

COPY INFO RELATING TO Agenda item 14(a)

WATCHTREE LIAISON COMMITTEE

Minutes of open meeting in the Village Hall, Great Orton on 14th January 2002 at 7p.m.

Apologies: N. Quayle, A. Greenhow, A. Holmes.

Present: See attached list.

All those present were welcomed from the Chair (P. Macdonald) Members of the Liaison Committee and representatives from other agencies introduced themselves to the meeting.

Minutes from the meeting held 26th November 2001 had been circulated.

Matters Arising.

The main item arising from the minutes was the matter of Community reparation. We had been advised in writing by Defra, Page Street, London that they are unable to offer any form of community reparation.

Report from Defra

The existing position is that Defra is working closely with local communities to ensure that Watchtree is developed to maximise benefit to local communities.

Several months ago a feasibility study had been offered to look into the possibility of a sewage system (Aikton parish) This had not been taken up because of the running costs and subsequent effect on rates, which would be borne by residents.

Defra had been asked if the sum involved to undertake a feasibility study (£20,000) could therefore not be used to benefit local communities.

Defra had looked into this with their legal department, who advised them that there is no justification for payment of Defra funds to local communities.

Mr Peter Green, Defra Head Office and Mr R. Anderson, Director of Operations were present to answer the many questions from local residents, as well as to listen comments made.

Mr. Green explained that the Watchtree site is now the responsibility of Defra, Buildings and Estate Management Division who look after the long-term interest and management of the site.

Mr D. Laidler (Great Orton) said that the local communities should have some recognition of the terrible time we have had here.

Mr Anderson replied that there had been other consequential losses around the F&M outbreak-tourism had been damaged-footpaths had been closed and there had been many other restrictions. In terms of compensation prescribed by the Animal Health Act 1981 & 1983, the Government will pay for disease control measures and take on responsibility of the site, but they are not responsible for consequential losses. They will endeavour to provide maximum benefit to local communities from the site itself.

District & County Councillor J. Collier said Defra are hiding behind statutes. It is astounding! Some recognition is needed from the government for the trauma suffered. The early stages had been a shambles, particularly with traffic in this area until one-way system imposed.

Mr W. Little(Orton) said he is astounded that there has been no recompense for the turmoil suffered locally. Hotel/tourism industry will recover. He expressed concerns about the values of property in the area. We will have to suffer the consequences of Watchtree for next 15-20 years. There will still be associated traffic-tankers etc, Great Orton and area is not finished with the turmoil yet. He stressed that some compensation should be forthcoming soon.

Mr L. Johnston (Great Orton) questioned the retrospective planning application which has been submitted. What sort of conditions can be imposed, as Defra claim they have Crown immunity and therefore did not need to submit a planning application.

It was explained that the Planners will agree a set of conditions with Defra. This has been an extraordinary and unique situation. An Environmental Impact Assessment is part of the plan. It was appreciated that all the parishes bordering the site had been under enormous pressure and had suffered a great deal of worry and concern. Had an application been submitted previously, it is unlikely that permission would have been granted. The site was not eligible for land fill tax. Is there not a facility for such extraordinary circumstances, so that communities can be compensated.

Mr A. Rushton(Kirkandrews) asked if it is illegal to commence engineering works without planning permission. Defra did not own the site at the time of commencement of use. The site has since been purchased.

Mr G. Johnston(Great Orton) said he was pleased about the change of name to 'Watchtree'

Defra should be thankful such a solid clay site had been available. Defra should make a gesture to compensate Great Orton and area. There had been a huge psychological effect seeing sheep travel through the village on their way to slaughter. If Defra have no legal reason to compensate, then they certainly have a moral one. Great Orton has been put on the map through disaster. Mr Johnston hopes this death site for sheep will be developed as an area where the animals will be properly remembered and suggested planting of oak trees.

Mr Anderson thanked Mr Johnston for his balanced argument. He explained that slaughter had been quick but disposal proved a problem. Live animals with no direct evidence of disease(dangerous contacts) had to be surrendered for slaughter in accordance with the Animal Health Act. He assured the meeting that Defra will listen to local people regarding future development of site.

Mr Newstead(Kirkbampton) also questioned the necessity of the retrospective planning application.

Submission had been expected in July. Defra had lost credibility because of the delay. An Impact assessment (part of NOPD) is required in accordance with E.U. regulations. Access for local people has security implications. This is a national site -should be a point of security.

Mr Green (Defra) explained that a boundary fence, specifications agreed by C.C.C. forms part of the application.

Mr Anderson added that remaining graves are a national asset, but they are not about to use the site for burials, although they could bury a small amount of carcasses, but this would not be significant numbers in terms of an outbreak.

Defra would seek consent again under ground water regulations. There will be full consultation prior to any further use.

Mrs G. Wharton (Great Orton) asked what the site could be used for in future, could it be used for disposal of domestic or industrial waste?

Mr Green replied No.

Mrs Wharton asked for an assurance in writing from Messrs Green and Anderson. This was promised.

