

## Letters to the Editor

Views of local MP wanted on WP2's ideas for site

# Confusion over plans to build pyrolysis plant

I recently received a very interesting e-mail alerting me to an article in the West Somerset Free Press (December 9, 2005), entitled "Energy plans fill MP with dread".

On reading the piece, I was horrified to discover that not only were residents opposing the building by WP2 of a pyrolysis incinerator on the outskirts of Wells, but now, according to this article: "[Somerset County Council] are already going to build a state-of-the-art biomass plant near Wells, which will provide only half the electricity needed by the city. It looks as if the council is planning renewable energy schemes that people won't want," said Bridgwater and West Somerset MP Ian Liddell-Grainger."

After reeling from this news, I decided to tackle said MP on his comments and telephoned his office.

I was impressed by his prompt response, and clarified that residents were opposing the building of an experimental hazardous waste pyrolysis incinerator, and not a supposed "state-of-the-art biomass plant".

Mr Liddell-Grainger assured me that he was quoting from what he had heard at the CBI conference the previous week, and so I inquired as to who was promoting this scheme.

On contacting Cllr Paul Buchanan, portfolio holder for economic development, he confirmed that he had indeed been promoting Somerset as a business opportunity at the aforementioned CBI conference, but knew nothing of Mr Liddell-Grainger's comments.

There was nothing on the Somerset Strategic Partnership (SSP) stand about "a state-of-the-art biomass plant near Wells", nor was the SSP or county council promoting this in any way. So where did Ian Liddell-Grainger MP source his information?

As your Journal article "Somerset being promoted in London as business location" (December 22, 2005) also confirmed, Cllr Buchanan wasn't

alone at the SSP stand - Richard Storey, chairman of the SSP's image and influence group, was also present.

Of course, in another role, Mr Storey is the PR man for WP2... everything clicked into place. Was it that Mr Storey had been using his position on the SSP to promote his own interests in WP2's pyrolysis proposal at Haybridge, and mislead our elected representatives in the process?

After empathising with our situation, Mr Liddell-Grainger cited how the residents of Bridgwater had defeated a similar plan for the Innovia site, and suggested that I contacted our own MP, David Heathcoat-Amory, for support.

So, having been conspicuously quiet on this important local issue, how about it Mr Heathcoat-Amory, what is your opinion on this development for Wells?

**Dr Zac Watkins**

Wells Environmental Protection Group (WEPG)  
Haybridge

● Richard Storey responds: The Wells Environmental Protection Group, and Dr Zac Watkins in particular, have seen fit to infer that I have improperly used my position to promote WP2's interests.

I find it regrettable that the pyrolysis debate has now moved on to involving a personal attack on an individual's integrity.

As chairman of the Somerset Strategic Partnership's image and influence group, I am involved in developing plans to boost the economic prosperity of Somerset through a combination of inward investment and encouraging existing companies to expand further in our county and to create higher value jobs.

This is just one part of a drive to increase the economic performance of Somerset within the South West region in line with the South West Regional Development Agency's economic strategy.

At the CBI Conference in November a number of examples of companies who have invested successfully in Somerset were

included in the promotional material used at the exhibition. There is no reference anywhere to WP2.

One of the priority sectors for the Regional Development Agency (RDA), fully supported by the SSP, is "environmental technologies - especially renewable energy and waste" (source: Regional Economic Strategy for the South West of England - Draft Delivery Plan 2006-2009) which is carried through into Somerset's renewable energy strategy published in 2003/4 (source: Somerset County Council - Renewable Energy Strategy) which envisages the development of various renewable energy facilities within the county by 2010.

Among these is a daily target of 7MW of electricity from waste by advanced thermal treatment.

Furthermore, Somerset council's views on this subject are well known. As far back as 2001 they have seen advanced thermal treatment as a promising method for dealing with non-recyclable waste (reference RPG10 September 2001 (Regional Planning Guidance for the SW) and its replacement, the Regional Waste Management Strategy (October 2004); Somerset Waste Local Plan (revised draft, issued June 2003 and accepted as recently as September 04).

Somerset's commitment to the advanced thermal treatment of waste was, therefore, public policy well before WP2 came into existence.

It has been WP2's policy to keep all local politicians informed of WP2's plans, and briefing meetings were held with both Tessa Munt and MP David Heathcoat-Amory prior to the submission of the planning application.

As an invited visitor, and a Somerset MP, asked to lend his support to the SSP's plans at the CBI Conference, Ian Liddell-Grainger MP attended on Tuesday, November 29.

He was already aware of WP2's plans as I had briefed him previously. As WP2's plans had been submitted for consideration by Somerset County Council at the time of the CBI event it is

possible that these were raised during discussions between the MP and county councillors present at the event, although I was not party to any such discussions.

I have no recollection of discussing WP2's plans with the MP at the event although, had he asked me about them, there would have been no reason not to respond.

As I have been unable to contact Ian Liddell-Grainger I am unable to establish his views on WP2's plans as previous discussions had merely sought to inform and not to garner support.

It is known, however, that economic development portfolio holder for Somerset County Council, Paul Buchanan, supports waste recycling at all levels and was shown to be in favour of waste energy recycling in an interview with the Somerset County Gazette in August 2005.

With reference to the county's plans to generate one to two per cent of its electricity needs from waste by 2010 he was quoted as saying: "These plans are well advanced and over the next couple of years I'd expect to see some of them up and running, producing energy."

I have never at any time sought to use my involvement with the Somerset Strategic Partnership to promote the interests of any company with which I am involved either as an investor or consultant and take strong exception to any inference to the contrary.

As with a number of other statements and inferences which continue to be made by the WEPG, this one is also without foundation.

I would like to point out that, despite there being no factual basis for descriptions such as "experimental hazardous waste pyrolysis incinerator" (see Dr Watkins' letter) - the process is, as has been made quite clear by an independent specialist chemical engineer, not incineration - these myths continue to be broadcast by opponents of WP2's plans.

Is it surprising that once again Dr Watkins has got hold of the wrong end of the stick?