

## West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

## AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield

## Policy SP4

**Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield**

Within the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) land use planning consultation zones surrounding AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield development will be managed in the interests of public safety, and to ensure that any proposed developments do not adversely affect the defence related operation or capability of the AWE sites.

Development proposals within the land use planning consultation zones that pose an unacceptable risk to the operation of the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan (OSEP) and/or adversely affect the defence related operation or capability of the AWE sites will be refused planning permission.

In determining applications, the ONR and AWE/MOD will be consulted on development proposals in the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ)<sup>(28)</sup>, Outer Consultation Zone (OCZ)<sup>(29)</sup> and 12km Consultation Zone which meets the ONR consultation criteria as detailed on the ONR website<sup>(30)</sup>. The ONR and AWE/MOD will be consulted on any proposal that is likely to lead to any increase in the residential or non-residential population (including visitors and workers) of the DEPZ. 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.

## Supporting Text

**4.39** There are two nuclear licensed sites located in West Berkshire, the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston (AWE A) and in Burghfield (AWE B). These are operated by AWE plc on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and regulated by the Office of Nuclear Regulation (ONR) (as well as other regulators).

**4.40** Both AWE sites are critical to sustaining the UK Government's nuclear deterrent and support national defence and security.

**4.41** There are hazards associated with the authorised use of these sites including conventional chemicals, explosives and radiation sources. As a result of the quantities and types of material involved, the sites are also regulated under the following key legislation:

- a. The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPIR)<sup>(31)</sup>. Both sites fall within the scope of REPPIR legislation. The regulator for these sites is the ONR;
- b. Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015 (COMAH)<sup>(32)</sup>. Under these regulations AWE A is a Lower Tier COMAH site. The joint regulators for this site are the ONR and the Environment Agency (EA). AWE B does not fall under the COMAH regulations at the present time (2022);
- c. Explosive Regulations 2014<sup>(33)</sup>. Both AWE A and AWE B sites have explosives on site and AWE plc holds an explosives licence for both sites. The regulator is the ONR.
- d. Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (EPR). Both sites generate and dispose of radioactive wastes. The regulator is the EA.

**4.42** The NPPF outlines that local planning authorities should consult the appropriate bodies when considering applications for the siting of, or changes to, major hazard sites, installations or pipelines, or for development around them.

28 Current and future Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) as defined by REPPIR and as detailed on the Council's website. The extent of the DEPZs (at January 2023) shown in Appendix 3 and the Policies Map could change before the Local Plan is updated or superseded. Policy SP4 will be applied to the latest version of the DEPZ.

29 Outer Consultation Zone (OCZ) and 12km Consultation Zone as defined by ONR along with relevant distances and centre points. The OCZ and 12km zone are depicted in Appendix 3 and on the Policies Map.

30 ONR website: <https://www.onr.org.uk/our-work/what-we-regulate/other-regulations/legislations/land-use-planning/>

31 Radiation - Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPIR)

32 COMAH Guidance: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/comah/guidance.htm>

33 Explosives Regulations 2014: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l150.htm>

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**4.43** Furthermore, the NPPF requires planning policy to promote public safety and take into account wider security and defence requirements. It requires that operational defence sites are not affected adversely by the impact of other development proposed in the area, and that existing businesses and facilities should not have unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established.

**4.44** The NPPF defines major hazard sites, installations and pipelines as *"Sites and infrastructure, including licensed explosive sites and nuclear installations, around which Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (and Office for Nuclear Regulation) consultation distances to mitigate the consequences to public safety of major accidents may apply."*

**4.45** Under the REPIR 19 legislation a Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) must be determined by the local authority where the relevant nuclear site is situated. For the AWE sites this is West Berkshire District Council. This process was undertaken in 2019/20 and reviewed in 2022/23. Under legislation formal reviews of the DEPZ are required to be undertaken at least every three years or as a result of a material change in work with ionising radiation. As such, the extent of the DEPZs shown in Appendix 3 and on the Policies Map could change before the Local Plan is updated or superseded. Policy SP4 will be applied to the latest version of the DEPZ.

**4.46** The DEPZ for the AWE sites is the geographic area that in respect of which the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan (OSEP) covers. The AWE OSEP must set out protective actions which would be implemented without delay to mitigate the likely consequences of a radiation emergency, and the Council, along with the other agencies involved in the AWE OSEP, must be able to respond effectively. The regulators therefore require assurances that the AWE OSEP, owned by the Council, is adequate and can be implemented effectively in order to protect the public.

**4.47** The OCZ and 12km land use planning consultation zones for the AWE sites are determined by the ONR and extend from a geographical centre point on each AWE site. During the plan period there may be changes to the REPIR legislation and/or in the inputs to the ONR's process which may result in consequential changes to the land use planning consultation zones or consultation criteria, which in turn could result in changes to ONR's advice on particular proposals. These will be kept under review and policy SP4 will be applied to the latest version of the ONR Guidance/Zones.

**4.48** In respect of both AWE sites, the ONR and AWE/MOD will be consulted on any planning applications within the DEPZ, the OCZ and the 12km zone which meet the consultation criteria as set out on the ONR website<sup>(34)</sup>. Developments within these zones may pose an unacceptable risk to the viability and operability of the AWE OSEP and/or adversely affect the defence related operation or capability of the nuclear licensed sites, and advice will be provided to the local planning authority accordingly.

**4.49** The ONR's decision making process is detailed on its website<sup>(35)</sup>. The ONR will normally advise against a particular development should they not receive adequate assurance that the development can be accommodated within the AWE OSEP. As a result, the ONR will consider feedback provided by West Berkshire District Council Emergency Planning Service, as the AWE OSEP owner under REPIR. Should it be considered that there would be an unacceptable risk to the AWE OSEP the policy makes clear that planning permission will be refused.

**4.50** Policy SP4 applies to all development proposals in the land use planning consultation zones, irrespective of whether they comply with other policies including SP1, SP3 and SP17. Applicants considering development proposals within the land use planning consultation zones are strongly encouraged to enter into discussions with the Council at an early stage to establish if there are likely to be any implications on the OSEP as a result of the proposals.

**4.51** The land use planning consultation zones for the AWE sites cross over into the following neighbouring councils: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council. The Council will monitor committed and future development proposals in partnership with neighbouring councils, those agencies with duties under REPIR, and the ONR to understand the impact on the OSEP and the operation of the AWE.

34 ONR website: <https://www.onr.org.uk/our-work/what-we-regulate/other-regulations/legislations/land-use-planning/>  
35 <https://www.onr.org.uk/land-use-planning.htm>