



CHIRK TOWN COUNCIL CYNGOR TREF Y WAUN

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD 16th JANUARY 2020

Present

Cllrs Mr Brian Colley (BC) – Chair, Mrs Jackie Allen (JA), Mrs Barbara Humphreys (BH), Mrs Sarah Williams (SW), Mr Gareth Baines (GB), Mr Michael Maxfield (MM), Ms Eleanor Burnham (EB), Mrs Dorothy Griffiths (DG), Miss Lynne Painter (LP), Mr Newman James (NJ), Mr Terry Evans (TE), Mr Frank Hemmings (FH), Mr Mark Roberts (MR) & Mr Mark Holmes (MH).

Mrs Karen Brown	Clerk to the Council
John Gibbons	Parish Hall Caretaker
Jack Butler	Press – NWN
Sue Austin	Press – Shropshire Star
Huw Brunt	Public Health Wales (PHW)
Rachel Andrew	Betsi Cadwaladr Public Health Team
Rod Poole	North Wales Fire & Rescue Service (NWF&RS)
Steve Houghton	North Wales Fire & Rescue Service (NWF&RS)
Jayne Sankey	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
David Powell	Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
Ian Oakes	Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
Mike McKenna	Kronospan Chairman
Neil Cuff	North Wales Councils, Regional Emergency Planning Service
Jonathan Holland	North Wales Councils, Regional Emergency Planning Service
Helen Kilgannon	North Wales Councils, Regional Emergency Planning Service
Sally Bottomley	Welsh Ambulance
Ian Jones	Wrexham County Borough Council, Public Protection (WCBC)
Mark Williams	North Wales Police – Chief Inspector

71 local residents / members of public

1. APOLOGIES.

Cllr. Chris Burgoyne (CB)

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST.

None.

3. UPDATE ON KRONOSPAN FIRE AND RELATED MATTERS

BC welcomed all to the Council meeting.

BC explained that whilst this was a Council meeting, there would be a section of meeting in which members of the public can speak and ask questions.

BC highlighted that that filming, broadcasting, recording of any sort is not permitted during this meeting in line with the Councils standing orders.

BC, on behalf of Chirk Town Council thanked the front line fire emergency team and key staff at Kronospan for dealing with the fire.

All invited stakeholders were asked to introduce themselves and the organisation they represented.

BC asked for an explanation, account of the incident to date and how it occurred.

Mike McKenna, Chairman of Kronospan, provided a verbal statement, key points were:

- Kronospan express regret for the fire and impact on residents.
- Recorded thanks to North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWF&RS) and Kronospan personnel in the log yard.
- Aim was to close the incident with minimum impact. Deal with the impact on the residents over the next few days.
- The fire was detected in the log wall at 2am and was beyond the control of the internal team at Kronospan so NWF&RS were informed.
- The fire was not simple to extinguish. The more they tried to move the logs, it created other problems.
- Initially the fire started in the log wall, it then moved to the recycled timber stock. It was not MDF warped as this stock was held tight.
- The fire had to run its course. There had been active management of the log yard to manage the fire. This had meant a faster closure to fire.
- Kronospan will conduct a full enquiry once the incident comes to a close.
- NWF&RS will leave the site on the Friday for Kronospan to continue to manage.

Communication:

- Kronospan had issued 5 press statements, the first one being at 10:25am Monday morning. As Kronospan are not allowed to be part of the local social media groups the press statements were issued via the main press outlets.
- The previous fires in 2017 and 2018 were highlighted. Kronospan repeated its regret that this fire had happened.
- Kronospan does its best to minimise traffic in Chirk and after 18 months of negotiations the Heads of Terms required for the land for the new access road have been agreed.

