

Nuclear weapons pose 'radiation emergency' risk to plan for 500 homes

AWE says Spencers Wood plans at risk in 'radiation emergency'

25th June



Nuclear weapons pose a risk to plans to build almost 500 homes just outside a village, a council has been warned.

The Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) – the only maker of nuclear warheads in Britain – says it opposes [plans for the development just south of Spencers Wood](#).

It told Wokingham Borough Council the residents would live in an area exposed to ‘radiation emergency’ if something went wrong at its site in nearby Burghfield.

It said: “The introduction of up to 475 dwellings within the detailed emergency planning zone for AWE Burghfield is directly contrary to public safety and emergency planning advice and raises significant concerns.

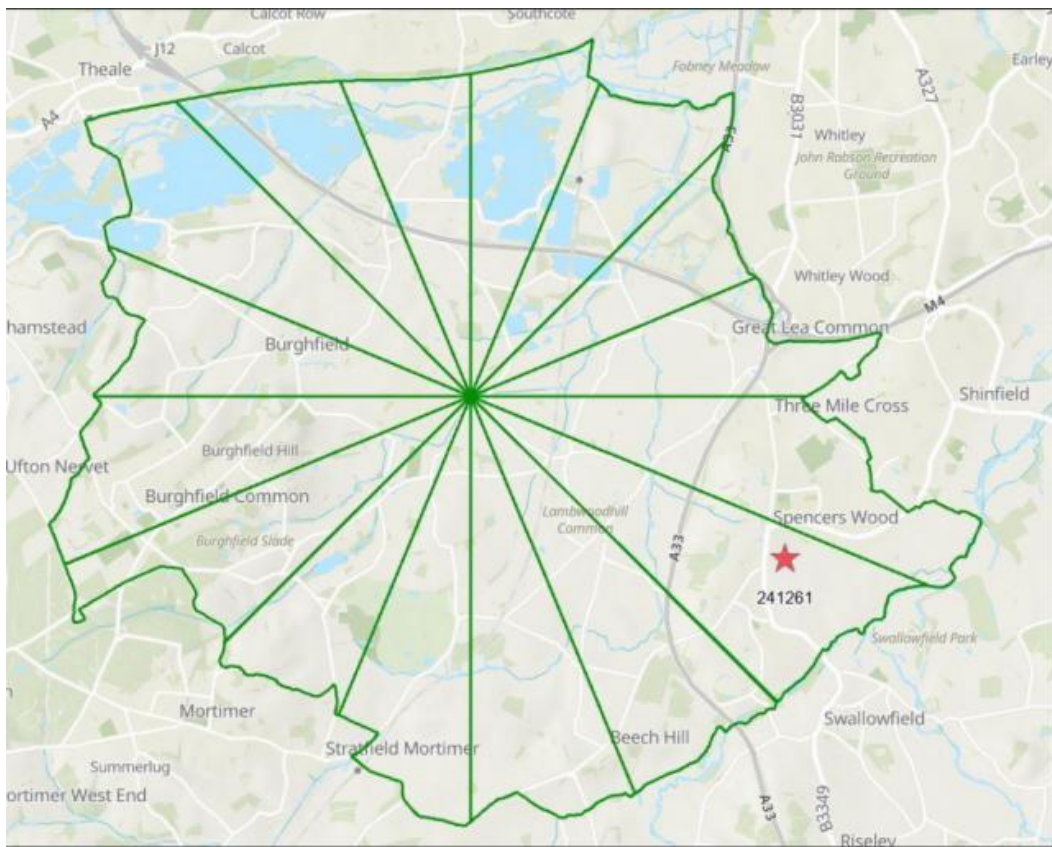
“AWE also wish to make it clear that they would be looking to strongly object to any future planning application seeking permission for the extent and forms of development stated.”

Development consultancy Pegasus Group submitted plans for up to 475 homes south of Spencers Wood to Wokingham Borough Council in May. Plans include a primary school, local centre and green space.

At this stage Pegasus was only seeking a ‘screening opinion’ from Wokingham Borough Council. This is not yet a full planning application but a request to determine whether a development would have ‘significant effects on the environment’.

But as the council consulted its planning, highways and environmental health departments, AWE wrote to raise its concerns.

Map showing boundaries of the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone for the AWE facility at Burghfield. The proposed site for the development at Spencers Wood is marked with a red star (*Image: AWE*)



In a letter to the council on June 3 it said the proposed site – between Basingstoke Lane and Sussex Lane – fell within its ‘detailed emergency planning zone.’

This is an area where neighbouring West Berkshire Council needs to have a detailed plan in place for its response to a nuclear emergency at Burghfield.

AWE said: “Whilst chances of a radiation emergency at AWE B are very low, the potential impact on the local population would be high and an appropriate and proportionate step is, to where possible, avoid new development being located within the DEPZ.”

It added that the increased population in the area would also put strain on emergency services’ ability to help existing residents in the event of an emergency.

It said: “It is notable the risks not only apply to any new population but also to existing populations, where the burden of managing existing residents and workers would come under more pressure if new housing increased populations and complexity.”

Wokingham Borough Council’s own emergency planning manager also said he would likely oppose the proposals if developers Richborough applied for planning permission.

He said the new development would have a ‘detrimental impact’ on its emergency plan to help people living with in the DEPZ.