

Key recommendations for waste management policy decision-makers: A case study of future opportunities for non-municipal waste facilities in Northamptonshire, UK

Margaret Bates^a, Paul S. Phillips^{a,*}, Lawrence O. Mbeng^a,
Waleed Montasser^a, Anthony C. Nwigwe^a, Alban Forster^b

^a *SITA Centre, University of Northampton, Northampton NN2 7AL, UK*

^b *SLR Consulting Ltd., Rowden Lane, Bradford on Avon BA15 2AU, UK*

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Abstract

This research identifies the barriers (e.g. planning) and drivers for the development of new non-municipal wastes management facilities in Northamptonshire, an English County in the East Midlands of England. The aim of the research was to give guidance to policy makers and planners at all levels so as to enable them to make informed decisions for the selection of sites for new facilities. This is key within England as public opposition to the siting of new facilities has meant that political decision-makers often fail to take a clear stand and follow sound scientific and technical advice. England therefore has a major problem in siting of new facilities to enable them to meet European-led targets by 2010. Key recommendations are given as to how decision-makers can move forward by carefully selecting sites well in advance of planning applications and so avoid the public opposition that often occurs.

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1. Introduction

The waste strategy for England (Defra, 2007) lays out a bold and vigorous vision whereby reliance on landfill, for a range of wastes, is reduced markedly under EU-led targets. In particular, emphasis is given to stimulating investment in waste treatment and the corresponding treatment technology options for a given waste stream. The role of local authorities is re-emphasised with a new agenda developing, whereby they are to be more heavily involved in business waste and to work closely with their partner Regional Development Agencies. Key to this new strategy is the development of the Waste Infrastructure Delivery Programme (WIDP) (Defra, 2007) which has been designed to aid local authorities. WIDP will provide high-level guidance to local authorities as they plan their procurement strategy for waste treatment facility capacity. WIDP in particular will seek to build

upon the opportunities to achieve synergy between municipal solid waste (MSW) and other waste treatment. It will seek to achieve a step change in moving local authorities from focussing almost exclusively upon MSW to an organisation that takes a holistic view of the needs of waste treatment/processing in its given area. The formation of WIDP is in part a response to recent key reports from the Office of Government Commerce (2006) and Office of Fair Trading (2006). Land-use planning (HM Treasury, 2006) for facilities has become a key issue in England as previously, prolonged disputes in the proceedings, have meant that waste management facilities have taken an inordinate amount of time to be completed and come on stream. Planners need to identify potential sites well in advance of commencement of the planning process as this way they can work closely with local communities to defuse public objection. As England needs to reach key Landfill Directive targets by 2010 (Defra, 2007), new cost effective facilities need to be introduced rapidly (Mayor of London, 2004). England and its regions needs to move quickly towards adopting the best practice found in case studies from many European countries (SLR, 2005).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 604 892385.

E-mail address: paul.phillips@northampton.ac.uk (P.S. Phillips).

1.1. Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire is a County in the East Midlands of England with a population of 629 676 in 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2007). Waste management in the County is two-tier with Northamptonshire County Council being the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA) with responsibility for the managing for disposal of MSW. The seven District or Borough Councils are Waste Collection Authorities (WCAs) for MSW. Waste arisings for Northamptonshire in 2005/2006 for MSW were 355 443 tonnes and for commercial/industrial were 1 029 000 tonnes (EMRA, 2006). The County Council as a planning authority have produced a Municipal Waste Management Strategy (Northamptonshire County Council, 2002) and along with that a Mineral and Waste Local Plan (Northamptonshire County Council, 2006) that will soon be changed, under central government guidance, into a Minerals and Waste Development Framework. The County Council therefore has the responsibility in planning for all waste management facilities that will be required not just for MSW but the new joint ones that promote synergy with other waste streams (Defra, 2007). It must be remembered that the role of political decision-makers is key here. Elected representatives of local government have a central role in promoting (or not) the need for new facilities to treat and manage waste arisings, even if it is unpopular with sections of their constituents.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has included Northamptonshire within a new sub-regional growth area, named Milton Keynes and South Midlands (MKSM) (Government Office for the South East, East Midlands and East of England, 2005). Within the sub-regional strategy, waste management is identified as a key issue for consideration, although little analysis is contained within the strategy as to how the growth in waste resulting from planned economic development will be adequately managed.