Mr W. Edgar suggested that the three empty trenches should be filled in. Neither Defra nor E.A. could see any problem with this.

Mrs P. Macdonald stated that several sites have been identified for possible use by Nirex, one of which is Sellafield. Could Defra confirm that Watchtree is not one of those identified.

Defra have no knowledge of this.

Mrs G. Spratt (Great Orton) commented about the discharge of leachate into the Irish Sea. Will the open graves be used for the return of leachate? Mr S. Barron, E.A. explained that the best environmental option in the first place was discharge into the sea. This has now ceased. E.A. have obligations re. discharge into the sea. This had been an emergency measure only, and an alternative site has been found.

Mr D. Ladler asked if we could pre-empt the current situation by having public consultation now about future use of the site.

Mr Anderson said Defra will apply for consent prior to using the site for further burials, but it is highly unlikely that any consent will be needed.

Mr Laidler urged everyone to register dissent re. planning application.

Mr R. Anderson said that the public should take the opportunity to let C.C.C./Defra know how the site should be developed.

Mrs P. Macdonald reminded Defra that a questionnaire had been sent out in July. We have already said what we want, but no-one seems to be listening.

Mr R. Evans, C.C.C. advised the meeting that representations have to be submitted by the end of January. Earliest committee meeting is in February, so further comments will be accepted.

At this stage in the meeting, Cllr. J. Collier as chairman of the C.C.C Planning committee asked that his interest be recorded. He took no part in this matter and no comment was made by him.

Mrs E. Whitfield asked about pollution of Pow Beck. When will this water way be safe?

Mr Barron (E.A.) explained that the incident in Pow Beck was short term and had been as a result of contaminated water escaping through an old 4metre deep drain.

A 12metre Bentonite curtain has sealed the hydrology from the 'outside world'

Pow Beck is 'fine'. Reports of testing April-Dec. are available. E.A.'s main role is to monitor surface water.

Mr D. Blunt (Great Orton) raised the question of damaged walls in the village as result of the extra heavy traffic, as well as the state of the road. This is the third meeting he has attended. Nothing has yet been done.

Mr Wallace(C.C.C)said that the roads were inspected at the beginning of the crisis and are being inspected again. Estimates for reinstation to be submitted.
Defra will be asked to fund the work.

Mrs A. Palmer(Hardcake) advised that the roadsides in her area are eroded. Again, Mr Wallace said that Defra would be asked to reinstate.

Mr D. Blunt asked if this would be funded from our community charge.

Mr Newslead reported that HGVs are not keeping to designated system. Could Defra please ensure that traffic situation is improved and HGVs leave site towards Wigton. CC.C replied that site management should be responsible for traffic management. The route should be properly signed by Defra. Designated route is part of planning application.

Mr G. Wills(Great Orton) added that roads in the area were in a bad state previously.HGVs have further damaged roads and verges. Could Defra/C.C.C. upgrade roads and kerb the roadsides through the affected villages?

C.C.C. advised that there will be funding to reinstate to previous condition.

Mr R. Anderson, Defra said that they are developing and improving the access to the site (Orton Grange to Watchtree) and will listen to C.C.C. regarding the state of the roads.

Mr D. Blunt(Great Orton) asked why the survey hasn't been completed yet.

Mr C. Wallace, C.C.C. said that because the site is still being used, C.C.C. want to ensure that all damage is reinstated.

Mr Blunt asked why they had taken so long to decide to widen the roads.

Mr D. Laidler raised the issue of overgrown footpaths due to closure. Will Defra be clearing them?

Mr Green, Defra said they would take advice on the issue.

Mr W. Little(Orton) had visited the site and had been struck by the amount of money spent on site. He felt that Defra should go back to central government and ask for recompense for the villages. Our communities have needs and they should offer a gesture of money to them. Expenditure continues at a high level There are two unused air curtain burners. What has happened to them?

Defra advised that one has moved south for trials. The second had been moth balled.

Mrs Wharton asked in what way had it been mothballed.

Mr Green replied that it would be sold,

Mr R. Anderson, Defra said he hoped no one thinks that Defra is not aware of the depth of feeling. They will respond to proposals, and develop a long- term management plan, which will be of benefit to local communities and the road network locally. HGVs have damaged road infrastructure. They are committed to make good the damage and improve access and the route around the site.

Mr I. Carter, Project Manager on site advised that fencing works will be complete by mid February The deep drain is almost completed. Re-seeding work will take place throughout the summer months. There is a leachate disposal contract and a surface water contract. Traffic to and from the site depends on rainfall.

Mr W. Edgar(Flatt) asked if any water is being spread on site.

All Water goes off site- Leachate to Stoke on Trent, Ground water to Carlisle.

Mr A. Rushton (Kirkandrews) had flown over the site and noticed water standing and asked if there is no surface water drainage and how is water monitored.

Mr S. Barron (E.A.) explained there are 70/80 boreholes used for monitoring purposes. Mr Rushton asked how water volume is calculated.

