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STIFLE FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – Saturday 31 October 2009

Parkway Social Club, Ernesettle Lane, Plymouth, PL5 2ET

Steering Group members present: Geraldine Lane (Chair), Rose Brooks (Secretary), Sharon Lambert (Treasurer), Joe Ellison (Public relations officer), Clare Gibson, Martyn Gimlett, Geoff Hillier, Jan Jackson, Stuart Lane, Neil Mawdsley, Bill Pym, Alison Sargent

1. **Welcome** to all those members attending – it was encouraging to see a good turnout.

2. **Apologies** received from: Jill Cole, Cllr Olive Eggleston, Cllr Derek Holley, Wendy Hudson, Paul Johnston (Greenpeace Laboratory), Cllr Mark Lowry, Sue Pym, Gwen Wengradt,

3. **Chair's report**

Geraldine reported that the steering group has been very active over the past year, with 12 meetings and regular discussions with television, radio and newspapers. The group have engaged with national agencies and attended a range of national and local meetings. Further details would be provided in the public meeting which followed the AGM.

4. **Treasurer's report**

Sharon Lambert presented a report of the funds over the past year; the majority of income had been spent on publicity, in particular printing leaflets and the purchase of a STIFLE banner; also £40 had been donated to the national umbrella group UKWIN who have offered STIFLE considerable support with the campaign. Funds came in from membership fees and £200 was raised by Jill Cole's concert at the Parkway in May, for which we were very grateful. More people need to be encouraged to join, for which reason the steering group had decided to reduce the joining fee to £1, but donations would be most welcome as the cost could rise considerably over the next year if the Partnership decide to proceed with the Ernesettle site.

5. **Election of steering group**

Chair: Geraldine Lane (re-elected)

Vice-chair: Neil Mawdsley (new post)

Secretary: Rose Brooks (re-elected)

Treasurer: Alison Sargent

Public Relations officer: Joe Ellison (re-elected)

The steering group members had all expressed their willingness to stand again and were duly re-elected.

Geraldine thanked the outgoing treasurer, Sharon Lambert, for her sterling work over the past year and asked if any other members wish to join the steering group. Anyone wishing to do so could contact a steering group at any time to express their interest. The steering group may also approach appropriate individuals to co-opt them on to the committee when

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we require specific expertise. There is a feeling that this coming year is going to be a “make or break” one for STIFLE as we await the final decision on the site for a waste incinerator.

PUBLIC MEETING

1. STIFLE were pleased to welcome Devonport MP Alison Seabeck who spoke on recent developments. She had recently attended a meeting with the Waste Partnership who indicated that if Viridor obtained planning permission to build a 275,000 tonne per annum waste incinerator at Lee Mill, they would still pursue the option of an incinerator at either Ernesettle or Devonport. Alison reaffirmed her support for the STIFLE campaign.
2. Presentation by Stuart Lane giving an update on STIFLE’s activities since January (a transcript follows)
3. Sheryl Murray, prospective Conservative Parliamentary candidate for south east Cornwall, spoke of her continuing support for STIFLE; she had circulated a questionnaire in Saltash which indicated total opposition to the use of the Ernesettle site for an incinerator.
4. Cllr Bob Austin (Cornwall County Council, Saltash) spoke of his support for the campaign, informing the meeting that a letter was being sent to the Chair of the South West Devon Waste Partnership outlining the Cornish objections to the proposal to use Ernesettle.
5. A lively question and answer session followed.

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PRESENTATION BY DR STUART LANE

It's just over a year now since STIFLE was born, and almost 10 months since our initial public meeting, so it seemed a good time to provide an update – especially as things are starting to move now.

For anyone who missed the start of year meeting, our concerns are over plans to use a previous greenspace sports and recreation area as a potential site for a major waste disposal site. As well as offering a valuable resource, the area is environmentally sensitive, abutting a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation, a Devon Wildlife site, listed historic monument, - the list goes on. Initially it was listed as a reserve site for possible limited use and even then with acknowledged problems. Now it has become a leading prospect for development. Ernesettle was the reference site for a successful PFI bid and although plans looked initially at disposal of Plymouth's waste, things have expanded and we are now dealing with a Partnership handling waste from all over the south of Devon.

