

Blackbridge Tip



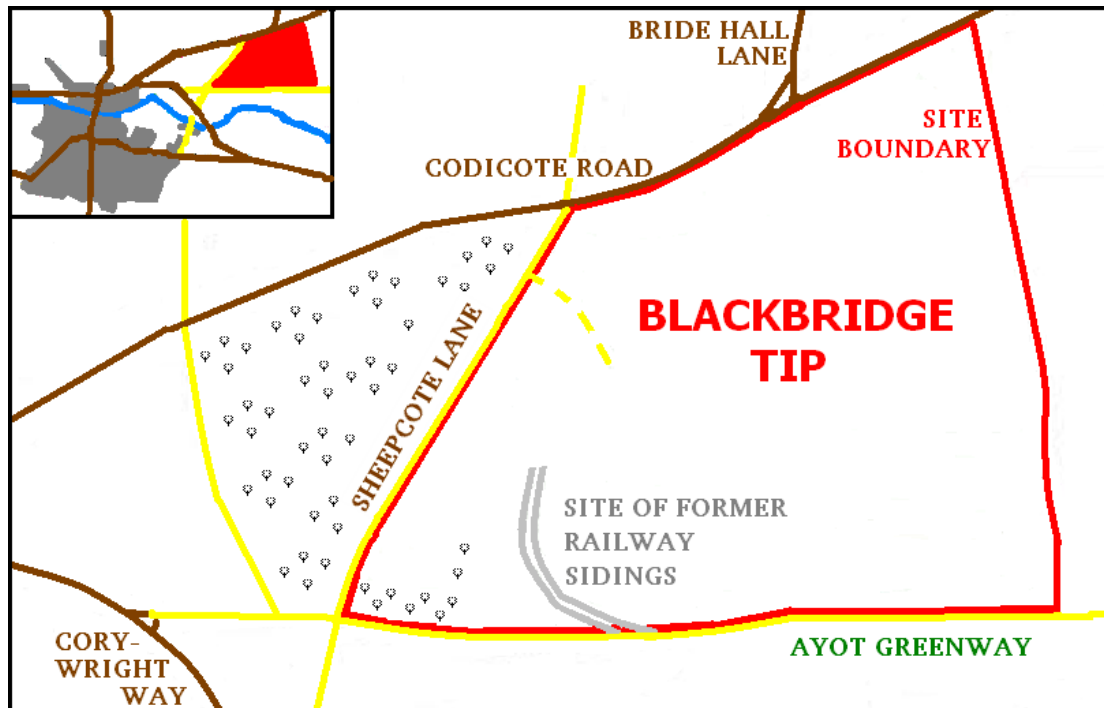
Local residents and long-standing members of WDPS will recall 'the battle of Blackbridge Tip' during the 1990s, when WDPS was instrumental in preventing Lafarge Redland's from re-opening the tip for what they called 'restoration'. This would have involved bringing 700,000 cubic metres of inert waste on to the site over a period of 5 years at a rate of 200 lorries a day along the Cory Wright Way bypass. When the tip closed in the mid 1970s, a legal agreement between Redland's, Hertfordshire County Council and the local District Council (known as the Tripartite Agreement) prohibited any future tipping on the site.

Wheathampstead people were concerned that, in addition to the dust, disturbance and pollution that would be caused by so many lorry movements, dumping more material on the site would compress the rotting waste beneath, causing leaching and pollution of the nearby River Lea. WDPS launched a major campaign to persuade the County Council to drop its support for the restoration scheme, and the District Council to enforce the Tripartite Agreement. Lafarge Redland's took the matter to the High Court and the Lands Tribunal to try to get the Agreement overturned, but the courts ruled in Wheathampstead's favour and the scheme was shelved.

Now Lafarge are trying to resurrect the scheme, as we discovered when the County Council issued its Waste Site Allocations – Issues and Preferred Options consultation document in November 2009. Appendix E of that document lists Blackbridge Tip as one of a number of proposed Re-Restoration Sites. No details are given of what 're-restoration' entails. There is no doubt, however, that if Blackbridge is included in the County Council's final Waste Site Allocations document, Lafarge will try to get it re-opened for



tipping. There is big money to be made out of providing facilities for the disposal of waste material.



