

## ARTICLE

# BAN Waste, Environmental Justice and Citizen Participation in Policy Setting

LYN DODDS & BILL HOPWOOD

*Sustainable Cities Research Institute, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK*

**ABSTRACT** It is widely acknowledged that the poorest sections of society bear a disproportionate burden of poor environmental quality, including toxicity and pollution. The struggles to address environmental injustice instigated at grassroots level also place the burden of righting the injustice on those who often have the least resources in terms of time, money and access to decision makers. The unfolding story of BAN Waste's sophisticated challenge to the proposed building of a replacement incinerator in a working-class area of Newcastle demonstrates many of the issues and stages common to struggles for environmental justice. The struggle became proactive and built wider alliances and a broad coalition across the city for change. The eventual success in preventing the incinerator being built and in producing a superior waste strategy counters the popular belief that environmental concerns are predominantly those of the middle class.

## Introduction

The concept of, and action on, environmental justice developed in the US during the 1980s and 1990s. Generally, poor communities, already suffering from economic and social deprivation, bear an excessive burden of poor environmental quality. Movements against injustice developed as local communities, of the poor and usually of black, Hispanic and native peoples,

---

*Correspondence Address:* Lyn Dodds, Sustainable Cities Research Institute, 6 North Street East, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST, UK. Email: lyn.dodds@unn.ac.uk

1354-9839 Print/1469-6711 Online/06/030269-18 © 2006 Taylor & Francis  
DOI: 10.1080/13549830600558762

opposed the siting of polluting activities such as industry and waste treatment in their area. The principle of environmental justice states that those already disadvantaged should not suffer additional burdens such as the damage that pollution does to health and well-being. Wider concepts of environmental justice have developed covering global and inter-generational injustice (Stephens et al., 2001).

The past decade has seen a growing recognition of environmental justice in the UK. Much of the UK literature on environmental justice has concentrated on discussing levels of injustice and inequality and decision processes (see Buckingham et al., 2005; Fielding & Burningham, 2005; Petts, 2005; Walker et al., 2005; Watson & Bulkeley, 2005). There has been less examination of the struggles and the lessons to be learned. Part of a commitment to justice—environmental and social—is that the voice of those who struggle should be heard; too often struggles for justice are hidden from history.

This article examines the lived experience of the struggle against Newcastle Council's plan to build an incinerator in Byker, Newcastle, one of the poorest wards in the UK. It follows the grassroots resistance through to its eventual hard-won victory, recording the process of struggle, giving a flavour of its vitality and giving a voice to the participants. It analyses the process and draws out lessons for environmental justice in Britain.

### Literature Review

It is widely claimed that the environment is a middle-class issue, with 'the "conventional wisdom" that only folks who wear Birkenstocks and drive Volvos care about the air they breathe' (Forrant, 2004, p. 119). This perhaps reflects the different concepts of environmentalism (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997) and sustainable development (Hopwood et al., 2005) and the perception in the global North that the environment is about conservation—of wilderness, countryside, forests and cute animals.

Yet it is clear that people in deprived areas are concerned with the environment and that 'in general it is the poorer people who bear the brunt of the ill effects of environmental problems' (Boardman et al., 1999, p. 5). Poor neighbourhoods and people suffer from the negative impacts of cars, with higher levels of accidents and a greater burden of air pollution, while having lower car ownership; higher fuel poverty; a greater likelihood of living near polluting factories and waste-handling facilities; and greater risk from flooding (Boardman et al., 1999; Friends of the Earth, 2001; Lucas et al., 2001; Walker et al., 2003; Brook Lyndhurst, 2004; Fielding & Burningham, 2005; Walker et al., 2005). Many deprived neighbourhoods often also suffer from issues such as litter and the lack of maintenance of public spaces (Burningham & Thrush, 2001). In many cases deprived neighbourhoods suffer from multiple and cumulative environmental inequality (Environment Agency, 2004).

Government bodies have begun to include environmental justice in policies and actions for regeneration, sustainable development and tackling poverty. The Environment Agency, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit have all commissioned research on the issue. The Sustainable Development Commission (2002) urged a shift in focus of regeneration to include environmental justice, noting that

There has been a lack of regard to the environmental concerns of disadvantaged communities, based to some degree on the presumption that the environment is a 'middle class' issue. (p. 5)

Environmental justice is an important component of the concept of sustainable development (Chalmers & Colvin, 2005), often giving a sharper edge to what are sometimes bland phrases in sustainability discussions (Agyeman et al., 2003). As Hofrichter (1993, p. 4) notes,

Environmental justice is about social transformation directed toward meeting human need and enhancing the quality of life—economic equality, health care, shelter, human rights, species preservation and democracy—using resources sustainably.

There is a growing appreciation that central to both environmental justice and sustainable development are the concepts of participation and justice (Haughton, 1999; Agyeman et al., 2003). While many involved in struggles for environmental justice do not use the vocabulary of sustainability or environmental justice, their actions and practice correspond to these ideas. In some ways it is also the case that the struggles for environmental justice are part of the old class struggles.

There are some common lessons from the movements for environmental justice, mainly in the US. Perhaps the most important is that popular action and struggle instigated at grassroots level are crucial, as with most challenges to injustice throughout history, to gaining justice. It is likely that achieving sustainability and justice will be more the result of the actions of citizens than the activities of technologists, economists and other experts (Prugh et al., 1999).

