

**Wear Valley District:** Composting of pre-shredded green waste at former Scoby Scaur Waste Disposal Site, Newfield, near Willington for Premier Waste Management Ltd.

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### **Introduction**

- 1 This proposal is one of three submitted planning applications submitted for the composting of pre-shredded green waste at closed landfill sites managed by Premier Waste Management Ltd. The other two locations are Bolam Quarry, Bolam and Coxhoe Quarry, Coxhoe. The proposals are for a temporary five year period and are intended to secure increased capacity for the composting of green waste and to take some pressure off Joint Stocks Quarry, Coxhoe, the Company's main site for this activity, which is already at full capacity and expecting a large influx of material over the summer months.
- 2 The Company is currently considering other options to meet the need for green waste composting facilities in the County. These include an extension of the existing composting area at Joint Stocks and the development of larger, purpose built facilities for these operations. It will take some time to bring forward a new site or sites and the current proposals are intended to act as a stop gap until a more permanent solution is found.
- 3 The Environment Agency granted exemptions from waste management licensing controls (under Paragraph 12 of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994) for the composting of green waste at each of the sites over two years ago and it is understood that these operations have been taking place since then, although this is not currently occurring. Planning permission was not sought as the Company believed that the activities were ancillary to the current agricultural use of the land. It is the view of the Planning Authority that this is not the case and the applications have been submitted to seek planning permission to allow composting operations to continue on site.

### **Planning History**

- 4 The former Scoby Scaur Waste Disposal Site was operated by Durham County Waste Management Company. Tipping ceased in May 1998 and the site has been restored to agricultural use. The adjacent Todhills (Cobey Carr) Waste Disposal Site has recently ended tipping and is currently undergoing restoration. As part of the restoration, planning permission was granted in March 2000 for a compound containing equipment to generate electricity from landfill gas emanating from the site. Also in operation, just east of the application site is the Todhills Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) which has planning permission for its current use until 2012.

## The Proposal

- 5 The development involves stockpiling pre-shredded green waste materials in windrows on 0.64 hectares of land located on the east side of the former landfill site not far from the Todhills HWRC (see attached plan). The material would be delivered by 40 tonne HGVs from Joint Stocks Landfill site (7 miles away) and would consist of soils and garden waste originating from household recycling centres within County Durham.
- 6 The material would be deposited directly on the land and laid out in rows measuring up to 75 metres in length and 4 metres in height, depending on quantities available. The green waste would be turned every two weeks by a loading shovel, to ensure that the composting process is carried out successfully. A screening procedure would also be undertaken during the turning process to remove any oversize material. The composting operation is expected to be completed within a 12 weeks period, after which the resulting compost would be spread on the former landfill site. It is anticipated that about 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> of green waste material would be processed every 12 weeks, which would amount to a maximum of 5,000 m<sup>3</sup> (approximately 4,000 tonnes) per annum.
- 7 Approximately 72 vehicle movements to and from the site are anticipated every 12 weeks in association with these activities. The level of movement and activities would vary according to the cycle of operations. The deposit of waste is likely to occur over a period of 14 days (average 4 vehicles in and out daily) although this could vary between 2 days (25 vehicles daily) and 1 month (approximately 2 vehicles daily). In general, the proposed hours of working would be between 07.30 and 16.30 Monday to Friday.

## Consultations and Views Received

- 8 Wear Valley District Council has no objections to the proposals subject to further information as to the locational breakdown of activities on the site, measures to deal with odour and vermin issues and details of a suitable landscaping scheme.

*Comment: Approximate dimensions of the windrows are detailed in paragraph 6 above but the applicant has stated that providing a breakdown of the exact layout of activities would be difficult as it would vary throughout the year depending on season and the amount of material to be composted. With respect to odour and vermin issues, see paragraph 18 below. The need for a landscape scheme as part of the works is considered unnecessary, given the type of activity (green waste composting) the nature of the site and surrounding environment and the intended timescales for operations (paragraph 20 below provides a more detailed account of landscape issues).*

- 9 Spennymoor Town Council has no objections to the proposal.

- 10 The Environment Agency has no objection to the development as proposed, but has requested that a condition be attached to any permission granted to ensure that the storage of waste materials is restricted to within the red line application boundary due to the close proximity of flood zones to the north. It is also requested that no spreading of compost takes place within any areas of flood risk. As part of the waste management licence / exemption process, the applicant has been asked to carry out an environmental risk assessment to address any environmental concerns within the remit of the Agency.
- 11 Natural England (Government Team) notes that the application has not provided any information with regards to designated sites or protected habitats and species and that there is a possibility that the site may be used by breeding birds. As such it is suggested that the Planning Authority may wish to attach an informative on any planning consent to make the applicant aware that such species may be present and that legal protection is to be afforded to them.

