

Recycling centre closure to be decided behind closed doors

The future of an East Lothian recycling centre will be decided behind closed doors next week as councillors are asked to shut it down for good.

Macmerry Recycling Centre has been mothballed since October last year in a cost-cutting measure by cash-strapped East Lothian Council.

Now plans to permanently shut it will be presented to a meeting of elected members with officers arguing it is surplus to requirement.

Nearly 2,000 people signed a petition calling for the centre to be reopened, which was rejected by the local authority's petitions committee at a hearing last month.

Raised by Conservative South Scotland MSP Craig Hoy, a meeting of the committee saw council leader Norman Hampshire, who is on record as saying the county needs a new additional recycling centre, accuse the former Haddington councillor Mr Hoy of launching the petition for "political purposes".

Mr Hoy denied the accusation saying he acted after being approached by many local residents concerned by the loss of the facility and increase in fly tipping in the area.

The petitions committee rejected the call to reopen the centre

insisting it should remain closed.

Now a meeting of all councillors will be asked to back officers recommendation to close it permanently.

Discussion over the proposal will be held in private due, the council says, to 'commercially sensitive' information surrounding the disposal of the site.

Craig Hoy MSP said: "I am concerned by the news that East Lothian Council is moving forward with plans to permanently close the Macmerry Recycling Centre. Despite significant public support and in spite of the rejection of my petition to reopen the site, this decision marks the final nail in the coffin for the facility.

"It is disappointing to see the SNP and Labour pressing ahead with this closure, ignoring the clear wishes from the community to retain a popular recycling service in the area. To make matters worse, this decision is being made behind closed doors, because of the 'commercially sensitive' nature of the decision. This approach stinks and simply erodes the public's trust in the process.

"The Conservative group on East Lothian Council proposed alternative budget plans that could have kept the site open. This was a missed opportunity by Labour and the SNP to show that the council is listening to residents' needs."

However a council spokesperson confirmed the proposal being put to councillors is a permanent closure of the centre.

They said: "On reviewing operational requirements and associated costs for the site at Macmerry, officers are recommending its permanent closure and that it is declared surplus to requirements. A decision will be for elected members to take.

"In a challenging financial environment in which it is likely

that there will be a requirement for East Lothian Council to continue making savings, the closure would result in a one-off saving of £53,000 and a recurring annual saving of £62,000.”

The council added it continues to operate recycling sites at North Berwick and Dunbar, as well as its modern centre Kinwegar at Musselburgh seven days a week as well as continuing to offer a bulky waste uplift to residents.

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter