

Response of the Deputy Director of Environment & Economy Growth & Infrastructure to the Petition about the closure of Dean Pit

Thank you for the petition presented to the County Council's Cabinet on Tuesday 19 July about the closure of the Dean Pit Household Waste Recycling Centre.

I know that there have been a number of emails and letters on this matter that have been sent to you in recent weeks and I will try not to repeat all of this information. However, there are a couple of points that I want to reiterate.

Firstly it is important to emphasise the changing nature of the need for household waste recycling centres. A much improved kerbside collection system has been introduced by West Oxfordshire District Council. This has been very successful and has changed the demands on the Dean Pit site. Site usage in terms of visitor numbers and tonnage has reduced substantially.

That success gives encouragement to our ambition to increase further the use of the kerbside collection system that has been put in place. This will have the added benefit of reducing the need for residents to travel to dispose of their recyclable material. Success in this regard will reduce still further the need for Dean Pit. Our experience across the County suggests that easy access to free of charge residual waste facilities do not encourage people to make full use of alternative ways of disposing of their rubbish.

The Dean Pit site costs money to provide and it is right that we continuously look carefully at all our expenditure. The site is expensive to provide compared to other sites. Value for money is very important to the County Council particularly in the current financial climate.

As previously stated, closure of the Dean Pit site will bring financial savings in the order of £200k per annum. The cost of closing the site is also approximately £200k but this is a one off cost that relates primarily to the physical restoration of the site, as well as publicity and security.

As you will appreciate, we cannot operate the Dean Pit facility past the end of the planning permission. In determining the current permission the Planning and Regulation Committee made it clear that it considered an extension of two years was appropriate. The proposal for a five year extension was turned down by the committee as inappropriate. On that basis even if we were to submit an application for a further extension it is by no means certain that permission would be granted.

The committee's decision prompted us to look for a site so we could provide a direct replacement for Dean Pit - we even carried out a search in the local area looking for a suitable site. A number of sites were considered but all had planning and delivery issues. However, since then the need for the Dean Pit site has reduced and this is reflected in the declining usage of the site. This is a trend that has been repeated across the County as investment by the district councils in new collection systems has come on stream. As a result we are not

providing a direct replacement for Dean Pit, or two other sites that are due to close at the end of their planning permissions.

You request that we carry out an equalities impact assessment (EQIAs) for the closure of Dean Pit. The county council takes equalities very seriously and uses EQIAs where we anticipate there could be a significant impact on equality issues. This was not the case for the closure of Dean Pit and therefore an EQIA was not carried out.

You also request that a specific environmental impact assessment (EIA) is carried out. Having considered carefully the EIA Regulations, we do not believe that it is necessary or appropriate to carry out an EIA in this instance.

I have looked at both these decisions and I am comfortable that they were both well made and appropriate for these circumstances. The circumstance in this case is that a planning permission will expire, investment in kerbside collection systems means that for the majority of residents the need to visit Dean Pit is reduced and we have an obligation to close and restore the site.

You suggested using the costs of closure to keep the site open longer, however, the £200k cost of closure would only keep the site open for approximately one year. In addition we would still be faced with the cost of closing and restoring the site anyway.

I appreciate the point that the closure of Dean Pit will have an effect on people who want to continue to use the site. However, the closure of Dean Pit has to be viewed in the light of a planning permission that will expire, a change in the need for the site and also the very tough financial climate that we are in.

I believe that the experience to date for many residents is that by making full use of the available kerbside collection service and the host of other routes for managing their waste it is possible to dispose of their rubbish in a way that minimises any inconvenience.

I hope this response goes some way to answering your questions and responding to the points made in your petition. I am very happy for you to contact me directly with any further points.

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