

10. SELLAFIELD AND THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY

10.1 INTRODUCTION

10.1.1 The nuclear industry plays a key role in Copeland. There are currently some 11000 employed at Sellafield and a further 2500 jobs depend on the purchasing power of the industry and workforce. The current site owner and operator, British Nuclear Group (BNG), plays an important role in the community not only as an employer but as a major stakeholder in projects to diversify the local economy. The company is a partner in the West Cumbria Development Fund which has supported major infrastructure projects including the Westlakes Science and Technology Park and the regeneration of Whitehaven harbour and which underwrites the business support role of the West Cumbria Development Agency. It also works proactively with local schools and training agencies to help them meet the skills needs of the local economy both now and in the future.

10.1.2 The future of the nuclear industry is a national issue. Copeland has been the focus of major inquiries into fuel reprocessing (the THORP Inquiry) and into the development of an underground disposal site for radioactive waste (the NIREX Inquiry). Important areas of Government policy are

- There are no current plans to invest in further nuclear power stations and the BNG business plan envisages that all reprocessing will cease by 2012.
- The clean up of the legacy of the nuclear energy programme is proposed to be the responsibility of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority which will be based in West Cumbria.
- A review of the national radioactive waste management strategy is underway with completion not expected until 2006.

10.1.3 The wide ramifications of this policy background have been discussed in the Employment Chapter. However two crucial issues are how the local community is involved in the debate on the future of the industry and how to ensure that whatever solutions are found that they are sustainable in the widest sense of a healthy local economy, environment and community.

10.2 RADIOACTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT

10.2.1 Reference has been made to the DEFRA review of national radioactive waste management policy. The Council is keenly aware that previous proposals for a radioactive waste deep disposal site have focused on Copeland. This is a strategic national and international issue which will be determined by the Government. As set out in the Development Strategy (2.10) the Council wishes to ensure that in so far as any decision has a spatial impact on Copeland it is based on a full consideration of all the facts.

Policy NUC 1: Radioactive Waste Storage and Disposal

The Council will only support a proposal for disposal or long term storage of radioactive waste where it meets the requirements set out in Structure Plan Policy ST4 and Local Plan Policy DEV 8 and in addition has

- 1. Involved and secured the support of the local Copeland community in the development and subsequent implementation of such proposals**
- 2. Included measures to meet local community needs and to mitigate the adverse effects of the proposals on the social and economic well being of the community.**

10.3 SELLAFIELD

10.3.1 The Sellafield site occupies some 300ha of land on the coast north of the village of Seascale in an area of relatively low population density. It started producing plutonium for military purposes in 1946 and later the first ever commercial nuclear power station was built at Calder Hall in 1956. An experimental Advanced Gas Reactor was built in 1963. Today none of these plants is operational and the Windscale military reactor piles are currently being decommissioned

10.3.2 At present the site supports four main activities :

- the reprocessing of irradiated fuel ;
- the treatment of waste products arising from reprocessing
- the manufacture of MOX fuel from plutonium and uranium recovered from reprocessing ;
- and the storage on site of waste products.

10.3.3 For a number of reasons reprocessing is becoming a less attractive option for dealing with irradiated fuel on both environmental and economic grounds. In addition the magnox stations are being phased out. In the foreseeable future therefore it is likely that reprocessing will cease at Sellafield and the remaining on site activity focused on decommissioning and clean up. The current British Nuclear Group business plan assumes that by 2013 all reprocessing plants and the MOX fuel fabrication plant will have been shut down. The economic implications of this have been referred to previously as a key driver for developing alternative employment opportunities. However the site based issues include

- The greater part of the UK inventory of intermediate waste and all the UK highly active waste is stored at Sellafield. The change of emphasis in national waste management policy from reprocessing to storage may lead to proposals to import fuel or other waste to Sellafield for storage. This is particularly likely in the light of the long term timetable for the DEFRA review of waste management options. The Council considers it would not be in its interest for this to happen because it would tend to influence and take the pressure off the DEFRA review. However the reality is that some decisions will have to be taken on operational, safety and environmental grounds over the next two or three years. The Council needs to be in a position to negotiate with the industry as and when such proposals come forward.
- The decommissioning proposals for the site will extend well beyond the Local Plan timescale. However as with the decontamination of other industrial sites it is important that the end use is established and that activity on site complements and contributes to this end.

