

Stop Newport & Monmouthshire Incinerator Campaign

John Griffiths AM

Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development

5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel, Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA

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Dear John

INCINERATION : (1) ABOLITION OF THE HPA (2) OUTCOME OF LOCAL ELECTIONS

During evidence to the Petitions Committee in late March, SNIC were rather surprised to hear your statement that you were “not aware of the Health Protection Agency’s imminent demise”.

I consulted the Clerk to the Committee and agreed that SNIC would write to you direct on this matter, but I am copying this letter to the Committee so that they are fully aware of this particular follow-up enquiry.

The proposed abolition of the HPA, and the transfer of all its functions to Mr Lansley’s Ministry were originally announced in July 2010. The HPA is to be abolished under Section 56 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 which received Royal Assent earlier this year. We do not know when that Section of the Act will be brought into force. We do know that Earl Howe explained during the final Lords’ stages of the Health Bill, that the HPA’s functions are to be transferred in their entirety to a new body – Public Health England – which does not have NDPB status and whose executive control will be vested in a Chief Executive reporting to the English Health Minister. **Perhaps your officials could establish when the HPA will be abolished and inform us, given the reliance placed on the HPA by WG Ministers and officials in relation to the safety of incineration emissions ?**

As WG were apparently unaware that the HPA faced abolition, despite the Government’s public reliance on its previous advice in respect of the health risk from incinerators, SNIC and others with an interest in the health implications of incinerators would be grateful to **learn which bodies will take over the HPA functions in respect of Wales ?**

The previous declared policy of your Ministry issued by your predecessor last year was to support the construction of EfW waste incinerators in every region of Wales. The same policy statement confirmed that the Welsh Government was only “technology neutral” between different kinds of incinerators. Your officers have constantly reaffirmed this stance. We hope that you do not share this view, as you have assured me on several occasions that you are genuinely open to alternatives to mass-burn incineration. However as there has been no recent Ministerial statement to modify the previous policy, widespread public concern inevitably remains about the health implications. It is vital that health advice of the highest quality and objectivity is available, and can be reviewed and updated regularly, with the benefit of further research commissioned by Welsh Government Ministers to meet the needs of Wales. This is urgent : once Section 56 of the new Act is in force, the UK Government will no longer have any duty to provide health advice on incinerators in respect of Wales.

You will be aware of public dissatisfaction with the advice from the HPA on health effects from waste incinerators, partly because of its narrow focus on epidemiology (unlike the US EPA), and partly because independent bio-medical experts come to different conclusions. In particular, Prof C.V. Howard, who is shortly presenting evidence to the Assembly Petitions Committee, judges that a precautionary approach (as under Wales’s sustainable development duty) favours non-incineration treatments of municipal wastes. Evidence

from Cardiff Against The Incinerator to the Petitions Committee details how the University Health Board used HPA advice on the Viridor incinerator license application (decided by the EA permitting team in England) but evaded most of the evidence presented to them, including documents from Professor Howard. I felt that pro-incinerator witnesses on 27 March were taking a similar approach to the recent Italian studies on health impacts of incineration which SNIC quoted to the Petitions Committee. Taking the line that *HPA have said x and we are sticking to x whatever new evidence others may submit* is surely not the right way to proceed if we are trying to establish the truth ?

You and Ministerial colleagues for health have an opportunity to remedy these deficiencies and to broaden and improve the sources of advice to the Welsh government and Welsh health bodies in respect of incineration (and to include incinerator ash as well as emissions). **Would you ensure that the new advice-giving process is fully transparent and open to scrutiny in Wales ?** Can you say too, what budget transfers, if any, have been, or will be, made between the Government in Westminster and the devolved government in Cardiff in respect of the transferred functions and programmes?

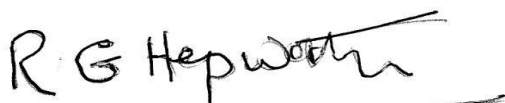
Outcome of Local Elections

SNIC note that you are quoted in your recent article in the CPRW magazine as stating that you “want to look at some of our most pressurized urban environments to ensure that we deliver a better quality of life for people who live there”. This surely applies to Newport and its “urban fringe” around the priceless Gwent Levels. **We wonder what contribution you expect a waste incinerator and its associated emissions, new lorry traffic and production of toxic ash will make to deliver a better quality of life for the people of East Newport, including those living in the new housing at the Llanwern regeneration site at Glan Llyn, and the surrounding villages?**

Every current trend shows the environmental and economic weakness of the case for mass-burn incinerators. The views expressed publicly this month by the European Commission, warning countries like Denmark and Germany to cut back on incineration in order to meet EU parameters for waste, are indicative. The EU will surely continue to increase the requirements on all Governments to recycle and the EC is now saying more clearly than ever that burning cannot be counted as recycling. Energy generation does not compensate for this. Meanwhile residual waste streams are falling across the UK and Europe, threatening the economic viability of new mass-burn incinerators everywhere. Incinerators are even being closed in Rotterdam. It would be a tragic mistake if Wales adopted incinerators and thereby put a *de facto* ceiling on recycling just at the moment when incinerators are being restricted and reduced right across the rest of Europe.

An incinerator in Newport would place an unacceptable environmental, health and cost burden on the whole population. There is near-unanimous opposition by local residents in Newport and Monmouthshire to an incinerator. This has been expressed in petitions and letters from the public, by the views of at least 7 local community councils, by the partnerships regenerating the former steelworks site at Glan Llyn and by both successful Labour and Conservative candidates in the recent local elections. We can see no mandate for the Welsh Government to override these views – or to ignore the manifesto of the newly elected Labour City Council in Newport – by forcing through a mass-burn incinerator in Newport. Such action would damage the physical and mental health of our people, and our economic and social prospects. **SNIC hope you will respect the outcome of the recent Elections, publicly change the policy embraced by your predecessor and instruct your officials to co-operate with Newport City Council and other local authorities to find a solution to waste disposal in our area that does not rely on mass-burn incineration.**

Yours sincerely



Rob Hepworth

Chair, SNIC