

ADLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL Chorley, Lancashire

ADLINGTON



TOWN COUNCIL

8 October 2024

Response to LCC Planning re LCC/2024/0023: for the erection of an Anaerobic Digester Unit (ADU) with associated infrastructure on land adjacent to Wigan Lane, Heath Charnock, Adlington

Adlington Town Council discussed this application at its meeting on Monday 23 September 2024. 35 residents attended to find out more and to express their concerns. The Town Council agreed to:

- Submit its initial response to **object** to this application for the reasons set out below and to
- Continue to work with adjacent local councils to jointly discuss the proposal, the responses submitted and/or reply to further information displayed on the LCC Planning Portal.

On behalf of residents in Lower Adlington, in particular, and the wider Adlington community, Adlington Town Council has summarised local concerns:

- About the proposal
- The issues it raises and
- The reasons why planning consent should be **refused**, and
- Has enclosed some aerial photos taken since the Town Council's meeting by a resident who is a licensed drone operator to illustrate local concerns. We are very grateful for his support.

1. About the proposal

Clerk to the Council: Ms Christine Bailey, 12, Berry Square, Blackrod, Bolton, BL6 5DU
Tel: 07896 729 646 Email: clerk@adlingtontowncouncil.co.uk

1.1 The application

J & B Woodcock & Sons want to construct and operate a very large anaerobic digester (AD) plant, along with necessary ancillary equipment, on-site infrastructure and associated works on a green field site adjacent to Wigan Lane in Heath Charnock next to the boundary with Adlington Town Council.

1.2 Access to the site

The site will be reached from the A5106, Wigan Lane by the current access road to the Chorley Sand and Aggregate quarry. This route is also used by the adjacent Yew Tree intensive dairy farm (photo A_512).



Photo A_512

1.3 What is an Anaerobic Digester (AD) Plant?

The AD plant will collect agricultural waste from nearby farms including manure from cows, poultry and spent crops. This will be broken down by bacteria to produce biogas and digestate. The biogas will generate renewable energy to power the AD plant. The digestate can be used as a fertiliser to improve soil condition.

The applicant proposes that any excess biogas will be sold and fed into the national grid by a pipeline. The pipeline will have to be constructed. If allowed, this would be an additional income stream for the AD plant operator.

The Town Council thinks the applicant is asking for permitted development rights for the pipeline. If this is granted, this suggests there would be no oversight or control of the route or of the construction of that the pipeline. Another local concern.

2. Objections to the proposal

On behalf of residents in Adlington, and having considered the application in detail, Adlington Town Council **objects** to the proposal for the following reasons:

2.1. Size and scale of operation

This is an **opportunistic** application due to adjacent Yew Tree Dairy Farm of 600 cows under intensive milk production, as a facility for use by two other farms owned/managed by members of the Woodcock family and, if allowed, to collect waste from other farms as a commercial business.

If well managed and on a small scale an AD plant can be a pioneering 'green solution,' to deal with waste from spent food and the intensive livestock industry.

On a larger commercial or 'industrial' scale, as proposed at Wigan Lane, its very scale, size, and the number of vehicular movements required to keep it going means that it would itself become a 'polluting' activity.

If granted, the current green field site would be covered in concrete to accommodate 8 processing tanks, each 32 m wide, two slurry tanks at 10m in diameter and associated on site equipment to operate at an intensive scale and to generate surplus power to be added to the national grid.

From the plan it is hard to determine the height of each of the processing tanks. The plan says there will be full screening of the site once the proposed planting matures. The planting will eventually surround the site on top of a 7m high concrete bund!

2.2 Incompatible with the residential nature of Lower Adlington

The potential public health and safety risks are of an AD plant are of greater concern when is close to residential properties. Online advice says in the UK, AD plants are NOT permitted to be within 200 m of residential property.

Potential adverse public health and safety risks will be from:

- Reduced or poor air quality, with dust and odours inevitable from the continual import of waste from adjacent and nearby farms including cow and poultry manure and spent crops, despite the holder tanks being fitted with lids. The 8 hour working day across 6 days per week and the prevailing wind will blow airborne materials towards Lower Adlington and beyond

- Pollution from traffic emissions during construction and in the scaling up of the operation to an expected 61 HGV movements per day for 6 days a week. At its maximum the AD plant will have a throughput of 400 tonnes of 'feedstock' per day
- Noise pollution from the operation of the AD plant
- The potential risk of biogas leakage, explosions or fires. The National Coal Authority has stated this as a 'Development High Risk' in its own response to the consultation due to previous open cast, shallow and deep mining in this locality close to the former Ellerbeck Colliery, where some shafts not even recorded at all, and
- Where any leakage or subsidence does occur, this may lead to contamination of the nearby water course, Eller Brook and the River Yarrow.

