



## **BRYN COMPOST LIAISON GROUP**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE COUNCIL OFFICES, PENALLTA HOUSE ON WEDNESDAY, 11TH JULY 2012 AT 3.00 P.M.**

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**PRESENT:**

D.V. Poole - Chairman

**Councillors:** Mrs. A. Blackman, D. Bolter, H.W. David, W. David, G.J. Hughes, S. Morgan and Mrs. J. A. Pritchard

**Residents:** Mrs. G. Davies, Mr M. Davies, Mr W. Griffiths, Mrs. P. Lapsa, Mr T. Matthews, Mr R. Matthews, Mr G Reynolds and Mrs. C. Woods

**Gelliargwellt Farm:** Mr P. Colley and R. Thomas

**Public Health Wales:** Mr H. Brunt

**Environment Agency:** Mr P. Burgess, Mr A. Carter, Mrs. M. Davies and Mr A. Evans

**Environmental Health:** Ms C. Edwards and Mr G. Mumford

**Officers:** R.J. Thomas (Committee Services Officer)

#### **CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME**

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting and gave his appreciation to the previous Chairman, Councillor R. Gough and for the progress made to date.

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: A. Angel and M.P. James; Residents: Mr J. Cuthbert and Mrs. A. Gray; Public Health Wales: Mrs. M. Bowley; Gelliargwellt Farm: Mr A. Price; Environment Agency: Mr L. Merlini

#### **2. MINUTES - 28TH MARCH 2012**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group held on the 28th March 2012 be approved as a correct record.

#### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

A Member raised concerns that a formal statement/press release had been issued by the Environment Agency shortly after the closure of the meeting, while Members had had to wait

until Friday to receive a copy by the clerk to the group. Mrs. M. Davies informed Members that the press release had been in draft form and following the discussions held at the meeting it had been decided it would be in the best interests of all parties to release the document sooner rather than later. In addition, it was highlighted that until the meeting took place, actions to be taken by Bryn Compost to either amend the process or reduce the tonnage of waste received, were unknown.

**The Chairman sought and received an assurance that the Liaison Group would be the first point of contact in the future, and information would go through him or the clerk to the group.**

Following receipt of information in relation to Mr N. Richards and a member of the group, it was confirmed that he would no longer be invited or would attend meetings of the Liaison Group.

#### **4. UPDATES FROM ENVIRONMENT AGENCY WALES**

Copies of the Bryn Compost odour complaints records, assessment results and indicators of breaches were circulated for Members information.

Mr P. Burgess informed the group that Mrs. M. Davies had moved to a new role with effect from 1st June and that Mr A. Carter would be replacing her. In the interim, Mr A. Evans was present to ensure continuity for the group.

Mrs. M. Davies referred to the odour assessment results that allowed a comparison between 2011 and 2012. It was acknowledged that compost odours had increased and that action needed to be taken. The site had given explanations in response to a number of the complaints, in particular the use of oversize material being placed on the compost. Although this was a routine part of the process, the compost was still quite wet at the time and this resulted in odours emanating whilst it continued to break down.

Officers had spoken to the site and they had agreed to reduce the amount of food waste being processed at the site by sending the 'food only' collections (not mixed with green waste) to an AD site in Wolverhampton. Co-mingled collections (green and food waste mixed) only were being dealt with through the compost site. In addition, the process had been varied to require the source material to be kept for a longer period within the building to ensure its stability before final maturation in the air outside.

Bryn Compost had also received a caution for a serious odour event and Mrs. M. Davies thanked residents for helping to collate evidence to facilitate this course of action. Further checks would be carried out, but she asked Members to note that as it takes 20 weeks to complete the composting process, so it would take time for any odour reductions to be realised. Another proactive intensive monitoring study may be carried out after this time period.

Members sought clarification as to whether the site should be working on weekends and bank holidays; in particular in regard to the recent Jubilee bank holiday, and comments were made regarding the differing odour strengths between Nelson and St Cattwg. Mrs. M. Davies confirmed that the composting process could not be stopped, once initiated, however there should be no spreading of slurry on bank holidays.

