ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 24 September 2003
(*Morning*)

Session 2

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ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
6th Meeting 2003, Session 2

CONVENER

*Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP)
*Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)
*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)
*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
*Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)
*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

*attended

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)
Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Mr Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Douglas Boyle (Composting Association Scotland)
Dr James Buchanan (Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group)
Susan Carstairs (Lochaber Environmental Group)
Dr Colin Clark (Chartered Institution of Wastes Management)
Ann Coleman (Greengairs Environmental Forum)
Stephen Cooper (Lerwick Waste to Energy Plant)
Steve Creed (Waste and Resources Action Programme)
Paul Dumble (Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group)
John Harris (Chartered Institution of Wastes Management)
Con Kerwin (Scottish Environmental Services Association)
Martin King (Scottish Environmental Services Association)
Liz Partington (Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership)
Duncan Simpson (Remade Scotland)
Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Tracey Hawe

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Brough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Catherine Johnstone
Roz Wheeler

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Environment and Rural Development Committee

Wednesday 24 September 2003

(*Morning*)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:04*]

Subordinate Legislation

Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Fishing and Fishing Methods) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2003 (SSI 2003/404)

The Convener (Sarah Boyack): I welcome colleagues, committee members, witnesses, the press and members of the public to this meeting of the Environment and Rural Development Committee. I have received written apologies from Roseanna Cunningham. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones.

Agenda item 1 is subordinate legislation. We have one instrument to consider under the negative procedure. The Inshore Fishing (Prohibition of Fishing and Fishing Methods) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2003 (SSI 2003/404) has already been considered by the Subordinate Legislation Committee, which made no comment on the order in its report. If members have no further comments, are they happy to make no recommendation to the Parliament on the order?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Petition

Landfill Sites (PE541 and PE543)

10:05

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, we have in front of us two petitions, which the committee agreed should be considered as part of our current inquiry on the national waste plan. Copies of petitions PE541 and PE543 are among the committee papers, along with a cover note that sets out the background, and further written submissions from both sets of petitioners. The petitions raise various points on landfill sites and call for a variety of improvements to procedures. The cover note says that the application that is referred to in PE541 was refused. In fact, to be 100 per cent accurate, it was withdrawn by the developers.

I welcome Dr James Buchanan and Paul Dumble from the Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group, who submitted PE541. I also welcome Karen Whitefield MSP and Ann Coleman from the Greengairs Environmental Forum, who submitted PE543. Thank you for giving us your information in advance so that members were able to read it. We will go straight to questions.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): What effects has the landfill site had on your community and what do you think we should do to try to minimise such effects if other landfill sites are allowed in the future?

Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): I will go first and then I will let Ann Coleman speak on behalf of the community, as she lives there. The landfill site has had a detrimental effect on life in the community. There is no part of the village that people can stand in without seeing landfill or opencast operations at work. The committee should bear in mind the fact that opencast sites will often subsequently be used as landfill sites to fill in the voids.

Quality of life is affected. There are so many trucks and lorries taking waste to and from the site that roads are affected and there are complaints from communities about constant noxious odours. Simple things, such as children walking safely to school, become problems. Depending on which way the wind is blowing, people are unable to enjoy their back gardens because of odours from the landfill site. There are also genuine concerns about the health impact on the community. Ann Coleman might want to say something about that as she conducted a health survey in the village recently.

Ann Coleman (Greengairs Environmental Forum): In February, we put together a community questionnaire and sent it out. We had a reasonable response, as these things go. I will use the words that people from the community used in their written responses to the questionnaires. One of the questions that we asked was about the disbenefits of living with opencast and landfill sites. These were a few of the comments:

"Because of the smells you can't open your windows in the summer to get fresh air";

"We pick up viruses";

"Being surrounded by opencast workings, dust smells, bird pollution in garden";

"Tips and smell from them";

"The landfill site, opencast sites … there is no restoration going on";

"Environment";

"The disbenefits are the smell coming from the tip and the noise from the machine at Boglea";

"Constant flow of heavy lorries";

"Terrible smell from the dump especially in summertime".

I have pages of individual responses to the questionnaire. We will end up with a big hole and Greengairs will disappear into it.

People have lost all hope for the future. We need more definite information so that we know what is ahead for us. What is the point of getting involved in any community development project, when the council is approving even more landfill? We already have the largest landfill site in Scotland—it is one of the largest in Europe—and three landfill sites have been completed recently. A further site was recently approved by the local authority and another is in the background. People who are up against that have no hope for the future.

As far as health is concerned, 97 per cent of the respondents to the questionnaire said that they feared for their health and for their children's health. We must make it clear that it will be 30 years before we know the impact on health of some of the pollutants from landfill, such as nitrogen dioxide. The young children who have been breathing in that gas might find that their respiratory systems have been damaged, but we will be 30 years down the line before we know whether that has happened, as there is no monitoring of the air quality in our area. Residents are given no specific information and no reassurance.

As we see it, nobody listens to us and nobody cares. We feel that the attitude is to dump all the rubbish there and forget that we exist. We are a small community without much voting power and we do not have financial resources with which to fight our case. The situation is demoralising.

Karen Gillon: I have known your community group for some time and it is very active. I take it that you have made representations to the council about planning applications and that you have complained about the smell. What action has the council taken?

Ann Coleman: It has done nothing.

Karen Gillon: Has the council taken any action on the smell?

Ann Coleman: The biggest success that the community has had was as a result of working directly with Shanks waste solutions. That work has had more impact than anything that the local authority has done.

For example, one complaint is about vehicles that travel along the main road without haps or covers. The local authority says that it will do something about the problem if we supply the vehicles' numbers. How can people see the number of a lorry that whizzes past while they are in the house? If the council is aware of the problem, why does someone not monitor the situation—at least occasionally? Why do council officials not go out on an ad hoc basis to check out the situation? There is no evidence that the local authority is doing anything.

Karen Gillon knows the carry-on that arose about working outside hours. The working hours for the landfill sites are from 7 o'clock in the morning until 7 o'clock at night. However, nobody is available in the local authority offices until half past 8 in the morning or after half past 4 in the afternoon. On one occasion, the community council videoed activity on the site outside working hours, but the local authority said that that was not good enough; the activity would have to be witnessed by two local authority officials before it could take any action. The recording took place at 11.30 at night, when work at the site was supposed to have finished at 7 o'clock. The work had gone on all night, but no one in the local authority would believe that that was the case; it just refused point blank to do anything. Karen Gillon knows about that—she got plenty in the ear when she visited the community.

That is the situation. The local authority pays no attention to the community. To be fair, it lacks the resources—as does the Scottish Environment Protection Agency—to be able actively to monitor and control the extent of the activities in our area. That is a big problem. We need to limit the size of operations to allow local authorities and other regulatory bodies to monitor efficiently.

10:15

Karen Whitefield: Enforcement is a key issue for communities across the North Lanarkshire area and the council is undoubtedly stretched. I suggest that, if consent for a planning application is granted, in particular for a site of considerable size, as part of the conditions of that consent, money should be granted to the local authority and used to employ an enforcement officer, who would ensure that the terms of the planning consent were not breached.

It is important that the local authority be allowed to employ the enforcement officer. The enforcement officer should not work for the company or the operator on the site. The community has to be able to believe that the officer is there to do the job properly and is on the community's side. The same goes for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency—there has to be joined-up thinking and proper enforcement. Often the local authority and SEPA try very hard, but they are not able to be there round the clock.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): My question is more or less the same as Karen Gillon's. Was the problem there even though tips were properly regulated, or were the tips not being properly regulated?

I am also interested in the effects of odour. This issue comes up time and again; it came up constantly at the Transport and the Environment Committee during the previous session of Parliament. There seems to be very little that people can do when they have an awful smell in their neighbourhood. Authorities never seem to recognise the problem or the effect that it has on people. Odour is a public health issue that has not been recognised. It is being ignored.

Ann Coleman: Odours from a landfill site will be caused by methane gas. Methane is an ozone-depleting agent. It has no smell itself but we have to consider everything else that goes along with it. What you smell is polluted air—that is the problem. Nitrogen dioxide has a very pungent odour; it is one of the components that goes along with methane.

To be fair, I have to say that Shanks has tried and tried to control the smells from the site. Our biggest problem—other communities might say the same thing—is that the site is far too close to the community. There is not enough space for any odour problems to dissipate. Our community is so close that we virtually live on the landfill site.

Karen Whitefield: That is the key issue. Shanks has spent more than £1 million in Greengairs on recapping the part of the site that is closest to the village. It invested that money because it really did want to do something about the odour, which it acknowledged was causing serious difficulties for the community. However, even after that investment, the odour problem remains. The problem lies in the proximity of the village to the site. Only a very small strip of land lies between the site and the community and there will undoubtedly be further problems with odour.

Mr Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Were the conditions that the council agreed to in the original planning application adequate for monitoring the site? Should we revisit that issue to try to get much better planning conditions for such sites? Your immediate problem must be solved, but an awful lot of other people will face the same problem.

Ann Coleman: We do not trust conditions. You can read them and accept them, but they have proved to be completely ineffective. The conditions are not applied. It would be all right if the conditions that were submitted with an application were tried and tested. However, the planning system is not accountable enough in respect of the contents of any planning application and/or the conditions that go with it. On the surface, the conditions might appear to address the various issues, but they are not put into practice. The way in which the public perceive the wording of conditions can also lead to problems.

Karen Whitefield: Conditions are only as effective as their enforcement. Sufficient conditions might well be in place at Greengairs, but the local authority and SEPA encounter difficulties in enforcing them. In some cases, SEPA has taken the operators in the village to court. The powers exist; the issue that needs to be addressed is their enforcement.

The Convener: The submission from the Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group talks about the impact of landfill sites on the local community. Is there anything that the witnesses would like to add about the operation and management of the sites?

Dr James Buchanan (Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group): Along with a local member of Parliament, we went to see the chairman of SEPA. We made the point that we did not feel that SEPA was involved in the planning application, and we were told that SEPA becomes involved only when the planning application has been approved. We feel that that is totally wrong.

On Ann Coleman's point, I want to quote a letter that was written by our Roslin medical practice doctors. They wrote of the landfill site's

"expansion to 2000 tons/day, consisting of approx 550 tons of household waste, 200 tons of commercial waste, and 1100 tons of industrial waste"

within 400m to 500m of the village. They continued:

"We believe that such an expansion of a landfill site is contrary to the aspirations contained in the document "Reduction, Re-use, Recovery, and Disposal"—

members will know about that document—

"is detrimental to the amenity of the area, and potentially detrimental to the health of our patients. Last year"—

meaning 2001-02—

"flies plagued the community. Seagulls and other scavengers are already seen regularly at the current tip".

This week, the seagulls have come back in large numbers. The doctors continued:

"We are concerned that an expansion of the tip will increase the nuisance caused by these pests and will increase the potential for the spread of infectious diseases, and diseases caused by environmental pollutants (such as asbestos dust)".

Some 2,000 tonnes of asbestos a year goes into the Oatslie site, which is only 400m upwind of Roslin village.

The doctors also say:

"We are aware of research, which has shown an increase in congenital defects in babies born to mothers living close to landfill sites."