These potential additional public health and safety risks, coupled with the continuing operation of the adjacent sand quarry, could each impact significantly and negatively on Adlington residents' rights to enjoy quality of life, to be safe and healthy in their own homes and neighbourhoods and could impact adversely on the health of pupils at the nearby Adlington County Primary School, Park Road.

2.3 Residential proximity and quality of life are overlooked

There is no mention of any potential adverse impact specifically on **residential amenity** or on quality of life of those living nearby. Paragraph 2.1.6, page 5 of the non-technical Environmental Impact Statement refers to 'other dwellings and farmsteads' of which the closest is stated as Coppull Brow Farm approximately 250m to the south west of the Wigan Lane site.

Adlington Village is stated as the closest settlement, the western edge of which is claimed as approximately 400 m from the application site. The applicants' aerial photos 'screen out' the adjacent residential area of Lower Adlington as much as possible. The annotated overhead plan on page 4 of this Statement does not point out the Lower Adlington residential properties in the lower right hand edge of this photo.

Photo B_526 shows the closest residential properties in Lower Adlington, particularly on Castle Drive, on and off Castle House Lane and Carrington Road where, as the crow flies, residents say their homes would be within 200m of the proposed AD plant and also in close proximity to the sand quarry excavation works.



Photo B_526

Photo C_538 shows the potential wider impact on all residents living off Park Road, pupils at Adlington County Primary School, Park Road, and on future residents given the imminent construction of 25 new build homes, allowed on appeal, as an extension of Carrington Road.



Photo C_538

Paragraph 5.1.3 and Table 5.1 of the non-technical Environmental Impact Statement does not refer any proposed mitigation measures for the AD plant in respect of residential or quality of life amenity at all. The proposals are deemed adequate.

The public right of way, FP 13, is a very popular local walk which runs alongside the northern edge of the site from Lower Adlington (photo D_458). Walkers on this footpath would experience the most visual impact from the proposed AD plant despite the proposed screening of the site and a 7m bund.



Photo D_458

Failure to comply with planning legislation

2.4 Inappropriate development in the Green Belt

The site is located in the Green Belt on Grade 3 agricultural land. The proposal does not meet any of the exceptions to inappropriate development as set out at paragraphs 154 and 155 of the key National Planning and Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2023.

The site is an open green field. (Photo D_458) The AD plant would result in significant built form (the application plan).

2.5. No 'Very Special Circumstances,' Paragraph 153 of the NPPF

"When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not

exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”

In the Town Council’s opinion the AD plant would not preserve openness nor would it comply with any of the exceptions to inappropriate development in the Green Belt. By definition it would be ‘harmful’.

2.6 Paragraph 156 of the NPPF, December 2023 states

“When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources”

The applicant argues that the surplus gas they produce could be fed into the wider network as a reason for ‘special circumstances’.

The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate the benefits of the development do NOT outweigh the Green Belt harm. In the Town Council’s opinion, the planning application, the Environmental Impact and Transport statements and other supporting information on the LCC website do not evidence either a ‘very special’ nor a ‘wider environmental benefits’ case for the AD plant on the Wigan Lane site. Consent should be refused.

2.7 Not compatible with LCC’s WM2 Minerals and Waste Local Plan

The concerns about the potential impact on residential and local amenity, set out above, are supported by policy DM2 of the Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013. [Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan](#)

The Wigan Lane site for use as an AD plant is not within LCC’s WM2 Minerals and Waste Local Plan, dated September 2013 and technically effective up to 2021. Potentially more suitable sites in the Plan are cited at Redscar and Riversway.

Though dated, the Plan has not been replaced. It is still in operation in terms of its core strategic policies, CS5 and CS9. These state that minerals or waste developments will be supported where the applicant can demonstrate that their proposals as appropriate and they will make a positive contribution to the:

- Local and wider economy
- Historic environment
- Bio-diversity, geodiversity and landscape character
- Residential amenity of those living nearby
- Reduction of carbon emissions
- Reduction in the length and number of journeys made

Adlington Town Council does not consider this case has been demonstrated by the proposal for an AD plant off Wigan Lane.

2.8 Impact on local roads

Given the significant scale and size of the proposed operation, the AD plant will need to bring-in 'import' and take away 'export' surplus products. The Town Council agrees with LCC Highways Authority that the applicant has not adequately assessed the highway impact.

The site location is not particularly well situated to gain access to the main roads and strategic highway network. The impact of additional heavy traffic – 27 ton HGV vehicles generated on unsuitable local roads is of concern given that at its maximum a throughput of 400 tonnes a day of 'feedstock' to be delivered through 61 traffic movements is anticipated.

Residents in Adlington are particularly concerned about the additional HGV traffic which will be generated, using Rawlinson Lane as a short cut, whether this is an approved traffic route or not, and then travelling on the A6 towards an extremely busy section of mixed residential, commercial and industrial activities in Lower Adlington Village.

