PRESS RELEASE

The RTPI Planning Awards

Donarbon

2010 - A Waste Odyssey

Cambridgeshire: communication has won over the local community to waste park

Cambridgeshire County Council's Sustainable Waste Management Park at Waterbeach is the key facility in a planned 75 per cent reduction of biodegradable waste landfill over 25 years from 1996.

The authority's waste management design guide, produced in 2004, will be the basis for major new waste treatment plant on the site. Adopted as supplementary planning guidance, it sets new standards for co-operation, sustainability and the physical appearance of waste sites.

The 135ha site 10km north of Cambridge was once a mineral extraction and landfill location. Permission was granted in 2001 for recycling wastes and aggregates, treatment of household waste, composting and works for the remediation of old landfill. Also covered was restoration of parts of the area for agriculture and nature conservation.

Following adoption of the Cambridgeshire Waste Local Plan in 2003, the site now provides advanced recycling and energy-from-waste technologies to reduce methane, recycle construction waste, operate controlled anaerobic waste treatment and produce "green" hydrogen.

The project aims to show how the concept of a waste management and resource recovery park can be implemented. It demonstrates that waste management technologies can be co-located and serve the interests of research and development, that engagement and education of local communities can be secured and that the design of the necessary buildings can be sensitive to the location.

The main difficulty was the negative image such installations generate. "Gaining public acceptance of the need for a large waste management development to promote sustainable practice in this field was a challenge," says waste management company Donarbon's director Sarah Clover. "These facilities have traditionally attracted hostility from local communities. This was successfully dealt with in this case through comprehensive community engagement."

The programme included liaison forums, manned exhibitions, open days, site tours and other educational initiatives involving the company and the local waste authority. In developing and updating the site designs, there was regular liaison with Donarbon's planning manager.

The environmental, social and economic benefits of the waste management park are significant. The mechanical and biological waste treatment plant substantially reduces the discharge of methane gas.

Offices and an education centre will use mainly recycled building materials and incorporate green energy generation such as solar heating and landfill gas sources. The scheme offers improved biodiversity, while collected rainwater will be used in the composting process to conserve drinkable supplies.

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