That is a reference to the Department of Health publication "Health Effects in relation to Landfill sites". The letter goes on:

"Whilst the causes have not been identified, the epidemiological evidence is concerning, and should lead to further research. In the absence of any other information we feel that such an expansion of waste disposal beside residential houses, and a primary school should not take place."

As the convener mentioned, the application was withdrawn.

The doctors conclude their letter by saying:

"We believe that recycling and disposal should be explored, before resorting to dumping, and that dumping on this scale close to residential housing should only occur when and if the community can be reassured of its safety."

The members of the community find themselves forced to be objectors instead of being involved in the planning application process. They feel disempowered and there is a feeling of helplessness among the people in the village who are faced with this kind of development. That affects morale.

I do not think that I have answered the question entirely, but that is what I wanted to say.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): Have there been any assessments of the impact on health of flies, rodents, seagulls and other scavengers?

Ann Coleman: Not to my knowledge.

Dr Buchanan: It is hard to find proof of cause and effect, as these things happen over such a long time. I do not think that there have been any definitive studies, apart from the DOH study on congenital defects in children, which is a Europe-wide study.

Karen Whitefield: People who live in communities that are faced with the consequences of landfill operations tend to distrust everyone, as they do not feel that they have been involved in the process from the start. They do not believe that they were regarded as stakeholders when the application was first mooted; their views were not recognised at that point and they were unable to alter the conditions that were then granted for the planning application.

People are concerned about their health. The links may or may not be obvious; nevertheless, that adds to the feeling of distrust. We must change the culture that surrounds how planning applications, for example, are made, so that communities are regarded as stakeholders and have a bigger say in decisions that affect them. If that were the case, communities such as those that I represent would perhaps be much happier to sign up to recycling initiatives and to consider the issues holistically. When they end up as the dumping ground for most of central Scotland's waste, they wonder why they should take part in such schemes, as they have already taken more than their fair share of waste and face the prospect of having to take more than their share for the next 30 years—or longer, depending on how effective recycling is.

That is the prospect that the Greengairs community lives with. Anything that cannot be recycled will still come to the landfill site at Greengairs, but the speed at which the voids can be filled will slow down. Therefore, recycling is a bit of a double-edged sword for a community that lives with landfill, and the community will not necessarily want to sign up for recycling, no matter how admirable we all think it is.

Karen Gillon: I have some questions about the history of the case. When did landfill start at Greengairs and how long is it currently proposed that it be permitted? On the big development of the Shanks & McEwan site, does the current site bear any resemblance to what was initially proposed?

Ann Coleman: Shanks got the licence in 1988 for 20 years, but by 2008, only part of the site will have been filled. At present, the site is filling at the rate of 600,000 tonnes per annum, although the company has permission to take 1.3 million tonnes per annum. It is estimated that, if the present figure is reduced to allow for the effect of recycling, it will take another 35 to 50 years for the site to be filled. The matter has gone to ministers, but another planning application for a site has been approved and a further application is sitting

on the sidelines. In addition, there are sites at Dalmacoulter, Hartlouphill and Riggend. It is terrifying to think about all the changes in ownership of the operators of those sites, which started prior to the introduction of the new regulations. It does not bear thinking about.

The area has a history of ad hoc dumping. In the 1950s, things were dumped in the disused drift mines. Now, the former opencast mining sites are being opened up as well. Add to that the potential 50-year period of contingent liability, following the completion of the landfill, before the site gets a completion certificate from SEPA, and we are talking about 100 years passing before the environment of the Greengairs community will get a clean bill of health.

10:30

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): You say that the former drift mines were used for landfill and are now being reopened as part of the opencast mining procedure. How is the material that is dug up disposed of? Does it go to the current landfill site?

Ann Coleman: We do not know—there are no records of that. Local people will tell you that tanker loads of liquid of some kind—nobody knows what—were emptied into the drift mines in the 1950s. The opencast operator has to have settlement ponds and so on in place. They have to work on the basis of protecting the environment from what could be present at the location. However, not as many regulations apply to them as apply to landfill sites.

Alex Johnstone: My understanding is that many landfill sites that have operated without regulation or under previous regulations no longer require to be controlled by the current operator of the site. The disturbing of previously landfilled material is a substantial grey area.

The Convener: Do the representatives of the Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group wish to add anything on the long-term nature of developments and their impact on the community?

Paul Dumble (Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group): I wish to pick up on some of the points that have been made on integration with waste policy. A lack of integration was one of the reasons why Roslin, Bilston and Auchendinny Community Group's campaign was successful in encouraging the landfiller to withdraw its application. The community was seeking some kind of engagement with the waste operator, possibly involving the local authority's waste systems and the other collection systems in place at the time.

Many issues arose from that. The civic amenity site at Penicuik was closed down, and was replaced by another civic amenity site at Oatslie. That did not appear to the community to represent any increase in opportunities to recycle and recover waste. It seemed to be more of the same—as well as being inconvenient for the people of Penicuik, who now had to bring their waste up to Oatslie. The community was keen to engage with many issues around waste recovery, but since the campaign ended last November, neither the local authority nor the waste contractor has contacted the community group with a view to involving the community.

I will move on to the issue of waste odour. I am a professional waste manager, and I know that certain waste types have odours. There must be practices or methods of treatment that are available to the waste contractor so that they can ensure that odours and certain types of waste entering the landfill site are controlled. My gut instinct is that it has been decided that some of the available technologies are too expensive. The argument of cost is always used. The sum of £1 million has been mentioned. I have been involved in other odour abatement schemes in Cumbria—in particular, the Distington odour group. In that case, the contractors were required to spend in excess of £1 million to achieve the odour abatement regimes that were imposed on them.

I know that there are technologies out there to deal with odours. My day job involves bringing new technologies from the defence, science and technology base to businesses. In the waste sector, some very exciting technologies are coming through. The waste sector is currently engaged in high-labour, high-cost recovery schemes. I am aware of technologies coming through that will change that, enabling the industry to move forward. Indeed, I would like the opportunity to introduce some of the people in this room to some of those technologies. I have worked for the Defence Diversification Agency, and I have been authorised to pass on contact details relating to those technologies to people who are interested in learning more about them. As a waste manager, I am excited about that. Some of the technologies could be used to abate some of the problems that have been mentioned in this room.

A range of policy issues needs to be brought to bear. We were disappointed by SEPA. We talked about its failures on the regulatory side, but it is poor at supporting waste policy. Its role should be to integrate that policy, not with one waste contractor, but between all the waste contractors in Scotland, so that they develop integrated waste recovery, treatment and disposal systems across Scotland.

As we say towards the end of our submission, we feel that many of the development applications lack imagination. We see a poor industry relying on Government handouts to move forward. I would like to see an industry that is competent to invest off its own bat, without having to wait for hundreds of millions of pounds of investment from the Government.

I believe that opportunities exist. I also believe that the communities that need to be involved in the process have been ignored. They should be brought into the equation. In our paper we suggest ways for that to happen. We heard from the other group that, by involvement with the landfiller, they achieved local solutions. That illustrates the point that local communities should not be viewed as interfering nimbys, or whatever classification is given to them; local communities should be involved and treated like ordinary people, with respect. The perception that they are excluded from the system should be reversed, so that we can move forward.

The Convener: I thank the petitioners for answering our questions this morning, and for giving us written evidence in advance. As a committee, we now need to agree the action that we will take on the petitions. Having listened to the questions and answers and looked at the evidence, I suggest several things.

We should highlight that we will take into account in our later evidence sessions the issues that have been raised today. We are now moving into the second of our inquiry sessions on the national waste plan. In particular, we will pick up on issues that have been raised about proximity, regulation, monitoring, community involvement and integration. We will also continue to examine the issue of noxious odours, which came up in relation to waste water treatment at our meeting on 10 September. We will ensure that we pick that up from the waste management side.

We also need to ensure that the Public Petitions Committee considers referring petitions PE541 and PE543 to the other committees in the Parliament that have an interest. In particular, I am thinking about planning issues—for example, planning applications, the involvement of stakeholders and long-term impact and changes issues—which are relevant to the Communities Committee. On the health side, the petitions could be referred to the Health Committee for its consideration of monitoring and the research and information that is available. Do members have any other suggestions?

Karen Gillon: Those are sensible suggestions. The issue that came out of the Greengairs presentation is that when applications are being considered, no account seems to be taken of the current environmental impact. I am not sure whether that falls between the two stools of us as the environment committee and the Communities Committee as the planning committee. However, in communities such as Greengairs, where it is clear that current landfill sites have an environmental impact, how do future applications, either opencast or landfill, take into account what is already happening on the ground? I do not think that they do. We need to find some way for that to happen.

The Convener: That is the cumulative issue, which relates to the historic points that Alex Johnstone asked about. We should pick that up.

Mr Gibson: To reinforce that, we must ask the Communities Committee quite pointedly how it will review the enforcement of conditions that are laid down in planning applications. That issue crops up again and again. A council can lay down conditions, but it is not in a position to do anything about them. This committee must say in the strongest terms that we are faced with a problem that could have been smaller if there had been proper enforcement. Issues such as noxious odours can begin to be dealt with by new technology, but enforcement in the first place would give us an idea of what is going on.

Alex Johnstone: One of the interesting points that came out of the discussion—having read the papers, I know that it will come up in some of the other evidence that we will take under our inquiry later today—is that the planning issues that have been raised in relation to landfill are not unique to landfill. Many of them are as relevant to other forms of waste management, which are likely to become more important. While there is an issue to do with remit—we will have to refer planning issues in relation to the petitions back to the Communities Committee—there needs to be a clear understanding that we will consider the impact of planning issues as part of our continuing inquiry into waste management.

The Convener: There is a crossover. Clearly, we will be looking at that evidence over the next couple of weeks.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): We have not picked up on the justice aspect—we may have to refer it to another committee—and the difficulty of getting prosecutions to court, the delays that occur and all that that involves. I know from my constituency how difficult it is for SEPA to get a prosecution together, get it to court and get the fines imposed. That can all happen five or 10 years after the offence, and in the intervening period, how many other offences are committed? As well as everything else, there is an issue about access to justice.

The Convener: That is another point that we need to capture and come back to. We can

incorporate some issues in our waste management report and we now also have some recommendations on referrals to other committees for their interest. On that basis, does the committee agree to close consideration of both petitions?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Excellent. I thank the petitioners for taking the time to come along and be grilled by us this morning.

We will have a brief suspension to let our current witnesses leave and our next set of witnesses arrive.

10:42

Meeting suspended.

10:45

On resuming—

National Waste Plan Inquiry

The Convener: We will now resume work on our national waste plan inquiry. This is the second of four scheduled evidence-taking sessions. Last week we were given an introductory overview. Today we will explore the practical and local problems associated with making progress on the plan, including market development, waste minimisation and urban/rural differences. Having read the written evidence that has been submitted in advance, members will be keen to ask questions.

The first panel of witnesses this morning comprises Con Kerwin and Martin King from the Scottish Environmental Services Association, and Dr Colin Clark and John Harris from the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management. We have received written evidence from both organisations, so we will move straight to questions from members. As ever, I ask members and witnesses to keep their answers and questions focused, so that we can cover as much ground as possible.

