

Minutes of the 27th AWE Local Liaison Committee Meeting

Held Thursday 29th November 2001

Present:

Dr John Rae	AWE	Chairman
Alan Brandwood	AWE	
Frank Winter	AWE	
Graeme Hammond	AWE	
Bill Haight	AWE	
Avril Burdett	AWE	Secretary
Bill Cane	Mortimer West End PC	Community Liaison Officer
Pamela Bale	Pangbourne Parish Council	
Mike Broad	Tadley Town Council	
Malcolm Bryant	Wokingham Unitary	
Margaret Dadswell	Aldermaston Parish Council	
Geoff Eddy	Hampshire County Council	
Maurice Eden	Holybrook Parish Council	
Terry Faulkner	Tadley Town Council	
Tony Ferguson	West Berks Council	
Pete Frazer	Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	
Peter Hobbs	Sulhamstead Parish Council	
David Leeks	Tadley Town Council	
Ron Meredith	West Berkshire Council	
Jeff Moss	Swallowfield Parish Council	
Alison Palmer	West Berkshire Council	
Murray Roberts	Padworth Parish Council	
John Southall	Purley-on-Thames Parish Council	
Peter Taylor	Brimpton Parish Council	

Observers:

Darren Baker	Environment Agency
Alyson Morris	Environment Agency
Chris Kemp	Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

1. Apologies for Absence

Sheila Allen, Peter Beard, Chris Bridges, Philip Kingston, Brian Hamilton-Hewitt, Royce Longton, Jon Gates, Philip Kingston, Gerry Traynor, Des Hoad, Doug Mundy and John Parfitt. Alison Palmer represented John Parfitt.

2. Actions from the Last Meeting

Apologies not minuted: Sheila Allen, Tony Ferguson, David Leeks & Margaret Dadswell.

26/1 Graeme Hammond to provide copies of the Food Standards Agency dose assessment document for members. Copies were provided for members together with an extract referring to AWE from the Food Standards Agency's latest report on Radioactivity in Food and the Environment. *Action complete.*

26/2 Avril Burdett to check parking and exhibition facilities at West Berkshire Council Offices in preparation for a possible future LLC meeting there. Parking at the West Berkshire Council Offices is extremely limited. Street parking is virtually impossible. Public parking is available at £4.50 in the nearby multi storey car park and £7.50 in the adjacent car park. There are suitable facilities to mount an exhibition. Did members wish to pursue this? *Members took a vote on this issue and the majority was in favour of keeping the meetings at AWE for the present time. Action complete.*

26/3 John Rae to ask West Berkshire Planning Authority for more details on the Valentine's Wood office block development. *AWE had contacted the West Berkshire Planning Authority.* The Company had been advised that this planning application had been given outline approval several years previously. Questions of suitability, traffic density etc had been determined at that time. All that remained to be approved were the details of design, external appearance etc. The principles could not be overturned. The application would be put before the Thatcham Area Committee on 8 January 2002. If anyone was interested, the Secretary had a summary of the planning history of the Valentine's Wood site.

With regard to the Strawberry Fields site, John Rae said that he understood that planning permission was being sought for two developments - one for 46 houses and one for 159 houses. AWE had been consulted on these developments and had looked at them in relation to emergency response - on and off site; explosive safeguarding areas and AWE site development. He said that AWE had concluded that their systems were robust enough to cope with the development, but had concerns about the traffic implications. Meetings had been arranged with West Berkshire Council to look at applying lower speed limits, especially around AWE's entrances. NII had also been consulted on these planning issues. *Action complete*

26/4 John Rae to provide members with an updated senior management organisation chart. Avril Burdett had forwarded these. *Action complete.*

26/5 Avril Burdett to pass the Committee's thanks to the AWE Fire Service personnel who rendered medical assistance to a lady at the Tadley Treacle Fair. The Committee's comments were appreciated. *Action complete.*

26/6 John Rae to write to Bill Cane concerning the phone-out alerting system. Frank Winter would bring members up to date at this meeting. *Action ongoing.*

26/7 John Rae to write to members with suggested dates for the tritium workshop. The workshop had now taken place on 9 November. For discussion later in the meeting. *Action complete.*

26/8 Angela Jenkins to provide hard copies of her presentation. *Action complete.*

26/9 Avril Burdett to ensure that LLC members had table microphones at the next meeting. *Action complete.*

3. Chairman's Remarks

Security:

A number of media enquiries had been received about the safety and security of AWE sites in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the United States and subsequent speculation about the vulnerability of nuclear establishments to aircraft crashes. One or two local people had raised the issue with local MPs.