Independent monitoring:

- Kronospan is a highly regulated and monitored industry.
- Current litigation by local residents requires independent monitoring in the community which is in place by the High Court.
- The gov.uk website includes independent monitoring reports on potential harmful emissions. There is a monitoring certificate scheme and noise monitoring showing that noise is reducing. The permit also proves these facts. Any further independent monitoring will duplicate what is already being carried out.
- Kronospan pays £1,000,000 in business rates, £40,000 for NRW permit and £18,000 for WCBC permit. Kronospan are committed to Chirk and spent £200,000,000 on investment in this area to improve conditions. Kronospan hopes this clarifies the situation.

Ian Jones, Wrexham County Borough Council, Head of Public Protection provided an oversight of the current situation:

- The fire has been classed as a significant incident, which invoked protocols and a multi-agency response.
- The first agency on site was the Fire Service and was the lead service.
- Nine agencies have been involved over the last few days with a tactical co-ordinators group which reviewed all activities constantly.

Ian Jones handed over to NWF&RS to explain their area.

- The NWF&RS were called out at 02:40 on Monday and two appliances were deployed.
- The fire then spread and an extra two appliances were sent.
- The fire crews have been on site for four days. It was a deep-seated fire and the quantity of wood was a problem.
- The situation of the fire was complex.
- There were 7,000 tons of chipped timber burning.

BC asked if there was any indication how the fire started.
The Fire Service confirmed that this will be investigated once the fire is out.

Ian Jones, Wrexham Council, stated there were unique conditions with the fire on site and the smoke was the main problem off site. Wrexham Council had received over 100 enquires relating to the smoke and air quality.

Huw Brunt – Public Health Wales (PHW) provided an oversight from a health perspective:

- From a public health perspective, the number one concern was smoke and air quality.
- Any smoke is harmful. PHW needed key quantitative data, and as soon as the data from the Fire Service showed that the fire would be burning for more than one day, it was agreed to get air quality monitoring equipment.
- This specialist equipment had to be brought up from South Wales and was installed on Wednesday afternoon.
- Some initial data had been received and showed that dust particles are above background levels. Anyone with respiratory conditions will experience some short-term coughing, wheezing, nose and eye irritations.
- The data was already showing an improving picture.
- Small amounts of gas particles had been found in the air monitoring, but this is to be expected with a wood burning fire.
- PHW understood the stress local people are facing. However the risks were reducing and advice remains to shelter and keep windows and doors closed.
- The air monitoring would continue after the fire until normal background levels returns.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) stated that the air quality monitor was deployed Wednesday evening and the data was shared with Public Health Wales.

Welsh Ambulance stated that as part of the multi-agency team they were made aware of the incident. No ambulance had been required on site or the surrounding area. There had been no increase in response traffic relating to the ambulance service, it was very much business as usual.

BC thanked all organisations for their updates and invited the Councillors to ask questions.

BC asked Wrexham what was the trigger for a 'serious incident'.

Ian Jones confirmed each agency considers its risks individually and together at the multi-agency team meeting the incident was classed as a 'significant incident'. Tactical meetings are then held daily to access the ongoing situation.

FH asked was it likely that the fire started by spontaneous combustion (noting this still needs to be confirmed by the investigation) and how are the stacks monitored for fire?

Kronospan confirmed that the wood stacks are monitored. Thermal imaging cameras are used and this is regulated by Wrexham Council. WCBC confirmed this was covered by the operations permit, which require the operator to have preventative controls against accidents. It was added that the permits regulate to the European highest environmental standards.

EB asked about the permissible weight, height and the core temperature of each stockpiles and was this also monitored in Ruabon?

Kronospan confirmed Ruabon was a short term storage site for logs and all have been removed. The stock piles are for three days production. The height of the stockpiles are 8-8.5 meters. There are two concessions; summer and Christmas when the stockpiles can increase as the sawmills do not operate through the summer and Christmas/New Year period.

EB suggested therefore, had the increased stock piles contributed to the fire?

This will need be to be investigated. EB added that the core temperature will need to be included in the investigation too.

