

ITEM 8: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS



Report to RWPG, 12th October 2020

This report provides an update on recent developments related to the process for identifying a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF). It covers:

- GDF Siting Process;
- RWM Update; and
- CoRWM.

1. Introduction

1.1 The UK Government's policy on **Working with Communities – implementing geological disposal** was published in December 2018¹, with the equivalent policy for Wales published in January 2019². The **National Policy Statement**, governing the planning aspects of the GDF in England, was published in July 2019³.

2. GDF Siting Process

2.1 Two communities have now begun discussions with RWM on the possibility of setting up a Working Group to explore the potential for a GDF in their area. Copeland Borough Council announced their decision to formally engage with RWM in July, with Allerdale Borough Council doing so in September.

Both local authorities are clear that their decision does not presuppose support for a GDF and have also ruled out consideration of a site within the Lake District National Park. They also argue that, regardless of where the GDF is eventually located, West Cumbria should be recognised within any siting process as the current host of much of the UK's radioactive waste inventory.

If engagement progresses well, then it is possible that one or both councils may establish Working Groups before the end of 2020. It is understood that RWM is also in discussion with interested parties in other parts of the country. NuLeAF is happy to provide independent advice to any local authority on the GDF siting process.

2.2 The nuclear regulators (Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and the Environment Agency (EA)) have produced a short video explaining their regulatory role within the GDF siting process. This can be viewed here⁴.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-geological-disposal-working-with-communities-long-term-management-of-higher-activity-radioactive-waste>

² <https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/190116-geological-disposal-of-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-working-with-communities-en.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-policy-statement-for-geological-disposal-infrastructure>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HY9qcwhCDB4&feature=youtu.be>

3. RWM Update

3.1 RWM has published its **Annual Review 2019-20**⁵ which sets out the progress made on delivering RWM's mission and plans for future work. The organisation has also launched **A permanent solution for Higher Activity Radioactive Waste**⁶, which outlines RWM's belief in the urgent need for action on the management of the UK's HAW.

3.2 RWM and ADEPT (Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transportation) held a webinar on the 29th September. The meeting was Chaired by Nigel Riglar, President of ADEPT and Director of Environment and Community Services at South Gloucestershire Council. Presentations on the siting process were delivered by RWM and NuLeAF's Executive Director offered a local government perspective.

3.3 A **Research Support Office (RSO)** has been established by RWM to support research capabilities in geological disposal science and technology⁷. This represents a partnership with the Universities of Manchester and Sheffield. It will focus its research on nine themes covering: advanced manufacturing; applied mathematics; applied social science; environmental science; geoscience; materials science; public communication of science; radiochemistry; and training. Teams within partner universities will be supported by around £20m funding over a period of up to 10 years.

4. CoRWM

4.1 Sir Nigel Thrift, CoRWM's Chair, along with 3 members of the Committee, met with NuLeAF's members at the September Steering Group. The discussion covered a number of issues including the planning aspects of the GDF process and the implications for the process presented by the proposed new infrastructure levy. Following the meeting NuLeAF wrote to CoRWM to expand on the issues raised and NuLeAF's Executive Director has had further discussions with the organisation's Chair.

4.2 NuLeAF's Executive Director also joined CoRWM's online plenary meeting on the 15th September. In addition to updates on the various workstreams CoRWM is involved in, the meeting heard a presentation from CoRWM member Professor Geraldine Thomas on the health effects of radiation. Prof. Thomas challenged current perceptions of the health risks from radiation, arguing that the risks presented are less than other risks that society and individuals deal with regularly.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916520/RWM_Annual_Review_2019_20_English.pdf

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dealing-with-the-uks-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-is-the-right-thing-to-do?utm_source=573e7542-2dd1-4f1c-b992-de147362bc66&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerating-implementation-of-a-geological-disposal-facility-in-the-united-kingdom?utm_source=0adbced3-0907-4140-aeff-3cb8ab7073f0&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate