

Minutes of the 23rd AWE Local Liaison Committee Meeting

Held Thursday 16 November 2000

Present:

Dr John Rae	AWE, Chairman	
Alan Brandwood	AWE	
Adrian Marks	AWE	
Frank Winter	AWE	
Graeme Hammond	AWE	
Philippa Kent	AWE	
Avril Burdett	AWE	Secretary
Ian Crossan	HSE/NII	
Chris Kemp	HSE/NII	
Gareth Beard	Environment Agency	
W Cane	Mortimer West End PC	Community Liaison Officer
DA Leeks	Tadley Town Council	
Mrs J Slimmin	Tadley Town Council	
MR Broad	Tadley Town Council	
G Eddy	Hampshire County Council	
CJS Bridges	Beech Hill Parish Council	
J Gosling	Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council	
Mrs M Dadswell	Aldermaston Parish Council	
A Ferguson	West Berkshire Council	
Dr Royce Longton	West Berkshire Council	
J Parfitt	West Berkshire Council	
R Meredith	West Berkshire Council	
P Hobbs	Sulhamstead Parish Council	
MRP Eden	Holybrook Parish Council	
D Hoad	Theale Parish Council	
PE Taylor	Brimpton Parish Council	
Dr AM Roberts	Padworth Parish Council	
A Sumner	Wokefield Parish Council	
T Whitaker	Mapledurham Parish Council	
J Southall	Purley on Thames Parish Council	
OR Waite	Shinfield Parish Council	
Mrs P Bale	Pangbourne Parish Council	
A West	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	
M Bryant	Wokingham Unitary Authority	
D Mundy	Burghfield Parish Council	

Apologies from:

A Campbell, C Thomson, P Frazer, F Kirkham, Mrs S Allen, J Moss, G Traynor, K Holyer, Barry Patman, John Mazillius. David Leeks for late attendance.

John Rae welcomed new member Chris Bridges representing Beech Hill Parish Council.

Actions from previous meetings

21/1 To have an unclassified version of Steve Gibbs' audit report made available to the LLC.

The Chairman hoped to do this during Spring 2001. Action pending

21/2 Avril Burdett to arrange for a member of Sellafield LLC to visit AWE.
The invitation had been extended, there had been no response to date. Action pending

21/6 To stage the AWE Environmental Exhibition in Tadley.
The Environment Exhibition 'Working Towards A Greener Future' was being staged in St Mary's Church Hall in Tadley following David Leek's suggestion. Members were invited to attend. Action complete

Action 22/1: To provide LLC members with a programme for the improvements to secondary containment.
Covered in the Chairman's opening remarks. Action complete

Action 2/22: To provide copies of quarterly reports to MPs for LLC members.
Copies were provided at the meeting. Action ongoing

Action 3/22: To ensure that proformas sent to members are returned within the timescale stated. **All members.**
The Secretary thanked members for the improved response. Action ongoing

Action 22/4: To provide information to members on trends in contractors' injuries.
Covered in Alan Brandwood's presentation. Action complete

Action 22/5: To provide members with details of the decision-making process on the question of the possibility of storing MoD tritiated waste.
The Chairman reported that there had been no new developments on this issue. AWE had made an initial approach to the Environment Agency and NII to ascertain their views. Further information was expected from the Ministry of Defence in due course. AWE was not committed to anything. Action ongoing

Action 22/6: To inform the MoD of members' opposition to the proposal and to forward Mr Cane's letter to the Minister and members. **Action complete.**

Action 22/7: To ascertain whether an aircraft breached the AWE restricted flying space. 19 July at 23:50 hrs.
This had been checked with the Ministry of Defence low-flying branch. They investigate if a formal complaint is made. However, there was no record of any aircraft having breached AWE's airspace. It was pointed out that not all of Tadley falls within AWE's restricted flying zone. RAF Odiham have assured AWE that pilots were well aware of the restricted flying zone but they would enforce the message. Action complete

1. CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

Members had been sent copies of the NII 3rd quarter report for 2000 and AWE's third quarter Assurance Report. Alan Brandwood to expand on that.

