Stakeholder consultation, CIRIA Network and CIRIA SAFESPUR Network, September 2013

Marion Hill summarises an event held in September 2013 on stakeholder consultation covering a range of nuclear decommissioning and civil engineering schemes. The workshop was organised jointly by the CIRIA Network, and CIRIA's SAFESPUR Network

Chair's welcome

David Collier (White Ox) explained that the meeting followed on from an earlier successful CIRIA-SAFESPUR event on stakeholder consultation. Its main aim was to allow practitioners from the nuclear and non-nuclear sectors to share their experiences and the lessons they have learnt. The intention was that such a meeting would be an annual event. In his view stakeholder engagement is a maturing field and one of the key challenges is to work out how to carry out consultation most efficiently. The meeting would be in three parts: nuclear decommissioning, civil engineering projects and a discussion.

Part 1: Nuclear decommissioning

Stakeholder consultation: what, why, when and what goes wrong?

Presentation

This introductory presentation was by Rhuari Bennet of 3KQ. The first part was in the style of an informal quiz to illustrate some key points. Rhuari began by suggesting three "possible definitions" of stakeholder consultation:

- a way of persuading people that a plan should be implemented in the way proposed
- a means of sharing and improving proposals
- a way of working with partners to achieve something that one organisation could not do alone.

He asked for a show of hands on which definition was the most appropriate. The majority voted for the second definition but some voted for the third. Rhuari said that he thought that the first of definition was of communication, the second consultation and the third collaboration, although improving proposals during consultation often involves partnership working.

The next question was why stakeholder consultation should be carried out. Possible reasons are to:

- improve decisions
- manage project risks
- make a project easier to implement
- meet moral obligations
- meet legal requirements.

A show of hands indicated that each of these reasons could be relevant to a particular project. Rhuari noted that some or all can be important and which ones are the key drivers depends on the nature of the project.

The third question was when to carry out stakeholder consultation. Possibilities are:

- before the issue is known
- when the issue is known but the options for tackling it are not
- when the issue and the options are known but the preferred option has not been identified
- when the preferred option has been identified
- when the project is going ahead.

Rhuari suggested that the first two of these are collaboration and the last communication. He noted that legal requirements for stakeholder consultation (e.g. in the minerals and waste industries) tend to focus on doing it when options are known and/or when the preferred option has been identified.

The last question was about what could go wrong. Rhuari said there are many possibilities. Drawing on the four Gunning Principles, which set out the key legal requirements for a robust consultation, the main errors that could be made are:

- the consultation is too late (after the decision has largely been made)
- there is insufficient reasoning in the consultation document (so stakeholders cannot respond constructively)
- inadequate time is allowed for the consultation
- responses are not taken into account conscientiously when the decision is made.

He thought that, in practice, all of these pitfalls can be avoided by using common sense and bearing in mind the moral obligation to consult.

Rhuari concluded his presentation by outlining the three year programme of stakeholder engagement that took place in West Cumbria about the possible siting of a geological disposal facility (GDF) for higher activity radioactive waste in the area. The programme was carried out in 2009-2012 by the West Cumbria Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) Partnership, which was made up of 17 organisations, including various local authorities and several trades unions. The outcome was a decision by the relevant Borough and County Councils not to proceed with the GDF siting process in West Cumbria. From Rhuari's perspective, the three principal lessons from this programme were:

- the importance of putting oneself in the shoes of the consultees (which led to, for example, the use of layered information, plain English and good graphic design, and required clear statements about how responses would be taken into account)
- the need for pre-consultation (i.e. engaging with stakeholders before issuing a formal consultation document)
- the need to keep decision makers involved directly throughout.

Q&A

There was a comment that there are situations in which stakeholder consultation is best carried out at a late stage because there is very little scope for stakeholders to influence a project. The example mentioned was for the water industry, where the construction of a new sewer often has to be at a particular place and to be completed in a fixed time in order to meet legal requirements. There was also a comment that it can sometimes be helpful to involve stakeholders at an early stage, such as when identifying options for tackling an issue. The example quoted was flood resilience, which often lends itself to a more collaborative approach.