We've queried this arrangement from the start; the guidelines for such developments say that waste should be dealt with as close as possible to the point of origin. The Partnership says that the bulk of the waste comes from Plymouth, so Plymouth should house the incinerator they favour. But their own waste arisings figures deny this.

At the initial public meeting we were interested in hearing what others thought about the prospect of an incinerator here. It was clear that there was a lot of opposition and that what most people wanted was their sports and recreation area back.

Eight companies subsequently expressed an interest in tendering for waste disposal for the Partnership. STIFLE contacted the Managing Directors of all of them direct, expressing our concerns and objections. Two subsequently withdrew. The Partnership later identified three companies to go forward. These were putting forward proposals involving in total four sites – two within the dockyard, one at Lee Mill – and Ernesettle. All plans were required to involve Combined Heat and Power systems – basically incinerators. One of the bidders – MVV Umwelt – has agreed to discussion with us if they eventually get the contract.

Over recent months the opposition to the use of the Ernesettle site has been growing. Three petitions have been raised so far, one of which has gone electronically to Downing Street, one tabled by Alison Seabeck in the Commons and the final one is still being compiled for use in any future planning enquiry. If you haven't already signed this one, please do so.

At the January meeting we already had the support of our three local MPs, three Plymouth City Councillors and five Cornwall Councillors. We now also have formal support from Sheryl Murray, Stephen Kearney, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the TUC, UKWIN; even Gary Streeter (who says he can't join our group!) has said in the Herald that the Ernesettle site is inappropriate.

Following the January meeting, the Partnership put up information on their website to 'calm concerns'; they didn't mention STIFLE, but every point discussed was one of ours. Unfortunately – and as is too often the case – what they posted were just claims with no evidence or references. We responded to their 'assurances', on the STIFLE website, this

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time with referenced comments. At the recent Guildhall roadshow, Devon's Recycling Officer admitted that the bidders had come to know about STIFLE and that they had real local opposition facing them.

A couple of pluses came out of the work that was required to respond to the Partnership. One claim, in relation to the problems of valley fogs and pollution retention, suggested that the thermal uplift of the incinerator gases could raise pollutants above the temperature inversion; this might happen, but it's hard to prove; local scientific studies have indicated that any weather patterns are difficult to model in this area. A very experienced environmental scientist at the University also pointed out that Sea Breeze effects ought to be considered – oscillating wind patterns caused by temperature differences over land and water which can recycle pollutants at both high and low levels.

We also heard about some interesting events in relation to health effects. Much of the evidence that the pro-incinerator lobby use to claim that incineration is safe comes from reports by the Health Protection Agency. Recently a Cornish protestor objected to a claim that there was no risk from incineration and took the matter to the Advertising Agency – who upheld his concerns when the HPA was forced to admit that they hadn't actually carried out any analysis!

Since then the HPA has published a statement to say that they have reviewed the topic and have no concerns - but they still don't say what they have reviewed and haven't done any health impact surveys. The Scottish Health Protection Agency has recently taken a more cautious view.

In opposition to this, as well as the major British Society for Ecological Medicine paper we reported previously, Prof Vyvyan Howard, a toxicologist, has spoken out against incineration – he was concerned about even smaller particles which we have no chance of measuring.

And we also came up with some interesting reports about dioxin production in incinerator gases – dioxins are broken down in incineration, but as the gases cool they reform in large amounts and according to at least one report, can bypass filters. The partnership's experts didn't seem to be aware of this research – we were happy to pass it on to them.

Over the months we have been involved in several events – we were invited to give a talk at the PCC Area Committee meeting, but at the last minute the PCC's lawyers blocked us - they said that we couldn't use a council event to discuss a commercial matter. In the Spring a major Energy Forum was held at Westminster, discussing - quite extensively - waste matters; the Partnership didn't attend, but our chair did, gaining some useful contacts. The report of this meeting is available to download on the STIFLE website. Later we took a table at the Saltash May Fair to discuss incineration with residents and also were invited to take part in discussions about trying to gain 'Transition Town' status for Plymouth.

