

The series of four "consultation" meetings for residents of Braystones concluded with the one held at Whitehaven Civic Hall on Saturday, 16th January, 2010.

In the foyer was a large number of display boards and some touch-screen displays with a do-it-yourself Powerpoint presentation of the results of the initial questionnaire which came out last April. Illustrated with some pretty pictures, it was noteworthy that there was not a single picture of Braystones amongst the whole exhibition. Happily, this was remedied by a local resident pinning a poster on the comments board provided for attendees to attach notes with their comments. There was no model indicating the likely impact; not even a Photoshop mock-up. Ploughing through the slides, it was irritatingly amusing to note that where legitimate objections and difficulties had been encountered the conclusion was always that "this matter can probably be resolved". Sadly, there was no indication of how it might be resolved or what the impact of such a resolution would be. A very amusing little problem was the requirement for a "no-fly" zone over the Braystones site. No problem, apparently - we'll just extend the Sellafield one a bit. Sadly, an objection to this was that such an extension might adversely affect helicopter flights from the Westlakes Academy for the NDA! Damn! (This could probably be overcome, however.)

At 10 – 05 a.m., the meeting proper began, with a Powerpoint presentation by a decidedly bored Mr. B. Cairns, head of Nuclear Waste (Legacy Waste and Decommissioning). He managed to offend most of the audience by reading what was on each slide in a desultory fashion - failing to spot that most of his audience could actually read for themselves. At several points he appeared to be boring himself to sleep. Not an auspicious start.

The chairman then introduced a Mr. McDonald, who was the "consultation lead". **In my opinion, whoever hired him should ask for a refund!**

Amusingly, the Hartlepool meeting was mentioned - there is a transcript on the DECC website of the meeting, including some interesting allegations about Mandelson and his devious practices. Where that peer of the realm is involved one surely has to be careful!

After twenty minutes of this, the public were allowed to speak. Despite the fact that most people are shy and unused to speaking in public, we were warned at the outset that, not only would we be required to use a microphone, but also that the whole thing was being recorded. So, no intimidation, then. Oh, and there was a photographer . . .

The absence of the local M.P., Mr. J. Reed was noted with disdain and cynicism. Someone asked where the Jedi was, apparently a reference to a remark Reed made in the Commons. It seems rather strange that such an important meeting should not have been attended by the local politician.

The first questioner pointed out that RWE had obtained an option to buy Braystones land and commenced drilling (allegedly just assessing the geological conditions) long before any of the residents were informed why. Mr. McDonald replied that RWE could do what they liked on the land they owned - missing the point that the residents had not been informed or consulted at that stage. Sadly, despite persisting doggedly, the questioner never did get a reply. Mr. McDonald repeating his line. One does have to wonder why RWE chose the Braystones area for their gamble, which may end up costing them £5 million, if their application is denied. (Does anyone honestly believe that this multi-national company would choose to pursue such a course without having been given the nod by someone? As one resident suggested, the locals might not be intellectually bright, but even they knew that if something stinks it is probably rotten.)

Who pointed RWE towards Braystones, what was the company told, when and why? We do know that the Renaissance quango (an unelected body, suitably stuffed with pro-nuclear people usually referred to as "Jamie's Mates") had discussed possible developments at Westminster over a year before. Our information is that Renaissance chose Braystones and then approached several potential nuclear developers to see if they would be interested.

There was a considerable amount of angry complaint from several participants about the consultation process (with audience members drawing attention to the lack of consultation in any aspect of the proposals by local or county councils) and its failure to properly consult in any meaningful way - even failing to comply with the government's own rules on consultation. There was no answer or denial. There were questions, too, about

whose convenience the meetings had been designed for. We had already registered objections to the venue, pointing out that we knew of at least three people who could not attend because it was too far/difficult for them to get to. We asked why a venue in Braystones, Beckermeth or Egremont could not have been found. We were told that the organizers were not from the area and didn't know anywhere else.

A gentleman from Kirksanton, obviously very knowledgeable, stated that he had been on the road since 5 a.m., but that public transport could only get him to Whitehaven (after a lengthy walk to a station where trains actually stopped) after the consultation had started. Very soon after he started, posing obviously well-researched questions, he was shut up and his microphone confiscated. He was not given a chance to speak again. Potentially another reason for a judicial review?

There were questions about the justification process, and it was again pointed out that the government had not followed their own criteria. No comment was forthcoming from the platform.