A Member then commented on the lack of updates from the Public Health Service and concerns were raised following recent newspaper articles linking legionella disease to recycled compost. A request for further analysis of the health risks was made. **Mr H. Brunt stated the group had previously received health analysis information, and he agreed to bring this back to the Liaison Group.** He also confirmed that the Environment Agency regularly send bio-aerosol monitoring results to him for consultation and comment. Based on

these results, there were no Public Health concerns. In addition, due to the processes used on site, he confirmed there was no risk of pathogens or legionella disease.

A Member questioned the time taken to resolve residents' concerns and he highlighted the need to improve their perception of both public health issues and the actions taken by the Environment Agency. The Chairman confirmed this was a shared desire of the Liaison Group and he reiterated the recent action taken by the Environment Agency and Bryn Compost.

Members questioned the management of the site, as what appeared to be basic errors were causing odours to emanate. Mrs. M. Davies confirmed the procedures used were routine, however composting was a living process and the material was constantly changing. Mr P. Colley had spent many years studying the subject, and processes had improved during that time. Information regarding the training of staff would be given later in the meeting.

A Member asked to view the complaint log sheet to establish exactly what was recorded when a telephone complaint was made. **The Chairman asked that a sample be brought to the next meeting to illustrate this.**

Clarification was then sought regarding the waste brought onto site and the mix of material was discussed. Mr P. Colley confirmed CCBC was the only local authority to mix its green and food recyclable waste and no waste was received from private sources. Mrs. M. Davies gave further clarification that Merthyr Tydfil CBC collected all recyclable waste at the same time but it was placed in separate units within the vehicles.

Members reiterated their frustrations over the time taken to resolve the odour issues and the Environment Agency's perceived lack of action against Bryn Compost. The Chairman and Mrs. M. Davies reiterated the remedial action taken whilst working in unison with the operators and informed the group of the financial penalties made against them for any breaches. The need for sufficient evidence was paramount to any investigation or closure order made by the Environment Agency, as they had a legal framework to work within.

Members repeated concerns regarding Public Health issues and Mr H. Brunt confirmed that the Environment Agency sent monitoring results to him to interpret on a quarterly basis. If a breach was noted, the Environment Agency was contacted immediately. Mrs. M. Davies confirmed data relating to these tests were available on the website. **Mr H. Brunt offered to summarise his findings at the next meeting. This was welcomed by the Chairman.**

Further discussions took place as to the possibility of food contamination from airborne pathogens. Mr H. Brunt advised he could not comment without testing a sample of the food, however Ms C. Edwards confirmed that she was not aware of any issues arising from the random sampling that took place across the county borough by Environmental Health Services. In addition Mr H. Brunt highlighted the unlikelihood of pathogens emanating from Bryn Compost due to the level of on-site monitoring and the tight legislation that governed the site. Ms C. Edwards added that food compost was kept in the tunnel for 48 hours at high temperature in order to comply with Animal By-Product legislation and to destroy pathogens. Bio-aerosol monitoring around the perimeter of the site indicate that pathogens were not present and therefore not emanating from the site.

A Member then questioned whether extra work was being undertaken on site, due to the higher than normal machinery noise, heard as he was leaving for the meeting. Mr P. Colley confirmed there was no additional activity being carried out on site.

A Member again raised concerns regarding the issue of pathogens and possible food contamination. Mr H. Brunt repeated that there was no data to suggest this was happening and Ms C. Edwards advised that this concern had been addressed in previous meetings. Local GPs had been contacted and it was established that there were no issues highlighted within the community.

Residents' then commented on the aforementioned management of the site, and raised concerns that it appeared only one man at Bryn Compost was fully qualified. The need for the site to be properly managed, to limit any possible health risks for future generations was stressed. Mrs. M. Davies confirmed that the site was governed by the European Union's Animal By-Products Regulations. The site also used an automated process to count down the required 48 hours once the waste had reached the approved temperature. Using this system, there was no possibility of human error. She added that air quality monitoring had taken place at the local school previously to safeguard the children, and the results showed that the levels of compounds tested were well within the European limits.

