

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE:	Council		
Report from	Chief Officer		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	Wednesday 22 nd June 2022	Time 7.00 pm	Location Town Hall
Agenda item	Agenda item 17		
Report title	Replacement Recycling Site for Congleton – Cheshire East Council Environment and Communities Committee, expected to be an agenda item on the 4th August 2022.		
Background	<p><u>Cheshire East Council Overestimated Cost of Replacement Recycling Site</u></p> <p>On 4th May 2021, Cheshire East Council's (CEC) cabinet decided not to replace the recycling site for the residents of Congleton and surrounding areas. CEC estimated that a replacement recycling site would cost about £ 4 million.</p> <p>CEC was asked at that cabinet meeting whether detailed information had been obtained from Norfolk Council to ascertain how it could build a recycling site at its Norwich South site for £1.9 million. In response, CEC advised that it had contacted Norfolk Council who had confirmed that the cost of £ 1.9 million in relation to their site did not include the purchase of the land or the building of a service road.</p> <p>Since that decision was made by CEC cabinet on 4th May 2021 and following the submission of a Freedom of Information request to Norfolk Council, relevant information was obtained concerning the Norwich South recycling site.</p> <p>The Norwich South site has a forecast annual throughput of 15,000 tonnes which is 5.4 times of the throughput of the former Congleton site. For the year ending 31st March 2020, the throughput of the Congleton site was 2,783 tonnes. This was not affected by COVID-19.</p> <p>The former Congleton recycling site only had space for six cars. The Norwich South site has 46 car park spaces, of which 24 have been widened to 3 metres rather than the standard 2.4 metres to enable users safely take items out of the back doors of their cars.</p> <p>The cost estimate for the Norwich South site of £1.9 million includes a re-use facility of 242 sq metres which is 18.5 metres by 13.1 metres, (61 feet by 43 feet) with solar panels on the roof, which would be expected to reduce Norfolk Council's carbon emissions.</p> <p>CTC believes that the Cheshire East Council cabinet had made its decision in May 2021 based on a flawed estimate of the cost to replace the former site.</p> <p>With this information, the then Town Mayor of Congleton, Councillor Murphy succeeded in obtaining the agreement of the full Council of Cheshire East Council to authorise its Environment and Communities Committee to carry out a full investigation to ascertain the detailed costs and feasibility of an alternative replacement recycling site for the residents of Congleton and surrounding areas.</p> <p>In early 2022, CTC identified another new recycling site at Uttoxeter.</p>		

A Freedom of Information request was made to Staffordshire Council, which advised that the site at Uttoxeter was completed in December 2016 and its annual throughput was similar to Congleton's.

The population of Uttoxeter is about half that of Congleton's. The Uttoxeter site is a well-organised site of 1.73 acres with 15 car park spaces, which cost £1.5 million plus the cost of land which equates to a total of circa £2 million.

This raises the question about the accuracy of the costing information on which Cheshire East Council's cabinet made its decision.

Unaccounted Tonnage Following Site's Closure Probably Alarming

In Section 8.6 of its Environmental Appraisal of the closure of Congleton's Recycling Site dated March 2021, Cheshire East Council had claimed that after our site closed, "(this) may result in a minor adverse effect at worst on recycling rates should residents add one or two (additional) items to the residual waste bin from time to time."

CTC suggests that this statement is totally unrealistic.

Many of our residents' silver bins are already full, whereas many of our residents' dark grey domestic bins are near empty.

Residents are making it clear on social media and in face-to-face contact with councillors that they are not taking items to recycling sites because the nearest recycling sites are now too far away. Instead, these items are dumped into their dark grey domestic bins.

This is not surprising, given in Cheshire East's public consultation held between 23rd November 2020 and 4th January 2021, 74% of all respondents stated that they would only be willing **to travel up to ten minutes** to reach their nearest recycling site. The Leader of Cheshire East Council has advised that in the period after the Congleton site closed, fewer people were visiting the sites at Alsager and Macclesfield than when our site was open.

So, the tonnage unaccounted for following the closure of the Congleton recycling site is probably extremely alarming.

Impact of Closure on Fly-tipping

The first lockdown in the Spring/Summer of 2020 resulted in a substantial increase in fly-tipping in the Congleton area during the four months of May to August 2020 inclusive.

There was also a particularly high number of fly-tipping incidents during the third lockdown and tiered system during the three months of February to May 2021 inclusive.

The number of fly-tipping incidents since the closure of our recycling site in September 2021 has been compared to equivalent months that had not been distorted by Covid lockdowns.

There were 51 fly-tipping incidents reported by our Streetscape Team during the four months of September to 2021 to December 2021. This level of fly-tipping was exactly three times the number of fly-tipping incidents reported for the equivalent four-month period of the previous year of 2020.

There were 55 fly-tipping incidents reported by our Streetscape Team during the first four months of 2022. This was just over three times the number of fly-tipping incidents reported for the equivalent four months period for 2020. The equivalent period for 2021 was distorted by the third Covid lockdown, therefore, there is clear

evidence that fly-tipping in the Congleton area has significantly increased since the closure of our recycling site in September 2021.

There must be a further concern that some of these fly-tipping incidents contain some hazardous substances which CEC recycling sites are authorised to accept.

Fly-tipping numbers and costs reported by CTC Streetscape Team have increased so much recently that our officers have been obliged to notify Cheshire East Council that fly-tipping levels and costs have risen to levels outside the level contracted in its contract with Cheshire East Council.