Successful struggles usually start with local action in reaction to a local issue but go on to build alliances, gain a wider understanding of the causes of injustice and seek to bring forward solutions (Watson & Bulkeley, 2005). Agyeman et al. (2003) point out that the shift from being reactive to a problem to being proactive with solutions is a challenging but important part of the struggle for environmental justice and sustainability.

Gibbs (1993, p. x), a leader of the battle of Love Canal in the US, observed that during struggles communities

realize the root of their problem is the lack of organized political power, deteriorating neighborhood conditions, poverty and race ... recognize the international dimensions of the problem ... build an even broader coalition for change ... with civil-rights and labor organizations, housing groups, women's groups and healthcare advocates ... these new alliances and cooperative work can achieve real democracy.

Many participants in struggles have to educate themselves about the issues and then raise the understanding of the wider public and even decision makers. Dunion and Scandrett (2003, p. 319), writing about struggles in Scotland, point to the importance of community education and the role of what they describe as popular education that has roots in the liberation philosophy of Freire, incorporating 'a political option . . . promoting participative and collective learning relevant to their engagement in conflicts with powerful agents'.

While the UK government has begun to talk about environmental justice, it remains the case that injustice has not been removed and therefore many communities across Britain are involved in struggles to redress some injustice. The website of one anti-incinerator campaign, Defenders of the Ouse Valley and Estuary (DOVE, 2005) in East Sussex, lists over twenty similar campaigns just on incineration in Britain.

### **Method**

The authors of this paper are both experienced researchers at Sustainable Cities Research Institute and have had close involvement with the struggle against the building of a replacement incinerator in Byker. The article is based on direct participation including attendance at meetings and informal discussions, interviewing participants, press reports and the reports produced covering the issues. Lyn Dodds researched and co-authored the evaluation of a key part of the process, the Select Committees, and therefore attended many meetings, interviewed participants and carried out a review of relevant literature. Bill Hopwood lives in Byker, and was a key participant in the struggle, attending almost every meeting; helping to develop the struggle's strategy and prepare the evidence and arguments to support its aims. He was also the main author of its reports. Both authors are sympathetic to the movement discussed in this paper, but have ensured that statements are based on evidence and are put into the wider context of environmental justice and sustainability theory and practice.

### **Byker in Context**

Byker Ward is a mainly working-class area in the East End of Newcastle upon Tyne. On the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation it was the 78th most deprived ward out of 8414. (See Table 1.) The Byker Estate, council housing built in the 1970s, is the centre of the ward and the foundation area of the struggle over the incinerator. It is an unusual estate, designed by Erskine with community involvement, and having many green spaces and attractive houses, bounded by the famous Byker Wall. The estate is presently being considered for listing by the Department of Culture, Media and Sports.

The first incinerator, across a main road to the south of the estate, was built as part of the housing development to provide district heating. It was an innovative idea at the time, aiming to use waste to provide low-cost heating for residents. However, it became clear that the practice did not measure up to

**Table 1.** Percentages of resident population of the Byker Ward (2001 boundary) from the 2001 Census (National Statistics, 2001)

	Byker	Newcastle upon Tyne	England and Wales
Employed	43.1	50.0	60.6
Unemployed	7.3	4.7	3.4
Permanently sick or disabled	15.0	8.5	5.5
With a limiting long-term illness	29.6	21.6	18.2
Had no qualifications	47.6	32.6	29.1
Qualified to degree level or higher	11.7	20.8	19.8
Owner occupied	27.2	53.3	68.9
Rented from Council	58.3	28.0	13.2
Have no car or van	68.5	45.2	26.8
Have two or more cars or vans	5.2	15.4	29.4

the idea. The heating was expensive rather than the intended low cost, while the waste-handling facilities and incinerator were plagued with problems both in technical operations and the noise, pollution and inconvenience to residents.

St Peter's Basin, a recently built private development, which is more affluent than the Byker Estate with more white-collar and professional workers living in owner-occupier and rented properties, is only a few metres to the south of the incinerator site. To the east is the mainly council housing area of Walker, while immediately to the west is a small area of industry and brownfield land. There has been significant new development in the nearby area with regeneration in the Ouseburn Valley, and major work on the Quay-side, including up-market houses and flats, the Millennium Bridge, the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and Sage Gateshead music centre. There are plans for more development in the Ouseburn, South Byker and along the banks of the Tyne and in Walker. (See Figure 1.)

### **Campaign Against Incinerating Refuse (CAIR)**

The Byker incinerator had operated since 1979 but by the late 1990s was near the end of its life due to tightening safety regulations and old age. The city's level of recycling had run at 3–6%, well below even the poor British average. In the late 1990s a new waste strategy was prepared with a new incinerator in Byker as a central feature. As residents discovered these plans in summer 1999, Campaign Against Incinerating Refuse (CAIR) was established and organized several local meetings. Campaign Against Incinerating Refuse pushed Newcastle Council, with discussions facilitated by Newcastle Healthy City Project, to organize a public meeting in Byker in January 2000.

