

# Briefing 3: Odour in Westbury

5 August 2021

## Introduction

Thank you for continuing to report odour to us using our pollution hotline. We continue to receive odour reports, although fewer since the weather has cooled down. We are working as hard as we can to make those responsible for the likely source of the odours take all appropriate actions to resolve the issue, as we know this is not pleasant to live with.

## Background

We sent our last briefing about this issue on 20 July 2021. This briefing note will provide an update on the current situation, what action we have taken and why.

We now have evidence that there is odour coming from the Northacre Resource Recovery Centre on Stephenson Road – a site run by Hills Waste Solutions under an Environment Agency permit. This means that they have breached their permit and we can take enforcement action.

Hills have replaced the first of three cells on the biofilter and expect to complete the second cell by the end of this week. The work to the last cell is due to be completed by the 30th August 2021.

## What have we done already?

- Our officers have investigated your complaints, met with residents and visited the site on multiple occasions at different times of day, and have confirmed there is odour originating from the Northacre Resource Recovery Centre.
- With the reports substantiated, we have classed this as an environmental incident. This means we are able to dedicate more staff and resources to resolving it. We can also recharge the company to cover our costs.
- We are working closely with the Public Protection and Waste Management teams from Wiltshire Council, to explore our options and ensure our response to this incident considers the wider impact on Wiltshire's waste services.
- Our officers continue to visit Westbury, to confirm where the odour can be smelt and to score its strength out of 6. On average, our officers are giving it scores of 2-3, which can be enough to be a 'reasonable cause for annoyance'.
- We are meeting regularly with Hills to ensure they are doing as much as possible to resolve the odour issues. We are already seeing an improvement in the odour scores since the start of July.
- More information on how we assess permit compliance can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessing-and-scoring-environmental-permit-compliance/assessing-and-scoring-environmental-permit-compliance>

## Our enforcement action

Now that we have evidence that there is odour coming from the Northacre site, we have confirmed Hills has breached its permit conditions. This gives us more powers to intercede, which could include taking legal action or suspending their permit.



With the general improvement of odours due to the action being taken and the expected continual improvement as each stage of the biofilter replacement process is completed, our first option has been to serve a legal enforcement notice to Hills.

**We have told Hills Group to complete the refurbishment of the biofilter by 30th August 2021.**

We have seriously considered suspending Hills' permit, which would stop the site from receiving any more waste. We discussed this carefully with Wiltshire Council as this would have a knock on effect on Wiltshire's waste services, and we do not want to cause you any further issues like, for example, suspended bin collections.

**Wiltshire Council have provided the following statement:**

**We know that these odours are having a negative impact on the local community and we are keen to see this resolved as soon as possible. We also recognise the efforts of Hills Waste Solutions in progressing with the replacement of the MBT (mechanical and biological treatment) biofilter material as quickly as possible to respond to the reported issues.**

**If the council were unable to continue delivering waste to the Northacre facility, there would be little option but to dispose of this waste to landfill, as the alternative waste treatment facility that would typically be used when the MBT is unavailable begins a pre-planned maintenance period from 9 August, meaning only reduced loads can be delivered to that facility. As waste disposed of in landfill decomposes it produces methane, which is widely recognised as a “greenhouse gas” and a contributor to climate change.**

**To add to this, a combination of the national HGV driver shortage and staff needing to self-isolate due to being identified as “close Covid contacts”, means that if we were to ask our collection vehicles based in the west of the county to drive to alternative disposal locations elsewhere in the county, it would increase the risk of delays to scheduled bin collections at this time, which would be highly likely to further increase the risk of localised odours.**

We will continue to monitor the situation and, if the odours get worse, we will not hesitate to take stronger action and suspend Hills Waste Solutions' permit.

Please continue to report odour by phoning our incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60**. This helps us to understand when and where the odour is strongest, and if the actions Hills Waste Solutions are taking are effective.

## **How do I receive more or less information?**

Please feel free to share this briefing note with others who may be interested. We have already shared it with local councillors and your MP.

If you would like to be added to, or removed from, the mailing list for this issue please contact us at [Wessex\\_Engagement@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Wessex_Engagement@environment-agency.gov.uk) (noting the underscore).

We will provide another update when we have any new information to share.

Our Customer Contact Centre: **03708 506 506**.

