Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee
Manchester City Council
Town Hall
Manchester
M60 3NY

SSA criteria Consultation
Nuclear Unit
Bay 135
Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
1 Victoria Street, London
SW1H 0ET

e-mail: SSACriteria@berr.gsi.gov.uk

11th November 2008

Dear Sir or Madam,

Consultation on the Strategic Siting Assessment Process and Siting Criteria for new nuclear power station in the UK.

Please find attached a response to the above consultation from the Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Mike Rumney
National Steering Committee Chair

Response from the Nuclear Free Local Authorities to the:
Consultation on the Strategic Siting Assessment Process and Siting Criteria for new nuclear power station in the UK.

1.0 The Consultation Process

We have found little evidence of a wide ranging consultation of local communities and stakeholders in the development of these draft criteria. There appears to have been no attempt made to promote this consultation in the areas around potential sites for new reactors either amongst the public or their elected representatives. The significance of this consultation should have been drawn to the attention of emergency planning authorities, local authorities and parish and town councils in potentially affected areas.

A condition imposed on a 'Credible Nuclear Power Operator' (CNPO) that wants to nominate a potential site that they must demonstrate they "have taken steps to engage local communities living in the vicinity of the nominated site." [1]. But there are no guidelines laid down about what constitutes an adequate consultation process. It should not be sufficient merely to organize an exhibition, hold public meetings and invite views. Engagement with the community should involve open deliberation and participation in the decision making process. A set of consultation guidelines need to be developed for Credible Nuclear Power Operators who may be considering nominating a site which are based on the Principles drawn up by CoRWM and are based on an open, deliberative engagement of local communities.

In this context, it is extremely worrying that a public meeting planned for Burnham-on-Sea near the Hinkley Point site, where there is concern about cancer levels, was cancelled and replaced with an exhibition. [2]

The statement on page 127, para 2.265 of the White Paper on Nuclear Power [3] that: "The Government expects that applications to build new nuclear power stations will focus on areas in the vicinity of existing nuclear facilities" appears to have pre-judged the outcome of the Strategic Siting Assessment. This suggests the criteria may have been drawn up with specific sites in mind. The draft criteria suggest that none of the existing reactor sites will be automatically ruled out. There are only four exclusionary criteria and they are set at levels that are highly unlikely to exclude any existing reactor sites. One might have expected flooding for example to be an exclusionary criterion, but it is only discretionary.

We are, therefore, concerned that the SSA process is simply a way of legitimising siting decisions which have already been taken. The SSA process looks very much like a step backwards to the old and discredited 'Decide Announce Defend' approach with nuclear facilities imposed on communities.

2.0 Public Acceptability

In this context, it is worrying that public acceptability is not one of the criteria mentioned in the SSA document.

It is generally assumed that people living near existing nuclear sites will be more supportive of new reactors than the population in general, but a recent opinion survey shows that as many as 38% of those living in close proximity to reactors would only reluctantly accept new reactors if they are essential for energy security and tackling climate change. [4] The conditional support for new reactors is, therefore, potentially quite fragile.

The Government has already been forced to run a second consultation on its proposals for new reactors after the High Court ruled it's the first consultation to be procedurally flawed.

The second consultation process was attacked by a group of academics specifically on the grounds that the Government was failing to point out the small contribution nuclear power can make to reducing the UK's CO_2 emissions, and was giving the public biased and incomplete information. [5]

Furthermore, in October 2008 there was yet another damning rebuke for the government's objectivity in the nuclear power debate when the Marketing Research Standards Board found that the market research company Opinion Leader Research, which conducted much of the public opinion work on nuclear power for BERR, breached its Code of Conduct, and that "information was inaccurately or misleadingly presented, or was imbalanced, which gave rise to a material risk of respondents being led towards a particular answer".[6]

It is quite possible that the reluctant public support for new reactors would evaporate quickly if, for example, expenditure on alternatives such as energy efficiency and combined heat and power plants came to be seen as a much more efficient way of saving carbon dioxide emissions per pound spent.[7]

3.0 Nuclear Waste Stores

New power stations will also be long term spent fuel and waste stores. These stores will be present on sites for around a hundred years and perhaps longer. It is logical, therefore, that the voluntary partnership approach developed by the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) should be applied to sites for new reactors. [8]

The absence of any ethical criteria is a serious defect in the SSA process. In particular consideration of the potential impacts on future generations from the operation of power stations and the storage of wastes should be considered.