The Council took a routine approach to publicizing the meeting, distributing one dull small leaflet just before the Christmas holidays. Campaign Against Incinerating Refuse believed in wide public involvement so used

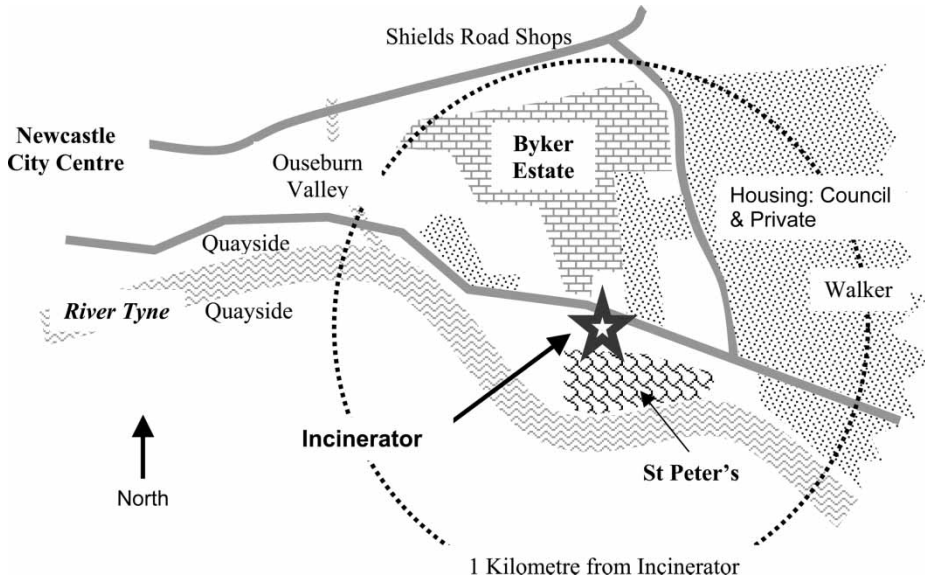


Figure 1. Simple map of the incinerator, Byker and surrounding areas

many ways to gain publicity and ensure the meeting's success. There was a banner drop from the incinerator stack, stalls were held in the local shopping centre, and the Byker estate was leafleted and flyposted (and the posters were taken down afterwards) in early January 2000.

The meeting revealed the gulf between the Council (and other agencies) and local people. Bob Stewart, Chief Executive of Healthy City Project, chaired the packed meeting of 200 people, mainly from the Byker Estate and St Peter's, in the local primary school. At the meeting both the Environment Agency representative and the Director of Public Health sat on the Council side of the top-table and appeared to be supporting the incinerator proposal, giving general reassurances about safety. The public, however, was overwhelmingly opposed, with people relating stories of the unpleasant smells, 'black snow' (soot from the chimney) covering windows, cars and washing hung out to dry, noise, concerns about poor health in the area, what was burnt and a host of other issues. Many of the people living around the existing incinerator knew that the promises of clean, quiet and safe operation were false—the same things had been said about the old one. They had tried to fight the old incinerator, and if the new one was not defeated there would be many more years of problems.

In response to the anger and opposition, the Council proposed the establishment of a partnership working group of local people, Council officers and councillors and other agencies to examine the issues raised at the meeting, in particular all the waste management options. This group was to become BAN Waste.

Campaign Against Incinerating Refuse continued to campaign against the planned incinerator, holding regular meetings, distributing several leaflets in the Byker area, holding protest actions and raising the issue regionally.

### **BAN Waste Established**

Local people wanted a real say in the decision about the proposed new incinerator; as the attendance of 200 showed, there was no problem in getting them involved. The real issue, as with much community engagement, was whether the working group would be meaningful participation or window dressing. Many local people, including those around CAIR, had reservations about a working group, since such groups are often seen as a means of either exhausting or enmeshing local people. There is long experience of authorities setting up similar bodies that are called a 'partnership' but where power is unequal, no decisions are taken and the authority dominates the community members. People have to read reports, prepare for and attend meetings in their own time, usually unpaid, on top of work and family commitments, and have limited access to resources while the authorities are paid and have time and resources. Such meetings, especially if real decisions are taken elsewhere, are frustrating and exhausting. Also community members can find themselves being enmeshed in the meetings, agreeing decisions over which they have little control and becoming out of touch with the wider community and their concerns.

There was strong local feeling, with a weariness born of past experience, that 'the Council is taking the piss' with yet more meetings. There was a widespread view that, as the Council knew that the incinerator was deeply unpopular, why didn't they just scrap it? There was a strong sense that not only were the poor having to bear the burden of pollution, but they also had to bear the burden of challenging its continuation. They had to make the challenge with very few resources and on top of the burdens of everyday life.

There were, however, advantages in establishing a working group. It made it easier to gather wide support; the working group had the involvement of organizations and people from across the city who would have been unlikely to join CAIR. The Women's Institute, Council for Protection of Rural England, the Newcastle Local Authority branch of the trade union UNISON and Newcastle Healthy City Project all became actively involved and other organizations gave support. The working group had much greater potential than CAIR to raise funds for research and to support people. It was also likely that if local people had not agreed to be involved in the working group the Council would have claimed that they had proposed a dialogue and people had refused the offer. After much debate the majority of CAIR members decided to be fully involved in the working group, BAN Waste, and to work to ensure that it was a success rather than just a talking shop or faded to nothing.