Impact of Closure on CO2 Levels

In Section 5.6 of its Environmental Appraisal of the Closure of Congleton's Recycling Site dated March 2021, Cheshire East Council admitted that the closure of the Congleton recycling site was expected to increase CO2 emissions by 158.8 tonnes per year.

Cheshire East Council's cabinet's decision not to replace the Congleton recycling site which based on this information is expected to increase CO2 emissions is surely contrary to Cheshire East Council's declared commitment of being a Carbon Neutral Council by 2025.

These figures do not take into account new house builds in the Congleton area and therefore, it could be expected that adverse impact on CO2 emissions will increase every year.

Decision Makers Not Provided with All Relevant Reports

Cheshire East Council advised the Information Commissioner that it would not release to Councillor Douglas the two follow up reports to the Feasibility Paper generated by consultants in 2018 into the search for replacement recycling sites for Congleton. In the negotiations between Cheshire East Council, the Information Commissioner's Office and Councillor Douglas, Cheshire East Council has agreed that should its Environment and Communities Committee make the decision not to provide a new recycling site for the Congleton area, Cheshire East Council will release these two reports, which are presently still being withheld, to the public.

So, presumably on that basis, these two confidential reports contain information that the members of the Cheshire East Environment and Communities Committee need in order to make a decision on the replacement recycling site.

Yet, not only were these two confidential reports not provided to the members of the CEC committee as Confidential Part II papers when the committee considered the issue of the replacement recycling site for Congleton in March 2022, our understanding is that members of that committee were not even made aware of the existence of these two confidential reports.

Furthermore, Cheshire East Council's officers advised the members of that committee that a decision to progress the cost and feasibility into a replacement site for Congleton would cost £ 30,000. However, why would a new investigation and feasibility study cost anything like £ 30,000, if much of that relevant information is contained within these two withheld confidential reports?

Environmental Considerations	<p>The loss of a household recycling site in the Congleton area will have resulted in the following adverse impacts on our environment :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Loss of tonnage taken to recycling sites in Cheshire East because items that were previously taken to the Congleton recycling site are now dumped in the dark grey domestic bin. 2. Increased fly-tipping. Some of these fly-tipping incidents could contain some hazardous substances which our recycling sites are authorised to accept. 3. Increased CO2 emissions as a consequence of residents having to travel further to their nearest recycling site. 4. Poorer air quality as a consequence of longer queues at the retained sites with some waiting in the longer queues idling their car engines. 5. The adverse environmental impact of not having a recycling site in the Congleton area will worsen every year as a result of additional house building and more residents moving into our locality. 6. Not replacing the Congleton recycling site is contrary to Cheshire East Council's declared commitment of being a Carbon Neutral Council by 2025
Equality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elderly and vulnerable groups and those without their own private transport are particularly suffering without a recycling site in Congleton, because they are less able to cope with travelling the longer distances. 2. Those caring for elderly and/or vulnerable groups and those with parental responsibilities are also particularly suffering without a local recycling site in the Congleton area by being obliged to travel to the Macclesfield or Alsager recycling sites. 3. Furthermore, ever rising fuel costs are making the adverse financial impact of the loss of our local recycling site on the poorest in our community even worse.
Financial	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. None expected in respect of Congleton Town Council itself. 2. However, a replacement recycling site in the Congleton area would bring financial savings to the residents of Congleton who are currently obliged to incur additional costs by the necessity to drive to Macclesfield or Alsager. 3. Based on Cheshire East Council's own estimates, the annual financing costs of a replacement recycling site with an initial capital cost of £ 2 million would be £ 125,000 per annum This only represents about 0.017% of Cheshire East Council's annual budget of about £ 750 million.

<p>Proposal</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That this Council notes that Cheshire East Council's cabinet's decision on 4th May 2021 not to provide a replacement recycling site for Congleton was based on flawed information which significantly overstated the cost of a replacement site as evidenced by information provided by Norfolk and Staffordshire Councils. 2. That this Council requires its officers to formally notify Cheshire East Council that as a matter of priority, a new recycling site must be provided as soon as possible for the residents of Congleton because <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) It would significantly reduce the unaccounted tonnage lost as a result of residents dumping recycled items into the dark grey domestic bins because other recycling sites are too far away. This is evidenced by Cheshire East Council's own public consultation which reported that 74% of respondents would only be willing to travel up to ten minutes to reach their nearest recycling site b) It would reduce fly-tipping, some of which may contain hazardous material which recycling sites are authorised to accept c) It would reduce CO2 emissions in line with Cheshire East Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2025 d) It would be in accordance with Congleton Town Council's policy of Equality and Inclusivity given that the elderly and the vulnerable and those without their own private transport particularly suffer if there is not a recycling site in the Congleton area. e) With additional housing and residents every year, the necessity for such a recycling site in the Congleton area increases every year 3. That this Council requests its officers to urge Cheshire East Council to provide members of Cheshire East Council's Environment and Communities Committee with the two confidential reports that are currently withheld so that the members of Cheshire East Council's Environment and Communities committee have access to all the relevant information. By providing these two confidential reports to the members of its Environment and Communities committee, Cheshire East Council will avoid incurring unnecessary expenditure into the cost and feasibility of a replacement site for Congleton where such work has already been satisfactorily completed in these two withheld confidential reports.
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