

June 2016

West Suffolk Operational Hub briefing note

This briefing note summarises information in the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury 14 June Cabinet reports and appendices. These conclude that following further investigation and assessment of suggestions and issues raised during the West Suffolk Operational Hub (WSOH) consultation in Jan/Feb 2016, land at Hollow Road Farm, near Bury St Edmunds, remains the most suitable site. Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury councils decide whether to progress with the next stage of the WSOH project on 28 and 29 June. The councils know that many people living near the site are very concerned about it. If the decisions on 28 and 29 June are 'yes' the councils will prepare a detailed planning application and continue to do all they can to allay the concerns of communities living near the site. The documents are available on: www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/wsoh

Background

Dealing with Suffolk's waste costs around £35 million a year. This takes into account savings of more than £8 million following the change from landfill to producing electricity through the Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Great Blakenham. Those savings for the taxpayer depend on a network of waste transfer stations being built near large populations, including Bury St Edmunds.

As partners, Forest Heath (FHDC), St Edmundsbury (SEBC) and Suffolk County (SCC) councils agreed to develop a WSOH – a single site bringing together:

1. a waste transfer station – where lorries drop waste inside a large shed for transfer into larger lorries which then travel to Great Blakenham;
2. depot – vehicle parking (so bin lorries drop off at the transfer station and park next door), workshops, offices and welfare facilities for staff;
3. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) – improved facility (for example, no steps

plus a re-use shop) replacing the one on Rougham Hill.

Current facilities are not suitable for collection and disposal of waste today or into the future as they are not large enough, in the wrong locations and costly to run. Bringing these waste services together will cut the cost to taxpayers over the lifetime (23 years minimum) of the EfW through sharing facilities.



Waste transfer station in March, Cambs

The WSOH project

Forest Heath, St Edmundsbury and Suffolk County councils expect to reduce the cost of waste by more than £1 million each year (before any borrowing costs) through building a WSOH at Hollow Road Farm. The councils have a legal duty to deliver many of the services and significant investment is needed in the necessary plant, equipment and facilities due to the expected growth of housing of more than 20%.

The WSOH would also be better for the environment, because lorries will cover fewer miles overall across West Suffolk. Currently they trek to the waste transfer station at Red Lodge, originally chosen when waste went to landfill, and then drive back east to Great Blakenham.

The WSOH would give the capacity to cope with significant future growth in West Suffolk (current facilities are at capacity). It would also free up Western Way land for future economic development, creating jobs and bringing a range of public services together on one site.

The HRF site is next to the sugar beet factory and smaller industrial premises (including a small waste transfer operation) with, due to its contours, minimal impact on the landscape. But the site is not identified for such a use in the Local Plan (it is useable farmland) and would generate more local traffic.

Consultation

A 2015 pre-planning application consultation (nationally-recognised good practice for major applications) on building an operational hub at Hollow Road Farm led to many objections from concerned local communities. As a result, the councils committed to carrying out a second consultation.

The councils carried out the second consultation earlier this year, not linked to a specific site and open to everyone in West Suffolk. They published the 'workings out' which had led to the councils identifying Hollow Road Farm as the preferred site. People were asked to scrutinise the research, comment on it and suggest alternative sites.

There were 551 responses with the concerns including disagreement with the reasoning for a single hub and the way potential sites were

assessed, traffic impacts, use of greenfield land, council policies and safety issues. A large number of responses came from the Great Barton and Fornham areas (113 and 97 respectively) which are closest to the Hollow Road Farm site.

Responses from the central, western and Moreton Hall areas of Bury St Edmunds were the next highest at 71, 62 and 23 respectively.



Inside a waste transfer station

The councils investigated the feasibility of new suggestions or alternative sites. Some issues had already been answered in the original Identification and Assessment of Potential Options and Sites report (IAPOS) or the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) which were published as part of the 2016 consultation. In response to new issues the councils asked the documents' authors, experts in their fields, to carry out further research and update the IAPOS and SA documents.