The Burghfield Level 1 demonstration exercise had taken place on Wednesday 27 September. It had been observed by representatives of HSE, NII, MoD and also Berkshire Fire and Rescue, Berkshire Ambulance Trust and the Royal Berkshire Hospital. NII's comments on the day had been favourable and the official report gave AWE a tick in the box.

Action 22/1 on Secondary containment around the sludge tanks.

Two one-year projects were underway. The first was to repair or replace the concrete bunding around the storage tanks. Work had begun in August and was due to be completed by July 2001. The second project, to put a roof over the sludge tanks, to prevent rainwater from filling the bunds. The first roof should be completed by Christmas and the whole project is due for completion by the end of November 2001.

Visits

Local MPs Martin Salter and Andrew Hunter had visited. Both Martin Salter and David Rendel had raised the issue of redundancy, particularly as it related to safety. AWE had given them an assurance that the redundancies were the result of a shrinking work programme and would not be allowed to compromise safety. Under the terms of AWE's Nuclear Site Licence this would not be allowed.

A total reduction of 1,400 staff was anticipated with 400 falling in the first year, AWE was continuing to recruit to ensure that the right balance of skills was maintained for the future requirements of the programme. To date 203 staff had left on Voluntary Redundancy, 110 had retired or resigned and 83 new staff had been recruited.

David Rendel and Sir George Young were also planning to attend the Environment Exhibition.

Judicial Review

The Judicial Review into the Environment Agency's process in determining AWE's discharge authorisations was now due to be heard on 11th, 12th, 15th January 2001. Whilst the action was not directed at AWE or the Ministry of Defence, both would be represented as interested parties.

Pangbourne Pipeline

John Rae thanked those members who had attended the presentation on the future of liquid waste management after the Pangbourne Pipeline ceased operation. AWE's proposals had been sent to the Environment Agency and their response was awaited. Members had been sent the notes from that meeting. A further presentation was planned covering AWE's site-wide tritium strategy (not including the separate issue of the MoD tritiated waste) and plans for the decommissioning of the Pangbourne Pipeline after its closure.

Community matters

AWE had published 'Community-Link' that week, it was circulated to around 19,000 local homes and businesses. Members were given copies.

AWE had contributed £10,000 to the Kennet School in support of their successful bid to become a Technology College. AWE's graduate trainees were also continuing with the refurbishment of a science laboratory at Richard Aldworth School.

Treaty Verification Seminar

Representatives from the Ministry of Defence, universities and non-government organisations had taken part in a Treaty Verification seminar hosted by AWE in October. AWE scientists had explained their work in support of developing capabilities that could be used to verify reductions in nuclear weapons, as described in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review.

Flooding

During severe weather, AWE Burghfield had been flooded to a depth of one foot over part of the site. At AWE Aldermaston, the North Ponds Water Management system had coped well with successive deluges. Aldermaston Village continued to have problems with flooding and John Rae said he was hoping to arrange a bus tour of the North Ponds complex so that Aldermaston villagers could see for themselves how the system worked. The Secretary would be liaising with the Aldermaston representatives to arrange this. More information from Frank Winter about the flooding later.

Mrs Dadswell, representing Aldermaston Parish Council thanked AWE for their help in providing sandbags and pumping out flooded properties. A letter of thanks had also been received from Mr Brown of West Berkshire Council.

Rumours of plutonium contamination

West Berkshire District Council had asked the Environment Agency to investigate rumours of plutonium contamination in the Aldermaston Stream, although AWE was unaware of anything that might have led to these rumours. More from Alan Brandwood later.

Ploughshares 2000 demonstration

The Ploughshares 2000 anti-nuclear group had demonstrated at AWE Aldermaston between 10-13 November. AWE had liaised with the Ministry of Defence Police and Thames Valley Police to ensure public safety and continued safe access to the sites. About 70 protesters had turned up. There had been several attempts to gain access to the site. Four demonstrators had been arrested for causing damage to the fence and appeared at Newbury Magistrates Court. AWE's operations were not disrupted and staff were able to get to and from work as normal.

