

Environment Agency Briefing - Saxon Pit, Whittlesey

January 2022

Community Briefing

We are providing this briefing to update you on the current situation at Saxon Pit, Whittlesey and to keep you informed of changes to permit applications we have received for the site.

Background

In order for the operator to fulfil the required stabilisation project to backfill the excavation void of the former brickworks with inert waste and soils, we issued an environmental permit for Deposit for Recovery operations on 30 January 2012. Over time, this permit has been transferred to different operators. Since 26 October 2017 it has been with the current permit holder and operator, East Midlands Waste Management Ltd.

Since we identified significant visual contamination across the surface of the excavation void in February 2018, further investigations have revealed the acceptance and disposal of a substantial amount of non-permitted waste. This was namely Automotive Shredder Residue (ASR)*, also known as fragmentiser fluff or shredder residue buried within the void between October 2017 and February 2018. This excludes wastes which may have been accepted and buried prior to October 2017.

* ASR is a waste by-product of the metal recycling and end-of-life vehicle sector following shredding, shearing or fragmentising and is mostly comprised of mixed plastics, foam, rubber and glass.

Since allowing all unpermitted waste to remain buried within the eastern buttress, subject to strict conditions, we've undertaken further investigatory work to obtain sufficient information to demonstrate that, subject to the completion of the required works, there will be no adverse environmental risk.

What has been happening?

Following our last community briefing in October 2021, the operator is continuing the remediation and restoration works within phase one of five along the southern boundary of the buttress. Phase one is approximately 75% complete. The overall required works include:

- a) depositing of material onto the eastern buttress to increase contour levels prior to the placement of a restoration layer to provide a growth medium to support the proposed habitats at the restored site;
- b) extending the existing monitoring boreholes within the waste mass above the levels of the restoration layer and depositing soils immediately around each borehole to protect them from damage;

- c) installing a French drain at the crest of the pit and an impermeable below ground clay plug along the eastern and south eastern boundaries positioned between the watercourse and the pit to a depth of approximately five metres penetrating down into the Oxford Clay to prevent or minimise ingress of surface and ground water; and
- d) monitoring of gas levels, surface water, groundwater and the onsite lagoon throughout the duration of the works to different required frequencies.

The deposited material will be engineered as a 'functional layer' to encourage surface water runoff and to separate the restored ground surface from the underlying waste.

Once complete, all permanently required monitoring infrastructure and containment measures will be engineered and incorporated into the final restoration scheme. This infrastructure will ensure long term monitoring can take place. Once fully landscaped, the restoration scheme should provide ecological benefit including, for example, standing water environments, reed beds, grassland and scrub habitat. We are informed by the operator that their intention is to allow public access for walking and recreation on part of the site.

Since remediation and restoration work started in June, gas monitoring results taken so far show:

- a) low levels of ground gas within the boreholes located around the site perimeter;
- b) the maximum concentrations of methane and carbon dioxide around the perimeter were recorded at 0.2% v/v (volume per volume) and 4.1% v/v respectively;
- c) no hydrogen sulphide detected at the site boundary;
- d) the results recorded from the boreholes situated within the buried waste of the buttress continue to indicate elevated levels of methane, ranging between 16.7% v/v and 91.1% v/v;
- e) elevated concentrations of carbon dioxide within the buried waste of between 5.2% v/v and 33.9% v/v;
- f) a maximum of 3% v/v hydrogen sulphide within the buried waste; and
- g) measured flow rates in all boreholes remained negligible throughout the monitoring between -0.1 and 1.1 litres/hour indicating low gas flow rates between the buried waste and the site perimeter.

To put this into context, elevated gas levels remain high within the buried waste of the buttress and very low outside the site at the perimeter. Should gas levels at the perimeter rise to levels that cause concern, the current infilling works will cease whilst further investigations are undertaken to try to identify the cause and source.

The operator is continuing to accept waste on site comprised mostly of soils to be temporarily stored pending their use and incorporation into the final remediation and restoration on the eastern buttress. These soils are derived from green field sites where there is no suspicion of contamination or from clean, uncontaminated sources of construction and demolition waste.

We are continuing to liaise with all relevant stakeholders including Environmental Health at Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council Planning Department.

New applications

Our National Permitting Service (NPS) have now completed the technical assessment of the application submitted by Johnsons Aggregates and Recycling Ltd to accept and process 250,000 tonnes of non-hazardous Incinerator Bottom Ash (IBA) and 50,000 tonnes of inert waste.

A decision has been made to formerly issue an environmental permit to Johnsons Aggregates and Recycling Ltd. Operations commencing on site are subject to the outcome of the planning application determination by Cambridgeshire County Council.

The technical assessment of two additional permit applications received from Materials Movement Ltd to accept and treat contaminated waste soils and to discharge effluent from the onsite lagoon to a watercourse is yet to begin. Both applications will be advertised on our website and we will update you when the consultation periods start.

How you can get in touch

We will keep you updated on matters relating to this site through further briefings, but in the meantime if you have any queries or would like further information please contact us at: Enquiries_EastAnglia@environment-agency.gov.uk or write to us at:

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