The consultation period for the Waste Site Allocations document ended on 18 December, so it was important that we (and as many people as possible) submitted comments on the Blackbridge Tip proposal by then. In doing so, we argued that this proposal has been put forward little more than 10 years after the previous attempt to re-open the tip was defeated, and no details or justification for what is now being proposed have been provided on which a reasoned decision could be based.

Our response is reproduced below.

The next stage is that the County Council will consider all the representations that have been submitted in response to the Waste consultation document and then issue a revised version for further consultation. The final draft document will be examined by an independent Inspector at a public inquiry before finally being approved. This whole process could take many months and possibly a year or two.

If Blackbridge Tip appears in the final Waste Site Allocations document and Lafarge decide to proceed with a scheme for the site, they will still have to get planning permission and have the Tripartite Agreement modified or overturned. There is a long way to go before Blackbridge Tip can be re-opened.



WDPDS's response



Hertfordshire Minerals and Waste Development Framework Waste Site Allocations Issues and Preferred Options 2, November 2009

Appendix E of the consultation document includes Blackbridge Pit, Wheathampstead in the list of Re-Restoration Sites proposed. Paragraphs 3.17 - 3.19 of the document explain, in very general terms, what might be involved in 're-restoration'.

We are extremely surprised that Blackbridge Pit (Tip) has been put forward for consideration little more than 10 years after a previous attempt to re-open the tip for the dumping of a large amount of inert waste in order to 'restore' it was defeated in the High Court.

Operations at Blackbridge Tip ceased in 1975/76 after many years of tipping domestic, commercial and industrial waste on the site following gravel extraction. Restoration and landscaping works were to be carried out following cessation of tipping, but this was not completed to a satisfactory standard by Redland Aggregates Ltd, the company responsible. In 1973 a legal agreement (known as the Tripartite Agreement) had been entered into by Hertfordshire County Council, St Albans Rural District Council and Redland Gravel Ltd to the effect that all tipping activity at the site would cease without limit as to time.

In the 1990s, Redlands joined with the County Council and Groundwork Trust to produce a scheme that was presented as a restoration of the site, but in fact involved dumping 700,000 cubic metres of inert demolition waste on it over a period of five years. At that stage, the County Council, for reasons not clear to us, took the view that the tipping of this



material in order to create a new landscape was not use as a refuse disposal site, and was therefore not in breach of the Tripartite Agreement. This scheme would have involved 400 lorry movements a day along the B653 bypass, with lorries approaching from the east being prohibited from turning right into the site and therefore having to make a U-turn at the Station Road roundabout in order to turn left into the site.

Professor John Burland, an internationally renowned expert on soil mechanics, demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Environment Agency that depositing so much material on top of the putrescible and toxic materials in the tip would compress it to such an extent that leachate from the tip would percolate down to the River Lea and cause serious pollution.

These 'restoration' proposals provoked immense anger in Wheathampstead, in view of the high risk of environmental pollution and the disruption and pollution that would be caused by the HGV traffic. A major campaign was mounted by the Wheathampstead and District Preservation Society and other people to get the Tripartite Agreement enforced so that the tip could not be re-opened. Eventually, St Albans District Council (as the successor authority to the Rural District Council) was persuaded to take the matter to the High Court. In May 1998, the judge ruled against Redlands and upheld the Tripartite Agreement.

Lafarge Redland Aggregates (as they had become) then applied to the Lands Tribunal to have the Tripartite Agreement modified to allow tipping to resume. This was opposed by the District Council and, eventually, by the County Council. Faced with such determined opposition from the local community and by the local authorities, Lafarge Redlands withdrew the application and the matter came to a close.

The Waste Site Allocations consultation document provides no information about what is now envisaged for the re-restoration of Blackbridge Tip. We assume that the proposal has been put forward by Lafarge Aggregates. The public are being asked to comment on a proposal for which no details are available, and we can only assume that it will be similar to the scheme that was so comprehensively defeated last time.

It would be irresponsible of the County Council to allow the proposal in its present form to go forward in the final document for submission to the Secretary of State. If it did so, we would expect to be able to demonstrate at the examination stage that the document was unsound by virtue of its containing a site allocation for which there was insufficient evidence available to be able to make a reasoned judgement. At the very least, more detailed information needs to be provided about the proposal for Blackbridge Tip, and there should then be further public consultation on it.

Return to the website:

<http://www.wheathampsteadpreservation.org.uk/id6.html>