AWE 50th Anniversary

AWE celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2000, William Penney had been given the site on 1 April 1950. In November, to mark the occasion, AWE was publishing a history of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent, entitled "Keeping the Peace."

2. HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Action 22/4: To provide information to members on trends in contractors' injuries. Alan Brandwood said that there were between 800 and 1000 contractors on site at any one time compared with 4,030 AWE staff. To date this year the contractors had had 7 lost time accidents, that is accidents requiring more than 3 days off work. In comparison AWE had had 11 lost time accidents. He said that lost time accidents was one of the executive's areas of concern. If the figures were given per 100,000 hours worked, contractors had 0.38 and AWE staff 0.22. The causes in both cases were the same, slips, trips, bumps, falls and manual handling although contractors did get more cuts. The problem was being addressed by on-the-job training and an awareness campaign for staff and contractors.

John Southall asked for information on the number of hours lost per 100,000 hours worked. This information could be provided for AWE staff but was currently problematic for contractor staff due to the adequacy of the system they use for collecting such information.

Action 23/1: Alan Brandwood to provide information on number of hours lost through accidents at AWE sites.

It was suggested that since contractors were more likely to be doing manual tasks, their risk of accident was higher. Alan Branwood said that the riskier the task, the more attention should be focussed on prevention. He did not feel that 11 incidents in one year was acceptable.

Jo Slimin asked how AWE compared with other organisations. She was told that AWE was average, but a factor of ten worse than the best.

A concern was raised that redundancies were a potential threat to safety, one member asked for trend information from the previous contractors and into the future. Alan Brandwood said that this comparison was made and AWE's safety record was improving. The previous year's figure had been 0.3 per 100,000 hours worked and this year it was 0.22.

Alan proposed that the next quarterly report would be produced in its current format and also in a new format with less words and more graphical information. Members would then be invited to put forward their views on the new format.

He went on to report that a series of programmes was in place to look at such improvements as Environmental Development and Culture Improvement.

All the year's performance indicators for 2000 were on target to be met. The Environment Agency and the NII had given reports on AWE's performance, both had said that AWE had made a good start under new management and that the areas selected for improvement were the correct ones. In the New Year both regulators would carry out a team inspection. The main thrust of the inspection would be to look at whether AWE was delivering what it had promised.

Steve Gibbs, AWEML's independent Safety Director was reported to be on target with his report on AWE.

The set of reports on AWE's aqueous waste management after the closure of the Pangbourne Pipeline were now published.

There had been a six-month review of AWE's performance by the NII. Key issues were discussed including the re-organisation of Assurance.

Alan Brandwood said that he had focussed on a series of key issues to target for immediate improvement:

- Lost time accidents
- MoD Police – helping them to lower their accident rate.
- Electrical safety
 - A peer review had been carried out and several recommendations had come out of that. The next stage was to bring that into force.
- Nuclear material control

New Assurance organisation

The new Assurance structure would give focus and resource for the long-term strategy. The new organisational structure was about to be submitted to NII for their consideration. The plan was to have a simpler, more integrated management structure with clear responsibilities and better control on the deployment of resources. This would make it easier to learn from experience and would focus on consistency, co-ordination and improved quality. He said that AWE needed to get Quality Assurance data right first time.

Alan was also reviewing the policies on Drugs and Alcohol, Road Safety and Stress Management.

Incidents in Quarter 3/2000

There had been no level 3 or 4 incidents, 45 level 2 incidents and 822 level 1 incidents, (level 1 being observations and 'near-misses'). Alan pointed out that AWE had to learn from the 822 to reduce the 45.

Nuclear Industries Family Study

The Nuclear Industries Family Study report into possible links between reproductive and child health and parental occupational exposure to ionising radiation had reported its findings. This study was funded by the Department of Health and the Health & Safety Executive and was set up in the early 1990s. It was based on information collected from employees past and present, of the Atomic Energy Authority, BNFL and AWE. The response rate had been over 80% and more than 23,000 individuals had been investigated. The results showed that male radiation workers did not father pregnancies with increased levels of adverse outcome. There were no positive conclusions from other groups as the sample was statistically too small. The authors' main conclusion was that the results, together with previous findings of no increased risks of cancer in the children of male radiation workers were very good news for RA workers. Alan Brandwood and other AWE staff, and their families had been amongst those taking part.

