

Planning Reform Team  
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and Local Government  
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16 August 2007

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Dear Planning Reform Team,

### **Comments on Planning for a Sustainable Future**

I write on behalf of NuLeAF - the Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum of the Local Government Association - to submit comments on some of the proposals contained in the Planning White Paper.

NuLeAF's specialist interest lies in the field of radioactive waste management. As such our comments are confined to matters associated with the proposals for improving the way key infrastructure projects are handled, with particular focus on the process of siting a geological repository.

You will be aware that Government is currently consulting on a framework for implementing geological disposal, as part of its Managing Radioactive Wastes Safely (MRWS) programme. Chapter 4 in the MRWS consultation document outlines the reforms proposed in the Planning White Paper. It states that:

4.23 The UK Government believes that the development of a geological disposal facility would be a major development of national significance. It may therefore need to be covered by the new arrangements set out for consultation in the planning White Paper. In this context, the UK Government is also considering the need to produce a National Policy Statement covering disposal of higher activity radioactive waste and the potential role of the Infrastructure Planning Commission. Both will need to fit with a voluntarism and partnership approach with a host community.

It then poses the question:

**Question 5: Do you think the proposed planning reforms in England outlined in Chapter 4 should apply to the development of a geological disposal facility, and if so how could this be integrated with the voluntarism and partnership approach outlined in Chapter 5?**

NuLeAF will be submitting detailed comments to the MRWS consultation, but I also thought it appropriate to outline our views in response to the Planning White Paper.

NuLeAF will strongly welcome the Government statement that the proposed planning reforms will need to fit with a voluntarism and partnership approach to siting a geological repository. This approach is necessary to ensure that local involvement and confidence can be developed and maintained through the repository siting process.

NuLeAF has set out proposals for how a repository siting process should take into account planning requirements and a right of withdrawal on the part of participating communities. These proposals are available on the NuLeAF website<sup>1</sup>. The proposals provide a basis for discussion about how the planning reforms could be integrated with the voluntarism and partnership approach.

NuLeAF also wishes to point out that if its proposed approach is followed, and a local right of withdrawal has not been exercised, it could be expected that a planning application for repository construction will be supported by the local Siting Partnership and Planning Authority. In such circumstances, it is not clear what purpose would be served by referring the planning application to the Infrastructure Planning Commission for determination.

Conversely, it is essential that the proposed reforms should not be used to impose a geological repository on an unwilling community. This would be at odds with an approach based on voluntarism and partnership.

More generally, I would like to make the following comments:

- It will be essential to undertake thorough and effective consultation on National Policy Statements at draft stage, particularly with local authorities where a development might have a particular impact on local communities.
- Government should give considerable weight to Local Development Documents in the preparation of draft national policy statements.
- Government should make it clear that the Infrastructure Planning Commission must take Local Development Documents into full account in coming to a decision on individual proposals.
- The process for determining major applications through the Commission must offer ample opportunity to robustly challenge and test the acceptability of individual proposals. Approaches based on direct questioning and 'open floors' must be sufficient to ensure that robust challenge and testing takes place.
- The acknowledgement that the Commission could come to a decision at variance with a national policy statement where local consequences outweigh the benefits is welcome.

I hope that these comments are of value.

Yours sincerely,

*Fred Barker*

Executive Director  
NuLeAF

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<sup>1</sup> 'Siting, Planning Requirements and Rights of Withdrawal', NuLeAF Briefing Paper 6, April 07 ([www.nuleaf.org.uk](http://www.nuleaf.org.uk))