Andrea Speranza

Robert Brigden
Planning Department
Leeds City Council
Civic Hall
Calverley Street
Leeds
LS1 1UR

30 June 2010 .

Dear Robert Brigden,

Re: plans by Rocpower Ltd to build a Biofuel Power Generation Plant at Warren Lane, Bramham, Leeds, LS24 9NU. Reference 10/02274/FU.

I am writing on behalf of Biofuelwatch to object to the plans submitted by Rocpower Ltd to build a Biofuel Power Generation Plant at Warren Lane, Bramham, Leeds, LS24 9NU, which is to burn vegetable and other plant oils, including palm oil, as stated in the Environmental Statement.This will not be used cooking oil, except, possibly, for a small amount during engine start-up.

Biofuelwatch is concerned about:

1) The impacts of the additional demand for liquid biofuels which would be created by this power station on the global climate; on communities in the global South and on the life-support systems which underpin global biodiversity.

2) Additional air pollution resulting from the operation of the proposed Power Generation Plant which poses a threat to the health of local residents, students and staff at the nearby Tadcaster School and Bramham Primary School.

3) Impacts of additional air pollution and greatly increased traffic on nearby biodiversity. We understand that the development is inside the greenbelt, another ground why we believe it should be rejected.

4) Rocpower has provided insufficient information to show that the fuel would comply with sustainability standards set out in the EU Renewable Energy Directive, which will have to be translated into UK law by next year. Non-compliance with those standards would result in the power station not being eligible to count towards any renewable energy targets and not being eligible for any subsidies, putting the economic viability of the scheme into the question, as would the, very possible, withdrawal of UK subsidies for liquid biofuels.

We would also note that the power station would be extremely inefficient, with a mere 35% efficiency, compared to a possible 80% or more for combined heat and power plants.

The applicant is also proposing five other similar developments in the region, totalling a generating capacity of approximately 60MW. We are concerned that this approach has meant that each development could be viewed as small-scale with insignificant environmental impacts; whereas a single 60MW plant would be considered a major development and require extensive assessment including an EIA. For this reason we believe each should be considered as a subsidiary part of the whole and treated as though it were a major development. Below are further details to our objection.

1) Impacts on climate change, biodiversity and wider sustainable development:

We believe that the proposed development will have significant adverse environmental, social and economic impacts at local and global level. We believe these should be treated as material considerations in determining this application.

Rocpower directly mentions palm oil as one example of fuel they intend to burn in Leeds. Another type of plant oil cited by this company is tall oil a by product of pulp and paper production. However, tall oil supplies are very limited and not widely used for heat and power anywhere in the world. Furthermore, tall oil is already fully used by other industries - it is not a waste product. We have been advised by Barnsley Metropolitan Council that Rocpower has so far been unable to run its Wakefield Biofuel Power Generation Plant on tall oil and has resorted to using biodiesel of unspecified origin, though soybean and palm oil constitute a significant proportion of overall biodiesel supplies in the UK. They have not succeeded in running their Wakefield power station on tall oil long enough to obtain emissions data requested by Barnsley Council.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, palm oil is the biggest driver of deforestation in Malaysia and Indonesia, see:

http://www.unep-wcmc.org/resources/publications/LastStand.htm

Largely due to Europe's growing demand for biofuels, the Indonesian government is planning to expand oil palm plantations by 20 million hectares. According to Wetlands International, over half of all new oil palm concessions in Indonesia and Malaysia are on peatlands. In order to grow oil palms, the peat is drained and this commits all of the carbon sequestered in the peat to the atmosphere. Plantation companies commonly set fires to speed up the process.

