

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Function:</u>	Operations, Waste & Recycling Service
<u>Date:</u>	21/12/22
<u>Title of Update:</u>	Altens East Recycling & Resource Facility Fire Update
<u>Report Author:</u>	Pam Walker, Waste & Recycling Manager
<u>Chief Officer:</u>	Mark Reilly, Chief Officer, Operations & Protective Services
<u>Contact Details:</u>	PWalker@aberdeencity.gov.uk

UPDATE

The purpose of this briefing is to provide an update to the Committee members on the contingency arrangements and the rebuild progress following the serious fire at Altens East Recycling & Resource Facility on 8th July 2022.

1.0 Background

The Council's Altens East Recycling & Resource Facility was severely damaged due to a serious fire over the weekend of 8th July 2022.

The fire resulted in the entire facility being out of use since that date and all Council operations were relocated that same weekend.

The facility housed:

- The Council's waste and recycling collection service (including around 170 operational staff, 20 management/support staff and 57 refuse collection vehicles plus vans).
- The materials recycling facility (MRF) that sorted and processed all of the recyclable materials from Aberdeen and also from other authorities.
- A refuse derived fuel (RDF) facility for processing residual waste which was sent to northern Europe as fuel for energy from waste facilities (this was due to be de-commissioned ahead of the Ness Energy facility coming onstream).
- Office and welfare accommodation for SUEZ operational staff who ran the MRF/RDF and also their management and support staff.
- Office accommodation for the Environment Team.
- Storage and garage space for grounds maintenance and street cleansing equipment.
- An evidence store for the Trading Standards team.

The Altens facility is owned by Aberdeen City Council, however the RDF and MRF facilities are operated by SUEZ as part of the waste management services contract. The collection services are operated by Aberdeen City Council.

The facility has been out of commission since the fire in July, the cause of the fire was deemed accidental and CCTV footage of the actual fire starting in the mixed recycling reception hall was publicly released in December (see link to video at end of this update). All fire suppression and alarm systems operated as they should, and the fire service arrived on site quickly but despite this the fire was not able to be brought under control.

Since that date, the displaced services for both the Council and SUEZ have been operating under contingency arrangements with all services impressively being back up and running with only 1 day of missed collection.

Unfortunately, the loss of the MRF and RDF has resulted in a significant number of the SUEZ operational team being made redundant. The Council provided assistance and support through this process to help those affected staff to apply for any suitable employment opportunities in ACC. No ACC roles were affected by the fire.

Some photographs of the facility have been provided as an appendix to this document for information.

2.0 Contingency Arrangements

2.1 ACC Waste & Recycling Service

The waste and recycling collection service is currently operating from Kittybrewster depot with office space for the operational supervisory and management teams being made available also.

However, there is pressure to vacate Kittybrewster due to the impending Berryden Corridor Project, and the space and welfare facility limitations that are not ideal for the service/staff. In addition, the additional parking and traffic movement pressures require to be carefully managed.

Work is underway to move the service (collection vehicles and staff) back to Altens in temporary accommodation that will be located in the lorry park area of the site. It is hoped that this will be complete by late January/early February 2023.

The remaining office/support staff have access to some desk space at Marischal College, or are working from home.

2.2 Waste & Recycling Treatment & Disposal Services (SUEZ)

The contract for the treatment of ACCs residual (black bin) waste at the time of the fire sat under the SUEZ contract and following the fire this material was diverted to Slattie Waste Transfer Station at Bucksburn whereafter it was transferred to Stoneyhill landfill site (which is owned by SUEZ) near Peterhead.

The Slattie facility is also owned by ACC but operated by SUEZ under the contract. Prior to the fire this facility handled the food and garden waste and other materials such as street sweepings, wood, carpets, white goods, etc. As a result of the increase in residual waste now coming through the site, some of these other operations have been compromised (reducing the ability to separate some materials as they were previously). There are also significant additional traffic pressures on the site and these are also being carefully managed.

The residual waste contract with SUEZ has since terminated and the new Ness Energy Contract is now responsible for the Council's residual waste. However, due to delays with the opening of the Ness facility, SUEZ are continuing to handle this material as a contingency operation until the energy from waste facility opens next year.

The mixed recyclables that previously were sorted for recycling at Altens are now being delivered to a local contractor in Aberdeen where they are then loaded onto bulk haulage and sent south to Hartlepool for sorting and processing. SUEZ remain responsible for the treatment of this material and have negotiated these contingency arrangements. However, the authority is more at risk of increased processing cost and rejection of material due to the vagaries of the processing and recycling markets. Altens was purpose-built to handle and deal with the Aberdeen mixed recycling material stream.

These temporary arrangements mean services can continue in the meantime but these arrangements are compromising the Council's ability to maintain its performance in terms of recycling rates and diversion of waste from landfill and the indications are that our recycling rate may drop again this year, albeit it has already been impacted by Covid and the changes that has brought to waste and recycling habits and waste composition and arisings.

2.3 Environment Service and Trading Standards

The Environment Service have relocated their equipment and staff to various other depots around the city, however this continues to present operational challenges and is regarded as a temporary solution.

The Trading Standards Team have removed their items from the Altens office building and have found a temporary alternative storage facility elsewhere.

2.4 Altens Rebuild and Repair

Work is ongoing to discuss the future of the facility. Currently, it is anticipated that both the office accommodation (which was mainly smoke damaged) and the southern end of the main facility (the RDF shed, around one-third of the large warehouse building), may be salvageable. The MRF (which occupied the other two-thirds of the shed) is destroyed and demolition began on 14th November, this is expected to take around 20 weeks.