A questioner asked who were the key decision makers in the GDF siting process in West Cumbria. Rhuari explained that these were members of two Borough Councils and of Cumbria County Council. While some councillors had been close enough to shape the consultation documents, others took little part until the final stages of decision making. There was then a question as to whether the experience in West Cumbria provided any insights into dealing with political agendas and into ensuring that the right people are involved, not just the right organisations. Rhuari said that in such situations there are almost always political agendas and there are limits as to what can be done to work around these. With hindsight it might have been better to ask for formal Borough and County Council endorsement to proceed with various stages of the stakeholder engagement programme, so that differences of view were identified earlier, when there was chance of resolving them.

Public and stakeholder engagement on the submarine dismantling project

Presentation

Simon Tinling of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) began by giving some background to the Submarine Dismantling Project (SDP). When nuclear submarines reach the end of their useful lives the nuclear fuel is removed and the boats are stored afloat, some at Devonport and some at Rosyth. Maintaining the submarines afloat becomes more expensive as time goes on. Dismantling them as soon as is practicable will be consistent with Government policy for nuclear decommissioning and with the principles of sustainable development, as well as saving tax payers' money. The dismantling process involves removing the parts of the submarines that are low level radioactive waste (LLW) and sending them for recycling (with disposal of residual LLW produced by decontamination) or for direct disposal, removing the parts that are intermediate level radioactive waste (ILW) and storing them pending the availability of a GDF, and dealing with the rest of the submarines via normal ship recycling procedures.

MOD carried out a public consultation in 2011-12 about where the dismantling of nuclear submarines should take place, how the ILW should be removed from the submarines, and generic options for interim storage sites for the ILW. This led to decisions to carry out dismantling at both Devonport and Rosyth, and to remove and store the whole reactor pressure vessels (RPVs) from the submarines (rather than cutting up the RPVs and packaging the ILW for storage). Work is now in progress to assess options for where submarine ILW should be stored prior to disposal in a GDF. There will be public consultation on ILW storage options in 2014. Such public consultation, which is linked to the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), is unusual for defence equipment projects. There is a well-established MOD process for making value-for-money decisions. This involves assessing operational effectiveness (OE), investment appraisal (IA) and considering other contributory factors (OCF). In the case of SDP, OE, IA and OCF are all informed by the SEA and the results of public consultation. OCF are likely to be particularly important for many stakeholders but are often harder to assess because they are qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

There is an SDP Advisory Group, consisting of representatives of local authorities, NGOs, community organisations, industry and regulators. The Group was formed in 2006 and holds its meetings in public. There is a sub-group that helps to shape plans for the decision process, for SEA and for public and stakeholder engagement. It also reviews draft documents and other material before they are released into the public domain. Communications are a challenge in SDP because there are a wide variety of stakeholders and the issues are complex. For the 2011-12 public consultation there was a hierarchy of documentation, with the consultation document at the top and below it fact sheets, the SEA non-technical summary and full report, options analysis reports and data reports. This helped stakeholders

to navigate quickly to the level of information that best suited their needs. Where possible, all documents are drafted with public release in mind.

For the 2011-12 SDP public consultation there was pre-engagement with Local Authorities and elected representatives. About 55,000 newsletters were sent out, there were eight local exhibitions and two national workshops. Responses to the consultation consisted of 147 forms, 102 letters and emails, and 157 “Plymouth says no” postcards. These were all carefully triaged for analysis. A post-consultation report was issued very soon after the end of the consultation period. MOD revisited its multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) taking into account the consultation responses. It also repeated the MCDA with SDP Advisory Group involvement and carried out a new OCF analysis. The MOD document setting out its decision and its response to the consultation was published in March 2013.

MOD considered that the 2011-12 public consultation was largely successful, although lessons had to be learned along the way. The consultation enabled a decision to be taken on where to dismantle nuclear submarines and also demonstrably influenced that decision. The spectrum of stakeholder views was captured, there was a rigorous audit trail for the decision and downstream project risks were identified. In MOD’s view, stakeholders felt that they had been heard and had had some influence, even if they disliked the outcome. The experience gained will be useful to MOD in planning future SDP consultations.

Q&A

A questioner asked about lessons learned for planning and budgeting. Simon said that the 2011-12 SDP consultation was very resource intensive, as was the pre-consultation work. MOD found that working in a transparent way with the SDP Advisory Group, which was a mixed group of advisers and stakeholders, took significant time and effort because it was necessary to develop relationships and build understanding. However, the group did improve overall outcomes. Resource needs for the 2014 SDP consultation would depend largely on the number of ILW storage sites that were short-listed. It was likely that a temporary team of MOD staff would need to be trained to support consultation events, as was the case in 2011-2012.