10.3.4 It should be noted that the Government is proposing to establish a Nuclear Decommissioning Authority to be responsible for the radioactive waste legacy in the UK. It will take over the ownership of the Sellafield site and other British Nuclear Group assets. A detailed decommissioning programme for the Sellafield site is being developed in the form of a lifecycle baseline incorporating milestones towards achieving a restored site. It will be subject to local consultation and agreement and will inform decisions by the Council under Policy NUC2.

Policy NUC 2: Use of the Sellafield Licensed Site

Within the licensed site boundary development for or related to the nuclear fuel cycle will only be permitted

where the development contributes towards a long term strategy for the future management of the site.

With the exception of irradiated fuel and the transfer of waste from Drigg Disposal Site no radioactive waste shall be imported for treatment or storage on the licensed site unless the proposal;

- 1. represents the best practicable environmental option and is an interim proposal pending agreement on a national disposal route**
- 2. involves and secures the support of the local Copeland community**
- 3. includes measures to meet the local community needs and to mitigate the adverse effect of the proposal on the social and economic well being of the community**

10.3.5 There are proposals to transfer office jobs currently provided within the site to locations outside the licensed site boundary. As far as possible the Council would expect these jobs to be relocated in accordance with the Development Strategy and Town Centre policies. There may be instances where there is a need to locate these jobs adjoining the licensed site boundary and so extend the area of the site. No provision is made for such development in the plan. If such development were to be approved the Council would seek an agreement to assist in the provision of compensatory investment to address the loss of the benefits of this employment from more sustainable locations, in particular town centres.

Policy NUC 3: Relocation of Non Radioactive Development

The relocation of non radioactive development from the site shall be undertaken in accordance with the Development Strategy Policies DEV 1 to 5. The following preferred locations are identified:

- General office in town centre or edge of town centre locations**
- Nuclear technology related at Westlakes Science and Technology Park**
- Workshops/processing operations on local employment sites**

10.3.6 Where exceptional operational or other grounds dictate that non radioactive development cannot be located in accordance

with NUC3, the location of development contiguous or very close to the Sellafield site would be considered favourably in the context of Local Plan Policies DEV 6 and DEV 8 subject to the applicant entering into a planning agreement or making a unilateral undertaking to address the loss of this investment elsewhere in the Borough.

10.4 DRIGG DISPOSAL SITE

10.4.1 The disposal of all solid Low Level Radioactive Waste (LLW) arising at Sellafield is undertaken at Drigg LLW Disposal Site about four miles to the south of Sellafield to which it is linked by rail. It has been operational since 1957 and is effectively the national LLW disposal site. It was originally tipped very much like any other landfill site but over the last few years significant improvements have been to the way in which the site is managed.

10.4.2 In the absence of a national strategy for radioactive waste there is no agreed long term disposal route for LLW once the Drigg Disposal Site is full. BNF has introduced high force compaction and grouting of waste which will extend the life of the consented area of the site. The Council takes the view that the use of the Drigg Disposal Site should not include processing of waste since this would be incompatible with this quiet stretch of coastline and would lead to increased traffic and disturbance to the village of Drigg. However responsibility for development proposals at the Drigg Disposal Site relating to the storage of waste lies with Cumbria County Council as waste disposal planning authority.

POLICY NUC 4: Drigg Disposal Site

The Council when consulted on development proposals at the Drigg Disposal Site will seek to resist any proposal for an extension to the existing consented area for the disposal of low level waste or for the introduction of processing operations associated with disposal.

POLICY NUC 5: Transport of Materials to Drigg Disposal Site

In considering a consultation on any proposal for further development within the consented area at the Drigg Disposal Site the Council will seek to ensure that construction materials are brought to the site by rail as a condition of any consent.

