

PORTLAND ENERGY RECOVERY FACILITY

APPEAL BY POWERFUEL PORTLAND LTD

APP/D1265/W/23/3327692

STATEMENT BY CLLR BRIAN HEATLEY, DORSET COUNCILLOR FOR RODWELL AND WYKE

I am Brian Heatley, a Dorset Councillor for Rodwell and Wyke Ward in Weymouth, which lies directly across Portland Harbour opposite the application site. I am a member of Dorset Council's Northern Area Planning Committee. I'm also someone whose interest in history was enough to get a degree in the subject in my 50s, which motivates a bit of what I'm going to say on the heritage aspects of this appeal.

I believe you should recommend rejecting this appeal because:

- it is not consistent with the Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Waste Plan adopted in 2019;
- the proposal will cause significant harm to the heritage assets and their setting around the harbour, despite the new access path offered by the applicant;

I will also be making a technical planning point arising from my planning committee experience about the consequences of some of the uncertainties in the proposal.

Waste

The proposal site is not one of those designated as waste sites in the 2019 Local Waste Plan. It is therefore not consistent with an up to date waste plan and following the first sub-paragraph of paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy for Waste they are obliged to carry out an analysis of demand and supply of existing operational waste facilities. They have done so, concluding that there is a need for the plant. Others disagree.

I am conscious that the complex disagreement about the need for the site has already been debated exhaustively here, and I'm certainly not getting into that. But the time occupied by that dispute should not obscure that it is a matter of fact that the Local Plan does not contemplate a waste facility at Portland Port. And this simple fact is an important material planning consideration in its own right, for if not Section 70(2) of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, a statutory requirement, not just guidance, about planning authorities having regard to any local development plan, would be frustrated.

In addition the second sub-paragraph of paragraph 7 of the National Planning Policy for Waste says that in this situation:

applicants [should] demonstrate that waste disposal facilities not in line with the Local Plan, will not undermine the objectives of the Local Plan through prejudicing movement up the waste hierarchy.

The Appellant's opening statement says that the incinerator supports movement up the waste hierarchy in that it is better than landfill. I don't contest this, but do point out that Dorset's waste largely goes to incineration, not landfill anyway, so in practice that is not very relevant.

But there is another important way incinerators can frustrate the waste hierarchy. Any large commercial waste incineration plant will lower prices to attract business. Local waste authorities, under continuing pressure to cut costs, will inevitably be incentivised to continue to provide large volumes of residual waste, and not to incur the higher costs of moving up the waste hierarchy by increasing re-use and re-cycling.

Moreover they will get better terms supplying waste with a high calorific value, which means more biogenic material like food and paper, and more plastic derived from fossil fuels. So incinerators create a system that incentivises them not to recycle as much of these materials as they can, going in precisely the wrong direction.

Heritage

Second, the plant will harm the setting of the heritage assets around Portland Harbour. In my view the harm is not just to the assets individually but to their ability collectively to tell the story of the harbour. This starts with its early origins with the Tudors and the two castles, proceeds right through the Napoleonic wars, then the age of fleets of dreadnought battleships anchored in the harbour and up to the harbour's part in the Normandy landings and beyond. This is the main significance of the setting of these assets collectively, the setting tells the story. And the port itself as part of the setting of these assets is at the heart of this story.

But the essence of the significance of the port as the centre of the setting is simple. It is that it is a port, a place where sea and water meet and ships come and go. It is not in fact a general industrial site whatever its planning designation. We do not want to preserve the port in Aspic as the Appellant suggests, but we do think its essential nature, as a port, is its significance as part of the setting for the surrounding heritage assets. They would not be there without it. A huge new building in the port unconnected with this naval and maritime heritage is a massive distraction from the way the port and harbour tell the story of the surrounding heritage assets.

Uncertainties

My more technical planning point concerns primarily the plume from the plant. The appellant argues that the plume from the stack, which could potentially have a large visual effect on the setting of both the heritage assets and the landscape, will only be visible for about 20 hours per annum. Many disagree with that; the truth is that nobody knows. It does depend on the Portland weather after all.

Now I know from experience that Planning Committees, under the usual urgings to try to promote development, we often seek to allow the development but impose planning conditions to mitigate problems and uncertainties like this. For example they may seek in this case to suggest a condition that the plant be turned off if the plume is visible for more than a certain time. But we are always told by our planning officers that such issues cannot be controlled like this as such a condition would not be reasonable under para NPPF 55. So the only way we can be absolutely sure that the plume will not do substantial harm to the setting of the Heritage Coast is not to proceed with the plant.

Similarly, as my colleague Cllr Sutton will explain, the residents of Rodwell and Wyke are very concerned by the estimate of 80 additional large HGV trips per day through the ward. They would be even more concerned if after some modification to the type of fuel, or the plant itself ten years on, that this turns into 120 movements a day. But we can't condition to prevent this this, and so this uncertainty has to be borne in mind, again adding its weight to the planning balance.

So remembering the importance of respecting local democratically arrived at plans and the way the port, as specifically a port, is itself at the heart of telling the story of our heritage assets, please recommend not allowing this appeal.

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