Mr Barron explained: Fluid x no of animals + rainfall per Ha. = volume to withdraw on a daily basis.

Mr Rushton asked if all water will be contained on site

All water is taken away, and Mr Barron explained the system for collecting the water:

Trenches are not all lined. The first trenches dug by the army have pipes inserted diagonally. Later trenches are lined and have a drainage system with pumps to the collecting silos.

Mr G. Johnston asked if tree planting is part of the plan. This would help to alleviate the surface water problem.

Mr W. Edgar asked about costs other than the £4million for the bentonite wall and deep drain. Any contribution made to local communities would be 'peanuts' in comparison.

Input regarding future of the site is invited from C.C.C. and local communities.

Mr P. Green said Defra will work through the Liaison committee. They have also hired an expert (Halcro) who devised the plan along with Capita db.

C.C.C. are interested in comments. Some planting will commence this year. Some of the existing concrete will be removed.

Mr Newstead expressed a wish for short term planting and a hedgerow system which would not interfere with existing views to the fells. Consideration should be given to ground nesting birds.

Mr A. Rushton enquired if the Environmental Impact Study concerned with reinstatement will account for visual appearance, when will site be returned, Why are three pits remaining?

Mrs J. Nanson (Great Orton) asked how much money has been spent? Will pits be left open, they should be closed if they are of no further use. Mrs Nanson stressed that the local communities deserve reparation and to know more about what is happening on site. Local people had only known about the activities on the site via pictures on T.V.

Mr Anderson said the site will not be used again without public consultation

Mr Green added that work on site will be carried out after approval of the planning application. Consultation can take place in the interim.

Mrs P. Macdonald asked if closure of the pits and tree planting would compromise the planning decision

Mr R. Evans (C.C.C.) felt there will be no problem

Mr Green (Defra) added that they will respond to will of the meeting.

Mr I. Carter (Building & Estates Management) explained that the trenches are being used as a temporary measure to hold water until the drainage system is complete. And Mr Barron further added that these had been used to hold water on site during the time of the bentonite wall construction.

Mr A. Rushton asked if the water in trenches is being analysed, and could the ponds be contaminated. Mr Barron replied no to both issues explaining that the trenches are plastic lined and are the best cells on site. Mr Rushton also asked if there could be contaminated run off. Mr Barron explained that the boulder clay is not a 100% seal, hence the bentonite wall to ensure that the site is completely sealed.

Mr D. Laidler asked how would the water contained in trenches be treated when they are emptied. And did all the water in question fall from the sky.

Mr Barron answered yes and that the water can be analysed and results made available.

Mr Fleming(Aikton) questioned whether the liner should be destroyed to prevent the area becoming boggy, once the trenches are filled in.

Mr B Bowe. (Wiggonby) asked what the current excavations are on the Wiggonby side of the site, to which Mr Carter replied, Surface Water Management

Mr.Rushton asked for clarification about where water was being disposed of.

Leachate goes to Stoke. Groundwater to Carlisle.

Mrs E. Whitfield stated that there is confusion about the water.

Mr Anderson said a written document would be submitted regarding Leachate, Ground water and Surface water.

There should be capacity on site for excess water based on a 1 in 10 year rainfall capacity

Mr R. Bushby(Aikton) questioned whether this is adequate.

Mrs D. Brewis(Orton) said that Landfill Tax had been payable for carcasses buried at other sites, yet the tax had not been imposed on burials at Great Orton site. Money should be available for the local communities from the Landfill Tax.

Mr R. Evans (C.C.C) explained that prior to F&M, the Waste Management regulations meant that significant quantities of agricultural waste did not need a licence. Because the carcasses were classed as agricultural waste, a landfill licence had not been granted for Watchtree. When asked if this could not be granted retrospectively, Mr Evans said that it is a matter for the government.

Mr J.Nattrass(Great Orton) asked if C.C.C./Defra believe there should be a public enquiry. Councillors Collier and Fairbairn, both representing C.C.C. said there should be a public enquiry.

Northumberland has had an enquiry.

Defra replied that the Government has established three enquiries 1, Science of Disease control.2. Lessons to be learned. 3. Impact of F &M on the future of farming.

He then gave a chronological history of the spread of the disease and the controls and restrictions implemented to stem the spread. When asked why it had not spread further in Northumberland, Mr Anderson said he could not answer that.

Mrs J. Holiday(Great Orton) stated that the only way we will get the absolute truth about the crisis was through a public enquiry.

Cllr A. Toole concluded the comments/questions saying that Defra should find some way of funding for people of the area. Restoration is a duty. Tourism has greatly suffered but will bounce back. This village and surrounding area has to live with the effects of F&M for 15/20 years. 30/40 years has been previously mentioned.

The chairman requested Halcro reports for the local communities.

Defra promised 100 copies of Non Technical Summary and 8 full copies of N.O.P.D.

After lively debate and many issues aired, the meeting closed at 9.p.m.