

ASTLEY GREEN

Dating back to before the Norman Conquest Astley Green is a charming peaceful rural township consisting of terraced houses and cottages almost entirely surrounded by Green Belt in the Wigan Borough. It lies to the south of the A580 East Lancashire Road (ELR) which was constructed in 1934 with the only access being via one road, Higher Green Lane (HGL). Also the Bridgewater Canal passes through the middle of the village.

Until the beginning of the last century it was largely an area of common land, 'The Green', with an agricultural community located alongside the lane known formerly as Green Lane which extended between the main road from Leigh to Manchester and Chat Moss.

In 1795 the Duke of Bridgewater was granted permission to extend the Manchester to Worsley Bridgewater Canal through "The Green" at Astley, ('The Cut'), dissecting Green Lane, creating the areas of Higher Green and Lower Green, and advancing on to Leigh to link with the Leeds to Liverpool Canal.

Following the construction of the canal, established to transport coal to other areas including Manchester and surrounding districts, a renowned industry of silk weaving developed with the oldest cottages in the village being the weaver's cottages.

However the beginning of the last century saw the introduction of the Industrial Revolution and possibly the formation of Astley Green, Astley Green bordering 'The Green', with a cotton mill located adjacent to the canal to the west of Higher Green Lane and the sinking of a mine shaft sunk by the Pilkington's in 1908, again adjacent to the canal but to the east of the lane. It was at this time that most of the existing terraced houses were built, most being built close to the edge of the pavements with small or even no front gardens. During its heyday, the village contained many shops including a Co-operative department store and a Barclay's Bank. There were also many Public Houses. Since the late 1960's, when both the mill and the colliery closed, the village has become a commuter settlement, with residents travelling outside the village and its immediate environs to work.

Today there are approximately 350 houses in the village. Most of the shops in the village including the Post Office have closed, although it still contains a pub, a take-away and a hairdressers, as well as a number of small businesses including offices and a coalyard. The colliery is now a mining museum, and following its closure in 1974 the whole of the colliery area was subject to a landscaping exercise and grassed and tree-ed. The character of the village is now very different from what it must have been like when both the colliery and the mill were working, with most people who have moved into the village having done so because of its rural aspect, character, and tranquillity.

WHITEHEAD LANDFILL SITE

The site lies adjacent and to the south east of the village of Astley Green. The site consisted of spoil from the local Astley Green Colliery which was worked from 1912 until the colliery closed in 1970.

Following the closure of the colliery attempts were made to reclaim the coal from the 'rucks' leaving a residue of spoil comprising of silt and more granular material. This material is underlain by approximately 30 metres of glacial boulder clay that contains lenses of sand and gravel. The underlying rock is Sherwood sandstone that dates from the Permo-triassic period and is an aquifer.

However during the reclaim of the coal the contractors went into liquidation and the derelict waste land was left dormant.

Due to the contamination the landscape failed to respond to treatment to bring back vegetation.

In 1997, a company, Terry Adams Ltd, submitted a planning application to restore the 'tip' by developing a landfill site. The village was advised that this plan would endeavour to cover the contaminated land with clay excavated from a deep seam of boulder clay already existing under the surface of the existing site. This in turn would enable the created hole to be filled with waste from the Greater Manchester Area in carefully designed cells. The plan was to work and 'fully restore the site to an area of outstanding beauty for use by the local community'.

As part of the means to placate the village, because of the existing problem with heavy goods vehicles (HGV'S), included in the application was the intention to construct a new road going from the A580 ELR to a new roundabout at the entrance to the site on Lower Green Lane.

Permission was granted with conditions including 'that the site is completed and fully restored for a period of ten years from the start of operations. Also included was the condition ' that all transport to and from the site

was to be only by the private road ' which in turn was made subject to a Section 106 Order. This required the removal of the road within twelve months of the cease of operations.

However, in 1997 ,shortly after the start of the landfill operations ,Terry Adams Ltd was sold to Viridor, who in turn became responsible to their parent company, South West Water Co, now part of Pennon Group.

In 2005 the villagers were consulted by Viridor who were proposing to extend the life of the landfill site by a further four years . A planning application was submitted in 2005 .

Again the village feared that this was only the start of an on-going process to extend the life of the landfill but we were assured that although there would be a continued operation of the site there would be no additional problems. Indeed it was stated that there would be increased efforts to eliminate the existing nuisances. It was also suggested that the planning application would provide the opportunity to put forward a more deliverable and sustainable restoration scheme.

Permission was granted in December 2006 with a condition that the restoration of the site, which was subject to the original planning application, be completed before any new operations began.

Restoration to much of the original landfill site has taken place with the area to the east having been tree-ed and planted although some of the western edge has been left to accommodate the extension of the landfill.

The original land level was 18 – 20 AOD with the level of coal tip being 32 AOD.

Although the planning application allowed for a pre-settlement height of 38 AOD the contours on the plans for the restoration of the site rise to a maximum of 34 AOD although there are viewing vantage points at 35 AOD.

ACCESS

The access to the site is via a private road, which was constructed in 1998 and to-date has not had any re-construction which requires a sharp left turn from the westwards carriageway of the dual carriageway A580 (ELR). As this private road lies after the left turn at HGL, which also leads to the landfill site, human element defines that there is always the probability that vehicles , especially given the current economical climate, will take the shorter route through the village. On leaving the site and then from the access road, as there is no right turn, all vehicles must proceed left in a westerly direction to the roundabout at the junction of the A580(ELR) and the A574 and then return easterly on the eastbound carriageway of the A580(ELR), a round trip of an additional 3 Kms from the exit of the private road. There is also the problem of loaded vehicles arriving from the west which have a similar situation inasmuch they need to proceed on the eastbound carriageway of the A580(ELR) to the junction of the A580(ELR) and the A572 and then returning on the westbound carriageway to the private road, Again involving a round trip of 6 Kms .As a result frequently there are vehicles turning, both left and right, at the junction of HGL and reversing into either the service roads or other minor estate roads or even proceeding through the village.

