

Digestate Lagoon Meeting—Spaxton Village Hall

On Thursday November 26th over 100 people packed the hall to discuss plans to dig a large lagoon to hold digestate from Cannington Enterprises Ltd (CEL) next to the old driveway to Quantock Lodge.

CEL processes food waste from sources across southern Britain. Anaerobic digesters use this to produce biogas which is pumped into the gas mains. 50 000+ tonnes of digestate per year is the by-product which is hauled to farmland where it can improve soil fertility.

Digestate spreading has caused bad smells and disruptive traffic so a 3000 tonne capacity store of it was not a welcome prospect. Resentment was further increased as the lagoon was notified as agricultural permitted development which allows no consultation or planning controls.

Mr Barrow who owns the land and whose crops will receive the digestate explained why the lagoon was needed. At times of the year when digestate can be spread there is intense activity by tractor/tankers. A lagoon can be filled gradually and then emptied as required. This would also ensure Mr Barrow's supply.

Mr Roe, MD of CEL committed the company to reducing the odour problem. He also promised greater opportunity for consultation although he saw no reason to use planning permission for further lagoons especially as this is a more costly option.

The company's vehicles may be marked to allow complaints to be more precise but Mr Roe pointed out that CEL is not the only user of such vehicles. Where vehicle movement is a problem alternative routes may be sought.

Dave Coles, Sedgemoor's Environmental Health Officer described what constitutes a statutory nuisance and how to complain, particularly about smell. For Environmental Health to take action the nuisance has to be sustained over a few days.

Chris Edwards, Quantock Hills AONB Officer, expressed concern that a part of the Quantock Greenway will be used for digestate haulage.

There were many questions and comments from the floor. A few people mentioned CEL's positive role in handling waste and providing employment but the majority spoke about the problems the company has caused.

Members of the public pointed out that as the lagoon will hold less than 6% of the digestate output any benefits from it will be limited. It became clear that due to reduced availability of waste in the future more land will be used to grow maize and other crops specifically for the digesters.

Postscript

The lagoon has now been dug. The turnout at the meeting probably surprised the organisers as much as anyone. It could leave no doubt about the public mood resulting from the activities of the company in the past. Our local authorities permitted one of Britain's biggest anaerobic digester sites. Its size far exceeds local need and its effects on the local area, especially those caused by digestate, were inadequately considered. For over 7 years the challenge has been to manage operations whilst not adversely affecting public amenity and confidence. The feelings expressed at the meeting suggest that this is yet to be achieved. All those who attended November's meeting will hope that it made a difference. Info from Cannington Enterprises Ltd at: www.canningtonbioenergy.co.uk. More information, accounts of the meeting, complaints & comment: www.anaerobic-indigestion.uk