



BRYN COMPOST LIAISON GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON THURSDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 2.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

A. Angel, H.W. David, W. David, N. George, J.A. Pritchard

Together with:

Residents: Mr J. Cuthbert, Mrs G. Davies, Mr M. Davies, Mr W. Griffiths, Mr G. Reynolds, Mrs C. Woods

Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm: Mr P. Colley, Mr A. Price

Natural Resources Wales: Mr J. Goldsworthy, Mrs E. Roe, Mr A. Ward

Public Health Wales: Mrs T. Deacon

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

Officers: R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

It was noted that Councillor Dave Poole, formerly the Chair of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group and the outgoing Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services had recently been appointed to the post of Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing. Councillor Nigel George was subsequently appointed as the new Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services.

In accordance with the Council's Constitution (in that the Cabinet Member for the Environment be the designated Chair for the Liaison Group) it was moved and seconded that Councillor George be duly elected as Chair. By a show of hands, this was unanimously agreed.

Councillor N. George moved to his position as Chair for the remainder of the meeting and introductions were made.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair referred to a recent public meeting held by Gelligaer residents to discuss a number of issues surrounding activity at Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm. He advised that in accordance with the Group's Terms of Reference (contained within the Council's Constitution), only those issues directly related to the Bryn Compost facility within Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm would be

discussed during the course of the meeting. A Member added that Environmental Health Officers had already provided detailed responses to the issues raised, and Officers confirmed that those responses relevant to the Bryn Compost facility would be discussed during the course of the meeting. The Member indicated that he would take this information back to local residents.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor G.J. Hughes, together with local resident representatives Mrs A. Gray, Mr G. Mahony, Public Health Wales representatives Mr H. Brunt and Mrs M. Bowley, and Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm representative Mr R. Thomas.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor H.W. David asked for it to be noted that he and Councillor W. David, together with local resident representatives Mr J. Cuthbert and Mr B. Griffiths, had attended the aforementioned public meeting of Gelligaer residents the previous week to discuss a number of issues surrounding activity at Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm.

5. MINUTES – 12TH MAY 2015

The minutes of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group meeting held on 12th May 2015 were received and noted.

6. MATTERS ARISING

A Member asked if the Composting Best Practice Document referred to at a number of previous meetings was now available. Officers from Natural Resources Wales (NRW) explained that as work was still being carried out on the document, it was not yet ready for general circulation. Due to the important nature of the document, the Member expressed concern with the continued delay in publication. NRW explained that they had contacted the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in respect of this delay, who are the government agency responsible for developing the document. However, as the document is outside the remit of NRW, there is little they can do to hasten its release. Another Member added that he would raise this matter with the Welsh Government's Environment Minister.

Reference was made to the arrangements made between Mr Price (Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm) and Environment Health and relayed back to the Liaison Group at a previous meeting, in that it had been agreed for odour-releasing activities by the farm and Bryn Compost to be minimised in and around the week of the Urdd National Eisteddfod event in May 2015. Clarification was sought on the action taken by the farm and compost facility to minimise these odour-releasing activities, and a Member queried why these arrangements that had been put in place for the duration of the Eisteddfod event were not carried out as a matter of normal routine.

Ceri Edwards, Environmental Health Manager, confirmed that she had contacted Mr Price regarding the Eisteddfod, which was to be held in the locality of Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm. Mr Price had agreed to schedule certain farming and composting activities so that they avoided the dates surrounding the event period (such as slurry/leachate spreading activities, emptying the vessels and moving the windrows). Miss Edwards explained that this request had been

made to facilitate a positive impression of the surrounding area during the event. However, she emphasised that the composting site, in line with farming activities, entailed 24-hour operations, and that it had taken a great deal of arrangement by Bryn Compost staff in order to defer these activities.

The Member commented on how this demonstrated that arrangements could be made to minimise odour-releasing activities when the need arose. Miss Edwards explained that these arrangements were put in place as a precautionary measure and that some of the farming and composting activities might not have been scheduled in any case during the week of the Eisteddfod. She re-emphasised the nature of the farm and composting site in that they are a 24-hour operation, and explained that whilst some activities can be deferred for a short while, these practices cannot be deferred indefinitely.

