

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 14th December 2023
Item: 5
Subject: Updates on national developments in radioactive waste management
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Introduction:

This paper updates members on recent developments in radioactive waste management and NDA operations. It covers:

- NDA Group update;
- UK Government update;
- International news;
- Regulatory news;
- Nuleaf update; and
- AGR Update.

Recommendation:

This paper is for noting.

1. NDA Group update

1.1 On behalf of Nuleaf Doug Bamsey attended an **NDA Critical Enablers (CE) Theme Overview Group (TOG)** meeting on the 17th of October. Key issues discussed at the meeting were:

The **National Nuclear Skills Task Force Report** will be published in early December and more work, including with partners will follow in 2024. A commitment was made to give Cumberland Council sight of the report and to engage local authorities through Nuleaf in the development of a Skills Plan. Overall, NDA believes that good progress being made in evolving the strategic workforce plan and in relationship to the Leadership Academy. At the same time there is acknowledgement that there is more to do reaching out to stakeholders and local partners, with agreement that there is opportunity for local initiatives to complement the national approach.

On **Security and Resilience**, NDA is considering how to assess when operational risks, as sites pass through decommissioning, no longer require existing security measures. They are running a design competition to seek innovation in autonomous systems to determine whether they are a viable solution in this context. This approach will then be deployed on lower risk sites to test.

On **Socio-economics**, it was proposed that Nuleaf, Scottish Government and the NDA should hold further discussions on NDA's approach to **Socio-Economics** and the methodology used for assessment.

1.2. Phil Matthews joined a **Critical Enablers (CE) Theme Overview Group** meeting on the 1st December while Doug Bamsey participated in the **IWM Industry Forum** held in Manchester on the 5th December. A verbal update on both will be provided to the Steering Group.

1.3 The NDA has published guidance on **Determining the timing and pace of decommissioning**¹. This sets out the revised approach to prioritisation of sites and how an optimal approach will be decided on for each site. The overall preference is to decommission sites as quickly as possible. However, there is recognition that a number of constraints are likely to slow or defer decommissioning.

1.4 Jonathan Cook of Cumberland Council attended a workshop on the **Management of asbestos in the NDA estate**, held via Teams on the 12th October. NDA has been undertaking work since the May 2022 Asbestos Summit and the session aimed to identify any gaps in the NDA's thinking before finalising a Strategic Position Paper which will be brought to a TOG for consideration.

Asbestos management is a major issue for the NDA, holding as they do the largest inventory in the UK. Some of this is radioactive and some is not. In discussion it was noted that:

- LLWR is not a suitable disposal option for majority of asbestos LLW as the friable state of the material makes it hard to meet LLWR acceptance criteria.
- The GDF is the currently assumed disposal option but is not viewed as ideal so alternative options are being examined.
- The NDA may need its own Near Surface Disposal Facility for asbestos. In situ or onsite disposal options will also be explored. If adopted, this will have implications for site end states.
- Commercial disposal options are limited and likely to contract further in future if asbestos management in the wider UK economy becomes a less significant matter over time. The supply chain needs continuity of work to invest and remain in market.
- The availability of skills in asbestos management is an issue.

¹ [Determining the timing and pace of decommissioning - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/determining-the-timing-and-pace-of-decommissioning)

- There is much uncertainty about how much asbestos in total there is and where it is. There is therefore a need for better data to inform planning of decommissioning activity and the availability of disposal routes.

1.5 A consultation on a revised NDA **Social Impact and Communities Strategy** was launched on the 29th November and a link has been circulated to Nuleaf members². The deadline for submissions is the 21st February 2024. Nuleaf will prepare a draft response and circulate it for comment.

1.6 John McNamara, NDA's Head of Stakeholder Relations, has taken up a year-long secondment to Great British Nuclear. In his absence **Samantha Harris**, Head of Government Relations and Public Affairs, has taken over responsibility for stakeholder engagement. Sam will be joining this Steering Group meeting to introduce herself and explain the changes in NDA Comms. Sam and Phil Matthews are also meeting monthly to liaise on engagement and communications issues.

Simon Napper, who has been working as part of the NDA Stakeholder Relations team, has now returned to his previous role with Nuclear Waste Services.

1.7 A virtual **NDA Stakeholder Summit** was held online on the afternoon of the 12th December, with a number of Nuleaf members joining the call. It is hoped that an in-person summit will be held in 2024, probably in Cumberland.

1.8 The NDA has published their **Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23**³. This provides an update of progress and showcases achievements and case studies. The Authority has also published its **Mission Progress Report 2023**⁴.

1.9 On the 31st October, Magnox Ltd was rebranded and will now be known as **Nuclear Restoration Services**⁵. The name change is in part due to the expanded nature of the company, which now includes Dounreay and which will take on responsibility for decommissioning of the Advanced Gas Cooled Reactors (AGRs) in coming years. It is also understood that NRS will take over the decommissioning of the MoD's Vulcan facility.

