



Lower Compton and Sands Farm Liaison Committee Meeting

Minutes of the Liaison Committee meeting held via Teams on 22 January 2026 at 18.00.

PRESENT

Carla Marygold (CM)

Cherhill Parish Council

Charlie Oram (CO)
David Grafton (DG)

Calne Town Councillor and Wiltshire Councillor

Cllr Sam Pearce-Kearny (SPK)

Wiltshire Councillors

Cllr Ashley O'Neill (AON)
Cllr Mike Sankey (MS)

Wiltshire Council Officers

Adrian Hampton (AH)
Sarah Valdus (SV)
Steve Bryant (SBR)

Environment Agency (EA)

Tom Fowler (TF)

Hills Waste Solutions

Steve Burns (SB)
Simon Allen (SA)

Hills Group Communications Team

Chris Waddell (CW)

	Action
1. Apologies	
Tom Bennell David Meakin (Hills) Derry Hill and Studley Parish Council Martin Litherland (Wiltshire Council Waste Management) Phil Bacon (EA) Invited: Calne Town Clerk Cllr Augusta Urquhart-Nicholls Cllr Robert Macnaughton Cllr Tom Rounds Dean Thomas (Wiltshire Planning) Dianne Zeitzen (Compton Bassett Parish Council) Linley Hunter (EA) Rod Lloyd-Davies (Compton Bassett Parish Council) Nick White (Cherhill Parish Council) Peter Barnett Peter Szczesiak (Compton Bassett Parish Council)	

<p>2. Minutes of the last meeting & matters arising</p>	
<p>Last liaison minutes were 2024 – no matters discussed.</p>	
<p>3. Updates</p>	
<p>SA updated that since an EGM in 2025 there has been a well-attended public meeting in Calne and that all works that Hills committed to regarding the landfill have been completed. And Hills has done more work beyond that -Hills experience is that odour issues off-site have significantly reduced. The intention is to maintain gas extraction on the live cell to further reduce risk of odour off-site.</p> <p>TF added that EA findings agree with Hills position with fewer reports of odour since September and EA's own visits suggest level of odour off-site is much reduced.</p> <p>SPK reported recent resident comments regarding odour, but SKP thought this was related to atmospheric conditions.</p> <p>SA confirmed a handful of recent complaints a few weeks ago but nothing since.</p> <p>TF confirmed four reports this month but all on one day. An EA Officer who lives in Calne has reported situation is much better. EA visits suggest no significant issues.</p> <p>SPK said that issues used to be daily before improvements and expressed gratitude for the improvements.</p>	
<p>4. Proposed closure of Lower Compton HRC (and Purton)</p>	
<p>MS informed committee that there is an extraordinary Calne Area board meeting in February. He asked if Hills had anything to put in the public domain alongside the Council's statements.</p> <p>SA offered a summary of Hills view as offered previously at Purton liaison with respect to Wiltshire Council discussions.</p> <p>AON wanted to clarify when referring to the Council whether SA meant council officers or councillors.</p> <p>SA confirmed that Hills' interaction had been with Officers rather than Councillors</p> <p>SA explained that Hills had a long professional relationship with Wiltshire Council officers going back decades.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current contracts were awarded in 2018 for a period of eight years (ending 31 July 2026). • Hills was asked to submit financial models over last couple of years on various aspects of the contracts to assess extension of contracts for a further eight years. • Two financial models requested for the two Hills-run HRCs in May 2024 <p>One of these models was to allow the council to potentially cease operations at one or both sites.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hills submitted both models to Wiltshire Council in June 2024 and after that Hills didn't hear anything for one year. 	

- In May 2025 Hills was asked to resubmit variations to the models. Hills resubmitted these models in June 2025
- All these proposals went to a Council meeting on 09 December 2025.
- The proposal was to extend the two HRC contracts with the intention of consultation within the first year about closure. The cabinet members changed that proposal.
- Hills was frustrated about events since 09 December. To be told that costs were unforeseeable when fully costed models were submitted in June 2024 was frustrating. Some council members' comments have been disappointing.
- Since these events Hills has been asked two weeks ago to put forward a further financial model for Purton HRC alone for a one year plus one year extension. That model has been submitted.
- On Monday Hills asked to produce similar one year plus one year model for Lower Compton HRC. To be formally submitted on 23 January although Waste's Managing Director has already emailed figures to Sam Howell.
- Hills disagrees with comments from Gavin Grant that "the ball is in Hills' court". The ball has always been and is currently in Wiltshire Council's court.

MS thanked SA and expressed that this was largely as anticipated.

AON explained that from councillors' perspective it was felt that Wiltshire Council's administration didn't know what they were doing.

AON recognised Hills' frustration and felt the council had treated Hills appallingly.

AON asked whether Hills could share information regarding public domain comments that proposed price increases were 400%. He asked why Hills press release was very different to claims from Wiltshire Council.

AON recognised that Hills figures reflected inflation fairly and that Hills wasn't planning to make huge profits.

