

Notice of Proposed Development (NoPD)

All of the new developments at AWE will be subject to the submission of a Notice of Proposed Development (NoPD) to the local council. However, unlike a Planning Application, NoPDs cannot be turned down. At least one NoPD has already been submitted, although everything appears to be moving more slowly than anticipated (possibly due to the wrangle over the 25 year contract and/or the political & design complexities of a controversial and over-ambitious plan) and it is possible that an NoPD for the proposed conference centre may be submitted soon (or even by the time you read this).

Application to the Council will be made in the name of the Ministry of Defence - who are exempt from planning law. However, it is committed to submitting Notices of Proposed Development to the local planning authority - the West Berkshire County Council (WBCC).

It is expected that for every new development, from the cosmetic site improvements to the hydrodynamic research, laser, laboratory and test facilities, a NoPD will be submitted to WBCC. The Council can object on very limited grounds, but can't refuse permission. They can, however, refer it to the Secretary of State and call on him to set up a public inquiry.

WBCC has to consider public complaints: DoE Circular 18/84, Crown Lands & Crown Developments Part IV: "In any case where strong objections are received, ..the authority must decide whether...they should be supported".

AWPC and other organisations are calling for a public inquiry, so that the future of UK weapons of mass destruction can be decided by more than a handful of local councillors - or and US hawks. If WBCC receives more letters than they know what to do with, then maybe we'll get that inquiry...

What can I do?

Join the growing opposition to the proposed new developments. Write to West Berkshire Council, write to your MP, go to the relevant WBCC Planning Meeting, take direct action at AWE Aldermaston.

Write to the Secretary of State for the Environment; express your concerns about the new developments at AWE Aldermaston; remind him that the UK has promised to get rid of its nuclear weapons; ask him to launch a public inquiry.

If enough - and that means thousands of people - oppose the new developments through the planning process, we can slow down the process, raise awareness and opposition, and make the future [or not] of Britain's nuclear weapons a real issue.

A range of materials on our website can be used by to make representations to West Berkshire Council opposing the Notice of Proposed Development. These include online petitions, background information and downloadable leaflets, model letters and petitions for you to print out and use. [Materials are also available by post]

Write to:

Lisa Smith Senior Planning Officer, West Berks Council, Market Street, Newbury RG14 5DL
email: lsmith@westberks.gov.uk

If you want to be kept informed of any NoPD submitted to WBCC, ask to have your objection in principle noted, and request written notification of any application that you may wish to examine and comment on and the dates and details of any public Committee hearing. If your organisation would also like to support this campaign, please let us know, and we will add you to the list of supporters on our petitions and other campaigning materials.

If you would like to join an e-group to keep in touch and share information with others campaigning on this issue, email awpc@gmx.co.uk and ask to join the aldermaston_tng e-group.

If you know people or groups who do not have e-mail or access to the web, please let them know about this campaign.

Nonviolent direct action

Nonviolent direct action works; US nuclear deployments were stopped and nuclear policy was changed by Greenham women's direct action.

Other groups

▼ Nuclear Information Service

For regular monthly updates on new developments at Aldermaston, read NIS Updates at www.nukeinfo.org.uk or subscribe to receive them by email.

▼ Trident Ploughshares

www.tridentploughshares.org
Newsline (recorded) 0845 4588365
Next TP disarmament camp at Aldermaston July 2004.

▼ CND

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
162 Holloway Road, London N7 8DQ
Tel: 020 7700 2393
Fax: 020 7700 2357
Email enquiries@cnduk.org
www.cnduk.org

▼ Reading Peace Group

c/o Reading International Solidarity Centre,
35-39 London St, Reading RG1 4PS.
Email readingpeacegroup@hotmail.com;
www.readingpeacegroup.freewire.co.uk

Contact us

"the next generation?" is a campaign organised by Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign

postal	157 Lyndhurst Road, Worthing, W Sussex BN11, Britain
tel	01639 600 780
UK m	07904 450307
email	info@aldermaston.net
web	www.aldermaston.net

Aldermaston Update!

Sporadic Newsletter of the Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign

September 2003

Special issue:

Next Generation Briefing

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AWE: the next generation of nuclear weapons?

In August 2002, the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston in Berkshire published a Site Development Strategy Plan. This briefing provides an update on the developments over the past year.

A brief briefing

For those with little time to read, but hopefully enough time to act.

AWE Aldermaston is equipping itself to build new nuclear weapons. A range of new site facilities are planned at a huge cost. This could enable AWE to build a replacement for the Trident warhead system, or to build lower yield "mini-nukes" or battlefield nuclear weapons. No parliamentary discussion has taken place; the government is denying everything. However, similar developments are being planned in the US; UK nuclear policy is closely tied to US nuclear policy.

