

Weymouth Civic Society objects to plans for the Portland Incinerator

Weymouth Civic Society has objected strongly to plans to build an incinerator to burn household waste in an enormous plant on Portland. Whatever the merits of incinerating waste to reduce using it as landfill, we believe that Portland, approached by a single, already congested road, close to residential areas, surrounded by environmentally sensitive sites and largely dependent on the development of tourism, is not a suitable position for a large incinerator. This is not mere NIMBYism, but well supported by evidence such as the recent County waste plan as detailed below.

The Society has objected to the plant on three clear planning issues, but it believes that there are many other reasons why the so called 'Energy Recovery Facility' should not be built on the island.

◆ The application contradicts the principles of the Dorset Waste Plan.

The application proposes to build a giant waste incinerator in Portland Port ignoring the principles of the Dorset Waste Plan agreed by Dorset Council, Bournemouth and Poole as recently as December 2019. The plan aims to minimise the impact of waste treatment on the environment and public health by concentrating treatment of waste on sites as close as possible to where it is generated. The capacity of the proposed incinerator is more than twice the probable total of Dorset's RDF: (Refuse Derived Fuel: waste suitable for incineration) which is processed at Canford. The application specifies that RDF could be sourced from anywhere within a 3-hour lorry journey. In addition, it insists on the right to import RDF through Portland Port, suggesting that the site would import waste from overseas.

◆ The A354 route to Portland is already inadequate for the traffic it carries.

The application estimates that the incinerator would generate an extra 80 HGV journeys (40 each way) through Dorset most days of the year, causing unsustainable congestion on the narrow cross country A31/35 holiday routes and the commuter route between Dorchester and Weymouth. The final, largely residential, urban roads through Weymouth to Portland are already choked and unsuitable for more HGV movements. Whether travelling via Boot Hill or Lanehouse Rocks Road, the lorries would further impact the air quality for residents and school children and add to the regular queues for local motorists.

◆ The likely damage to the development of Portland

Portland's successful development in recent years is closely connected with its spectacular natural advantages. The development of water sports and the Sailing Academy, land based outdoor activities, the World Heritage Jurassic Coast, national and international sites of landscape importance and natural interest, the historical monuments and the lively arts scene all attract tourists. The massive industrial building with its 80 metre stack emitting an almost permanent plume of polluted steam would be an eyesore, intruding into the local landscape whether viewed from the Fleet, Weymouth or much of Weymouth Bay and disturbing the character of the whole area.

The Society recognises that incineration is a partial solution to the environmental problem of non-recyclable waste. However, Portland is an unsuitable site on virtually all environmental grounds. To refer to the plant as an 'Energy Recovery Facility' is seriously misleading. The process is significantly polluting, adding around a tonne of CO₂ to the atmosphere for every tonne of RDF burned. To mitigate this, plants are generally sited where the heat and energy which can be generated by the process can be utilised by nearby industry or housing or by feeding into the National Grid. This application makes no such provision. To serve the Verne or the nearby housing would require prohibitively expensive groundworks (including tunnelling through the cliff) and would be complicated by the nearby SSSI and historic naval buildings. The application only mentions supplying those cruise ships which can use shore power and survive the Covid pandemic, hardly compensation to Portland for the impact of such an industrial eyesore.

The Society plans to ask its members for their views on the issues facing Portland's environmental and historical legacy, which this application has brought threatens. We will be asking whether they consider that further objections are merited to help protect the future of the island.

Note to editors

Further information on the Society's position on this very complex issue is available from Pauline Crump,
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Planning and Environment Committee,
Weymouth Civic Society