

Briefing for local authorities on STEP programme with UKAEA
Thursday, 28th February 2021, 10.00 – 11.00
Online

Present:

Phil Matthews	Nuleaf (Meeting Chair)
Catherine Draper	Nuleaf
Cllr David Moore	Nuleaf/Copeland Borough Council
Rob Ward	Copeland Borough Council
Cllr David Southward	Cumbria County Council
Michael Barry	Cumbria County Council
Rachel Whaley	Cumbria County Council
Lisa Chandler	East Suffolk Council
Bethany Rance	East Suffolk Council
Terry Burns	Essex County Council
Katharine Harvey	Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Linda Townsend	Gloucestershire County Council
Angela Presdee	Gloucestershire County Council
Robin Drake	Gloucestershire County Council
Rhys Jones	Isle of Anglesey County Council
Iain Robertson	Lancaster City Council
Jason Syers	Lancaster City Council
Gavin Kingsnorth	Maldon District Council
Kevin Broughton	Oxfordshire County Council
Doug Bamsey	Sedgemoor District Council
Kinga Grabarczyk	Sedgemoor District Council
Sion Roberts	Snowdonia National Park Authority
Paul Hickson	Somerset County Council
Louise Martin	Somerset County Council
John Burton	Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Matthew Riddle	Nuleaf/South Gloucestershire Council
Gillian Ellis-King	South Gloucestershire Council
Cllr Richard Smith	Suffolk County Council

Cameron Clow	Suffolk County Council
Tris Denton	Head of Commercial & Programme Development, STEP, UKAEA
Anna Clark	Chief Strategist, Site Decommissioning and Remediation, NDA
Richard Arnott	Strategy Programme Manager, NDA
Michael Hughes	Property Manager, NDA
Nigel Houlton	Head of Future Programmes, Magnox

Observers:

Kelly Anderson	Stakeholder Relations Manager – Cumbria, NDA
John McNamara	Head of Stakeholder Engagement, NDA
Simon Napper	Stakeholder Engagement Manager, RWM

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Tris Denton of UKAEA. He also welcomed representatives of NDA and noted that, following the discussion on STEP, there would be an opportunity to ask questions of them on their engagement with STEP and the wider issues around interim and end uses of NDA sites.

2. Tris delivered a presentation on the STEP programme. Fusion is proven technology however it has not yet been possible to get more energy out of a fusion reactor than was put in to create the reaction. The aim of the STEP programme is to deliver a prototype plant which achieves this, thus demonstrating that it is a feasible source of low carbon energy.

3. The UK is a world leader in the construction of spherical tokomaks, which look like a cored apple, compared to the traditional doughnut tokomak shape. UKAEA believes the spherical tokomak is more commercially deliverable.

4. Although a commercial fleet of reactors cannot be delivered before the Carbon Net Zero deadline of 2050, they can be constructed in order to help sustain net zero.

5. Commercial fusion has always been seen as 30 years away, however, because of a series of small successes and progress, there is now a level of confidence that the technology is deliverable resulting in international investment.

6. STEP's mission is to deliver a UK prototype fusion energy plan, with a target date of 2040 and which will set a path for the commercial viability of fusion. As it develops the plant, STEP will also look at what is required to bring the commercial plant to fruition.

7. Phase 1 of the project has been funded by the UK Treasury and will aim to produce a 'concept design' by 2024. It also includes finding the site for STEP and looking at how to develop delivery and supply chain capability to take the project forward. Phase 2 will be a

detailed engineered design and include all permissions and consents required for construction, which will be Phase 3 with an aim to complete construction by 2040.

8. The siting process remains open until at least 31st March 2021. Nominations are site specific, and the site does not need to be on or adjacent to an existing nuclear licensed site. More than one site can be nominated in a single area, and if there are gaps in the information required for a nomination then these should be flagged up. Please ask questions.

9. This is not a volunteerist process and the decision on which site will be proceed rests with the Secretary of State. The project is of such significance that the successful site will have global visibility.