To help us stop the next generation of UK weapons of mass destruction massive numbers of people need to act now. The nuclear clock is currently set at x minutes to midnight. Please take x minutes of your life, and write a letter protesting about the new developments or get involved in the "next generation" (tng) campaign and help organise opposition. See back page for details.

AWE Aldermaston

The Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston 9 miles (as the wind blows) from Reading in Berkshire is the home of Trident warhead production, maintenance,

research and development. Although Aldermaston is owned by the British government's Ministry of Defence, since 1 April 2000 Aldermaston has been managed as a government owned, contractor operated company by AWE ML (Management Ltd), a consortium of three companies: British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL), US arms producers Lockheed Martin and the facilities management company Serco.

AWE Burghfield - 7 miles away (by road) from Aldermaston - is also run by AWE ML. It is the final warhead assembly and disassembly site before convoys deliver them to and from the Trident base at Coulport in Scotland.

Timeline

June 2002: Observer and Guardian report on plans for new developments at AWE - costing some £2 billion - reportedly to build the next generation of nuclear weapons. A spokesperson for AWE ML tells the Guardian that the new facilities would provide Aldermaston with the capacity to design and produce mini-nukes.

August 2002: AWE publishes a Site Development Strategy Plan (SDSP), outlining [non-classified information] about new facilities the company plans to build on the site. Plans include a science centre, environmental improvements and a running track for employees, but also new supercomputers, a high powered laser, hydrodynamic testing facilities and non-specific "laboratories". See: http://www.awe.co.uk/main_site/site_development_plan/sdp_introduction.htm

"No matter how many environmental viewing platforms, landscaping schemes, new entrances or visitor centres they build, they cannot pretend that an 'industrial [nuclear bomb-making] factory' is merely a 'science and technology centre'". AWPC Press Release

October 2002: AWE management address a Nuclear Awareness Group (NAG) meeting in Reading. [see below]

January 2003: The government announces an extension of AWE ML's existing 10-year contract by another 15 years.

Some science

The new facilities at AWE will enable research on nuclear weapons to continue without underground testing, which is banned under the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. [but see US developments opposite] It isn't a question of building new production facilities - the A90 warhead production complex at Aldermaston can be used to build and service nuclear warheads for many years ahead, with appropriate re-tooling. The skills and equipment to build small nuclear weapons also exist. But what is not available is the means to test them - hence the long term alternative plans to offer methods of testing a new warhead design.

AWE Test Facilities to Comply with the CTBT

The AWE Strategy Plan explains that the new hydrodynamics facility is needed to enable test data to equal that previously only available from underground nuclear tests. AWE currently tests weapon mock-ups and small amounts of fissile material in an existing hydrodynamics facility where giant x-ray machines diagnose the effects of extreme forces inside an exploding warhead. However, there is no report of the current facility failing to keep Trident "one-point safe", suggesting that any new facility is planned to coincide with testing a new weapon.

Similarly, AWE wants to replace the existing HELEN laser, with "the UK's own national laser facility". The new material science laboratories will also provide underground-test quality diagnosis of weapons' materials. The supercomputer to transpose test data into mathematical models of warhead performance is already in place.

Fourth-Generation Nuclear Weapons Triggers

First and second generation nuclear weapons are atomic and hydrogen bombs, with the neutron bomb developed in 1960 -1980s being the third generation. Advanced technology will enable a fourth generation weapon to be detonated by a relatively small thermonuclear explosion. This small nuclear weapon will be considered not to break the taboo of "first-use" of Weapons of Mass Destruction. This technology could be perfected at laboratory level in 10-15 years.

Edited from Disarmament Diplomacy No. 67, www.acronym.org.uk



the next generation?

March 2003: The contract extension is signed. British Defence Secretary, Geof. Hoon says Iraq "can be absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use nuclear weapons".

April 2003: Proposal to close the Burghfield site and transfer operation to Aldermaston is revoked.

May 2003: New Scientist reveals (21 May 2003. Britain boosts nuclear bomb research) that AWE intended to recruit more than 80 specialist scientists.

What do AWPC want?

After months of lies about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, we don't believe the government's denials. Nuclear weapons are a live issue. And so is the possibility of nuclear war.

Building more weapons would contravene the Non-Proliferation Treaty to which the UK government is a signatory, threaten the security and future of the planet, and continue to endanger the environment and people of West Berkshire, the south of England and way beyond.

AWPC wants the plans to be scrapped, before a huge amount of money is spent on developing facilities to build indiscriminate weapons that are clearly illegal under international law.

AWPC is calling for massive public opposition to the proposed developments, and asking people, locally and nationally, to write to West Berkshire County Council calling for the plans to be referred to the Environment Minister for a public inquiry. Nuclear weapons policy is a national issue, and cannot be left to West Berkshire Council to rubber stamp." (See planning issues on back page.)

AWPC wants AWE Aldermaston to scrap their plans and use their expertise in decommissioning to disassemble Britain's existing Trident warheads and all weapons production facilities.