John Rae reassured members that, following the recent terrorist attacks, increased security measures were being taken at the AWE sites and would be kept under constant review.

Such measures could be compromised if they were to be made public and, for this reason he could not be specific about their nature. He did say that they were in line with measures being taken at all Government establishments and were part of the national response to the perceived threat.

There was no suggestion that AWE was at special risk.

With regard to the question of a specific threat from aircraft (particularly with regard to a concern expressed about the proximity of Lower Wasing Airfield): Dr Rae said that there were several hundred airfields within an hour's flying time of any number of potential targets in the United Kingdom. The proximity of airfields close to AWE sites was, therefore, not a major factor in itself.

He stressed that AWE practised regularly to deal with any type of emergency – including the unlikely event of an airliner crash - and there were well-rehearsed plans in place that would enable AWE, the civil emergency services and the local authorities to minimise the consequences to the community.

In terms of injury and loss of life, the actual consequences of an aircraft crash at AWE – even one involving a radioactive material processing facility – were likely to be far less than a crash onto a residential area. Moving air corridors, or restricting activities at airfields, whether to counter the possibility of an accidental air crash or terrorist assault, would therefore appear to offer no additional safeguard.

John Rae pointed out that there was no comparison between the AWE sites and a nuclear power station or processing plant. AWE has no nuclear power reactors nor any high level waste, and only a small experimental pulsed reactor (Viper) which did not build up fission products like the nuclear power reactors. Years of testing had demonstrated that an accidental nuclear bomb type explosion was simply not credible.

The potential risks, and advice to the public on actions to take in the event of an emergency at an AWE site, is contained in a public information leaflet called the 'PIRER' leaflet which is issued to local residents. A new version is due to be published in 2002.

Mike Broad asked whether this information had been given to the press to allay fears. John Rae said that it had, but was not always reported in a clear positive way. Tony Ferguson asked what would happen if an aircraft hit AWE's waste stores. John Rae answered that again, the impact would be a lot less than people imagined. Tony Ferguson asked that AWE did not try to tell people that there was no risk, but find the correct balance.

Action 27/1 Graeme Hammond: To try again to get the true facts concerning actual risks from AWE into the local press.

David Leeks asked for details of the restricted airspace around and above AWE, following a low-flying VC10 in the area several weeks previously. Graeme Hammond said he would furnish the LLC with that information.

Action 27/2 Graeme Hammond: To show David Leeks the exclusion zone map as soon as possible and to show the zone as a slide at the next LLC.

Ron Meredith said that the last level 2 exercise three years previously had used an aircraft crash at AWE as the scenario. The public asked the question of when and how Iodine tablets would be issued – there was still a belief locally that they would be needed in the event of an accident at AWE whereas this was not the case.

Action 27/3 John Rae: to go back to the reports on the exercise and use the information to publicise the actual risks.

Tritium Workshop

John Rae said that he was most grateful to members for their enthusiastic participation at the special workshop on tritium issues held three weeks previously. From an AWE perspective, the workshop had been very helpful in allowing the Company to present some issues associated with tritium and listen to the reaction and questions from people outside of AWE.

In addition to a general overview of the Company's Tritium Strategy, the workshop had been asked for views on three specific questions.

First a range of options were put forward for dealing with two tanks of legacy tritium liquid wastes, currently held in AWE's Waste Management Area, where the Best Environmental Option would be dispersal through a sea discharge pipeline. However, the practicalities of transport, gaining agreement of another licensed operator (and its LLC), as well as obtaining an authorisation to make the discharge, would make this approach difficult. Taking into consideration the discussion at the workshop, AWE intended to present a case to deal with these two tanks of wastes in different ways:

- For the tank containing the highest volume of water but the lowest quantity of tritium AWE would seek to discharge via the Pangbourne Pipeline which would be well within the existing discharge authorisation.
- For the tank containing the lowest volume of water but the highest quantity of tritium, this waste would be incorporated as part of a process to make stored low level waste sludges into cement blocks.

