

Southern Water Services Appeal, Aylesford

A report by Head of Planning Applications Group to Planning Applications Committee on 11 September 2007

Summary – Update on the outcome of Southern Water Service's appeal for upgrade to Aylesford Wastewater Treatment Works

Recommendation: for information

Local Member: Mr G Rowe

Unrestricted

Background

1. Members may recall that at the 12th September 2006 Planning Applications Committee, the Committee resolved to refuse planning permission for development at the Aylesford Wastewater Treatment Works, Bull Lane, Aylesford (planning reference TM/05/4134). This development related to the expansion of the sludge recycling centre, including improvements to site access junction with Bull Lane, improvements to visibility splays and creation of passing bays along the access road.
2. There was considerable local objection to the proposal. The Committee refused the application on the grounds that
 - i. *The traffic generated by the proposed development would cause an unacceptable impact on the local highway network, particularly Eccles Village, contrary to policy TP15 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006.*
 - ii. *The development and associated traffic would have an unacceptable impact on the existing community facilities in the locality, particularly in terms of the usage of roads and footways and would therefore be contrary to policy QL11 of the Kent and Medway Structure Plan 2006.*
3. Southern Water Services (SWS) appealed the decision and a 6 day public inquiry was scheduled to be held commencing on the 24th July 2007. Proofs of evidence were required to be exchanged 4 weeks before the start of the inquiry.
4. On the morning that proofs were to be exchanged, the appellant's agent and the Planning Inspectorate advised that SWS had withdrawn the appeal. They are not required to give reasons for doing so. In a press statement however, the Company advised

“Southern Water is to re-think plans for a sewage recycling centre in Kent.

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As a result, the company is withdrawing an appeal against Kent County Council's Planning Committee's rejection of proposals for a centre in Aylesford.

As part of a £40 million environmental improvement scheme the company had planned to expand its existing sewage sludge treatment facilities prompting opposition from villagers in neighbouring Eccles.

Instead Southern Water says it will go back to the drawing board and review all options to provide the facilities.

Karl Taylor, Programme Director for Southern Water, said "While fully understanding the concern of residents we did feel we could still provide a satisfactory solution at Aylesford. However, following further consideration of the concerns raised by the residents, we have come to the conclusion that our plan is not the best way forward."

Southern Water still has to find a way to deal with increasing volumes of sludge, solid waste removed during the sewage treatment process, so it can be recycled into an organic agricultural product.

Mr Taylor said: "It is not an option for us to do nothing and we remain committed to finding a sustainable and county-wide solution to sludge treatment in Kent. We will be carrying out a comprehensive review of our options and working with the local community to produce a solution that has as little impact as possible."

5. The timing of the withdrawal of the appeal was in my view unreasonable in the terms of planning appeal guidance and was too late to prevent the County Council incurring considerable costs in preparing its evidence. This involved the appointment of Counsel and consultant expert witnesses. I have therefore made an application against the appellant for costs for the expenses that have been wasted in preparing for this appeal. I have also sought to establish early dialogue on the emerging sludge strategy.

Recommendation

6. Members are asked to note this report.

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