We also attended the 'Big Question' session in the Pavilions hosted by the Herald, and raised the question of waste incineration at Ernesettle. Most members of the panel shared our concerns, although Councillor Salter was sure that everything was ok – we had a discussion afterwards! It's interesting that more recently he has been protesting about the health risks of fumes from the trial fire-ups at Langage...

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After a lot of approaches we have eventually started discussions with a group representing the Partnership, while on a lighter and much more pleasant note a local singer, Jill Cole, provided us with a very enjoyable evening's entertainment to help raise much needed funds for STIFLE. If anyone else has ideas for fundraising, please come forward and let us know – there are no central grants to help our efforts and it does cost!

In August the Partnership announced a Roadshow in the Guildhall to outline their activities; this again came with very little warning – just three days – but we did get steering group members there to raise STIFLE's views. Similarly when Viridor held a Roadshow about their plans at Lee Mill, steering group members again attended, but this time unofficially just to see what was being planned.

As well as this we now have a new website, have circulated our first newsletter and have a strong Facebook identity. We have also recently been in contact with the Tamar AONB – a presentation from Joe Ellison – to seek their views and also with Sport England over the loss of playing fields if the waste plans go through. An unexpected factor may have come into play here with the opening of Dave Shear's Motocross track on part of the site – evidence of a continuing recreation need on the site, a factor which should be considered under PPG note 17. In a similar vein we're also interested to hear from anyone who has walked dogs on the area for a long time – perhaps if someone is willing to organise a dogwalkers petition it may prove of use too.

So what is happening with Viridor at Lee Mill? They have announced plans to go ahead with a 275000 tonne waste incinerator whether they get the contract or not, on a quarry site they already use for waste management. They are submitting a planning application next month which will include road improvements and landscaping and intend to reuse the bottom ash on site.

On the face of it, you might expect that the waste partnership would be happy with this – problem solved and no public money involved – but they have indicated that things are still going ahead and there could be a second incinerator too. Why would we need 500,000 tonnes of waste incineration?

This is a bit worrying, as both of the other bidders are discussing plans that could include Ernesettle and a source from Cornwall has reported that the local Environment Agency might be open to the idea of a regional rather than county-based waste plan; two incinerators might fit this.

One of the concerns we raised was about traffic flows in the area, and a few people have suggested that this might be less of a problem with the closure of Toshiba; the new Driving Test Centre appears to be more than making up for this and a new Kingdom Hall planned for Ernesettle Lane will increase traffic further – and at some stage the factories will be back in use again.

Just a couple more points before I finish; the Partnership has just announced their next set of roadshows to discuss their plans. If you don't want a waste incinerator here, you need to attend and to make your views heard – if you don't they will say that they have held consultation and everyone is happy. Please try to make sure that you get to at least one – more would be better.

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Also coming up:

Plymouth Sports Strategy is now up for consultation – it would be good if many people suggested that we want facilities here. Similarly the city's greenspace strategy has now been published. Linked to this is a new scheme – Stepping Stones to Nature – in which Big Lottery funding is supporting greenspace development around the city. There is some funding for improvement of at least one area in each 'priority neighbourhood' It would be good if Ernesettle was one of those areas – but if we don't get together and make a strong case, we won't get anything. STIFLE can't take this on as well – others need to get involved.

At the end of the talk in January we stated that we felt that Zero Waste should be our target – if we can't recycle or reuse it, industry shouldn't be making it and we shouldn't buy it! Recently Professor Paul Connett made the point that areas that use incineration are less good at recycling. Plymouth is currently proud to be recycling 30% - but South Oxfordshire recycles 70% and on the 13th of this month Oxfordshire turned down two applications for waste incinerators . There are firms around already – such as TQ Recycling at Kingsbridge – that are capable and looking for municipal contracts; but the council think that Plymouth residents are incapable of recycling. We need to prove them wrong.

Our target remains to oppose the use of the Ernesettle sports site for any type of major waste facility and see it returned to sports and recreation use – we need all your support – if you haven't joined STIFLE, please do now. **So far nobody has said that Ernesettle is the right site for waste!**