Second: the new effluent treatment plant required to enable closure of the Pangbourne Pipeline included two evaporation stages, the first to clean up the effluent and the second to generate a vapour discharge which would contain a little tritium. John said that AWE intended to submit to the Environment Agency a justification to dispense with the second evaporation stage and to discharge the effluent as trade waste via the Silchester Works.

Third: the subject of tritium discharges into the Aldermaston stream and the ability of AWE to find and remediate a historical source which was contributing to these discharges.

John Rae said that AWE had explained that the initial proposals were that, because the discharges were very low and the work conducted to date had confirmed that finding the source was likely to be very difficult, he did not believe it was justifiable to spend further taxpayers' money on finding the source at this stage, but that AWE should continue to monitor.

However, he had received a very clear message from the workshop that the Company should do more. As a result AWE would review efforts to date and look again at the feasibility of finding the source.

Action 27/4 John Rae: to report the results of this further work after April 2002.

Dr Rae told members that a public information leaflet on the strategy for dealing with Tritium wastes at AWE would be available shortly which would include details of these proposals. It would be circulated to members and be published on the AWE website.

Action 27/5: Avril Burdett: to send copies of the Tritium Strategy Information leaflet to members.

Bill Cane said that all who had attended the workshop had found it a very worthwhile exercise. There had been considerable hostility towards leaving the buried tritium in situ and members had felt that AWE should re-double their efforts to locate the source. He added that he was very pleased that AWE was re-visiting the issue.

John Rae said that it had been a very clear message and that workshops were held in order for AWE to listen. He said that he could not make any promises that they would be able to locate the tritium due to the probability that it was very small in size.

Tony Ferguson asked whether the Environment Agency had made any comments about AWE's plans to leave the second evaporator out of the new liquid waste management process. Frank Winter said that the AWE Nuclear Safety Committee had seen and approved the paper on this topic and it would now go through a due process with the regulators. He added that the design would allow for the addition of a second evaporator if necessary.

Aldex:

On 15 November AWE had completed a Level Two Emergency Response Exercise. This had been designed to test AWE's ability to work with the local authorities and the civilian accident and emergency services to ensure the proper protection of the public in the event of a major accident at an AWE site that had off-site consequences.

Among those taking part with AWE were Thames Valley Police, the Fire and Rescue services, West Berkshire and Basingstoke and Deane Councils, Hampshire Constabulary, the local health authorities, the NRPB, the Food Standards Agency, the NII and EA. The exercise had been centred at the Thames Valley Police Headquarters at Kidlington. A Media Centre had been established at the West Berkshire Council offices and a team of professionals from the Government Central Office of Information 'played' the Press.

As always the exercise provided a number of useful lessons. Overall it had demonstrated that the preparatory work carried out between the various organisations over the past few years had paid major dividends. There had been a very high degree of co-operation.

Ron Meredith said that from a West Berkshire perspective it had been a useful exercise which had gone reasonably well. He felt that the biggest problem had been communications, the flow of information had not been good. The strategical part had been very good. He said it was obvious that a lot of work had been done and he had appreciated the presence of a larger AWE contingent at Kidlington. He felt that it was impossible to replicate the amount of demand for public information and that communication problems could be worse if the media centre had to be set up in say a village hall with no phone lines. He said that overall he had been satisfied that it had gone well and that the exercise had been played up to a point where control could be handed over to the local authority.

Graeme Hammond said that he had been at the media centre and praised his team. He said that the media play had been fairly realistic and had put the media representatives from the participating agencies through hoops. He said that AWE's communications had worked well but he had been concerned with the slowness of quality information available to give to the media. He said that there would be a series of meetings over the coming weeks to address the issues raised by the exercise.

Burghfield Sitex:

The Burghfield Level 1 Demonstration Exercise had taken place on 7th November, having been postponed from 12th September following the tragic events in the United States. The exercise scenario was judged by NII to have been a challenging one.

Site emergency services were involved in the response, including support from Aldermaston and, for the first time in a Level 1 exercise at Aldermaston or Burghfield, the Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue service responded and participated.

