

Response on behalf of the objectors to application 19/03962/CCD

Throughout this process, the applicant, spokespeople for NCC and others have conducted themselves in such a manner as to imply that the proposed salt dome's construction is inevitable and that objection is futile. It seems that no one, other than the objectors, has given serious thought to the proposal. The council has offered:

- No thinking out of the box, no creativity of ideas
- No serious consideration to alternative methods of protecting the rock salt
- No serious consideration of alternative locations for the depot
- Intolerance of and, at times, utter contempt for the views of objectors

When the depot first opened in the mid-1950s, not "80 years" ago as is claimed, it was on the edge of the village. Now, because of the new building to the north of the village, it is in the centre of a large residential area. A retired planning consultant has described the excessive noise and light disturbance from the depot as being "outrageous", advising that it should be reported to Environmental Health.

The objectors are not satisfied that a serious effort was made to find an alternative location for the depot. The response to the objectors' Freedom of Information request was silent as to what had actually been done, stating only that "the Forestry Commission and the MOD were contacted regarding suitable alternative sites, without success".

- It is difficult to interpret so bland a statement. Did the Forestry Commission and MOD not pick up the telephone or reply to a letter? Or did they both respond, but were unable to offer suitable sites?
- What was actually ask of them?
- If other locations were suggested, where were they?
- Were suggested locations ignored because it was easier to stick with the Otterburn Depot?

One would imagine that if alternative locations were suggested, the person preparing the FOI response would have been happy to publish a fulsome list. Either nowhere was suggested in these enquiries OR the enquiries were never made.

It is now nearly four years since the first application for a salt barn of titanic proportions at Otterburn was withdrawn. What have council employees been doing in the meantime? Very little, it seems. I leave it to elected members to decide whether NCC staff were truly assiduous in their efforts.

The Revised Heritage Impact Assessment includes misleading photographs of a light-coloured dome which bears no relation whatsoever to the proposed dome. Elected members should be aware of, and seriously question, both the efficacy and artifice of using photography in this fabricated and technically inadequate manner. Constructed photographs of this kind create false perspectives and cannot convey the true scale of the dome.

The Revised Heritage Impact Assessment also quotes the wrong planning policies, saying that the Local Plan has been adopted when, as yet, it has not. The GD1 policy about small-scale is still relevant.

The officer's report in Para 7.2 states that it would be a small-scale development in accordance with Core Strategy policy GD1. But Para 7.11 says: "Overall, there would be some harm arising from the development due to the size of the proposed building". At 13.6 metres (44.62 feet) high and 27.8 metres (87.86 feet) wide, the dome cannot be considered small-scale in GD1 terms, especially as it is twice the height of the tallest surrounding buildings, and of almost every building in Otterburn.

However, as the officer attempts to justify, salt domes need to be big structures. True perhaps, but they only need to be so big as to allow tipper wagons, when replenishing the stockpile, to reverse inside and deposit their loads. The high domed roof plays no part otherwise than in keeping the stockpile dry. Nevertheless, this does not justify a dome as the only, or most appropriate, means of storing or protecting rock salt. The officer's report, in the objectors' opinion, draws faulty conclusions and is not argued correctly.

The objectors believe elected members should not take a final decision on this application UNTIL they have visited the identical, and equally contentious, dome at Allendale. This will enable them to fully comprehend its actual proportions. They should then visit Otterburn depot before deciding whether they think it appropriate to build an identical structure there, particularly regarding its excessive height and industrial appearance, which would be harmful to the character and amenity of the residential area in which it would be located.

You are asked to reject this application.

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