The Council also found BAN Waste useful, since it had to be seen to be working with the public on its waste strategy. However, it tried to control and limit the level of dialogue. On the one hand they denounced the people

criticizing the incinerator plans as 'scaremongering', having 'no concern for local people' and being 'political'. (It seems odd that councillors elected as politicians use 'political' as a term of abuse.) At the same time Council officers were involved and often tried to dominate the meetings. It was noted that

In the early days of BAN Waste many members felt that the Council representatives could easily dominate the discussion as they had, or gave the appearance of having more knowledge of the subject area [and] the Council representatives did not play an equal part and yet they held the power to make the final decision on the waste strategy. (Davidson & Dodds, 2004, p. 33)

Over time as the community members, from Byker and across the city, gained in confidence and developed a clear policy the officers' involvement declined. In fact a senior officer expressed surprise that after nine months BAN Waste was still meeting.

Both approaches, of denigrating and trying to dominate, illustrate a lack of commitment to genuine partnership working. BAN Waste was never a full partnership in which there was an open and honest dialogue between the partners with a sharing of information, genuine discussions and collective decision making (Communities and Organisations: Growth and Support, 2000). The community members often found out about Council decisions on waste policy after the event. BAN Waste offered to help the Council in drawing up proposals on recycling and other matters and these offers were not taken up. It was extremely frustrating for community members to be involved in an unequal partnership in the hope that it would result in a high-quality waste policy for Newcastle and no incinerator in Byker. However, the community members ensured that BAN Waste continued to progress and it did allow some level of contact and exchange between the community and the Council that would not have taken place without its existence.

The early BAN Waste meetings, with an average attendance of 40 people, were highly charged. The meetings resembled a battleground between the majority, local people who were deeply distrustful and angry, and Council officers, defensive and attempting to control the meetings. In the middle were the Chair, Bob Stewart of Healthy City, and some other people new to the issues. In spite of the tensions, community members took seriously their responsibility to investigate the issues from the January 2000 public meeting.

At the first meetings, in spring of 2000, it was thought that BAN Waste would complete its investigations within a few months. However, as the extent of the work required became apparent, it was realized that this would take at least a year. Initially there was no administrative or secretarial support for BAN Waste, other than what was provided through the Chair from Healthy City Project. BAN Waste gained funding from Millfield House Foundation for a worker, who started in the summer of 2000. Newcastle Council agreed to contribute towards support costs such as postage and room hire.

### Select Committee Examines Waste Options

In the autumn of 2000 BAN Waste decided that the key task was to explore thoroughly different waste strategies for the city, moving to a proactive approach rather than just reactive opposition to the proposed incinerator. The agreed procedure was a Select Committee, based on those in the House of Commons, where a panel hears evidence from and asks questions of witnesses and then draws all the hearings together in a report. Obviously the BAN Waste Select Committee would be different from one in the House of Commons. Members of Parliament are well paid, it is their full-time job, and are well supported with research staff and administration. The BAN Waste Select Committee would be made up of people who were doing this as well as work and family commitments, without being paid and with the support of only one part-time worker. This was a very innovative method of gathering evidence, producing an alternative strategy and publicizing findings. It appears that this approach was unique, so BAN Waste members had to design the process themselves but it was also a great opportunity to show the advantages of a different approach.

To bring it to fruition five sub-groups were established to investigate issues in more detail. They all worked hard to bring forward information and proposals that proved invaluable for BAN Waste over the following years. These proposals were agreed democratically by the members of BAN Waste. It was decided that the Select Committee would hold a series of full-day hearings in order to have several witnesses on linked subjects. Hearings were a week apart to allow members some time to prepare for each one. So that no one should be financially worse off through attending hearings people were compensated for travel, food, childcare and loss of earnings. However, the social security benefit laws made it difficult to implement these principles.

The Select Committee had a fixed membership of 20, which was quite large compared with those in the House of Commons. However, this large membership recognized the difference between BAN Waste and MPs, since it was likely that a few members would miss any given hearing and some members would not have been able to prepare for a hearing. Although BAN Waste itself was a partnership, to widen involvement in the Select Committee several city-wide organizations were invited to nominate a member and Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services and Community Action on Health did this. The Council was invited to nominate a councillor, but for various complex political reasons none was forthcoming although a senior Council officer was nominated. The Select Committee, while being brought into being by BAN Waste, was responsible to itself for its reports. This was a bold and trusting move by the membership of BAN Waste but increased the authority of the reports.

Once BAN Waste had agreed the Select Committee procedures, the issues to investigate, possible witnesses and the process for publicizing the findings, there was the task of making everything happen. It was recognized that to pay witnesses' travel costs and expenses, members' expenses and loss of wages, produce reports and other major items would amount to a significant cost.

The Council made it clear, while providing funds for core administration and support in kind, that it was unable to contribute to the main costs of the Select Committee. After much hard work, in the spring of 2001 a charity interested in strengthening democracy, Atlantic Philanthropies, agreed to contribute £85,000. Suddenly it was all on. The Council sat up and took more notice of BAN Waste; after all it had now raised over £100,000, which was no small feat. With a rush, over the summer of 2001 the first set of hearings were arranged including confirming witnesses and finding a Chair, Andrew Bennett, MP and Chair of the House of Commons Environment Select Committee. The report of these hearings (BAN Waste, 2002a) presented a broad overview of the issues and choices about waste with the aim of moving from waste disposal to resource recovery. A second set of hearings was planned to investigate turning these broad ideas into detailed proposals considering the health, environmental and economic issues involved.

