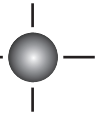


President's Page



One of the enjoyable aspects of this President's role is having the opportunity to air one's musings, for better or for worse, with a significant part of Britain's Geoscience community. But this month I am obliged to comment on a particularly serious matter; that of the BGS Core Store in Edinburgh.

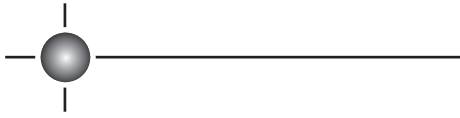
The paragraphs below are my own thoughts only. Those of the PESGB are illustrated by the results of the member's survey, published on Pages 33-37 in this Newsletter. In summary out of 367 members who completed the survey, 77% believed that the Core Store should stay in Edinburgh, 48% were actual users and of those, 5% believed it should be removed to Keyworth. Of all those users, only 3 people were aware at the time, of the consultation exercise initiated in the summer of 2009. The 19 different external organisations that were apparently approached by the BGS need to consider their role in this.

I am sure the key parties on both sides of the debate are well-intentioned and it has been difficult for the PESGB Council to be placed, late in the day, into the middle of it all. But the angst amongst our members is such that it has been essential to allow them to air their views unfettered, and of course for the BGS and others to do so likewise. In the interest of complete openness we have not interfered with the content of such correspondence. I hope people agree that we have been fair and to that extent it was equally important that BGS were able to reply again in this edition (pages 32-33) to the statements made in one of last month's more heated letters.

Indeed, in respect of one comment made in

last month's correspondence, I must clarify that the PESGB's relationships with its affiliated Special Interest Groups are generally informal and we do not require high levels of reporting to PESGB Council. Also, although it is a source of some bemusement that we were not brought into the BGS consultation process, it seems to me that the consultants commissioned to carry out the facilities review worked with professionalism under difficult circumstances.

I am a great believer in the BGS, having done my PhD with them in the late 70s and I have watched them adapt under the changing circumstances of recent decades which have exerted strong financial pressure while continuing to deliver a service to the nation during a period when Geoscience has not been a lucrative bandwagon. But this time the BGS, or its overlords, seem to have lost the plot. Its 2009-2014 strategy is stated to be to "...deliver applied Geoscience knowledge and services for the UK's national good..." including "...to engage with ...Universities, the commercial sector and the public to meet their data and information needs...". And yet here we are talking about one of our nations truly great treasures which we have spent thousands of millions of pounds to retrieve from inside the earth's crust. In the Edinburgh core store lie the often delicate rocks that yielded the secrets of the North Sea's geological past, enabled us to discover and so far extract 38 billion boe of hydrocarbons, and yield £271 billion of tax revenue alone for the nation. And while it continues to do that, this core material also enables key universities to provide high quality training for its students to become the next generation of oil industry scientists, engineers and managers who will need to be the guardian's of an ever more



President's Page

precious energy resource.

Unfortunately it seems that the public sector definition of “service” is somewhat different from my understanding. Surely no commercial organisation in its right mind would decide to invest millions of pounds to relocate its service centre 400 km away from where nearly all its customers want it to be, and are used to having it? I struggle to understand what has happened. Apparently few real users were consulted, nor some of the key staff in BGS who actually understand that business. Then a decision was announced which does not seem to match particularly well with the facilities report. As a result a very well managed operation, with an excellent HSE track record, highly regarded by its users, and at least 30 years more capacity (even without a multi-million pound re-build), is to be closed down and moved away at huge expense, carbon cost, and danger to the integrity of the core.

But instead of apportioning blame, let us please find a positive way forward that works for the people who actually use this core store service. It is at times like this when leadership really counts and I revert to one of my favourite analogies with that of a mountaineering expedition. Here, no decision should ever be final as the leader must watch the changing conditions, consider whether previous judgements were correct, and be prepared at all times to change his or her mind. The most successful leaders are the ones that are brave enough to turn back and bring all their party safely home, not the ones that press on regardless to end up in deep trouble. So I call on the PESGB membership to get beyond their aggravation and join me in saying to the BGS, NERC, and

DECC, that if the decision on the Edinburgh Core Store was reversed at this time, it would be forever remembered as a truly courageous and creditable act. To that end the powers-that-be should be prepared to reinforce such a move as a commendable decision by their management that will shed them in a very positive light.

So what should the future look like? I believe that however far the Keyworth construction has gone it should be shelved and the attempted fudges to make the best of a bad job abandoned. A Steering Group should be formed comprising the real stakeholders; the actual users from industry and universities, the BGS staff who run the current installations, and of course the people with their hands on the purse-strings. Between them they need to agree what and who the core store is actually there for and then find the optimum solution to achieve that objective assuming the same level of funding as the current plan, but also looking for innovative ways of reducing cost to the tax payer. This will require some seriously creative thinking, forgetting the apparent problems and barriers but focusing on all the positive aspects of what BGS has done for us so well, and ensuring that they can build on that, not destroy it. Let's turn this into one of the great success stories of 2010.

Henry Allen
President 2010