

Ref: EIR2024- 042

████████████████████
29 August 2024

Dear ██████████,

Further to our previous correspondence regarding your request for the following information:

1. When do you expect active commissioning to start or has it already?
2. When do you expect Mensa to be operational?
3. When will the current warhead assemble/disassembly facilities (the Assembly Technology Centre?) cease operations?
4. Can we have a copy of the consequence report for the site that will be applicable once the current warhead assemble/disassembly facilities cease operations and Mensa is operational.
5. If this is not yet completed, can you tell us the estimated size of the UPAZ - understood to be the downwind distance of the 7.5 mSv inhalation dose contour for the most severe fault requiring detailed emergency planning according to the REPPiR risk framework.
6. Does the fault chosen for this work have a likelihood of less than 1 in 100,000 years? (The REPPiR cutoff point).
7. What permissions do you have from the ONR to continue use of the current facilities?
8. Can we have copies of all relevant letters exchanged with the ONR since 2019 on the topic of permissions to run old facilities, future site risk profile and the commissioning of Mensa.

Your request has been handled as a request for information under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR/the Regulations). EIR regulation 12(2) stipulates that a public authority must apply a presumption in favour of disclosure in relation to environmental information

In relation to questions 1, 2, 7 and 8:

We can confirm that AWE holds some of the information you have requested regarding the expected commissioning date of project MENSA, when project MENSA is expected to be operational and the relevant permissions from the ONR. However, we are withholding the information under Regulation 12(5)(a). This exception provides public authorities the ability to withhold information where disclosure would adversely affect international relations, defence, national security or public safety.

Regulation 12(5)(a) is a qualified exception and subject to the Public Interest Test (PIT). We will now set out arguments for and against disclosure in terms of the public interest, along with the reasons for our conclusion.

The PIT provides two arguments in favour of disclosure. Firstly, public authorities are required to apply a presumption in favour of disclosure. Secondly, releasing the requested information would demonstrate AWE's commitment to openness and transparency.

Conversely, there are arguments for withholding the information. Firstly, in the interest of safeguarding national security and defence. Secondly, providing details about AWE's infrastructure and future projects could be exploited by adversaries or hostile nation states to plan attacks on the AWE facilities, thereby jeopardising the maintenance of CASD (Continuous At Sea Deterrent) and undermining the defence of the UK and its allies.

Providing details of future projects at AWE could allow any and all adversaries to identify and directly target these facilities. Additionally, releasing this classified information into the public domain would highly likely have critical implications for the UK's global security interests.

The PIT has been conducted and the outcome has fallen in favour of applying the exception 12(5)(a) and as such withholding the information in relation to questions 1,2, 7 and 8 in full.

Detailed guidance issued by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) states, in relation to the national security limb of the exception provided by regulation 12(5)(a), that national security has many different aspects. This exception has been thoroughly considered and we are confident that the exception can be relied upon.

In relation to questions 3, 4, 5 and 6:

Thorough searches to locate the information you have requested have been carried out and we can confirm that AWE does not hold any relevant information in relation to these questions.

Under regulation 9 (Advice and Assistance), we would like to advise you that the Assembly Technology Centre does not have an assured date when its current operations will cease. AWE conducted a periodic review of safety in 2016 which justified ATC's continued use for the next 10 year period. In relation to questions 4, 5 and 6, when AWE is required to carry out any assessments under REPPiR, AWE will prepare a consequences report as soon as reasonably practicable (unless regulation 6(2)(b) applies) and this report will then be made publicly available in accordance with REPPiR 2019.

Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications. If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you are unhappy with the way your request has been handled you have a right to request an internal review within 40 days of receiving this letter, by writing to information.requests@awe.co.uk or our postal address: Information Requests Team, AWE Aldermaston, Reading, RG7 4PR. If you are still unhappy after an internal review has been completed, under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Regulation 18 of the EIRs you have the right to take your complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office. Please note the Commissioner will generally not consider a complaint until you have exhausted AWE's internal complaints process.

Yours sincerely,

AWE Information Requests Team