The Council was required to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment of the new incinerator. BAN Waste felt it was crucial that the health impacts were also considered and it would be better to do a combined Environment and Health Impact Assessment based on comparing alternative waste strategies rather than on only a single proposal. Eventually the Council agreed to a Strategic Environmental and Health Impact Assessment (SE & HIA) that compared options, in part due to the pressure from and to the specifications proposed by BAN Waste. However, as this took longer than expected, the plan of hearings was changed to two short sets. The first in the autumn of 2002 looked mainly at the views of the public and economic and employment issues (BAN Waste, 2003a). The final hearings, in September 2003 following the completion of the SE & HIA, focused on health and environmental issues. The final report (BAN Waste, 2003b) drew together the evidence of all 15 hearings, presenting clear reasons against an incinerator, and instead outlined an alternative strategy that would cost roughly the same, be better for health and the environment and provide up to 1000 jobs.

### **Continue to Campaign**

The work of BAN Waste and especially the Select Committee and Community Events (see below) took a huge amount of time and energy for the community members. However, BAN Waste members and CAIR maintained campaigning and public information efforts, including stalls and leaflets, blockading the gates of the incinerator for a morning and regular coverage in the local media. One of the Byker members stood in the local elections as a 'Socialist Alternative—No Incinerator' candidate. Although Byker is a safe Labour ward, the election campaigns involved a large number of local activists, publicized the issues around the incinerator and, as they gained a respectable vote, maintained pressure on the councillors.

In addition to the proposed new incinerator, the campaign also took up a number of linked issues. In the past the Council had applied ash from coal-fired power stations on footpaths, especially in allotments. In a move to save money, during the 1990s over 2000 tonnes of ash from the Byker

incinerator were applied to footpaths. When this was discovered, the Council initially dismissed any concerns about health but, due to the efforts of members of CAIR and BAN Waste, it eventually agreed to test the ash, which revealed that its use had resulted in ‘massive contamination with dioxins’ (Pless-Mulloli, 2000). In 2002, the Council and the company operating the incinerator were taken to court and fined and since then some of the allotments have had soil remediation. This scandal undermined the public’s confidence in the Council, since it showed the failure of it and the Environment Agency to protect the public and on the other hand strengthened BAN Waste’s case and reinforced the mood for a change in policy.

The incinerator had originally been built to provide cheap heat for the residents of the Byker Estate, but had never delivered; instead the cost was ‘prohibitive to anyone on low to average income’ (Newcastle Council, 2001). Over the years, residents had pushed for a reduction in charges and changes to the system. Finally in 2003, largely due to BAN Waste, the Council agreed to reduce the charges by 14% and review the entire system.

In the winter of 2002–2003 Newcastle Council proposed to introduce a kerbside collection scheme to be run by SITA UK, a private waste company, which also had another major waste contract for the city. Both BAN Waste members and the Council workforce were concerned about this proposal, for many reasons, including SITA’s poor track record (Davies, 2001), so they worked together on an in-house bid. This partnership was very useful, with each one learning from the other, and produced a proposal that would have cost the same as privatization but would have delivered a better service. However, the Council officers were opposed and managed to persuade a majority of councillors, with some strong cross-party opposition, to accept the SITA proposal (Wainwright, 2003).

### Success, and Why?

In the autumn of 2003 Newcastle City Council agreed not to proceed with the proposed new incinerator in Byker. The old incinerator was closed, and Byker heating was fuelled by natural gas. This was a huge victory for BAN Waste—four years of hard work had made a difference. Following that achievement, BAN Waste gained national recognition, winning awards from WWF, for the Best Environment Campaign of the year, and from *The Guardian*, for Best Local Environmental Campaign. BAN Waste was the subject of BBC Radio 4’s programme *Changing Places* (broadcast 30 January 2004). The success clearly came through hard work, tears, stress, energy, sometimes humour, and determination. It involved hundreds of meetings and many more hours outside meetings. The amount of unpaid human effort, on top of the pressures of everyday life, from community groups is usually unrecognized by those in power. Even compared with some other vehicles of struggle, such as trade unions, community groups suffer from a lack of long-term independent support structures. However, such effort is no guarantee of success; many community groups give a huge amount for their neighbourhood yet fail to gain improvements.

Crucial for BAN Waste was gaining independent funding, but this was itself a result of the work of the group. One of the keys to BAN Waste's success was the development of a clear strategy that understood how to operate within the rules of the political system—using the Select Committee in particular—while not becoming enmeshed in that system or compromising or losing BAN Waste's independence. The lively democracy of BAN Waste also prevented incorporation. It was clear that behind the scenes some in the Council were deeply hostile to BAN Waste, but in public the Council had to state it was working with it. Over time, due to BAN Waste's work, there was a shift in attitude as it gained the respect of a growing number of councillors and officers. BAN Waste's strategy successfully combined features of both a campaign and a partnership using a wide range of tactics, including the Select Committee and its well-researched and clear reports, art, direct action, media coverage, local campaigning in many different ways and building a wide alliance. BAN Waste produced powerful arguments against incineration, proposing instead alternative strategies for recycling and composting. These alternatives were going with the flow of public opinion and BAN Waste successfully publicized its case both in the media and through its own actions.