Another question was about the costs and benefits of the consultation. Simon said that it had cost a significant sum (from memory, well over £1 million). Whilst it is difficult to quantify the benefits of consultation, the costs are relatively small compared to the risks it helps to mitigate (such as legal challenge or failure to obtain planning or regulatory approvals at a later stage). Consultation also satisfies legal obligations and complies with industry good practice, which themselves have benefits.

Berkeley boilers removal and treatment project

Presentation

This presentation was given by Simon Bedford of Magnox Ltd, which is the operator of the Berkeley site and which carried out the boilers project jointly with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), LLWR Ltd and Studsvik. Berkeley nuclear power station generated electricity from 1962 to 1989. It had 16 boilers. These were delagged and lowered in the 1990s, when one boiler was cut up and removed. The original plan was to leave the remaining 15 boilers in place until final site clearance in about 2074. Drivers for earlier removal included the need to make earlier, visible progress with decommissioning and increased emphasis on treatment and recycle of waste. Following a graduate project in 2010 on options for the boilers, Magnox collaborated with LLWR to carry out a feasibility study and make a business case for early removal. NDA approved the expenditure in spring 2011. The schedule was challenging because the last boiler was to be received at Studsvik in Sweden by the end of March 2013.

Stakeholder identification began during the graduate project on options for the boilers. Stakeholders on the Berkeley site included Magnox staff managing operations at plant near the boilers, the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) safety and security regulators, and the Environment Agency inspector. The boilers were to be transported by road to Sharpness, taken by barge to Avonmouth for temporary storage, then taken by ship to Sweden. Stakeholders for road transport included residents and businesses along the route, the Highways Agency and the ONR Radioactive Materials Transport team. For river and sea transport they included the Harbour Authority, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and, because transfrontier shipment of radioactive waste was involved, the Environment Agency. In Sweden the nuclear safety and environmental regulator, SSM, was a stakeholder. The Finnish nuclear regulator, STUK, was also a stakeholder because a Finnish ship and crew were to be used. Secondary radioactive waste produced in Studsvik when the boilers were decontaminated had to be returned to the UK for disposal at the LLWR or, in the case of very low level waste (VLLW) at a landfill. People local to these disposal sites were also stakeholders.

A stakeholder engagement plan was formulated at the start of the project and reviewed after each major step. The plan showed, inter alia, the interests and objectives of each stakeholder, the potential impact of the project on them, the influence they could have and the strategy to engage them. Engagement began with the Berkeley Site Stakeholder Group (SSG), ONR and the Environment Agency. Magnox attended local public events to raise awareness of the project and provide information. There were site visits by local councillors and MPs. Key internal and external stakeholders were given fortnightly updates. There was a 24 hour telephone hotline and local and national media were used. Promotional material was produced for each event and, shortly before the start of transport operations, flyers were distributed to people who might be affected.

Simon ended with a list of dos and don'ts identified based on his experience with the project:

Do:

- identify key stakeholders early on and work closely with them
- engage early, regularly and imaginatively
- listen to stakeholders' concerns and be prepared to make changes to the project (or at least explain why it is not possible to make changes)
- manage stakeholders' expectations
- use concise and consistent messages.

Don't

- underestimate the task
- be afraid of opposition
- assume it is impossible to overcome challenges.

Q&A

The first question was about whether the distance over which the boilers were transported influenced the number of stakeholders who needed to be engaged. Simon said that the road transport route was only 4.5 miles long and many people along it were contacted and consulted. For the transport along the River Severn, people who might see the barges from their houses or workplaces were contacted to find out if they had any concerns. A second question was about the size of the stakeholder engagement team. Simon said that there were two people in the communications team at Berkeley and they spent about 50% of their time on the project.