As stated previously there is a Section 106 Order that requires all landfill traffic to use the private road as does an order banning vehicles from using the A572 Worsley to the A580(ELR) road.

With regard to the condition of the private road, this road was constructed in 1998 for an intended life of ten years and to date has not had any further refurbishment.

TRAFFIC

As you are probably aware the village already has huge HGV problems inasmuch that vehicles to and from the light industry to the south of the landfill site are required to use the village route. However for the past two years discussions have been taking place so that these other vehicles may have the temporary use of the private road, but there is also the question of an annual ' toll. However these discussions have suggested that the present economy will not allow the Local authority to adopt it

There has also been a report that the Highways Agency has recommended the closure of Junction 13 of the M60 Manchester ring-road motorway at Worsley. If this were to happen then there would be no local exit from the clockwise carriageway of the M60 at Worsley, the only alternative exits from this direction being either Junction 11 of the M60 at Eccles or Junction 4 of the M61 at Middle Hulton. In both cases this would necessitate extra mileage and transport costs and the transport of the waste through well populated urban districts.

In recent major planning applications i.e. Salford Racecourse, it was reported that traffic on the A580(ELR) is almost at, and at peak periods exceeds, saturation point.

At times, on a regular basis, accidents and incidents on the local trunk roads and motorways bring the local road network to a standstill.

NOISE

Although there are conditions to the planning permission for the landfill site that restrict the movement of vehicles and the starting of engines to between the times of 7.30am and 5.00 pm Mondays to Fridays and 7.30am to 1.00pm Saturdays, there are many occasions when the conditions are not adhered to. There are also times when the ' Hum ' of the gas turbines can be heard.

ODOUR

As you are aware landfill sites give off various gases, some being odourless.

However the village has suffered and occasionally still suffers from quite powerful acrid, pungent odours associated with landfill gas.

There has been the occasion when the Environment Agency has had to suspend the landfill licence because of the severity of the odour. Even as recent as March this year the village and the surrounding districts of Astley, Boothstown, and Mosley Common suffered an odour covering a period of a few days and as yet this odour or the cause have not been identified.

As, as been identified, the most regular prevailing winds are from the south it is not uncommon for the odours to be most prevalent with the housing across the open land 1 to 1.5 Kms to the north of the landfill site.

DUST

There is the problem of fine dust which, especially in the dry Summer months, is also quite prevalent in the village and surrounding areas.

FLIES

It is a requirement of the landfill licence that measures are taken to keep flies under control.

However already earlier this year, during the hot weather spell, there has been an upsurge in the number of flies. Again, without an actual analysis, it is difficult to ascertain the source of the problem, but it is a regular seasonal nuisance that probably could be exterminated with the demise of the landfill site.

GULLS

Given the slightest opportunity there can be an invasion of gulls and other birds. Most occurrences happen when the operational site is not covered with inert material at the end of the working hours.

IMPACT

The effect of further landraise as well as a further site extension at this site is likely to produce an unacceptable effect on local landscape in terms of visual intrusion in this area of fairly flat landscape.

The proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt by virtue of damaging openness and injuring the visual amenities of the Green Belt.

The cumulative effect of further landfill/landraise at this site, in addition to the existing permitted landfill/landraise will have an unacceptable adverse impact on the perceived environmental quality or character of the area.

LEGAL

Although it was mooted in the early stages of the plan that the Whitehead site could be an option it was not until the consultation period to January 2010 that the site was adopted as a Preferred Option. The local authority, Wigan Council had already objected to the site being included as it was deemed that the site was unsuitable and should be classed as Band 'D'. Salford City Council also objected with other representations being from the Environment Agency, English Heritage, and some local residents.

However in July 2010, by an internal report, the Cabinet of Wigan Council was advised that the allocation of the Whitehead site was pivotal to the delivery of the Waste Plan strategy. It also stated that if the objection were to remain then there would be the possibility of the Waste Plan being found 'unsound' at examination. The Cabinet then agreed to withdraw their objection. Also in the report was the question 'Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population'. This received a **negative** answer !!

CONCLUSION

Objective 6 of the Waste Plan states that the aim is 'To ensure appropriate protection of the quality of life of communities.'

From the beginning of the last century until 1970 the community of Astley Green, ½ km from the landfill site, had the disturbance of the coal mining and the cotton mill. The reworking of the colliery waste material lasted until the 1980's and, including the existing facility there have been three landfill sites in close proximity from this time.

But, following the closure of the colliery and the cotton mill, industry in the village had virtually ceased from around 1975 and because of its rural aspect, peace and tranquillity, it was a greatly sought after area.

However, even after the start of the landfill site in 1998 and the added extension, it was perceived that life would revert back to the earlier conditions with the added benefit of the beauty of the restored landfill site.

Now, although any extension to the site would require further planning applications, the thought of further 'upset' to village life is unbearable.

However In considering further applications, the local authorities would have to consider the cumulative effect of previous waste disposal facilities on the well-being of the local community, including any significant adverse effects on environmental quality, social cohesion and inclusion or economic potential.

Now there remain the questions;

- a. Would the landfill site have an impact on the well-being of the local community ?
- b. Would the site would have an adverse effect on the openness of the Green Belt ?

Undoubtedly there cannot be a negative answer to these questions and thereby the need for the withdrawal of the Whitehead site from the Waste Plan will be required !