

# GOSFORTH . PARISH . COUNCIL

clkt Stuart King

CUMBRIA COUNTY C  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

30 JUL 2008

The Senior Responsible Officer  
Managing Radioactive Waste Safely Programme  
4C Ergon House  
Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 2AL

Dear Sir

At its last meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> July the Parish Council discussed the Government White Paper 'Managing Radioactive Waste Safely - A Framework for Implementing Geological Disposal'. Following that meeting the Parish Council:

1. Recognises that the information needed, to enable the people of the parish of Gosforth to make an informed decision as to the advisability or otherwise of 'hosting' a GDF, can be accessed only by registering a without commitment Expression of Interest.
2. Found itself constrained in debating further the subject of registering an Expression of Interest because:
  - a) There exists a considerable lack of clarity and attendant uncertainty relating to a number of key critical points made in the White Paper.
  - b) There was concern that any community eventually designated as the 'Host Community', initially would be subsumed and ultimately submerged under a much larger grouping, the further along the engagement process it proceeded, leading inevitably to a loss of influence and the ability to control events within its own community.
3. Given below is a more detailed explanation of some of the Parish Council concerns leading to the assessment outlined above:
  - a) **SAFETY.** Quite obviously the issue of safety is of paramount importance. The Parish Council has a 2-fold concern:
    - 1) Retrievability, from the advent of NIREX and subsequently, has been a subject of major focus. The Parish Council is of the opinion that the Government's position on retrievability is something of a fudge, leaving as it does a final decision for future generations. The Parish Council believes that this position is only tenable if accompanied by a commitment from Government to fund a sustained programme of research into reducing the hazardous nature of high-level wastes.
    - 2) The involvement of the BGS in the preliminary stages of geological investigation is both welcomed and reassuring, as is the input from CPG and CRP. The Parish Council considers the involvement of a body with the status of the BGS, completely without Government control, would be a most reassuring feature for potential Host Communities in all later geological and hydro-geological investigations right up to and including the undertaking of excavation works, and wonders why the Government has not sought to retain the BGS for a much longer time-span.

- b) **HOST COMMUNITY - DEFINITION.** The Parish Council has no problems with the definition of 'Host Community'. However problems do arise with sections 6.16 - 6.20 of the White Paper, headed 'Who can express an interest'. It had been the belief of the Parish Council that, following on from the experience of NIREX, the CORWM consultations, and the consultative document of 25/06/07, the whole approach toward engagement through voluntarism, would be a bottom-up approach, and the definition of 'Host Community' does nothing to contradict this belief. Sections 6.16 - 6.20 on the other hand suggest very much a top-down approach, with the 'Local Authority' the mainspring of all decisions. The Parish Council has great difficulty with this, discerning a lack of logic in defining a Host Community, emphasising voluntarism, but then encouraging 'local authorities' to make Expressions of Interest and then go out and canvas further Expressions of Interest from smaller entities better able to match up to the Host Community definition. This is most decidedly a top-down approach and the Parish Council is firmly of the view that this will inhibit potential Host Communities from involvement in the engagement process.
- c) **ENGAGEMENT PACKAGE.** The Parish Council finds it strange that on the one hand Government states that a Host Community will be volunteering "an essential service to the nation" while on the other hand it states that the costs of the local community engagement "will be funded either partly or wholly through Government.....". Wholly-funded presents no problem. Partly-funded, when volunteering "an essential service to the nation", is a completely different matter. The Parish Council believes that most, if not all communities, would find part-funding unacceptable and is of the opinion that Government has made a serious error here.
- d) **COMMUNITY BENEFITS PACKAGE.** It seems quite clear to the Parish Council that as far as a benefits package is concerned the White Paper has not taken on board the lessons of the NIREX debacle. To ask any community to consider hosting a GDF without having some up-front concrete proposals as to the benefits likely to accrue to a 'successful' Host Community verges on the naïve. This (Gosforth) community, indeed this wider locality, has a long history of waiting for the (additional) benefits of its association with the Nuclear Industry to materialise - NIREX in the 90's, Drigg for 50 years and even Sellafield itself. Earlier the consultative document held out hope of lessons learned with its mention of trust funds, a tax on the facility and property price protection, all now sadly gone. The question is really quite a simple one - how can a community volunteer to host a GDF if it has no knowledge of what the 'quid pro quo' is, other than a few broadly generalised Government statements? Indeed it would not be surprising if communities were to conclude, that to enter any engagement process without a proposition of concrete benefit proposals, would be foolhardy in the extreme. There is also concern by the Parish Council regarding the concept of 'additionality', brought about by mention in the White Paper, in the list of possible benefits, of 'skilled employment for hundreds of people' and improved local training and skills development. The Parish Council would argue that without such 'skilled employment' etc. a GDF could neither be built in the first place nor operated over a longer term. The Parish Council is firmly of the opinion that 'additionality' means in addition to that which is already available to or present in a community. In respect of Government proposals for a community benefits package there is, for this Parish Council, an overwhelming and very unwelcome sense of 'déjà vu'.