Peat expert Professor Florian Siegert of Munich University estimated that the emissions from such fires accounted for 15% of all global greenhouse gas emissions in 2006. And Professor Siegert said the following about the use of palm oil for generating heat and power in Germany:

> "We were able to prove that the making of these plantations and the burning of the rain forests and peat areas emits many thousands of times as much CO2 as we then are able to prevent by using palm oil. And that is a disastrous balance for the climate." See: http://de.indymedia.org/2007/03/170912.shtml

Several recent peer-reviewed scientific papers report that the overall impact of burning biofuels is actually worse for the climate than burning equivalent amounts of fossil fuels. This is due to the strong global warming impact of nitrogen fertilisers used in growing industrial-scale biofuels, and to the large amounts of carbon dioxide emitted when natural ecosystems and healthy soils are turned into biofuel plantations:

A study by Joseph Fargione et al shows that converting rainforests, peatlands, savannas, or grasslands to produce food-based biofuels, such as palm oil and soy in Brazil, Southeast Asia, and the United States creates a 'biofuel carbon debt' by releasing many times more CO_2 than the annual greenhouse gas reductions these biofuels achieve by displacing fossil fuels. Joseph Fargione of the University of Minnesota calculated that biofuel from palm oil grown on forest land leaves a carbon debt of 86 years and for palm oil grown on peat land this figure increases to 840 years.

Official statistics currently omit all 'indirect land use change' emissions despite a major Government report (the Gallagher Review in 2008), identifying them as one of the main drawbacks of crop-based fuels:

www.dft.gov.uk/rfa/reportsandpublications/reviewoftheindirecteffectsofbiofuels.cfm .

Without taking account of these large direct and indirect land use change emissions, it is not possible to accurately assess the full environmental impact of producing biofuels, and it is therefore presumptuous to describe them as sustainable.

According to Watch Indonesia!, 45 million people in Indonesians depend on rainforests for their livelihoods. Oil palm plantations could eventually create up to 10 million jobs but this would leave 35 million people destitute. Evictions are common; many of them violent, and according to the Indonesian NGO Sawit Watch, there are already 576 land conflicts in Indonesia linked to oil palm plantations: www.sawitwatch.or.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=79&Itemid=64&lang=english .

Pesticide poisoning leading to acute and chronic illness and even death is common on oil palm plantations and often involves pesticides which have been banned in the EU because of the health risks, such as the highly toxic Paraquat.

A World Bank report in 2008 indicated that biofuels caused 75% of global food price inflation:
www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/jul/03/biofuels.renewableenergy .

According to a United Nation report, food prices are set to rise as much as 40% over coming decade amid growing demand from emerging markets and for biofuel production: www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/jun/15/food-prices-rise-un-repor

Moreover, many thousands of species are threatened with extinction as a result of deforestation. NGOs including Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the Centre for Orangutan Protection have shown that even those palm oil companies who are members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil are also responsible for the destruction of Orangutan habitat.

From next year, the UK government will not be able to subsidise biofuels which do not meet standards set out in the EU Renewable Energy Directive and once which fail the standards will not be allowed to count towards any renewable energy targets either. EU legislation ignores key factors that are frequently associated with overseas biofuel production: all human rights abuses, increases in food prices and in the number of people going hungry, abusive working conditions and slavery-like conditions - common for example amongst Indonesian migrant workers on oil palm plantations in Malaysia. Nonetheless, as we shall discuss further below, there are serious doubts over

Rocpower's ability to comply with those standards. This means that the development cannot be assumed to contribute towards renewable energy targets inYorkshire.

Regarding renewable energy policies, Planning Policy Statement 22: Renewable Energy (PPS22) states as one its key principles that:

> '(iv) The wider environmental and economic benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects, whatever their scale, are material considerations that should be given significant weight in determining whether proposals should be granted planning permission.'

Biofuelwatch believe that if wider environmental benefits are to be treated as material considerations in considering a planning application, then so should wider environmental impacts.

PPS22 also states that:

> 'Renewable energy developments should demonstrate any environmental, economic and social benefits as well as how any environmental and social impacts have been minimised through careful consideration of location, scale, design and other measures.'

In our view, the use of large volumes of imported vegetable oil, including palm oil, for this application is totally incompatible with the requirement to ensure that "environmental and social impacts have been minimised". As for design, a particularly inefficient technology has been chosen by Rocpower.

> Planning Policy Statement 23: Planning and Pollution Control, confirms that 'any considerations of the quality of land, air, water and potential impacts arising from development, possibly leading to impacts on health are capable of being material considerations in the determination of planning applications.'

