

ITEM 8: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to RWPG, 31st January 2024

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

- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update;
- GDF Community Partnerships;
- 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. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

2.1 Juliet Sotnick has been appointed to the Board of Nuclear Waste Services. Her background is in sustainability, having previously served as the Chief Sustainability Officer at Babcock International Group⁴.

Speaking of the appointment Adrienne Kelbie CBE, Independent Chair at NWS, commented *'We are committed to developing and designing sustainable waste management solutions to protect the environment for generations to come.....Juliet brings first class knowledge and experience of designing and implementing sustainability strategies, which will help us expand our capabilities and influence how we work.'*

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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sustainability-expert-juliet-sotnick-joins-nws-board>

3. GDF Community Partnerships

3.1 Members of the **Theddlethorpe Community Partnership** visited Bure in France in November. The site, operated by Andra, hosts an underground research laboratory on geological disposal and is the proposed site for the French GDF. In addition to viewing the laboratory, 500 metres underground, the group was able to meet with local community leaders.

Members of **Mid-Copeland Community Partnership** have also recently visited the Finnish GDF site at Eurajoki.

4. CoRWM Update

4.1 Phil Matthews attended a **Committee on Radioactive Waste Management** (CoRWM) plenary held in Edinburgh on the 28th November 2023. Among the updates provided were that:

- In October, CoRWM ran a workshop on social sciences with senior managers at NWS, part of wider work to build the social science capacity of the organisation. The workshop highlighted the work of Prof. Sarah Whitmore of Oxford University in empowering local communities to participate in flood risk management⁵; and Prof. Ash Amin of the Nuffield Foundation on communities and well-being⁶. Both are felt by CoRWM to offer useful lessons for GDF community engagement.
- CoRWM's position paper on Underground Rock Laboratories (URLs) is nearing completion and should be published early in 2024.
- The Committee recently visited the Trawsfynydd site in north Wales to discuss issues including storage and the disposal of waste on site.
- They are continuing to consider the implications for a GDF of the Government's commitment to 24GW of new nuclear. It was suggested that the underground footprint of a repository capable of taking all waste from a new nuclear programme on the scale, along with existing wastes, could be up to 50km².

The meeting also heard a presentation from the Nuclear Energy Agency on their **Waste integration for Small and Advanced Reactor Designs (WISARD)** research programme. Running until 2027, this is considering the waste and decommissioning aspects of new and small reactor designs.

5. International situation

5.1 A meeting was held in Brussels on the 6th and 7th of December as part of the ongoing **EURAD** research programme on radioactive waste management. The

⁵ <https://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/impact/spotlight/clandstrom.html>

⁶ <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/opinion/communities-and-place-matter-for-social-well-being>

seminar focussed on the UMAN (uncertainty management) work stream and involved waste management organisations, technical support bodies and civil society. Nuleaf is a member of the Civil Society Group and Nuleaf's Executive Director attended.

5.2 A decision on the site of Canada's deep geological repository is expected during 2024⁷. Two sites are under consideration – Ignace and South Bruce and the municipalities and the First Nation peoples in each area are planning to vote on the plans in the coming months. Both must approve the plans for it to proceed, and there is therefore a risk that neither site will progress.

If a site is selected the regulatory approval process will then take a decade, with construction taking another 10 years. Fuel emplacement would be undertaken over around 60 years after which there would be an 'extended monitoring' phase of about 7 decades.

⁷ [Site for Canada's nuclear waste repository to be selected next year \(citynews.ca\)](https://www.citynews.ca/2024/01/31/site-for-canada-s-nuclear-waste-repository-to-be-selected-next-year/)