TE asked about the stock of round wood timber and the recycled timber; it needs to be temperature controlled and atmospheric storage; this fire was not an accident. The chips get damp, dry chips are put on top, it gets damp, dry on top – making a fire. There has been a burning wood smell since October and the recent formaldehyde smell in Lodgevale has been terrible, it's been hell for the residents.

Ian Jones (WCBC) reminded all at the meeting not to make assumptions about the fire, we must rely on the investigation by the Fire Service for the facts.

NRW are in the process of determination for the licence. The process looks at how well these standards fit the permit. Waste water, formaldehyde and wood storage must satisfy all concerns using best market available. NRW will consider the residents' concerns as part of this process.

JA asked about the concerns of individual's health problems going forward. Will there be any monitoring on future spikes in health problems which could be related to this incident?

PHW stated that air quality in Chirk was good (outside of the fire incident). This fire has caused the standards of air quality to fall, however the Ambulance and Health services have not seen any increase from residents in Chirk.

JA asked if GP surgeries were aware of this incident and does the community hospital and care homes know amount vulnerable residents. PHW confirmed the air quality had deteriorated this week. They are continuing monitoring the situation now.

Members said the air monitoring was happening now as the fire was dying down, what would it had been like on Monday and Tuesday?

Residents highlighted that they called Wrexham Council between 10:24 and 16:00 on Monday and didn't get a response from the office.

GB stated that his day job was working for a power company and if he had demonstrated this level of incompetence in health and safety breaches his Board would have sacked him; GB questioned the accident rate was a reflection of Kronospan's competence.

LP read out a personal statement; key points were:

- A resident of Lodgevale Park for 36 years and now a Town Councillor. This incident residents have been subjected to had been the worst on record.
- Contacting relevant authorities (emails to NRW, WCBC and BBC) however no reply.
- Concerns about the advice from PHW to stay indoors and keep doors and windows closed; which was difficult with the vile smell. People have complained about sore throats, eyes, etc. It's not only humans being affected – pets also.
- Horrified on Tuesday to find Jewson's employees having to work outside in the thick of the smoke and pollution.
- Unbelievable that Kronospan themselves did not put out an immediate statement clarifying the situation. What was wrong with doing a letter box drop?
- The monitoring equipment arrived just as the fire was dying down.
- Thanks was given to the County Borough Councillors and Cllr Gareth Baines for being so proactive in dealing with this incident and in trying to get to "the bottom of it".
- Hopefully this latest incident will now create a positive effect on our future living conditions here in Chirk.

PHW stated that they requested the air monitoring information from NRW once the ongoing smoke was the problem.

WCBC confirmed that they fully understood residents' concerns and explained that they do not have the capacity or the specialist kit for the monitoring in terms of this incident. This is what we plan for with the Regional Emergency Planning Team and this is why they are engaged to support.

In order to quantify the risk to the public, advice went out to the public before the monitoring kit was deployed. The public health advice first came out on Tuesday following the fire assessment relating to the direction of plume.

TE stated that the fumes on Monday evening were unbearable and had contaminated furniture clothes and cars. The worst two days (Monday and Tuesday) nothing was done; then when the situation started to improve PHW got involved. Why wasn't this done on Monday.

Ian Jones, WCBC explained that the focus on Monday was tackling the initial fire and making the initial assessments.

NWF&RS confirmed they had to assess the complexities of this fire, wind direction, dynamics of the fire, the plume, wind speed, initially it was heading North west and dispersing quickly.

WCBC – on Monday complaints were being received, the officers were making the connections and evaluating the situation.

NWF&RS – The fire was a dynamic situation, with changing circumstances, initially it was difficult to foresee what was required, as the fire changed so did our assessment and response.

Members asked if the response and actions would be part of the investigation?

WCBC confirmed yes. There will be a de-brief session after the incident had ended and issues, concerns would be considered.

Local people raised concerns again about the length of time it took to put the crisis protocols and emergency plan in place – it was Tuesday afternoon onwards.

