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Baroness Verma of Leicester  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department of Energy and Climate Change  
3 Whitehall Place  
London  
SW1A 2AW

22 October 2012

Dear Baroness Verma

Following the decision to 'pause' the MRWS process in West Cumbria, I would like to take the opportunity to brief you on the views of the town and parish councils in West Cumbria, which we as an Association represent.

There are 88 town and parish councils in West Cumbria. As the democratically elected third tier of local government, these councils represent the interests of local communities at the grass roots level; the level at which any GDF development would have the greatest impact.

We welcome the 'voluntarism' approach set out in the MRWS White Paper with decisions being taken via local democratic structures. Although town and parish councils are not formally Decision Making Bodies, we would expect their views to be given considerable weight as elected community representatives. Indeed, our view is that the decisions taken by the Decision Making Bodies are unlikely to be viewed as "credible" in the terms of paragraph 6.22 of the MRWS White Paper unless supported by the parish tier of local government.

The current position is that only 8 of the 88 town and parish councils have expressed support for proceeding into Stage 4 of the MRWS process, while 43 have said they do not support proceeding. The remaining 37 councils have chosen not to express an official position for, according to our enquiries, a number of different reasons including splits of opinion within the councils.

The agreed position of this Association, on behalf of town and parish councils generally, is that a decision about future participation in MRWS should be delayed

until three matters have been taken further. I enclose a copy of our position as submitted to the Decision Making Bodies for your information.

We therefore welcome the decision to 'pause' the MRWS process and generally agree with the reassurances that the Decision Making Bodies seek from Government. However, what is missing from the Decision Making Bodies' letter to you is any reference to the need to secure, prior to a decision about participation, some reassurance from the expert geological community that there is a reasonable chance of finding suitable geology for a GDF in West Cumbria.

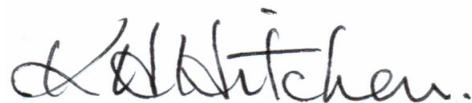
The present position is that two professors of geology have been prominent in arguing at considerable length that all of West Cumbria can be ruled out now, while the majority of geologists have simply stated that not enough is yet known to say definitely either way.

We view the contribution from the majority in the geological community to be insubstantial and unsatisfactory. There is an urgent need for an expert view about whether there is a sufficiently good prospect of finding suitable geology to justify the expense, time and effort in proceeding. This essential expert opinion is not currently available, despite the fact that there is sufficient geological information available to undertake such an appraisal.

We do not believe that a decision to proceed with MRWS in West Cumbria would be viewed as 'credible' by town and parish councils or many others unless it is underpinned by a peer reviewed appraisal of West Cumbria's geology which shows there is a sufficiently good prospect of finding a suitable site to justify proceeding. The Geological Society has indicated to the former West Cumbria Partnership that it would be willing to advise in connection with such an appraisal.

This Association urges you to extend the 'pause' to allow this work to be done. We believe it would be time very well spent in the long run.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Hitchen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

CLlr Keith Hitchen  
Chairman