1.10 Nuleaf's Executive Director was invited to join the NDA at the **VIBES Awards** in Glasgow on the 8th November. VIBES is the main business environmental awards in Scotland and the NDA sponsored one of the prizes.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/nda-social-impact-and-communities-strategy-consultation-nov-2023>

³ [Nuclear Decommissioning Authority: Annual Report and Accounts 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118888/nda-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-to-2023)

⁴ [The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority Mission Progress Report 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118888/nda-mission-progress-report-2023)

⁵ [Major nuclear company rebrands as 'Nuclear Restoration Services' - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-nuclear-company-rebrands-as-nuclear-restoration-services)

2. UK Government update

2.1 Nuleaf participated in a meeting of the Radioactive Substances Policy Group (RSPG) on the 26th October. The RSPG is the main high-level forum for engagement between the UK and devolved governments and regulators. There were two main items on the agenda:

1. The proposed final version of the Managing Radioactive Substances and Nuclear Decommissioning Policy was presented. The Policy represents the first substantive review and update of policy in over 25 years. The final version incorporates the Government's response to comments made by Nuleaf and others in the recent consultation.

The updated policy has addressed issues raised by Nuleaf in relation to the siting of a Near Surface Disposal (NSD) facility with a commitment that a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) should be developed for the NSD to support local authority engagement. At the RSPG, Nuleaf's Director raised the issue of community benefits and a further discussion with DESNZ civil servants was held after the meeting. The plan is for the final policy to be published early in 2024.

2. The meeting discussed the launch of Great British Nuclear (GBN) and Government plans related to new nuclear development. In support of GBN's work, DESNZ plans to publish three related documents:
 - A roadmap that will set out more information on plans for the delivery of 24GW of new nuclear power. This will include a high-level vision and more information on how they intend to boost skills, support the supply chain, ensure finance and investment, promote effective waste management and decommissioning, etc.
 - A consultation on the development of alternative routes to market, to overcome some of the challenges that have been experienced in ensuring sufficient private investment in new nuclear projects.
 - A consultation on the proposed approach to siting of new nuclear developments, including SMRs and advanced modular reactors. The intention is to publish this before the end of 2023. This will be followed in 2024 with a draft NPS which it is hoped will lead to the completion of the Parliamentary scrutiny process and the designation of the new nuclear NPS in 2025.

2.2 **Great British Nuclear** (GBN) has announced that 6 companies are through to the next stage of the Small Modular Reactor (SMR) competition⁶. EDF, GE-Hitachi Nuclear Energy International LLC, Holtec Britain Limited, NuScale Power, Rolls Royce SMR and Westinghouse Electric Company UK Limited have been selected.

⁶ [Six companies through to next stage of nuclear technology competition - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/six-companies-through-to-next-stage-of-nuclear-technology-competition)

The designs chosen are considered to be the most able to deliver operational SMRs by the mid-2030s. In the next stage of the process, successful companies will be able to bid for government contracts. The ambition is to announce in Spring 2024 which of the 6 companies the government will support, with contracts awarded by Summer 2024. This timetable aims to make this competition the fastest of its kind in the world.

GBN has also expressed interest in purchasing South Gloucestershire College's technology campus, covering 45 acres on the Berkeley site. The organisation has been looking at the potential for SMR development on the Berkeley and Oldbury sites⁷.

2.3 On the 29th November, Phil Matthews attended a reception on **Nuclear Energy in Scotland**, held in the Scottish Parliament. Speakers at the event included Andrew Bowie MP, Minister for Nuclear and Networks, and Tom Greatrex, Chief Executive of the Nuclear Industry Association.

Current Scottish policy is for no new nuclear generation, with the last station, Torness, due to close in the next few years. The meeting was well attended by Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and a commitment was made to establish a Cross-Party Group on nuclear, which would consider both decommissioning and any proposals for new nuclear stations.

2.4 The UK Government has published its response to the consultation on draft National Policy Statements for new energy infrastructure⁸. This does not cover EN-6 on new nuclear, a new version of which will be brought forward in 2024 as noted in 2.1.

2.5 The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Nuclear Energy has published a report on new nuclear, **Made in Britain: the Pathway to a nuclear renaissance**⁹. It makes 5 recommendations:

- Establish a Net Zero duty on the Planning Inspectorate and all relevant regulators; designate nuclear deployment as a Critical National Priority.
- Publish a Nuclear Roadmap this year that outlines a full programme of projects to 2050.
- Commit the funding to GBN necessary to build its developer capabilities and to invest directly in at least the first two SMR projects and next large-scale project.

⁷ [Berkeley campus might be bought by Great British Nuclear - BBC News](#)

⁸ [Draft National Policy Statements for energy infrastructure: government response to consultation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Nuclear Energy APPG Report: Adopt international approach so SMRs are made in Britain - Nuclear Industry Association \(niauk.org\)](#)

- Select a partner for the next large-scale nuclear project beyond Sizewell C in this Parliament. It suggests the best location for a new large scale nuclear plant is Wylfa.
- Award funding and assign sites to SMR Technology Partners by March 2024.