Members expressed dissatisfaction that these odour-restricting arrangements were not part of normal practice, explaining that local residents were unhappy that odour-releasing activities had been restricted for the purposes of the Eisteddfod but would not be restricted for the purposes of residents. Concerns were expressed regarding the health impact of poor air quality on the local population and a Member commented on the communications impact of the arrangements, explaining that this implied that residents' health was of less concern than that of the Eisteddfod. Following a debate with Environmental Health Officers, the Member explained that he was relaying the concerns of local residents to the Liaison Group, specifically those arising from the aforementioned public meeting the previous week.

Miss Edwards elaborated on the arrangements made with Bryn Compost, explaining that she had approached Mr Price following a request from the Group that odour-releasing activities be curtailed during the week of the Eisteddfod. She added that this did not acknowledge that there were currently odour issues arising from Bryn Compost, but rather that Environmental Health had been complying with the request from the Liaison Group. A Member suggested that this action was an implicit recognition that there was a problem with odours and Miss Edwards explained that she had merely responded to the Group's request as she would have been held to account by them if she had not done so.

A local resident Member confirmed that she had made the initial request regarding farming and composting activities around the week of the Eisteddfod, but explained that her notion had been that the farm would shut down for a week. Miss Edwards reiterated that the farm was a 24-hour operation and therefore such activities could not be stopped. The Member alluded to the earlier comment made in respect of odour-releasing activities being restricted during the Eisteddfod and suggested that the health of visiting children to the Eisteddfod had been given precedence over that of local children. Miss Edwards explained that she was unable to agree with this comment.

Mr Price of Bryn Compost addressed the Group and explained that he had been approached by Miss Edwards with a view to restricting odour-releasing activities around the week of the Eisteddfod. Activities scheduled for that week that were put back included the emptying of the compost tunnel, together with silage and slurry spreading activities. He confirmed that no in-vessel composting or slurry spreading activities were carried out that week, and that the farm and compost site had to catch up on these activities the following week.

A Member asked if any lessons, new techniques or better practices had been learned as a result of the amended operation. Miss Edwards reiterated that the processes had not been changed but simply been postponed. Mr Price also reiterated that he had not changed his operation but had merely delayed composting operations for that particular week.

Mrs Emily Roe from Natural Resources Wales referred to the dataset of odour complaints surrounding the week of the Eisteddfod. An odour complaint was received on 20th May 2015, which corresponded with the notification given by Bryn Compost that they were moving compost down from the in-vessel composting (IVC) facility (and was subsequently not recorded as a breach as the site had been operating in line with their permit and environment

management systems). NRW attributed those odour complaints received during the last week of May and the Eisteddfod period to farming activities following notification from Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm, or as not originating from the site due to the wind direction at the time.

On 2nd June 2015 and 4th June 2015 NRW carried out odour monitoring following a number of complaints. Farming odours were detectable in the Gelligaer area but no compost odours were present. On 8th June 2015, Bryn Compost notified NRW that they were moving compost from the IVC facility to outside windrows, as this activity could give rise to odours in the local area. NRW did not receive any odour complaints that day. Mrs Roe explained that there had therefore been no complaints attributable to the composting facility immediately before or after the Eisteddfod event.

A Member from Penybryn commented that she had been on holiday during the Eisteddfod but that there had been very strong odours in the area at the time, and that there continued to be an odour, which currently resembled a strong fish smell. Mrs Roe reiterated that none of the complaints detailed within the dataset of complaints during this period were attributable to composting activities.

7. UPDATES FROM NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

The Group were referred to the overview of odour complaint data for Bryn Compost between 1st April 2015 and 31st July 2015, with the four months of data spread over two pages of graphs. The data detailed the number of odour complaint telephone calls received by NRW, together with the type of odour detected if NRW officers attended the site in response to the complaint received. The recorded wind direction on the day of each set of complaints was also included in cases where it had been in the wrong direction to be coming from the locality of Bryn Compost and Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm. Where there was no wind information listed, it could be assumed that there was potential for odours to be coming from the direction of the Bryn Compost site.

