

OPEN LETTER TO DAVID CAMERON MP – LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

GlosVAIN c/o Homeward, Oxlynch Lane, Standish, Glos GL10 3DE

4th January 2010

Dear Mr Cameron,

I am writing to you in my capacity as chair of GlosVAIN (Gloucestershire Vale Against Incineration), which is a non-party-political alliance of Parish Councils, environmental organisations and residents opposed to incineration of waste in Gloucestershire. We seek your help in persuading your colleagues in Gloucestershire not to pursue incineration as a waste option.

Much of what we stand for is in line with Conservative Party waste policy:

I know that you personally care passionately about the environment, and that you see a key role for local councils to tackle climate change.¹ Conservative policy on waste states that: 'We believe quality of life and environmental issues must be at the heart of politics – which is why we have pledged to improve Britain's environment by ...providing **incentives to recycle** and **working towards zero waste**.'²

The report "**Quality of Life**", edited by ex-Environment Minister John Gummer and Prospective Conservative Parliamentary candidate Zac Goldsmith, states that " a ban should be established by 2012 on the incineration of any untreated biodegradable and recyclable waste".³ The report's recommendations seek to encourage the use of new technologies - in particular it highlights anaerobic digestion as having "proven carbon benefits". The report warns of the danger of councils "locking in" to long-term contracts with large energy-from-waste plants, "creating a situation where marginal costs of disposal fall to zero, reducing incentives to increase recycling rates". Concerning treatment options for waste, councils should be encouraged to think locally and reduce "waste miles", the report says. It calls for the planning regime to be adjusted to "favour small, flexible and selective schemes rather than large, inflexible and mass-burn schemes".

¹ David Cameron "We have to think globally and act locally. Conservative councils are bringing innovation and imagination to the challenges of tackling climate change at a local level. Conservatives are already the largest party in local government, and I'm encouraging our councillors to do everything they can to advance the green agenda." <http://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/search/story.aspx?brand=ENOnline&category=News&itemid=NOED19%20Apr%202006%2010:23:17:400&tBrand=ENOnline&tCategory=search>

² http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Environment.aspx

³ (iv) "Quality of Life " is at: <http://www.qualityoflifechallenge.com/> and <http://www.qualityoflifechallenge.com/documents/fullreport-1.pdf>

Your Shadow Chancellor, George Osborne, the MP for Northwich 'has given his backing to opponents of a planned incinerator in Lostock'.

"Many have been in touch with us, deeply worried about the serious health risks, the environmental damage, the inevitable traffic chaos and angered by the sheer effrontery of others sending waste to their home town for burning. In giving his support today and signing our petition, (George Osborne) has shown an understanding of their concerns. This is nothing to do with party politics. Our three local MPs have all objected to an incinerator in Northwich and I sincerely hope that other politicians in the area will soon follow their example."⁴

Many Conservative-controlled councils are also against incineration – for instance Surrey County Council's Conservative administration have announced that they are scrapping plans for any Energy From Waste (EfW) plants, more commonly known as incinerators, in Surrey. Cllr Lynne Hack, the Cabinet Member for the Environment, says 'there are cheaper and more ecological alternatives for waste disposal than incineration or landfill. By looking at new technologies we are able to propose a better solution'⁵.

What is happening in Gloucestershire?

Gloucestershire County Council has secured £93m PFI credits to commission a waste solution in Gloucestershire, so that we no longer bury our waste. They have gone out to tender and have short listed 4 companies who will be invited to submit detailed ideas in 2010. All companies would use the Javelin Park site in Haresfield. The County Council has maintained a position of 'technology neutrality'. This has resulted in all 4 bids having some element of incineration as part of their proposals.

Why GlosVAIN opposes incineration

GlosVAIN opposes incineration, and instead supports alternatives, in line with the Conservative policy as outlined above, because:

- **Incineration has a negative impact on climate change.** The burning of waste creates more CO₂ emissions than any other available waste technology⁶. Incineration is also the most inefficient way to create energy from waste. There are more effective and energy efficient technologies available. In particular anaerobic digestion (AD) has the capacity to meet 50% of the U.K.'s domestic gas needs⁷. One large

4

http://www.northwichguardian.co.uk/news/4796923.Osborne_backs_campaign_against_incinerator/

⁵ <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/localgovernment/2009/12/surrey-rejects-incinerators.html>

⁶ <http://66.102.9.132/search?q=cache:BsSchZET-FPMJ:www.london.gov.uk/mayor/environment/waste/docs/greenhousegas/summaryreport.rtf+mayor+of+london+report+on+incineration+and+greenhouse+gas&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk>

⁷ The Potential for Renewable Gas in the UK. National Grid 2009

incinerator on Javelin Park would generate CO₂ from transportation of waste over long distances.

- **Incineration destroys valuable resources.** A study undertaken for the National Assembly of Wales shows that 93.3% of municipal waste could be recycled and therefore reused. Recyclable materials can drive economic development and create jobs. An incinerator would simply burn much of these resources, requiring the extraction of additional natural resources to manufacture goods, which uses more CO₂ and therefore drives climate change. Incineration would inhibit the development of green businesses.
- **Incineration is bad for health.** Burning non-toxic metals and plastics creates dioxins. Tiny toxic particles escape into the atmosphere and build up in surrounding areas, affecting people and livestock. These nano-particles pass easily through membranes into lungs, where they build up over years and adversely affect health, resulting in an increase in all-cause mortality. Several large studies have proven increased mortality rates in areas close to incinerators⁸.
- **Incineration creates toxic waste.** After incineration, as much as 30% of what goes in to be burned is left as residues and up to 5% of this is fly ash, which is extremely toxic. Through incineration therefore a large amount of waste still needs to be buried and, because it is toxic, disposal is expensive and dangerous. Health risks for residents living near disposal sites are proven. There are less residuals from other methods of waste disposal such as better recycling, Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) and AD and they are not toxic.
- **Incineration is inflexible.** A large incinerator would lock the county into a 25+ year-contract. The incinerator would need to operate at full capacity in order to be efficient, and this would act as a disincentive to recycling, just at a time when supermarkets are moving towards 100% recyclable packaging. New technology is developing rapidly, providing better and more environmentally friendly solutions to waste treatment, yet the county would not be able to take advantage of these as we would be locked into a long-term contract with an outdated 'dirty' technology.
- **An incinerator would have massive visual impact.** An incinerator at Javelin Park would be hugely intrusive and clearly visible from the AONB and Cotswold Escarpment. They are huge buildings. Other technologies such as MBT and AD would blend in better with local surroundings.

⁸ *"The Health Effects of Waste Incinerators"* by Dr. Jeremy Thompson and Dr. Honor Anthony of the British Society for Ecological Medicine on incinerators and health
http://www.ecomed.org.uk/content/IncineratorReport_v3.pdf.

- **Incineration is bad for the taxpayer.** Apart from being hugely expensive to build and operate, there would be additional costs such as penalties if insufficient waste is provided, costs of upgrading if European safety guidelines are tightened, decommissioning costs. What appears to the County Council as a short-term solution would bring long-term cost and pain. Other alternatives such as MBT and AD are flexible and much less costly and do not have incineration's 'hidden' costs. Large incinerators in other areas of the country are already deemed to be a mistake.

How can you help?

We ask you to help us by encouraging your members in Gloucestershire to study the implications of incineration, and to decide to use our taxpayers' money for waste solutions that help protect our planet for the future rather than destroying it.

We look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

Sue Oppenheimer
Chair of GlosVAIN
Vice-Chair of Standish Parish Council