SA explained that the running of two HRCs was part of the larger Lot 1 contract which include the operation of transfer stations and Municipal Recycling Facility (MRF) at Sands Farm.

SA said that Hills had struggled to make any profit on the Lot 1 contract for the last six years. This was not related to the HRCs but related to the performance of the MRF. SA emphasised that Hills has honoured the contracts despite these difficulties and that claims of profiteering were false. Hills has in fact subsidised Wiltshire Councils waste management costs.

SA explained that the contract was based on the original 2014 tender prices with mechanisms to increase the costs to the council in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). Costs have increased above and beyond CPI which means Hills has had to absorb the additional cost increases.

SA said that council officers had been told frequently about the financial difficulties under this contract, and extensions would see a significant increase in price. SA went on to explain that site infrastructure such as offices and other infrastructure were now crumbling at the HRCs and that both sites needed capital

investment which has been accounted for in Hills Proposals for a new eight year contract.

SA confirmed that Hills' proposed increases for running the HRCs were around 75% not the 400% being reported.

SA reported that Paul Sample came to the Purton liaison committee and said Hills costs were four times that of the running costs at eight other HRCs run on council owned sites.

SA expressed doubt on these figures.

AON also expressed doubt on figures quoted by Paul Sample.

AON asked if the required investment would be run through the contract itself or whether Wiltshire Council would have to make a capital contribution.

SA stated that some of the information was commercially sensitive but that he could say that the capital costs were to be amortised over the eight-year proposal.

SA expressed that this would cause difficulty if an eight-year contract was agreed with break clauses because the capital investment would still need to be recovered over a shorter period

AON asked if Wiltshire Council had requested improvements as part of the renewal or if these proposed improvements were from Hills.

SA explained Wiltshire Council's scoping document didn't allow for capital investments but that other requirements from that document were priced. Hills' proposed capital investment was seen by Hills as minimum requirement to fulfil the contract in a way which satisfied the requirements of the scoping document.

AON suggested that Calne's forthcoming public meeting would likely attract the same attendance as a recent Royal Wootton Bassett meeting about Purton (c. 300 attendees) and that they wouldn't necessarily welcome attendance from cabinet members as it would be preferred that members of the public had an open forum.

AON asked whether Hills would want to attend if cabinet members or council officers did attend.

SA said that Hills has a good relationship with Wiltshire Council officers and didn't want to end up in a slanging match despite grievances. SA said that liaison committees remained the best forum for Hills to answer questions.

AON confirmed that SPK and MS would take this issue offline.

SPK felt that public opinion mattered and that online publication of corporate responses would be better.

SPK felt that closures are seen as indefensible by the community and that Hills are not seen in a bad light because of this situation.

SA said Hills' attendance would be discussed with the board but emphasised that Hills' current position is that the liaison committees are the right forum for Hills to attend. *(It has since been confirmed that the board agree with the current position.)*

AON said that as division member he wasn't informed by the administration about their decision and that he found out via a press release. He felt that from a community perspective that it had been handled poorly

AON asked SA if he could send any additional questions via email.

SA confirmed happy with that

MS asked as the council couldn't lease or purchase Lower Compton HRC whether the council could lease or buy gymnasium or old NAAFI site.

SA confirmed no conversations to date and that as far as he knew Hills hadn't said Lower Compton wasn't available.

SV disagreed and suggested this wasn't the information she'd received and requested that future discussions were taken offline.

SB explained that the old gymnasium is within an AONB and that it's on the wrong side of Hills' screening bund. In Hills' experience planning permission would be unlikely that side of the bund. The old NAAFI is subject to an uplift covenant payable to the MOD.

SB emphasised that having an alternative site would cost more money and that the cabinet's decision is that they can't afford it despite Hills' view that costs are no different to anyone else's. Hills hasn't loaded this with profit.

SA explained Hills view that planning permissions for new sites would not be easy to obtain and that there was an understanding of why the council wanted HRCs on their own land.

CM asked if Hills had any plans for the HRC once closed.

SA said that Purton residents had asked same and that those plans hadn't been discussed yet.

SPK asked if Hills would consider running Lower Compton HRC commercially for residents.

SA explained that it was easier to run an HRC under a contract rather than on an ad hoc charging basis because pricing would be complex on a car-by-car basis without knowing what materials were being brought.

SA informed that although they could measure numbers of visitors currently it would be hard to predict traffic to a commercial site when residents were used to having their recycling dealt within their tax.

SB confirmed that whatever happens, in order to continue the previously mentioned capital investments would have to be made and to commit to those without knowledge of future income, particularly if Wiltshire Council put a new site in, in the north of the county would be challenging

AON asked about the realities of setting up proposed north of county facility within three to four years as the council have suggested.

SA expressed concern about planning permission and EA permits holding up the site which would otherwise be relatively easy to set up. SA suggested the council may be able to speed up planning and that EA permits should in theory be simple as HRCs are low risk but that in Hills' experience nothing was quick with permissions and permits.