Alex Johnstone: I will pick up where we left off. Both papers that have been submitted refer to problems associated with planning. You have made it clear that the kinds of developments that are necessary to make radical changes in waste management are likely to run up against problems in the current planning system. As you know, consultation is taking place on and consideration is being given to what may ultimately be radical changes to the planning process in Scotland. It is important that you clarify your concerns for us and indicate what you would like to happen with planning when it comes to the development of waste-handling facilities in the future.

Con Kerwin (Scottish Environmental Services Association): This morning we heard the concerns of residents of both Greengairs and Roslin. The industry believes that whatever type of planning application it submits, for whatever type of facility, it will encounter opposition. People are concerned about issues such as vehicle movements, as a minimum.

We need to find a way of supporting plans. As we said in our written evidence, we need to identify clearly areas where we can put waste facilities. The difficulty that the industry experiences is that if we say that a waste facility will be developed an objectors group will be formed almost immediately to stop the scheme proceeding. We have seen objectors fill a planning committee meeting when a decision is being made, to put pressure on local councillors to turn

down the application. We need to find a way around that difficulty.

Martin King (Scottish Environmental Services Association): As the committee heard from the petitioners, the history of waste disposal in Scotland has mainly been one of landfill. The national waste plan is designed to minimise the amount of waste that goes to landfill. We are at the beginning of a journey to meet European targets by 2020. That journey will require us to put in place an infrastructure that allows us to divert waste from landfill. That will involve planning applications for transfer stations and various technologies, with the residue of waste going to landfill. If we want to deliver by 2020, the big picture must be kept in mind.

Maureen Macmillan: Can you say more about transfer stations and so on? Might local people object to having those facilities in their area, in the same way as they object to landfill? Can you be more specific about your proposals?

Martin King: In our experience as an industry, we find that, irrespective of how minimal the impact of a development on a community may be, direct objections tend to be made to any planning application for a waste management facility. I could provide examples, but it is not appropriate for me to mention them here. Extensive objections were made even to a planning application for a small transfer station receiving very little domestic waste from a local community—40 tonnes a day, which amounts to two truck loads. That issue must be faced if we want to deliver the national waste strategy.

The Convener: One of your recommendations is that waste strategy areas should be statutory consultees for the development plan process. Would that tie the process together more effectively? There is clearly an issue about engaging the community in the wider overall waste management strategy, which the previous petitioners mentioned. How do you think including the areas as statutory consultees would take us further ahead?

Con Kerwin: Given that the waste strategy areas involve councils, they should involve communities. A number of parties should be involved. If they become statutory consultees, we get more ownership of the process as the planning applications go through.

Martin King: Various local authorities are included in each area. The delivery of the national waste strategy in each area should involve liaison with councils so that the area, rather than just individual communities, are considered.

John Harris (Chartered Institution of Wastes Management): One of the frustrations of professional officers in the institution—from private industry, local authorities and SEPA—is that when a planning application is made for a particular facility, whether for landfill or more modern technologies, the planning process appears not to keep up with the processes and procedures that the waste management industry has to go through. It is almost as if in some instances the planning process holds back the development of advanced waste management facilities.

The Convener: Do you have examples of that happening?

John Harris: There are a number of examples of that. In Aberdeen, a new energy-from-waste plant is being proposed. At the moment the professional officers in both the council and the company concerned are finding it difficult to obtain planning permission. A planning application for a materials recycling facility—nothing more—was made in Stirling three years ago, but has only recently been made the subject of a public inquiry. The plan was turned down initially because of planning objections—even though SEPA and the rest of the local authority in Stirling approved the plan—and it is now awaiting the outcome of the reporter's inquiry.

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Are you advocating a strategic consideration of land in each area that would identify areas in advance and zone them specifically for waste management or treatment of some sort?

Con Kerwin: We are definitely looking for that type of thing to happen. We could identify areas in the development plans for waste treatment or waste disposal. Let us identify those areas clearly. We do that for housing and minerals. Why not do it for waste as well?

Eleanor Scott: Would you identify areas for waste management of some sort and leave the particular nature of that to be decided in future? The area might subsequently be used for a recycling facility or for an incinerator.

Con Kerwin: That is the approach that we would take. Areas should be identified for waste, as we do for housing—

Eleanor Scott: But when any subsequent plan for an incinerator came up for approval, people would be unable to object to it fundamentally, because the area had already been zoned.

Con Kerwin: That is right. In principle, the land use would have been established. There would obviously be an environmental impact assessment as part of the process, but at least the area of land would be identified.

Karen Gillon: Why does one community—such as Greengairs—have to have three or four different landfills?

I am concerned that if we move to zoning, communities will be surrounded by landfill sites—as Greengairs is at the moment. Why do you not play a responsible role in the community and avoid putting more landfills in places where landfills are already in operation?

Con Kerwin: That is a good point. To answer the question, we must look back 100 years. Greengairs was established because coal, fire-clay and other minerals could be won there. As a result, communities sprang up in the area. Greengairs is an example of one such community. In West Lothian, because of the oil shale workings, communities sprang up all over the place. Some still exist, whereas some have gone. Mineral winning has created voids that the waste industry and society have decided to use for waste. Parts of Harthill were taking ash from Edinburgh in the 1930s, when waste was being incinerated. This is an historical development—it is not of our making. We must go where the geology allows and where minerals have been won. In some areas we end up with communities that are close to landfill operations because, historically, those communities developed to win minerals.

The Convener: Will that be the case in future, given that there will be different technologies and greater emphasis on composting, recycling and reuse? What will be the future footprint for waste? I do not ask you to specify individual communities, but what the future pattern will be, given the importance of proximity and other sustainable development issues, such as transport. Will facilities be located at existing developments, or is there an opportunity to do something different?

Con Kerwin: The national waste plan is designed to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill, but we must accept in principle that a residue of material will always have to be disposed of in that way. Waste treatment could be carried out on industrial estates, because we have the ability and technology to develop facilities that can handle material under cover, in buildings, with air control. The situation will change, but a landfill-type process will always be needed.

Dr Colin Clark (Chartered Institution of Wastes Management): I want to add something about the alternative waste processes. Where populations are dense, there will be a greater need for facilities. However, the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management believes that there is no fundamental reason that those should not be spread around the country, for the sake of proximity. As we said in our submission, everything depends on how the Parliament defines proximity for Scotland.

Karen Gillon: I am interested in your theory of community win for former coal mining villages. I represent a number of such villages, and there is not much community win for them. They do not have employment or facilities. Con Kerwin's notion of the win that those communities had bears no resemblance to what I see on the ground.

You have still not answered my question. Why should there be four landfill sites around Greengairs, and why are they so close to the village? Why do companies not show some social consideration for a village? Why is the Shanks site so close to Greengairs? Why have the companies that you represent not decided that it is not acceptable to do that any more, that the site does not need to be so close to the village and that they will move it without parliamentary intervention?

Con Kerwin: I have not made myself understood very well. I meant that communities had been developed to dig minerals—to win them from the ground. I did not mean that the communities had gained from that process in any way. Historically, a small village would develop around a coal mine or opencast site to win minerals. People lived in the area because employment had been created. I hope that I have made my meaning clear.

There are so many landfill sites around Greengairs village because, historically, that was an area of opencast mining for minerals such as fire-clay and coal. We have a choice—either we can leave a scar on the landscape or we can use a process to restore. Historically, it has been acceptable to put waste facilities in such areas. We are moving forward, but we are only eight months into the journey of our national waste plan. In five years' time, there may be a totally different process. Greengairs may have a waste treatment facility for composting and the environment may be completely different.

11:00

Karen Gillon: You still have not answered the question about why you, as companies, do not exercise some kind of social control. When the Greengairs site opened in 1988, you knew that if you put waste half a mile away from a village the smell would get out. Why do companies not exercise some kind of social control without laws needing to be in place?

Martin King: That takes us back to Con Kerwin's answer. Where the holes in the ground are is where we need to go for landfill. We and you rely on the planning systems and the legislation to control such issues as the one that you raise. Environmental impact surveys of sites should take into account the impact of landfill on the community. The planning processes and the environmental legislation should deal with such issues.

Maureen Macmillan: In other words, you try it on. You find a hole in the ground that is 500m from a village and try to get planning permission to use it. The local quarry owner or landowner thinks that that is a great idea, as they can get money out of it. That is what happens all the time. I can think of three places in the Highlands where that has happened. Do you not think that there should be a better way of doing it than that? Should not the views of the communities be taken into consideration right from the start? Instead of trying to push it through, should you not think first about the effect on the community of your filling with waste a quarry that is on their back doorstep?

Con Kerwin: I take issue with the idea that we try it on. We try to provide a service to society. Yes, we do it to make a living, provide jobs and make a profit; I have no problem with that. However, we also provide a service.

We all create waste. If there is a hole in the ground and it is geologically the right place to put that waste, we will ask the question. We have to ask whether we can place a facility there and, more often than not, the demographic process says that we cannot and we have to look somewhere else. It is not a case of our trying it on; it is a case of our trying to satisfy the needs of society and trying different areas to see where we can go. That is the principle on which our industry has to work.

Martin King: The facilities need to be in proximity to the main waste arisings. Unfortunately, that tends to be in centres of population. We do not try it on with planning applications. It costs thousands of pounds to go from the beginning of a submission to a public inquiry, if that is necessary. We would not try it on with a planning application. We would approach the planning department and ask for a review of the site, its availability and the likelihood of our getting planning consent. If that review concluded that we would be unlikely to get planning consent, that the site was not zoned for such purposes and that a landfill site would not fit with the local plan, we would not proceed with an application.

Mr Gibson: You have concerns that, in the way in which they are applied and developed, the regulations are not keeping up with need and not making your job easier. In your submission, you talk about the *Official Journal of the European Union* laying down waste acceptance criteria although

"the Executive has not issued its proposals for transposing WAC into national law."

Would you like to comment further on that?

Con Kerwin: I am happy to look at that. We need to be up to speed with the latest legislation. We have concerns about the implementation of the landfill directive and about conditioning plans. Scotland was behind England with a submission date for those plans. It is important that we get the legislation in statute so that we can get on with it and manage the process; otherwise, all that will happen is that the time will get squeezed further and further and we will end up having to push something forward.

It is like the fridge disposal situation. People thought that the private sector made a profit out of that. We did not. We had to try to deal with it as quickly as we could. That was another example of central Government implementing legislation late, resulting in an issue being forced on us. We were asked to deal with the problem and we dealt with it as quickly and cost-effectively as we could.

Mr Gibson: Does the institution think that there are problems in tackling things because of that delay?

Dr Clark: One of the problems is that there has been a rush of regulation from Europe on waste management, and the national waste strategy has brought considerable pressures to bear on the Executive and on SEPA, which produce guidance documents. They have been struggling. I was at a meeting with SEPA last week at which we identified 31 guidance documents that were being consulted on between June and November. They are not thin documents. It takes long enough just to print them, let alone to read them and comment on them. I shudder to think what the poor souls who have to write them go through.

Mr Gibson: It is an area of government in which questions are being raised about whether the resources exist to apply such regulations. I hope that we can bear that in mind.

The Convener: We talked about the catch-up issue during a previous meeting.