*Comment: An informative alerting the applicant to the possibility of ground nesting birds, especially during the main breeding period (1 March and 1 August) can be attached.*

- 12 Natural England (Geology, Landscape and Soils Team) does not raise objections to the proposal but has made some observations on a number of general agricultural, soil resource protection and associated reclamation considerations, which have been passed onto the applicant.
- 13 Durham Bat Group has expressed concern over the proposals stating that the application site is close to the River Wear which is an important feeding ground for bats. Any leachate resulting from the composting activities could have a damaging effect on the water quality, which in turn would impact on the ability of the river to provide food for bats.

*Comment: As stated in paragraph 10 above, the Environment Agency has requested safeguards, including a risk assessment from the applicant to deal with potential leachate issues.*

- 14 The application has been advertised on site and in the local press. No representations have been received.

## **Planning Considerations**

### **Waste Policy**

- 15 National waste planning guidance is reflected in PPS 10: Planning for Sustainable Waste Management, which introduced the concept of a waste disposal hierarchy, wherein landfill is regarded as the least preferable disposal route, particularly where waste can be used as a resource through composting.

- 16 The County Council's adopted County Durham Waste Local Plan [WLP] recognises that composting as a process removes a significant and potentially polluting element from the waste stream and also reduces demand for peat and other soil improvement products for land reclamation. Policy W42 provides opportunities for outdoor composting facilities in particular where the proposal can be satisfactorily located on previously developed land, makes beneficial use of the composted product as part of a reclamation proposal and the processing of waste remains appropriate in scale to an existing primary use. In so far as the development would utilise the compost to upgrade the condition of land on a former landfill site that would benefit from improvement it would be in line with this policy requirement. WLP Policies W9, W31 and W33 relating to landscape character, environmental and neighbourhood protection are also of relevance.

### **Local Amenity**

- 17 The Environment Agency advised in a policy statement in August 2001 (also reflected in the WLP) that new composting facilities should not be located within 250 metres of a workplace or curtilage of a dwelling unless a risk assessment demonstrates acceptability. The nearest houses to the proposed composting area are located over 380 metres to the south, on the other side of the Todhills landfill site. 550 metres to the east of the site is Todhills Farm and Brickworks, and Willington is located over 750 metres to the north and west.
- 18 The application site would be used to compost green waste only and should not give rise to litter, odour and vermin problems. Nevertheless, mitigation measures would include litter picking should any waste batches inadvertently contain other materials, turning and screening of the compost at low wind speeds to prevent odours, and monitoring for any signs of vermin activity. At the request of Wear Valley District Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO), the applicant has agreed to take a more pro-active approach to possible vermin problems by employing a competent pest control company to undertake annual on-site inspections at a time of year when vermin activity would be highest. The EHO is satisfied with the mitigation measures to be employed, and their provision can be covered by planning condition.
- 19 Given the nature and scale of the proposals, the degree of separation from residential property and mitigation measures proposed, it is unlikely that composting operations would have any adverse impacts on the amenity of the area or the wider environment.

### **Landscape and Nature Conservation Issues**

- 20 The application site is located in open countryside within an Area of High Landscape Value that follows the line of the River Wear. The Scoby Scaur site rises up gently from the river but is largely dominated by the

more elevated Todhills landfill site (undergoing restoration) when viewed from the north. The boundary of the Scoby Scaur site is planted and there is a block of trees around the HWRC, which flanks the eastern edge of the application site. The area where windrows would be placed is therefore not particularly prominent and partially screened from general views. Although the windrows would be raised features on the restored site, they would not be obtrusive nor diminish the landscape value of the immediate or wider surroundings.

- 21 No statutory nature conservation designations affect the site, although there is a County Wildlife Site located directly north of Scoby Scaur, which has been designated due to its quality as a wetland area. The County Council's ecological advisor has raised some concerns regarding leachate but is satisfied that the Environment Agency has set limits to the spreading of compost away from flood zone areas.

### **Public Rights of Way**

- 22 A public right of way cuts across the south west corner of the Scoby Scaur site running in an east-west direction. The path is fenced from the surrounding fields and users of the public right of way would be largely unaffected by the proposed operations except during periods when the compost is to be spread on the land and the field gate across the path is open. However most of the south west corner of the site falls within a flood risk area and no spreading of compost would take place here.

### **Traffic and Access Considerations**

- 23 The site is accessed via a surfaced road just off the hairpin bend at Cobey's Carr Lane that is used in association with the HWRC. The visibility distances for vehicles turning onto and off Cobey's Carr Lane are approximately 100 metres in both directions. The surfaced road veers right into the HWRC but HGV's would continue straight ahead to the application site along an unmade track. Vehicle movements associated with the operations are fairly low and can be acceptably catered for by the site access and local road network. There is no objection to the proposal on highway grounds.

### **Recommendation and Reasons**

- 24 National strategies and planning policies encourage the aim of recycling and composting. The proposal would make an important contribution to recycling targets in the County and help to divert green waste going to landfill. The proposed development accords with WLP policies, and would have limited affects on the character or appearance of the area and local residents, given the location of the site, infrequent vehicle movements, and proposed mitigation measures that are to be put in place.

