

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

J L THOMAS LIAISON GROUP

Wednesday 11 November 2009

Present:-

Councillor Percy Prowse

Mr T Green, J.L.Thomas

Mr S Cockram, J.L.Thomas

Mr J Henthorne, Residents' Representative

John Leech, Environmental Health Manager

Alex Bulleid, Environmental Health Technician

Howard Bassett, Member Services Officer

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CHAIR

Councillor Prowse was appointed Chair.

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APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Choules, Newcombe and John Staddon.

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NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON 22 APRIL 2009

The notes of the meeting held on 22 April 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

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PROCESS UPDATE

The list of improvement works remained active, Terry Green having advised at the previous meeting of the need to be selective and invest in areas where a substantial improvement to odour control can be gained. There had been no significant change to the process plant but progress was continuing with the various improvements works listed below:

- Installation of an extraction fan connecting the boiler house to drier room was expected to be completed within two weeks.
- A substantial quote had been received for the replacement of the odour extraction ducting with stainless steel ducting from the Fallen Stock area to JLT tower. Because of financial restraints capital expenditure would not be secured for this at present, however, the ducting had been examined and necessary repairs made. Regular inspections were made to ensure the ducting remains in serviceable condition.
- A quotation had been obtained for installing a simplified conveyor system from the pressors to the warehouse to further improve plant reliability. A further quote had also been obtained prior to the meeting. Both quotations would be considered in due course.
- No progress had been made regarding the installation of a tallow drainage system ex drier. This was not a high priority at present in the programme of improvement works.

- The installation of ducting from the Large Flakt to the press room was on hold pending the outcome of Aerox trials at the Hartshill plant in the Midlands. A preliminary mini Aerox trial had been carried out at Hartsill which had proved unsuccessful. John Leech/Alex Bullied would be advised and invited to attend if further trails were planned.
- The installation of a tallow recycle tank to improve drier efficiency was no longer necessary as there was sufficient means of diverting tallow to the drier using existing equipment.
- New warehouse doors had been installed. This was an aesthetic improvement and not odour control related.
- The replacement of two bays of factory roof to provide longer term security against wind damage was on hold at the moment as previous substantial repairs were considered to be satisfactory to ensure the integrity of the roof.
- There was no progress on the replacement of the wet cooling tower with an air condenser.
- Boiler fuel ring main and controls had been completed.
- Neutralising agent sprays would be installed to the outside of effluent tanks before Spring 2010.
- The catalyst agent for the small Flakt tower had been replaced shortly after the previous meeting.

There was an ongoing need to be selective in respect of planned improvement works because of financial restraints due to the current economic climate. Since June, the plant had changed from being open on a 24/7 basis to being open five and a half days per week, 6am on Monday until 6pm on Saturdays. There had been a decline of around 300 tonnes per week of raw tonnage resulting in the plant processing from late pm Monday to early pm Saturday. On this basis, it had been normal to experience two shutdown periods each week due to zero stock levels, the downtime being utilised for plant maintenance. Reduced tonnage had arisen from a national decline in red meat consumption and also a loss of raw materials to competitors as a result of an on-going price war which had began in August 2008.

In response to the Chair, John Leech stated that the list of possible odour improvement works had been compiled following a meeting with Directors of the Company in August 2008 in order to introduce improvements over a period of time because of a significant number of complaints over the summer of 2008. As outlined above, Mr Green had stated that the various works were being prioritised and balanced with environmental gain and the situation was being monitored by Environmental Health officers. Environmental Health officers also monitored complaints with visits made to the plant to check the residual odour and to determine whether smells were being caused by fugitive emissions as opposed to normal tower emissions. If so, the Company would be requested to take remedial action as a matter of priority.

Mr Henthorne enquired about the number of complaints in 2009 compared with 2008. The Chair stated that he had lived at his present address for 23 years and acknowledged that weather conditions impacted on the incidents of smells. To a degree, he was used to the presence of smells and therefore did not feel the need to pursue a complaint on every occasion. He stated that sometimes complaints were received regularly and that there were also long periods without complaints. He stated that he could not remember the last time he had experienced a smell.

Alex Bulleid circulated a list of a further six complaints received since the dispatch of the agenda together with a complaint analysis.

Mr Green advised that John Leech or Alex Bulleid were notified at the earliest opportunity when complaints were received by the factory and that every endeavour was made to investigate the cause.

Referring to the breakdown of complaints, Alex Bulleid stated that odour complaints were down every quarter in 2009 compared with 2008 apart from the first quarter, which was identical. There were a number of factors affecting the level of complaints.

Mr Henthorne stated that he had lived in the area for 15 years from 1994 onwards and that this was his third meeting of this Group. Prior to a number of problems in 2008, he had not complained for five years. He was at a loss to understand what had gone wrong and how the problems could be resolved. He stated that both he and Terry Green recognised that problems relating to chemical smells were treatable and that JL Thomas had spent significant sums over the years but that the problem was still there as evidenced by the number of complaints in 2008 and were possibly as bad this year. The areas to the south and south west of the plant, such as Alphington, did not make the same number of complaints as those areas to the north of the plant in the line of south westerly winds. Most complaints came from the eastern side of the river. Although the Group met twice a year, there did not seem to be any change in the overall position. Mr Henthorne suggested that there were two types of smells – a residual odour which was chemical in origin and the smell of animal by products being transported by the lorries. During the summer time it was sometimes necessary to close the windows of his bungalow, making conditions uncomfortable especially at night time leading to poor sleep. In addition, he referred to a choking sensation he sometimes experienced as a result of the smell caused by air swirling around in pockets in the same place.