Eleanor Scott: The institution's submission states:

"Local authority procurement, particularly PFI/PPP, could be another major hurdle. PPP is protracted and expensive and also restrictive".

Can you say a little bit more about that and suggest an alternative if public-private partnership is not the answer?

Dr Clark: I am not sure that it is the institution's business to suggest alternatives. The experience to date on waste public-private partnerships and private finance initiatives is that they seem to take an awful long time to bear fruit. It can take years to get there and lots of money from both the public and private sectors. Both the local authorities that are involved in PFIs and the contractors who bid for them have to employ all manner of consultants, and they do not come cheap. There is, ultimately, a certain element of the banks taking over, and

banks in the UK are very concerned about risk. They seem to be especially risk averse in waste projects—north of the border, if not south of the border. If things have to happen quickly, PFI might not be the mechanism to deliver that. There are other procurement methods, which would perhaps deliver quickly, but that remains to be seen.

The Convener: What are the other suggestions for the procurement of new facilities?

Dr Clark: There is a facility whereby a company tenders simply for a service. That service could be operated on a gate-fee basis and would achieve more or less the same aim as PFI—I think, from my limited knowledge of PFI—which is a reduction in capital investment by the public sector.

John Harris: One of the small problems with PFI is the fact that the contracts that have been signed so far, or which are currently being negotiated, tend to run over fairly lengthy periods of time—20 to 25 years. The problem that some of the officers of the institution sometimes have with that process is that a solution that is being proposed now might in 15 years' time, never mind 25 years' time, be totally inappropriate. However, because of the expense and the type of technology that may or may not have to be used, the partnership agreement between the private sector and, for example, the local authority requires a length of time to be set to enable the return on any capital investment to be achieved. The dichotomy is between identifying the length of contract that meets the requirements for the delivery of the plan and ensuring that the plan is not out of date by the time that the contract finishes.

Martin King: The industry has found that, when councils put out to tender contracts that will run until 2020, they want to incorporate the risk transfer of achieving those targets to the private sector, which is bidding for the contracts. In so doing, they need to cover 2010, 2013 and 2020. That is why the contracts tend to run for a longer period. A major issue is the fact that the banks will not fund such a project unless there are guarantees that it will meet those targets.

The Convener: So what is your suggestion? Both your submissions make points about new technologies coming through all the time, but we are also faced with trying to move away from the existing reliance on landfill. How do local authorities and area waste teams manage the conflict between achieving fairly swift results over the next three years with major investment, and being able to upgrade or perhaps totally change facilities or processes within five or 10 years?

Martin King: The North and South Lanarkshire tender that is out at the moment is a negotiated partnership, not a PFI. One of the difficulties with the PFI and PPP systems is that they were originally designed for building new build, such as schools and hospitals, which bears no relationship to building an infrastructure to deal with waste. The couple of PFIs for waste that have been tendered recently include old landfill sites that need to be brought up to standard to meet the landfill directive. There is a contamination risk with those old sites, and trying to fit such projects into a PFI system that was designed to deliver schools and hospitals is a difficult process.

The Convener: Can you give us a bit more information? With negotiated partnerships is there a point, say at five years in, when the local authority can say, "A new technology is available. We'd like to incorporate it"? Would they then have to set up a totally new partnership, or could such a change be accommodated by the partnerships that are currently being established?

Martin King: Any partnership will need a project agreement between the client and the contractor to define what the contractor promises to deliver to the client. There needs to be flexibility in the project agreement to take account of new technologies, deliveries and targets, because in 2020 nothing will be the same as it is today.

Maureen Macmillan: I presume that it would be possible to incorporate references to best available technology in contracts.

Martin King: Yes. The difficulty is that one has to start with a basket of solutions that will deliver the 2010, 2013 and 2020 targets. However, there has to be flexibility within that to deal with the growth or minimisation of waste. A range of issues has to be dealt with in the project agreement to allow flexibility between the contractor and the client.

Maureen Macmillan: So what is the best solution to the dilemma of looking into the future and not being able to use new technology because it is not in the contract?

Martin King: I agree that PFI/PPP is an ill fit for waste management, and that a negotiated partnership with a project agreement is a better way forward.

Nora Radcliffe: Is the problem the fact that we are trying to allocate risk and nobody wants to take it on? Which stakeholders should take on part of the risk? Do we need people to be a bit more up front about saying, "Okay, hands up, we've got to do it", and to just get on with it?

Martin King: In our experience, obviously the client wants to transfer the risk that goes with the technology. The banks, as we all know, do not want any risk. The risk is a commercial risk that is normally taken in the contract by the private sector, but it is a calculated risk.

Dr Clark: In addition, in the area that we are moving into—where recycling, waste minimisation and reuse will be the terms that we use—quite a bit of the risk lies with the public and cannot be transferred either to the local authority or a private contractor. Much is said about risk transfer, to which perhaps the Scottish Environmental Services Association does not wholly subscribe. The important point is that there will be elements of risk transfer if and when a local authority contracts work out. However, some risk remains and cannot be transferred from the public.

Con Kerwin: One of the other issues that we should consider is direct charging. As we suggested in our written evidence, charging the public for waste services would focus the mind. Direct charging involves community groups and makes them aware of what is happening—they see what they are paying for. We could start with a flat-rate charging system, which would become more sophisticated as recycling rates increased. That would help to spread the risk and bring the public close to the process.

11:15

Nora Radcliffe: How do you envisage voluntary effort and community groups integrating with the professionals in the waste business? Much of the recycling that happens at the moment is the result of voluntary effort and community groups.

Con Kerwin: We welcome the work of community groups, because they do pump-priming work—for example, in education. As we said in our written evidence, in the long term the involvement of large organisations that have the ability to bring resources to bear will be needed to deliver the national waste plan. However, there will always be a place for community groups, especially in smaller communities where access is a difficulty.

Dr Clark: The Chartered Institution of Wastes Management agrees whole-heartedly with that view. The community should, and hopefully will, play its part. We need to find a niche for community groups and to enable communities to do what they can through funding delivered by the strategic waste fund.

Nora Radcliffe: In some community schemes, there is a significant amount of protected employment. Do you think that the profession should be asked to take on part of that social obligation? Obviously, it would be paid to do so from the public purse, which is a consideration. Would your taking on, in part and at a price, the social obligation for that stream of protected employment be a possible way forward?

Dr Clark: In our written evidence, we suggested that Scotland will have to make a decision about the value of social inclusion and of having community groups do X, Y and Z when that could be done more cheaply by the local authority or a private contractor. In my experience, where community groups work they are a valuable addition to the overall plan. However, they must find their niche within the big picture. They will not deliver the national waste plan. The need for us all to make a decision about the value of the things that community groups do as compared with simple provision of a service was evidenced only a couple of weeks ago, when a community group in Stirling lost a contract to collect glass.

John Harris: Many community groups are supported financially by initiatives such as the landfill tax credit scheme, which is coming to an end. Given that there is still uncertainty about what will replace the scheme and how the money will be devolved, it is difficult to see how some community groups will be able to continue their activity, as they have employees who need to be paid. In some rural locations, in particular, recycling is not financially viable but is being done for the good of the community. One must accept that for such recycling to work it will have to be subsidised financially in some way.

Alex Johnstone: We have covered many of the points that I wanted to make, but I want to touch on the financial issue surrounding waste management. It is clear that the industry is perceived as one that will always need to be supported by public resources to carry on the job that it does on behalf of the public—disposal of waste. That was made clear again in the evidence that we took earlier on landfill sites.

As we consider the national waste plan and recycling, opportunities will arise to generate a return. You have said that, in community groups, recycling is uneconomic. Through the establishment and implementation of the national waste plan, however, will it be possible to generate profit streams that can begin to subsidise the whole process of waste management?

Con Kerwin: I am not clear where the idea comes from that we rely on subsidies and handouts. The industry charges a gate fee. We dispose of waste and then take on the environmental responsibility for looking after that waste for perhaps 30 or 50 years. We charge the council a fee for that service. The only revenue that we take from the public purse is for the service that we provide. We will hear from the Waste and Resources Action Programme and people like that about developing markets, closing the loop and generating income streams from the materials that we recover.

Martin King: At the risk of giving away my age, I will say that I have been in this business for 40 years. I remember being taken to Polmadie to see a picking line. Recycling was going on at that time.

Since then, there have been various peaks when paper was required and recyclate found a home; at other times, we could not get rid of it at all. Therefore, in any business plan, it would be dangerous to assume a continuous income stream.

Waste, and municipal waste in particular, has been dealt with by our bins being emptied into a vehicle and taken to a landfill site. Local authorities now encourage kerbside recycling, which is in the national waste plan. However, it would be naive in the extreme to imagine that such a system of collection, without some intermediate segregation and removal of contamination, could provide totally clean recyclate and raw material that could be used in other products. When material is collected from the kerbside, significant cost is involved in segregating that material and making it fit for reprocessing. The disposal of the contaminated fraction must also be considered. Let us be in no doubt that recycling has cost implications. There may be some income to mitigate the cost, but recycling does not provide a clear income stream.

Alex Johnstone: So, will the public purse remain the prime support mechanism?

Martin King: Local authorities face a significant and growing cost in dealing with waste in line with the national waste strategy and the landfill directive.

Nora Radcliffe: We are making assumptions about contamination from materials that could be recycled. Is there evidence—from other places where material is collected and from starter schemes here—of how much contamination is likely? Witnesses from Glasgow City Council last week seemed surprised at the low level of contamination that they were getting.

Dr Clark: We have quite a lot of data on the relative levels of contamination that might be expected, depending on the method of recycling. The closer to home the method, the cleaner the material tends to be. The institution's view is that having clean materials delivered by the public is not beyond our wit. We should be moving in that direction. I do not want us to produce more waste so please do not take this the wrong way, but because we do not produce huge quantities of waste in certain parts of Scotland, we should be aiming to get premium grade recyclate from the public. I am reasonably sanguine, as are the membership of the institution, that we can achieve that in time.

Martin King: I agree—in time. The industry's experience to date has been of contamination of between 5 per cent and 60 per cent, depending on the method of collection. I agree with my colleagues that the aim is to get that down to a minimum. However, local authorities in Scotland will remain the people who collect the material. Resources must be put into that front-end collection to achieve the aim that Colin Clark spoke about.

The Convener: Thank you for coming along. We have covered a lot of ground and your written submissions have been extremely useful. The committee has two further panels of witnesses to hear from this morning, so we will have a short break to allow people to move to the table.

11:25

Meeting suspended.

11:30

On resuming—

The Convener: We will start with the second panel of witnesses. I welcome Douglas Boyle, from the Composting Association Scotland, Steve Creed, the director of business development and procurement at the Waste and Resources Action Programme, and Duncan Simpson, from Recycling Market Development—Remade Scotland. Duncan is here in place of Professor Jim Baird, whose name appears on our agenda.

The issue of recycling and markets has come up in just about every submission that we have received so far. Therefore, this evidence-taking session is highly relevant. I thank WRAP for its advance written submission. Nearly every submission has referred to the huge challenge to the recycling market's stability. Obviously, the witnesses' organisations try to ensure that high-quality products come from the rubbish that we create. The national waste plan sets out targets and the WRAP submission identified the progress that has been made towards meeting the targets for paper, glass, plastics and so on.

