

## **ITEM 9: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS**

**Report to RWPG, 6<sup>th</sup> November 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;
- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and NDA Update;
- International news; and
- Regulatory update.

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The UK Government's policy on **Working with Communities – implementing geological disposal** was published in December 2018<sup>1</sup>, with the equivalent policy for Wales published in January 2019<sup>2</sup>. The **National Policy Statement**, governing the planning aspects of the GDF in England, was published in July 2019<sup>3</sup>.

### **2. GDF Community Partnerships**

2.1 The **Theddlethorpe GDF Community Partnership** has appointed a new Chair, David Fannin, who has a background in the local government and third sector. Nuleaf's Executive Director held a meeting with David in early October to discuss his work plans and how Nuleaf may be able to support local engagement.

The Partnership is also inviting local people to offer their vision for the area and continuing to undertake surveys of local marine life and birds to support a baseline environmental assessment.

2.2 **Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership** has published the results of its annual residents' survey. Over half of the survey participants (53%) would support

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-geological-disposal-working-with-communities-long-term-management-of-higher-activity-radioactive-waste>

<sup>2</sup> <https://gov.wales/geological-disposal-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-guidance-communities>

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

the potential construction of a GDF in the Mid Copeland Search Area, while 12% would be opposed. This compares with 56% and 15% respectively in last year's survey. The net support for the construction of a GDF in the Mid Copeland Search Area stood at +41 from this survey, the same figure as last year.

When asked about potential advantages to a local GDF, more than half (56%) of respondents said increased job opportunities; 17% said improved safety of existing nuclear waste and 15% said investments in local environmental improvements. The most common perceived disadvantages related to local disruption – 24% said potential increased traffic or congestion and 22% said potential disruption and dirt produced by construction.

2.3 A similar exercise has been undertaken in **South Copeland**. In this case 36% were supportive of a GDF in the Search Area, with 31% opposed. One third of those interviewed were neutral. The survey showed a level of uncertainty in relation to nuclear waste management with only 27% aware of the UK's current storage method for its most hazardous radioactive waste at interim surface and ground-level storage facilities. A greater proportion of respondents (38%) believed it was already held in vaults deep underground in the UK, and 30% admitted that they did not know.

2.4 The BBC has published articles on the GDF siting process. The first covers the general siting process and quotes Nuleaf Chair, Cllr David Moore<sup>4</sup>. The other focusses on Theddlethorpe, and includes the perspectives of those against the development, featuring a recent report published by a local opposition group, Guardians of the East Coast (GOTEC)<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and NDA Update**

3.1 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 here<sup>6</sup>.

3.2 NWS has published guidance on their **Property Value Protection (PVP) Scheme**<sup>7</sup>. 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

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<sup>4</sup> [Where will the UK bury nuclear waste for 100,000 years? - BBC News](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Theddlethorpe nuclear waste site 'would be disaster for seaside' - BBC News](#)

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

<sup>7</sup> [Property Value Protection scheme: An introduction to the scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

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.

## 4. International news

4.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director, along with Lincolnshire County Council's Head of Infrastructure Vanessa Strange, participated in a site visit to **Oskarshamn** in Sweden, on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September. The town is the location of the Aspö rock laboratory and waste encapsulation plant. 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.

4.2 Staying in Sweden, the GDF siting process in the country took a major step forward on the 24<sup>th</sup> October after the national **Land and Environment Court** granted an environmental permit for the construction and operation of the repository and encapsulation plant<sup>8</sup>. The repository will be located at Forsmark/Osthammer, while the encapsulation plant is located at Oskarshamn (see above).

This decision enables preparatory work to start, although tunnelling cannot commence until the Radiation Safety Authority (SSM) provides an approved safety report. It is expected the facilities will become operational in the mid-2030s.

The permit applies to all Sweden's past and current nuclear reactors but does not apply to any nuclear waste or spent fuel from a new nuclear programme.

4.3 **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%)<sup>9</sup>. Voting has also now taken place in the other potential community, **South Bruce**, though the result has not yet been announced<sup>10</sup>.

To progress, a positive vote is also required from the Saugeen and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nations, representing indigenous people in South Bruce and Ignace

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<sup>8</sup> [Environmental permit granted for Swedish repository - World Nuclear News](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Ignace council votes in favour of potential nuclear waste repository | CBC News](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Voting period opens on South Bruce DGR referendum | Mitchell Advocate](#)

respectively. Engagement between the community and waste management organisation (NWMO) continues.

4.4 The BBC have published an in-depth article on GDF siting processes around the world<sup>11</sup>.

## **5. Regulatory update**

5.1 The Environment Agency (EA) and Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) have issued their joint annual report on regulatory scrutiny and engagement<sup>12</sup>. They conclude that there has been good progress in many areas, but that there were some gaps in engagement related to a number of areas including site evaluation.

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<sup>11</sup> [How to build a nuclear tomb to last millennia - BBC Future](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Regulatory scrutiny and engagement for geological disposal: annual report 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK](#)