What do the new developments mean?

According to press reports, the proposed developments are likely to cost a huge amount over the next ten years. The new facilities would enable the designing, testing and building of a new generation of nuclear weapons. It may - eventually - involve the relocation of warhead assembly & disassembly facilities to AWE Aldermaston from AWE Burghfield, and will include the building of hydrodynamics and laser research facilities. The £15 million super-computer and a new tritium handling facility is already in place.

"The facilities envisaged will give AWE the capability to develop a successor to Trident. That is nuclear proliferation and exactly contradictory to the UK's commitment under the NPT Treaty..... it should be obvious to everyone that this is not a local matter, the issues and the implications are national and international. There has to be a Public Inquiry."

Trident Ploughshares press release , August 2002

The Government say that the new developments will enable them to ensure that Trident is safe and reliable, and will avoid a return to the physical testing of weapons. But the 1998 Defence Review stated that Britain needs to retain the capacity to develop the next generation of nuclear weapons - a line which is maintained.

"There are no current plans for any replacement for Trident and no decisions are yet needed. In line with the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, it is our policy to maintain the capability to design and produce a successor weapon should this prove necessary." Lewis Moonie [Defence Procurement] in response to Parliamentary questions on 11 and 12 June 2003.

AWPC don't think it will ever be necessary to produce a successor weapon - do you?

However, Paul Rogers, Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University, comments: "At the very least, they want to build the infrastructure to create a new generation of weapons".

A new generation of weapons?

At a meeting organised by local campaign group NAG (Nuclear Awareness Group) in October 2002, speakers from AWE ml suggested that any such developments would be a matter of government policy and denied that they were aware of any such intention, despite much scepticism in the meeting about the huge planned investment in AWE if new weapons were not on the agenda. An interesting discussion arose about what exactly was meant by "maintaining the capability, to design new weapons systems if required" and how this could be done without allowing skilled personnel the opportunity to work on such projects on a continuing basis. There was no clear answer but the speakers claimed there was no design work currently going on.

Concerns were also raised over whether the proposed developments would be paid for by Public/Private finance initiatives. The bulk of the development costs will come out of AWE's £2.3 billion contract with the MoD, though the extension of the contract to 25 years also opened up more possibilities of securing private finance.

Yet AWE had reported earlier in the year that their day-to-day costs were too high; in response to expressed fears that economy measures might impinge on safety standards. AWE said substantial savings had been made by amalgamating many small contracts and letting one or two larger ones.

AWE speakers also indicated that Notices of Proposed Developments (NOPDs - see back page) would be issued piecemeal to the local authority, and suggested that the plans were not yet fixed and may be subject to change.

Local MPs Martin Salter and David Rendel have already asked the government to go public on the development, but in his replies to their questions in the House of Commons, Under Secretary of State for Defence, Lewis Moonie, has denied everything. Menzies Campbell MP - Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesperson has called for parliament to be consulted "before embarking on expenditure of this size on an issue of such political controversy".

US connection

UK nuclear policy - and weapons research and production - is inextricably linked with US nuclear policy. The UK can't even fire a nuclear missile without US permission. The Trident missile - our current delivery system - is manufactured in the US by Lockheed Martin; and the warheads built at Aldermaston are produced similar to a US design.

The first private company to run AWE - Hunting BRAE - was a consortium including US Hallibuton subsidiary, Brown and Root. The current consortium includes US arms giant Lockheed Martin.

In early 2003, the US announced its new nuclear doctrine; new US legislation allowed new funds for weapons development, and the renewed possibility of nuclear testing. Joint research between Aldermadston and US is carried out under the 1958 UK-US Mutual Defence agreement -recently including joint sub-critical tests into the properties of plutonium on 14 February 2002.

Technical exchanges on warhead matters take place regularly in Joint Working Groups and through exchange of information and visit reports between AWE and the US.

In 2002 AWE scientists visited 25 US institutions including Dept. of Defence, laboratories, arms companies and other sites including the Los Alamos National Laboratory, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, National Nuclear Security Administration Headquarters, Bechtel Nevada and of course, Lockheed Martin Missiles and Space. Scientists from 19 of these sites visited AWE [Parliamentary Question by Alan Simpson MP 9 Jul 2003.]

"At the Offut Strategic Command base, near Bellevue Nebraska, a group of Pentagon officials, scientists from the nuclear weapons laboratories, weapons contractors and spooks met for a week in early August 2003 to plot the latest developments in the USA's nuclear arsenal. The meeting started on the anniversary of the dropping Hiroshima bomb, and ended on that of Nagasaki. Only a month earlier, Bush abolished the nuclear oversight committee".

Source:http://www.fantompowa.net/Flame/bush_nuclear2003.html

Wherever US nuclear policy goes it seems the UK follows close behind.