Can I get a sense from you of what the targets actually represent in terms of the amount of waste that we produce? Do the targets represent a drop in the ocean? We are obviously gearing up from a tiny amount to a more substantial amount. How significant are the targets that you are working towards? Can you give us a sense of how well we are beginning to do?

Steve Creed (Waste and Resources Action Programme): First, I thank the committee for inviting WRAP to give evidence today; we are pleased to be here.

We are talking initially about a very long journey towards achieving recycling targets by 2020. The amount of our current activity is more appropriately measured in terms of how much change we are making now. For example, in the

Shotton paper mill project there has been an increase of, I think, 321,000 tonnes in the use of recycled paper. That is equivalent to increasing all the recycled paper in the United Kingdom by 50 per cent. Therefore, we are making big jumps forward. However, it is not a massive amount in the context of the total amount of recycled paper. I do not have the numbers to hand, but I could provide the committee with details of the total amount of paper that is recycled in the UK and the total amount of paper that is used.

In the plastics sector, about 400,000 tonnes of plastic are currently used to make plastic bottles. We are recycling about 20,000 tonnes. Therefore, a target of increasing recycling by 20,000 tonnes is a 100 per cent improvement, but there is still a long way to go before we make it to the total amount.

The Convener: It is useful for us to remember that when we consider waste minimisation, which came up at a previous meeting. If we do not reduce the amount of waste that we produce, it will become an increasingly bigger task to create new recycling opportunities. Witnesses at a previous meeting made that point effectively.

Eleanor Scott: We have been talking about stimulating the procurement of goods from recycled products. I wonder how far down the line you are on that. I am particularly interested in public agencies' procurement policies because, from my point of view, it is the obvious place to start.

Steve Creed: That is an attractive target. In that context, people often talk about low-hanging fruit, but it is difficult to pick. The public sector offers many opportunities for recycling because the sector as a whole is focused on sustainable procurement. Energy and other matters are high on the sector's agenda, but recycled products are lower on its agenda. Recycled paper is a common product, but we want to do more than just recycle paper.

We have undertaken recycling activities with central Government. We have worked with Westminster and we have talked to people in the Scottish Government regarding procurement of products for activities such as construction. We suggest that the UK and Scottish Governments should use innovative targets in that area: rather than set a target that says that a certain amount of tonnage of recycled material should be procured, we suggest that they might use a value target.

The idea is that to set a target for the value, rather than the tonnage, of recycled content will leave it open to suppliers, contractors and designers to innovate in how they use any product that they choose from a list of available products. For example, they could use a lot of a low-value product or a little of a high-value product to reach a percentage of content. Recycled aggregates are of low value but are high volume. Specialist decorative tiles that are made from recycled glass might be used to create a signature building such as a plaza. That would cost a lot of money, but if the intention was to create a signature building anyway, money might be spent in that way and the target would be reached. That stimulates the supply chain to take action and we are working hard to make that happen.

A more practical activity involves the standard called EcoHomes, which was created by the Building Research Establishment Ltd and the National House-building Council, and which guarantees homes. The standard measures the eco-efficiency of properties that are being built. The target is good because, as members know, much new housing is of a standard construction and designs are not too different from one another. The standard awards points for using recycled products. We are working towards identifying products that can be used to meet higher value targets.

We are investigating training of the people who specify homes so that they understand how to use the EcoHomes process and how to obtain higher values. We are aware that housing authorities and local authorities throughout the United Kingdom are considering whether the standard could be a way to measure the environmental efficiency of properties and should therefore be an aspect in granting planning permission. We are using more than one lever—not only the direct procurement specification approach, but other activities such as the planning permission process, where demand for such a standard might exist.

Alex Johnstone: I will shift the subject to composting. During our evidence session last week, we discussed composting several times and I am keen to have an impression of the proportion of Scotland's municipal waste stream that could be recycled through composting. Will you expand on the disposal or use of composted material, given the issues about the disposal of sewage industry products, for example, and the question whether the market—if it can be called a market—exists to take the material that is created?

Douglas Boyle (Composting Association Scotland): I like the phrase "if it can be called a market", because it raises an important issue for the Composting Association Scotland and the UK Composting Association, which is our parent body.

I will return to the role of composting in the national waste plan. In area waste plans, composting is the main plank of delivery of the initial diversion targets. The Executive's target of rolling out composting will require about 30 plants that can deal with 10,000 tonnes per annum to be

built or operated before 2010. That target is phenomenal. One or two plants exist, but many developments will be required to meet the target.

That raises two issues, which Alex Johnstone mentioned. What are the barriers to the market? We have heard this morning about planning. Area waste plans or waste disposal processes—including composting or composting facilities—need to be included in plans for structure and area waste plans as infrastructure that society needs as much as it needs housing, sewage disposal, education facilities and roads. Waste treatment—be it recycling, landfill, composting, incinerating, or energy from waste—needs to be considered in the infrastructure planning stage.

Other potential logjams in a big expansion in composting are the potential pollution prevention and control regulations and the Animal By-Products (Scotland) Regulations 2003. A welcome was given yesterday to the Scottish version of the animal by-products regulations, which will allow us to move forward and plan the actual operations of composting plants.

As far as marketing goes, WRAP, along with the UK Composting Association and the British Standards Institution, has developed the publicly available specification PAS 100 standards system for organic materials derived from the composting process for use in horticulture. However, I have indicated the critical role that composting plays in delivering the national waste plan. Other outlets for the materials are needed.

The comparison with the sewage sludge issue is appropriate. The Composting Association Scotland believes that we need to develop a matrix, as has been done for the sewage treatment industry, for a range of applications for lower-grade materials that will accommodate the volumes that will be produced, so that those volumes fulfil a realistic function and have a role in closing the loop of organic resource management. There is a big need to develop a matrix that takes into account the quality of the source materials that are used in composting, the intensity of the composting process, and the potential end uses. In some cases, those will be markets. In other cases they will be outlets.

Maureen Macmillan: Could you give me more detail on what will go into compost? Are we talking just about vegetable waste? Are we talking about animal waste? Are we talking about human waste and fish waste? How will non-vegetable materials be treated?

Douglas Boyle: Anything that is non-vegetable waste—I presume you refer to animal waste—will have to be treated under the Animal By-Products (Scotland) Regulations 2003. The whole composting industry, along with the state veterinary service, has been working hard to develop hazard procedures, hazard analysis and critical control point procedures so that we meet the aspirations of the state veterinary service and the necessary sanitisation criteria that it is imposing. Composting will do that. A proper process that is properly managed will achieve the sanitisation that the state veterinary service requires.

Maureen Macmillan: Having lived for a number of years not far from a knackery, where beef and bone meal are produced for fertiliser, I am slightly anxious about the processes.

Douglas Boyle: Such materials would be category 2 materials under the Animal By-Products (Scotland) Regulations 2003 and would not go to composting plants without being pre-treated according to criteria that are laid down in the regulations, specifically in order to safeguard animal health.

Maureen Macmillan: What about human health? We heard earlier from people who were complaining about odour nuisance. I seek reassurances that facilities that are close to villages will not treat human and animal waste, which would impact on the health and well-being of people.

Douglas Boyle: The odour issue is controlled by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the waste management licensing system, and animal health is controlled by the state veterinary service. The whole point of composting is to take organic residues that would normally go to landfill, which produce the majority of odours and gasses, and to stabilise them by processing them under enclosed conditions. That is what the new regulations will require. The hope is that that will render landfill sites more benign because the residual materials will be treated in a controlled manner.

11:45

Duncan Simpson (Remade Scotland): At the start of the questioning, an issue was mentioned on which Remade Scotland has tried to move forward with WRAP and others, which is that there is no real recycling until people can buy recycled goods. In order to buy recycled, people need to be reassured that the product that they are buying performs and has value for them—it needs to have reliability and a guarantee.

What that demands of the waste management industry and of us as consumers is that we move away from considering waste simply as waste and that we try to split it down into its constituent parts. I need to start asking whether I can take a product away from refuse disposal and put it into supply-chain management. That will provide an audit trail

of where the material came from, what process it went through and whether the material was regulated and controlled. That is the only way to deliver value in the end product and to put value into waste management and the recycling loop.

People will not buy a product of which they are scared or which they believe to be unreliable. Now more than ever, consumer groups and community groups are well informed because they have access to more information than ever. That puts an onus on our industry and on our partners to work hard to guarantee that products are safe and have value within the community. In that way, we will be able to move away from landfill and towards recovering the resources that are available to us.

Maureen Macmillan: But those materials must be processed as well.

Duncan Simpson: Absolutely.

Maureen Macmillan: Your written evidence suggests that what you do is on a big scale, but the evidence that we heard earlier today suggested that much community recycling and composting is not cost-effective and that it would be more economical if it all just went away. What is your view on that?

Steve Creed: One thing that we have set up in relation to composting is PAS 100, which allows people to operate at quite small activity levels. We have had several applications from smaller organisations as well as from larger ones. In fact, proper green-waste composting can be run on a smaller scale. Depending on the materials that are being produced, the products that come out of composting can be sold locally.

Let me give a few further pieces of information, a summary of which I will pass over to the official reporters. Having done some work on the size of the potential market for quality green-waste compost, we think that the market potential in the United Kingdom as a whole is about £54 million. In the short term, we see a lot of growth in areas such as landscaping. WRAP has produced guidance notes for landscapers and on how people who use the materials can put them to proper use. It is feasible that smaller operations in rural areas could start up small-scale windrow composting.

On the odour issue, if green composting is done correctly, there should be no serious odours. PAS 100 includes not just a standard specification but a process definition. If the process is followed correctly, there should be no odours.

Finally, I am aware of green composting techniques in Italy that take place inside a building that looks just like an industrial unit on an industrial site. People do not even think of the building as being a waste treatment facility.

Nora Radcliffe: That partially answers the question that I was about to ask. We talk about composting, but that covers a wide spectrum of treatments and ways of doing things. It would be quite useful to have an outline of all the different things that we mean by composting.

Douglas Boyle: Indeed. It is important to distinguish composting as a process from compost as a horticultural product that is bought from the garden centre. A range of end products come from the composting process with a range of qualities that depend on the inputs and on the intensity of the composting process that is used. As Steve Creed indicated, composting is operated from the community scale right up to the large industrial scale. Let us hope that that continues to be the case.

It has been rightly pointed out that community effort is laudable and essential and that various social inclusion benefits and other benefits cannot be measured in tonnage; indeed, benefits should not be measured solely in tonnage. There can be a spin-off benefit in awareness of recycling and resource reuse issues from local community composting.

Options such as local community composting are fairly low-tech options. One tenet of the national waste plan is the best practicable environmental option—the BPEO. In rural areas of Scotland, the BPEO is often composting if the requirement to include the proximity principle is taken into account. Lower technology lends itself particularly to organic waste streams that do not require excessive transport of low-value materials to high-tech reprocessing facilities. Composting is therefore particularly suitable to rural Scotland.

