



BRYN COMPOST LIAISON GROUP

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH ON TUESDAY, 2ND FEBRUARY 2016 AT 2.00 P.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor N. George - Chair

Councillors:

A. Angel, H.W. David, W. David, G.J. Hughes, J.A. Pritchard

Together with:

Residents: Mrs G. Davies, Mrs A. Gray, Mr W. Griffiths, Mr G. Mahony, Mr G. Reynolds,
Mrs C. Woods

Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm: Mrs J. Morgan, Mr R. Thomas

Natural Resources Wales: Ms E. Davies, Mr R. Hughes, Mr A. Ward

Public Health Wales: Mrs T. Deacon

Environmental Health: Miss C. Edwards, Mrs M. Godfrey, Mr K. Jennings

Officers: R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Bolter, M.P. James and S. Morgan, together with local resident representatives Mr J. Cuthbert, Mr M. Davies, Mr T. Matthews and Mr J. Szura, Public Health Wales representatives Dr G. Richardson, Mr H. Brunt and Mrs M. Bowley, and Gelliargwellt Uchaf Farm representatives Mr P. Colley and Mr A. Price.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES – 3RD SEPTEMBER 2015

The minutes of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group meeting held on 3rd September 2015 were received and noted.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Reference was made to occasions of “offensive and strong” farming odours reported to the CCBC Environmental Health department by Natural Resources Wales and discussed at the previous meeting of the Bryn Compost Liaison Group in September 2015. A Member sought clarification on the actions undertaken by Environmental Health in responding to such occasions.

Ceri Edwards (Environmental Health Manager) outlined the procedure for these occurrences, explaining that Officers will attempt to attend the location of where these odours are detected on the occasions when they receive notification of such instances from Natural Resources Wales.

Members were reminded that these particular farming odours had been attributed to the breaking of the slurry pit crust at the farm, which follows normal farming practices. Miss Edwards added that since the introduction of a new slurry-stirring system, there has been a significant reduction in the number of farming odour complaints received by Environmental Health.

Clarification was sought on the timeframe between NRW reporting such instances of farming odours to Environmental Health and follow-up action by Environmental Health Officers. A Member suggested that Miss Edwards had indicated that following the report of an odour, it could take Officers several days to attend the location of the odour complaint. **Miss Edwards explained that she would have to refer to her records to establish the timeframe and report this information back to the Group.**

A Member explained that he was seeking clarification on the timeframe because of a strong odour that had been detected at Penallta Park (which is in the locality of the Bryn Compost site). He explained that a local resident is being treated for a nasal complaint and that this resident had attributed this odour as being the cause of the nasal problem. The Member explained that by the time Environmental Health Officers visited Penallta Park, the odour had dissipated. He suggested that other people in the area could have been affected by the odour and asked if NRW could contact local GPs in the area to establish whether other residents were experiencing similar nasal complaints.

Miss Edwards confirmed that she had spoken with the resident in question but that there was no evidence to suggest that this odour was the source of the resident’s nasal complaint. She further explained that it would not be appropriate to discuss the health of an individual with the Liaison Group. She also made reference to a letter that had been sent to the local Assembly Member on behalf of local residents in connection with this issue.

The resident in question was in attendance at the Liaison Group meeting and explained that the smell in the Penallta Park area was extremely strong on occasions. He added that depending on the wind direction, this odour was also affecting residents in Gelligaer. The resident explained that the odour was causing him to experience problems with his nose, which had resulted in him having to use a nasal spray. He explained that he attributed this problem to the breaking of the slurry pit at the farm and the subsequent release of odour-creating sulphide gases, which were acting as an irritant to his nose, and felt that Environmental Health should investigate this matter.

Miss Edwards explained that she was reluctant to discuss an individual’s health with the Liaison Group in that it would be inappropriate to hold such a discussion in public, but explained that there was no evidence of cause and effect on this occasion. Miss Edwards added that she would require confirmation from the local resident’s GP that the nasal problem was a result of this odour. She explained that should such a link be established, the matter would then be passed to Public Health Wales. The Chair suggested that the matter be taken up for discussion between Miss Edwards and the local resident outside of the meeting.

A Member asked if Public Health Wales could make enquiries with local GPs as to whether any similar cases of nasal complaints had been reported in the area. It was mentioned that a question has been raised in a recent letter from the local Assembly Member. A local resident Member also referred to a request made at the Liaison Group meeting in September 2015 where PHW had been asked for data in respect of bio-aerosol monitoring (to ascertain whether there had been an increase in ill-health within the local area). Another Member responded by commenting that even if there was an increase in ill-health, this could be due to a number of causes/factors and that it would be difficult to attribute odour as the underlying cause.

