

circulated
together

WEST CUMBRIA & NORTH LAKES FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

**Cllr Tim Knowles
Cumbria County Council**

Oct 14th 2008

Dear Cllr Knowles

I am writing in connection with the letter that was circulated to a number of stakeholders in August, seeking preliminary views on the desirability of Cumbria County Council registering a 'without commitment Expression of Interest' in holding discussions with Government about the siting process for a deep geological repository for nuclear waste.

We note that environmental NGOs were not specifically included in this invitation, but also note that those to whom it was addressed were invited to share it with other relevant organisations, and we therefore feel that you would wish to know our views.

We have been studying the matter and consulting with experts, and we have reservations both about the 'voluntarism' concept as set out by the White Paper, and about the viability of the deep disposal concept. We would very much like to take part in any future deliberations on this important subject as we too feel that the question of how to handle nuclear waste – especially that which has built up here in Cumbria - is one that urgently needs to be addressed. Some important questions, specifically about the disposal concept and the adequacy of geological criteria – which would inform an initial screening stage - are set out in a separate letter from our Nuclear Researcher Dr Rachel Western to Stewart Kemp.

The current state of knowledge about the science of 'disposal' has led us to oppose the proposal. But we would like to stress that it is most certainly not a case of knee-jerk NIMBYism. We share the County and Government's concern about the fate of the high and intermediate level waste that is building up in Cumbria, some of it in an extremely hazardous state. But we argue that the fact that much of it is already here should not, as some people believe, make Cumbria the site for an underground burial option. That can only be decided on the basis of rigorous scientific, engineering and geological considerations.

The Nirex Inquiry in the mid 1990s showed that the site which seemed most promising in Cumbria for deep burial was not only unsuitable, but that Nirex's more general technical case for it was repeatedly described as 'over-optimistic' by the Inquiry inspector Chris MacDonald. We have found little evidence to convince us that the technical and engineering issues have moved sufficiently further forward from the mid-90s to allow a new case to be made.

It seemed important to us at this time to begin to ascertain the nature of public opinion, and so, in the time available to us, we have gone out on the streets and invited people in Cumbria – both residents and visitors – to sign the attached petition. It contains 896 names.

This process has given us a brief opportunity to try to gauge people's views, and we found different attitudes, ranging from support – often enthusiastic - for our case, through to lack of interest, resignation and disagreement with our position. However, we were concerned to learn that many people knew very little about the question. They want more information and to hear more debate from different viewpoints - which so far seems to have been lacking. We therefore hope that you will do all you can to promote such debate.

We hope you will register our position and agree with us that there is much further discussion needed on this important question. We would also be grateful if you could also draw the attention of Copeland and Allerdale Councils to the contents of this letter.

Yours sincerely



Dr Ruth Balogh

Nuclear issues campaigner
West Cumbria & North Lakes Friends of the Earth