An international perspective

Presentation

Peter Booth of Hylton Environmental provided an international perspective on stakeholder engagement for environmental remediation and decommissioning projects, based largely on his work for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA, a United Nations organisation). He said that there are many types of nuclear and radiological projects that may require stakeholder engagement. In the case of the nuclear fuel cycle they include uranium mining, decommissioning nuclear plants, remediation of radioactively contaminated land, siting radioactive waste disposal facilities and constructing new nuclear power stations. Projects involving naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM) include oil and gas exploration and exploitation (including fracking), mining and desalination.

Worldwide, inadequate stakeholder engagement is one of many potential barriers to successful remediation and decommissioning projects. Others are:

- not enough trained personnel
- inadequate funding
- lack of appropriate technologies
- poor project management
- inadequate legislation
- limited waste management solutions.

Barriers to successful stakeholder engagement for remediation and decommissioning projects can arise from sources such as:

- limited understanding of the issues (perhaps because they are quite technical, perhaps because of previous secrecy)
- reluctance of stakeholders to speak in public (especially in large meetings)
- the dominance of anti-nuclear groups
- the long timescales of a project
- not allowing enough time for engagement
- using security issues as a reason not to engage
- failed previous engagement exercises (especially if there has been loss of trust)
- lack of a national policy that encourages or requires engagement.

Internationally, stakeholders' concerns can include:

- lack of information about activities on a site
- re-use of materials that may contain residual radioactive contamination
- whether there are interrelated solutions (e.g. waste transport and disposal are being considered, as well as decommissioning operations)
- financial constraints (which may lead to incomplete projects or relaxation in clean-up criteria)
- limited understanding of radiological issues (terminology such as "contamination" does not help)
- effects on local drinking water

- lack of independent facilitators.

Stakeholders' aspirations can be for:

- complete clean up of a site
- unrestricted use of a site after clean up (similar to the above)
- tangible benefits to the local community
- greater transparency about what is being done
- more involvement in decision making
- better understanding of long-term issues (such as monitoring, record keeping, potential changes to legislation).

Peter then briefly described a case study, which was stakeholder engagement at the Caldas uranium mining site in Brazil. An environmental remediation plan had been developed for the site and, although stakeholder engagement had never previously been undertaken, it was now seen to be an important component of the overall work. The main environmental concern was acid water emanating from waste rock piles and tailings that might eventually filter into streams flowing off site, thus potentially contaminating surface and subsurface waters. The remediation plan also had to consider the mine pit and an industrial area. Peter was a member of a wider international group sent by the IAEA to the area to help with the provision of advice on environmental remediation. He carried out his particular technical mission alone and focused purely on the stakeholder engagement aspects of the project. He learnt that the site operator had not engaged sufficiently with nuclear and environmental regulators or with local people. He was able to answer questions posed by the site operator and the regulators about stakeholder engagement, and to make recommendations about the merits of wider engagement and how to build an engagement programme. After his visit his hosts cited a number of visible improvements. The site operator began presenting the remediation plan in local towns and cities, and all parties are now considering whether the development of a site specific stakeholder engagement group along the lines of those in use at US Department of Energy sites would work in a country like Brazil. The regulators have also continued to engage more with each other and now undertake joint inspections and site visits.

Q&A

A questioner asked how many years Brazilian stakeholder engagement practices were behind those in the UK. Peter said that at Caldas there was no real engagement until 2012 and then what was done was similar to stakeholder engagement on nuclear issues in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s. A questioner then asked whether use of international experience would enable Brazil to make more rapid progress. Peter thought this unlikely because the main barriers to effective stakeholder engagement in this case seem to be more cultural in nature and it is probably more appropriate to take small steps forward. There was also a question as to which countries might be the best models for countries such as Brazil to look to for stakeholder engagement practices. Peter thought the UK, the US, Canada, Sweden and Finland would provide good examples for nuclear issues.

Part 2: Civil engineering projects

Introduction

Presentation

The introductory presentation on stakeholder consultation in civil engineering projects was given by Clinton Leeks of HS2 Ltd, who was previously involved with the Hong Kong Airport and Crossrail projects. He began by outlining the two phases of HS2: Phase 1 will be from London to Birmingham and Phase 2 from Birmingham to Leeds and Manchester. When complete, HS2 will link eight out of ten of Britain's largest cities. It will be the first new railway built north of London since the nineteenth century and will add significant capacity to the rail network. Other benefits include modernisation of stations, new developments around stations and job creation.