Tracey Deacon (Public Health Wales) explained that she would have to discuss this matter with her director. She stated that she could attempt to replicate a report that had been submitted to the Liaison Group several years ago which was based on health data from GPs.

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 their Head Office was now liaising with DEFRA (the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the government agency responsible for developing the document) as to a possible release date for the document. Members expressed frustration with this continued delay in publication and highlighted the importance of the document in respect of composting matters. The Chair suggested that Members could raise their concerns with their local Assembly Member regarding this delay.

NRW Officers explained that they appreciated the frustration of the Group regarding the delay and that they would raise the matter with DEFRA again. They gave assurances that they were not intentionally withholding the document from the Liaison Group, and in explaining that there had been some delay in actively pursuing the publication of the document (owing to a recent change in NRW personnel), apologised to the Liaison Group in this respect.

A Member referred to the movement of compost from the IVC to windrows located within Bryn Compost, which had been discussed at the previous Liaison Group meeting in September 2015. At that meeting, a number of Members had stated they were unaware of these changes, and NRW had responded by explaining that discussions had taken place at previous Liaison Group meetings with a view to the windrows being moved to the quarry.

The explanation given by NRW at the last meeting was disputed by a local resident member, who explained that she had never attended a Bryn Compost Liaison Group meeting where the matter of moving windrows to the quarry had been discussed, and that she wished for this observation to be brought to the attention of the Group. Miss Edwards explained that this had been happening for several years and that the Group had observed the windrows on various site visits to the Bryn Compost facility.

Another Member explained that they were unaware that compost had been moved to the quarry. Miss Edwards explained that it had been some time since this process was implemented but that this had taken place because 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. 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. Miss Edwards also explained that reducing the windrow size had been successful in reducing odours.

A Member commented that on a previous site visit to the Bryn Compost facility, the compost product at the final maturation stage had been covered with tarpaulin. Miss Edwards explained that this product had been covered over at some point but that the facility had been given different recommendations and opinions over the years in respect of best composting practices, and that the process had been subject to trial and error as a result. She added that the last time the product was covered, this had been done so with a breathable-type cover and also that a recommendation to make the composting area smaller had been

implemented.

The same Member asked whether NRW were aware of when the windrows/compost product was transferred to the quarry. Adam Ward from NRW explained that this has been common practice for a number of years and that odour complaints had dropped since the compost product was stored in the quarry. **He confirmed that he would check when this commenced and report back to the Group.**

Tracey Deacon referred to the previous meeting of the Liaison Group and explained that she had stated that she would examine the data from local GPs which had been previously presented to the Group, but that she was in agreement with the observation made by a Member of the Group in that a change in the health of local residents would be difficult to attribute to odours.

5. UPDATES FROM NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

Adam Ward from Natural Resources Wales referred to the monthly newsletter updates sent to residents and hoped that the Group found them to be of informative value. He explained that the process currently undertaken by NRW in respect of logging, assessing and attending of odour complaints would continue. A copy of the December 2015 monthly newsletter was tabled at the meeting, which focused on the permit application for the Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Plant and for the regular compliance assessments required throughout the year. Comments were invited from Members on its content following presentation of the dataset of odour complaints.

The Group were referred to the overview of odour complaint data for Bryn Compost between 1st September 2015 and 31st December 2015, which illustrated the number of odour complaint calls received each month by NRW and the number of instances where composting odours were substantiated. In total, Natural Resources received 78 complaints between 1st September 2015 and 31st December 2015. 30 of these complaints were attended and 12 were confirmed to be attributed to compost odours.

Mr Ward gave his apologies in that a monthly update newsletter prepared for August 2015 had not been conveyed to residents and hence the data had not been included in the dataset presented to the Liaison Group. He explained that 14 complaints were received in August 2015 and NRW officers attended site twice during that month.

There were 39 complaints in September 2015 and 24 complaints in October 2015, which were of a similar level to those received the preceding Autumn. NRW Officers responded to 12 of these complaints and confirmed that there was increased land-spreading activities due to the relatively good weather conditions. At least 6 of the complaints were attributed to land-spreading, although NRW confirmed 2 compost odour events that took place that month.

On 3rd October 2015, an NRW Officer attended site in response to a number of complaints received from residents from Gelligaer and the surrounding area. The attending Officer confirmed composting odours, but due to technical issues experienced by the Environment Management Duty Officer, the attending Officer was unable to follow site specific assessment procedures. Therefore, the Officer could not confirm the cause of the odour on this occasion. So that this does not re-occur in future, NRW have implemented a simplified, yet robust response procedure that will be accessible to investigating Officers without the requirement for internet access.