Mr Green confirmed that the smell of raw material could be associated with vehicles arriving at the factory, but for some time the risk of this had much reduced. Great effort had been made to plan the arrival times of vehicles to avoid the need to park on the yard prior to tipping. Daily raw material intakes had also been reduced to ensure tipping room was normally available inside the factory. Alex Bulleid stated that there were a number of possible small scale factors that could cause the change in conditions that led to smells.

John Leech stated that any smell hanging in the air was dependent on prevailing wind conditions. Further dilution of smells following departure from the plant depended on wind conditions. Mr Green stated that there had been 104 complaints received to date in 2009 compared with 181 in 2008. Possible factors for this reduction was that wind directions had been more variable in 2009 compared to 2008 where there was a greater preponderance of south westerlies. In addition, there had been a reduction in operating hours at the factory. Mr Green stated that the Company took its environmental responsibilities very seriously and that considerable expenditure was routinely spent on environmental control. A schedule of expenditure for the period March – September was circulated to Members.

The Chair stated that the Group meetings were of value in order to ensure that the level and nature of complaints were being monitored.

It was agreed that a factory tour would be arranged for the Chair and Mr Henthorne in the near future.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED SINCE THE LAST MEETING

Mr Henthorne enlarged on his complaint dated 26 May 2009. He stated that he had first been aware of the smell/stench standing outside his bungalow. He described it as rank/"smell of death" a description which he felt mirrored the comment of another complainant referring to the smell of road kill. He suggested that the use of the word "odour" was inappropriate and that terms such as smell, stench, stink and rank more accurately reflected the true nature of the problem associated with the plant. He believed that, in this instance, the problem related to material being carried by lorries to the plant.

He had decided to visit the plant that evening and arrived at about 6.30pm remaining for about 30-40 minutes. He had been advised (in a not particularly customer friendly manner) by a factory operative that a lorry had recently arrived. However, just before Mr Henthorne had decided to leave the yard, the same lorry had departed which he felt still smelt. Terry Green explained that pressurised hot water was used to clean vehicles inside the factory after tipping and this was very effective. In addition, all vehicles were finally sprayed with scent at the weighbridge before leaving the premises.

Mr Henthorne referred to statements recorded from historical Group meetings made by Mr Dennis, former General Manager of JL Thomas, with regard to the previous practice of using netting to cover articulated trailers. Mr Cockram commented that for many years netting had not been allowed and these had been replaced with tarpaulin sheets. Mr Henthorne enquired who owned the lorries and whether DEFRA were responsible for ensuring that the contents of lorries were properly secured.

Mr Cockram explained that the transport operations operated in compliance with the Animal By-Products Regulations which were enforced by DEFRA vets at abattoirs. Third party hauliers as well as their own vehicles were used for abattoirs collections all of which were supervised by DEFRA vets. He also advised that JL Thomas operated some fully enclosed vehicles which were used for various types of other collections, but these were not suitable for abattoirs.. Mr Henthorne compared the process with collecting dog faeces from dog bins where, although smells were evident from the bins themselves, no smells emanated from the collection vehicles as they were completely enclosed. Mr Green stated that only in recent years had rendering competitors in the north of England opted to replace netting on their lorries with tarpaulin sheets. John Leech referred to the sheeting of lorries during the last outbreak of Foot and Mouth and advised that no vehicle related complaints had been received during the outbreak. He advised that the City Council went through certain procedures when investigating a complaint in respect of the movement of material.

Mr Henthorne referred to the transportation of bones from butchers which were also transported in enclosed vehicles but which smelt when the doors of the vehicles were opened.

He questioned the urgency in treating the material on the 26th May and suggested that, in the driver's rush to get away, the vehicle had not been washed properly. He asked what had gone wrong on that occasion. Mr Green suggested that the problem might have emanated from the air lock or have been compounded by the extra volume of material dealt with on this day because the previous day had been a bank holiday.

Mr Green stated that it was normal practice for all lorries on route to the factory to stop and apply scent to vehicles before entering the City boundary.

John Leech and Alex Bulleid confirmed that the City Council would continue to monitor the position.

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CROWN PET FOOD PLANT AT CASTLE CAREY

Alex Bulleid read out the report of Liz Taberer, JL Thomas' Group Environmental Manager on the impact of carbon filtration technology at the Crown Pet Food Plant at Castle Carey. This report had been requested as it had been reported that incidents of complaints of smells from the Castle Carey plant had reduced substantially since the works had been undertaken.

The report concluded that the use of similar technology for the JL Thomas Plant was not appropriate and that the measures used in the Exeter plant were equal to, or better than, these techniques. In addition, the Castle Carey plant dealt with pet foods which was therefore different in nature to the material processed at JL Thomas. Mr Green also reported that, on a recent visit to Castle Carey, he had noticed that the plant, which was adjacent to a number of industrial units, was shut down and therefore an assessment of emissions at the time had not been possible.

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OTHER OPERATIONS IN THE AREA

It was noted that other smells were sometimes reported from the factory area which related to the Hide and Skin plant on Marsh Green Road and also the Council operated Green Waste site adjacent to JL Thomas' south east boundary. Mr Green advised that he reported any smells from the Green Waste Site to Alex Bulleid in case complaints relating to these smells were attributed to JL Thomas.

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DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted.

21 April 2010 at 5.30pm.

3 November 2010 at 5.30pm.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)

Chair

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