In view of the large number of local authorities affected, the planning procedure for HS2 involves Parliamentary approval. This will be via two Hybrid Bills, one for Phase 1 (scheduled for this Parliament) and one for Phase 2 (probably for the next Parliament). In the Hybrid Bill procedure a Parliamentary Select Committee in effect acts as a planning inquiry. It hears petitioners, to whom the developers (Government and HS2 Ltd) respond by amending their proposals to mitigate impacts or provide compensation, or by explaining why changes cannot be made. The outcome of the procedure is an Act of Parliament that gives permission to build and operate the railway, to acquire and lease land without the owners' consent and to do other work related to the railway (e.g. to protect existing infrastructure). The Act also identifies "reserved planning matters" that are to be dealt with by local authorities. These can be called in by the Secretary of State if necessary. Local authorities cannot overturn the decision to go ahead with the railway once the Act has received Royal Assent.

HS2 Ltd has to consult, communicate with and engage a very large number of stakeholders. These include: Government, MPs, local authorities (at county, district, borough and parish level), affected people (landowners, tenants, occupiers), community organisations (residents' groups etc.), statutory bodies, NGOs, businesses (local and national), trades unions and action groups. Engagement with these stakeholders is critical and entails working with people to take on board a range of views. The aim is to gain assent, even if it is with some reluctance, so that stakeholders will work with HS2 Ltd after the decision to go ahead is made. There are 24 community fora for Phase 1 of HS2 and there will be more for Phase 2. There was a major consultation on the draft Environmental Statement for Phase 1 and there will be another on the final Environmental Statement, which is about 50,000 pages long and will be submitted electronically (on DVDs). There is extensive consultation on compensation for loss of property and there are a large number of bilateral discussions with local authorities and others. Opponents of HS2 make considerable use of social media (e.g. Twitter) to comment rapidly on proposals. This is a problem for the developers, who must respond consistently and accurately. ("Opponents can be quick, developers must be right.") A further feature of HS2 is the potential for legal challenges in the form of judicial reviews. There have been ten judicial reviews of HS2 so far. Of these, nine have been won by the developers (but one is currently the subject of an appeal by opponents of HS2) and one was lost (which led to further consultation by the developers).

Clinton contrasted HS2 with the Hong Kong Airport project. The airport, which is about the same size as Heathrow, was designed and built in nine years, before the handover of Hong Kong to China. An ordinance on environmental impact assessment was passed during its construction. The Hong Kong Government had control of land use policy and planning and was committed to growth. The Crown was the only freehold owner of land in Hong Kong, which simplified development. Although the culture was very different, the system of law was similar to that in the UK.

The presentation ended with a brief mention of Crossrail. In this case Parliamentary approval was via the Crossrail Act. There was extensive consultation and many compulsory purchases of land in London and elsewhere. An independent Complaints Commissioner was appointed to deal with small claims and this proved very effective.

Q&A

A questioner asked why HS2 was not being dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate's Infrastructure Planning Directorate (previously the Infrastructure Planning Commission). Clinton pointed out that other major rail projects (the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (HS1) and Crossrail) had also been the subject of Parliamentary approval procedures rather than those of the Planning Inspectorate.

A delegate commented on the importance of reducing uncertainty for stakeholders, particularly when compulsory purchase of their property is a possibility. Clinton strongly agreed that it is often uncertainty that leads to most distress and that it is essential to reduce it as soon as possible.

Glencourse water treatment works

Presentation

This presentation was given jointly by Kenny Naylor of Scottish Water (the owner and operator of the Glencourse Water Treatment Works, near Edinburgh) and John Marshall of Black & Veatch (Scottish Water's contractor for the design and construction of the works). The project was the winner of a CEEQUAL outstanding achievement award. It followed on from a project to construct a new water treatment works for Glasgow, in which Scottish Water had to overcome well-organised opposition. Lessons learnt included the importance of a "no surprises" approach, in which the delivery programme is set out and implemented.

New water treatment works were needed for Edinburgh in order to replace ageing assets and meet future needs, including avoiding constraints on development arising from lack of adequate water services. About 300,000 customers were affected. The two options for the new works were to build them on an existing site, where space was limited, or to use a greenfield site. The latter option was preferred and six sites were shortlisted from 26 identified. Each of the six sites was subject to the same evaluation and consultation procedures. The choice of Glencourse was announced in June 2007.

