

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 11th September 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) update; and
- International news.

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 On the 28th August, NWS launched a 20-minute video on the **geology of Copeland**⁴ and its suitability for a GDF. The video explains the investigative work undertaken over the last 2 years, including seismic surveys, and what the implications of these are. It focusses in on the Mercia Mudstone Group (MMG), a mix of mudstones and halites (salts). The video states that this makes the MMG potentially of interest for a GDF as both mudstones and salts have very low

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>

⁴ [Understanding Copeland Geology - YouTube](#)

permeability. The MMG has a thickness of between 300m and 800m within the Copeland inshore area.

1.2 **South Copeland GDF Community Partnership** has published an information page on the current position of the UK Government, Environment Agency and Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) on the complex issue of retrievability of nuclear waste. This can be found here⁵.

1.3 David Fannin has been appointed as the Independent Chair of the **Theddlethorpe GDF Community Partnership**, replacing Jon Collins who has acted as interim Chair since the CP was established in June 2022. David is a director of Lincolnshire Voluntary Engagement Team and previously served as Assistant Chief Executive at South Holland District Council.

2. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

2.1 Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) has published its 2024 **Geological Disposal Facility Report** which details progress with the siting process. The report outlines the work of the three Community Partnerships, noting that £7 million has now been distributed to local communities. It highlights NWS' international engagement and the progress that is being made in undertaking the studies required to understand the surface and sub-surface environment. The report can be viewed here⁶.

2.2 A new video explaining the siting process has been released⁷.

2.3 On the 30th August, NWS published guidance on their **Property Value Protection (PVP) Scheme**⁸. The intention is to provide support to those who are able to demonstrate a compelling need to sell their property, yet have been unable to do so, other than at a substantially reduced price, due to the search for a suitable site to host a GDF in their community. It is based on similar schemes employed as part of infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and High Speed 2 (HS2).

The scheme will remain in place until the Secretary of State approves communities to proceed to the site characterisation phase of development; or until a Community Partnership is dissolved following a decision, by either NWS or the relevant principal local authority/ies, to stop consideration of a GDF in that community.

2.4 **Liz Peace CBE** has been appointed as the new Chair of NWS and began her work on the 1st September. Her previous roles include serving as the Chief Executive of the British Property Federation for 13 years⁹.

⁵ <https://southcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/gdfs-and-retrievability-what-is-the-uks-position/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gdf-report-2024/gdf-report-2024-protecting-people-and-our-environment>

⁷ <https://theddlethorpe.workinginpartnership.org.uk/the-journey-to-a-gdf/>

⁸ [Property Value Protection scheme: An introduction to the scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/property-value-protection-scheme)

⁹ [Liz Peace CBE appointed as new Chair of Nuclear Waste Services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/liz-peace-cbe-appointed-as-new-chair-of-nuclear-waste-services)

3. International news

3.1 Posiva, the Finnish radioactive waste management company, has announced that a trial run of placing disposal casks in the **Onkalo** used nuclear fuel repository has begun¹⁰. Expected to take several months, the exercise is not emplacing actual spent nuclear fuel but is designed to test the operation of the repository.

The Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (STUK), Finland's regulator, is expected to publish its opinion on whether to grant an operating license for the repository by the end of 2024, at which point the Government will make a final decision on whether to give the go ahead. If they do, the operating license will run until 2070. Posiva CEO Ilkka Poikolainen commented: *'Posiva's operation now takes a significant step toward the start of the actual final disposal operation. This is a momentous occasion also to our employees and cooperation partners.'*

3.2 GMF Europe has organised a site visit to Oskarshamn in Sweden, the location of the Aspö rock laboratory and waste encapsulation plant, on the 25th and 26th September. The rock laboratory has led much of the research that has informed the development of a final repository for spent nuclear fuel in Sweden. Aspö will close permanently in spring 2025 with the final repository planned for another community, Östhammar.

Nuleaf's Executive Director will be participating in the visit in his capacity as Vice President of GMF.

3.3 Ignace, one of two potential locations for the Canadian Geological Disposal Facility (GDF), has voted in favour of becoming the potential host. Of approximately 1,035 eligible voters, 660 registered to participate in the vote. Of those, 640 actually cast a ballot, with 495 voting yes (77%)¹¹.

While Ignace Township has voted to progress, a positive response is also required from the Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation, representing indigenous people, and engagement between the community and waste management organisation (NWMO) continues.

A vote in the other community remaining in the process, South Bruce, is expected in October. Again, approval will also be required from the First Nation community in that area.

¹⁰ [Trial run at Finnish repository starts : Waste & Recycling - World Nuclear News \(world-nuclear-news.org\)](https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Trial-run-at-Finnish-repository-starts)

¹¹ [Ignace council votes in favour of potential nuclear waste repository | CBC News](https://www.cbc.com/news/canada/ignace-council-votes-in-favour-of-potential-nuclear-waste-repository-1.7011111)