

DEPUTATION THREE – FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Will you please make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and could you please begin by introducing yourself and the people of your delegation. Thank you.

MR D FANAROFF: My Lord Mayor and fellow Councillors, thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is David Fanaroff and I represent, and a group of my colleagues, organisations in Leeds who are under the banner of No Incineration Leeds. We are an organisation of environmental groups, local residents and social justice groups who oppose waste incineration as a form to process waste in Leeds.

Why Leeds should not be chained to waste incineration.

On 2nd November the Executive Board will be asked to make a decision on who should build a waste incinerator for Leeds. This decision will effectively lock and chain Leeds City Council into a contract for burning 50% of the domestic waste produced in the city for the next 25 years.

This is why the Council should not approve a waste incinerator for Leeds.

An incinerator will tie the Council down to a contract which will have to guarantee a minimum level of waste to be burnt each year. Councils such as Sheffield with similar contracts who have not produced enough waste have had to rely on imports from other areas or increased levels of commercial waste to feed the incinerator. In Hampshire, Veolia (one of the bidders for the Leeds contract) applied to vary the plant's planning conditions to allow them to process more commercial waste and, potentially, import waste from outside the county. One can accurately predict the quantity or quality or make-up of waste for the city for the next 25 years. Waste levels have been falling steadily. Such a contract, even with safeguards, is foolhardy.

Incinerators suppress demand for local recycling as residents see less need to separate and recycle their waste. Leeds has set a recycling target of 50%. Other authorities are already exceeding this level and have set much higher and progressive targets. Leeds is now lagging behind most other UK cities, including Bradford and Hull, with their current recycling.

Incineration releases high levels of climate change-causing gases, including CO₂ – more than other processing technologies. To build an incinerator would be counter to the Council's own Climate Change Action Plan with commendable targets for reducing its carbon footprint by 40%.

Incineration does not eradicate landfill. We estimate that, in a region of 150,000 tonnes of toxic, concentrated, mixed domestic and industrial hazardous ash will be produced over the contract period. It will need to be loaded on to lorries and transported

through Leeds to a special landfill site. The Council's own Waste Strategy is to achieve zero waste. This will be impossible for 25 years if the incinerator is built.

Waste incineration poses significant health risks. Although modern incinerators use expensive filter systems, they emit significant levels of ultra-fine particles. These can pass through lung lining, causing internal inflammation and penetrate into organs. There is no doubt that incinerators produce toxins. The argument is whether the amounts are harmful and what they will mix with in the atmosphere. The Council should adopt a precautionary principle and not accept a new industrial development which releases hazardous chemicals into the atmosphere.

Incinerators are prone to breakdowns and the nature of an operation that burns mixed materials at high temperatures and produces steam at high pressures creates risk. In September 2006 the Kirklees incinerator suffered a serious incident that put it out of action for a week. A local Councillor reported the incident was so serious that the Huddersfield water system could not handle the needs of the fire services, which is why they pumped water from the local canal.

Compared to reuse and recycling, incinerators create few jobs and little in the way of additional income or contracts for other companies in the local economy.

Incinerators are often justified on the basis of energy production. However, it is a very inefficient way to produce power. They often require gas to be burnt to create heat to dry out unsuitable materials to make them burn. The electricity produced will have no direct benefit to Leeds because it will go direct into the National Grid. If the point was to produce extra electricity, there are far better ways of doing it.

The two companies that Leeds has left to choose from to build the incinerator pose significant risks. Veolia recently announced they are in financial meltdown, pulling out of 37 different countries and falling into tens of millions of pounds of debt. This is not the first time they have got into severe financial problems which resulted in selling off all their waste incinerators in the United States.

Covanta, the other bidder, who filed for bankruptcy protection in 2002, has no experience of operating an incinerator in the UK and has not completed the construction of an incinerator for over 15 years. Both companies have been sued for labour violations after treating their workers illegally and prosecution for major pollution leaks.

It is possible for Leeds Council to pull out of the current procurement of an incinerator process. Both Hull and East Riding Councils have pulled out of a contract with a company to build an incinerator at a stage in the process beyond where Leeds is now.

THE LORD MAYOR: Could you move to your final sentence, please?

MR D FANAROFF: OK, fine. There are alternatives to waste incineration and we would like to discuss those with you further between now and 2nd November. We have a lot more information which can justify everything that we have said and we will be sending you reports so that you can analyse this in more detail.

Thank you for the time to speak. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor James Lewis, please.

COUNCILLOR J LEWIS: Thank you. I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

COUNCILLOR LOBLEY: I second, my Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All those in favour, please? (*A vote was taken*) That is CARRIED, thank you.

David, thank you for coming along and for saying what you have said. You will be kept informed of the considerations which your comments will receive. Thank you again. (*Applause*)