WORKINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

Town Hall, Oxford Street, Workington, Cumbria CA14 2RS
Telephone:
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GDF Siting Process Consultation
Department of Energy and Climate Change
Room M07
55 Whitehall
London
SW1A2EY

cc Cumbria Association of Local Councils

4 December 2013

Response to Review of Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached a response from Workington Town Council to the consultation 'Review of the Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility'.

Workington Town Council is the first tier of local government for the Civil Parish of Workington. It has 30 councillors, representing 25,200 people in West Cumbria.

This response was considered initially by a joint meeting of the Town Council's Planning and Policy and Resources committees, before being adopted at an extraordinary meeting of the Full Council.

If you have any queries at all, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Chris Bagshaw
Town Clerk

(emailed with attachment to radioactivewaste@decc.gov.uk)

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Special Full Council 3 December 2013 Appendix

Responses to Consultation on Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility

Workington Town Council met to consider the Government's Consultation 'Review of the Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility. It agreed to submit the following responses.

1. Do you agree that a test of public support should be taken before the representative authority loses the Right of Withdrawal? If so, what do you think would be the most appropriate means of testing public support, and when should it take place? If you do not agree with the need for such a test, please explain why.

Yes. A referendum of a geographically determined area would have the most robust mandate. However the definition of the area and community requires further thought. Whereas it might be convenient to reduce this to district council boundaries, those boundaries are not necessarily the most appropriate to use. Some communities straddle boundaries. An expression of interest should require a district council or community to demonstrate local support. The process should be defined in statue.

2. Do you agree with the proposed amendments to decision making within the MRWS siting process? If not, how would you modify the proposed phased approach, or, alternatively, what different approach would you propose? Please explain your reasoning.

Yes, but we would like it defined in statue.

3. Do you agree with this approach to revising roles in the siting process set out in the White Paper? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

No. For the reasons stated in 1, the 'representative body' must demonstrate that it has a mandate to speak for the actual community. It would be better to allow partnerships of local authorities to emerge, which demonstrate how they fit the criteria and how they would be delegated powers of decision making. A self-defining community, of the sort required by Neighbourhood Planning regulations may be a useful model to learn from.

There should be, defined in statue, capacity building measures for any community – represented by parish, and other lower tier authorities - that is considering their suitability for expressing an interest.

4. Do you agree with this proposed approach to assessing geological suitability as part of the MRWS siting process? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

No. There must be a method of screening far more of the UK's geology at an earlier stage to avoid communities with unsuitable geology coming forward, attracted by the potential benefits. All previous geological siting work must be made publicly available.

5. Do you agree with this proposed approach to planning for a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

Yes. It seems inevitable that such an important decision should be made outwith the local planning framework.

6. Do you agree with this clarification of the inventory for geological disposal – and how this will be communicated with the volunteer host community? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

No. Whereas we agree with the principal, there needs to be far more information about the communication strategy required to ensure a community is making informed judgments. It is inappropriate to include fuels and material which may be recycled by future processes. Effective research into alternative solutions and uses must be maintained throughout the process.

7. Do you endorse the proposed approach on community benefits associated with a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

No. Community benefits should accrue to the deciding community and be structured to benefit most those who are most affected.

The definition of the affected or volunteering community must be addressed before they can be considered beneficiaries of any package (see question one). This should be in statute, along with definitions of 'neighbouring authorities' and other phrases which require precise determination.

8. Do you agree with the proposed approach to addressing potential socio-economic and environmental effects that might come from hosting a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

Yes.

9. Do you have any other comments?

Yes. Whilst emphasising that this council believes the method of dealing with nuclear waste and siting any geological disposal facility should be defined in statute law, the council further urges government to maintain research into alternative solutions. Furthermore it stresses to government the desperate need for short and medium term investment in the storage of radioactive material that is on-site at Sellafield now.

The siting of a Geological Disposal Facility may be a long term answer, however it fails to address the current infrastructure issue, and the current presence of high volumes of highly radioactive waste on the Sellafield site. Without significant investment into research and development for current above ground storage, there is a significant risk that some of the material may never make it to a geological disposal facility in 30 years' time.

We urge the government to open a wider dialogue, both locally, and in the national and international community, to consider how the necessary investment in managing radioactive waste safely in the immediate future, as well as the longer term, will be secured.