

CUMBRIA MINERALS AND WASTE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
HEARING IN PUBLIC FOR THE CORE STRATEGY AND GENERIC DEVELOPMENT
CONTROL POLICIES
CLOSING STATEMENT BY CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL

On the first day of this Hearing I read out the County Council's opening statement. This included a brief description of the spatial context for the plan and a summary of its previous stages. The council stressed that, although it was recommending changes to the submitted documents, it did not consider that any of these changes were necessary to make the Core Strategy or the Generic Development Control Policies sound. The changes were updates or intended to clarify or improve text.

After two weeks of rigorous and detailed examination of a very wide range of matters and issues, the council is still of that opinion that the documents are sound in all respects. Other participants may possibly consider that it is only just sound, but only two or three people have suggested that a part of the Core Strategy should be scrapped altogether.

I think that most of the issues that we have discussed, in relation to representations, fall into two categories,

- firstly, there are ones that concern changes to the spatial context that have occurred since the documents were submitted, and,
- secondly, there are ones that concern matters that have not been included in the documents.

And then, in a category all of their own, there have been the Inspectors' requests for further information and for the council's response to all of the matters and issues.

In the first category, of being overtaken by events, we have spent time discussing, the publication of the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West, publication of the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely White Paper and the decision by the Coal Authority to re-engage with the planning system.

In the second, or omissions, category I would mention provision for managing Very Low Level Radioactive Wastes, and for safeguarding coal resources and high specification roadstones.

With regard to the adopted RSS 4 North West has confirmed that the documents are in general conformity with it and has not raised any issues. The main implication of the RSS has been that we have had to withdraw changes that we were initially proposing.

Our “homework” has included a fairly serious rethink of the text in Chapter 8 about radioactive wastes, including one or two corrections, but I do not think that any of the suggested changes, would significantly alter the policies that were put forward in the submitted documents. We are still in the process of redrafting that chapter. We will now have to wait to see the responses of all the relevant representors once they have been able to consider the latest suggested changes. The majority of participants at the Hearing sessions confirmed that their preference was for a timely review of this part of the Core Strategy rather than for it to be found to be unsound. The council welcomes this approach.

Whilst we have only been able to go part way towards incorporating the range of matters that the Coal Authority was seeking, the Authority has confirmed that it is not now raising issues of soundness.

The Core Strategy, in several places, highlights the importance of the Annual Monitoring Reports in assessing the performance and continued relevance of policies. In addition to the radioactive waste matters that I have already mentioned I would single out the management of commercial and industrial wastes; the site location criteria for waste management facilities, inter-regional supplies of high specification roadstones and the trends in the sales of aggregates. The Hearing sessions have confirmed the importance of this monitoring.

The Inspectors have frequently had to remind all of us about the constraints on making changes at this stage that are imposed by the 2004 Regulations. Hopefully, the 2008 Regulations will prove to provide much more appropriate procedures for the next set of documents that we now hope to progress towards publication in early 2009.

I would like to thank all of the participants for the manner in which they have presented their arguments. The council appreciates the time and effort that has been put in and has every sympathy with people faced with trying to understand what must seem to be rather arcane and rigid procedures which the Regulations have imposed on the proceedings.

Finally, I would like to offer the council's thanks to the Inspectors for the way they have conducted the Hearing sessions. This has ensured that the sessions have proceeded in a positive and informal atmosphere whilst virtually every aspect of the two development plan documents has been rigorously examined. No-one can say they were not given every opportunity to make their points.

Mr Pratt has already commented on how we were taken aback by the number and range of issues that were raised by the Inspectors and which nobody else had even thought of. Our experience over the last two weeks has been that having to come up

with answers to all of these points, and fairly recently, has meant that they were fresh in our minds and we were prepared and able to answer nearly all of the questions that came up. Naturally, we hope that people will have regarded those answers as an adequate response even if they do not agree with what we have said.

I think it would be going too far to say we are looking forward to the next Examination and Hearing, which will be under the new more sensible procedures, but I would like to thank everybody again on behalf of the county council.

We now eagerly await the Inspectors' report to see what we got right and what was not so good.

Thank you.

RGE/p334/21/004

21st November 2008