

ITEM 6: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to RWPG, 21st July 2022

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

- Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process;
- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update;
- CoRWM update; and
- International situation.

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. Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process

2.1 It was announced on the 30th June that a Community Partnership has been established at **Theddlethorpe**, the first outwith Cumbria.

Jon Collins, who has been asked to be the interim Chair of the Partnership, commented *'Community Partnership is an exciting new phase of work, that will take place over a number of years, where all aspects of the proposal to develop a GDF in the area can be explored and discussed. To do this, the Partnership needs to reflect the community, and this is the chance for people to get involved, share their views and work alongside others looking at what this could mean for the area. The process of recruiting new members has begun, to both the Partnership itself and to the stakeholder forums planned in future, so that we can build wider public involvement and debate.'*

Theddlethorpe GDF Working Group also held a series of local engagement events in June and July. A 16-seater minibus, containing information on the GDF proposals, is being used to tour various locations across the community.

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>

2.2 A new Chair has been appointed for the **Mid Copeland** GDF Community Partnership⁴. Andy Pratt is a member of Copeland Borough Council's Executive and runs a milk delivery business. Mr Pratt commented *'I'm passionate about this area, its people and the caring communities we have here. As Chair of the Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership I'll continue to help take forward the conversations which have started about whether Mid Copeland is the right place for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) - what it could mean, listen to questions, discuss concerns and also look at the opportunities.'*

2.3 The **South Copeland** GDF Community Partnership has opened discussions with communities in Canada involved in a similar siting process. The Mayor of Ignace, Penny Lucas, and the Chair of the local Nuclear Liaison Committee, Brad Grieves, delivered online presentations to the Partnership on a range of topics.

The local authority is one of only two communities remaining in the Canadian GDF siting process out of a total of 22 that initially registered their interest. Ignace along with another community in Ontario, South Bruce, will hold Tests of Public Support before a final decision is made in late 2023.

Ged McGrath, Chair of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership, said: *'We were pleased to be able to speak to representatives of the Ignace Community Nuclear Liaison Committee in Canada, to understand more about their siting process, the ways in which the local community has engaged, and the benefits the process has brought and a GDF will bring to the area if it is selected.'*

There is a lot that we can learn from Ignace and other communities who are considering the possibility of, or are developing a GDF, and I look forward to our Partnership continuing such conversations as we continue to engage with and understand the views of our community here in South Copeland.'

2.4 **Allerdale** Community Partnership has expanded with four new members joining. The new members are all based in the local area: two are local businessmen while another represents the Cumbria Youth Alliance. The fourth member has a background in the nuclear industry including having previously worked for Nirex and the NDA⁵. The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) have criticised the fact that three of the appointees have some connection to the nuclear industry⁶.

2.5 Marine geophysical surveys are now underway to help increase understanding of the deep geology off the coast of Cumbria. This research is important to all three **West Cumbrian Community Partnerships**. A useful Q&A with NWS' Senior Project Manager, Chris Eldred, has been published. This covers issues including the

⁴ <https://midcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/new-chair-appointed-to-mid-copeland-gdf-community-partnership/>

⁵ <https://allerdale.workinginpartnership.org.uk/new-members-join-the-allerdale-gdf-community-partnership/>

⁶ <https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/news/nuclear-free-local-authorities-question-independence-of-allerdale-appointees-linked-to-nuclear-industry/>

impact on marine life⁷, an issue that has led to small local protests and to a petition calling for a full council debate and vote on the plans⁸.

3. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

3.1 Nuleaf and NWS held a successful fringe event at this years' LGA Conference in Harrogate on the 29th June. The breakfast meeting heard presentations from Nuleaf's Executive Director and Steve Reece of NWS with these being followed by a discussion on a range of topics. Representatives of local authorities from across England took part, and further conversations were held with NWS across the three days that the conference took place.

4. CoRWM Update

4.1 CoRWM held a special online Open Plenary on the 30th June, focussed on the French approach to local engagement in their geological disposal siting process. The speaker was Benoit Jacquet, General Secretary of the Local Information and Monitoring Committee (CLIS) for the Underground Research Laboratory at Bure. CLIS is an independent body which collects information and makes it available to the public so they can make up their own minds about the issues around GDF. It is neutral on nuclear power generation.

M. Benoit's presentation explained that the research laboratory site was chosen by central government with no community veto. The main criteria for selection were suitability and the level of local political support, though the low population density at Bure was also seen as a positive. Significant funds have been provided for the area, up to 30million Euros per year. The event proved popular, with 37 attendees including Catherine Draper from Nuleaf and a number of local authority representatives.

5. International situation

5.1 Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organisation (NWMO) has completed a full-scale demonstration of the engineered barriers that will contain and isolate the country's nuclear fuel in a deep repository.

As part of the demonstration, technical teams built a life-size model of one of the repository's underground storage rooms at the NWMO proof test facility in Oakville, Ontario, with the exact dimensions and interior walls lined with simulated rock tiling.

⁷ <https://midcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/marine-geophysical-surveys-interview-with-the-project-manager/>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-62142459>

During the process, the durable used fuel containers – made of thick carbon steel for strength and coated with corrosion-resistant copper – were encased in protective layers, called buffer boxes. Made of compressed bentonite clay, the boxes, weighing 8 tonnes, provide additional protection against corrosion or degradation. Once the boxes were placed into the storage room all the remaining space from floor to ceiling was filled with loose granular bentonite.

In-depth analysis is now underway to assess the results and yield insights that will support the ongoing design and planning of the deep geological repository.

5.2 Nuleaf Executive Director joined a **EURAD** meeting online on the 13th and 14th June. The meetings involved discussion on issues around the management of uncertainty and risk in relation to geological disposal.

Approaches to uncertainty and the engagement with the public were considered, both in theory and in relation to real examples. Of particular interest were small group discussions around how different stakeholders should respond to various scenarios. These included the emergence of new evidence around the mobility of radionuclides to the implications of a Ukraine style conflict for an operational GDF.

5.3 EURAD also held an event on the **Finnish GDF programme** on the 22nd June. The presentation and discussion can be viewed here⁹.

⁹ <https://www.ejp-eurad.eu/news/check-recording-ll-implementation-worlds-first-geologic-disposal-facility-spent-nuclear-fuel>