

Ombudsman rejects complaint – time to take control?

Binn Farm Newsletter, Wednesday 24 March 2010

Dear Binn Farm campaigner,

At tomorrow's Community Council meeting, the people of Abernethy have the chance to tell SEPA and Perth & Kinross Councillors about their concerns over the Binn Farm incinerator proposals. However this raises a broader question – can ordinary people really influence big decisions that affect their communities? Three years of campaigning have raised grave doubts in my mind.

For example, as I expected, the Ombudsman has now turned down my complaint against the Council for signing new contracts with SITA (for dry mixed recyclate) and TEG (for composting mixed garden/food waste), despite the fact that both companies have been stinking out Abernethy for years. In fact, like the Council, they have refused to even consider my complaint because it is a 'contractual' matter, and therefore exempt from public scrutiny.

In short, the Council is free to contract with rotten, incompetent companies with impunity. You and I have no say in the matter.

Worthless politicians

And what do our political representatives have to say on the issue? Guess what – nothing!

The three Councillors for Almond & Earn Ward have been as silent as the grave. Admittedly George Hayton (Lib Dem) sent a letter of objection to SITA's application for an operator's license last year. However this must be seen in context of his refusal to support the campaign against the incinerator at an earlier stage. Councillors Alan Jack (Conservative) and Wilma Lumsden (SNP) have also refused to get involved. In fact when the Development Control Committee met last November to discuss the Shore Road incinerator, committee member Wilma Lumsden said that although she didn't support the Shore Road proposals, there was a case for incineration in other areas – *Did she mean Binn Farm?*

As for local MP Gordon Banks (Labour) and MSP Roseanna Cunningham (SNP) – both have refused to help their constituents in Abernethy to fight the Binn Farm incinerator. Gordon says we should just leave it up to SEPA to decide, while Roseanna has never made any comment.

It gets worse. When I met Environment Minister Richard Lochhead at the Government's roadshow in Aberdeen last August, he defended incinerators by saying they were much cleaner than they used to be. In reply, I pointed out that SEPA had found that the state-of-the-art incinerator at Baldovie was emitting 102 times the legal limit for deadly dioxins. He had no reply to this. Later I put the same point to Alex Salmond, but he clearly wasn't interested. He said "Didn't you say that SEPA had solved the problem?", at which point his aide drew him to one side and whisked him away in a limousine.

It's time to take control

This can't go on. Anti-incinerator campaigners around Scotland have concluded that the only way to get heard is to get into positions of power. My friend John Askey, who is leading the fight against incineration in Peterhead, is urging locals to stand for election to the Council. He says:

"Power and control seems the only way to influence decision making. It's who you know and connections that count. Even intelligent people who vote on these issues, who are aware even of environmental issues, will vote for incineration because they believe it will solve their local authorities waste issues at less cost."

Abernethy's political representatives have shown they are not fit to represent their constituents. The question is, who will truly champion the health and wellbeing of the people of Abernethy and the surrounding population? Could it be you?

Best wishes,

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