Some HGV traffic will use Wigan Lane, but the AD plant is envisaged as having up to 305 two-way HGV movements per week, some 15,870 per year. The applicant's consultants, RSK suggest these additional traffic movements will be 'unnoticeable' on the local highway network. Residents of Lower Adlington and the Town Council do not agree with this!

2.9 Is there any benefit for the immediate community?

The AD plant does not indicate any local community beneficial spin-offs during or after construction plus the applicant requests permitted development rights to link the proposal to the national electricity grid. What route will this take and with what impact? There is no suggestion or offer to the local community of being able to access locally generated electricity at a reduced price cost as some recompense for local disruption and the reduction in quality of life if this application is approved.

2.10 No Local employment generation

RSK's Transport Statement suggests there will be 5 workers attending on site. The planning application does not mention the number of jobs created at all. Neither is local employment generation a beneficial spin off.

2.11 The Environment Agency's response to the planning application

The Environment Agency says it has no objection to the Wigan Lane proposal.

The management of the facility is regulated through a separate permit procedure that the applicant has to apply for which is handled by the Environment Agency. This procedure is not

subject to any public consultation. Once granted quality control and compliance is dependent on the operator.

The Town Council will copy the MP, Sir Lindsay Hoyle into this letter, and will ask him to oversee this aspect of the procedure on behalf of the Adlington community.

2.12 Visual impact and screening

In time – some 10-15 years plus, the applicant says there will be full screening of the site once the proposed planting matures. The public right of way, FP 13, which runs alongside the northern edge of the site, will have the most visual intrusion from the AD plant despite the proposed screening of the site and a 7m bund.

2.13 LCC Ecology Report

The LCC Ecology Report suggests that potential pollution impact of Eller Brook is of concern together with the need for further investigation of several main ecological issues arising from the proposal which relate to the local designated *statutory sites of scientific interest* (SSSI) sites including:

- West Pennine, Wrightington Bar and Charnock Richard Pasture SSSIs
- The non-statutory designated site of the Ellerbeck Colliery Biological Heritage Site
- For protected species and their habitats, including: Great Crested newts, bats, otters, birds, and
- The priority protected species of: common toad, brown hare and hedgehog
- Invasive species
- Biodiversity net gain.

2.14 Prevailing westerly winds

The prevailing westerly winds will blow any odours and dust particles from the site towards the Adlington community.

2.15. Lack of open public consultation

Residents in Lower Adlington told the Town Council that:

- LCC Planning department carried out a very poorly targeted, minimal public consultation to raise awareness of the proposal with no-one in Lower Adlington being informed until some residents who had been contacted began to spread the word. The Adlington Ward Councillors then helped by hand delivering a letter in Lower Adlington. Word of mouth and social media have now helped to increase local awareness of the proposal
- They are disappointed that the applicant has not arranged for its own consultants to give a public presentation to explain the proposals, answer questions and encourage collective

discussion. This would have been a more open, community-orientated way to consider the merits of the proposal and any 'green' credentials

- The thoroughness of the separate operational permit process managed by the Environment Agency is not subject to public consultation
- They need more time, information and advice on the planning procedure: who to contact; how to do this; how a decision will be made, when and by whom; the indicative timescale etc
- Whether a site visit will take place and can residents speak to LCC Planning Committee members during the site visit?

3. A joint local approach

At its meeting, Adlington Town Council agreed that it would:

- Prepare and submit its initial response to the LCC Planning portal
- Make this and other relevant information available to the public on its own website and in Adlington Library for the public to read and use to make their own views known to LCC Planning as soon as possible before a decision is made
- It would update those who attended the Town Council's meeting on 23 September 2024
- Invite Heath Charnock and Coppull Parish Councils who surround the site to come together to discuss the proposal, any further information available on the LCC Planning portal and to work together to speak as one voice, to keep the public updated and help them to respond
- Ask LCC Planning if the LCC Councillor for Adlington, a Ward Councillor and a representative of each of the local councils affected by the proposal could join the site visit to speak to LCC's Planning Committee
- Provide the LCC Planning department's contact details for residents to get more information and to directly submit their own views.

4. In Conclusion

Adlington Town Council asks LCC Planning Committee to:

- Take into consideration these detailed and evidenced reasons to refuse this application,
- Respond to the concerns of residents which you have and will continue to receive, and to
- Agree that the LCC Councillor for the Adlington District, the Ward and a local Councillor for each of the three local councils which include or adjoin the application site be invited to join the site visit to speak to LCC's Planning Committee **before** a decision is made on this application.

This response is submitted on behalf of Adlington Town Council, with the aerial photographs numbered 458, 512, 526 and 538 taken by a resident who is a licenced drone operator.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Bailey,
Clerk to Adlington Town Council