Scottish Water developed a stakeholder map, so that it was clear which members of the team dealt with which stakeholders, and a clear communications plan. A website was established early in the project; it held large amounts of information, was updated regularly, and proved useful to the planning departments in local authorities, as well as others. There were "meet the team" events, quarterly e-newsletters, community fora, an education programme and site visits. To avoid always having to phone people back, some Scottish Water call centre staff were trained to answer questions about the project. Great care was taken to convey positive messages about the project in all communications.

The early involvement of Black & Veatch in the project had the advantage that they could hear stakeholders' views about the proposed design of the works first hand. The design eventually chosen had a number of features that minimised its visual impact, including locating some structures below ground and the use of green roofs. Nearby residents were given personalised photomontages of the proposed works, using photographs taken from inside their homes. An innovative water treatment process was chosen that enabled the works to have a smaller footprint. Sustainable, locally-sourced materials were used wherever possible. About 75% of the excavated soil was used on site and the rest used to improve local farmland. At a fairly late stage it was discovered that there were the remains of a Roman

camp on the proposed site for the works. It was agreed at a meeting with stakeholders that the works would be reoriented to avoid the camp, thus resolving the issue.

The success of the stakeholder engagement programme was demonstrated at the time of the formal planning application. Obtaining planning consent for the Glencourse Works took only ten weeks (compared to about 2.5 years for the previous Glasgow works) and there were no objections at all to the planning application. In a DVD shown at the meeting, stakeholders including a local resident and the head of the local primary school were very complimentary about the engagement programme.

Q&A

There was a question about potential overlap between the roles of Scottish Water and Black &Veatch. Kenny responded that the roles of the two organisations were always clear. Scottish Water found it very helpful to have its design and build contractor in the room to assist in responding to stakeholders' concerns. There was a comment that stakeholders tend to feel they have more influence if the designers, and preferably also the constructors, for a project are present at meetings.

Community consultation on coastal realignment

Presentation

Jonathan Hunter (Environment Agency) described stakeholder engagement for the Medmerry coastal realignment scheme in West Sussex[1]. The section of coastline involved (between Selsey and Bracklesham) is very dynamic and several areas near the coast were at high risk of flooding every year. The risk was previously managed by continually adding shingle to the beaches. It was recognised in the mid 2000s that this was not sustainable. The Environment Agency determined that managed coastal realignment was the preferred option and would also have the advantage of replacing habitat that had been lost in the Solent. Although there was consultation on the option prior to the Environment Agency decision (in 2008) to adopt it, many community concerns remained. With hindsight, the Agency felt that the consultation could have been planned better and took the lessons learned forward in developing the community engagement programme for the design of the realignment scheme.

From the start of the engagement programme, the Environment Agency was very open about which aspects of the design of the scheme the community could influence and which they could not. A stakeholder analysis was carried out and, in 2009, the Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group was set up. This involved local residents and interest groups. It held four workshops and had a significant influence on the design of the scheme. The workshops were on single topics and aligned with project milestones. Planning permission for the scheme was granted by Chichester District Council in 2010; work started in September 2011 and was completed in September 2013 (the week before the SAFESPUR meeting).

The Environment Agency regard the Medmerry realignment scheme as a success. It achieves sustainable management of flood risks and has created new intertidal habitat. It was carried out with community participation, has community buy in, and the Environment Agency has local partners to maintain the scheme in the future. Jonathan noted that the Agency is embedding the principle of "working with others" throughout its flood protection activities and its other work. The emphasis is on proportionate engagement and, whenever appropriate, on the "engage, discuss, decide" approach. This is in keeping with Government initiatives to encourage collaborative working in order to achieve more than one organisation can do alone.

Q&A

[1] Further details of the Medmerry scheme are at: http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods/109062.aspx.

The first question was how the Environment Agency identified the relevant residents to engage and how it made contact with them. Jonathan replied that this was relatively straightforward. It had been working in the area for a number of years and had had previous contacts with those whose homes or business premises were at risk of flooding. Use was also made of District Council and fire brigade contacts. Annual flood awareness meetings were held for local residents and businesses to discuss flood risks and the flood warning service. A further question was about whether stakeholders were discouraged from engaging because they could not influence some aspects of the coastal realignment scheme. Jonathan said that there were some difficulties at first but the situation had improved when Environment Agency became more open about which aspects of the scheme stakeholders could influence and which they could not.