The SUEZ team are currently operating from temporary accommodation in the staff car park area of the facility. There is still no mains power and so generators are being used to power these offices.

2.5 Altens Office Building

The office building did not suffer any fire damage, but was affected by smoke/heat, there was a very effective fire wall between the office and MRF building which responded very well. However, it is apparent that the building has suffered some movement as a result of the fire and there is evidence of cracks in walls and movement in door frames, etc. Further structural surveys will be required to assess to extent of that damage. The office is attached to the main MRF building and as such this has caused movement.

The demolition process will detach the MRF from the office and once that is done further surveys will be carried out. In the meantime, dehumidifiers and heaters have been installed to protect the building from further damage and the ceiling tiles have been removed to allow for further inspection. The building is currently inaccessible due to the demolition works.

2.6 Materials Recycling Facility

The building and the equipment contained within (conveyors, sorting equipment, baler, etc) are all destroyed. Demolition of the MRF including removal of the equipment is underway. SUEZ and ACC have commenced the work on preparing the specification for the replacement facility. The MRF will be rebuilt to a similar standard as before although there may be scope to make some amendments to the process to take account of future and current legislative requirements and changes. Being that the facility was only 5 years old the facility was of high standard.

2.7 Refuse Derived Fuel Facility

The adjoining RDF facility was less damaged than the MRF part of the building, however, this will also require further structural surveys to confirm its future. It is currently thought that it may be salvageable in some form but this is not yet confirmed. Again, further surveys will be carried out when the MRF building has been demolished and detached from the RDF shed. The equipment within the RDF shed (shredder, eddy current/magnet and bale wrapper) were also fire damaged and are currently undergoing further surveys to determine whether these are repairable or not.

3.0 Summary

In summary, the following is the current position:

- The MRF is destroyed and currently being demolished
- The RDF end of the building may be salvageable and work continues to confirm whether this is the case
- The office building may also be salvageable but further structural surveys will be required once the MRF has been demolished (and detached from the office building) to ascertain its condition
- There is still no mains power on the site
- The collection service is cuckooed into Kittybrewster depot but planning to move back to Altens in temporary accommodation
- SUEZ are working from temporary accommodation in the Altens car park
- The recyclables are still being recycled but being tipped locally at a private contractor waste transfer facility in Aberdeen before onward transport to a processing facility in Hartlepool
- The residual waste is being landfilled at Stoneyhill until the new Ness Energy Facility comes online next year
- Work is underway to progress the replacement facility

Pam Walker
Waste & Recycling Manager

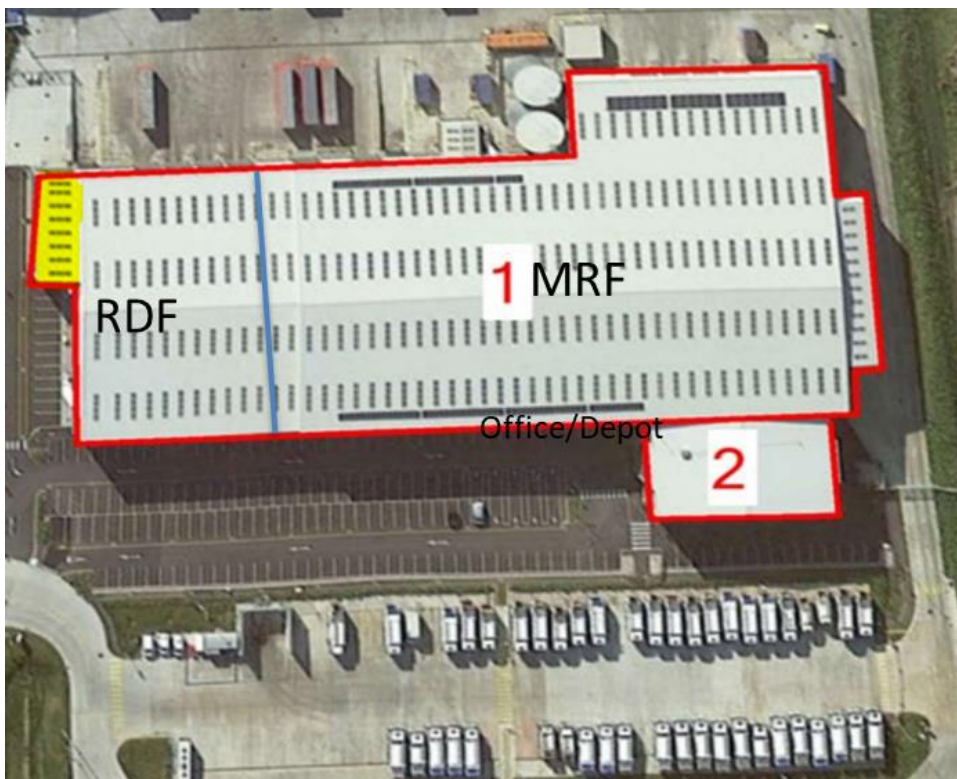
Link to video:

<https://youtu.be/6l94tWf3XZE>

APPENDIX



Altens East Facility pre-fire



Altens layout



Altens offices post-fire – firewall did its job very well



Inside MRF before and after fire



External photo, post fire.



Overall site – note the condition of the RDF building on the left compared to the MRF building.