GB asked what help would be offered to people whose houses smell, and what support would be offered to support people's wellbeing following the effect of this fire.

PHW confirmed that the acrid smell needed ventilation once the plume moved away and to open windows and doors.

NJ noted that it was January and for households with young children or vulnerable adults, opening the windows/doors would have a negative effect. This was acknowledged.

Ian Jones, WCBC explained that the emergency planning situation would soon move into the recovery stage once the incident was over. An example of flooding was given as a recovery stage. The after effects will be considered. EB stated that we are not impressed at the slow response.

SW said that at the last public meeting 3 ½ years ago it was agreed to get it off the yard. The extra high log piles are a let-down. The silos are there for a reason. If this was in another country this would not have happened. We need a real-time cloud based monitoring system and the permits need to be looked at as we are not sure how safe it is?

Mr McKenna stated that he would take all these points on board.

NRW stated that they may change the permit.

Members of the public asked the following questions:

Concerns raised about the time it took to advise schools to keep children indoors. It could have been 30 years, 20 years or 10 years ago. Wrexham Council are supposed to represent the people but it feels like Wrexham work for Kronospan. The children deserve fresh air. Families want to live in Chirk.

Wrexham need to check the height of the log walls and why the recycling heap was so near it. It should be kept away.

Residents called for permanent air monitoring. On Monday we were chocking, couldn't sleep with sore throats etc. There is no emergency helpline number at Wrexham to call. Wrexham has signs 'pollution kills' all along the A483 road to reduce to 50mph, but nobody cares about Chirk residents. We have discovered that burning wet logs gives off more chemicals than dry logs. PHW confirmed burning wet logs were more dangerous.

Ian Jones, WCBC said the helpline was noted. WCBC are here to represent you. Our activity is to deal with statutory legislation and tools for improvements. We have to work within this legal framework.

NRW stated that there will be a public consultation later this year relating to the new Kronospan permit and the evaluation controls will form part of this consultation. NRW highlighted that the public need to check these controls and ensure that acceptable levels of stock piles are included.

WCBC clarified that as this incident was a fire, it was NWF&RS as the first priority agency, WCBC do not respond to fire. The Fire Service contacted Wrexham initially.

Residents once again summarised that the response time to the community was extremely poor. Residents asked why there was no air quality data for Monday and Tuesday, their health was affected but there was no evidence.

How long have we been waiting for monitoring to remain here on a long term basis? If it had been here it would have captured this incident.

Ian Jones confirmed WCBC have previously installed air quality monitoring at the schools.

Residents stated that this is not an extraordinary time, this was happening every day. Whenever air monitoring was in place the factory reduces its output. Question to Kronospan – Why is the factory not running tonight, now that the air monitoring data has been put in place? Mr McKenna said this shutdown was planned months ago.

Residents hoped that the investigations will cover:

- The planned shutdown was not a coincidence
- That previous incidents are included
- To check what was burning other than the log piles
- All current permits to be re-visited to ensure they are compliant.

NRW confirmed that the permit remits are being concluded later this year.

Kronospan confirmed that silos are used, as there is no more wood chip or dust on yard. Residents highlighted that the Kronospan website states that they are doing away with formaldehyde. Mr McKenna confirmed this is not correct. Kronospan website also states its main objective is the cheapest product for best price. Residents feel that this is compromising the clean air in Chirk and their wellbeing.

Residents asked would Kronospan be accountable for its actions.

It was confirmed that there will be an investigation. The investigation will be key, everything done in the investigation will be completely transparent. It could end up with enforcement actions.

BC called the meeting to a close. If residents would like to make personal representation then Simon Baynes MP would be at the Parish Hall, Chirk on Saturday 18th January to hear people's views and he would take action at a MP level.

BC stated that Chirk Town Council constantly represents residents' views, and hoped this would see the change we seek; we look to Wrexham CBC and NRW for support.

BC thanked everyone for their attendance.

Meeting closed 20:10

Signed

Chairman

29TH January 2020