12. Waste management

12.1 Oxfordshire residents, businesses and public organisations produce approximately 1.6 million tonnes of waste a year, mainly comprising municipal, commercial and industrial, and construction and demolition wastes, with smaller quantities of hazardous wastes. This waste all has to be treated and/or disposed of somewhere. At present the main method of management is disposal at local landfill sites. In addition, Oxfordshire has for many years received waste from London, which at present does not have sufficient facilities to deal with its own waste.

12.2 Generation, treatment and disposal of waste on the current scale is not environmentally sustainable. To move towards a more sustainable approach to waste management will require substantial changes, many of which are outside the scope of land use planning.

12.3 Since the adoption of the last Structure Plan there has been a considerable amount of new legislation and Government guidance, and a Regional Waste Management Strategy for the South East is being developed. A draft Regional Waste Management Strategy was published for consultation in March 2004[45]. This strategy was the subject of an Examination in Public in October 2004 and the subsequent report of the Panel (December 2004) has recommended some changes. The decision of the Secreatary of State on the Regional Waste Management Strategy is expected by the end of 2005.

12.4 The Government's Waste Strategy 2000[46] states that waste management decisions should involve choosing the best practicable environmental option (BPEO) in each case. In this way decisions will be taken which minimise damage to the environment as a whole, at an acceptable cost, in both the long and short term. In determining the BPEO the following principles should be taken into account:

a) the waste hierarchy: reduction (minimisation); re-use; recovery (recycling, composting, energy recovery); disposal;

b) the proximity principle;

c) regional self-sufficiency.

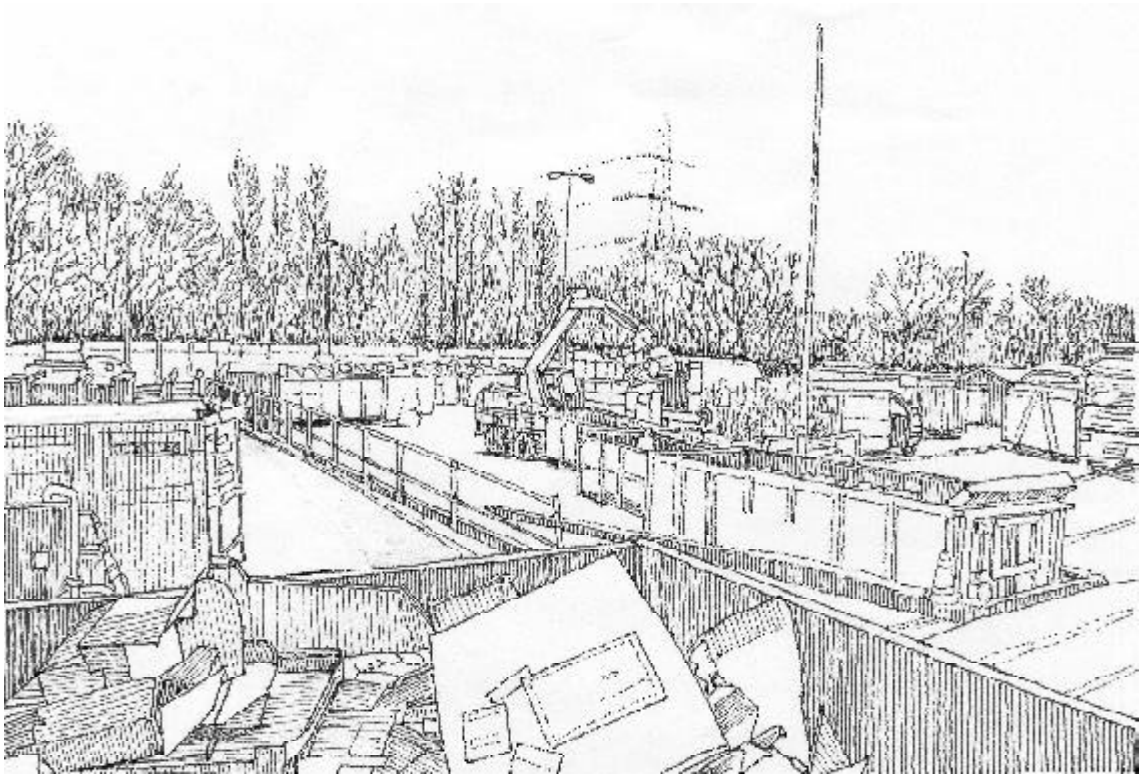
In applying the waste hierarchy, incineration should not be considered before opportunities for recycling and composting have been explored. The proximity principle requires waste to be managed as close to the place of production as possible. Regional self sufficiency requires that each region provides facilities with sufficient capacity to manage the expected quantity of waste needed to be dealt with in that area for at least ten years.

