

New waste contract creates financial risk for North London residents, warns Pinkham Way Alliance

This evening, the Pinkham Way Alliance will make a speech to Haringey Council about a proposed contract that could see residents incurring financial penalties for not producing enough waste.

The contract is being negotiated by the North London Waste Authority, and provides for a colossal waste-processing plant to be built on Pinkham Way in the borough. Under the plan, seven north London councils — including Haringey — will commit to supplying a minimum amount of residual waste (the waste residents throw into their black bags) to the plant each year, for a suggested 30 years, or face financial penalties.

The amount of waste that Haringey Council will commit to supplying to the plant (known as Guaranteed Minimum Tonnage, or GMT) is based on the amount of rubbish that Haringey residents throw into their black bins at present. But figures show that between 2000 and 2010 Londoners managed to reduce their waste, and continue to do so. Recycling targets have risen, and there is now a target to recycle 50% of waste by 2020 — around 20% or so above Haringey's present rate. Even if black bag waste did not continue to fall in line with current trends but instead remained static, then Haringey would be close to a contract shortfall by the end of the decade, and much earlier if current waste trends continue. Financial penalties would follow.

This scenario is already being played out in other areas of the country. Stoke-on-Trent Council has recently been given a bill of £650,000 for not producing enough waste, and Kent Council sends valuable material to be processed as waste rather than recycled to avoid having to pay penalties.

The North London Waste Authority is statutorily bound to promote prevention, reduction, reuse and recycling, but is simultaneously threatening open-ended penalties for what the Authority's Managing Director calls "councils' failure" to produce enough waste. By contrast, the director of the South London Waste Plan recently said this about the incinerator they are planning: "Long term we expect people's recycling habits to improve and we would want our waste to reduce. There is no obligation for us to keep feeding the plant."

The Pinkham Way Alliance will be speaking at the full council meeting of Haringey Council, which takes place at 7.30pm this evening, 19th November, at Haringey Civic Centre, 225 High Road, N22 8LE.

The meeting will be followed by one of a series of occasional council debates, entitled Waste in the 21st Century, with Dr Andy Tubb, an expert in waste management from the University of the West of England in Bristol.

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