

West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group
Notes from Meeting of the Low Level Waste Repository Sub-committee
Wednesday 13th September 2006

Attendees:

Sue Brown (Chairman)	Cumbria County Council
Adrian Dalton (Vice Chairman)	Drigg & Carleton Parish Council
June Shield	WCSSG secretariat
Dave Ferguson	EA
Richard Evans	Cumbria County Council
Dave Weatherburn	NDA
David Moore	WCSSG
James Millington	LLWR
Chris Halliwell	BNGSL
David Davies	Copeland Borough Council
Kneale Thompson	Drigg & Carleton Parish Council
Jimmy Naylor	Drigg & Carleton Parish Council

Observers:

John Graham	LLWR
Geoff Grint	NII
Andy Dietzold	LLWR
Neil Shaw	Envirocentre
Andrew Fairhurst	EA
James Fisher	BNGSL
Jean Butterworth	Resident
Robert Grey	LLWR
Cherry Grey	Visitor
John Hillary	BNGPS
Bob Brown	Millom Without PC
Paul Pointon	Washington Group International
Chuck Conway	Washington Group International
John Jennings	Drigg & Carleton Parish Council
Roy Young	Drigg & Carleton Parish Council
Bob Williamson	Drigg & Carleton Parish Council
Jane Marley	DPH Treasurer
Paul Singleton	Turley Associates

Apologies:

Apologies had been received from members of the Committee who were unable to attend.

Welcome/Introductions:

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves stating the organisation they were representing. She was pleased to observe that there were more members of the public present than usual.

Minutes of previous meeting held on Wednesday 14/6/06

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

Consignment of Unusual Low Level Waste

James Millington, BNGSL

Occasionally LLWR receives unusual consignments of waste and has undertaken to inform the community whenever this would be happening. James advised that a consignment would be arriving at LLWR later this year. This would consist of four 'Slagpots' from the steel industry which are 4m across and 3m high. The timescale for delivery is one Slagpot before Christmas (possibly two) with the remainder in the new year. They will be transported through the village on the back of a transporter lorry and residents will be requested to park their vehicles off road, as they were when the last large load was received at LLWR.

Q. What is the weight of the Slagpots?

A. 70 tonnes

Q. Why is it radioactive?

A. It was smelted by a Steel company in Sheffield and some low level radioactive metal was mistakenly smelted.

Q. What is the contamination?

A. Believed to be from pacemakers, therefore Plutonium contaminated (not alpha).

Q. How do you propose to store this on site?

A. On the 'shelf' which is a raised area, using a large crane. It will be concreted in situ.

Q. How far have they gone with the decontamination of these items?

A. They have been working on these for the past three years to get to the point where both the Environment Agency and LLWR are satisfied.

Q. As these items are so large, won't they take up an awful lot of valuable space?

A. The 'shelf' is not suitable for normal containers and hence can be used for the Slagpots.

Q. The last time the village had such a load travelling through, several residents experienced ground movement whilst in their properties, have you assessed the local structural impact that transferring these loads through the village will have?

A. The consignors who are responsible for getting the package here have engaged a specialist transport company to help them with the arrangements. The LLWR team are holding fortnightly meetings with the consignors.

The Environment Agency at Sheffield accepted the consignors' Best Practicable Means (BPM) and Best Practicable Environmental Option (BPEO) assessments before giving authorisation for the Slagpots to be transported here.

The view was expressed by a number of the people present that the receipt of these Slagpots highlights the need for another LLW store elsewhere in the country, rather than transporting such large items across the country.

The Role of the Planning Authority

Richard Evans, Cumbria County Council

There are three planning authorities that cover the local area; these are Copeland Borough Council (CBC), Cumbria County Council (CCC) and the Lake District National Park.

CCC deal with planning permission for waste management developments, i.e. use of land, including erection of plant or machinery, access to highways. The one complication is that there isn't a legal definition of waste. CCC is developing a Minerals & Waste Development framework document which is all about making provision for a planning policy over a 12 year plan period. CCC is still consulting on this document and will be meeting in November in order to look at the preferred options to take the plan forward. Consultation will finish by the end of January 2007 with the end of the planning process being September 2008. The local Parish Council has a copy of the framework document, and it was suggested that they could discuss the document and submit their comments

CCC is in agreement with the findings of CORWM that radioactive waste other than LLW should be dealt with by deep geological disposal which should be both phased and recoverable; but because national policy has not yet been decided then CCC is unable to comment and hence this issue is not in their plan.