CoRWM stated that:

"New build wastes would extend the timescales for implementation possibly for very long but essentially unknowable, future periods. Further, the political and ethical issues raised by the creation of more wastes are quite different from those relating to committed – and therefore unavoidable – wastes. Should a new build programme be introduced, in CoRWM's view it would require a quite separate process to test and validate proposals for the management of wastes arising".

CoRWM points out that its recommendations were supported by an extensive Public and Stakeholder Engagement programme. During this process it was made clear that the inventory under consideration was committed waste only, and that its recommendations apply to an unavoidable problem only. [9] The Energy Review consultations were not an adequate substitute for the "quite separate process" on new build waste which CoRWM has called for.

The high burn up spent fuel which new reactors are expected to produce will be more dangerous than existing spent fuel, because high burn up fuel uses more enriched uranium, and it is left it in the reactor for longer. This gets more output from the fuel, but increases the dangers of radioactive releases as the fuel cladding gets thinner. This increased danger persists throughout its storage and disposal. [10] This makes further open and transparent local engagement all the more imperative.

4.0 The Nomination Process

As indicated above we have serious concerns about the nomination process. The process will only last 8 weeks, during which time the Department for Energy and Climate Change and the company wanting to make a nomination will 'engage' with the local community to test for

new reactors. But it is not clear how this engagement process will be implemented. Presumably it will be carried out by the nominator with support from DECC, but this cannot be judged to be an impartial and fair way to engage with the local community. No information is given on how the community response will be judged, and by whom, or indeed how the community is to be defined.

Public acceptability is not included as a criterion. Nor is whether the plans fit in with local authority/regional development plans included as a criterion. The Government needs to explain exactly why it is proposing to do any local consultation at all and under what circumstances, if any, the local engagement process would lead to the rejection of a nominated site. The process appears to be designed to give the greatest possible advantage to the nuclear industry to deliver new nuclear power stations at existing sites as fast as possible.

A fair siting process fully involving the local community would take far longer than eight weeks. The Government would presumably argue that we need an accelerated and centralised process because the issue of climate change is urgent. Even so, this process is unlikely to see any new reactors begin operation much before 2020. We need to begin tackling climate change much sooner, and the contribution new reactors might be able to make after 2020 is very small. It seems, therefore, that **we are sacrificing the opportunity to implement a fair local democratic process in order to introduce a technology which cannot meet the required objectives**.

5.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment

A Strategic Environment Assessment requires giving full and proper consideration to alternatives. The Government says it is undertaking a Strategic Environmental Assessment in relation to proposed new reactors and that it will publish an Environmental Report which assesses the environmental impacts of new reactors when it consults on the draft Nuclear National Policy Statement in 2009. But it has not said how it will consider alternatives to nuclear power at the sites which might be nominated.

The Government should consider both alternative uses for the sites and alternative energy options for the local community. It should also say how it intends to prevent nominators sitting on potential sites and causing planning blight. Grid access is one of the main reasons why existing reactor sites are favoured for new reactors. This access could be just as valuable to other potential energy sources. Access to the grid is flagged in the consultation document for local consideration, but there needs to be a national discussion about how we make best use of our existing transmission grid.

6.0 Demographic Criteria

The Government is proposing to drop the remote siting criteria used at the time of the Sizewell B public inquiry and allow new reactors to be sited on a semi-urban site. The new, less stringent, criteria on demographics are exclusory. However criteria on emergency planning are flagged only for 'local consideration'. The consultation document hardly refers to the risk of an accident or terrorist attack.

The local criteria will be considered by the Infrastructure Planning Commission at a site-specific planning application stage, but the Nuclear National Policy Statement will set out the Government's view on how these local criteria should be viewed by the IPC when they consider planning applications.

It is important, therefore that a full independent assessment and report on the possible effects of a nuclear accident or emergency (from terrorist attack) on either a reactor or spent fuel stores is undertaken - no matter how small the likelihood of such an event because the impacts

could be so massive – for each new reactor proposal. A similar assessment should be made of the routes of any nuclear material to and from the site.

7.0 Flooding

This criterion is discretionary. Yet if a site is liable to be inundated within the period that the power station is operating or being decommissioned, or the waste is still stored on site, then, in our view, it should be excluded. Final clearance of a new reactor site may not take place until around the year 2180.