NII and MoD agreed that it had been an adequate demonstration of the emergency arrangements, with lessons learned and improvements shown since last year's exercise.

Radiation Course:

As a result of the exercise a one-day course "Medical Aspects of Radiation Emergencies" was being organised at Surrey University in February next year for medical, accident and emergency staff. The course is to be run by Trident Medical Services, which provides medical services at AWE. This is in addition to a radiation protection course it already runs on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive for medical staff working in the field of ionising radiation.

Drugs and alcohol policy:

Over the past year AWE had been in extensive consultation with its trades' union colleagues concerning the development of a revised drugs and alcohol policy. John Rae reported that, with the endorsement of the three trades' unions involved, effective from 1st February 2002, AWE would be introducing random drug testing. This brought AWE in line with the standards already established within the United Kingdom civil nuclear industry.

John Rae emphasised his confidence in the integrity of AWE's staff. He said that the standards of propriety at AWE were exceptionally high. He stressed that AWE could not ignore the substantive reports of increased use of alcohol and drugs in Society. AWE would be focussing on support not discipline and an individual experiencing a problem could expect maximum sympathetic counselling and help from the Company - although failure to participate in or respond to this could result in disciplinary action, and dealing in drugs would not be tolerated.

The new policy was essentially aimed at protecting the security and well being of AWE staff, the community and individuals. It had also been designed to reassure AWE's stakeholders - the local community, the regulators and the Ministry of Defence - that AWE had a modern robust policy capable of dealing with an increasing social problem.

He said that random testing for drugs would apply to all Company employees, contractors and to unescorted visitors to all AWE sites. The dialogue with the trades' unions would continue so as to explore the further question of alcohol testing, which could take a further 12 months. However, AWE had had a protocol for testing for both drugs and alcohol on a "for cause" basis for several years. A pilot study lasting several months had been carried out using senior management; this had included John Rae and the AWE Executive.

Bill Haight added that AWE had the full support of MoD for MoD staff on site personnel to be included in the scheme and discussions were underway with the MoD police for them to participate.

David Leeks said that he welcomed this on behalf on the community. He approved of the pilot scheme being tested on the most senior staff at AWE

High Performance Computer:

John Rae said that he had a long list of investment proposals for the future, the first to come to fruition was the agreed purchase of a new IBM high performance computer which would greatly enhance AWE's capability. The machine is capable of three teraflops, (million million) calculations per second. Once in operation early in 2002, AWE would be in the top five of the world's most powerful computers.

Mike Broad suggested that AWE should actively promote this in the press as it would show that AWE was still moving forward and one of the top in the world. Graeme Hammond said that this was in hand.

25 year Contract:

John Rae said that AWE was still awaiting a decision by the Ministry of Defence on the extension of the AWE management contract from 10 to 25 years. Negotiations had been completed. He understood that a positive recommendation would be made to the Minister in the near future and an announcement would follow. This would

possibly be made by way of an 'arranged' question in the House of Commons. He would let members know the outcome as soon as possible.

Closure of AWE Cardiff:

AWE Cardiff was to be handed over to the Defence Estates Agents in December. The site was now fully demolished and decommissioned. This had meant that the LLC's counterpart, the AWE Cardiff Local Liaison Committee had been disbanded. The MoD had the view that the project to close Cardiff had been very well managed and completed ahead of schedule. They felt that this boded well for future rationalisation schemes at AWE.

From an environmental point of view John Rae had been pleased with the results. Gaseous and liquid discharges had been less than 4% of authorised levels and out of 16,800 tonnes of material, only 125 tonnes had been classified as low level waste. All this had been as a result of the good decontamination techniques employed. It was likely that the site's future would be as a housing estate.

Youth Handbook

AWE had received thanks from the Tadley Youth Forum for the young persons' guide to what there was to do in Tadley and the surrounding area. (Entitled 'What's on in Tadley'). AWE had met the costs of the graphics work and printing and the booklet was to be distributed to all local school children from age 5 to 16.

5. Assurance Report (Alan Brandwood)

Quarterly Report topics:

Freon. There had been a number of events related to Freon, used for refrigeration. Each had been dealt with individually, but they were being investigated as a group to find any related underlying cause. Assurance staff were looking at maintenance and fitness for purpose, Alan said he would keep the LLC informed of the outcome of the investigation.