A Member commented on the Animal By-Products Regulations and due to the perceived public health concerns, questioned whether the regulations worked in an industrial environment. A comment was also made in regard to recent planning applications by Bryn Compost and the way in which the Planning Committee considered the applications. The Chairman asked that comments be restricted to the matter in hand, and not digress to others.

A Member acknowledged the legal constraints that the Environment Agency worked within, but highlighted the residents' frustrations at what they perceived to be a lack of action taken against the site. Clarification was sought regarding the process involved in obtaining a stop notice and Mrs M. Davies confirmed the need for a "serious risk of pollution". While the site emitted consistently low levels of odour, this was not sufficient to issue a stop notice. Members were reminded that the group, at its last meeting, discussed the type of sanctions available.

**A resident then asked if the liaison group could receive a log of the quantity of materials entering and leaving the site, together with forwarding destinations, over a period of twelve months.** Mrs M. Davies confirmed this information is required by the Environment Agency on a quarterly basis, however the relevance of this information was questioned. The resident advised he would like to know the location of materials, whether they were being dumped or stockpiled anywhere and whether the materials produced smells. Mr P. Colley confirmed materials were not stockpiled and Mrs M. Davies questioned whether residents were confusing the farm operations with the composting. She added that composting volumes leaving the site could be as much as half as the waste entering the site. Members stated a complaint regarding strong odours had been made a week last Friday. Mr. P. Colley advised this date coincided with farming operations on the site.

Mrs M. Davies then informed the Liaison Group of the training undertaken to operate the site, in response to a request made at the last meeting. She confirmed both Mr A. Price and Mr. P. Colley had completed the highest level (level 4) of the required WAMITAB training. The successful completion of the training course was a requirement for the site to obtain an environmental permit. This course was reviewed every two years and Mr Price undertook the training in 2011, while Mr Colley qualified in 2010.

Members confirmed that the issue of training had been raised as a result of the Environment Agency's own report. Concerns remained due to the number of staff at the site with a lack of basic knowledge. Mrs M. Davies stressed that while inspectors required a good working knowledge, basic operators could carry out their duties with a limited working knowledge. Due to the number of basic errors recently identified, members of the group queried this statement. Mr P. Colley advised that he instructed other operators in the use of the equipment, and it was confirmed that now, no waste was to enter the vessel until he was present to oversee the process.

Mr A. Evans then referred to the handouts distributed earlier and he ran through the odour complaints substantiated by Environment Agency officers. Clarification was given as to the cause of complaints, any breaches to Bryn Compost's permit, the penalties incurred by the company and action taken to ensure these did not occur again.

Further clarification was given to the group regarding the scoring mechanism which dictated the cost of the environmental permit/licence and it was confirmed that this had now increased from £2290 per annum to £3500 per annum due to the number of breaches on site.

Mr A. Evans continued to present the findings displayed on the handouts, and confirmed that while the monthly odour complaints remained at a steady level, it was felt that these were too high and the Environment Agency was working with the operator to bring in new measures to reduce these.

Clarification was sought as to the location of complaints recorded between 19th March and 2nd July, as the graph appeared to show contradictory information. A member questioned the reliability of the data whilst this was in doubt. **The Chairman agreed that there was a need for consistency and asked Mr A. Evans to clarify this matter at the next meeting.**

Mr A. Evans was then asked to define the difference between a minor and strong odour. The group was informed this was for officers to establish at the time. Once determined by a qualified officer, that person would be expected to advise and defend his decision in a court of law. A resident questioned the subjectiveness of this, but Mr A. Evans reiterated that there was a legal system in place that had to be adhered to.

The residents reiterated that they were affected more severely by short bursts of odours that dissipated before the Environment Agency officers arrived. Mr A. Evans highlighted that proactive monitoring had taken place at different times of the day and officers did go out on site as soon as practically possible in response to odour complaints.

## **5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman wished Mrs. M. Davies every success in her new post and thanked her for all the hard work and assistance she had given to the Liaison Group since its conception.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 4:40 p.m.