To meet the requirements of Article 5 of the EU Landfill Directive, Defra has put in place the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS), which represents the most significant driver for the development of municipal waste infrastructure in the

UK (Defra, 2005). Non-municipal waste streams – commercial and industrial (C&I), agricultural, hazardous, and construction and demolition (C&D) – are not included under LATS, but are subject to a range of other regulatory mechanisms. As a result, there may be a need either for additional capacity to be planned at municipal facilities, or for dedicated non-municipal waste projects to be developed.

In recognition of this potential need, East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) initiated research to provide information and guidance to support decision-makers to make “future-proofed” choices with regard to infrastructure development for non-municipal wastes. EMDA has responsibility for driving economic growth at a regional level (EMDA, 2005), and therefore, the approach developed to assess opportunities in Northamptonshire will be transferable to other sub-regions within the East Midlands and potentially others within the MKSM sub-region.

East Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA) produced a new Regional Waste Strategy (RWS) in January 2006 (EMRA, 2006), which includes growth projections and proposed actions for each waste stream at a regional level. This provides a clear indication of the direction of waste management in the region, but consideration of planning risk – widely regarded as the biggest stopper for project developers – is outside the scope of the strategy. The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) (EMRA, 2005) produced on behalf of Government Office for the East Midlands (GOEM) in March 2005 provides the most up-to-date guidance for local authority planning departments (GOEM, 2005), but is currently under review as a result of changes to planning requirements.

SLR Consulting Limited (SLR) has recently completed a waste planning study on behalf of EMRA (SLR, 2006) to inform the review of the RSS, the objective of which was to develop a realistic sub-regional pattern of waste management infrastructure (Enviros Consulting, 2005a,b) (for both municipal and non-municipal wastes). Although focused on the broader East Midlands, with specific regard to Northamptonshire the study recommended a centralised pattern of fewer larger facilities based around urban centres of economic growth. Fig. 1 contains information on the decision-making influences on non-MSW infrastructure development in Northamptonshire.

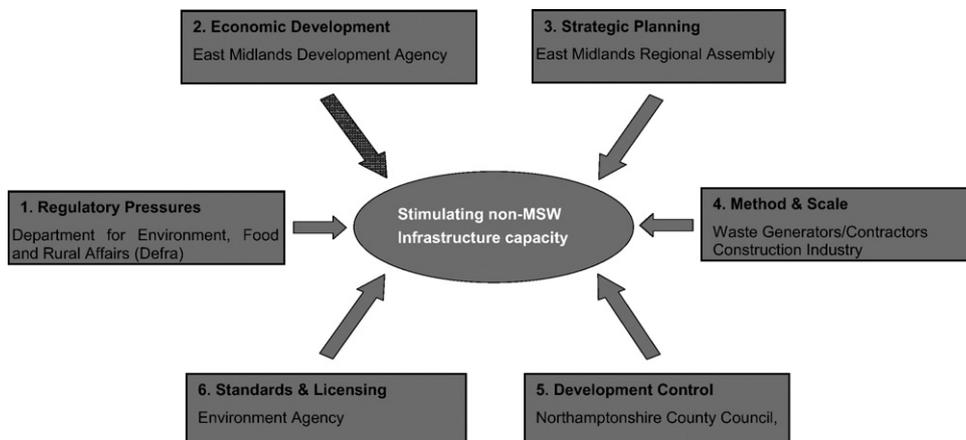


Fig. 1. Summary of decision-making influences on non-municipal waste infrastructure development in Northamptonshire.

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