

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF PLYMOUTH FROM STIFLE

From Monday 9 November the South West Devon Waste Partnership are holding roadshows around the region to publicise their plans to build a giant waste incinerator to burn the waste produced in Plymouth, South Hams, Torbay and West Devon. We strongly urge EVERYONE to attend and find out about these plans – we are all responsible for producing waste and a solution needs to be found to dispose of it in the most environmentally-friendly way, but we have to question if that solution should be incineration.

STIFLE (Stop The Incinerator Fouling Land at Ennesettle) was set up by a number of very concerned residents on both sides of the Tamar – arguably the region's most iconic river which will be blighted by such a development.

There are so many reasons why Ennesettle is unsuitable – briefly,

- it is a greenfield site, formerly providing a sports centre for a community with very few facilities
- the nearest houses are only 200 metres away, with schools and nursing homes in very close proximity
- the traffic on the Victoria Road roundabout is often at a standstill because of sheer volume; the new motor car and motor cycle test centre adds considerably to this traffic – is it wise to mix learners and large numbers of HGVs?
- The site is part of the city's "green corridor" and is adjacent to the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Area of Conservation, SSSI and County Wildlife Protection Site.
- The frequent river valley fogs will trap pollution and will be worsened by the chimney emissions.
- In 2004 a new waste incinerator at Swansea suffered an explosion – what would be the outcome if this were to happen to an incinerator in the "rumble zone" of the Armaments Depot?

We are frequently asked what are the alternatives as the Waste Partnership have only considered incineration, so this is an attempt to answer that question.

There are authorities in the UK that are aiming to implement a Zero Waste policy; The premise is that everything we buy is, or eventually will be, made from materials that can be repaired, reused or recycled. So governments, councils and industry should be working together to find ways to turn waste into a profitable resource or designing it out of the system altogether. The Scottish Parliament is currently consulting on a zero waste policy and is aiming to have no more than 25% of waste being sent to incineration by 2025. This compares with the South West Devon Waste Partnership plan to still be burning 50% of residual waste even as late as 2039.

One of their arguments is that people will NOT recycle – this is where we all need to show them that we are willing to do so; we also need much more encouragement to recycle and re-use. Where are the recycling "islands" seen in other European towns – so that our visitors and shoppers can drop cans, plastics, bottles, paper etc into appropriately marked bins? Why do we have to fight city council bureaucracy when

trying to get garden waste collected and why are people told to put their garden waste into the bins destined for landfill through what can be the busiest months for pruning? When the garden waste scheme started, the collection went from March to December, now reduced to May to October. We are aware that the Council are planning to expand this service, but householders feel that the messages currently sent out do not indicate that the council is serious about recycling. Plymouth boasts that recycling rates are 30%, while South Oxfordshire this summer achieved a rate of 70% - surely, with effective leadership, Plymouth could improve considerably!

There are no plans for Plymouth to collect food waste separately – this is one of the biggest contributors to the methane gas which blights landfill. Our other Devon partners manage to collect it; the food waste is then treated using anaerobic digestion and the gas captured and used as fuel – this is the method recommended by the EU for disposal of organic waste.

There are a number of top medical experts who are extremely concerned that we do not yet know the harm we are doing by continuing to burn vast quantities of unsorted waste. Councillor Dr David Salter recently raised questions over possible dangers in the steam and smoke emitted from the Langage Power Station, saying “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”. This is exactly the argument the scientists make about incineration – because we cannot see the ultra-fine particles emitted from the chimneys does not mean that they are not there and are not doing untold damage which may only become clear in the years to come. Unfortunately the arguments that incinerators are completely safe and very well-regulated means very little when people realize that there is no way of testing for some of these highly dangerous emissions.

We ask people to check out the website at www.ernesettle.org.uk and follow some of the useful links to find out more about waste management and the dangers of incineration, and also to make time to attend one of the roadshows the partnership is arranging so that you can let them know your views.

STIFLE STEERING GROUP