

**COUNCIL
28 NOVEMBER 2024**

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The following motion has been submitted, due notice of which has been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

To be moved by Councillor Jon Clayden and seconded by Councillor Louise Peace

Motion on Hitchin Industrial Estate Fires

The Hitchin area has recently been plagued by a series of industrial fires associated with metal recycling facilities within the industrial area to the north of the town. Most recently, a fire broke out on the industrial estate on the 8th of November 2024 at around 2:30am, producing a plume of smoke and steam that was visible across a wide area for much of the day, and affected local residents including children on their way to school. Fires also occurred in the same area in September 2024, July 2024, February 2024 and December 2023.

In response to these fires, there have been multiple calls for action in the press from Hitchin and Ickleford councillors, and the MP for Hitchin, across political parties and over several months. There has, however, been no intervention from the Environment Agency in response to these calls that members have been made aware of, despite their increasing urgency. Since the Environment Agency licences the recycling operators it has the authority to review or revoke their licences, but has not exercised this authority.

These fires put residents at risk of harm due to the significant air pollution they produce, which is spread over a wide area, and would be expected to be worsened by repeated exposure. The amount of air pollution present is, however, not quantifiable in the absence of systematic monitoring. Given the quantities of water needed to put them out, and the proximity of the River Hiz, they also threaten our precious chalk streams, which are already under pressure.

Council reiterates the importance of recycling to a sustainable North Herts, but clarifies unambiguously that this must not be at the expense of residents' long-term health.

Council acknowledges with gratitude the efforts of the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in responding to, containing and extinguishing these fires each time they occur, and investigating their causes. It nevertheless notes that these investigations have not led to meaningful reduction in the recent frequency of these potentially harmful fires, indicating that management of the associated risks appears to be ineffective or impossible.

Council therefore resolves to

- 1. Instruct the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health to write promptly to the Environment Agency, to express North Herts Council's serious concerns about the safety of recycling sites on the Hitchin industrial estate, and request that their operators' licences be reviewed urgently;**
- 2. Work proactively to instigate a system of air quality monitoring in the residential areas closest to the industrial estate;**

- 3. Further instruct the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health to report back to Council within six months with details of any action that has been taken by the competent authorities in the intervening period to monitor pollution and mitigate the risks of future fires.**

Proposed by: Councillor Jon Clayden

Seconded by: Councillor Louise Peace