

Statement by Rebecca Kemp, 13 Pauls Mead, Portland DT5 1JZ

I'm here to read a statement on behalf of plot-holders at the Incline Gardens and Community Orchard. These community gardens are perched on the hillside in line with the top of the proposed incinerator stack, less than a mile from the Port, so we're directly affected by the outcome of this planning inquiry.

The Incline Gardens are a community space, set up from scratch by local people in 2009. Led by Tammy Arundel, who still gardens at the Incline today, brambles were cleared and the land was reclaimed for food-growing. Thanks to a huge amount of graft, Tammy's vision of an orchard, a community garden and rows of healthy vegetables became a reality, and the Incline Gardens are now a haven where people can grow chemical-free crops while enjoying fresh air and plenty of exercise in a beautiful coastal landscape. Today's plot-holders range from families with young children to people in their 70s and 80s, from novice gardeners to experts. We absolutely love gardening as a community and we share our produce, not just with each other, but also with the community fridge and local food bank. During the cost-of-living crisis, many of our plot-holders absolutely rely on the food they grow on the Incline.

Our gardens are already busy and highly productive, but we have plans to make them even better. We're encouraging biodiversity by creating wildlife corridors, and we're finding ways to harvest rainwater. Next year we hope to raise enough money for a cabin so that we can run community workshops, and we also want to open up an area that's currently under bramble and make starter plots for new people. Of course, these plans are pointless if the incinerator goes ahead – how can we possibly grow veg in the path of an incinerator plume?

I asked my fellow plot-holders what they would like to say to this inquiry, and these are just five snippets from the messages they sent:

The first is from Tammy, who created the site:

"The produce from our plots, the apples from our orchard, the honey from our bees and the abundance of wildlife are all thriving, but for how long?"

From Jennie:

"The gardens provide a beautiful safe space to grow food, meet friends, host social events and activities. If the incinerator is built, not only won't we be organic anymore, I can't see how we will be able to eat what we grow."

From Antje:

"My husband is immuno-suppressed due to leukaemia, therefore it is important to us to supplement our diet with very fresh, organically grown vegetables. We only have a small back yard at home and the Incline gardens give us a place where we can enjoy gardening and nature. If the incinerator goes ahead, this all will be taken from us."

From Yollande:

"The prospect of the incinerator has been a dark cloud hanging over us these past few years and has affected us all mentally. The reality is that if the incinerator is built, we will no longer be able to grow our food, and this precious space, which contributes to the mental and physical well-being of so many in the local community, will be lost."

And finally, from Charlotte:

"My healing association with my plot on the Incline began in 2018, and, following illness and bereavement, I can honestly say that the Incline has saved my life. We only have a very small yard at home so access to an open space, managed organically and for wildlife, is of benefit to me in multiple ways. Growing pollinator plants as "crops" means that the biodiversity on my plot increases year on year, which is crucial in the face of the degradation of the natural environment, and we have super-fresh fruit and vegetables to eat in season. This will all be destroyed by the incinerator, with consequences for my health, the subsequent increased burden on an over-stretched NHS and a precious part of the planet."

I know there's repetition in these statements, but I think it underlines what a devastating blow this would be for us, and how this planning application is a huge threat to a place that we love.

And although we're a small group of people, we represent a bigger movement. You only have to drive round Portland to see that we're an island of growers, beekeepers and smallholders. We at the Incline Gardens are right at the sharp end because we're so close to the port, but all of these people will be impacted negatively by an incinerator built on our doorstep, poisoning our air and soil. It will be the end of organic food-growing on Portland and will cause significant harm to our community for the next three decades.

We're therefore here to beg you to protect local people, and green spaces like our community gardens, against the purely commercial interests of Powerfuel. Please, uphold Dorset County Council's wise decision and say 'no'.