[45] Proposed Alterations to Regional Planning Guidance, South East – Regional Waste Management Strategy, March 2004.

[46] Waste Strategy 2000 for England and Wales, DETR, 2000

12.5 Waste Strategy 2000 sets national targets for the reduction of biodegradable waste sent to landfill over the period to 2020, as required by the EU Landfill Directive[47]. In addition, the Government has set national targets for a reduction in the amount of commercial and industrial waste sent to landfill by 2005, and for increased recovery of value from municipal waste and recycling or composting of household waste over the period to 2015. The Government has also set statutory targets for recycling and composting for each local authority for 2005/06. These targets and the principles set out above, have been taken into account in the Draft Regional Waste Management Strategy.

12.6 The County Council and the five District Councils have together developed the Oxfordshire Joint Household Waste Management Strategy, which sets out policies for the management of household waste in Oxfordshire in order to comply with the Government's national waste strategy and associated targets.



Reduction, re-use and recovery

12.7 Policy G6 encourages more efficient use of resources, reduction of waste, increased use of recycled construction materials and increased provision for recycling and composting through new development. However, reduction of waste at source is largely outside the scope of land use planning and relies on actions by individuals, industry and other agencies, including Government. The County Council is implementing waste reduction initiatives to encourage householders and others to reduce the quantities of waste they produce.

[47] Council Directive 99/3/EC on the Landfill of Waste, European Commission, 1999.

12.8 The County Council is also working to encourage further re-use and recovery of resources from waste, particularly through recycling and composting. The Joint Household Waste Management Strategy includes provision of an integrated management system for household waste that will achieve the Government's targets for Oxfordshire, which are to recycle or compost at least 33% of household waste by 2005/6.

12.9 The Draft Regional Waste Management Strategy, as recommended by the Examination in Public Panel, proposes challenging regional targets for recovery of resources from waste and diversion of waste from landfill, increasing to 79% by 2015. Within these recovery targets, recycling/composting targets are proposed to increase to 50% for municipal waste and construction and demolition waste, and to 55% for commercial and industrial waste. In addition to helping achieve more sustainable management of waste, there are potential business opportunities and economic benefits to be gained from increased recycling and recovery of resources from waste.

12.10 Energy can be recovered from non-inert wastes either through decomposition (gas generated by anaerobic bio-processes in purpose built facilities) or by incineration. Waste-to-energy schemes can have the double benefit of providing energy and reducing the amount of waste which has to be disposed of by landfill. Sewage treatment works may be able to play a significant part in the treatment of biodegradable wastes to provide energy. Energy can also be recovered through the collection of landfill gas (primarily methane) at sites where biodegradable waste is or has been tipped. This also has the benefit of reducing the amount of landfill gas (a greenhouse gas) emitted into the atmosphere. There are generating plants fuelled by landfill gas at the Ardley and Sutton Courtenay landfill sites. Recovery of energy from waste can make a contribution towards meeting targets for renewable energy generation (see Chapter 10), but decisions on waste management options should be based primarily on consideration of the BPEO, the waste hierarchy and the proximity principle.

Making provision for waste management

12.11 RPG9 requires that waste planning authorities aim to make provision for a sufficient range and number of facilities for the re-use, recovery and disposal of waste that will need to be managed within their areas, and a similar policy is proposed in the Draft Regional Waste Management Strategy. This policy is based on the 1997 SERPLAN guidance on waste planning[48] which also advised that counties should make an appropriate contribution to regional needs, in particular waste exported from London. This is reflected in RPG9 which says it is unlikely London will achieve self-sufficiency in the short term and disposal to landfill sites outside the capital will continue to play an important role, but that London should make provision to meet its needs so there is a progressive reduction in the amount of untreated wastes exported to the adjoining regions for disposal.

[48] SERP 160. A Sustainable Waste Planning Strategy for the South East. SERPLAN 1997.

12.12 The Draft Regional Waste Management Strategy, as recommended by the Examination in Public Panel, says provision for London's exports should usually be limited to landfill in line with the Landfill Directive targets, with new provision being made only for residues of waste from recycling or other recovery processes by 2016. Waste planning authorities should make provision for appropriate capacity for waste from London to be landfilled, but the capacities required are not specified at the sub-regional level. Rail and water transport are strongly favoured for longer distance bulk movements of waste materials, particularly for waste imported from London.