Mrs Roe summarised the first page of odour complaints received between April and June 2015, highlighting those where NRW had attended site or where composting odours had been detected. Arising from odour complaints on 16th April 2015, NRW attended site and confirmed that both farming and composting odours were detectable. As notification had been received that Bryn Compost were moving compost from the IVC facility to outside windrows earlier on in the day, the site was in line with their permit and environment management procedures and therefore no breach of permit was logged against this event. On 29th April 2015, NRW carried out a routine inspection, with no odours detected off site at the time of the visit.

NRW visited the area on 16th May 2015 in response to odour complaints. No compost odours were detected during this visit but farm odours were detected in the Gelligaer area. On 1st June 2015, odour complaints were received, which corresponded with notification from the farm that slurry spreading activities would be taking place that week in the Gelligaer and Nelson areas. On 2nd June 2015 and 4th June 2015, NRW carried out odour monitoring following a number of odour complaints. Farming odours were detectable in the Gelligaer area but no compost odours were present.

In response to a Member's query, NRW explained that they have a set criteria for responding to odour complaints. Attendance at site in the event of complaints received is based on a wide range of factors (including the number of complaints received), and efforts are made by NRW to attend as many site visits as possible. The Member made reference to some odour complaints that did not appear to have been recorded by NRW and Officers explained that they were happy to discuss the matter once they had finished presenting the dataset.

Mrs Roe then summarised the second page of odour complaints (those received between June and July 2015) again highlighting those where NRW had attended site or where

composting odours had been detected. On 8th June 2015 Bryn Compost notified NRW that they were moving compost from the IVC facility to outside windrows, as this activity may give rise to odours in the local area. NRW did not receive any odour complaints this day.

On 16th June 2015, NRW Officers carried out a routine site inspection at Bryn Compost and during this time, NRW received a number of complaints regarding odours coming from the site. Off-site odour monitoring was carried out at this time and no composting odours were detected off-site. Bryn Compost was fully compliant with their permit during this inspection and the odour monitoring substantiated that farming odours were present in the Gelligaer area. On 17th June 2015, NRW were able to substantiate farming odours in Gelligaer in response to complaints, but no compost odours were detected.

On 22nd June 2015, Bryn Compost notified NRW that another batch of compost would be taken out of the IVC building to the outside windrows area. No odour complaints were received on this day. On 25th June 2015, NRW were able to substantiate farming odours in Gelligaer following odour complaints, and no compost odours were detected. On 26th June 2015 NRW visited site following complaints and an odour was detected. They were unable to substantiate the source of the odour on that occasion.

On 2nd July 2015, NRW detected farming odours in Gelligaer and faint localised compost odour in Legions Way. Work had been carried out on site to keep a bio filter working and therefore it was understandable for a rise in odour to occur. The work was necessary and was in accordance with Bryn Compost's permit, with no breach recorded at this time. On 10th July 2015, NRW attended further reports of odour in the Gelligaer area. There were no composting odours present but farming odours were detectable throughout Gelligaer.

On 15th July 2015, Bryn Compost notified NRW that they were moving compost from the IVC facility to outside windrows. NRW received an odour complaint from the Nelson area at this time and went to investigate the impact of this movement. The wind direction had changed by the time the Officer had reached Nelson so NRW were unable to measure the extent of the impact the movement of compost may have caused. A faint compost odour was detectable in Legions Way, which was linked to the site's bio filter. Upon inspection, Bryn Compost found that water filtration had not entirely reached the very low levels within the bio filter and undertook immediate action to rectify the situation. There were no faults with the water sprinkler system and the odour was caused by unusual weather conditions.

On 21st July 2015 a routine inspection was carried out at Bryn Compost and off-site odour monitoring detected faint levels of composting odour in Legions Way. On-site investigation determined the bio filter as the cause, which was due to those works carried out on 15th July 2015. There is a "bedding-in" period for the bio filter to become fully functional when new filter material is introduced, which is common practice and must be carried out on occasions in order to keep the bio filter fully functional. It was deemed that Bryn Compost had carried out all the work in such a way as to keep odours to a minimum and no breach was recorded. NRW added that this remedial work to the bio filter appeared to resolve the problem and no further issues with this equipment had arisen since then.

