**BACKWELL RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATION**

Hon Secretary Mike Veal, 36 Long-thorn, Backwell, BS48 3GY

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7 May 2021

Councillor Donald Davies

North Somerset Council

Dear Councillor Davies

**Backwell Recycling Centre**

Backwell Residents Association (BRA) is a membership organisation with over 400 paid up households representing almost 800 adult Backwell residents.

This letter presents BRA’s view that the Backwell Recycling Centre (BRC) should be moved to a more suitable location at the earliest opportunity.

Background

BRC was moved from Cheston Combe to its present site in 2006 and resulted in controversy from the start. Residents were worried about road safety, traffic congestion and noise levels; a group campaigned unsuccessfully to oppose the move to this site. Part of the justification for accepting the likely levels of traffic was the proximity of the previously busy (but now closed) Coles Quarry, with all its HGV traffic in Dark Lane. After the site opened the concerns about noise and traffic continued and a ‘Liaison Group’ was established to discuss ways to reduce the problems. The noise issues were reduced, but certainly not cured, by a large new acoustic barrier along the northern edge of the site.

Location and Approach Roads

Noting the associated volumes of traffic, BRC is certainly not in a safe location. Unlike NSC’s other two Recycling Centres, BRC is situated in a residential area close to a junior school. All approach roads are narrow; some have only one pavement, some have no pavement and all are subject to a 20 mph speed limit. The busiest approach road, Dark Lane is used by most cars visiting the site and is the HGV route for all the vehicles servicing the site. Unfortunately, in normal times Dark Lane is also used to access the A38 and Bristol Airport. The acceptance of significant HGV traffic in Dark Lane based on precedence from previous quarry operations (mentioned above) is considered completely irrelevant in today’s climate; there is considerably more traffic and we are thankfully far more safety aware these days. Two years ago, despite strong local opposition, mainly on grounds of excessive traffic, approval was given for the adjacent Coles Quarry to be re-developed. [Fortunately, progress with this project seems to have stalled.]

On school days there is a lot of traffic associated with the nearby school and the inadequate pavement becomes very crowded with parents and children. Many children walk between school and Backwell cross-roads on their own. Other village roads, especially Station Road are busy and frequently congested with traffic, which includes BRC traffic. BRA does not have any data on the BRC users ‘catchment area’ but it seems likely to include Nailsea which is much larger than Backwell, and numerous smaller, widespread communities such as Blagdon, Dundry, Felton, Long Ashton, Wrington and Yatton. Residents using the amenity also report that many folk from Bristol have been using BRC.

BRC Site Constraints

The site itself is too small to allow a safe and efficient layout; this is only too obvious when comparing it with other two NSC sites. Arrangements for those with mobility issues have been reported as very difficult.

Operational Constraints

In the most recent Biffa contract, there were strict conditions closing Dark Lane to BRC HGV traffic at school in / out times for half an hour morning and afternoon on school days. [These restrictions have been extended to an hour morning and afternoon during the pandemic.] Initially, there were many breaches which had to be dealt with – some were very dangerous to pedestrians. [BRA has the records of these transgressions.] It is assumed that these movement restrictions also apply since the new organisation came into effect on 1st April and are presumably a significant operational inconvenience.

Traffic queueing to use the site has been a feature of life in Dark Lane and Church Town for a long time and became significantly worse when BRC opening days/hours were reduced as a cost saving measure. Indeed, some two years ago, the owners of Coles Quarry became so concerned about access to their own site that they offered to build a modified access to BRC, to create a greater capacity for queueing traffic (up and over an incline). The scheme has not yet been completed so this incomprehensible rationale is yet to be tested.

Environmental Considerations

BRC traffic, especially queueing traffic causes harmful atmospheric pollution in a residential area close to a school. There is more traffic throughout the area because of BRC.

Despite the acoustic barrier, local residents in Church Town, Dark Lane and eg Hilldale Road still have to live with the scraping and banging of skips, the operation of compacting machinery 7 days a week, and the general hubbub of traffic on days open to the public.

Impact of the Pandemic

In recent times, all the above issues have been exacerbated by the Covid Pandemic. In particular traffic has frequently been queueing a considerable distance down Dark Lane. This causes inconvenience and dangers to residents and BRC users. Frayed tempers have not been uncommon.

A Short-Term Palliative?

BRA understands that it might be possible to introduce a booking system. This seems a good way forward in the short term, as we note that even on busy days, there are quiet periods. An added benefit would hopefully be to ensure authorised users only. However, this will not resolve most of the issues affecting residents.

An Alternative Use of the BRC Site?

BRA suggests that the BRC site could be re-developed for residential housing – perhaps up to ten dwellings.

A Survey of Current and Future Needs for Recycling Centres?

BRA would be interested to know whether NSC is planning to survey and analyse the use of the three recycling centres – specifically who, what, how often and from where? It seems fundamental to conduct an objective appraisal of overall requirements and to select the best site to replace BRC.

North Somerset Local Plan?

It seems likely that NSC will have to accommodate a large number of new homes in the new Local Plan period. Presumably, recycling arrangements will need a commensurate increase, whether that be larger recycling centres or more recycling centres? Would more kerbside collections be a more sustainable solution? A recycling policy should be included in the Local Plan.

Conclusion

The current BRC site is too small, dangerous and inefficient. Its location gives rise to unacceptable dangers on local roads, is not good for the environment and is a blight on the lives of local residents. BRA hopes the above views and questions will prompt NSC to undertake a full investigation and lead to a detailed policy in the new Local Plan. Whatever else happens, **BRA strongly recommends that Backwell Recycling Centre be moved as soon as possible to a safer, more suitable location which will NOT be in a residential area and will be closer to the largest concentration of users.**

We look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely

M J Veal

Hon Secretary Backwell Residents’ Association

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