The wording of PPS23 does not limit the geographical scope of 'potential impacts'. In our view therefore, the wider environmental and social impacts of palm oil production, which include adverse impacts on the quality of land, air and water in producing countries as well as on the health of indigenous people, should be treated as material considerations for determining this application.

Local planning policy further shows that climate change and wider impacts on sustainability should be considered when determining planning applications. For example, the Leeds Strategic Plan states has as an objective a reduced ecological footprint through responding to environmental and climate change. Rocpower's proposal, on the other hand would increase the ecological footprint.

2). Air pollution

The air quality assessment submitted by Rocpower confirms that the emissions of NO2 and small particulates will "not be insignificant". NO2, PM10 and PM 2.5 as well as formaldehyde and other PAHs emitted from the burning of biofuels are linked to respiratory and cardiac disease and, in the case of PAHs, associated with cancer and birth defects. It should be noted that PM2.5 is expected to be included in revised EU legislation as an additional pollutant to be monitored and controlled to take effect from 2011at the latest. The likely PM 2.5 emissions from the Plant should therefore be modelled and assessed in anticipation of the new legal limits.

It is also relevant to add that there is major uncertainty over the figures used for modelling given that no tall oil emission figures appear to actually have been obtained as yet. Rockpower appear not to have modelled it for the full range of vegetable oils which they say they intend to use.

We are very concerned about the effects of additional air pollution, in particular on people living at Headley Hall Farm (15 houses); Wise Warren Farm (3 houses); the Farmhouse at Spen Common Farm -All properties which belong to the University of Leeds- We are also concerned about pupils and staff at Tadcaster Grammar School, Bramham Primary School; staff and visitors at Bramham Park and the playing fields.

We understand that the site lies within the west Yorkshire Green Belt and fails to meet the requirement for such development as set out in national planning policy.

This proposal is also detrimental to the flora and fauna of the area as Biofuel Power Generation Plants increase NOx and nitrogen deposition which affects local ecosystems. This is particularly relevant if we take into account that nearby the proposed Biofuel Plant, woodland covers nearly 500 hectares of the Bramham Park. This Estate has a range of important plant communities (235 species) and it is home to an extensive population of foxes, badgers, hares, weasels, roe deer, breeding pairs of red kites and several breeding pairs of buzzards. The level and type of traffic to be generated by Rocpower proposal would affect seriously the local wildlife.

Moreover the proposed Biofuel Power Plant will cause pollution which will harm the farming activities on the University of Leeds 's farm -where a considerable amount of ecological and agronomic work is carrying out- as well as the farming activities on on Bramham Estate.

3).The Plant may not be financially viable

Electricity generation from bio-liquids is only financially viable because high levels of subsidies have recently been made available for this type of operation under the UK Renewable Obligation. The EU Renewable Energy Directive (DIRECTIVE 2009/28/EC), makes these subsidies contingent on the sustainability of fuel.

Rocpower have supplied no evidence to suggest that they can meet the new European standards which will be compulsory in respect of subsidies and eligibility to count towards renewable energy targets in the UK from next year. Apart from tall oil, which as discussed above is in very short supply, it appears highly unlikely that any of the other fuels they might consider, let alone types of palm oil, would qualify as a 'residue' under EU legislation. Yet Rocpower state in their sourcing policy: ' It is not possible for Rocpower to influence the purchasing or production policy of the major food, oleo-chemical and paper process businesses that are the primary purchasers and producers of the source virgin oils for the various production processes'. This suggests that they have developed no sourcing policy compliant with EU legislation. Accordingly, their eligibility for ROCs from next year is very doubtful. Furthermore, a recent government consultation paper on the grandfathering of bioenergy states that the government considers not to grandfather ROCs for liquid biofuels because of concerns that using those for electricity may not be the best way for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Although we believe that this reason downplays the serious negative effect biofuels have on climate change, it is nonetheless clear that long-term subsidies are far from guaranteed even for biofuels that meet RED standards.

Without subsidy, it will be uneconomic for Rocpower Ltd to operate the proposed Power Generation Plant.

Yours sincerely,

Andrea Speranza

Biofuelwatch