Every issue raised – there were just over 380 separate issues – has been responded to by the councils in the Consultation Report (Appendix A of the report going to FHDC and SEBC Cabinets on 14 June).

Next steps

The councils have taken account of every consultation response but the extra research has still led back to land at Hollow Road Farm coming out of the assessment process as the best solution for dealing with waste from across West Suffolk, both now and into our growing future.

Both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury (SCC already has the necessary democratic permissions) now need to decide whether to go ahead with the West Suffolk Operational Hub project on land at Hollow Road Farm.

If the decision is 'yes' then the next stage is a planning application, which would need to include detailed information about traffic and environmental impacts, how the site would be managed (including how smells and vermin would be dealt with), safety, archaeological studies and all the other requirements for a project of this size. This is unlikely to be ready before autumn 2016.



HWRC re-use shop, Thetford

The decision would be taken by St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Development Control Committee, as the Local Planning Authority for this type of planning application.

This committee includes councillors who have received training in planning legislation and, with its role subject to the requirements of such legislation, acts independently from the council's policy-making function.

As with other planning applications there would be a three-week period during which parish councils, residents, statutory authorities and other interested parties could submit their comments.

Some more information

- Disposal of waste has changed from landfill to generation of

electricity through the Energy from Waste (EfW) at Great Blakenham.

- A waste transfer station is needed close to Bury as current arrangements are unsustainable and costly to taxpayers.
- The number of homes needing waste collection in West Suffolk is set to grow from 75,000 to around 92,000 over the next 20 years.
- Bringing all the facilities together (Option 4) would save the West Suffolk's councils around £656,000 and SCC £450,000 a year (before borrowing costs).
- Project cost over past two years to the three councils is £320,000 out of the £660,000 councils-approved funding.
- WSOH advantages include:
 - more efficient land use;
 - more opportunities for joint management of operations;
 - more opportunity for income for commercial services;
 - better HWRC;
 - more efficient working patterns;
 - greater potential to meet changing demand.
- Following consultation suggestions, three new sites were considered alongside Tut Hill and Hollow Road Farm:
 - land between River Lark and A14 (opposite side of A134 to existing HWRC);
 - land between Rougham Hill, A14 and Rushbrooke Lane, Bury; and
 - land south of West Suffolk Crematorium, near Risby.
- All five sites have been assessed, including an initial Highways assessment.

- Closest potential alternative to Hollow Road Farm is the field south of Risby Crematorium.
- Difference between Hollow Road Farm and alternatives is considered significant.
- Some changes have been made to the Sustainability Appraisal as a result of additional research following the consultation but scores and conclusions (Hollow Road Farm being the most suitable and deliverable site) remain unchanged.
- Comprehensive additional information, such as a detailed Transport Assessment, would be submitted with a planning application.
- Natural staff turnover should allow management of any reduction in staff.

Timeline

July 2012: Suffolk County Council report says a waste transfer station is needed near Bury St Edmunds.

October 2013: Planning approval given by SCC for a waste transfer station at Rougham Hill.

Summer 2014: While a legal challenge is being made to the Rougham Hill site the West Suffolk councils start talks with SCC about whether a shared operational site could be an option. This followed a change in ownership of the NHS Logistics building in Olding Road, leading to a revised Western Way masterplan and need to move the depot.

February 2015: A number of sites were assessed, leading to Hollow Road Farm being identified as the most suitable location for a shared facility. A land option was agreed with the owner to secure the price should proposed development be approved.

March-April 2015: pre-application consultation with local communities close to Hollow Road Farm.



Waste transfer station, Manchester

January-February 2016: Second consultation (not linked to a specific site, open to everyone in West Suffolk) set out why Hollow Road Farm had been identified as preferred site. People asked to scrutinise research, comment on it and suggest alternative sites.

February-June 2016: consultation responses recorded, analysed, researched and responses written. Reports updated to reflect the councils' responses to comments, including alternative sites.

June 2016: Councils decide whether to proceed with the WSOH project.

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