



**Friends of
the Earth**

Spoken statement January 9, 2008: B&NES Cabinet meeting

The written statement I presented to the cabinet dwelt with the incompatibility between a zero waste policy and an incinerator. What I want to say now starts similarly but follows a different argument. The B&NES public consultation on waste earlier this year was well attended. Aside from the universal rejection of the use of incineration, those assembled found unanimity on one other topic: that facilities should be relatively small, local and not encumbered by long binding contracts.

To quote the WoE report published in December: “A considerable majority voiced an opinion in favour of a large network of smaller localised facilities dispersed across the area”. So where has this concept gone? It is nowhere to be seen in the current proposals. So what is desirable about small and more local? Containing congesting, reducing CO2 emissions and related pollution was certainly one of the main reasons. This meant not having all the refuse lorries driving across the region towards Avonmouth.

What else might we get through more local facilities? One of the worst habits we have fallen into collectively is the sense that once we have discarded something that is the end of it. Out of sight out of mind. Keeping waste relatively near one’s doorstep allows us to actually pay attention to our civic responsibilities. These are different for each of the councils: Bristol has more paper and card, B&NES more food & green waste. Hence, our needs for not landfilling these “leftovers” are different. B&NES and North Somerset have need for more in vessel compost systems and anaerobic digestion. Bristol may need more pre-sorting and mechanical biological treatment. South Gloucester has an abundance of plastics, which might be best dealt with through expanding contacts with plastics recyclers.

Instead, phase 3 in the West of England report opts for the ubiquitous solution of burning. Is this best-practice or simply best price? Smaller more flexible facilities have many advantages that a bigger solution does not. When an incinerator breaks down or catches fire, which they do, you have no back up. Lower technology facilities do not break down in the same “all or nothing” way and were one to temporarily fail we would have other solutions to back it up. And when the waste stream reduces or changes direction, we can retire or change our folio of facilities without major upheaval. The financial implications of replacing a large incinerator make this technology permanent over the term of its contract (usually 25 years).

The incinerator option is relatively simple to budget for and a cynic would be suspicious that its preference is just an easier answer. If the smaller and flexible facilities are in fact the right solution for our communities and the right answer environmentally, how much cheaper does the incinerator have to be to adopt this “non-best practice”?

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