The matter of other reasons for judicial reviews was raised by myself, as I read out the ten points that I considered would benefit from a judicial review. Whether the costs of such an action could be claimed as part of the consultation exercise has yet to be discovered, if they can, it could prove interesting. Happily, despite an attack of nerves, I managed to spot that some of the points were hitting home. Mr. McDonald looking rather displeased, but nodding at each point and scribbling on his notepad.

The government's practice of releasing thousands of pages of documents near the end of the consultation process was also mentioned. Despite having spent several months studying this (new to me) subject, I was horrified to discover that there were more than nine hefty documents (one of 300 pages!) that I needed to know about. A total of around 900 pages!

Disturbingly, although I made it my business to pick up a copy of all available literature, I find that I have a document that appears to be incomplete. The page numbering running from 82 to 105. I can find no suggestion as to where the rest of the document is to be found, nor what those pages might contain. Probably I don't need to know. Er, except it relates to the reasoning behind why Braystones was even considered . . .

One resident, who had worked on building his new home in Braystones for many years, pointed out the effect that the indecision was having on people's mental, physical, and financial health. In common, I think, with many other attendees, he had been awake very early; unable to sleep because of the worry. His home had gone from being worth £375,000 to being worthless and unsellable. He asked what compensation he could expect as a result of the proposals – for the property blight, or for his suffering. Sadly, the answer was a bit vague, but seemed to indicate that there would be none - unless and until RWE and the government made a decision. Sadly, this is unlikely to happen for many years. Even then, there might be no reason to compensate anyone.

A few members of the audience were in favour of the proposals, but they were a small minority. Some of the audience were pro-nuclear, but still against any development at Braystones. One young man stated that he was in favour of the proposals. He drew attention to his comparative youth and that the development would allow him to gain a good employment, improving his and his family's lot in life. It would have been nice to have had the experts point out that such employment would be unlikely to arise if the facts from other sources are correct.

A member of the audience did relate his experience of the Okiluoto build in Finland. He likened conditions to the Wild West: labourers from Czechoslovakia and Poland, for example, living in wooden sheds with very rough conditions and little privacy or respect. It does seem unlikely that any contractors employed to build in Cumbria will recruit locally - other than for labourers, and then very few. What is considered most likely is that the contractors will develop the workforce before arrival at the site, using local labour only to fill-in.

Noteworthy throughout the entire meeting was the failure to answer questions posed. Nor was any information forthcoming on health or environmental matters - some of which (including the most important ones) will not be made available until the consultation has finished and the decision made. It was observed that enquiries in correspondence to DECC, the Prime Minister and Professor John Ashton (Director of Public

Health for Cumbria, likes to be in the limelight – e.g. making a lot of noise about potential pollution from the floods in Cockermouth, but not being very loud about high level waste dumps; best remembered for making a fool of himself on the picket lines at Stanlow Oil Depot during the last fuel crisis) had all been unanswered. In some cases since last April. In Professor Ashton's case, despite the request being made under the Freedom of Information legislation and thus subject to a deadline, not even an acknowledgement. Our home MP did receive her copy without problem.

Although it was stated that nuclear waste, legacy and future, would be dealt with, there was no description of how this would be achieved.

Interestingly, Mr. McDonald contradicted himself quite badly: when asked If the decision over development at Braystones was likely to drag on for years, and if in the first instance it was removed from the shortlist it could be put back on again, he said no. He stated quite categorically that once the decision had been made that would be that. Later on, he said that it might happen that, if one of the preferred sites proved to be unviable, Braystones might be put back on the list of acceptable sites. It is not nice to see such equivocation over important things.

Questions about health effects – which should have been a major item – were very poorly handled. After the event an approach to the representative from the Health Protection Agency, specifically mentioning the presence of children on Braystones beach and enquiring why there had been no inspection of the beach bungalows, produced the statement that there was no need to worry. She said that the particles were so heavy that they could not become airborne, whether by wind blowing dry material or in sea spray. (This we know to be strangely at odds with what we have read, for example about the Merlin family in Saltcoats.) I am currently seeking expert advice on this, as the lady was about to submit a paper to the various nuclear inquiry. If this is the level of accuracy of that document, then I believe we have reason to be very, very concerned.

All in all, if this is what the government deem to be consultation, then I'm afraid their grasp of the concept is sadly lacking.

The meeting concluded at around 12-10 p.m. with the exhibition workers shooing everyone from the room so they could dismantle their equipment.

In my opinion, as a consultation exercise it was an abysmal failure. However, it proved a good opportunity to meet people of a similar opinion to ourselves and to reinforce our views that this proposal should never have been put forward in the first place.

I will pursue the cost implications of the judicial review process and, if possible, obtain a legal opinion on the various matters which I feel should be scrutinized.