Viper. A small experimental pulsed reactor, having several safety systems which formed part of its safety case and an additional one which still existed from before its recent refurbishment. This system was designed to flood the reactor with argon, but during a routine check it was found that it would not have operated automatically as it should have done. Although the system did not form part of the safety case it was being investigated.

Radioactive material wrongly despatched off-site. A consignment of uranium had been despatched as an asset rather than as waste. The substance was properly packaged and transported to regulation standards, but should have been sent as waste. There was no authorisation to cover this, the matter was being investigated and a programme of improvement was in hand.

Cllr Ferguson then asked who had identified the problem over the transport of uranium. Alan said it had been noted by the regulator and part of the investigation was to establish why AWE had not identified the problem earlier.

Workshop on joint regulation: The NII and EA, together with members of the nuclear industry had met together to try to identify overlaps between regulation by the EA and NII. The initiative should result in a better way of regulating nuclear sites.

No decisions were made but there were many suggestions. The principle of a single regulator was ruled out.

ISO 14001: The ISO 14001 auditors were expected to visit AWE in the near future to hopefully close out some outstanding actions that would enable AWE to receive this important international environmental accreditation. If AWE was successful, it would be a significant confirmation that the environmental management conformed to international best practice.

Key Performance indicators and targets: Alan Brandwood said he would be reviewing the key performance indicators and targets for 2002. He said he would inform the LLC if there were any changes from 2001 targets.

Supporting data for the 2001 Performance Indicators was showing a levelling off of performance in some areas. This was particularly noticeable in the number of events and personal injuries. Alan's staff were looking at the previous six months for issues which might have slowed down performance improvements. The Company was looking at local improvement plans and putting in place local performance indicators at workplace level.

Mars in Berkshire Award: AWE had won one of the top six Mars in Berkshire Golden Oak Award for improvements in environmental performance. The award recognised in particular the work of AWE's voluntary Conservation Group and the environmental exhibition the Company had staged in Tadley a few months previously.

Safety Conference: following the health and safety seminar at AWE early in September, the learning had been taken up by Directors and briefed out around the Company.

Climate: Following a pilot study, a Health and Safety climate survey would be rolled out over the whole Company in 2002. This would feed back what employees felt about the Company's safety systems and safety management.

Risk analysis: Mr Taylor had raised with Alan Brandwood the question of how AWE conducted a risk analysis. Alan offered the LLC a presentation on how AWE conducted risk assessment and wrote safety cases. Members were in favour of a presentation at the next meeting.

Action 27/6: put on the agenda for the 28th meeting - presentation on Conducting Risk Assessments and Writing Safety Cases. Alan Brandwood.

Murray Roberts asked whether there had been actions placed following the Independent Safety Report. Alan replied that most of the findings of the report had already been built into improvement plans. A remediation programme was also in place, was funded and had been agreed with HSE, for example on fire prevention. Alan assured members that he would keep them informed.

Tony Ferguson asked for confirmation of that in order to reach targets AWE would not stop staff reporting incidents and near-misses. Alan assured members that this was not the case. He explained that events were categorised on a scale of 0 to 4, with 4 being a serious incident. Each event was scored with the 'near misses' having low or zero scores i.e. no penalty for scoring. The more serious events got a higher score and were therefore more visible. He said that there had been no category 4

events, the last category 3 was actually a series of category 2 incidents related to failure of breathing equipment which were being investigated collectively as a category three incident.

John Rae said that the Company was well aware of the balance required on reporting and actively encouraged reporting in a no blame culture. He said that the downside of this was that the press could say there had been 970 incidents at AWE but he could live with that and would definitely prefer to be told about 970 trivial incidents.

Tony Ferguson asked that the LLC be given the 2002 targets before the end of 2001. Alan Brandwood said that the proposed targets would go to the Executive on 17th December. If the Executive were not happy final agreement would not be reached until January. He did undertake to let members have the targets as soon as they had been agreed.

Action 27/7: Alan Brandwood to provide members with the 2002 performance targets as soon as they had been agreed by the Executive.

Jeff Moss asked for more detail on the freon incidents. Alan said they had been five events within a few months and he was looking at these as a group, particularly in respect of how chilling equipment was maintained and declared fit for purpose.

