



Sustainability & Nuclear Policy Unit

Head of Services: Mr. David Davies

Your ref:
Our ref: S&NP/ENR/DTI1006

30 October 2006

Energy Review: Nuclear Policy Framework
Department of Trade and Industry
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Dear Sirs

Re: CONSULTATION ON THE POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR NEW NUCLEAR BUILD

Thank you for giving Copeland Borough Council the opportunity for comment on your consultation "Energy Review Implementation – Nuclear Policy Framework". However, the Council is disappointed that it was not formally consulted but had to find out about the consultation on the DTI web site.

The Nuclear Working Group at Copeland Borough Council has carefully considered the issues you have raised. A debate on this response was held at the meeting of the Council on 19th October 2006. That debate had been informed by:

- A report prepared by consultants on the energy baseline (including information on nuclear power).
- A seminar for Members to explore the 'Implications of the Energy Review for Cumbria' (to which key renewable and nuclear energy speakers were invited).

We have endeavoured to look at your proposals from a national, regional and, particularly, a local community point of view. You will appreciate that with four nuclear licensed facilities – Calder Hall, Sellafield, Windscale and the LLW Repository – plus some 60% of the UK's radioactive waste in Copeland, the nuclear power question holds great significance for our community.

The Council fully understands that the Government is seeking to give the private sector confidence that the process for approving new build nuclear power will be speeded up to reduce uncertainty and expense. This is clearly an important consideration to encourage the early and substantial investment in nuclear power generation, given the considerable lead time to commissioning and the possibility of problems in peak time supply as early as 2015.

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It appears appropriate and necessary for Government to establish the need for nuclear energy to be an integral component of the energy supply mix as part of national energy policy. However, this short cut methodology could set a precedent for 'difficult' types of development such as nuclear waste stores, which is of concern to the Council. However, it is Council policy to support the concept of new build.

As the development of new nuclear power stations will be commercially lead it is important for those developers to have strategic guidance with a clear statement of need from Government. This should clearly show the envisaged percentage of nuclear power in the overall UK energy mix, which is currently lacking in the consultation.

The Government proposes a high level assessment of candidate designs for new build put forward by developers. The purpose of this assessment is to remove the general high-level questions of the health and safety aspects of nuclear power - for example, 'is nuclear power safe?' – from the planning inquiry arena. It is important to clarify how robust the assessment of safety and environmental impact is at such an early strategic stage. These assessments are normally iterative and become more vigorous throughout the design implementation and commissioning stages. As Copeland is a nuclear community it is important at this stage, that there is full and comprehensive public engagement, as these will be key concerns for communities and interested groups.

As part of their strategic assessment, involving public consultation, the Government would also establish criteria for identifying the most suitable sites for nuclear power stations and indicate how potential sites meet these criteria. They state that as the public will have been fully engaged at a strategic level already, the same considerations should not be reassessed at a later public inquiry. However, will the earlier assessment of the chosen sites stand the test of time to justify not revisiting at the public inquiry?

In addition, there is no timetable on the siting assessment, except it will commence in 2007 Is it possible at this early stage for the design to be fully assessed by the regulators? Regulatory reassurance and assessment is iterative and is based on site-specific design so it could be difficult up front and early. It is imperative that this is a thorough assessment with comprehensive public engagement. This is a correct approach to evaluating alternative sites on a national basis.

Government states high-level safety and environmental strategies will not be revisited at Public Inquiry. The Council supports the concept of conducting a national Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), but a site specific Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would still need to be part of any site planning enquiry. Furthermore, the pre-setting of strategic high-level siting criteria would reduce flexibility in finding suitable locations. We suggest that strategic siting criteria should be capable of being reviewed during the siting decision-making process

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Changes in local circumstances, community aspirations and more detailed examination of sites, may impact on whether specific sites continue to be viable. That a nationwide assessment has been undertaken strengthens the case at a public inquiry, but it should be complemented, if necessary, by further detailed examination at the local level, as part of the planning application process, the Local Development Framework process and the planning inquiry process, as relevant. Therefore the strategic assessment of whether sites are viable sites should not be a 'given' to the local inquiry.

Nuclear power stations are controversial developments required by Government in the national interest with serious perceived implications for local areas. The Council takes the view that communities that meet the siting criteria should be candidates for the volunteerism, veto and community benefits approach recommended by CoRWM in respect of long-term radioactive waste disposal.

The Government proposes that the inspector at an inquiry should act on the assumption that the regulators will properly discharge their respective duties in the areas of health and safety, security, non-proliferation and radiological discharges to the environment. This is a valid point, which is applied in the consideration of planning proposals. The planning system should not duplicate controls that exist elsewhere.

Preliminary statements on the authorisability of candidate designs for new nuclear power stations are supported. Prior and parallel regulatory considerations of proposals will inform the planning process.

In conclusion, Copeland Borough Council strongly supports the involvement of potential host communities in participating in planning inquiries for nuclear power stations. We also support the action to address some of the 'generic' nuclear issues before specific nuclear proposals are considered through the planning system. However, there does need to be an in-built flexibility in order to allow discussion on changes in local circumstances and detailed examination at the local level.

I hope you find these comments helpful.

Yours faithfully



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