WM1 Provision will be made for the treatment and/or disposal of a quantity of waste equivalent to the total quantity of waste produced in Oxfordshire, except for that waste which requires management at specialised sub-regional, regional or national facilities. Provision will also be made for the reception and treatment and/or disposal of waste from London, provided it is consistent with regional policy and the waste is transported by rail or water for the principal component of its journey.

12.13 Policy WM1 allows for cross-county boundary movements of waste where this accords with the proximity principle, but seeks to ensure Oxfordshire does not become a net importer of waste from elsewhere in the South East or from other regions except London. London is an exception because the current shortage of waste management capacity there necessitates continued but declining reliance on adjoining regions for disposal of untreated waste in the short term, whilst waste treatment capacity is developed in London, and of residues from treatment processes in the longer term. Provision of facilities in Oxfordshire for treatment of waste from London will usually only be appropriate where this would help the development of more sustainable waste management methods for dealing with Oxfordshire's waste.

12.14 The provision required in Oxfordshire for waste treatment and disposal, including for waste imported from London, will be established in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework, which will replace the Minerals and Waste Local Plan (see paragraph 11.2). It is considered that there is no need for additional landfill capacity in Oxfordshire at present, but this will be kept under review. Oxfordshire's share of provision for London can be accommodated within the existing permitted Sutton Courtenay landfill site which is served by rail.

Waste management facilities

WM2 Permission will be granted for waste management facilities (for re-use, recycling, composting, resource recovery, treatment, transfer, and landfill) to ensure sufficient capacity for the management of that waste which needs to be managed within Oxfordshire, having due regard to the principle of best practicable environmental option, including the waste hierarchy and the proximity principle. Proposals which move waste management up the hierarchy will be encouraged. Permission will only be granted for landfill required for the disposal of waste which remains after reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery policies have been applied.

12.15 Guidance is given in the Minerals and Waste Local Plan on where waste recycling facilties will be permitted. This will be reviewed in the Minerals and Waste Development Framework, which will consider the need for detailed locational guidance for other types of waste treatment facilties, and whether appropriate sites for waste management development should be identified. In accordance with the proximity principle, waste management facilities should be located close to the main locations where waste is produced. In considering where waste management facilities should be located, the County Council will take account of other relevant policies of this Structure Plan, including in particular the general policies for development (chapter 3), policies on transport (chapter 4) and policies on protecting and enhancing the environment (chapter 5). Policy G4 sets out policy on development in the Green Belt. Recycling and other waste treatment facilities will usually be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, which will only be permitted in very special circumstances. Such exceptional cases will be treated as departures from the development plan. Special circumstances may be demonstrated where there is a need for the waste facility, the proposed location is consistent with the proximity principle, there is no suitable alternative site and any adverse environmental impact can be satisfactorily mitigated.

12.16 Even if waste reduction, recycling and recovery policies are fully successful, there will still be residual waste which has to be finally disposed of. For the immediate future at least, landfill is expected to remain the main means for managing Oxfordshire's waste. However, landfill comes at the bottom of the waste hierarchy and, in the light of the Landfill Directive targets for reduction in landfilling of waste, landfill provision will be made only as a last resort. In any case, the provision of further landfill capacity is likely to become more difficult to achieve in the future as the locations where waste, particularly non-inert waste, can be accepted is increasingly restricted by constraints such as the need to protect groundwater. Also, the amount of inert waste needing disposal by landfill is expected to decrease as the recycling of construction and demolition waste increases.

WM3 Permission for landfill (including land raising) will be granted only where it is required for the restoration of active or unrestored mineral workings to appropriate after-uses or where there would be an overall environmental benefit.

12.17 As part of the move to making better use of waste and seeing it as a resource, where the disposal of waste by landfill is necessary this should be used in a beneficial way. Therefore, landfill should be used only for the restoration of mineral workings or where the tipping of waste on land would enable an overall environmental benefit to be achieved. In view of the lack of need for additional landfill capacity, it is considered that landraising will not generally be necessary. Developments such as screening bunds, landscaping features, golf courses and country parks which involve a significant element of deposition of waste materials above original ground levels will be considered against policy WM3 and as such are likely to be opposed by the County Council unless there would be an overall environmental benefit.

12.18 The provision of borrow tips for the disposal of waste material from nearby major construction projects can reduce the environmental impact caused by transporting large volumes of materials to a single site over a short period. However, borrow tips will only be permitted where the waste material cannot be re-used or recycled and the disposal of waste at the borrow tip would have less environmental and traffic impact than if the material was disposed at existing permitted landfill sites. In addition, the tipping should normally either improve the agricultural quality of the land, enhance landscaping or enable the restoration of a borrow pit excavated to provide materials for the construction project.