Action 23/2: To provide copies of the report for those members who wanted one.

Rumours of Plutonium in Aldermaston Stream

Alan Brandwood reminded members that AWE had always said that there were minute traces of plutonium in the Aldermaston Stream, but he stressed that there had been no enhanced levels and no discharges. The source of the rumours was unknown.

Staff Changes

Peter Gardner from NII had left and was replaced by Mike Jeel. Alan thanked Peter for all his work at AWE. Ian Jackson had left the EA, Darren Baker was covering the post until a permanent replacement was appointed. Alan thanked Ian for all his work at AWE. At AWE, Jenny Richards, Environmental Manager had left and Mark Liddiard had taken on that role.

John Southall asked for more information on MoD police incidents and accidents. Alan replied that they were mostly minor. AWE was training the police on safety awareness and had trained 6 police officers in risk assessment. Everything was being done to help them improve their safety culture.

Bill Cane asked for details on the problems with emergency response at Burghfield. NII Report (para 5). Ian Crossan (NII) answered that the area used in the last Burghfield site exercise, as a Zone Control point was inadequate for the purpose. It was an important area in an emergency, accounting for persons evacuated and other persons going into the area, the space was too cramped and NII was asking for them to come up with an alternative. Ken Saint added that it was normal to find areas for improvement after such an exercise and his staff were looking at alternatives. Despite this the exercise itself had gone well.

Alan Brandwood said that the other issue was training records not up-to-date. This was in part due to training records being kept on several different databases instead of a central system, this was being reviewed across both sites. Ian Crossan added that at Burghfield some refresher training had not been done and he needed to be sure that this was being done. Progress so far was good and he was due to meet with the director in charge for a final report. John Rae added that the IT system which held such records was out-of-date and he had a team working to modernise it, this would also help this situation.

Peter Taylor asked if members could be told the cost of safety at AWE. Alan Brandwood said that some of that information was easy to identify, he knew how many of his staff were employed in the safety area, but a high percentage of staff had safety responsibilities within their jobs, the restructuring of the Assurance Group would give a better picture. John Rae added that to an extent, every person on the AWE's sites had a safety responsibility.

3. ISSUES ARISING FROM RECENT BAD WEATHER.

North Ponds

Frank Winter explained that the North Ponds complex has a catchment area of 43 hectares, equivalent to 100 football pitches, but that was still only one fifth of the catchment area of the Aldermaston Stream. The complex had been designed to cope with a one in 100-year event, 50mm of rain. The recommendation at the time had been to build for a one in 50-year event. The recent storm had produced 100mm of rain, the equivalent of two 100-year events back-to-back. The complex discharges at a rate of 219 litres per second, at the height of the storm the complex was filling at a rate of 1200 litres per second (for comparison this is one large tanker lorry full every 40 seconds). The complex was built to hold back water from areas of site where there is known to be small amounts of contamination, so that it could be checked before release. The lake at Aldermaston Court covers 4.5 hectares, at AWE's discharge rate the level of the lake was raised by 25mm. At the height of the storm it rose by 150mm over an area the size of 11 football pitches. There is no flow control from Aldermaston Court.

The EA were monitoring the input and output rates at the time. When the storm was at its worst 1200litres/sec was falling on already saturated land. In order to prevent the north Ponds complex from overflowing the decision was taken, with EA knowledge, to release water from areas of site known to be uncontaminated.

[When the new centre site facility was built a drainage system was installed which could feed storm water into the North Ponds Complex or divert it through other routes.]

A total of 30 samples of the water were taken prior to release and these have shown that the water was uncontaminated. Without this action, North Ponds would have overflowed whilst rain was falling at a rate of 1200l/sec. The maximum discharge rate was therefore 500 litres/sec.