10. The meeting opened up to questions:

10.1 *Q: Are you able to put a figure on the amount of water you need, as this factor may rule some areas out of consideration?*

A: We don't yet have a figure, this will be clarified as we develop our plans. However, we don't think we need to limit the site to coastal areas, but could be sited on a river, lake or estuary where we could draw water.

10.2 *Q: With the potential for LEPs to cease and local government reorganisation, what would be the impact of the nominating entity ceasing to exist in its current form?*

A: We would hope that there would be sufficient depth of community interest which would enable us to work with a new partner at that site.

10.3 *Q: What has your engagement been with NDA and EDF?*

A: NDA is a major landowner and we have asked them if they would make land available if a community was interested in putting it forward. NDA has said that some land would be suitable, and we have a provisional understanding of what that would be. We would urge communities to ask NDA if land is available. As EDF is a private company land the situation is different and UKAEA is not actively looking at their sites. However, they would be able to tell you if they had land available if you enquired.

10.4 *Q: What are your plans for public and community engagement on nuclear fusion, as the word 'nuclear' is emotive and could lead to apprehension and misunderstanding of the project?*

A: We will need to undertake a wide programme of engagement, and we expect there to be public appetite for this.

10.5 *Q: Does the 100 hectare requirement need to be in the form of one piece of land?*

A: The requirement is that the 100 hectare minimum should apply to an area that could be practically operated as a single site. Naturally, an operational site has many

component features, some of which do not need to be directly adjacent. Our priority would be to assess whether these barriers could be overcome with feasible operational mitigations. If in doubt, we urge that a nomination is made.

Comment from NDA: NDA has 4500 hectares of land, and there are requirements on this to help us deliver our mission. We have been engaging with UKAEA about what land would be suitable for their needs and will conclude that work shortly. It will be up to BEIS to permit the land to be released for re-use. NDA has set up a Strategic Land Management Working Group to help us understand what the different demands mean for us. We need to ensure we have the land we need to deliver our mission, but are agnostic about what surplus land is used for, though this does need to deliver value for money to taxpayers. From our point of view, the fact that the community would nominate a site, and that the decision would be made by the Secretary of State are positives. Our role is to understand what are credible, not preferable, uses for the land. We have a lot of information about our land and the communities which surround our sites which could be helpful, but we need to be sure we do not stray from our vires.

10.6 Q: The time period for submission of prospective sites is quite short. Is it your intention to bring more than one site forward? If you select one too early, what would happen if it dropped out?

A: We will take a package of recommendations to the Secretary of State for them to make a decision. It would be difficult to proceed with more than one site beyond 2022, at which point we need to start making plans and using site criteria to influence the build design.

10.7 Q: If the land selected belongs to NDA/BEIS, what will the level of involvement be by the nominating entity following site selection?

A: This process isn't volunteerist. We need to understand the appetite of a community have STEP located in their area. It will be the role of the nominating entity to work with us to assess the site. The process needs to be open and transparent otherwise you will not build the community support necessary.

10.8 Q: Can you give more information about the socio-economic benefits associated with each phase?

A: Phase 3 will have all the socio-economic benefits associated with a major infrastructure project. During Phase 2 we would develop our presence in the community, but benefits would be much lower than Phase 3. Phase 1, which runs to March 2024, benefits would be limited, and it would be about establishing communication channels and trust. We are currently developing an outline map of skills development and will seek to engage with local academia/education on developing skills fairly early on. The site will have global visibility and this has the potential to draw further benefits.

10.9 Q: Does the NDA sell land at commercial rates?

A: Land is valued by an external valuer and offered at commercial rate.

Comment by UKAEA: Please don't hold back from nominating a site just because you can't provide a figure for the value of the land.

10.10 *Q: Are you looking at sites in Scotland?*

A: We are not aware that there are any areas of the UK which cannot be considered.

Comment from NDA: Our understanding is that the present Scottish administration's nuclear concerns relate to existing operating technologies only.

10.11 *Q: Are similar propositions being taken forward in other countries?*

A: Yes.

11. The slides from the presentation will be made available once all introductory meetings have been completed and Nuleaf secretariat will circulate to members and meeting participants.

12. The Chair thanked Mr Denton for the presentation, and NDA for their contribution, and the meeting closed at 11.00.