The criterion requires developers to 'confirm that they can protect the site against flood-risk throughout the lifetime of the site' as well as 'take into account the wider impacts of their flood protection countermeasures on areas surrounding potential power station sites'. Evidence strongly suggests that several sites likely to be nominated will be highly vulnerable to flooding within the period when the site will still be operational for the purposes of waste management.

Reports on flooding published by British Energy in November 2007 which argue that no new major engineering projects will be needed to protect the site, appear to be based on information in the IPCC's 3rd Assessment report of 2001, which is now eight years old. The IPCC's 4th Assessment report suggests that sea levels will rise more quickly and therefore site protection will, in fact, require major engineering. British Energy's response is that the most recent IPCC report "has yet to be given the UK interpretation". [11] In fact even more recent research suggests that sea level rises will be double what was expected in the 4th Assessment report by the end of the century.[12]

Decision about whether a proposed site will require engineering work or should be excluded because of the likelihood of flooding should not be left to the waste producer alone.

Conclusions

A wide ranging engagement process needs to be carried out with local communities around existing nuclear sites which involves open deliberation and participation in the decision making process. This should not just cover the possibility of new reactor building, but should look at all the alternatives with a focus on producing energy.

The SSA process as is currently proposed appears to be simply a way of legitimising nuclear siting decisions which have already been taken - a step backwards to the old and discredited 'Decide Announce Defend' approach.

Regardless of the final process chosen, public acceptability needs to be included as a criterion. But the public also needs to be properly informed by an impartial body on issues such as the proposed storage of spent high burn-up fuel on proposed reactor sites, the limited contribution which nuclear power could make to tackling climate change, and on alternative carbon abatement techniques. Alternative uses for the sites will need to be considered as part of the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

A full independent assessment of the possible effects of a nuclear accident or emergency (from terrorist attack) on either a reactor or spent fuel stores should be undertaken. A similar assessment should be made of the routes of any nuclear material to and from the site.

An independent assessment of whether a proposed site will require engineering work or should be excluded because of the likelihood of flooding should be carried out which is fully informed by the IPCC's 4th Assessment and more recent science.

[1] Condition 2, page 9 of the Consultation Document. http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file47136.pdf
[2] Burnham-on-sea.com 2nd October 2008 http://www.burnham-on-sea.com/news/2008/hinkley-meeting-cancelled-02-10-08.php
[3] Meeting the Energy Challenge: A White Paper on Nuclear Power, BERR, January 2008. http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file43006.pdf
[4] Nick Pidgeon, Karen Henwood, Karen Parkhill, Dan Venables and Peter Simmons, "Living with Nuclear Power in Britain: A Mixed-methods Study", Cardiff University and the University of East Anglia, September 30, 2008
http://www.kent.ac.uk/scarr/SCARRNuclearReportPidgeonetalFINAL3.pdf
[5] Paul Dorfman (Ed) Nuclear Consultation: Public trust in Government, Nuclear Consultation Working Group, 2008. http://www.nuclearconsult.com/
[6] Market Research Standards Board, Complaint by Greenpeace, October, 2008
http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/files/pdfs/nuclear/MRSfindings.pdf
[7] See for example Amory Lovins interview on CNN, October 16, 2008
http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/americas/10/10/amory.lovins/
[8] Implementing a Partnership Approach to Radioactive Waste Management: A Report to Government, CoRWM, April 2007
http://www.corwm.org.uk/Pages/Archived%20Publications/Tier%202%20(7)%20-%20Implementation/Tier%203%20-%20Implementation%20advice/2146%20-%20%20Report%20to%20Government%202007%20-%20final.doc
[9] Reiteration of CoRWM's position on New Build, September 2007.
http://www.corwm.org.uk/Pages/Archived%20Publications/Tier%202%20(7)%20-%20Implementation/Tier%203%20-%20Implementation%20advice/2162%202%20-%20CoRWM%20position%20on%20new%20build%20reiterated.doc
[10] Too Hot to Handle, by Hugh Richards, April 2008
http://www.no2nuclearpower.org.uk/reports/TooHottoHandle.pdf
[11] See Sizewell Community Meeting 11th March 2008, Minutes http://www.british-energy.com/documents/Sizewell_New_Build_Public_Meeting_minutes_110308.pdf
[12] Climate Change: Faster, stronger, sooner, by Dr Tina Tin, WWF, October 2008
http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/cc_science_paper_october_2008_1.pdf