3. International news

3.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director participated an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) **Technical meeting on the role of municipalities in radioactive waste management**, held in Vienna on the 16th-20th October.

The event drew together delegates from across the world to share learning and experiences. Phil was invited to speak on the challenges in defining a community and also Chaired and reported on other sessions. All Nuleaf costs for attending the meeting were met by the IAEA.

The visit to Vienna incorporated the **General Assembly of GMF Europe**, which represents municipalities on nuclear issues and Phil was re-appointed as a Vice President of the organisation.

Further progress was made in developing international connections, and GMF Europe/Nuleaf, together with the **Energy Communities Alliance (ECA)**, representing American communities, and the **Canadian Association of Nuclear Host Communities (CANHC)**, signed a Global Partnership agreement to build co-operation on issues of mutual interest.

Finally, Phil and some colleagues from Europe and North America met with IAEA **Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi** who later issued a strong commitment to better engagement with local government and communities.

3.2 The Executive Director was invited to join an online panel discussion on the Decommissioning and clean-up of legacy nuclear sites in the UK, held as part of **Remplex (Center for the Remediation of Complex Sites) Global Summit**. The event was held in Richland, Washington State, USA and other members of the panel were from NDA Group and the Environment Agency.

4. Regulatory news

4.1. The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) held its **Industry Forum** in London on the 11th October, and Nuleaf's Executive Director attended.

The focus of the meeting was conventional health and safety and cybersecurity. It was noted that there had been two fatalities on nuclear licensed sites in the last year, both related to construction incidents, and so this has been identified as a

priority issue for the industry and ONR. The uptick in cyber-attacks on public bodies was also highlighted, leading to the prioritisation of action on this issue.

4.2 Representing Nuleaf, Steve Smith attended an ONR workshop on **Proportionate Regulatory Control (PRC)** in Liverpool on the 26th October. The meeting was attended by representatives from other regulators (including Environment Agency (EA), site licence companies and the NDA). The workshop aims were to:

- Discuss the applicable conditions for delicensing and how ONR will assess against them;
- Explore opportunities for how PRC could be used to optimise decommissioning/delicensing nuclear sites and end state planning;
- Inform ONR's revision of relevant guidance.

The intention is that the new regulations will come into force in April 2024. The Energy Act 2023 will update the current delicensing arrangements which were originally included in the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. ONR is currently revising its guidance relating to nuclear site delicensing to reflect these changes.

The future of site delicensing arrangements is of particular interest to local authorities in a number of respects including:

- Community and environmental protection post-delicensing
- Site end states and future use of the site for local benefit
- Responsibility for ongoing regulation and implications for local authority regulatory roles

The workshop noted some issues of particular importance for local government:

- Early consultation with the local community is fundamental in this process.
- Site end states should be agreed with the local community and a 'master planning' approach may be appropriate, with Winfrith as an example.
- 'Optimising decommissioning' needs to be assessed on a comprehensive sustainability basis – not just in terms of time and cost.
- Site licensees, regulators and local authorities should agree a 'roadmap' for delicensing for a site.

Further versions of the ONR guidance documents will be made available to stakeholders for comment prior to formal publication, expected by end March 2024. A Workshop Summary report will shortly be made available by ONR and will be shared with Nuleaf members for information.

4.3 The ONR has published its **Annual report and accounts**¹⁰.

¹⁰ [Office for Nuclear Regulation annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115442/2022-2023-annual-report-and-accounts.pdf)

5. Nuleaf update

5.1 Nuleaf has engaged former members **Doug Bamsey** and **Steve Smith** to provide policy and engagement support to the network on a consultancy basis. This follows on from a recruitment process for a Senior Policy Adviser which failed to identify a suitable candidate.

Both Doug and Steve bring a wealth of experience and knowledge of local government and nuclear issues. They will attend meetings and provide other support on an ad-hoc basis. This arrangement will initially run until the end of March 2024, when it will be reviewed.

6. AGR Update

6.1 EDF Energy has announced that the defueling of the first of two reactors at **Hunterston B** has been completed on time and on budget, after beginning in May 2022¹¹.

Defueling the plant involved removing more than 300 channels of fuel from each of the reactors. The fuel channels will be stripped and processed then taken to the on-site fuel storage pond to cool before being packaged into used fuel flasks and transported via rail to Sellafield.

Work to defuel the other reactor is due to start shortly. EDF said the aim is to have this achieved and all used fuel sent to Sellafield by mid-2025, prior to transfer of site ownership to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority in 2026.

¹¹ [Fuel removed from first Hunterston B reactor : Waste & Recycling - World Nuclear News \(world-nuclear-news.org\)](https://www.world-nuclear-news.org)