

Waste Expert urges Haringey Council not to back Pinkham Way contract

An expert in waste management has warned Haringey Council not to back the plans for a waste plant at Pinkham Way.

Dr Andrew Tubb, a specialist in waste management from the University of the West of England, told a council meeting this week that the proposals:

- ◆ Would stop council-tax payers from benefitting from new technology
- ◆ Risk penalising north London residents for efficient recycling
- ◆ Are the most costly of all future waste management options for council-tax payers

The Pinkham Way contract currently being negotiated by the North London Waste Authority would be binding on North London councils for a period of 25-35 years. Dr Tubb said that it is impossible to predict with any certainty how much waste Haringey will be producing at such a distant date in the future, or how much waste technology may change to bring down costs. He used the analogy of the communications industry to illustrate how new technology can bring about huge changes in the price of goods and services — reminding councillors that 25 years ago the cost of a mobile phone was £6,000.

Dr Tubb pointed out that waste companies will generally seek the security of 25- or 30-year contracts, complete with council-backed guarantees of sufficient waste to keep facilities running 24 hours a day, 52 weeks of the year, for maximum profitability. Yet if councils fail to provide the guaranteed waste stream, waste companies often have the power to fine local councils – penalties that local residents end up paying through council tax. This means that local residents risk a financial clobbering for recycling more and producing less waste.

Dr Tubb stressed that councils need to retain flexibility in waste planning, so that residents can take a fair share of the benefits as they manage to recycle more and waste technology improves.

In a summary of evidence from official waste-management bodies, Dr Tubb showed that the type of plant proposed for the Pinkham Way site is the most costly of all available options for council-tax payers.

Stephen Brice of the Pinkham Way Alliance, which campaigns on behalf of local residents, welcomed the speech. “Dr Tubb has given a clear scientific explanation of the reasons why the proposed facility at Pinkham Way is a bad deal for North London councils and residents alike. We believe that both councils and residents are committed to recycling, and determined to do their bit for the environment. For the NLWA in one breath to be promoting waste prevention and reduction, and in the next threatening councils with fines for producing too little waste, looks insane. According to the NLWA’s own consultants, any claims to this being a ‘green’ solution are extremely questionable, which, the consultants say, is “not what decision-makers expect to hear, but is an important reality for them to accept”. The 30-year fixed commitments that councils are being obliged to make, in the very fast changing context of waste and resource use, are locking hundreds of thousands of council tax payers into pointless and open-ended long term risks.”

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