

Blennerhasset & Torpenhow Parish Council Response

Government Consultation Paper 'Review of the Siting Process for a Geological Disposal Facility' December 2013

Contact:

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Question 1: Do you agree that the test of public support should be taken before the representative authority loses the Right of Withdrawal? If so, what do you think would be the most appropriate means of testing public support and when should it take place? If you do not agree with the need for such a test please explain why.

Yes, a test of public support should be taken.

We believe that referendums are the most appropriate means of testing public support, following a process of information-giving and consultation with the communities involved.

A referendum should be held **before** the district or unitary authority confirms that it intends to move to the focusing stage.

Another, more local, referendum should be held once geological surveys are complete and point towards a specific area.

Further consultation will be required with the communities that will be directly affected. This means providing detailed information and entering into a frank and honest discussion.

Question 2: Do you agree with the proposed amendments to decision making within the MRWS siting process. If not how would you modify the proposed phased approach, or, alternatively, what different approach would you propose? Please explain your reasoning.

We are very concerned that Parish Councils and County Councils are excluded from the process.

A clearer structure and process would be helpful which shows when and how decisions will be made.

More clarity is needed on what a 'local body' is and its role.

The term 'community' is used to mean different things in the process. Each reference should be better defined

The representative authority should be required to consult local people and stakeholders before giving its consent.

More consideration is needed on how the steering group and consultative partnership will relate to the community. They should be independently led and include local community representatives.

Question 3: Do you agree with this approach to revising roles in the siting process set out in the White Paper? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

Parish and Town Councils are better placed to represent the interests of local communities and should be part of the decision-making process.

It appears that the district council has a number of potentially conflicting roles including representing the local communities (who may be opposed to a Geological Disposal Facility site) and promoting the local siting of a GDF.

Further information is needed on how the representative authority would reach decisions. Lessons should be learnt from the experience in Cumbria about whether a council's cabinet or executive makes the decision to participate.

Question 4: Do you agree with this proposed approach to assessing geological suitability as part of the MRWS siting process? If not what alternative approach would you propose and why?

In our view, there should be more details about the suitability of the geology of the area earlier in the process. Non-intrusive investigations should be carried out during the learning phase – before the decision on whether to move forward to the focusing stage.

More work on the six high level site selection criteria should be undertaken before the focusing stage is entered.

Question 5: Do you agree with this proposed approach to planning for the geological disposal facility? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

Yes, we agree that proposals for a GDF are a nationally significant infrastructure development that should be considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

The proposal for a National Policy Statement should include an Appraisal of Sustainability that deals with alternatives to the government's policy of a GDF.

Question 6: Do you agree with this clarification of the inventory for geological disposal - and how this will be communicated with the volunteer host community? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

It is vital to know what type and quantity of waste may be disposed of within a GDF. This should be clarified for the volunteer host community at the beginning of the process.

Question 7: Do you endorse the proposed approach to community benefits associated with a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

It is not clear what is meant by the 'host community' here. The effects do – and therefore the benefits should – go beyond the immediate host community.

The benefits should be clearer from the outset – this was not the case in the previous MRWS consultation.

Lessons can be learnt from how such funds are distributed in this and other countries. Examples of best practice should be identified.

Question 8: Do you agree with the proposed approach to addressing potential socio-economic and environmental effects that might come from hosting a GDF? If not, what alternative approach would you propose and why?

Positive and negative socio-economic and environmental impacts must be fully explored and reported upon in the Learning Phase. It should provide information that will assist everyone in making their own decisions on how they respond to a referendum.

Question 9: Do you have any other comments?

It is important that geological investigations are carried out early in the site selection process. It is vital to know that a GDF can be constructed that will fulfil geological and safety requirements before other issues are considered.

We would re-iterate that Parish Councils should be given the opportunity of taking part in the decision-making process.