5. Planning Applications

SA said that there was nothing at the moment although Hills is looking to apply to cover part of the concrete pad at the Transfer Station to reduce visibility of the site and improve odour, litter and pest control. Hills doesn't expect planning to be granted quickly.

SB requested that residents were made to understand this planning would be for an improvement to the existing operation and not for an increase in waste to be processed.

CO asked for clarity on what materials were handled at the transfer station.

SA explained that the waste included:

- residual black bag waste set to be sent to Energy from Waste (EfW) plants and Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) plants
- plasterboard
- wood
- garden waste.

CM queried the geography of the transfer station.

SB confirmed it was just to the rear of the large green building near the HRC.

CM asked for confirmation that this was the area Hills wanted to put a roof on.

SA confirmed that was correct.

6. Landfill

SA reported that further to the earlier brief update that infrastructure changes had made a difference to the odour issue. Landfill tonnages are as expected although heavier during planned EfW shutdowns in the summer.

SA also reported that the next landfill cell was being engineered and that Hills expected 120,000 tons per year to that cell.

CO asked for how much longer will those cells be filled.

SA explained the Low Lane Extension had planning until mid-2028 and that after that an area further to the south of that extension had permission until 2042. However, exact timings and tonnages are difficult to predict with increased diversion from landfill and other sites in the UK closing.

7. Garden waste and wood chipping

SA said Wood waste is transferred un-shredded in low amounts (mostly from our HRCs) to facilities that want C and A-grade wood. Green waste volumes are seasonal as expected and are transferred to our composting facility at Purton

8. Quarry – aggregates and concrete operations

SB said Quarry was run by a different division of Hills but updates are rare as very little changes:

- No extraction of sand at Lower Compton for a number of years.
- All reserves are exhausted other than at Freeth Farm
- Occasional imports of soft building sand from Oxfordshire are stockpiled at the old washing plant at Sands Farm.
- Concrete carries on as before but in a depressed market.

CO asked for an update on extraction at Freeth Farm

SA said no activity at present, and none planned in the short term

CO asked if rights for extraction at Freeth Farm were current.

SB explained that outline permission was established after WWII and that more detailed planning permission has been approved since regarding conveyor routing and boundaries. There are question marks over the economic viability for digging at Freeth Farm currently.

CO confirmed his understanding of the situation.

8. Recycling and Transport

SB said that recycling continues at the MRF with local materials primarily from Wiltshire Council and some from Hills commercial division.

SB emphasised that no waste is imported from further afield other than from an MOD contract in Hampshire and that 95% of waste was Wiltshire generated.

SB explained that the MRF contract would be going to a different provider (Norse) from 01 August and that the MRF building was owned by Hills and would be leased to the council and that third party.

SB said that the Municipal transport depot would still be at Sands Farm but that would be run by a different company from 01 August.

CO asked if waste vehicles would still be coming in and out at Sands Farm.

SB confirmed that for several years to come that would be the case but that those vehicles which are currently owned by Wiltshire Council will continue to be owned by them but run by a different contractor using the same crews managed by the same managers but badged differently.

SV confirmed that an alternative briefing for councillors would be forthcoming regarding the future of waste services.

CM asked about operating times in terms of truck movements.

SB said that weighbridge opened at 07:00 but that empty vehicles were leaving site from 06:00

CM asked for clarification on vehicles arriving at site and had concerns about vehicle movements and inconsiderate parking as early as 05:30

SB clarified that no vehicles were coming into site before 07:00 but accepted that some may arrive outside the site before then.

<p>SA said that there were difficulties telling drivers not to park up early.</p> <p>CM expressed concern about noise issues in the summer months when residents had windows open.</p> <p>SB offered information regarding general staff arrivals in cars as early as 05:30 including staff who lived locally to Sands Farm, readying themselves for their working days.</p> <p>SB commented that Hills had previously tried to reduce the problem but that there wasn't much Hills could do with drivers who spent their working weeks living out of their cabs in laybys who chose to arrive early. SB offered that Hills would speak to drivers to remind them that couldn't enter site.</p> <p>CM remarked on the speed of some drivers</p> <p>SB reminded the committee that Hills previously supported plans to reduce limits from 60mph to 40mph on certain roads</p>	
<p>9. Any other business</p>	
<p>MS asked about the feasibility of Low Lane from the wash plant being used for commercial vehicles going to new housing developments instead of Anchor Road or Mill Street.</p> <p>SB said this was outside of the Waste business but that it had been previously discussed and that there were huge concerns regarding work to improve what is currently just a dirt track.</p> <p>SB also commented on existing land stability issues around housing developments near to Low Lane.</p> <p>MS expressed an understanding of the issues.</p> <p>SB offered to come back to MS following further discussions internally with Hills Group rather than Waste.</p>	
<p>10. Date of next meeting</p>	
<p>Wednesday 08 May via Teams 18:00-19:00</p>	<p>ALL</p>