John Southall asked for details on liquid effluent which had been over reported and how it applied to the Pangbourne Pipeline. He and Alan agreed to discuss this outside the meeting.

Peter Taylor asked for more detail on non RA discharges which had been exceeded due to the weather.

Action 27/8: Alan Brandwood to provide information on how many times levels had been exceeded

David Leeks asked for more detail on the injured MOD policemen, Alan said that he would let him know.

6. Infrastructure Report (Frank Winter)

Site Services Contract: Frank said that he was about to implement the first phase of an improvement programme to provide efficient and effective site services for Aldermaston and Burghfield. This would involve consolidation and rationalisation of 27 current site services contracts – all essential support to AWE's operations but not core business.

The scope covered estate management services, restaurant, vending, landscape, cleaning, waste disposal, vehicle hire, security/escort services etc. – under a single supplier. The preferred chosen contractor was Haden Building Services (subject to negotiation).

The benefits of this arrangement, in addition to considerable cost savings, included the provision of services by a 'best practice' provider and investment in AWE's infrastructure by an outside organisation. The contractor would also provide a single point 'help desk' for the benefit of all AWE employees.

The new arrangements would be in place on 1 January 2002.

Alerting System: The current position on the proposed public alerting system was that the investigative work into the technical issues, identification of suitable systems and vendors etc., was now complete. The next step was to build a database of those who were willing to receive calls under the circumstances envisaged. He reminded members that there were legal complications associated with using a database that allowed users to simply call every phone in the area, without the recipients' permission. Nevertheless he was confident the problem could be overcome with some effort. The database would be compiled by sending out a simple request slip with the next issue of the PIRER leaflet. This was expected to be done in the spring of 2002.

Once the database had been completed, it would be possible to accurately specify the technical requirements of the system and enable AWE to fill in the blanks in the specification. (E.g. How many numbers needed to be called in what time-scale). This was fundamental to being able to fully assess the functional and financial implications to ensure the right decision was made on this as a potential option.

In the meantime Thames Valley Police and Hampshire Constabulary would continue to provide the same public alerting service as they did for all other emergencies in their respective areas.

Bill Cane asked how the system would cope with people moving house within the area and new people moving into the area. He agreed that AWE posed a low risk to the public but was concerned that it was taking a long time to get system in place. He doubted that people would complete forms and asked if the company would contact Oftel to see if there was any way the regulations allowed a call to be made under emergency circumstances. Both he and John Rae agreed that in view of recent events it would be worth contacting Oftel again.

Tony Ferguson pointed out that the electoral roll was now available on a rolling database. Frank said that it was vital that the specification of such a system needed to be exactly right and it was important to take the time at this point to ensure this. Ron Meredith asked how nuclear power stations dealt with this issue. Frank answered that some had sirens and others with small populations around the sites had been able to devise a call-out system. Terry Faulkner pointed out that with the large population around AWE sites, this would not work.

John Rae thanked members who had written to him on this issue.

Action 27/8: Frank Winter to contact Oftel to ascertain whether AWE's proposals for a call out system for emergency use only, could be allowed.

Mike Broad asked about the progress on the new waste management complex to replace the Pangbourne Pipeline. He was told that a great deal of preparation work had been done, such as reducing the amount of liquid which would go to the new plant and that the main specification for the plant would be issued shortly.

In answer to a question on the status of the issue of the MoD tritiated waste, John Rae said that MoD was still looking at this and other routes were being investigated.

7. Any Other Business

Avril Burdett said that at the workshop on tritium issues some members had expressed an interest in visiting the tritium facility at the JET Laboratory in Culham, some members who had not been present also expressed an interest.

Action 27/9: Avril Burdett to try to arrange a visit to the JET Laboratory in the New Year.

Aldermaston Parish Council had asked for a second member of their council to attend LLC meetings owing to their close proximity to the Aldermaston site and the issues which therefore had direct impact on local residents. After a discussion on this it was agreed that Aldermaston should have two representatives and also that under the same considerations, Burghfield Parish Council should also be invited to have a second representative.

8. Date Of Next Meetings:

Thursday 28th February 2002

Thursday 13th June 2002

Thursday 12th September 2002

Thursday 14th November 2002