On process types, the vast majority of composting, apart from green-waste composting—segregated green garden waste and landscapers' waste—will have to be done in enclosed environments so that scavengers such as wild birds and vermin cannot get access to it. That matter comes under the animal by-products regulations and there are benefits to the whole process. Because of the rainfall in the west coast of Scotland, if one wants to do any composting and have any control over the process there, it will have to be enclosed anyway. The majority of systems will be enclosed in buildings, vessels or enclosed bays where there is complete control or a large degree of control over the potential for generating methane, hydrogen sulphide or ammonia, for example.

I would be happy to forward more detailed information on the range of composting types—to go into details is probably beyond my current remit.

Nora Radcliffe: It would be useful to have more details, nonetheless.

Mr Gibson: I am interested in developing two issues. From the direction of the debate, it is obvious that we are looking for people to take responsibility. Ideas relating to composting in industrial units, for example, could also relate to larger communities and towns. We can discuss that matter presently.

We must find a set of measurements other than just economic measurements in order to establish the value of such activities. The quality-of-life measurements that must be made would help, but they are in their infancy. Are there ways in which we might measure some of the activities that we are discussing?

Duncan Simpson: Industry, local government and central government put an onus on corporate social responsibility, social responsibility or collective responsibility. Recycling allows the industry to go to householders and get them to look into their bins, rather than allow them to put the responsibility on someone else's shoulders by saying, "You take care of that for me. I trust you." The responsibility for such work lies in our communities—that is why we are having this debate today. Recycling provides a simple tool with which to put forward sustainability arguments. Industry will take on a social responsibility, but it is hard for it to do that, because it must try to balance short-term pressures to achieve set targets with the long-term aspiration of overall benefit.

I will try to give the committee a simple example. In the UK, there is finite capacity for recycling glass, which is a topical debate. The amount of green glass in the UK exceeds demand, so there is a requirement to create alternatives. There are, as Steve Creed said, low-value, big-volume alternatives, such as aggregates and secondary aggregate applications, through to high-value, low-volume alternatives, such as decorative applications.

The net effect of the opening of those markets is that it has given choice to authorities, collectors and communities. Their choice has been widened so that, rather than decide to collect in three colours and ship the material from one end of Scotland to the other to make it back into a bottle, which has a certain environmental impact, they can now choose to take an element of the material that they can collect mixed. That causes a lower transport impact because they have a shorter distance to haul it. They can also put it into a local business, which provides local employment. That choice has not existed before.

The mechanisms that have been put in place through the national waste strategy have started to generate such issues. However, we have to look far into the detail of the problem in order to raise it from below and use it as an education tool.

Mr Gibson: Targets are often economic, and benefits are often about quality of life and sustainability. It is vital that we find ways to measure those so that they are part of our overall monitoring of the waste strategy. Can your activities pinpoint any aspects of quality of life? Duncan Simpson has mentioned making householders more aware and making them look inside their bins. Does anyone else have any other comments?

Steve Creed: We are working in a commercial environment. Ultimately, at some point, we have to create wealth to solve a problem that we have created for ourselves, which is that we tend to throw away more and more—as our gross domestic product goes up, our waste levels go up. We have an opportunity to use that economic activity to generate wealth that will turn around the problem for us.

Currently, the recycling sector is worth about £13 billion a year. That is a lot more than the waste management sector, which is worth about £5 billion a year. The recycling sector also supports something like 140,000 jobs in the United Kingdom. We envisage the sector's growing to between £20 billion and £25 billion a year by 2018 with the amount of material that will become available. There will also be significant job-creation opportunities.

When we talk to the private sector, we have to use language that it understands. I fully support corporate social responsibility, but I also understand that the private sector often looks much more strongly at the currency of money because it tends to be measurable across all areas. We need to speak to the private sector in that language as much as we can. There are huge opportunities in that. We are seeing a great deal of investment in our sector and a great deal of interest in investment in it—several major banks are getting interested in the waste management sector. They see great opportunities in it. Jobs will be created and there will be opportunities for people to have a better life through buying things that they did not previously have the opportunity to buy, through job creation and through the reduction of waste around them.

The Convener: We will pick up the employment, economic and financial issues when we hear witnesses from the Confederation of British Industry and the Federation of Small Businesses next week.

I will move on to comments in the WRAP paper about being able to meet future European Union directives on waste. I sense that a real issue is being teased out. You mention the new biowaste directive, which will

"make source segregation mandatory for compost products."

You mentioned the importance of developing high-value markets rather than low-value markets. Is there an issue about the work that local authorities are doing to collect waste that is not in the form that allows you to get the highest value out of products? Will that cause us problems in fulfilling future EU regulations and directives?

12:00

Steve Creed: We have to be wary of that. Obviously, we do not know what regulations might be created in the future, so it is hard to look into a crystal ball and give an answer. In trying to reach a certain level of recycling at this stage, we must be careful not to move to lower-value applications too soon. We could be putting off a problem that we might face later.

As we have highlighted, it is important to take advantage of the home owner's ability to provide high-quality recyclate. The sooner material gets separated and is kept separated, the better the quality one will have. I am encouraged by the fact that many local authorities are talking about having kerbside collection schemes, because that is one of the best ways of getting out recyclate.

As we move forward, if we are enticed into a lower level of treatment, we must be careful to keep open the opportunity of continuing to have the recycling. We can bring on different levels of treatment at different rates, but it would not be desirable not to do kerbside collections because of a concern about disposal of materials, for example. I take a businessman's view. A businessman who was considering investing in a reprocessing business would prefer to start the business when there was a large pile of resource ready for him to process; he would not want to do so before there was a pile to work with. He would want to see the material not only so that he could get started in the business but, probably more important, so that he could convince his bank manager to help him to get started.

We want to get out all those materials as soon as possible, to give maximum opportunity for varied products and for varied processing activities to take place. We can build up as we get more material out of the stream.

Duncan Simpson: Again, glass is a good example. As well as chairing Remade Scotland, I work for one of the compliance schemes. Remade Scotland worked hard to open up an alternative end market for remelt. We wanted to create choice in the marketplace, so that the material would have value again, because at one stage its price was zero. That choice has appeared. There are entrepreneurs who can take glass and make it into a water filtration medium or abrasive. If such an entrepreneur were to be successful in landing a 30,000-tonne order to provide a water filtration medium of a set specification for Scottish Water, they would need 30,000 tonnes of glass. That is the kind of issue that Steve Creed is talking about. The order would fall through if we did not have the collections. Businessmen and entrepreneurs in Scotland are trying to balance the material that is coming out with demand and the guarantee that they will have to give to the businessmen who want to buy the material at the other end.

For glass, the issue is collection. I sometimes worry whether we will get it out quickly enough. Organics is a different issue. If one drives out 25,000 tonnes of plastic bottles, one will get 250,000 tonnes of paper, which amounts to one paper mill. Are we going to build a new paper mill in Scotland? There are export markets that could deal with that.

If we deal with single streams and forget the whole waste management task that we need to deal with, we will forget the integrated part of the work in relation to which earlier witnesses tried to square the circle. We need to deal with waste on an on-going basis but, if we break it into its constituent parts, we will make the problem much more complicated to manage.

The Convener: In my constituency, the glass-recycling facility was taken away because people putting bottles in it destroyed residents' quality of life. The other streams are slightly easier to separate at source. Do you have views on what we should be doing with glass? Should we have on-street glass recycling or should we have glass recycling at supermarkets? What are the clever solutions?

Duncan Simpson: I hope that Steve Creed will help me on how to go forward on glass. Remade Scotland believes that, within the UK, we need to go out and get nearly 1 million tonnes of glass. Glass comes from two types of place—pubs, clubs and restaurants and our houses. To collect glass from a bring-to bank—a recycling centre—costs between £25 a tonne and £40 a tonne. To collect it from a pub, club or restaurant costs between £35 a tonne and £65 a tonne. To collect it from the kerbside costs from £85 a tonne, to as much as someone is prepared to pay to get contamination levels down and to separate the glass at the kerbside. There are probably 50,000 pubs and clubs in the United Kingdom from which it is economically viable to collect glass. They generate 400,000 tonnes of glass, which tells me that we need to collect glass from them all.

We also need to collect from bring-to sites, which we should smarten up and tell consumers about. They should be part of the built environment as opposed to being bins that are shoved into the environment as a cheap and cheerful method of collecting glass. We need to remove as many barriers to consumers recycling as we can by putting a box at people's houses and saying, "There you go; you have no excuses now for not taking part."

The solution will be a balance of those options, each of which has a different cost. It is clear that we need to have all those collection methods and that we need to be as clever as we can. We have made things easier at pubs and clubs by having mixed glass collections because they cannot colour separate. Several types of bin are required in the built environment, but if ones walks around Edinburgh one can see that there are no spaces to put the bins. We need to be clever about how we market. Companies such as the one I work for need to get their customers—big retailers—to use their marketing expertise on householders to encourage them to take part. Local authorities and community groups need to use their skills to encourage householders and others and to tell them what they have done, how well they have done and what else they can do. We are clever individuals and, against popular belief, we take in quite complex messages. Usually, if people are asked to do something, they will do it.

Steve Creed: WRAP is working on programmes to assess different collection techniques, including running trials for pub collections from licensed premises to consider all the issues of noise, storage and so on. To make it work we might need to have four collections from pubs and clubs on a Friday night, because they cannot store the glass. We are considering how the different collection techniques work and we are developing a programme to assess those approaches. I have seen several innovative approaches to collecting glass at bring-to sites, which reduce the noise and the number of times that the glass has to be collected, for example by grinding the glass up while it is in the storage device. That has not quite made it to the market yet, but I am aware of people who are trying very hard to get there. That opportunity is coming.

The Convener: There are two more questions, which I suspect have been sparked off by the glass question.

Eleanor Scott: Are we pitching our efforts at recycling glass at the wrong point in the waste hierarchy? Should we be considering re-using glass bottles as bottles rather than breaking them up into broken glass?

Duncan Simpson: Absolutely. I want every single remelt plant to take as much glass as it possibly can. I want them to do that day in, day out, because the more they demand it, the more value there is. However, the UK produces 80 per cent clear material and we collect 80 per cent green material, and we cannot make clear glass from the green material. There is a need for alternatives to complement the foundation of the industry, which is glass remelt. Colleagues in the glass remelt sector would, I hope, understand that Remade Scotland, WRAP and others see them as a key means of achieving the targets for the future. They must be seen to use their technology to put more material into the furnace. There is no doubt that there need to be alternatives, because alternatives can offer choice and improve the environmental impact in rural areas. There is a very applicable market for choice in those areas, where it would probably benefit the community. A balance is required, but I would like every bottle to go to remelt.

Nora Radcliffe: You mention bottles going to remelt, but what about bottles going back and being refilled?

Duncan Simpson: Do you mean reuse?

Nora Radcliffe: Yes. We are talking about moving up the hierarchy.

Duncan Simpson: I agree. To go one stage higher, the waste packaging regulations and the fact that the cost of waste disposal is increasing have caused companies—for the commercial reasons that Steve Creed mentioned—to say that if they can reduce the amount of raw material that they put in, they will be able to lightweight bottles. Companies have lightweighted bottles to levels that we have not seen before. They will continue to do that because it saves the business money and allows them to sell the product to us more cheaply, so they can compete. Taking in recycled content benefits the companies in energy savings.