The early efforts to open up CAIR to involve a wide number of local people, so that it tapped into the rich experience in the community of environmental, community and trade union activists with knowledge of campaigns and the political power structures, were vital to later success. BAN Waste continued to involve many people with different talents—artists were important to the success of the Community Events and making the reports so attractive. There were conflicts and tensions within BAN Waste; this is inevitable in any community-led group. However, the democratic structure, clear strategy and widely agreed purpose and process helped to ensure these conflicts never wrecked BAN Waste and its alliances. BAN Waste was also fortunate to gain the support and advice of a wider national and international network of people committed to community involvement and sustainable waste policies. In turn BAN Waste itself was an inspiration to community organizations in Newcastle and environmental groups nationally.

## **Environmental Justice in the UK**

### *Facing Inequality*

The experience of BAN Waste and many other similar campaigns shows that, although environmental justice is on the research and discussion agenda, on the ground there is still injustice to be fought. Without BAN Waste and CAIR, an incinerator would have been built in Byker. It would have been unthinkable for the Council to propose locating an incinerator in an affluent area, which illustrates the injustice of pollution and environmental quality.

It is also the case that BAN Waste's struggle for environmental justice experienced the inequality in the possession and use of power between official agencies and local people. In some quarters there was surprise that the mainly

working-class community of Byker could mount such a sustained, inventive and coherent struggle for justice. BAN Waste gained support from across the city with 'as wide a representation as possible [which helped] to enhance [its] credibility and engagement' (Davidson & Dodds, 2004, p. 43), in a process that reflects Agyeman and colleagues' (2003, p. 3) comment about building support among people 'from different social locations'. Nonetheless the bedrock and drive of BAN Waste's struggle were rooted in a working-class community. That BAN Waste went on to victory is, however, not the usual outcome of many similar struggles and this may be a reason for the belief that environmentalism is mainly a middle-class concern, arising from the higher-profile and often more successful environmental challenges raised by the middle class.

As well as class inequality, justice struggles face gender inequality (Buckingham et al., 2005), in that women generally suffer more from environmental inequality and men predominate in positions of power. Women played a major role in BAN Waste: they were four out of the five support workers, two of the four chairs of BAN Waste and half the BAN Waste members of the Select Committee. Most of the women were working and had children, so the pressures on their time and energy were great. In contrast, as is common in Britain, all the senior Council officers and waste industry managers were men.

The issue of justice, including gender, race and class, remains central to tackling environmental issues, whether globally or locally. Perhaps a stronger commitment to justice would strengthen and broaden support for environmental issues (Rowell, 1996).

### *Recycling and Change*

Over time BAN Waste members became real experts on waste issues. In fact on several occasions they knew more than the Council's officers or hired consultants. One of the disappointments for BAN Waste members was the conservative outlook of the many professionals in the waste industry who are reluctant to contemplate change, despite the need for the industry to change. They prefer technological solutions, usually expensive, complex and sometimes risky, rather than appreciating that the key to successful recycling and resource recovery is people and the participation of the public and workforce. The industry has yet to shift its outlook from seeing the problems of waste disposal to envisioning the economic, environmental and employment opportunities of resource recovery (Murray, 1999; BAN Waste, 2003b). The unwillingness to grasp the opportunities of necessary change was demonstrated by the officers' opposition to the in-house recycling proposal, since it would mean change, innovation and a real partnership of management, staff and public. Even the final decision not to build the incinerator was led by the councillors, who were aware of the huge political opposition to such a proposal, rather than the officers.

*Democracy, Education and Participation*

While BAN Waste's main focus was Newcastle's waste strategy, from the beginning there was an aim of working in a democratic matter. The monthly full BAN Waste meetings were open to all and took all the major decisions. The sub-groups, with an open membership, carried out investigations and presented proposals to the full meeting which were then debated, amended and agreed. While being a long process, this ensured democratic control and allowed the involvement of members. Full minutes of all meetings were circulated to all members. The only elected officers were the chair and vice-chair. The management group, the only elected sub-group, was not an executive but responsible for liaising with and supporting the BAN Waste worker.

The Select Committee hearings were open to the public and at all times BAN Waste worked to involve and inform a wide number of people. The reports (BAN Waste, 2002a; 2002b; 2003a; 2003b) were accessible, clearly written and well laid out, and the concise summaries were sent to over 1000 people and organizations across the city and beyond. All the information was placed on a website (<<http://www.banwaste.org.uk>>) and reports were placed in the public libraries. BAN Waste ran stalls at the Ouseburn and Green Festivals and leafleted the Byker estate. Throughout all the work, BAN Waste maintained good relations with the local newspapers and provided them with regular news and updates.

BAN Waste also organized seven Community Events in the spring of 2002 in public places, including pools, a library and community centres. These were well advertised, child-friendly, enjoyable and not the usual top-down consultation, instead there was a genuine dialogue between people and BAN Waste about waste, recycling and the ideas of BAN Waste with all the views reported and summarized in a report (BAN Waste, 2002b). Some people attended because they were interested in recycling but many came along because they were curious or just using the pool or library. Considering they were run by volunteers with little money, less than £7000 to cover the events and produce the report, they were a huge success attended by nearly 400 adults and 250 children.

