



WILLITON PARISH COUNCIL

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Chairman: Cllr Peter Payne
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14th February 2024

Councillor Bill Revans
Leader Somerset Council
County Hall
The Crescent
Taunton
Somerset TA1 4DY

Dear Councillor Revans

We write as the Parish Chair or Representative of Parishes surrounding Williton Parish and represent an estimated 11,000 parishioners living within an 8-mile radius of Williton, to express our condemnation of any plan to close the Williton Recycling Centre. Such a decision would be a contradiction of all that our Liberal Democrat led Somerset Council stands for, is illogical from an economic, geographical location, facility design and a capability point of view. Over two hundred members of the public and Parish Councils attended a meeting in Williton on 30th January 2024 and everyone in the room, except for your representatives, expressed their anger and disbelief that the future of the Williton Recycling facility was threatened with closure.

What, quickly, became obvious at the meeting was the apparent lack of any reliable research or due diligence carried out by Somerset Council before it submitted its intention to propose the closure of the Williton Recycling facility. We were not presented with any financial arguments, no cost benefit analysis or a statement setting out the detailed savings alongside the collateral additional costs that would be incurred by closing the Williton facility. The environment seemed to be forgotten or ignored and when questions were asked about what the carbon impact of closure would be, there were blank faces. When asked who owned both Minehead and Williton recycling facilities, your representatives did not initially know, but later told the meeting both sites were owned by Somerset Council. Your representatives were badly prepared for a meeting that was negative to your proposed plans.

For the avoidance of doubt, we are not advocating the closure of Minehead recycling.

Some figures and statistics were discussed by your representatives, and they concentrated on the numbers of visits to the recycling facilities and the average weights. As was pointed out at the meeting by the public, it is an obvious fact that private recycling in a town the size of Minehead would result in more visits with smaller loads while the area around Williton will result in marginally less visits, but larger loads of recycling given its rural setting.

We implore you to withstand the temptation to close the Williton facility and list just a few of the reasons why this plan lacks any real financial or environmental credibility.

- For those who do not know West Somerset, may we remind you that our road network is already exhausted and not fit for purpose and any thought that Williton and surrounding parishes residents would drive to Minehead for their recycling is dangerous for the environment and unrealistic.
- Again, for those ignorant of our geography whatever goes to Minehead from Williton, and surrounding parishes must then be trucked out on the very same roads adding to the pollution and congestion on this poorly designed and poorly maintained highway winding through narrow villages. That combined with Butlins "changeover" days (Monday and Friday) makes those roads near impassable and chaotic particularly in the summer which also happens to coincide with significant garden waste destined for recycling.
- Williton and Watchet are likely to see upwards of 1000 new houses in the near future and not only will that put more pressure on the regional road infrastructure, but it also points to the Williton recycling facility becoming even more strategically important and essential.
- Why did West Somerset District Council choose Williton to build its Council offices? Because Williton is the centre of West Somerset and has a larger share of West Somerset's population surrounding it than does Minehead. It is also the junction for Taunton and Bridgwater traffic.
- The district is already plagued by fly tipping, and this will only grow exponentially if Williton was closed. Residents of Williton and the surrounding area will not drive to Minehead to recycle and already there is a demand, for Williton to have the capability to recycle asbestos as Minehead is poorly designed, very badly located and traffic management dysfunctional.
- Somerset Council have a statutory duty to retrieve and pick up fly tipping as soon as it is reported, and we understand that alone costs Somerset Council £1000 per fly-tip. There will be a major increase in fly tipping making the closure of Williton a false economy. Last week we asked your representatives who would police fly tipping and who would bear the cost of bringing charges against those proven to have fly tipped? The question was not answered.
- At last week's meeting many people commented on the cooperation, help and courtesy of the Williton staff compared with the rudeness and lack of assistance of the Minehead recycling staff.
- Disabled members of the public avoid going to Minehead not only because of the staffing issues but more importantly the lack of ramps and accessibility. Somerset Council has a statutory obligation and duty under the Equalities Act 2010, to provide appropriate facilities to meet the requirements of disabled members of the public. May we remind you that does not mean providing able bodied staff who may or may not offer to help such an individual.
- What you are proposing to do will: -
 - Increase the number of people, all over Somerset, burning timber, garden waste and other burnable items, on their properties by open fires or incinerators, causing significant adverse environmental pollution and confrontation from neighbours. Furthermore, it will increase, in the summer, the risk of grass and tree fires causing fire service call outs.
 - Cause garden waste to end up in streams and rivers which will contribute to future flooding.
 - As was pointed out last week household waste bins will be used for waste never intended for acceptance by the rubbish bin collector, including concrete and small appliances.
- The recycling facility in Williton is better designed and is significantly larger than Minehead, it sits adjacent to the home recycling truck depot and is also, for the future, adjacent to the West Somerset railway line. A modest sum of money spent on Williton will increase its capabilities significantly.

The meeting last week had every right to expect that a Liberal Democrat led Council, supposedly proud of its environmental credentials, notwithstanding financial funding from Central Government, would be investing in future proofing the responsible processing of waste rather than proposing a blatant contradiction of their own principles. We were also reminded by a member of the public of the upcoming election. West Somerset desperately requires bigger and better recycling facilities, not closures and reductions.

A copy of the letter is being released to the media.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Peter Payne
Chairman
Williton Parish Council

For and on behalf of the below listed Parish Councils

- Chairman, Bicknoller Parish Council
- Carhampton Parish Council
- Clatworthy Parish Council
- Crowcombe Parish Council
- Dunster Parish Council
- Kilve Parish Council
- Monksilver Parish Council
- Sampford Brett Parish Council
- Stogumber Parish Council
- Watchet Town Council
- West Bagborough Parish Council
- Williton Parish Council

cc
Ian Liddell-Grainger MP; Cllr Leyshon; Cllr Darch; Cllr Davies; Cllr Woods; Somerset Council Executive Members; Mr Duncan Sharkey, Chief Executive; Cllr Ashton; Cllr Chilcott; Cllr Fothergill; Chard Parish Council, Crewkerne Town Council, Castle Cary Town Council, Dulverton Town Council; West Somerset Free Press; Somerset County Gazette and BBC Points West