Reuse schemes are appropriate in specific areas where there is a local packing and filling operation, a local collection scheme, or a local retail and take-back scheme. However, most businesses in Europe have expanded to become global operations, and I do not think that it would be possible to revert to reuse. I can see more savings coming from one-way containers, waste reduction and waste minimisation. However, all businesses will weigh up whether reuse is another option.

Nora Radcliffe: It worries me that we are going for recycling when we need the guaranteed secondary resource to fuel the recycling industry. Perhaps we should put the same effort into reuse. All the distribution and filling plants and so on can get everything out there. Why can they not get it back again? If we put the same effort and money into doing that, would we not have a better outcome in the long term?

Steve Creed: The point that has been made is that the industry has now moved on. Unfortunately, we no longer have a local dairy that delivers milk to our doorstep in all cases. There are much larger conurbations of people and plastic bottles are used instead. People have moved to a different alternative. Now if we want to utilise resources effectively, we need to get the plastic bottles back and use them again for something else. It would be difficult to turn the economic tide on all that. The industry would find it difficult because it has become global. Most products that people buy and consume come from organisations that are not in the United Kingdom, let alone Scotland. Often, they are located somewhere in Europe. Wine bottles are a classic example of that.

Nora Radcliffe: But we are in the European Union. If we can organise that wine coming to me in a green bottle, can we not organise the green bottle going back to be filled up? Could that not be done if we put the same amount of money and effort into organising such a return system as we put into taking the green bottle, melting it and remaking it or smashing it into aggregate?

Steve Creed: Then we would have twice the transportation costs. We would have to consider whether that was an environmentally friendly activity.

Nora Radcliffe: We are moving to whole life things.

Steve Creed: Exactly. I am not saying that it would not work.

Nora Radcliffe: We could perhaps use the green bottle five or six times. I cannot remember how often a milk bottle could be used; I think that it was about 20 times.

Steve Creed: The point is that it depends on how thick the milk bottle is. Milk bottles could be used many times because they were solid, like the old Coke bottles. I remember from my youth in North America that those were reused and they went round and round. That was very effective.

The Convener: We might capture that point for our conclusions, because one of the things that we want to do with our report is to communicate with the European Union, which is examining product design and waste minimisation and management issues. That might be an issue to put back to the EU.

I will keep us moving on because we are not finished yet—we have a third panel of witnesses. I thank the witnesses for their evidence and for answering our questions. As with previous witnesses, you are welcome to stay until the end of the meeting if you have the stamina.

We will now have a two-minute suspension to let the next panel of witnesses take their places.

12:14

Meeting suspended.

12:19

On resuming—

The Convener: I open our third and final panel session. Last but not least, I welcome Liz Partington, head of recycling at the Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership; Stephen Cooper, head of environmental services at Lerwick Waste to Energy Plant; and Susan Carstairs, development officer at the Lochaber Environmental Group.

If you have been following our deliberations over the past couple of weeks, you will have noticed that the issues in your briefings, such as waste to energy, incineration and the involvement of local groups, have popped up regularly. We are glad to have you here this morning. We will go straight to questions from members. I reiterate that members and witnesses should keep their comments as to the point as possible so that we can cover a lot of issues.

Eleanor Scott: How does what the local groups were doing before now fit in with councils taking over a lot of waste management? What aspects of local groups' hitherto successful operations are under threat of being taken over by the council?

Susan Carstairs (Lochaber Environmental Group): We are moving into a different situation. What we were doing before is relevant to some extent, but we are now being given the chance to do a lot more. Community groups have been doing a lot of different things. I divide the work into waste minimisation, which is about home composting, reuse and waste minimisation, and collection and processing, in which fewer large community groups are involved. I do not know much about collection and processing, because those have not been part of our experience.

Education must also be considered. That has been difficult for local authorities, because they are trying to keep the cost of their implementation plans as low as possible. They always have an eye on council-tax rates and, given the nature of what they do, they are obliged to produce the lowest cost outcome.

Community groups will probably not come out as the lowest cost option for work on education or reuse, partly because they are not achieving economies of scale and partly because they are pursuing social objectives as well as waste management objectives. People have talked about the difficulty of reflecting that adequately. I do not have a simple answer. An extremely good furniture project in Caithness produces an annual audit. It tries to assess how many people have

been helped with goods, the value of the goods and how many people have donated goods. Donating goods as well as receiving them is worthwhile as people know that their stuff will go to people in their area who need it. We can devise measures. We are not just talking about tonnage—we cannot just put a price on it—but that does not mean that we cannot find measures.

The education work that community groups do is in danger of being lost. It is terribly important, because the reason why we are trying to get waste levels down is that we are trying to address the sustainability agenda. We are trying to make society different. Often community groups are made up of people in the community who are extremely interested and who bring all sorts of skills with them. Within the Highland area, we have people who specialise in business aspects, there is a chap who is really good at vermiculture, and there are scientists and teachers who bring along their skills, so we are drawing in a huge number of skills. We must recognise the value of that, because local authorities will not be able to do that.

We have talked to local authorities about how to reflect the different objectives. Most of the work is being left to the technical services and waste management people, who have their work cut out moving tonnes of stuff around. We very much welcome Highland area's proposal in its draft implementation plan to set up a challenge fund for community groups. That is great, but we should do all we can to tie community groups' efforts to the main strategy and to not see them as something that happens on the periphery. We will lose an awful lot if we do that.

We are in danger of missing an opportunity. The work of Waste Aware Scotland has been great and it is an awful shame that the delivery of the educational side of the waste strategy is not being devolved to local community groups.

Liz Partington (Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership): Community groups such as LEEP have delivered an enormous amount of good practice and have been at the forefront of developing and delivering sustainable waste management during the past 20 years, which the question acknowledged. The national waste strategy reiterates that community groups should be part of the process. We agree because we have been doing this for 20 years or more.

The question was whether there is a threat now that local authorities have come to the fore because all this money is now available and waste has become a top priority for Parliament and the Executive. There is a big threat. Community groups have worked hard in the background and have scrabbled around for funding for years. They have done a lot of good and are very good at engaging with the public. Television advertising campaigns and so on are excellent for getting across a general message but getting people involved at a local level requires the existing community groups. I hope that community groups such as LEEP and others throughout Scotland can be helped to do that.

My fear is that the funding is not available. The demise of the landfill tax credit scheme was a major blow to community groups. LEEP lost an enormous amount of funding, and although the scheme was replaced by interim funding, that will last for only one year. Six months have passed and there is still no word about the replacement. Rumours say that the funding might end up in the strategic waste fund, which would be a shame, because we have a lot to contribute in partnership with local authorities.

We can work together. Many community groups, including LEEP, work together very well and have been involved in setting up the area waste plans, as the plans reflect. However, the funding mechanism is not there to deliver the objectives in the national waste strategy that seek to involve community groups. The strategic waste fund will not be the answer for community groups, and neither will Transforming Waste Scotland, because £4 million over three years is not enough money for community groups to continue their work.

Maureen Macmillan: Everything that I wanted to ask the community groups has been answered. We are conscious of the dichotomy between economics and the social and educational work that such groups do. We will have to consider that when we write our report.

I have a question for Stephen Cooper from Shetland about the incinerator. Environmentalists usually say "No way" to incinerators, but has it been a success story? I have noticed that the level of recycling in Shetland is fairly low. Does that mean that everyone thinks that everything will go into the incinerator so why should they bother?

Stephen Cooper (Lerwick Waste to Energy Plant): The waste-to-energy plant in Shetland has been a success. Because Shetland is so remote and has a dispersed population, the cost of waste collection and management is one of the main issues. Any solutions that we come up with tend to focus on finding a local solution. One reason why we opted for a waste-to-energy plant was our particular need for district heating. We are not on the national grid, and the costs of producing electricity by burning oil at the local power station are high. Therefore, our decision was driven by need.

Quite a number of the local residents are benefiting from that. Despite the perception that

incineration is bad, in our case the local population and industry are benefiting, as they can obtain a cheap form of heat. Monitoring panels, which members of the community council come along to, also have a role. We can try to reassure them that we are well within our limits for emissions and pollution and environmental monitoring.

12:30

Maureen Macmillan: How many people benefit from the district heating scheme?

Stephen Cooper: About 500 premises—equivalent to 500 houses—including hospitals and schools are currently in the scheme. There is the potential for a further 1,000 premises—equivalent to 1,000 houses—to come into the scheme, out of a potential 4,000 houses in the Lerwick area.

Maureen Macmillan: If the amount of rubbish that you burn grows and grows, you will be able to heat more and more homes. Is that how you look at it?

Stephen Cooper: Not at all. The plant is designed for a particular throughput of waste. We seek to supplement the waste with other renewable sources. Some waste oil or waste heat might come out of the power station, which can top up what we are already producing. The important thing is that we have an infrastructure in place that delivers heat to houses, hospitals and businesses. As the infrastructure is there, we can supplement the waste with alternative sources of heat. The waste issue was the catalyst to putting the infrastructure in place in the first place.

Maureen Macmillan: Would you recommend your methods to other communities as a way of solving their waste problems?

Stephen Cooper: It is probably not appropriate for all areas. Our remote location is a benefit. There might be a place for incineration and energy recovery where there are specific waste streams, for which a plant can be designed. We have designed our plant for a mixed waste stream, which I think is right for our circumstances, although it is perhaps not right for all circumstances.

The Convener: Every member wishes to come in on that, so I will patiently work round you all, starting with Alex Johnstone.

Alex Johnstone: I have just heard the answers to most of the questions that I was going to ask. However, I will add one or two points and see whether we can get one or two more answers. What is the level of emission from the plant? Is there smoke billowing out all the time, or is there a system in place that ensures that the combustion process effectively removes pollutants?

Stephen Cooper: We operate within the emission standards imposed on us, and we have never had a single breach of those standards. We are aware that new standards will come out at the end of 2005 and we already have equipment in place to ensure that we will meet them. I am fairly confident that what we put out comes well within the standards that apply.

Alex Johnstone: We spoke earlier to people who are objecting to a landfill site. We heard all the complaints about lorry movements, odours and so on that we would expect to hear about a plant such as the one with which you are associated. Do you get complaints about those issues, or do you find that any such complaints are mitigated by the substantial public benefit for those living adjacent to the plant?

Stephen Cooper: During the three years I have been in Shetland, I recall hearing only one complaint, which was to do with the colour of the plume coming from the stack. I think that it was something to do with the light on the day in question—it was a misperception. That aside, we do not get any complaints at all. The plant is located away from the town, so there is no direct impact on people living close by. There have been very few complaints.

Mr Gibson: You mentioned the status of bottom ash as a covering material, which is an aspect of the regulations that has obviously changed. Will you comment on that matter a little more?

How do community groups in Shetland relate to the opportunities that the plant presents? I know that the community on Shetland is small, but the plans were drawn up before recent high-tech approaches to waste management had been formulated. Do you receive co-operation from the islands to make the plant efficient?

