

ITEM 7: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to RWPG, 30th April 2024

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

- GDF Community Partnerships; 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 Community Partnerships

2.1 There was a significant development in the GDF siting process on the 25th January when it was announced that **South Holderness** had established a Working Group, with the local authority, East Riding of Yorkshire, agreeing to participate⁴.

A number of drop-in sessions in local communities were held in early February to discuss the plans, but there was significant opposition and on the 21st February the local authority voted almost unanimously to exit the process. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) stated that they 'fully respect' the Council's decision and that they will now take the steps required to wind down the Working Group⁵.

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 [South Holderness area considered for radioactive waste disposal - BBC News](#)

⁵ [Nuclear Waste Services responds to council's withdrawal from South Holderness Working Group - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

While it is understood that a number of other communities are or have been engaged in discussion with NWS, it remains to be seen if any will move formally into the process.

2.2 South Copeland GDF Community Partnership has published the results of research on community attitudes towards geological disposal. This was based on engagement with 203 local residents at the end of 2023.

The research shows that a significant majority (84%) claimed to be aware that a Search Area had been identified within South Copeland for further investigation of its suitability for a GDF. When considering the construction of a hypothetical GDF in the South Copeland Search Area, 15% opposed it and 50% were supportive, with 35% neutral.

Ged McGrath, Chair of South Copeland GDF Community Partnership, commented *'The latest results provide another snapshot in time of local people's views on geological disposal, and guide our role in seeking and providing the information that our community require about a GDF and the siting process. We are currently surveying members of the public three times per year.... It's important that our community have confidence in the information provided to them about the siting process, potential impacts and relevant scientific and technical issues, in order to make an informed decision if or when a Test of Public Support on GDF is held – and this is our goal as a Community Partnership.'*

South Copeland Partnership has published its **Annual Review**⁶. Via their website they have also provided links to an interesting video from Prof. Clare Corkhill on nuclear waste and geological disposal⁷; and an article explaining the UK's position on the retrievability of waste⁸.

3. CoRWM Update

3.1 The Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) has published a position paper on the implications for Higher Activity Waste (HAW) and Spent Fuel (SF) management of the development of Small and Advanced Modular Reactors (SMR/AMRs)⁹.

The paper echoes some of the concerns raised in the Nuleaf seminar on AMRs held in 2023. CoRWM state that *'So far there is little published material from the promoters and developers of new reactor types to demonstrate that they are devoting the necessary level of attention to the waste prospectively arising from*

⁶ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/south-copeland-annual-review-looking-back-on-2023/>

⁷ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/explaining-nuclear-waste-and-geological-disposal-a-video-with-professor-claire-corkhill/>

⁸ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/qdfs-and-retrievability-what-is-the-uks-position/>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-of-small-modular-reactors-smrs-and-advanced-modular-reactors-amrs-corwm-position-paper>

SMR/AMRs, on which there has been Parliamentary criticism in respect of similar submarine reactors.'

The paper also notes that 'it is not necessarily the case that all types of spent fuel and radioactive waste will be suitable for disposal in a geological disposal facility (GDF), at least without potentially difficult prior treatment processes. Some may simply not be able to achieve the necessary state of passive safety required in a GDF as currently planned, in which case other new options will have to be identified, which may involve treatment or conditioning and which could be expensive, complex and uncertain.'

It concludes that 'Clear guidance is needed from government to promoters, regulators, Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and GBN on the necessity of addressing the cost, safety and environmental issues associated with radioactive waste management at an early stage'.