

**Reading Borough Council  
Planning Applications Committee**

**AWE Burghfield: Paper from Nuclear Awareness Group (NAG)  
(Application reference 09/00163/ADJ)**

The Nuclear Awareness Group (NAG) is a local group which was set up with support from Reading Borough Council to act as a stakeholder voice on behalf of local people on matters relating to the Atomic Weapons Establishment following the 1993 Community Inquiry into AWE Aldermaston.

NAG has written to both West Berkshire Council and Reading Borough Council to express concerns about the planning application submitted to the Ministry of Defence for construction of a ‘Main Process Facility’ at AWE Burghfield. The facility would be built to assemble and dismantle nuclear weapons and NAG has fundamental concerns about the suitability of the AWE Burghfield site for this purpose. The proposed development is located in a strategically important area and would have a substantial potential impact on other major developments in the area. We believe the following matters are important planning issues which have relevance to Reading Borough Council.

***Strategic siting issues***

The Ministry of Defence claims that the AWE Burghfield site is the only possible location for this development. No evidence has been provided to support this assertion, and as recently as 2002 there were plans to close the site and transfer operations to AWE Aldermaston. Given the known flood history of the AWE Burghfield site and its proximity to Reading, one of the largest urban areas in the South of England, there are significant questions as to whether the Burghfield site is appropriate for development of a new nuclear facility.

***Flood risk issues***

The AWE Burghfield site has a history of flooding, and serious flooding at the site in July 2007 led to production work ceasing for a period of nine months. The proposed development would handle radioactive substances, explosives, and hazardous chemicals, and the operations which would be carried out are similar to those described as being ‘highly vulnerable’, and thus prohibited from development in flood risk areas using the ‘sequential test’ specified in Planning Policy Statement 25. Should flooding occur at the site, one of the possible consequences is contamination of flood water with radioactive substances. This water would then drain downstream through watercourses passing through Reading, with environmental health implications for the Borough Council.

***Population density and future planning***

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is concerned that “the current population characteristics around the AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield sites are approaching the defined limits and HSE/NII may need to advise against further planning applications”. HSE has written to authorities in the area, including Reading Borough Council, to warn about the need to control development within safety zones around AWE sites (letter dated 12th December 2008).

It appears that future developments which add significantly to the population around the site could therefore face a long term veto from HSE. Plans for an extension of the Madejski Stadium, western expansions of Green Park, and other proposed developments in the HSE consultation zone could be affected if permission is given for construction of a new main process facility at AWE Burghfield.

Construction of the new facility would extend the life of the AWE Burghfield site until the 2050s, potentially with major implications over the length of this period for Reading Borough Council's Local Development Framework and future development in South and West Reading.

### ***Transport and traffic management issues***

Construction traffic approaching the development from the M4 motorway would be routed towards the AWE Burghfield site along the Bath Road and the Burghfield Road. Construction traffic generated by the development can be expected to increase congestion along these roads, particularly along the Burghfield Road. Burghfield Road is a busy commuter artery during peak hours and becomes congested at the narrow bridge over the River Kennet by the Cunning Man Inn, which is controlled by a traffic light shuttle system.

### ***National and Regional issues***

The planning application which has been submitted for a new main process facility at AWE Burghfield is for a major development at a sensitive site. The development is said by the developer to be "of national and international significance" and is located in the South Reading / Kennet Valley / M4 corridor area which has considerable strategic importance in planning terms.

The site is located close to a boundary point between three local authorities and requires a joint approach to be taken by these three authorities. The Health and Safety Executive has advised that local authorities should co-operate on planning issues in relation to AWE sites in order to avoid compromising population safety zones around these sites. However, there is no evidence that West Berkshire have sought any co-operation from neighbours with regard to this planning application. Furthermore, the Core Strategy document for West Berkshire was withdrawn in December 2006, making it difficult to assess the compatibility of the proposed development against up-to-date planning policies and criteria for the area.

### ***Conclusions***

1. If permitted, the development has the potential to seriously compromise future planning policies in South and West Reading.
2. The development matches criteria making it appropriate for determination by the Secretary of State. Reading Borough Council should therefore write to the Secretary of State with a request for her to call in the planning application, and should also formally ask West Berkshire Council to refer the application to the Secretary of State. A public inquiry would be advisable to explore the complex issues surrounding the proposed development before a decision is made.
3. Regarding the specific issue of construction traffic, Reading Borough Council should request West Berkshire to impose a planning condition prohibiting deliveries to or from the site during peak hours, or ask the developer to fund improvements to the Burghfield Road, including widening of the bridge over the River Kennet and improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, through a section 106 planning obligation.