The water which flooded Aldermaston Village was released from areas of the stream which for various reasons could not cope. Members of AWE's staff walked the stream and it was apparent that four-fifths of the stream were not managed, and the stream was blocked in a number of places, this increased the height of the stream by up to 100mm. AWE's staff sandbagged vulnerable areas and unblocked the stream where possible.

At the AWE Burghfield a brook runs through the site. It increased in level until it got above the level of the bank and then flooded offices and stores to a depth of 12 to 14 inches. The water was also flowing over the sewage plant and into the stream, at which point staff were told not to go into work. The flooding did not affect the operational areas of the site.

Tony Ferguson asked how long the water diversion had been in place. Frank Winter told him that it had been switched on and off as dictated by the rainfall, by 11am Monday it was again being routed through North Ponds.

Action 23/3: Frank Winter to provide information on the volumes of water diverted.

Gareth Beard (EA) said that his team had been looking at North Ponds only a few days prior to the storms and they had identified areas where there was possibly contamination. Under such circumstances as those during the storms, he would have expected AWE to manage and retain control over those areas which were contaminated. He stressed that sampling had been carried out and he felt that there was nothing else AWE could have done.

Tony Ferguson asked whether AWE would be sampling in Aldermaston regularly.

Secretary's note: Aldermaston Stream water is sampled every four hours by an automatic sampler at the exit to the North Ponds complex. Water is also grab-sampled monthly at Fisherman's Lane and annually from Aldermaston Bridge. There is also a High Volume air sampler in Aldermaston Village which is changed fortnightly. All these results are tabled in the Technical Annex to AWE's Annual Report. The North Ponds complex did not overflow at any time during the storms.

Frank Winter said that a new Trade Waste facility would be handed over the following Monday which would give AWE extra capacity under such circumstances. This project had been put in place on 2nd April 2000 and completed ahead of schedule at 25% less cost.

All the water which left site was shown on testing to be uncontaminated within 12 hours of discharge. In answer to a question from John Parfitt, members were told that all the water from areas of site where contamination has been found in pipework, gullies and gutters was processed through North Ponds and checked before release.

Royce Longton said that he felt AWE had taken sensible precautions and asked that AWE get together with West Berkshire Council and Burghfield Parish Council to see if problems with sewage following storms had the same root cause. Frank Winter agreed to follow this up.

Action 23/4: Frank Winter to see that AWE meets with the Burghfield Council and West Berkshire Council to see if there is a common root cause for the sewage problems during heavy rainfall.

Chris Bridges suggested that AWE and local farmers should all ensure that ditches and watercourses were dredged or cleared out regularly.

Action 23/5: Frank Winter to look at the state of watercourses at AWE with a view to dredging and clearing out.

Mike Broad asked whether the amount of contamination would reduce over time. Frank Winter answered that it would reduce as older buildings and pipework were removed. He also said that AWE planned to install filters on the North Ponds Complex as a further method of ensuring that no contamination left the site via the Aldermaston Stream, this would be in place by November 2001.

Action 23/6: To give a short presentation at the next LLC on the filtration to be added to the North Ponds complex.

Peter Taylor asked what the risk to the local population was. Frank answered that there was none, the risk of flooding was greater than the risk of contamination.

Action 23/7: Alan Brandwood to supply quantified information on the risk to the public from contamination via the Aldermaston Stream.

4. FEEDBACK ON LLC WORKSHOPS.

Emergency Alerting – Ken Saint, Manager Emergency Response.

Ken explained that his role was to make sure that the sites were prepared for emergencies, this included floods, protestors or any other problems.

He thanked LLC members for attending the workshop and summarised the conclusions the group had come to. The group had decided that three systems were required:

1. A system by which any member of the public could phone in to AWE for up-to-date information during an incident. (Phone-in system)
2. A system which phoned out to the public in vulnerable areas to give a warning and instructions for their safety. (Phone-out system)
3. A siren or similar alerting system.

The provision of a phone-in system had progressed well. A prototype had been provided for staff use, the first version had been unable to cope with demand, but an improved system had met demands of 4000 calls in a day and the information had been updated every few minutes. The contract to supply a similar system capable of meeting public needs was expected to be out to tender before Christmas, and in place within 6 months.

