on doors in the affected area to substantiate the odour from other local residents. He maintained that the odour has a distinct "sickly" smell and is not as a result of slurry spreading activities.

Mr Goldsworthy acknowledged the difficulties highlighted by the resident and explained that the operator have improved their reporting procedures so that NRW have advance notice of all farming and composting activities. A Member called for a more substantive investigation into the odours detected in the Penybryn area. Mrs Edwards explained that she was not aware of any changes in procedures by the operator that would generate a different odour and that if there was a significantly different odour, this would be investigated. Environmental Health had not previously been notified of any concerns regarding changes to odour types.

Discussion took place regarding the frequency of meetings and a Member suggested that these should be increased to 3-monthly intervals, given the recent spike in complaints. Representatives from Bryn Compost and Natural Resources Wales explained that they were unable to support this change, and the Chair suggested that the Group should wait until the new AD process is implemented to see whether complaints settle down.

Discussion also took place regarding the terms of reference for the Group. A Member suggested that there was a need to look at the wider issues raised at the meetings and that the terms of reference should be reviewed and expanded to cover farming activities at the site. Arising from this, it was moved and seconded that the terms of reference be reviewed at the next meeting of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group. The Chair explained that he would need to seek advice from the appropriate Officers before further action could be taken on this matter.

A local resident Member asked for it to be noted that she was unhappy with the meetings remaining at 5-monthly intervals, given the contentious issues raised at the meeting. The Chair confirmed that advice would be sought with regards to reviewing the terms of reference at the next meeting, and that this meeting would be scheduled for February 2017. He also confirmed that the Group would be updated on proceedings in due course.

The meeting closed at 3.12 p.m.