Throughout its activities BAN Waste members educated themselves in order to challenge the Council. A prime concern of all those involved was participation and collectivism and while the use of popular education was not a conscious one, the processes were similar to those described by Dunion and Scandrett (2003). The Select Committee heard evidence from a range of experts and allowed the members of the committee to test alternatives and reach collective decisions on the content of the proposed waste strategy. This process of the members choosing the topics for examination was similar to that used by Freire in his culture circles (1974).

BAN Waste members' experiences convinced them of the need to increase local democracy, openness and participation. National government policy urges partnership working and participation for its own actions and those of local authorities and other public agencies. BAN Waste's experience is

that authorities remain reluctant to share information and power. As Rydin (2000) points out, to move up Arnstien's ladder (1969) to 'Degree of Citizen Power' including partnership, the costs compared with the benefits of participation need to be reduced. The Select Committee began to tackle this issue by providing basic compensation for the members, important to encourage participation and support equity, and by having a clear process and goal. If the government's desire for participation is to move from words to practice, the barriers to involvement must be overcome. Community representatives should have the legal right to paid time off work, benefit recipients should be able to receive a reasonable level of compensation and there needs to be a dramatic increase in support, with independent advice and research. Currently the regeneration magazine *New Start* is actively campaigning around this issue in their 'Just Rewards' campaign. Robinson et al. (2005, p. 24), based on their research, state that 'Government policy, especially on the benefits issue, needs to change'.

As participation takes time and effort, to successfully engage people, who often face pressures of family and a shortage of time and money, there needs to be confidence that the effort is worthwhile. When BAN Waste was established and the Select Committee began, it was not at all clear that the Council would take any meaningful notice of the results. Although the Select Committee was a powerful means of gathering and analysing evidence and producing reports and recommendations on a complex issue, there were drawbacks. It required a huge amount of effort from the community members to keep BAN Waste and the Select Committee going. Effective participation, of which the Select Committee could be a useful model, should not be a constant struggle; to be worthwhile it requires a genuine partnership from the outset (Davidson & Dodds, 2004, pp. 41–42). The struggle took four years and some people not involved in the Select Committee did not feel they had a role. All this left less energy for involving the wider community and the active membership of BAN Waste, especially from Byker, declined over the years, although there remained widespread interest and support in Byker for the BAN Waste's work. Deciding on the balance of energy to commit between the Select Committee and community activity was one of the most difficult choices for BAN Waste.

### *Building Alliances and Being Proactive*

Often campaigns such as BAN Waste are accused of NIMBYism (Burningham, 2000). It is striking that BAN Waste never took such a view; rather its proposals were based on not inflicting incineration or other harmful waste treatment processes on any community. What did happen was that the campaign moved from being reactive in opposing a 'Bad', a new incinerator in Byker, to being proactive in promoting a 'Good', a resource recovery strategy for Newcastle.

Rising from a grassroots challenge, BAN Waste built a wide alliance, which reached internationally and gained city-wide support for their case for environmental justice in Byker and environmental improvements for all of

Newcastle. This city-wide support was a key factor in the Council's decision not to build the incinerator. As Agyeman et al. (2003) note, building alliances and becoming proactive is often the way in which environmental justice movements gain prominence and success.

## **Conclusion**

Without BAN Waste and CAIR the Byker incinerator would now be built and burning. As the struggle lasted four years and bore heavily on the energies and dedication of the people of Byker, it cannot be stated too emphatically that not only do the poor carry an unjust burden of environmental problems but they also face injustice in trying to counter this. Environmental injustice reflects wider social and economic injustice. The struggle encountered unequal relations of power and resources between 'partners', as do most community-based campaigns, so the campaigners had to use their own scarce time and energy to band together to instigate and carry out the challenge and propose solutions.

BAN Waste's struggle followed the often observed move from reacting to a single-issue environmental 'Bad' to proactively promoting an increase of 'Goods' and building strong alliances. In this case much of the knowledge to make this shift came about through the strong internal democracy, participation and popular education style of the Select Committee.

In spite of the government's words of support for sustainable development, it remains the case that the principles of justice, participation and equity are not applied in practice. Long-term sustainability requires the inequalities of power and resources to be addressed. At present, tackling environmental injustice requires struggles; this is why community campaigns and, in particular, the successful struggle over the Byker incinerator are significant.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the community members of BAN Waste who made it all happen, the generous funders of BAN Waste (Millfield House Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, New Opportunities Fund, Newcastle Council and the Byker, Elswick, Grange, Heaton & Sandyford Ward committees) and all who participated in the Select Committee.

## **Postscript**

Following the decision in 2003 not to build a new incinerator, BAN Waste and Newcastle Council have been working to develop a more meaningful partnership to help establish a sustainable waste and resource recovery strategy.

