

West Wickham Parish Council Objection to an Anaerobic Digestion Facility at Spring Grove Farm (SCC/0045/23SE)

West Wickham Parish Council objects to the application to construct and operate an anaerobic digestion facility on the land north of Spring Grove Farm and the associated lagoon site on land north east of Cadge's Wood. The lagoon site is in close proximity to West Wickham Parish.

We object to the application on the following grounds:

Policy Grounds

Suffolk Minerals & Waste Plan (adopted in 2020) Policies WP3 and WP7 do not support this application as the site is neither used for existing waste management, industry or distribution; it is not brownfield land; it is not within or adjacent to agricultural buildings, or integrated with a water treatment plant.

Economic Grounds

Haverhill Vision 2031(adopted by St Edmundsbury Borough Council in 2014) identifies 12 hectares of land at Hanchet End as a strategic employment site in Policy HV10. This policy zones this land for technology, research and light industrial employment, aiming to bring high quality jobs to Haverhill. Haverhill Research Park and the landmark Epicentre innovation centre is only 200m from the site boundary. In addition, the Flying Shuttle public house is also within 250m of the site boundary. The visual appearance of this site, its noise and odour will be hugely detrimental to attracting developers and high value employers to the area. No prestigious employer is going to want to site their office overlooking such an unattractive set of structures with the well documented risk of unpleasant odours.

We do not accept that the odour 'Pathway Effectiveness' to employment sites in such proximity can be dismissed as 'Ineffective'. The conclusion that the 'Odour Exposure Risk' to these employment sites is 'Negligible' is not credible.

The applicant's claim of 5 FTE positions generated through operating the proposed plant is vastly outweighed by the damage it would do to existing and future employment sites in close proximity to this facility.

Environmental Grounds

The lagoon site is less than 100m from the Stour Brook to the south. The brook and other ditches surrounding the site are prone to flooding according to the Environment Agency Surface Water Flooding 1% and 0.1% annual probability data. We have significant concerns regarding the potential contamination of the Stour Brook that could result following extreme rainfall, accident or leak.

We also note with concern the relatively high contributions of NH₃ pollution at the ancient woodland at Cadge's Wood from the lagoon site at 50% of critical level and 39% critical load and that the applicant has made no provision or commitment that these projected levels are not exceeded or even monitored.

Loss of Residential Amenity

We consider that the presence of a large scale waste processing facility represents a significant loss of residential amenity to residents of Haverhill, especially those in the Hanchet End area. The visual, noise, traffic, odour and pollution impacts are all detrimental to those close to this facility. The substantial change in the character of the area from technology and research based high value employment, modern homes and leisure facilities, to a large scale facility for processing farm waste on a prominent approach into Haverhill is detrimental to the amenity of the town in general.

The lagoon site is detrimental to the amenity of the nearby Skippers Hall Farm, Exhibition Farm and Exhibition Cottages due to the risk of odours from the 22500m³ of stored digestate with a surface area of over 3600m². Planning applications for anaerobic digesters always promise in their planning statements that odour will be 'negligible risk' or 'low impact' and then nearby communities are blighted. A few examples are listed below:

- January 2019: Residents subjected to 'unbearable odours' from AD plant in Ballymena¹.
- February 2020 County & Borough Councillors appeal to the Environment Agency to shutdown the AD plant near Farleigh Wallop due to a 'most unpleasant' smell affecting hundreds of homes for 'sustained periods'².
- March 2023: Environment Agency fines AD plant operator in Stockton-on-Tees for failing to control odour³.
- May 2023: Councillor reports that the Fernbrook plant near Rothwell "certainly does smell and It's absolutely disgusting"⁴.

In addition, the recent explosion at the Severn Trent site in Cassington, Oxfordshire has highlighted that the storage of large amounts of flammable gas carries inherent risks⁵ incompatible with being close to residential and commercial development.

We consider that allowing this application in such close proximity to Haverhill, neighbouring villages such as West Wickham and other surrounding villages would place the environment and the wellbeing of large numbers of people at risk.

¹<https://www.ballymenaguardian.co.uk/news/2019/01/17/gallery/residents-complain-over-foul-odours-from-plant-2904/>

²<https://www.basingstokegazette.co.uk/news/18233295.councillors-call-anaerobic-digester-close-odour-pollution-reported/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/north-east-company-fined-thousands-for-odour-issues>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv240e5044xo>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-66991876>