Part 3: Discussion: stakeholder consultation – art or science?

David Collier began the discussion by asking speakers what advice they would give to an organisation that proposed to carry out fracking at a new site, as an example of a potentially difficult stakeholder consultation challenge. The following is a summary of points made during the discussion. These are grouped by topic, rather than arranged in the order in which they arose.

Provision of factual information

- it is helpful to provide stakeholders with factual information at an early stage, to prevent or counter myths.
- for fracking, there is a lack of independent information. A British Geological Survey report on potential shale oil and gas reserves is not seen as independent. A Royal Society report was published some time ago but is not widely known about or read. Negative information from the US and from test drilling in Lancashire is not necessarily relevant elsewhere and has been unhelpful.

Communication with stakeholders

- it is essential to communicate well in order to consult well.
- clear and consistent terminology is important.
- it is helpful to use layered information.
- the challenge is to provide enough information at the right level. “Talking down” to stakeholders should be avoided.
- websites can be very helpful, provided they contain comprehensive, accessible information and are kept up to date.
- in some contexts the term “stakeholder management” is seen as demeaning. (Many stakeholders do not like feeling that they are being managed.)

Relationships with Stakeholders

- it is valuable to start building stakeholder trust early in a project.
- although it is difficult to regain trust once it has been lost, relationships with stakeholders can be rebalanced.
- clarity about what stakeholders can and cannot influence leads to better relationships.
- it is important to get to know individual stakeholders, as well as communicating with communities at large.
- the timing of messages to stakeholders should be sensitive to their perspectives. It is unwise to try to deal with those who will be impacted negatively by a project at the same time as dealing with those who will be impacted positively.
- uncertainty as to whether and how they will be affected can often cause stakeholders most concern. Reducing uncertainties for stakeholders should be a priority.
- local media can fuel divisions in communities and can mislead the public. For example, when a particular group of stakeholders engages with the developer, this can be portrayed as the group endorsing the project.

Separating out Strategic Aspects

- there is merit in separating the strategic and generic aspects of a project from the site specific ones. This can help to make some interactions with stakeholders less emotional.
- there is a mechanism for consulting on strategic aspects of large projects prior to site-specific aspects. This is the use of National Policy Statements (NPSs) for infrastructure projects. This mechanism has not been used for fracking, so people are unclear about how fracking fits with national energy policy and with societal needs. This is in contrast to, for example, new nuclear power stations, for which need was dealt with in the NPSs for energy infrastructure.
- the large new sewer for London is another project where more could have been said about strategic need.

Suspicion of profit motives

- the water industry is one in which a public service is provided by private industry. It is heavily regulated. The public tends to ask about the profits from a proposed water industry project, not about the benefits to them or the views of regulators.
- it is sensible to separate strategic need from profit-driven motives for pursuing a project.
- it is useful to be able to refer to the role of regulators. In the case of fracking, it may be that Environment Agency has not been given enough time to decide how it will regulate activities.

Skills and training

- people with various skills are needed in stakeholder consultation. Technical people can be as useful as communications professionals.
- in smaller organisations the task of stakeholder engagement often falls to the civil engineers who are managing projects. They have little choice but to learn on the job. Larger organisations provide training in stakeholder engagement.
- all practitioners can learn from hearing about the successes and mistakes of others, including those in other industries. For example, as this meeting showed, there are considerable similarities between the water, transport and power sectors.
- asking stakeholders for their feedback during and after a consultation can provide useful learning points.
- support systems are needed for some who take part in stakeholder engagement, for example those who have to talk at large hostile meetings, those who must deal with very distressed stakeholders such as flood victims.
- practitioners in developing countries can learn from international organisations that carry out consultations, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. There are principles and processes that are applicable in any culture.
- there was general support to a suggestion from Owen Jenkins that CIRIA continue to arrange activities on this topic, particularly if such activities would help medium and small-scale schemes as well as the larger scale or major projects discussed at the meeting.

Conclusion

David Collier closed the meeting by thanking the speakers and other participants. He reminded the audience to provide feedback to CIRIA on both this meeting and topics for future CIRIA or SAFESPUR events.