Ken had details of five phone-out systems, non were ideal but could be adapted to suit AWE's needs. It could be used between AWE's sites and by other bodies involved during an incident at AWE, as well as in alerting the local community. This type of system was being evaluated nationally for use as a flood warning. Ken would look at whether it was possible to link into that system if the timescale fitted in with AWE's needs.

The siren system was proving to be more difficult to achieve. A single siren would not cover the area it would need to alert, nor would it be directional. A network of sirens would be needed. Such sirens would be vulnerable to interference by vandals or protestors, it would also be important to have a system which could not be set off except by the operators. There was also a concern that such a system of alerting had resulted in 3 deaths at 3-mile Island in the USA, when an incident which did not result in any radiation escaping the building, caused panic amongst the local community.

Ken said that as an Emergency Manager he would find it difficult to recommend such a system unless this problem could be resolved.

Bill Cane said that he understood the problem, nonetheless he felt that the workshop had been a worthwhile exercise and was pleased to see that the other two solutions were viable. He asked that thought was given as to how persons out in the open could be alerted in the absence of a siren, and suggested using local radio. He was particularly concerned that people did not go into the area because they did not know there was a problem. Ken said that local radio had been used to good effect when alerting Burghfield staff about the flooding on site. Bill added that whatever systems were introduced, the public should be made fully aware of what to do.

Copies of the presentation slides are attached to these minutes.

Information Needs – Avril Burdett, Community Liaison.

Avril thanked members who had attended this workshop despite the fuel crisis at the time. She said that AWE had introduced the workshops to take account of the LLC's views and in this case to ensure that the information given to members was relevant to their needs and the needs of the communities they represented. She said that this workshop had been very successful and had highlighted several areas for improvement.

Discussions had already begun with senior AWE staff on how some of the suggestions could be implemented, some had already happened. The presentation on the technology to be used to deal with liquid waste after the closure of the Pangbourne Pipeline had been presented in plain terms and had been well received by members, the same would be done with future presentations and briefing material.

There were some changes which would take longer to achieve, but AWE was already working on improvements to the web site (www.awe.co.uk) and some issues would need more discussion and possibly other workshops.

Copies of the presentation slides are attached to these minutes.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

John Rae said that he would make sure that the right aspects of MoD Police safety were dealt with and equally that he would make sure that the zone control problems at Burghfield were properly addressed. He said that he would also task Avril Burdett with arranging a visit to the North Ponds complex for Aldermaston Villagers. Frank Winter would ensure that discussions would take place with local councils and landowners over the question of sewage problems related to flooding around Burghfield and AWE's Burghfield site. John Rae also said that a tour of the Burghfield site would be arranged for a future meeting.

Action 23/8: Avril Burdett to arrange for Aldermaston Villagers to view the North Ponds complex.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bill Cane asked if any of the waste from repairs to the Royal Navy's nuclear submarines would be stored or treated at AWE. John Rae said that he would not expect AWE to store this type of waste and that AWE had not been asked to do so, nor did he expect radioactive waste to be generated from these repairs and inspections.

John Southall said the he felt that the two workshops held had been very beneficial to both AWE and LLC members and asked that this be built into the LLC's remit. He

suggested that the LLC, having representation for all of AWE's neighbours, could be used to help solve problems which had connotations for the local community.

John Gosling asked whether AWE intended to cease its assisted travel scheme. John Rae replied that AWE had notified users of the scheme that it would cease in three months time. The scheme was open to all of AWE's 4,000+ staff but was used by only 50 to 70 people. This meant that this was neither cost effective nor environmentally friendly when buses were run with only a handful of people on board. Discussions would continue with those staff who would have problems getting to work without this scheme to see what other help could be offered. This included three staff with disabilities, some apprentices too young to drive and those not living near public transport routes.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

February 8th 2001

June 14th 2001

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AWE LOCAL LIAISON COMMITTEE**

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Action 23/2: To provide copies of the report for those members who wanted one.

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