

E-bulletin 4 – June 2010

Our Aim is "to make recommendations to Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council on whether they should participate or not in the Geological Disposal Facility siting process, without commitment to eventually host a facility".

This is the fourth newsletter from the West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Partnership. This newsletter includes information about the outcomes from the first stage of the Partnership's public and stakeholder engagement programme, the start of a study of West Cumbria by the British Geological Survey, and two frequently asked questions.

Public and stakeholder engagement

- The Partnership has now completed its review of the first stage of its comprehensive public and stakeholder engagement (PSE) programme. This will lead to changes in the Partnership's operation, its Work Programme and PSE activity over the next 12-18 months.
- Feedback from the public and stakeholders raised many issues, which are addressed in the report, together with the Partnership's responses to them. Five key messages stand out. These are:

1. **Overcoming cynicism and gaining trust.** Local experience and history demands that particular efforts are made, for example, to show the difference between the 1990s Nirex process and the Government's current approach of voluntarism. Related challenges exist, for example, to overcome suspicion about whether this is all a foregone conclusion or whether public views will really be listened to. There is also a lack of confidence in local councils taking account of people's views, which has an impact on how much people trust the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) process.

The three main responses the Partnership is making as a result are to:

- Seek written reassurance from the Government on their commitment to the principle of voluntarism and the right of withdrawal.
 - Publish a briefing note clearly setting out the differences between this MRWS process and the Nirex process in the 1990s.
 - Publish a clear list of changes made as a result of public input: these are also included in the full PSE report which is available to download from the Document Library on the Partnership's website (Document 61).
2. **Clarifying decision making.** A key issue is who precisely makes what decision and when. It is a complicated and as yet unclear area, and more work is therefore planned to provide clarity in later stages. What constitutes a *credible*

level of support to either participate further in the process or withdraw, is identified by the Partnership, and through the PSE process, as a particularly difficult issue.

The three main responses the Partnership is making as a result are to:

- Publish a briefing note clearly setting out the respective roles of the PSE work, the Partnership and the Decision-Making Bodies (Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council).
- Form and publish a view about how decisions should be informed by stakeholders' views and public opinion. This includes both a potential 'decision to participate' and also any ultimate decision about a facility.
- Agree a set of principles that set out how the Principal Authorities (Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland Borough Council and Cumbria County Council), the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) and the parish councils and others could work together *if* a decision to participate is taken.

3. **Being rigorous.** There appears to be a clear but implicit message that people expect this process to be done rigorously or not at all.

The three main responses the Partnership is making as a result are to:

- Buy in expertise to advise the Partnership on technical issues such as geological suitability, in order to provide independent and trusted peer review.
- Commission our own independent research on the potential impact of a facility on the image of West Cumbria in terms of tourism and inward investment.
- Seek independent expertise to advise the Partnership, including both pro and anti viewpoints.

4. **Striving to engage.** Consistent feedback is that there is a need to engage widely and more intensively as the process proceeds. The Partnership should seek to reach an ever-wider range of interests and views in the community, both in terms of numbers and also diversity.

The three main responses the Partnership will be making as a result in the second stage of its Public and Stakeholder Engagement programme will be to:

- Double the investment in communications activity the Partnership carries out.
- Increase the number and diversity of people being reached by the Partnership's work, in particular young people.
- Offer an extensive range of methods by which *anyone* can engage with the Partnership's work including meetings, workshops, the website, presentations, exhibitions and a Discussion Pack.

5. **Securing community benefits.** A few saw community benefits as a distasteful bribe, whilst many others viewed them as a rightful and valued aspect of the Government Managing Radioactive Waste Safely process if a decision to participate is taken. However, those who saw the opportunity of community benefits as a positive thing were careful to point out that the benefits must be additional to the jobs resulting from any facility. There was also widespread suspicion of the Government's long-term commitment to keep its promises on investing in West Cumbria: stories of past disappointments abounded. These

issues are already included in the various tasks looking at community benefits, and indeed are shared by many on the Partnership.

The three main responses the Partnership is making as a result are to:

- Start developing principles by which community benefits would be negotiated and distributed, *if* a decision to participate is taken.
- Investigate how successive governments can be held to binding agreements about delivering community benefits, *if* a decision to participate is taken.
- Identify the ethical implications of hosting a facility, including how impacts and benefits might affect different areas and generations. We will also clarify how and when these ethical issues should be addressed later in the process, *if* a decision to participate is taken.

