

Statement on Behalf of AWE

Responding to the following question at Matter 9: Other Issues of the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions – Stage 2 Hearings

9.2 *Is the Council's approach to the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone and other consultation zones for Atomic Weapons Establishment Burghfield consistent with that of its neighbours, West Berkshire District Council and Wokingham.*

1. This statement is submitted by AWE plc (AWE) in respect of their operations at AWE Burghfield and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as owner of AWE plc and the Atomic Weapons Establishment. AWE Burghfield is located outside of the Borough but its Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) extends into Wokingham Borough as well as Reading Borough. AWE is an arm's length Non-Departmental Public Body, wholly owned by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). AWE Burghfield is a designated site under the Atomic Weapons Establishment Act 1991. It is essential for the maintenance of the UK's Continuous at Sea Deterrent (CASD), known as Operation Relentless.
2. The background to this statement is set out in the original representations.
3. The neighbouring authorities approach to the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone is within the following local planning documents:
 - 3.1. West Berkshire District Council Local Plan (West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023 - 41) was adopted in June 2025 contains Policy SP4 AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield¹; and
 - 3.2. Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan Update (2023 – 40) is currently at examination and contains proposed policy SS7 Development in the vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishment²
4. Whilst AWE strongly supports the principle of Policy OU2 and its intention to ensure the effective management of development located within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zones (DEPZ) for AWE Burghfield (and this is detailed further in the original representations), there are some differences between the Council's approach and that of the two neighbouring authorities.
5. Both West Berkshire and Wokingham have separate policies relating specifically to AWE and also have an enhanced role for ONR, which in the case of West Berkshires' policy states

¹ [SP4_AWE_Aldermaston_and_AWE_Burghfield.pdf](#)

² [Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040 Proposed Submission Plan](#)

“Development within the DEPZ is likely to be refused planning permission where the ONR, as regulator of the nuclear licenced sites, advise against the proposed development”.

6. AWE consider that a further criterion should be added to the Council’s draft OU2 Policy to make clear that proposals will be refused unless the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) does not advise against the proposals. This will ensure that appropriate weight is given to the ONR’s views as the expert consultee on nuclear safety issues.
7. AWE also consider Policy OU2 could be split into OU2 a) Hazardous Substances and OU2 b) AWE to ensure it is clear that the Local Plan seeks to avoid growth that would increase the population within the DEPZ specifically and to bring it in line with current planning policy.
8. The reasoning for the proposal for greater clarity in the policy is to recognise the need to ensure that there is no growth proposed that would increase the population within the DEPZ, which would place additional strain on an already stretched Off Site Emergency Plan (OSEP), which is applied to the DEPZ.
9. It is relevant to note that the chances of a major incident occurring which involves the release of ionising radiation are extremely low. Nevertheless, AWE Burghfield falls under the Radiation (Emergency, Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 and for AWE Burghfield to operate an adequate OSEP is required to be in place for the DEPZ.
10. These matters are material considerations in planning decisions. This has been reinforced in a recent planning appeal in Wokingham on Land East of Hayes Drive, Three Mile Cross³ which was dismissed following recovery by the Secretary of State. In this appeal the Secretary of State specifically concluded that there would be significant harm to public safety and well-being from additional population within the DEPZ and that this should be accorded substantial weight:

“Overall, the Secretary of State agrees at IR15.55 that although there is a tiny chance of an accident occurring, the consequences would be significant throughout the DEPZ as a whole; that the radiation dose at the appeal site is highly unlikely to cause physical harm but there could well be psychological harm; and there may also be harm resulting from the shelter period; and that there would be many resources required in an emergency which would be diverted from elsewhere and there would undoubtedly be strain on Blue Light and other public services. Like the Inspector, he concludes that the appeal proposal would cause an unacceptable risk of harm to the safety and wellbeing of future residents of the proposed development, and the wider public (IR15.58, IR15.67). He considers that this carries substantial weight against the proposal.”
(Decision Letter, paragraph 23).

11. The Secretary of State also reinforced the critical national importance of the continued operation of AWE and the serious consequences for our defence capabilities of allowing the population within the DEPZ to increase and put pressure on the OSEP:

“The Secretary of State has taken into account that the nuclear deterrent is critical to UK defence policy, and that AWE(B) is essential for the delivery of Continuous at Sea

³ Appeal APP/X0360/W/24/3354607 Land East of Hayes Drive, Three Mile Cross

Defence (CASD) which has been a cornerstone of the defence of the UK for over 6 decades. He agrees that the current global security landscape is reinforcing the criticality of that capability. For the reasons given at IR15.59-15.65, the Secretary of State agrees at IR15.59 that if the ONR were to declare the OSEP inadequate, then AWE(B) would not be able to operate, and that the consequences of AWE(B) not being able to operate would be very serious in terms of national security.” (Decision Letter, paragraph 24).

12. The Secretary of State also concluded:

“The Secretary of State agrees at IR15.67 that the future capability and capacity of AWE(B) to operate effectively would be at an unacceptable risk. Given its critical importance for national security, he considers that this carries very substantial weight. He further agrees that the proposal would be contrary to MDD Policy TB04 and paragraphs 102(b) and 200 of the Framework (IR15.67).” (Decision Letter, paragraph 26).

13. Furthermore, the proposed changes to the NPPF which is currently going through consultation (December 2025) states in Chapter 17 (P1 (d)) Pollution, public protection that plan making policies and security should –

“Identify whether restrictions on certain types or forms of development are necessary as a consequence of consultation zones around hazardous substances sites, safeguarding areas around aerodromes, technical sites or military explosives storage areas, and consultation zones around nuclear sites (and reflect the implications of these areas in any allocations of land within the plan)”

And the accompanying footnote in the draft NPPF specifically refers to detailed emergency planning zones.⁴

Thus illustrating the critical importance of land use decisions being managed in the interests of public safety, emergency response, and national security and defence requirements at a national level.

14. Overall, AWE are supportive of the proposed policy for the overriding reasons of national security and public safety. However, as set out above, there are certain parts of the relevant policies that could be more effective in terms of providing clarity and certainty, namely those mentioned in paragraphs 6 and 7 above.

⁴ [National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation](#)