Basingstoke Sewage Treatment Works Thermal Hydrolysis Plant

Key Issues
Basingstoke Sewage Treatment Works (STW) is located in the countryside to the east of Chineham. A significant area of land between the STW and Chineham has been allocated in the emerging Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan for residential development. The development was opposed by the local MP, local County Councillors and nearby Parish Councils.

The planning application included the following:
- EIA Screening
- Planning and Design Supporting Statement
- Transport Statement
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Carbon and Sustainability Assessment
- Odour Dispersion Modelling Report
- Air Dispersion Modelling Report
- Noise Assessment
- Water Resources and Flood Risk Assessment

In addition, a public exhibition was held prior to the submission of the application and a meeting with objectors (hosted by Hampshire County Council) prior to the determination of the planning application. MWH also spoke on behalf of the application when it was considered by the Regulatory Committee of Hampshire County Council in December 2015.

Purpose of the project
Thames Water Utilities Ltd has a 25 year sludge strategy which seeks to maximise energy recovery whilst minimising sewage sludge production. The enhanced sludge digestion facility, incorporating a Thermal Hydrolysis Plant (THP) at Basingstoke STW will achieve these objectives by:
- providing a sustainable cost effective supply of renewable energy by generating some 18,000GwH of electricity per annum, sufficient to run the treatment works with any surplus fed into the national grid; and
- reducing the overall volume of sewage sludge produced by creating a dryer fertiliser product. It will also reduce the need to treat sludge with lime.

Description of the project
The enhanced sludge digestion facility will treat up to 20,000 tonnes of sewage sludge per annum. The THP forms part of the pre-treatment process, increasing the digestibility of the sludge and the biogas generation, and reducing the sludge mass. The biogas generated is used to generate green electricity in a reciprocating engine which in turn is used to power the STW. The remaining sludge is dewatered for use as a fertiliser or soil conditioner.
Lessons learnt

MWH’s approach to the Planning Process sought to reduce the risk of an unfavourable outcome; be it a planning consent with multiple onerous conditions or subject to a legal obligation or an outright refusal of planning permission. The key was to work with TWUL and the local planning authority, sharing information at all stages and holding meetings.

A significant output was confirmation from Hampshire County Council that, based upon the information submitted as part of an EIA Screening exercise, the development would not require EIA; a major benefit to the project both in terms of time and cost.

The public exhibition, held at an early stage in the preparation of the planning application, allowed the design and the information submitted to address stakeholder concerns and thus potentially reduce the number of objections received. The public exhibition highlighted local concerns in respect of the potential impact of traffic on the nearby A33 and the visual impact of the development on nearby footpaths. Early awareness of these issues enabled the design of the scheme to be revised. These changes were then highlighted in the information submitted in support of the application.

Following the submission of the application regular contact was maintained with the local planning authority case officer, who notified us of comments and objections received. In response Briefing Notes were prepared which addressed the concerns. The Briefing notes were circulated by the local planning authority to everyone who submitted comments during the public consultation process. They also formed the basis for a roundtable discussion with stakeholders and Hampshire County Council. The meeting proved beneficial for all involved as it clarified a number of issues of concern (e.g. there was a misconception in respect of increased traffic movements on the nearby A33 within the Transport Statement).

The planning application was unanimously approved by the Regulatory Committee in December 2015, with the planning approval subject to only 9 conditions and no legal obligations.

Identifying and addressing key issues at an early stage, together with regular communication, provided TWUL with greater confidence as to the application outcome. Local planning authority and stakeholder involvement facilitated the agreement of supporting information, the provision of comments on proposed designs, allowed for familiarity with the proposal, and the removal of concerns.

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