## References

- Agyeman, J., Bullard, R. & Evans, B. (2003) Introduction, in: J. Agyeman, R. Bullard & B. Evans (Eds) *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (London, Earthscan).
- Arnstein, S. (1969) A Ladder of Citizen Participation, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 35(4), pp. 216–224.
- BAN Waste (2002a) *Our World, Our Waste, Our Choice* (Newcastle).
- BAN Waste (2002b) *Don't Rubbish Newcastle: Ban Waste Community Events* (Newcastle).
- BAN Waste (2003a) *A Wealth of Waste* (Newcastle).
- BAN Waste (2003b) *Too Good to Waste* (Newcastle).
- Boardman, B., Bullock, S. & McLaren, D. (1999) *Equity and the Environment: Guidelines for green and socially just government* (London, Catalyst/Friends of the Earth).
- Brook Lyndhurst (2004) *Environment Exclusion Review for NRU, ODPM* (London).
- Buckingham, S., Reeves, D. & Batchelor, A. (2005) Wasting women: the environmental justice of including women in municipal waste management, *Local Environment*, 10(4), pp. 427–444.
- Burningham, K. (2000) Using the language of NIMBY: A topic for research, not an activity for researchers, *Local Environment*, 5(1), pp. 56–67.
- Burningham, K. & Thrush, D. (2001) *'Rainforests Are a Long Way from Here': The Environmental Concerns of Disadvantaged Groups* (York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation).
- Chalmers, H. & Colvin, J. (2005) Addressing environmental inequalities in UK policy: an action research perspective, *Local Environment*, 10(4), pp. 333–361.
- Communities and Organisations: Growth and Support (2000) *Active Partners: Benchmarking Community Partnership in Regeneration* (Wakefield, England, Yorkshire Forward).
- Davidson, G. & Dodds, L. (2004) *Final Evaluation Report* (Newcastle, Sustainable Cities Research Institute).
- Davies, S. (2001) *Sita in Brighton: Humiliation by the Sea* (London, Public Services International Research Unit).
- DOVE (2005) <<http://www.dove2000.org/links.php>> (accessed 11 November 2005).
- Dunion, K. & Scandrett, E. (2003) The campaign for environmental justice in Scotland as response to poverty in a northern nation, in: J. Agyeman, R. Bullard & B. Evans (Eds) *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (London, Earthscan).
- Environment Agency (2004) *Addressing Environmental Inequalities* (Bristol, Environment Agency).
- Fielding, J. & Burningham, K. (2005) Environmental inequality and flood hazard, *Local Environment*, 10(4), pp. 379–396.
- Farrant, R. (2004) Where the bad things go and what's being done about it!, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 15(4), pp. 119–122.
- Freire, P. (1974) *Education: The Practice of Freedom* (London, Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative).
- Friends of the Earth (2001) *Pollution and Poverty—Breaking the link* (London, Friends of the Earth).
- Gibbs, L. (1993) Foreword, in: R. Hofrichter (Ed.) *Toxic Struggles* (Philadelphia, New Society).
- Guha, R. & Martinez-Alier, J. (1997) *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (London, Earthscan).
- Houghton, G. (1999), Environmental justice and the sustainable city, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 18, pp. 233–243.
- Hofrichter, R. (1993) Introduction, in: R. Hofrichter (Ed.) *Toxic Struggles* (Philadelphia, New Society).
- Hopwood, B., Mellor, M. & O'Brien, G. (2005) Sustainable development: mapping different approaches, *Sustainable Development*, 13(1), pp. 38–52.
- Lucas, K., Grosvenor, T. & Simpson, R. (2001) *Transport, the Environment and Social Exclusion* (York, Joseph Rowntree Foundation).
- Murray, R. (1999) *Creating Wealth from Waste* (London, Demos).

- National Statistics (2001) *2001 Census*, (<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/AreaProfileFrames.asp?TID=1&AREA=Byker+ward&AID=176968>) (accessed 29 November 2004).
- Newcastle Council (2001) Byker Ward profile: social perspective. Paper for Byker Ward Committee, Newcastle Council, 2001.
- Petts, J. (2005) Enhancing environmental equity through decision-making: learning from waste management, *Local Environment*, 10(4), pp. 397–410.
- Pless-Mulloli, T. & Edwards, R. (2000) *Report on the Analysis of PCCD/PCDF and Heavy Metals in Footpaths and Soil Samples Related to the Byker Incinerator* (Newcastle, University of Newcastle).
- Prugh, T., Costanza, R. & Daly, H. (1999) *The Local Politics of Global Sustainability* (Washington, Island Press).
- Robinson, F., Shaw, K. & Davidson, G. (2005) 'On the side of the angels': community involvement in the governance of neighbourhood renewal, *Local Economy*, 20(1), pp. 13–26.
- Rowell, A. (1996) *Green Backlash* (London, Routledge).
- Rydin, Y. (2000) *The Public and Local Environmental Policy: Strategies for Promoting Public Participation* (London, TCPA).
- Stephens, C., Bullock, S. & Scott, A. (2001) *Environmental Justice: Rights and Means to a Healthy Environment for All* (Brighton, ESRC Global Environment Change Programme).
- Sustainable Development Commission (2002) *Vision for Sustainable Regeneration: Environment and Poverty—the Missing Link?* (London).
- Wainwright, H. (2003) Burning ambition, *The Guardian*, 26 November 2003. Available at <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/waste/story/O,,1092736,00.html>>.
- Walker, G., Fairburn, J., Smith, G. & Mitchell, G. (2003) *Environmental Quality and Social Deprivation* (Bristol, Environment Agency).
- Walker, G., Mitchell, G., Fairburn, J. & Smith, G. (2005) Industrial pollution and social deprivation: evidence and complexity in evaluating and responding to environmental inequality, *Local Environment*, 10(4), pp. 361–378.
- Watson, M. & Bulkeley, H. (2005) Just waste? Waste management and the politics of environmental justice, *Local Environment*, 10(4), pp. 411–426.