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As we still seem to have some software problems I've pasted in the response of Holme St Cuthbert Parish Council below.

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For and on behalf of Holme St Cuthbert PC, Mawbray west Cumbria.

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Please add to mailing /contact lists.

1. Site Selection.

The key factor in identifying an intrinsically safe site is inevitably the suitability of the local geology. Only after the pre-determination of areas/regions with a high potential for geological suitability should the procedure for seeking local voluntarism commence. This has been the mechanism that has worked in ALL other countries (including those listed in your preamble) in which geological disposal of R/A waste is being investigated or progressed. The previous MRWS process ignored the geological issue and jumped straight to the voluntarism level. This created an inevitable conflict in West Cumbria between the 'Nuclear (Sellafield) Lobby' and those who had experience of the NIREX Inquiry and who had serious concerns about the geological suitability of West Cumbria. Many eminent geologists also questioned the logic of seeking a site in West Cumbria as the area's geology has been extensively studied over the years and its nature appears to offer little in terms of its suitability for this particular purpose. Even the British Geological Survey was hard pressed to isolate even small areas of West Cumbria that might be proven suitable even after a long and expensive study.

It would make much more sense in any future MRWS programme to first identify a shortlist of locations where suitable geology may be found after which communities may be consulted comprehensively. In West Cumbria such comprehensive consultation did not occur as it was only very late in the process that the MRWS partnership conceded that the geological issue was important, in fact their final report gave only scant mention of geology. The methodology of the MRWS process to date i.e first find a 'willing community' then find out if the area contains a fit for purpose site is at best illogical and at worst lazy and incompetent. To place primary emphasis on the willingness of the local community rather than the safety and integrity of the site smacks of expediency if not complacency.

2. Voluntarism and the Willingness of Communities.

How is any of this defined? In the initial stage when local authorities were asked if they wanted to put forward their areas for consideration NONE of the local councils representing West Cumbria made any attempt to consult the local community – in effect they took a political decision to volunteer on our behalf. It is unlikely that when local communities elected their councillors they intended to empower them to this extent.

At the end of the MRWS 'consultation process' the local authorities were then put in the position to decide whether or not to proceed to the next stage of investigation (the stage that really should have come first as it has done in all other countries engaged in this process) – it is hard to imagine how these men and women would feel suitably qualified to make such a decision particularly in the absence of any meaningful community consultation. How were they to decide on what level of voluntarism would be appropriate to proceed even if a local referendum were to take place -51 % in favour, 75% in favour, 100 % in favour? Also what about those communities that would be directly affected i.e the people whose land and homes would either be lost or devalued - should their views be give a higher weighting?

Also what of those communities not within the consultation boundary but who are near enough to nevertheless feel an equal level of impact – should they not also have a say?

Clearly much more thought needs to be put into the definition of voluntarism and exactly what constitutes a 'willing community'

3. The MRWS Consultation Process.

Much has been made of the MRWS consultation in West Cumbria and it has received a high level of praise in some areas. How was it then that widespread awareness of the plans only emerged a few short weeks before the deadline for local authority approval meetings? During those weeks local communities mobilised themselves to such an extent that the Government and Local Authorities were panicked into postponing meetings and extending deadlines.

Why was it that given all the resources that the MRWS partnership had to hand it signally failed to communicate adequately with the local community in West Cumbria?

Perhaps at a time when we are bombarded with nuisance telephone calls and junk mail the decision to consult via phone surveys and mailshots was not the most sensible approach to adopt. Throughout the MRWS process in West Cumbria very little mention was made in the mass media – local TV, Radio , Press etc. indeed the phrase 'media blackout' became more and more common within the community.

It could almost be felt that the whole procedure was designed to deliver a yes vote by an organisation predisposed to finding a disposal site in West Cumbria.

An attempt was made to show that a majority of local people were in favour of moving to the latter stages of the process however it became clear that this rested on the interpretation of the answer to a single question in a postal questionnaire and a single telephone survey. How was it then that in only a couple of weeks thousands upon thousands were signing petitions opposed to the process?

Why was it indeed that the the 'powers that be' chose to ignore the massive majority of Parish Councils who voted against progressing the programme? Parish Councils are by their nature far closer to the mood of their communities than are Borough and County Councils yet their views were cast aside.

Any future consultation will need to ensure that it is comprehensive and thorough unlike in West Cumbria where it displayed a level of complacency probably borne out of a false assumption that West Cumbrians are all pro-nuclear and would therefore fall into line.

Future consultations should also be more imaginative in their approach – in retrospect the West Cumbrian experience appears quite amateurish.

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