

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 12th March 2025
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;
- International news;
- Regulatory update; and
- Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM).

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 **East Lindsey District Council** is withdrawing from the Theddlethorpe GDF Community Partnership, with Council Leader Craig Leyland issuing a statement on the 12th February⁴.

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 [A statement from Cllr Craig Leyland, Leader of East Lindsey District Council - East Lindsey District Council](#)

Cllr. Leyland noted that his Council's decision was in response to the announcement by Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) on the 30th January that their 'Area of Focus' for the GDF headworks would move from the former Theddlethorpe gas terminal to land between Gayton le Marsh and Great Carlton. The view of his local authority is that this move from a brownfield site to agricultural land close to the Lincolnshire Wolds Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) 'severely tests the original rationale' of the Council in engaging in the siting process.

Mr Leyland commented that *'We also need to consider the progress that the Community Partnership has made in being the liaison between NWS and wider community.'*

As the Leader of ELDC I have had to acknowledge at full council, that the engagement process has been clumsy, interrupted and not generally seen as helpful. The four-year timescale to this point is disappointing and frustrating in equal measure. It is only in recent months that the flow of more relevant information has been appropriate but both NWS and the Community Partnership have had to recognise that the engagement and consultation process had not been effective or informative in the way we had anticipated or hoped for. It has only achieved one thing and that is to unnecessarily antagonise and distress our residents and communities.'

Lincolnshire County Council continue to participate in the Community Partnership. The involvement of at least one principal local authority is necessary for the process to continue.

1.2 On the 30th January, Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) announced the proposed **Areas of Focus** within the three potential host communities, Mid and South Copeland and East Lincolnshire⁵.

These locations⁶ will enable NWS to focus more in-depth studies and investigations to help experts understand and consider the potential for an area to safely and securely host a GDF. They have been identified using a range of information, such as geological data, areas of environmental protection, and consideration of built up areas.

Two surface Areas of Focus (AoF) have been identified in **Mid Copeland** – Land East Of Sellafeld and Land East of Seascale. In South Copeland there is one surface AoF – **Land West of Haverigg**. The sub-surface AoF off the coast is the same for Mid Copeland and South Copeland.

In Lincolnshire, a surface Area of Focus has been identified between the villages of Gayton le Marsh and Great Carlton. The sub-surface Area of Focus off the coast is under the seabed in the inshore area which extends 22km from the coast.

⁵ [Cumbria and Lincolnshire chosen as potential nuclear waste sites - BBC News](#)

⁶ [Areas of Focus - Nuclear Waste Services](#)

2. International news

2.1 Nuleaf has prepared a case study on the Canadian GDF siting process, following the announcement that the communities of **Ignace** and the **Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nations**, in northern Ontario, have been chosen as the location of the repository. A presentation on the Canadian experience will be given at this Steering Group meeting and the Case Study will be circulated to members shortly.

2.2 Groundwork has begun for the construction of Sweden's final repository for Spent Nuclear Fuel at Forsmark in the Osthhammer municipality⁷. *'It is a historic day for the Swedish nuclear waste programme. We are taking an important step and breaking ground for a final solution for the spent nuclear fuel'* said Stefan Engdahl, CEO of the Swedish waste management organisation SKB.

A major expansion of Sweden's existing repository for low and intermediate level waste, also located at the Forsmark site, is also underway⁸. The repository is situated 60 metres below the bottom of the Baltic Sea and began operations in 1988. Most of the short-lived waste deposited in the SFR comes from Swedish nuclear power plants, but radioactive waste from hospitals, veterinary medicine, research and industry is also deposited within it.

3. Regulatory update

3.1 Nuleaf has submitted a response to a consultation from the UK Environment Agencies on the requirements for authorisation and regulation of radioactive waste disposal facilities⁹. We are grateful to the members that commented on the draft – the final version is available on the Nuleaf website¹⁰.

4. Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)

4.1 CoRWM has published its 2025 progress report on the delivery of an operational GDF¹¹. It offers a range of comments on NWS' organisational capability and also on the Community Partnerships, potential sites and on policy and regulation.

The report notes that:

- While NWS is building its organisational capacity, its social science capabilities are taking longer to establish and there is an urgent need to involve communities in co-creating their siting and engagement frameworks.

⁷ [Sweden breaks ground for used fuel repository - World Nuclear News](#)

⁸ [Expansion of Swedish repository under way - World Nuclear News](#)

⁹ [Guidance on the requirements for authorisation and staged regulation for the disposal of solid radioactive waste - Environment Agency - Citizen Space](#)

¹⁰ <https://www.nuleaf.org.uk/policy-communications/consultation-responses-2/>

¹¹ [Delivery of an operational geological disposal facility \(GDF\): progress report 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

- That lessons need to be learned from the withdrawal from Allerdale and South Holderness. The Committee recognises that there have been improvements to aspects of the engagement with the Community Partnerships in other areas.
- There are 'very significant' technical and practical challenges in establishing a GDF in the target zones off Cumbria, located more than 15km offshore.
- CoWRM believes that onshore options for locating a GDF could still be identified.
- The Committee will be considering the transport aspects of a GDF further given that they are potentially controversial with members of the public.