

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 18th June 2024
Item: 6
Subject: Update on Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) siting process
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Introduction:

This report provides an update on recent developments related to the process for identifying a site for a Geological Disposal Facility and activities at NWS. It covers:

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

Recommendation: This report is for noting.

Background information:

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.

1. Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process

1.1 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.

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/docs/desh/publications/190116-geological-disposal-of-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-working-with-communities-en.pdf>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-policy-statement-for-geological-disposal-infrastructure>

The research shows that a significant majority (84%) claimed to be aware that a Search Area had been identified 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**⁴. Via their website they have also provided links to an interesting video from Prof. Clare Corkhill on nuclear waste and geological disposal⁵; and an article explaining the UK's position on the retrievability of waste⁶.

1.2 The **Theddlethorpe GDF Community Partnership** is recruiting an Independent Chair to take forward the work of the group in engaging with local people. Closing dates for applications was the 31st May, with interviews taking place this month⁷.

1.3 **Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership** has started to consider how a community vision could benefit the local area, should a GDF be located there. Given the long timeframe for GDF development, one particular area of focus is in engaging young people. As part of this local Scout Group has been asked to consider how the area could look in 10 years and 50 years' time, with the young people coming up with a range of ideas to improve amenity and wildlife.

Seascale Parish Council is now going to work with the scouts to apply for Nuclear Waste Services' GDF Community Investment Funding (CIF) and make some of the ideas a reality in the shorter term. Cllr David Moore, Nuleaf Chair and the Seascale Parish Council member on the Community Partnership, commented: *'Visioning work is really important to us... And looking at some of these ideas, there's things we can get started on in the short term.'*

⁴ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/south-copeland-annual-review-looking-back-on-2023/>

⁵ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/explaining-nuclear-waste-and-geological-disposal-a-video-with-professor-claire-corkhill/>

⁶ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/gdfs-and-retrievability-what-is-the-uks-position/>

⁷ [We are recruiting an independent chair - Theddlethorpe GDF Community Partnership \(workinginpartnership.org.uk\)](https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/we-are-recruiting-an-independent-chair-theddlethorpe-gdf-community-partnership/)

2. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and NDA Update

2.1 Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) plans to submit a Development Consent Order (DCO) for site characterisation boreholes as early as 2027.

NWS head of major permissions Malcolm Orford told New Civil Engineer⁸: *'The first DCO is for our boreholes' because 'any boreholes greater than 150m deep have been deemed nationally significant infrastructure and must be consented via a DCO'.*

Orford said that NWS is *'looking to commence drilling in 2029 or 2030 and therefore, to be able to meet that date, we have to submit [the DCO application in] 2027 or 2028'.* These dates are not precise but are targets, he added.

2.2 **Eden Nuclear and Environmental (Eden NE)** has completed a study for the NDA and Scottish Government on the technical aspects of Near Surface Disposal (NSD) in Scotland.

The study considered all technical areas relevant to the feasibility of NSD in Scotland, including the policy and regulatory context, design concepts, site characteristics, environmental performance of different concepts, potential Scottish inventory suitable for NSD, transport, nuclear safety and security, cost and schedule.

Eight design concepts with different depths of disposal, access approach and degrees of retrievability were developed. More information can be found here⁹.

3. International news

3.1 The 5-year **EURAD (European Joint Programme on Radioactive Waste Management)** has drawn to a close¹⁰. A range of publications have been released, including on transparency in the establishment of radioactive waste management (RWM) facilities¹¹ and on public participation in the technical aspects of RWM¹².

Nuleaf's Executive Director was a member of the programmes **Civil Society Group** where he represented both Nuleaf and GMF Europe. It is understood that a EURAD-2 programme will begin in October, but it is not yet clear what representation there will be for local government or wider civil society.

⁸ [Nuclear Waste Services details progress towards boreholes for Geological Disposal Facility | New Civil Engineer](#)

⁹ <https://www.eden-ne.co.uk/projects/technical-investigations-of-the-near-surface-disposal-of-haw-from-sites-in-scotland>

¹⁰ [EURAD final annual event - Thank you to all participants! | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

¹¹ [EURAD deliverable D9.17 ROUTES – Implementation of the ROUTES ICS action plan second phase | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

¹² [EURAD - D9.18 Implementation of ROUTES action plan third phase | Eurad \(ejp-eurad.eu\)](#)

4. CoRWM Update

4.1 Members of the **Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)** have visited the Dounreay and Vulcan sites on the north coast of Scotland.

Dounreay presents complex decommissioning challenges, having been established in 1955 and being the host of world leading research into fast breeder reactors. A particular area of challenge is in the retrieval, characterisation and packaging of wastes from the site's shaft and silo, where past waste management decisions have presented challenges to the current mission. More on the visit can be found here¹³.

¹³ [CoRWM visits Dounreay nuclear site - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/co-rwm-visits-dounreay-nuclear-site)