A Member raised a query in respect of the movement of compost from the IVC to windrows located within Bryn Quarry. NRW explained that this was part of the composting process arranged with the Bryn Compost site. A number of Members stated that they were unaware of these changes, and NRW explained that discussions had taken place at previous Liaison Group meetings with a view to the windrows being moved to the quarry.

Mr Price explained that the final maturation stage of the composting process had historically been causing odours when this took place on the concrete pad adjacent to the IVC building. Along with other improvements, it had been determined that once compost leaves the IVC building it would be better to move the windrows directly to the concrete pad in the quarry. This has led to a decrease in the production of odours.

A Member stated that Bryn Compost had previously been instructed by NRW to ensure the compost product was kept covered over, and Mr Price reiterated that Bryn Compost had been given changeable information over the years in respect of the best way forward regarding composting practices. He explained that the biggest breakthroughs experienced by Bryn Compost in respect of odour reduction had been the introduction of smaller/higher windrows, and reducing the compost temperature as quickly as possible following its removal from the IVC.

A local resident Member made reference to the detection and assessment of odours, and explained the difficulty experienced by complainants in describing the type of odour. NRW explained that their officers have a wide range of experience in a variety of farming odours, and described the methodology used to assess the odour type and its source. The Member also raised a query regarding NRW's response time in respect of attending site to investigate odour complaints. NRW explained that they attempt to arrive on site as soon as they can, but depending on the circumstances, this is not always possible.

A Member expressed their frustration in that when they telephone NRW to report an odour, the smell will often quickly dissipate, only for another to take its place. NRW explained that there were a number of other farms and activities in the area that could account for the variety of smells. Local resident Members stated that they had never experienced issues with farming odours before and that the problems had only started when Bryn Compost was set up. They also reiterated their concerns regarding the health impact of poor air quality on local children. NRW explained that on occasion they deemed these farming odours to be "offensive and strong" and that such instances are reported to CCBC's Environmental Health department, as farming odours are outside the remit of Natural Resources Wales.

A Member relayed the strong views of local residents arising from the recent public meeting to discuss activity at Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm. He explained that the odours detectable were more than simply farming smells and were subsequently within the remit of the Liaison Group, and that it was the feeling of local residents that their concerns were not being properly addressed.

Mrs Roe explained that further investigation by NRW had established that the farm's slurry pit, (which may become anaerobic when static) releases an ammonia-type smell when initially stirred. She explained that because this smells unlike a farming odour, people assume it is a compost odour. Mrs Roe was confident that the compost facility was not the main cause of odours as she felt the Bryn Compost facility is well-managed. The farm has invested in a slurry-stirring system (which should result in the slurry mixture producing a more farm-like odour) and thus the matter is already being addressed. Mrs Roe reiterated that farming odours did not come under the remit of NRW but was the responsibility of Environmental Health, with whom she had recently met with to inform of her findings.

Members of the Group noted the findings as a plausible explanation for the odour, and requested a meeting with Environmental Health and the local Assembly Member to discuss the matter further. Environmental Health Officers agreed to this request but explained that this slurry pit process conforms to normal farming practices. They clarified that the crust that forms on top of the slurry is broken so that the contents of the pit can be agitated and stirred to produce a more homogenous liquid that is pumped through the umbilical pipes for spreading on fields. It is the breaking of the slurry pit crust (that forms as a layer on the top of the pit) prior to stirring that allows an initial release of odour.

In response to a Member's query, the Environmental Health Manager confirmed that these odours would initially be offensive and strong. Another Member referenced the strong ammonia smell arising from the slurry pit and Mr Price confirmed that ammonia contains nitrogen, and in accordance with the practice used by many other farms, is spread as a fertiliser. In response to concerns expressed by Members regarding this practice, the Environmental Health Manager explained that they had received email notification that slurry

spreading activity was currently taking place in the area and no complaints had been made to the Environmental Health department in this respect.

