

## **The ‘planning’ of *Oxfordshire County Council’s* incinerator proposal: Some surprises from the council’s website**

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Shocked by the speed at which this incinerator proposal appeared, apparently without prior local consultation, I decided to look into the history of the issue using publicly available documents on the website of *Oxfordshire County Council*. Due to my surprise at what I found, I have written this article summarising the worst aspects of the story. When reading the original documents, however, you should be aware of the generally unclear language used throughout. Instead of writing about ‘incinerators’, coded references such as ‘thermal treatment’, ‘energy reclaimed from waste’, ‘residual waste management’ and ‘treatment facilities’ are constantly used.

At the current time, *Oxfordshire County Council* does not have up-to-date policy on managing municipal and commercial waste (1), despite the statutory requirement for such policy to exist (2). Due to the already delayed development of new waste management policy being suspended in December 2007, the county is still operating under a plan written in 1996 (2). This 12-year-old plan makes no provision for incineration, as it was considered unlikely to be necessary (3,4). Therefore, *Oxfordshire’s* formal waste management plan does not address the introduction or siting of incinerators.

In the absence of up-to-date formal policy, a group formed by representatives of the county and district council called the *Oxfordshire Waste Partnership* published their “Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy” (5). The main thrust of this document, published in August 2006, was that *Oxfordshire* is at risk of incurring huge fines from the European Union for dumping biodegradable waste in landfill, and so must change its waste management process (5). It then discusses alternatives for dealing with waste that is not recycled or composted, concluding that incineration, again termed ‘Energy from Waste’, was their preferred option (6). This view conflicted with the results of their own consultation, where incineration was the “least favoured [option] among the public” (6). Despite this public opposition, *Oxfordshire County Council* began the process of procuring a ‘waste treatment technology’ based on this strategy in March 2007 (7).

At this time, *Oxfordshire County Council* was still attempting to write its formal waste policy, the “Minerals and Waste Development Framework” (2). Whilst this new policy is not yet in effect, reports commissioned by *Oxfordshire County Council* from external environmental consultants have been made available on council’s website. One of these reports, published in September 2007 stated that the Sutton Courtenay site should not be used for any ‘thermal treatment’ (including incineration) unless it could be established that this would not impact on the ‘Special Area of Conservation’ at Little Wittenham (8). Overlooking the irony that no concerns were raised about the dangers to the human beings who live much closer to the proposed site, there is no evidence from the council or WRG’s publications that the safety of the Great Crested Newt from incinerator emissions has been addressed.

The Sutton Courtenay incinerator is proposed to burn 300,000 tons of waste every year (9). According to data from the *Oxfordshire Waste Partnership’s* strategy

document, this is equivalent to the entire municipal waste production of the whole county for 2005-6 (5)! Even taking into account the council's own projections for municipal waste production, only 155,000 tons needs to be disposed of per year in 2013 when the incinerator will be complete (6). This short-fall between municipal waste required to avoid landfill and the total capacity of the plant is likely to be made up by burning industrial waste, to which none of the new landfill fines apply (6).

Thus, without even having the necessary county framework in place, *Oxfordshire County Council* is attempting to commission one of the largest incinerator facilities in the country as a panic measure to avoid being fined. Building a single incinerator with the requirement to burn all of Oxfordshire's waste in one place in the county is both inequitable and illogical, as it will lead to waste being transported unnecessary distances by road, and the environmental impact being concentrated over a small area. In addition, local communities have not been consulted, as would have occurred within the proper waste management planning process.

In summary, without a sensible plan to appropriately share the burden for waste disposal over the whole of Oxfordshire, the county council has cut corners and is now attempting to foist its unwise and overambitious 'solution' on village communities without proper consultation. On the basis of what I have found, I believe that *Oxfordshire County Council* should cancel this unfair procurement process or be prepared to defend its position at a public inquiry.

(1) Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Plan Newsletter, May 2008.

[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/planning/planning\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_policy/OMWP-May-2008-Newsletter.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/planning/planning_policy/minerals_waste_policy/OMWP-May-2008-Newsletter.pdf)

(2) Report by Head of Sustainable Development, January 2008.

[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/planning/planning\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_policy/development\\_framework/MWDFScheme/CabinetMemberSD080103MWDSReport.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/planning/planning_policy/minerals_waste_policy/development_framework/MWDFScheme/CabinetMemberSD080103MWDSReport.pdf)

(3) 1996 Waste Local Plan, Waste Disposal Section.

[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/planning/planning\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_local\\_plan/waste\\_disposal.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/planning/planning_policy/minerals_waste_policy/minerals_waste_local_plan/waste_disposal.pdf)

(4) Policy from 1996 Waste Local Plan 'saved' by Secretary of State in 2007.

[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/planning/planning\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_local\\_plan/MWLPSavedPolicies25Sept07.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/planning/planning_policy/minerals_waste_policy/minerals_waste_local_plan/MWLPSavedPolicies25Sept07.pdf)

(5) Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, Core Strategy, August 2006.

[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/waste\\_recycling/alternative/joint-municipal-waste-management-strategy-2006.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/waste_recycling/alternative/joint-municipal-waste-management-strategy-2006.pdf)

(6) Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy, Options for Residual Waste, August 2006.

[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/waste\\_recycling/alternative/Anx-D.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/waste_recycling/alternative/Anx-D.pdf)

(7) *Oxfordshire County Council* Press Release on Procurement Process, July 2007.  
[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/other\\_sites/owp/about\\_us/meetings/280907/10a-Annex1-ISOS-Press-Release.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/other_sites/owp/about_us/meetings/280907/10a-Annex1-ISOS-Press-Release.pdf)

(8) ERM Report on Site Selection for Strategic Waste Management Facilities, September 2007 (WRG Site referred to as Site 10).  
[http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council\\_services/environment\\_planning/planning/planning\\_policy/minerals\\_waste\\_policy/development\\_framework/wastesites/stage2\\_report\\_part2.pdf](http://portal.oxfordshire.gov.uk/content/publicnet/council_services/environment_planning/planning/planning_policy/minerals_waste_policy/development_framework/wastesites/stage2_report_part2.pdf)

(9) WRG Sutton Courtenay Energy from Waste Update Newsletter, April 2008.  
[http://www.wrg.co.uk/suttoncourtenay/data/GreenIssues\\_Sutton\\_NewsletterimpV3.pdf](http://www.wrg.co.uk/suttoncourtenay/data/GreenIssues_Sutton_NewsletterimpV3.pdf)

All references accessed 25 August 2008.