SEWPAG

The South East Waste Authority Planning Advisory Group (SEWPAG) comprises Waste Planning Authorities (WPAs) in the south east of England, the Environment Agency, representatives from similar fora in London and the east of England and waste industry representation through the Environmental Services Association (ESA). It is a non-executive body, funded directly by the WPA members.

SEWPAG exists to help WPAs in the south east fulfil the statutory plan making ‘Duty to Co-operate’ on strategic cross boundary waste issues, and to give effect to the Government’s stated intention to encourage WPAs to work together in groups in order that they may carry out their individual responsibilities more effectively.

The overall aim of SEWPAG is to ensure that meaningful, collaborative joint working between WPAs, the Environment Agency and the waste industry (represented by the ESA) within the south east of England on strategic waste management issues is undertaken diligently and on an ongoing basis for the mutual benefit of those authorities.

Role of Lakeside EfW facility in the region

Currently, a significant quantity of waste from the South East Region goes to the Lakeside Energy from Waste (EfW) facility in Colnbrook, Slough. This facility has a capacity of 450,000 tonnes per annum and in 2017 was working at capacity\(^1\). This represents almost a fifth of the municipal and/or Industrial & commercial incineration capacity in the South East\(^2\).

In 2017\(^3\), it received around 90,000 tonnes from Slough, with the rest from London (180,000 tonnes), the South East Region (120,000 tonnes) and beyond (61,000 tonnes).

Additionally, the Colnbrook facility also hosts other forms of waste management such as a high-temperature incinerator and a Materials Recovery Facility.

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Potential impacts from the additional runway at Heathrow

[NPPW / protection of existing operational facilities (Para. 8 1st bullet)]

The Government has indicated that it prefers the proposed additional runway at Heathrow airport as an airport expansion option and the area for this would likely include both the Colnbrook waste complex and rail depot.

Some of the proposed plans for the additional runway do offer a nearby alternative location for the EfW, however relocating such a facility is a complex project that is still subject to negotiation, as well as planning consents and other permits. While the current Waste Plan for the Berkshire area does provide possible alternative for EfW facilities⁴, these have not been implemented. There is only limited possibility that a replacement facility would be delivered in the timescale predicted for the Heathrow expansion.

The potential loss of this facility would have a significant impact on waste management in the region as waste would need to travel further. The waste from London is unlikely to find alternative waste management within London, thus increasing travel in the area and beyond. It may also be the case that 450,000 tonnes of extra waste management could not be easily accommodated, and landfill deposits may have to increase if other facilities are not available. [Waste hierarchy]

The demolition of the facility itself is an additional issue, due to the large quantities of waste, including hazardous waste, that are likely to be produced and may need processing at nearby facilities.

Providing a replacement facility outside the Heathrow area is likely to pose a particular challenge in terms of timescales, as the process for locating, approving and building EfW facilities is known to be long, sometimes taking a decade or more.

Furthermore, the building of a replacement facility or any other facilities to cover the capacity gap, will also require construction minerals, at a time when a significant, unquantified amount may be required for the work on the Heathrow expansion.

Recommendations

The SEWPAG local authority members, having reviewed the available information on Lakeside EfW and proposed Heathrow expansion, have the following recommendations to make:

1. That the Lakeside facility is considered a regionally important facility, as befits its waste management role in the region and a full assessment of the potential impacts of losing this facility is made.

⁴ [Reference]
2. That, if the Lakeside EfW facility were to close, an equivalent or greater replacement waste capacity needs to be provided.
3. That an assessment is undertaken of the potential impacts of the waste produced by demolishing this facility and how it would be managed.
4. That there is no gap in the provision of replacement capacity.
5. That, ideally, the replacement facility would be in a similar location.

The SEWPAG WPAs consider that these recommendations are in accordance with the importance of the Lakeside EfW facility in the South East region and would serve to adequately mitigate the potential negative impacts of closing this facility.

Contact

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