British Geological Survey 'desk top' study of West Cumbria

- The British Geological Survey (BGS), the UK independent geological experts, have been commissioned by the Government to carry out a study of the geology of West Cumbria. Before a community can make a decision about whether or not to participate in the process of finding a site for an underground geological disposal facility, the Government requires the area to be screened to take out areas that are clearly geologically unsuitable and therefore make sure that there are places that could be geologically suitable for such a facility. There is obviously no point any community spending too much time considering this issue if there are no areas where the facility could be built.
- The BGS will look at the information that is already available about the geology of the whole of Allerdale and Copeland and up to 5 km offshore, and screen out any areas that clearly have unsuitable geology for a disposal facility, based on the criteria set out in the Government's White Paper on the MRWS process. The results of the BGS study are expected to be available in September.
- The screening will be led by the BGS Chief Geologist and carried out by a team of experienced BGS geoscientists. It will be a 'desk based study' only. This means that it will only use readily available information and will not undertake any drilling or field-based investigative studies. It will not be 'in depth' and there will be no consideration of non-geological factors. More rigorous assessment of a wide range of criteria will only be undertaken if West Cumbria makes a 'decision to participate' in further stages of site selection.
- The BGS study will not provide any indication where a facility might eventually be located. This work will also not directly affect where the surface facilities, such as the entrance to the tunnel leading to an underground facility and offices, could be located. The surface access facilities could be a number of miles from the underground facility and could therefore be located in an area that is found to be unsuitable for an underground facility.

Partnership meetings

- The Public and Stakeholder Engagement work was the main issue considered at the Partnership meetings on 31st March and 13th May. The reports of both meetings are available on the website in the Document Library (Documents 68 and 72).

The Partnership meets every six weeks. Members of the public are welcome to attend as observers and are also given an opportunity to ask questions. The next two meetings will be:

- **25th June 2010** at the Washington Central Hotel in Workington.
0900 arrivals, 0930-1600

The meeting will consider the decision making process and in particular what would constitute 'credible' public support, and the Partnership will also look at how the process to identify possible sites would work if there is a decision to participate.

- **5th August 2010** at The Copeland Centre, Whitehaven.
0900 arrivals, 0930-1600

The meeting will consider what types of radioactive waste might go into a geological disposal facility and the implications of possible new nuclear reactors being built, as well as looking at how the planning system might work in this process.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. Haven't parts of West Cumbria already been found to be geologically unsuitable following the Nirex process?

A. Nirex did not look at the whole of West Cumbria in detail. In 1994, after carrying out initial geological testing, Nirex sought planning permission from Cumbria County Council to construct an underground rock characterisation facility at a site near Sellafield to enable more detailed investigations to take place in that area. This application was rejected by Cumbria County Council and the then Secretary of State.

There were a range of reasons why the Nirex planning application and the subsequent appeal were rejected. These included the technical and scientific uncertainties and deficiencies in Nirex's application, as well as the process that Nirex used to find a possible site. Therefore, the Government say they do not believe the outcome of the work by Nirex means that the area near Sellafield considered at that time should be excluded from the screening process or treated differently from any other part of the UK which makes an expression of interest at this stage.

Significant advances have been made on the science of geological disposal in the UK and overseas since the Nirex application was rejected. In addition, examination, modelling and understanding of geological processes have advanced significantly since the 1980s and 1990s and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority therefore expects a more comprehensive scientific analysis of potential geology to be carried out in the future than has been carried out in the past.

Should a decision to participate be taken, the geological suitability of any candidate site would need to be thoroughly examined at later stages in the process. The UK's independent safety and environmental regulators would also have to be satisfied that a disposal facility was safe before they would permit it to be constructed and operated.

Q. What is happening next?

A. The Partnership has already carried out some initial communications and consultation with people in West Cumbria to raise awareness of the issues involved and to start to gauge people's views. As long as the BGS study does not rule out the

whole of West Cumbria we will be starting a much more comprehensive communications and engagement programme to give everyone living in West Cumbria the opportunity to find out about the work of the Partnership and the issues that we are looking at, so they can form their own views.

Eventually, once this work has been completed, and people have had their say, the Partnership will make a recommendation to each of the local authorities on whether or not they should make a formal decision to participate further in the process. This is likely to happen in the second half of 2011.

It's important to understand that a decision to participate would not be a decision to host a facility. At this stage we are simply looking to make a decision in principle about whether we are prepared to consider hosting a geological disposal facility somewhere in West Cumbria.

If West Cumbria does make a decision to participate, a Community Siting Partnership would be established to build on the work done by the current Partnership. Ongoing Partnership discussions would be coupled with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority looking at a wide range of criteria, including detailed safety, social, environmental and geological assessments to begin to narrow the focus to potentially suitable sites.

At each stage increasingly detailed assessments would be made of potential sites, with resources becoming focused on investigating those that are most likely to be suitable. The community would be able to withdraw from the process right up to the point when a planning application is made to start work on building a facility.

A key role of the Partnership is to represent the views of people living in or near West Cumbria in these discussions with the Government. If you want to get involved then see the website for details or call us on 0800 048 8912.

Please pass this newsletter on. Thank you.

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