On 13th October 2015, a NRW Officer conducted an odour assessment and confirmed a mild composting odour in Nelson. Having investigated on site, it was found that third-party contractors were completing an electrical installation in the IVC building and therefore the doors were left open and the bio-filters were briefly turned off. On this occasion, NRW recorded two minor (Category 3) breaches of permit against the Bryn Compost facility. The

reasons for scoring these breaches were for leaving the door open and the operator not informing NRW of the electrical installation work in line with the Odour Management Plan (OMP). NRW have therefore requested that the operator updates the OMP to provide better procedures and to ensure NRW are contacted before starting any similar (maintenance or repair) work in future. This will allow NRW to help ensure the risk of odour release is reduced as far as possible during such events.

Natural Resources Wales received 7 odour complaints in November 2015 over 6 separate days and 8 complaints in December over 7 separate days. NRW followed procedure by logging and assessing these complaints before discussing them with the operator but did not attend site in response. Regulatory officers attended site on several occasions throughout November and December 2015 to attend meetings and conduct site inspections. No land-spreading took place during this period and this is reflected in the reduction in odour complaints, although some complaints have been attributed to the general odours caused by the dairy farm within the site.

Discussion of the dataset ensued and a Member referred to the “strong and offensive odours” discussed at the previous Liaison Group meeting and the subsequent meeting held with Environmental Health Officers to discuss the connection between these odours and the breaking of the slurry pit crust. The Member also referred to the implementation of the new Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Plant and slurry-stirring system and queried the impact these had had on odour complaints.

Mr Ward confirmed that monitoring of the AD Plant had commenced on 20th January 2016 following its implementation. Members were asked to note that there had been a decrease in odour complaints since the AD plant began operation in November 2015 (it has been producing gas using farm yard slurry and waste water treatment sludge and did not require a permit at this time as it was a temporary activity). NRW Officers have not observed any odours from this process during site inspections of the facility to date but will continue to tightly regulate the facility to ensure it remains compliant with its permit and management systems.

Environmental Health Officers also explained that since the introduction of the new slurry-stirring system, they had received 3 farming odour complaints in October 2015 and none since that time, and therefore it was considered that this operation had been successful in eliminating the odour complaints previously associated with the system.

Members expressed the need for continued monitoring of the new AD Plant and consultation with local residents over an extended period to determine the effectiveness of this new composting system.

A Member raised concerns that not all food waste is able to be processed via the AD plant and expressed his fears that this issue would be exacerbated in the summer months when food and garden waste (which is collected and mixed together before arriving at Bryn Compost) is prepared for the composting process. He asked the Chair (who is also the Cabinet Member for the Environment) about the Authority’s plans to collect food waste and garden waste separately in the future. The Chair explained that a recycling strategy which incorporates this matter is currently being developed but that he was unable to provide an implementation date at this current time, although it was estimated that the introduction of such collections would be a year or more in the future. The Member indicated that he was unhappy with this implementation delay due to the issues that could arise in the processing of mixed food/garden waste but the Chair explained that the Authority’s priority was to establish the specifics of the recycling strategy in the first instance.

Discussion took place regarding the feasibility of a site visit being arranged to Bryn Compost to view the new Anaerobic Digestion (AD) Plant. Officers explained that a site visit had been arranged in September 2015 following a request at a previous meeting of the Liaison Group but that attendance at this visit had been very low. A number of Members stated that they

had not been aware of this site visit and expressed concerns that they had not received an invitation. Discussion also took place as to whether the site visit was arranged during the course of a previous Liaison Group meeting. **Miss Edwards explained that she would check her records to establish the method by which the invitation was conveyed to the Group, confirming that she would organise another site visit to Bryn Compost which would take place in the next couple of months, and that Members would be informed of the site visit accordingly.**

During the course of the debate on this matter, a Member expressed concerns regarding the breach of permit against Bryn Compost in October 2015 (whereby third-party contractors left open the doors of the IVC building and released a compost odour) and expressed the need for accountability in respect of this matter. Discussion also took place regarding the running of the new AD Plant and the qualification/training processes for Bryn Compost staff. Ms Jennifer Morgan of Bryn Compost explained that the staff that operate the AD Plant also run the IVC facility and hold a range of technical qualifications from a number of teaching establishments.

In closing, discussion took place regarding the monitoring processes of bio-aerosol levels. NRW confirmed that this takes place every four months and that the results will be appended to the relevant monthly newsletter update.

The meeting closed at 2.47 p.m.