

Speech by Neil Wilson to Middlewich Town Council Planning Committee

9th June 2009

Hello, my name is Neil Wilson and I am a proud citizen of Middlewich. I am also a Chartered Engineer, something else I am extremely proud of. Upon hearing about the proposal for an incinerator I conducted my own research to understand the pluses and minuses of such facilities and form an unbiased view. I now find myself a supporter of the campaign against incineration as a whole and, more so, the Middlewich incinerator planning application. I feel I can speak on behalf of the 7500 people, about 70% of my fellow townspeople, who have signed the petition requesting the Council reject the Covanta planning application.

First, I wish to say that this Planning Committee has been set an onerous and complicated task in deciding what recommendation to make to the full Council regarding the application. I assume that you have all read the 600 plus pages of the application and consulted the various guidelines and policies in order to meet your responsibilities and make an informed decision on this critical matter.

My plea this evening is that the Planning Committee decides by a unanimous vote to oppose the Covanta planning application and thereby meet its obligations to protect Middlewich and its community for this and future generations.

At the last meeting of this Committee, Sula Stanley made an eloquent speech covering the many reasons for opposing the application. You will recall these included health risks, particularly to children, traffic issues, the sheer scale of the proposed buildings, reduction in house values and many others. I am not going to repeat these here this evening. However I would like to say a few words about health risks and then concentrate on challenging the necessity for a waste incinerator at all and, specifically, why Middlewich?

Firstly the health risks, I wish to emphasise that it is not the policy of all who campaign against the application to state categorically that incinerators will definitely damage the health of those who live in their vicinity although many believe that to be the case. We are certain however that there is credible medical evidence provided by qualified experts that there are serious risks involved. These experts say that it takes many years to properly monitor the effects of even modern plants and point to the fact that it can take 10 to 20 years for conditions like cancer and damage to unborn babies to appear. Their advice is that in the meantime we should adopt the precautionary principle. Play safe, in other words, and not go ahead with waste incinerators. I think that is sound advice and the Planning Committee should take it.

Now to move on to the point I wish to concentrate on – the justification for constructing an incinerator in this area. I believe this is what you would call a ‘planning reason’. First a few key numbers.....

The annual total amount of Municipal Solid Waste generated in Cheshire East is about 136,000 tonnes
The amount of similar waste generated in Middlewich is about 5,000 tonnes

The Covanta incinerator would have a capacity of 370000 tonnes. So HGVs would take this amount through the plant gates. About 130000 tonnes would return as ash or recycled metal leaving an astonishing 240000 tonnes which would come out of the chimney as smoke, emissions and heaven knows what.

A key question is where is the waste required to feed a Middlewich incinerator going to come from?

The answer is I believe that very little, if any, will come from Cheshire. Their PR machine does not mention it, as far as I know, but Covanta failed dismally in its bid for the Cheshire County Council municipal waste contract. Despite that, by the way, this is what they are claiming on their corporate website today:

‘Covanta Energy is proposing a new Energy-from- Waste (EfW) plant near Middlewich (UK) to handle all Cheshire’s non-recyclable household waste.’

A totally misleading statement. I leave it to the members of the Planning Committee to draw their own conclusions.

The critical fact is that planning permission has already been granted for one million tonnes of waste processing capacity in this area. An incinerator of 850000 tonnes capacity in Runcorn and a green technology plant of 150000 tonnes in Northwich. In addition there is a planning application under review for an incinerator of 600000 tonnes at Ince Marshes near Frodsham. In other words, much much more than enough to meet our needs. Some good news is that the amount of waste suitable for incineration is likely to decrease in the future as we recycle more and less wasteful packaging is used. There are people worried that there may not be enough waste available to feed these monsters and they may deter recycling which would be a disgrace.

To summarise on this point. I believe Middlewich and Cheshire East have no need for Covanta’s incinerator. If constructed it would be dependent on importing waste from outside of the county to keep it going. This would add to traffic congestion, create more unnecessary carbon dioxide emissions and waste precious fuel. It would have a catastrophic effect on Middlewich purely to enable Covanta to make millions of pounds in profit burning other peoples’ rubbish in our town.

Finally, I said at the beginning that I am a proud citizen of Middlewich. I love the place. Until Covanta came along it has been my intention to retire here. If they do get their way, I would not want to raise my family in a place dominated by the dangerous monstrosity they want to inflict upon us. I know that there are many others in this hall and in the town who feel the same and I would ask this Committee and the full Council to bear this in mind when they decide whether to accept or reject the planning application.

Please, please send Covanta and Cheshire East Council a resounding message on behalf of Middlewich and it’s residents. Forget party and other differences, stand together and vote unanimously to reject incineration, Oppose the planning application and send Covanta on their way.

Thank you.

