

ITEM 8: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to RWPG, 30th April 2021

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 update.

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 **Cumbria County Council** has decided not to become involved in the GDF Siting Process in Copeland⁴. The County Council's local committee for Copeland had asked the Council Cabinet to consider joining the Copeland Working Group or delegating the decision to the local committee. A non-binding motion calling on the Council Leader to join the Copeland Working Group was passed, but the proposal was formally rejected by the County Council's Cabinet on the 18th March. It is likely that the County will now also decline to join the parallel Working Group in Allerdale.

2.2 The **Copeland Working Group** has published a series of 4 initial evaluation reports for the local authority and the three interested parties in the area⁵. These provide an early assessment of whether each of the areas identified by the interested parties has any potential to host a GDF, based on the six agreed Siting Factors. The reports conclude that the Copeland Area, and specific identified sites within in, have the potential to host a GDF, while noting that further work will be required to establish the actual suitability of the area and potential sites within.

2.3 The **Allerdale Working Group** website is now live and includes a virtual exhibition and a range of other information⁶. The Group also produces a regular newsletter, and anyone interested in receiving this can sign up via the website.

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/geological-disposal-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-guidance-communities>

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

⁴ [County council declines to take part in search for underground radioactive waste disposal facility \(cumbriacrack.com\)](https://www.cumbriacrack.com)

⁵ <https://copeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/working-group-area/>

⁶ <https://allerdale.workinginpartnership.org.uk/>

2.4 The **Nuclear Free Local Authorities** (NFLA) have published a paper on the GDF process in West Cumbria and proposals for a new deep coal mine in the area⁷. The mine proposal has now been called in by the UK Government and may well not proceed. However, the paper suggests that, if it was constructed, the mine might serve as a 'rock characterisation facility' or even that the mine shafts and tunnels could be used as access tunnels for nuclear waste disposal in a future GDF.

RWM has rejected any suggestion of a link between the two potential developments, stressing that it would not be feasible for the mine to be used as a 'characterisation facility' or as part of the GDF development given that there is no possibility of a repository being developed within such geology. The Copeland Working Group⁸ has stated that *'A GDF will be a purpose-built, highly engineered facility designed specifically for radioactive waste. RWM will assess the suitability of any potential GDF location in a comprehensive evaluation process. The design and safety features must meet the stringent requirements of independent UK nuclear and environmental regulators. A coal mine would not meet these requirements.'*

3. RWM Update

3.1 RWM has won an award at the annual Women in Nuclear event for its work in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion⁹. The organisation is now close to achieving the UK Industry target of 40% female workforce by 2030.

3.2 The minutes of the last **Regulatory Interface Management** (RIM) group meeting, held in September 2020, have been published¹⁰. RIM discusses regulatory and land-use planning matters related to geological disposal. Its members include RWM along with Defra, the Environment Agency, ONR and the Planning Inspectorate.

4. CoRWM Update

4.1 **CoRWM** (Committee on Radioactive Waste Management) held an open plenary meeting on the 17th March. In addition to general updates the meeting heard from Claes Thegerström, the former President of the Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management company (SKB). He spoke on 'Experiences of siting a deep Geological Disposal Facility for spent nuclear fuel in Sweden.'

The minutes of the previous CoRWM meeting, on the 24th November 2020, are now available¹¹. The next CoRWM meeting will be held online on the 19th May, and, as with all of the Committee's meetings, is open to the public¹².

⁷ https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rad_Waste_Brfg_86_GDF_and_Cumbria_coal_mine.pdf

⁸ <https://copeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/frequently-asked-questions/>

⁹ [RWM celebrate success at industry awards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rwm-celebrate-success-at-industry-awards)

¹⁰ [Regulatory Interface Management \(RIM\) group - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-interface-management-rim-group)

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/corwm-meeting-minutes-24-november-2020>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/corwm-plenary-meeting-dates-and-locations>