Stephen Cooper: We use the bottom ash from the waste energy plant as covering material on the landfill site. However, it is likely that such activity will no longer contribute to our recycling target. At the moment, we can argue that the use of bottom ash should go towards our recycling target because it is a substitute for virgin material that we would otherwise have to bring in. That debate will continue. If we are not allowed to put bottom ash use towards our recycling target, our recycling rate will fall to 5 per cent.

As for your second question, Shetland has a number of community groups and, like anywhere else, they have a role to play. We recognise that some of the groups have social benefits as well as benefits for recycling. For example, one group that recycles furniture allows people with learning difficulties to gain work experience.

Mr Morrison: How long has the facility been in operation?

Stephen Cooper: Since early 2000.

Mr Morrison: From what you have learned over the past three years, do you think it would be easy to translate this type of facility to a comparable area such as my own area of the Western Isles? What would be the cost of putting in the infrastructure? Have you learned any harsh lessons about efficiency?

Stephen Cooper: It might be possible to translate the facility to areas such as the Western Isles. However, one would need to know what the needs and circumstances were, and I am obviously not in a position to comment on that.

As for whether we have learned any lessons, we experienced some technical difficulties in building the plant and it would have been better to have ironed out those problems before we began to operate. As a result, we have had more down-time than we would have hoped.

Mr Morrison: Would the facility's viability be threatened in any way if the oil industry was not present in the area?

Stephen Cooper: The income that was generated in Shetland from the oil industry certainly helped to pay for the plant. We also received European funding. These plants do not come cheap and I am not sure—

Mr Morrison: How much did the plant cost?

Stephen Cooper: The plant itself cost £10 million and the district heating infrastructure cost another £10 million. If a council is not in a position to pay out that kind of money for such a big project, it might have to consider some of the options that were discussed earlier, such as PFI and PPP. However, there are risks associated with such an approach. For example, banks see waste-to-energy proposals as high-risk ventures.

Our furnace is fairly low technology. Much of the new technology that has been mentioned, such as gasification and pyrolysis, is pretty much untested. Although there are examples of such technology, I would be interested to find out whether the banks would be willing to risk their money on them. We chose to use older technology because it was tried and tested, and it has been fairly reliable. However, we use new high technology at the abatement site for cleaning up gases.

Nora Radcliffe: One of the major arguments against incineration is the volume of waste that is needed to make it practicable. What tonnage of waste do you need to operate the plant and what percentage is that of your waste stream?

Stephen Cooper: We are currently putting through about 20,000 or 22,000 tonnes. At the moment, 50 per cent of the Shetland waste arisings that we receive goes to the waste-to-energy plant, 30 per cent goes to landfill and 20 per cent goes to recycling, which includes bottom ash. We hope that from 2006, once we improve the recycling infrastructure, 50 per cent of the waste will still go to the waste-to-energy plant, 20 per cent will go to landfill and 30 per cent will go to recycling.

Nora Radcliffe: Was the plant designed to take that volume of waste?

Stephen Cooper: Yes. Once a plant is designed for a particular throughput, that has to be maintained.

Eleanor Scott: How much pre-treatment or sorting do you have to do to the waste? Also, does the fly ash have to be disposed of at some point?

Stephen Cooper: There is no pre-treatment of the waste going into the waste energy plant. Fly ash is regarded as hazardous waste and is sent to a landfill.

Maureen Macmillan: How much do you depend on waste from Orkney? What relationship do you have with Orkney Islands Council in that regard?

Stephen Cooper: We need that waste. As I said before, the waste energy plant is designed for a particular throughput and if we did not maintain that, the viability of the plant would be jeopardised.

There is a degree of flexibility in the supply of waste in Orkney and Shetland because a certain amount goes to landfill. I would be able to take some of that and use it in the waste energy plant if I lost any of my supply.

The plant was designed to take waste from Orkney and we have a fine relationship with the council.

Maureen Macmillan: Does the council pay you or do you pay it?

Stephen Cooper: It pays us.

The Convener: I am aware that this waste energy plant is a rural one and that Dundee's experience is quite different. Its incineration plant is much older and has been less reliable. There have been issues relating to community involvement and Friends of the Earth Scotland has been involved in running the plant.

While the Lerwick plant is a useful example to consider, given the practical link with the local community and its experience of being in a remote community, I remind members of the danger of applying the Lerwick model to the rest of Scotland. For example, I cannot imagine that an incineration project would be welcomed in my constituency or would be able to include the sustainable development objectives that, through necessity, the Lerwick plant has built in from the start.

I am particularly interested in the issue of furniture reuse. We have spent most of our discussions talking about composting and recycling, but less time talking about reuse. I am particularly interested in the benefit that that can bring to the community. For example, is work being done on trying to capture the value of being able to give people on low incomes free furniture or white goods? If no one is working on that, all that we are doing is stating that reusing furniture is a good thing.

Liz Partington: The Lothian and Edinburgh Environmental Partnership helped to set up the Edinburgh furniture initiative, which is one of the best examples of a furniture reuse project and was quoted in the area waste plan for Lothian and the Borders.

I do not know what work is going on to try to get an idea of the exact tonnage that the initiative takes in, but I am sure that the group either does that work or aims to do it.

Capturing the value of the social benefit of such projects is like putting a price on the environmental impact of cutting down a tree. Community groups struggle with that kind of calculation, which makes it difficult for us when we argue for our continued funding. It is difficult for us to put a price on the benefit that such initiatives bring and we have to rely on the anecdotal evidence that is given by people from the social services, who say that a number of people have benefited from furniture that has been donated to and repaired by the EFI.

Your question raises the issue of how community groups, working with local authorities to deliver shared objectives, compete with other people in procurement exercises. Do councils really use the principle of best value, or is their number 1 criterion in a procurement exercise always financial? Obviously, that is a pragmatic approach and it cannot be any different.

To return to the question, I do not have those data available to hand, although I am sure that they are being collected and could be available.

12:45

LEEP is about to start working with charity shops. Some initial research that we have done in Edinburgh suggests that charity shops do not talk to one another. If charity shops cannot pass on the items that are donated to their own shops, those donations are then going for immediate waste disposal. A central collection point might make it possible for more donations to go back into the community, which would have social benefits not only for the people who receive those materials but for the people who work for the charities.

The Convener: Reuse is on the agenda in other countries. In Denmark, for example, it is built into the infrastructure of local communities and is seen as a value, and there is training and direct community feed through. We do not have a reuse target, because we do not have a dedicated group of people dealing with reuse of materials. We have been considering the targets in the national waste action plan, so I am posing that question, in a sense, to leave it on the table. Having dealt with constituents, I can see the community benefits and the logic of what is proposed, but without a target and without reuse being valued as something that is worth chasing, nobody will do it and it will happen only as a voluntary community activity.

Susan Carstairs: Setting a target would be absolutely doable. The Community Recycling Network for Scotland has employed a furniture co-ordinator, who is being funded jointly by the CRNS and by Communities Scotland. Statistics have been pulled together on how many furniture groups there are and what their tonnage is, and SEPA and a group called Grangemouth Enterprises Ltd, which has been working on furniture reuse for a long time, have worked out between them a table for estimating tonnage. We need to pull everything together and to be able to say to people, "If you're doing furniture, here's how to collect it and here's how to systematise the information." We are nearly there, and it would be easy to set up standards.

The calculation that we use to value the goods that we deal with was worked out by the Moray furniture project from some figures in the *Scot-Ads* a few years ago. It is not the best measure, but we could easily devise a good measure, publish it and ensure that everyone costs what they are doing to the same standard. A reuse target is just within reach, and I would recommend that the committee talk to the CRNS about that.

The Convener: We shall try to pick up on that and plug it into our work. That would be most useful.

Alex Johnstone: We must be careful how we define furniture recycling and reuse and what we include in any assessment. For example, an antiques dealer could be called a furniture recycler, although that would be taking it a bit far, but the private sector operates in the recycling of furniture at a level below what would be described as antiques dealing. An awful lot of people out there in the private sector are buying and selling furniture at relatively low cost. Would your criteria have any way of calculating the contribution that they make to the recycling of furniture?

Susan Carstairs: Yes, that could be done. It would be important to include that sector.

Nora Radcliffe: How do you get past some of the barriers to reuse? How do you reach the current standards for furniture and for white goods? Is that difficult?

Susan Carstairs: There is a national organisation called the Furniture Recycling Network, which is based in Bristol and has done an awful lot of helpful work on standards. It has spoken to the Government and the European Union about trying to include reuse when the detail of the directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment is set.

The network is available to give guidance on exactly what standards we need to meet. It is talking about publishing standards and is asking different groups to become members of the network. We would then be able to see that everybody was working to the same standard.

Dealing with standards is complicated, but support is available. We are learning how to deal with the problems and to specify what materials can be dealt with together, which ones need to be segregated and how hazardous materials need to be treated. The area is complex, but a lot of work has gone into it and standards are absolutely achievable.

Liz Partington: I agree. I have some knowledge of that work as well. If the furniture is to be passed on to people who have no income and therefore cannot purchase the items, it will come down to a cost-per-tonne analysis. That is how the funding mechanism works and it is somewhat prohibitive to community groups'—or any groups'—continuing that kind of service. I reiterate my point that it is impossible to measure how much each tonne of waste that is saved from going to landfill is also benefiting people who, for example, have experienced homelessness and are returning to accommodation.

Maureen Macmillan: There must be other areas of reuse apart from furniture. For example, there are lots of projects to reuse information technology equipment. Have we any way of finding out how many such schemes there are for reusing different kinds of materials? Where would we get those statistics? We will want to explore that issue.

Liz Partington: As Susan Carstairs said, the Community Recycling Network Scotland has been undertaking a mapping exercise—

Maureen Macmillan: That is not just for furniture.

Liz Partington: No. The CRNS is collating all the information on community groups and other people who are working in that field. The network would, therefore, be the first organisation to speak to if you wanted to find out the tonnage of things that are being reused or recycled in Scotland.

Susan Carstairs: The furniture reuse sector is good for statistics, as it deals with things that can be measured. We should ensure that we do that as well as we can, and set targets and so on. However, I make a plea not to leave out the education side of it. Education is crucial to achieving a change in attitude in Scotland towards the idea of sustainability. We must either get cleverer about targets or use our judgment and allow ourselves to do things that have open-ended results.

Liz Partington: I agree whole-heartedly with what Susan Carstairs says. Education and waste minimisation, which cannot be measured or costed—we could not measure how many tonnes of waste were diverted by, for example, an education officer leading paper-making workshops with schools—will be crucial to the future funding of such mechanisms.

The Convener: Yes. We pick up the point that the Lochaber Environmental Group made in writing, about the importance of waste minimisation. The community sector has been cited by others—both today and last week—as being important in raising awareness and trying to get us to behave more sustainably. The question is how we can do that.

That seems a reasonable point on which to end although, as with every other group of witnesses, we could continue the discussion for hours. Your evidence has been extremely useful to us. We now have one or two questions for the minister concerning the future of moneys that used to come through the landfill tax and what will replace those moneys. Thank you very much for coming along today.

That is the end of today's meeting. Our inquiry will continue over the next two weeks. It is hoped that most of the submissions that we have requested from other groups will be with us before we meet the minister again in a couple of weeks' time, which will help us to ask him the right questions.

Meeting closed at 12:54

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