- 25 Accordingly, I **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the proposed development subject to appropriate conditions to cover time limits and to mitigate any potential environmental effects, for the following reason:

The proposals would contribute to targets associated with the recycling and re-use of waste materials in accordance with national and local strategies and given the scale, location, and nature of operations the proposals would not give rise to significant visual, amenity, highway or environmental concerns. The development would accord with Policies W9, W31, W33 and W42 of the County Durham Waste Local Plan.

- 26 As the development is intended to be temporary the applicant be advised that the Planning Committee expects that every reasonable effort is made to identify and develop suitable alternative sites for green waste composting within the period specified by this consent.

### **No Departure**

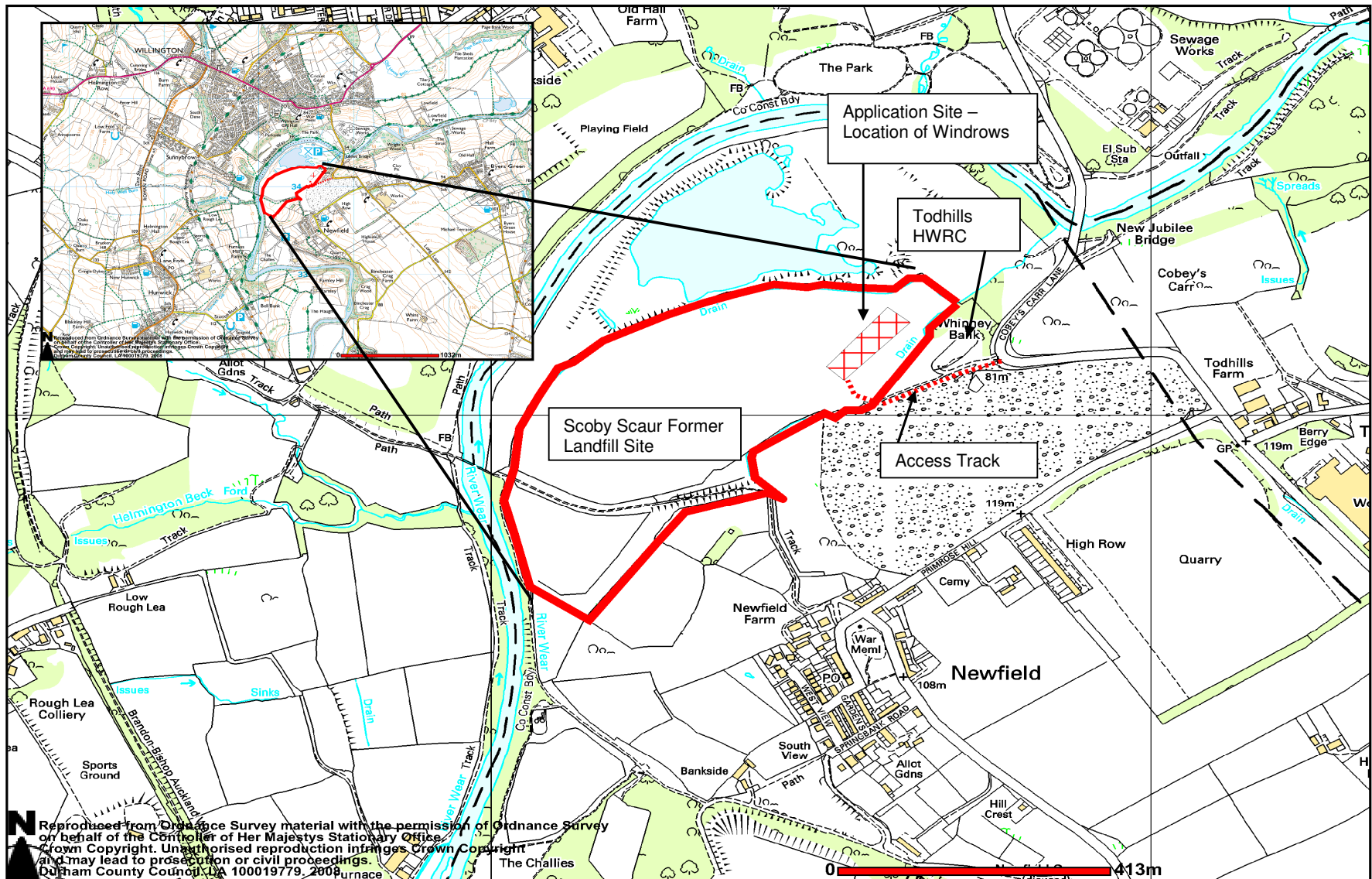
### **Background Papers**

Planning application forms and certification accompanied by letter from Premier Waste Management Ltd to Durham County Council dated 7 March 2008 and supporting statement. Consultation letters, responses and other correspondence on the application file CMA/3/26.

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<b>Local Members:</b>	<b>Councillors Burn and Taylor</b>	

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