e) **DECISION TO PARTICIPATE.** While the Parish Council understands that the Decision Making Body has some role to play in the context of the wider community's involvement in the development of a GDF it fails to comprehend completely the rationale behind giving this body an involvement in the Decision to Participate stage. Involvement of the Decision Making Body at this point seems arbitrary and illogical. It is the Parish Council's considered view that any self-respecting community registering an Expression of Interest would, in the natural course of things, feel that it had the right and the competence to make its own decision to participate. The arbitrary and illogical imposition of the Decision Making Body at this stage will have a negative impact on expressions of interest from potential host communities.

f) **RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL (ROW).** Given the importance of the ROW to a potential Host Community the Parish Council finds it inexplicable that the responsibility for exercising the ROW has been vested in the Decision Making Body. The ROW is the ultimate source of comfort for potential Host Communities, and the fact that such communities are not to be entrusted with its exercise is yet another indication of the lack of confidence that the Government has in smaller communities, and a further example of Government's top-down approach to the siting of a GDF. Furthermore consideration of these ROW proposals highlight some intriguing and difficult questions eg.

1. If the Host Community wishes to exercise its ROW, would the Decision Making Body have to accept that decision and act accordingly?
2. Could the Decision Making Body ignore the wishes of the Host Community?
3. If any of the wider local interests chose to withdraw, would acceptance by the Decision Making Body make any difference to anything?
4. Would a decision to withdraw by the Decision Making Body be binding on all parties and terminate everything or could the Host Community and wider local interests carry on alone?

The Parish Council finds this nightmare territory.

g) **COMMUNITY SITING PARTNERSHIP.** In principle the Parish Council supports the idea of partnership working. In practice a consideration of the proposals put forward in the White Paper would in the Parish Council's opinion lead to a partnership so lop-sided that the organisation would be a partnership in name only, so dominated would it be by the Decision Making Body. Any partnership which contains a Decision Making body able to make decisions relating to,

1. The decision to participate,
2. The ROW and 'continued participation at key stages',
3. The 'local acceptability of proposals for community benefits packages',
4. The 'local acceptability of the sites within an area that are proposed for field surface-based investigations',
5. 'Whether potential retrievability of wastes has been adequately considered',

renders the role of all other partnership members redundant. While in theory the Decision Making body would take careful account of the advice and recommendation from the Community Siting Partnership (in which of course it is the most powerful member) in practice the Parish Council has no doubt that the Decision Making Body would go its own way.



h) **BOTTOM-UP/ TOP-DOWN.** A theme which the Parish Council has referred to at times in this letter is Government's top-down approach towards the establishment of a GDF. For this Parish Council this is bitterly disappointing. The long struggle of the 1990's against a top-down approach, as epitomised by NIREX, led eventually to CORWM, and some hope that lessons had been learned, and indeed with the voluntarism approach and partnership working and the consultative document of June 2007 this seemed to be the case. A bottom-up approach looked decidedly possible. The White Paper, while trumpeting voluntarism and partnership working has severely restricted the former (to making an Expression of Interest only) and neutered the latter. By creating an all powerful Decision Making Body and having it act as 'in loco governmental' the Government has shown a lack of confidence in smaller communities, and implemented a top-down process. As a democratically elected Parish Council, strongly supportive of the bottom-up approach, this has led to the decision taken by the Parish Council that it is unable to debate further the subject of registering a without commitment Expression of Interest until greater clarification is made available.

As requested in the White Paper the Parish Council is copying this letter to the County and Borough Councils (and their corresponding representatives for Gosforth), as it is uncertain which of its 2 local authorities will be the Decision Making Body.

Copies are also being sent to the Lake District National Park Authority (who are responsible for planning decisions in 80% of Gosforth parish), the Chairman of 5-Rivers Partnership (a grouping of 7 Parish Councils adjoining the Sellafield and Drigg sites, of which Gosforth is a member), the MP for Copeland, and the Chief Executive of Cumbria Association of Local Councils.

Yours sincerely



D A Polhill

Clerk - on behalf of Gosforth Parish Council

Date: 28th July 2008

Distribution:

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Mr N Clarkson.	Cumbria County Council Member for Gosforth area
The Chief Executive.	Copeland Borough Council
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Mr J Jennings.	Chairman 5-Rivers Partnership