

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

J L THOMAS LIAISON GROUP

Wednesday 29 October 2008

Present:-

Councillor John Winterbottom (Chair)
Councillor Marcel Choules
Councillor Vanessa Newcombe

Mr T Green, JL Thomas
Mr B Ratcliffe, JL Thomas
Liz Taberer, JL Thomas
Mr J Henthorne, Residents Representative
Alex Bulleid, Environmental Health Technician
John Leech, Principal Environmental Health Officer (JL)
Sarah Prior, Assistant Member Services Officer

18

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from John Staddon, Residents Representative.

19

NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2008

The notes of the meeting held on 12 March 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

20

PROCESS UPDATE

Mr Green from J L Thomas updated the group on progress made since the last meeting. Over the last two months, at a cost of about £1million, they have had a new drier installed and when fully commissioned it will provide a greater rate of throughput. A new concentrated odour scrubbing tower has also been installed to the press and drier vapour extraction system. Additionally, upgrading of the control room has been completed and there is now a purpose-built IT system in place to view and control the various plant operations.

Mr Ratcliffe explained that the Company acknowledges the high number of complaints received over the summer and it will make every attempt to identify and implement further improvement works as soon as possible. He explained that there has been a significant improvement to the plant operation processes over the last 6-8 weeks.

The question was raised as to whether there have been improvements to increase throughput which in turn had led to an increase in the volume of material processed? It was explained that the volume of throughput had, to date, remained similar. Improvements that have been made are expected to improve plant reliability and reduce the number of processing hours by means of increased throughput, once the new drier is fully proved.

The question was raised as to whether it is expected that there will be a change in throughput in the future, for example, due to any possible future changes in agriculture etc? It was explained that the Company did not anticipate any reduction in the volume of raw materials processed at the factory.

21

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED SINCE THE LAST MEETING

An additional schedule was distributed to the group (attached) and John Leech explained that a further two complaints had been made since the schedule was produced two days ago. Since the last meeting in March there has been a total of 175 complaints. A table of process problems on specific days was also provided.

John Leech explained that Exeter City Council are concerned about the number of complaints received, which has increased considerably since the last meeting, particularly complaints received when there has been no obvious process problem.

Jeff Henthorne raised the question on behalf of John Staddon, Residents Representative, as to whether a letter could be sent to all complainants letting them know what the problem is. John Leech explained that the complainants were all contacted individually to give them feedback. It was agreed that a standard letter is not likely to have any great benefit. However, it does remain a problem convincing the public that every effort is being made to improve the situation. It was queried as to whether the Liaison group notes were available for the public to view. It was agreed that they should be published on the Internet.

Jeff Henthorne expressed concerns over the way in which some of the odour complaints were judged, with 'odour not judged to be offensive' in the case comments notes. There is concern that the public will feel it is pointless to complain. He explained that he felt there had been significant improvements to odour control made over the past few years, however this year has been much worse. It was queried as to why this was?

It was explained that there has been a fairly consistent west / south westerly wind direction over the summer and these consistent wind directions were reflected in the increase in the numbers of complaints from the area to the west of the river. It was mentioned that the majority of complaints, during this period, are usually from residents in the St Leonard's and Rivermead Road areas.

John Leech explained that there has been some media interest in the issue of odour from the factory. Articles were published on 23 June and 4 August in the Express and Echo, and there had been articles in the St Leonard's newsletter. A telephone contact for the Council was given in the latter publication. It is likely that this has had a significant impact on the number of complaints made. Alex Bullied explained that one or two of the complainants had even mentioned that on seeing the articles they were prompted to 'join the campaign'.

The procedure of lorries waiting on the yard at the factory prior to unloading inside the factory was discussed. It was explained that staggered arrival times are arranged where possible to avoid any queuing on the yard. However, when logistical problems do arise, a loaded vehicle may have to wait on the yard for a short period of time. It is normal policy for incoming lorries to be sprayed with scent before entering the City boundary to minimise any odour from the vehicle.

It was explained that on receiving complaints JL Thomas staff will visit the areas and they make daily tours of the boundary and a log is kept, as is required by the Local Authority. JL Thomas acknowledges that the number of complaints is a

serious problem. In a meeting with Council Officers and Cllr Winterbottom, on 29 October, it was agreed that a working party would be set up to look at the incidents over the summer period and identify possible improvements to the process. By 2009 the effects of operational improvements made this year should be more apparent.

The issue of the effects of the wind direction was discussed. It was thought that the last summer has seen a prevailing west / south westerly wind direction. It was suggested that it would be useful to carry out an analysis of the last five years wind direction.

The question was raised as to whether it is possible to ascertain how many complaints have been made as a direct result of the media coverage? Alex Bullied explained that the increase in complaints is difficult to quantify, however, subjectively it would appear that there had been an increase due to the publicity.

Mr Henthorne raised a concern about an incident when there was a very loud 'drilling' type noise coming from the plant in the early hours of one particular morning. It was explained that this may have occurred following installation of the new drier, the likely cause being a steam safety valve blowing off under pressure during commissioning trials. The problem had since been rectified.

22

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The question was raised as to what progress had been made in negotiations with Cyclerval with regard the possible supply of steam to the factory from the proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) incinerator. It was explained that J L Thomas had not had any further contact from Cyclerval for the last six months. J L Thomas had previously expressed an interest in the supply of steam to the factory from the EfW incinerator, but before this could be possible various technical issues would need to be resolved.

23

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was arranged to be held on Wednesday 22 April 2009 at 5.30pm in Bad Homburg, Civic Centre.

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.10 pm)

Chair