A Member sought clarification on the instances of compost odour detected in July 2015 and NRW further outlined the remedial work undertaken by Bryn Compost in respect of the bio filter. A query was also raised in respect of the complaint logging system used by NRW and Mrs Roe outlined the current procedure. She explained that in NRW's next monthly update newsletter to residents, she would ask that complainants make note of the date and time they reported the odour and also request a NIRS reference number. In the event of any queries, this will allow the complaint to be easily located.

A Member raised concerns that odour complaints to NRW were not being correctly logged and cited instances where callers had been cut off during the call. NRW discussed this matter with the Member and asked for further details of the date and time of such instances to be forwarded to them.

Discussion took place in respect of the possible identification of the ammonia-type smell and the purpose of the Liaison Group. Mrs Roe reiterated that there had been issues with compost odour in the past and that historical instances of odours should not be attributed solely to farming activities. Mrs Roe explained that the Group had driven forward a number of improvements arising from past issues with compost odours, and she emphasised the strategic direction of the Group and the usefulness of information received from local residents.

Members' attention was directed to the second graph contained within the meeting papers that displayed the number of odour complaints for Bryn Compost over a two year period between July 2013 and July 2015. Members were asked to note the decreasing trend line that indicated a decrease in detectable compost odours in the local community, although there was a spike in the summer months due to the warmer weather.

A concern was raised by a Member as to whether this decreasing trend line was a true reflection of a decline in detectable odour or whether local residents were tiring of reporting odours. He asked that the importance of reporting all odours be reiterated to local residents, and also suggested that feedback be given to complainants explaining what action had been carried out by NRW. Mrs Roe explained that it was not possible to respond to every call received by Natural Resources Wales, and that newsletters had been introduced for local residents, which were far more informative and gave a more detailed overview of odour incidents.

Members' attention was directed to the final graph in the meeting papers, which displayed the number of complaints between 1st January 2015 and 31st July 2015, split into the location of each odour complainant. In total, 122 complaints have been received from 30 complainants. This graph was accompanied by a map showing the centralised location of where the odours were detected.

Reference was made to the last meeting of the Liaison Group in May 2015, whereby a Member from Nelson advised she had made a number of odour complaints that had not been recorded by NRW. The Member had been asked to forward the reference numbers for these complaints to NRW so that the matter could be investigated. NRW explained that the Member had been contacted but had been unable to locate the relevant numbers and had subsequently withdrawn her query. NRW had investigated their system but could not find any details that corresponded with the odour complaints reported by the Member. NRW reiterated to the Liaison Group the importance of keeping a record of all calls made to them in respect of odour complaints.

A query was raised regarding the monitoring process in respect of air quality and the concerns of local residents regarding the matter were relayed to the Liaison Group. NRW explained that an external company carries out monitoring of air quality on a quarterly basis and any

comments are relayed to the relevant parties. NRW outlined the processes entailed in monitoring air quality and explained that they had no concerns regarding current bio-aerosol levels. Members expressed a need for this information to be relayed to residents to alleviate their concerns and NRW agreed that they would include this information in the newsletter on a quarterly basis.

A Member referred to a previous presentation by Dr Gill Richardson, regarding the results from bio-aerosol monitoring. A request was made for Public Health Wales (PHW) to repeat a similar exercise, and their representative, Tracey Deacon, explained that she could present data from local GPs similar to that which had previously been presented to the Group.

Mr Jon Goldsworthy from NRW advised the Group that there would be a change to the focus of future datasets in respect of odour complaints and that they would be presented on a monthly basis in future. He explained that the more detailed datasets compiled over the last year had enabled NRW to gain a better understanding of the odour complaints. Members were given assurances that NRW would continue to operate in the same way and continue to provide monthly updates to residents.

8. EMILY ROE – NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

The Chair advised the Group that Mrs Emily Roe had accepted a new position within Natural Resources Wales and this was therefore her last Bryn Compost Liaison Group meeting. Mr Adam Ward (who was in attendance to observe proceedings) will be taking over the regulation of the site from Mrs Roe.

Members thanked Mrs Roe for her hard work and acknowledged the significant improvement in contribution from NRW as a result of her efforts. In turn, Mrs Roe remarked on the strength and achievements of the Liaison Group as a collective whole since its inception and thanked those present for their valued contributions to the Group.

The meeting closed at 3.39 p.m.