Community Group Sues Council over £600m incinerator contract

Tuesday 22 January, 2019

A community group is taking Gloucestershire County Council to court over the award of a £600m incinerator contract. Community R4C, a non-profit mutual society which has had support from celebrities including Jeremy Irons, Jonathon Porritt, Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall and Kevin McCloud, claims the contract was unlawfully awarded, resulting in a massive rise in costs to taxpayers and a breach of procurement law. They filed a lawsuit with the High Court on Friday.

Campaigners have been opposing the waste incinerator at Javelin Park for years, saying the project wasted taxpayers money, was bad for health and the environment and that there were cheaper and better alternatives. Requests to see the contract, the largest the county has ever entered into, were consistently refused until a tribunal forced its disclosure in 2017, by which time a revised contract had been signed. This was only released on 20th December 2018.

“It was a very difficult decision to take this course of action when so much taxpayer money has already been spent on legal battles”, says Patricia Watson, a waste consultant and volunteer director of the group. “The underhand behaviour of the council and contractor has led to a far higher price than anywhere else in the country for the lowest possible environmental benefit.”

Board member Sue Oppenheimer says: “The contract has increased by a staggering £150m making it 30% more expensive. By law, it should have been retendered. Instead Gloucestershire County Council has spent around half a million pounds keeping this information secret. With the support of the community, we had been working on a much cheaper waste processing plant and would have bid for the contract. Our plant would have increased recycling, reduced pollution and would have been a better deal for the environment and the taxpayer."

Tom Jarman, another board member says: “There is a strict 30 days limit to bringing this sort of claim and it seems to us that the council timed the disclosure of the relevant information strategically, just before Christmas, so to make it almost impossible for anyone to bring legal action in time. Keeping a 30% increase in cost secret from the public and its own audit committee is not the way we expect a public authority to conduct itself.”

ENDS

Notes for Editors

Background

There has been widespread and consistent objection to the building of an incinerator on the Javelin Park site in Gloucestershire, alongside an area of outstanding natural beauty. Well over 4000 people wrote to object and the Council’s own planning committee unanimously rejected the plans, yet still the plans for the incinerator have been pushed ahead, and the plant is now in an advanced state of build.

Documents available on the Community R4C website show the planned incinerator is very inefficient and expensive. The lack of heat use (combined heat and power) means that almost 80% of the energy available is wasted, and the plant is a harmful emitter of greenhouse gasses, and harmful dioxins. Two thirds of the electricity comes from inefficiently burning plastic, a fossil fuel, and this is even more harmful to the environment than landfill. It burns all material received, yet well over 50% of this material is recyclable.

The gate fee £190 per tonne of waste (for the first 108,000 tonnes, Council guaranteed minimum) almost twice the cost of alternatives.

The Council has been consistently secretive, refusing to release contract details despite numerous FOI requests.

In 2015 a local group decided not just to campaign against something, but to work towards a better solution which would serve the community and protect the environment. This harnesses the commitment of the local community to preserve resources while minimising cost so that other local services could be

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Community R4C Ltd

Community R4C is a Community Benefit Society based in Stroud, Gloucestershire registered with the Financial Conduct Authority.

In 2016 Community R4C raised almost £100,000 in a groundbreaking Community Share Scheme to facilitate its aims and the building of an alternative waste resource recovery plant - the R4C plant - in co-operation with investors and partners.

Community R4C has widespread support, both within and outside Gloucestershire including from well known campaigners for sustainability - among them Jeremy Irons, Jonathon Porritt, Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall, Kevin McCloud

Lawsuit

This was filed on Friday 18th January.

Details and papers can be found here.

A claim for compensation is the only remedy available to us. We want to invest the proceeds back into the local community, just as we would have done with the profits from our own plant.

Contact details

For further information please

visit https://communityr4c.com

email press@communityr4c.com

or call Tom Jarman on 079 66 22 33 06

Company Contact:

Community R4C

E. press@communityr4c.com
W. https://communityr4c.com

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