Every region produces their own LLW so therefore every authority should have their own policies pertaining to their waste. There are 20 million cubic metres of LLW at Sellafield and only 2 million cubic metres everywhere else.

Before any decisions on future disposals at the LLWR are made, the following issues which need addressing are:-

The impacts of climate change

The uncertainty of what is in trenches 1-7 (this needs to be fast tracked)

How licensable is the site by other agencies

LLW from decommissioning

CCC feel that the DEFRA report was misleading and that the LLWR will be full by 2008. When permission for higher stacking was granted, this had potential to prolong the capacity of the site until 2010 but because of the amount of containers being brought to the site, the actual date will be 2008.

There is the need to look for alternative sites and whether LLWR should accept only Cumbria's waste. A benefits package should be in place.

Q. More explanation is needed of why there is more PCM than originally thought and why it may take longer to remove from site than originally anticipated?

A. There has been a category of Intermediate Level Waste known as Plutonium Contaminated Material (PCM) on the site since the 1960's. The site was originally an ordinance factory and its magazines were used to store this PCM. To retrieve, package, assay and transport this waste involves planning condition constraints and the original date for removal was by 31/12/06. Work is going very well but some of the items are difficult to retrieve and operators are required to wear air-fed suits. LLWR has not given up on the deadline of 31/12/06 but to counteract the possibility of any more difficulties arising, has applied to the Environment Agency for an extension until 30/09/07. LLWR do not expect the removal of PCM to take until 30/09/07 but have set this date rather than having to apply for a second extension.

LLWR recently asked for permission to work at weekends, operating 2 shifts and they have established a new day team. 521 PCM items have been shipped out leaving 29 yet to be removed. To date 8480 drums have been dispatched, with another 730 already retrieved, assayed and ready to go. A further 410 are yet to be retrieved. Last week saw the highest numbers ever achieved and the key message is that we have not given up on 31/12/06.

Q. How many days does it take to handle one item?

A. When retrieving items, some of them have to be size-reduced (cut up) before being put in a Gemini flask. The items that are left are the difficult items, but LLWR believe there are enough working days to achieve the deadline, however this does not leave any contingency.

Q. How many drums are going to Sellafield each week?

A. 64 with the hope of increasing this number, however the key thing is to ensure that safety is maintained rather than rushing to meet the deadline. Both the community and the workforce will be disappointed if the deadline is not met, but this has been a six year project, so in that respect a further couple of months is not unacceptable.

Q. What progress has been made with the 'difficult' drums?

A. these drums have been concreted which makes them difficult to assay. We are trying to do this without having to break them up.

Q. What is the capacity for Vault 9?

A. Vault 9 is just over 100,000 cubic metres.

This concludes that there is a massive shortfall in capacity and therefore another LLWR is a must.

Update on Modular Vaults

Paul Singleton, Turley Associates on behalf of BNGSL

Turley Associates are planning consultants who are working with BNGSL to look at implications for new planning applications. They will prepare any planning application and have currently identified the need for five applications:-

1. Waste Receipt Facility which will include new sidings, offloading area, transient storage area and a contractor compound
2. Vault 9 including a contractor compound

3. Vault 8 contingency (2 locations are being looked at)
4. Offsite boreholes around the perimeter of the site which will also include boreholes on some privately owned land, therefore consent will be required.
5. Reuse or continued use of PCM buildings.

The intention is to reuse PCM compounds for interim storage until Vault 9 is ready. This strategy has been agreed at previous sub-committee meetings, however some members of the community believed that the granting of higher stacking in Vault 8 would give enough capacity to bridge the gap until completion of Vault 9 and were unaware of the intention of stacking in the PCM compounds which will inevitably have a visual impact on Shore Road. The community originally contested higher stacking in Vault 8 and challenged that there would be no added value by doing so. More information on this issue will be available at the next meeting.

The focus for the Waste Receipt Facility is to try and move operations to the centre of the site, minimising visual impact.

