

Saxon Pit, Whittlesey - Community Briefing

26 February 2021

Purpose of this briefing

We are providing this briefing to share an update on the current situation at Saxon Pit, and to explain about additional permit applications we have received for the site.

Background

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

Following the identification of significant visual contamination across the surface of the excavation void in February 2018, further investigations revealed the illegal acceptance and disposal of 122,858 tonnes of Automotive Shredder Residue (ASR) by the current operator. This had been buried within the void between October 2017 and February 2018. This excludes waste accepted prior to October 2017. ASR is a waste by-product of the metal recycling and end-of-life vehicle sector following shredding, and is mostly comprised of mixed plastics, foam, rubber and glass.

The Environment Agency decided to allow all non-conforming waste to remain in situ for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- The excavation and removal of all non-conforming waste down to the required depth of 15 metres prior to immediately backfilling with clean suitable inert material would lead to stability concerns. This work would likely involve a complex and potentially problematic engineering solution to ensure the structural integrity of all surrounding faces of the pit in order to stabilise the surrounding embankments whilst the works took place. In addition to this, the number of vehicle movements associated with the required works would be significant;
- We do not believe there to be any direct pathways to groundwater or surface waters to cause pollution due to the nature of the site being underlined by Oxford Clay and positioned below the surrounding surface waters; and
- The original permit was issued to fulfil a stabilisation project. This was to ensure the stability of the surrounding embankments following the cessation of the former clay brickworks. Following expert technical review of the stability risk of the void, the outcome confirmed there to be a low stability risk in the long-term therefore effectively satisfying the stability objectives of the permit.

Since allowing all unpermitted waste to remain buried within the void subject to strict conditions, further investigatory work has taken place. This is to obtain representative information to demonstrate that, subject to the completion of the required works, there will be no adverse environmental risk.

What we are doing

Consultants acting on behalf of the operator have been tasked with monitoring gas levels and water ingress entering into the pit, and we are expecting to receive their final monitoring report in March 2021.

Following our interpretation and formal approval of the final monitoring report, we will then agree all necessary remediation works with the operator and the works should commence. The start of these works will be subject to planning and to the availability of suitable waste material. The operator's remediation works are likely to include gas infrastructure installation, leachate management, encapsulation and the installation of an impermeable barrier between the watercourse and the pit. This will extend to a depth of five metres, and will penetrate down into the Oxford Clay to prevent or minimise further ingress into the pit.

Once complete, it is anticipated that all permanently required monitoring infrastructure and containment measures will be engineered and incorporated into the final restoration scheme. When landscaping is complete, the restoration scheme should provide ecological benefit including standing water environments, reed beds, grassland and scrub habitat. The site may then be open for public access.

New applications

Our National Permitting Service (NPS) has received three further permit applications in relation to the site.

The first is a bespoke application to operate an installation to accept and process 500,000 tonnes of non-hazardous Incinerator Bottom Ash (IBA) and inert waste by Johnsons Aggregates and Recycling Ltd. This application is currently being determined by NPS after being advertised on our website for public consultation until 22 February 2021.

Two other permit applications have been received from Materials Movement Ltd, acting on behalf of East Midlands Waste Management Ltd.

The first is for a mobile plant deployment to bring soils and other materials contaminated with asbestos, heavy metals and hydrocarbons to site for treatment. The applicant also proposes to encapsulate ASR and contaminated soils in cement or lime to produce an inert Hydraulically Bound Material (HBM). A proposal to produce HBM was previously refused by the Environment Agency in June 2019 at the site.

The applicant proposes that all suitably treated soils and HBM (subject to testing) will be deposited on the excavation void in order to complete the contour works and fulfil the approved restoration scheme. This is due to the apparent shortfall in naturally occurring soils and inert wastes from uncontaminated sources.

This mobile plant deployment application will not be advertised for consultation because it is associated with a standard rules permit.

We fully understand the proposed acceptance of additional hazardous waste types is likely to generate further concern within the local community.

The second application is to discharge effluent from the onsite storage lagoon to the Kings Dyke watercourse. This discharge permit application will be advertised on our website, referenced by postcode, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/environmental-permitting-waste-installations-and-radioactive-substances-activity-notices-of-applications-made>

How you can get in touch

We will aim to keep you updated about this site. In the meantime, if you would like further information please contact us at: Enquiries_EastAnglia@environment-agency.gov.uk

We can also be contacted in writing via: Environment Agency, Brampton Office, Bromholme Lane, Brampton, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE28 4NE.

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