

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

J L THOMAS LIAISON GROUP

Wednesday 28 November 2012

Present:-

Councillor Percy Prowse (Chair)
Councillor Marcel Choules
Councillor Rod Ruffle
Mr J A Staddon, Residents Representative
Mr N Parsons, J L Thomas
Mr S Wellaway, J L Thomas

John Leech, Environmental Health Manager
Alex Bulleid, Environmental Health Technician
Richard Shears, Environmental Health Technician
Jo Quinnell, Assistant Member Services Officer

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APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Rob Sargent, J L Thomas, and County Councillor Vanessa Newcombe.

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NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON 18 APRIL 2012

The notes of the meeting held on 18 April 2012 were agreed as a correct record.

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PROCESS UPDATE

Nick Parsons reported that there had been no significant changes to processes and that volumes of material processed at the factory remain the same.

In response to a question about the sniffing towers, Nick Parsons advised that there are three odour towers on site. A tube runs down the side of these to enable staff to identify what odours are being released from the top. Nick Parsons offered Councillor Ruffle a tour of the factory.

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COMPLAINTS RECEIVED SINCE THE LAST MEETING

An additional report was circulated at the meeting which detailed an additional complaint received since the agenda was distributed, complaints summary, number of complaints received by complainant and road, days on which there were more than one complaint, and other issues witnessed during inspections.

The Chair made reference to another business which was situated near the Cleansing Department in Marsh Barton. Odours from this facility had been investigated by the Environment Agency as practices they are undertaking are outside of their planning consent. Potentially some complaints could be as a result of this, but it was difficult to distinguish, and Alex Bulleid suggested that where an officer investigated a complaint, they would be able to determine the source of the odour. The complaints listed in the report were therefore likely to be from J L Thomas premises. However, where complaints were emailed to the Council and officers were unable to investigate the complaint at the time the complaint was

made, due to the fact that in many cases the emails were received outside normal office hours, it was not possible to verify the exact source of the odour.

There had been a period, both at the beginning and end of July, where a significant number of complaints had been received. These were due to the poor quality of raw material being processed. If these two particular periods were removed, the number complaints during the period would be similar to previous years. Nick Parsons confirmed that the company could not control the quality of raw material they collected although they endeavour to collect the material as soon as possible after it has been produced.

With reference to the additional complaint circulated at the meeting, it was noted that the blood is collected but not processed at the Exeter factory. As the blood tanker was leaving the site for processing at another plant, this may have had a residual odour which could have been the basis of the complaint.

Alex Bulleid referred to the complaints summary, and advised that since 2003 when the factory changed the material processed, no other significant changes had taken place.

Nearly half the complaints came from seven complainants, and 29 complaints had been received over a 10 day period (see above). There had been a week of hot weather, and as a result of this, the material being processed had degraded more. In addition to that, a process problem had been identified where the factory lost production capacity during the week - they had an ending stock of 100 tonnes and had to start up early on the Monday morning to clear the backlog. Remedial and other works had been carried out, and this is subject to a maintenance system. The factory would be replacing equipment next year as part of programme of routine upgrades. Other factors included the wind direction, and that members of the public may have been sensitised from the odours on 30 July, which may have resulted in more complaints during the rest of the week.

It was noted that a complainant had been offered a tour of the factory to better explain the processes involved, but this offer was declined. Nick Parsons advised that the factory has an open door policy, and they would be willing to show anyone around the factory.

It was noted that over the last four years the tonnage received by the factory had been very consistent. It currently stands at approximately 70,000 tonnes, compared to around 80,000 tonnes 10 years ago.

As a result of other issues witnessed during inspections, which occurred after complaints, but did not attribute to them, the factory had put in corrective measures to ensure that these issues did not happen again.

The Chair commented that with this volume of complaints, he was happy that the factory was doing everything they could to alleviate problems. There would always be a residual odour. The majority of complaints received an instant response and an investigation was carried out. If complaints are made direct to the factory, they are able to investigate.

The residual odour does generate complaints, and as a result of this, the Council has asked the factory to review two areas of odour control.

One of the options was to replace one or possibly two of the treatment towers with a bio filter. This was a large peat bed which breaks down the odorous chemicals.

The second area for review is odour from the effluent treatment system. One solution to this issue would be to install a thermal oxidiser to replace the effluent treatment system. This had been looked at in the past but was not the right solution at that time. The effluent treatment system is an odour source and this alternative would result in significant changes to the way the factory operates so it will require careful consideration of whether it would be appropriate.

A study would be undertaken on these two options and a report would be submitted to the Council in March 2013. This report would be discussed at the next meeting of the Group.

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Terms of Reference and Constitution

The Terms of Reference for the Group pre-dates the current legislation, and therefore the Chair thought that they should be reviewed.

The Constitution states that two local residents should be invited to sit on the Group. The resident representatives should be nominated by the ward councillors, and should include a resident from either side of the river. Councillor Ruffle, together with County Councillor Newcombe, would try to identify a resident on the Alphington side of the river. Mr Staddon is the residents representative for the Countess Wear side of the river.

The Chair confirmed that the meeting would not be open to the general public, but the agenda and minutes would be made available on the website. The Chair also confirmed that the meetings would continue to be held at 2pm.

It was agreed that Officers would review the Terms of Reference. The revised Terms of Reference would be considered by members at the next meeting.

Environment Agency

With regards the business being investigated by the Environment Agency, mentioned earlier in the meeting, the Chair advised that he held copies of letters he wrote on behalf of the Cleansing Department, and Councillor Ruffle would contact the Cleansing Operations Manager to ascertain if the situation had improved.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Wednesday 17 April at 2pm.

(The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 3.06 pm)

Chair