Modular Vaults is the preferred option for Vault 9, this will help support decommissioning, research and hospitals etc. The application for Vault 9 will be for storage not disposal, with the clear intention that waste is capable of being retrieved. The dimensions will be roughly 110 metres by 180 metres and will have a 5500 container capacity. The vault will be built with an inbuilt liner which will meet regulations if disposal rather than storage is later decided on. If Vault 9 is not used as a final disposal option, then the waste will need to be retrievable. The design is being finalised and pre-application discussions are taking place with CCC.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Scope Report requires comments and agreement from CCC. Turley Associates want to understand any key issues that the WCSSG and the community are likely to have and welcome feedback on what information is required, when and how this information should be received.

Q. If a later decision means that Vault 9 is to be used for final disposal, what sort of work would be involved?

A. This has been taken into account in the design of Vault 9, i.e. the bottom of the storage area has been designed to accommodate final disposal.

Q. What is the timeframe for this consultation exercise?

A. This will be publicised and a copy of the scoping document will be made available to the Chairman of the Parish Council.

CCC commented that if stacking on the rail sidings was to persist, then planning permission would be required. They raised the question why can't the waste from each individual power station, be kept temporarily at their own site?

Update on Competition Process and Arrangements

Dave Weatherburn, NDA

There are two elements to the scope of competition; these are the operation of LLWR and the proposals & possible implementation of LLW innovative management solutions. The contract will be for a maximum 17 years (5+5+5+2). The aspiration is to have a mutually beneficial long term relationship but with the flexibility to sever the contract should the incumbent contractor not perform to the necessary standards.

The date for LLWR to be a stand alone entity was originally December 06, this is now February 07. The invitation to tender (ITT) period remains as per the dates provided at the Industry Day back in April – i.e. late October 06 until late January 07; with the contract scheduled to be awarded in October 07. The site will operate under its new contractors from April 08 following a transition period.

Three successful consortia have been invited to tender, these are (in no particular order) Babcocks, EnergySolutions and Washington Group International. The NDA offered the opportunity for the WCSSG to meet with the bidders in December 06. This invitation was accepted and it was agreed that it should be in the form of a separate meeting, lasting half a day. The meeting would involve the WCSSG and the Parish Council, the general public would be able to feed their comments/questions via the Parish Council.

Dave Weatherburn also covered the Draft Evaluation Criteria and gave an update on the Draft Community Recognition Model, explaining that any community benefit funding would likely be contributed to by the consignors in the form of a levy and a good neighbour donation from the SMC – as such this funding would be self generating.

Q. A question totally unrelated to your presentation, but once all PCM is removed from LLWR, I believe that the site will be re-categorised to a category 4 site. What security levels will there be?

A. The OCNS are the regulatory body who will give permission to re-categorise the site, however they won't do this until the job is complete. LLWR is currently in talks with the OCNS, but it is much too early to say that security levels will be changing.

Q. Any downgrading of security would cause concern in the community.

A. Security levels would not be changed without consultation.

A suggestion was made that this should be discussed further; however it was felt that the next meeting in December would be too soon. It was agreed that this matter would be covered in the meeting in March 2007 and that it may be appropriate to invite members of the Emergency Planning Sub-committee.

Action: Sue Brown – To liaise with Dave Weatherburn regarding a date for the WCSSG & Parish Council to meet with the successful bidders. The invite to this proposed meeting should come from the Parish Council.

Defining the End State for the LLWR

Andy Dietzold, BNGSL

The End State is the physical condition of a site when the NDA has finished its business there. The NDA has asked the site operators to engage with stakeholders on the End States, whilst asking the Site Stakeholder Groups to indicate the site end uses that they would like.

LLWR is seeking agreement from the WCSSG regarding the process for this consultation and views and comments will be invited. The timeframe set for this by the NDA is the end of March 2007.

The Chairman of the WCSSG pointed out that at the next Scrutiny meeting of the WCSSG they would be announcing a process along with a timeline for consultation on site end states. This would almost certainly not be concluded by the end of March 2007.

Update on Drigg & Carleton Parish Plan

Adrian Dalton, Drigg & Carleton Parish Council

A questionnaire (funded by DEFRA) covering nine separate categories has been distributed throughout the community with an encouraging 70% of responses being returned. Work is progressing on producing a report from the responses received to indicate to BNGSL and the NDA what the Parish aspirations are.

Any Other Business

It was pointed out that at the last meeting there was an action to seek DEFRA representation at future meetings.

The Chairman reminded the group of the date of the next meeting, 13th December and thanked June Shield for taking the minutes and everyone for their attendance.

Action: Sue Brown – To try and ensure a DEFRA representative is available for next meeting