

# Relentless campaign fails to halt energy plant

A WASTE recycling plant that will convert thousands of tonnes of contaminated wood, plastic and paper into energy has been given the green light, in spite of massive local opposition.

Somerset County Council's Regulation Committee approved WP2 Ltd's plans to build a £12million pyrolysis plant at a LA Moore's demolition waste site in Haybridge near Wells at a meeting on Tuesday.

According to WP2, a consortium of local businessmen, the operation will use 45,000 tonnes of industrial waste, which would otherwise have gone to landfill, to produce enough energy for all the homes in Wells.

But Mendip District Council, several parish councils and

thousands of residents fear the operation would cause air pollution and unbearable traffic problems.

Wells Environmental Protection Group (WEPG) has been campaigning against the proposal since it was first revealed more than two years ago. The group presented the committee with a petition signed by 2,600 people across the county, calling for the plans to be scrapped.

Around 200 people attended

the meeting at Crispin School, and chairman Robin Bush did his best to let everyone have their say. Public speaking time ran for two hours before councillors even got to debate the proposal.

Commenting on the perceived threat to public health, county and district councillor Ron Forrest said: "Can we be absolutely sure that the proposed plant will present no risk to local people? We have heard that pollution will enter

the water and the soil.

"Are we to be guinea pigs? When thalidomide was introduced it seemed a good idea - we all know the consequences."

Planning officer Bob Mills recommended the plans for approval, claiming that there would be very little impact on air quality as emissions would not exceed set limits.

However, with the nearest home just 130 metres away, and fears that emissions would fall straight on top of residential areas in Wookey and Wells in still conditions, Mr Forrest questioned the threat posed by a cocktail of harmful gases.

"The impact of a mix of chemicals is poorly understood. I suggest caution," he added.

"I do not want any of these

emissions falling on the people I represent or anybody else. This technology does not have a track record to say the least."

Although the county highway authority expressed no concerns, objectors said the A371 is struggling to cope with existing traffic and would be made even more dangerous by lorries delivering waste to the pyrolysis plant. They also questioned just how far the plant would be receiving waste from.

Action group member Sarah Briton said: "The are a number of places where no two vehicles can pass each other. There is no mention of the two back lanes in regular use by residents.

"The number of vehicle movements depends on the

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## Wells pyrolysis plant

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density, compression and size of skips used. Phase two may require as many as 76 daily loads."

However, Mr Mills stated that a condition attached to the permission would limit the company to 25 deliveries - or 50 traffic movements - per day. Deliveries would be allowed every day except Sunday from 8am to 6pm.

Highways spokesman Jeff Copp said: "I don't believe the highway network will suffer greatly. The A371 is not the best road in the world but it is very unlikely that all 50 additional HGV movements will be along this road."

Concerns were also raised about the impact on wildlife. Les Cloutman of Somerset Wildlife Trust said: "This is in close proximity to the headwaters of the River Axe, which contains otters, trout, dippers and kingfishers.

"There is potential for toxic precipitation onto Wells and the Mendip AONB."

One local person who supported the plant was farmer George Baker, who said: "There is a lot of support from farmers. We can no longer burn plastic, string and netting. I used to have a fire once a month but we have been told to clean up our act. "This scheme would be of great benefit. It is something new but we have to go forwards not backwards."

Speaking in defence of the proposal, WP2 managing director Dr Mike Love explained that the site was chosen because it is in the centre of a region which currently exports its waste. He said being on the edge of an urban area means there will be

minimal loss of energy through transmission and excess heat could be used by the local leisure centre.

"Local waste transfer stations currently truck waste to Castle Cary and even Tiverton for disposal," he said. "This will

**'We simply can't bury our heads in a bucket of sand. As a society we have to face some very big issues that will affect future generations'**

reduce total waste miles in the county. We simply can't bury our heads in a bucket of sand. As a society we have to face some very big issues that will affect future generations."

The first phase of the operation will see 15,000 tonnes of waste heated to 820°C in the absence of oxygen to produce syngas to fuel electricity generators. In phase two, the plant will work at full capacity converting 45,000 tonnes of waste. An amount of char (carbon residue) will have to go to landfill if alternative uses can not be found.

County councillor Henry Hobhouse suggested that the new technology should be given a chance but that adequate monitoring equipment should be put in place before production begins. He said that if phase one is not a success, phase two should not be allowed to proceed.

The plans also found favour with county councillor Derek Yeomans, who reminded everyone that Somerset council tax payers will have to

foot a £1million bill if landfill limits are exceeded.

"The site is already a tip; there are batteries and wrecked vehicles all over the place," he said. "I find it extraordinary to imagine that this could be the preferred option."

"The neighbouring paper mill's chimney was smoking away merrily while I was there - I don't know if anyone has done an analysis on that. "Air quality is a concern but the Environment Agency will be crawling all over it. This is new technology so they don't want egg on their faces."

Councillors voted eight to three in favour of the plans. Speaking after the meeting, Dr Love said: "Whilst we respect the views of our detractors, the time has come for heads to rule hearts and fact to win out over fiction.

"We have always been at pains to stress our emphasis on safety and to operate in a wholly responsible way. We are all part of the same local community and our plans are intended to enhance our environment for the benefit of residents and businesses alike".

**Mathew Manning**