

**Minutes of the Steering Group meeting held online,
12th March 2025 10:00 – 15:00**

Attendees

Cllr David Moore	Cumberland Council
Cllr Tony Markley	Cumberland Council
Cllr Paul Thomas	Folkestone and Hythe Council
Cllr Philippa Williamson	Lancashire City Council
Cllr Richard Smith	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Michael Caswell	Somerset Council
Cllr Chris Davies	South Gloucestershire
Kevin Kerrigan	Allerdale Borough Council
Jonathan Cook	Cumberland Council
Eleanor Godesar	Dorset Council
Terry Burns	Essex County Council
Bethany Rance	East Suffolk Council
Claire Bromley	Gloucestershire City Council
Amartya Deb	Gloucestershire City Council
Iwan Jones	Isle of Anglesey/Ynys Mon County Council
Gwen Thomas	Isle of Anglesey/Ynys Mon County Council
Bryan Geake	Kent County Council
Diane Neville	Lancaster City Council
Andy Gutherson	Lincolnshire County Council
Edward Wright	Lincolnshire County Council
Richard Outram	Manchester City Council
Marianne Keen	Maldon District Council
Simon Milson	Maldon District Council

John Burton	Somerset Council
Louise Martin	Somerset Council
Tessa Bond	Somerset Council
Ross Walker	Suffolk County Council
Ayse Ozcan	Sefton Council
Rachel Whaley	Westmoreland Furness Council
Chloe Atkinson	Nuleaf assistant
Philip Matthews	Nuleaf Executive Director
Paul Skelton	NWS
Howard Falconer	NWS
Michael Borelli	NWMO
John Mcnamara	NDA

1.	Welcome and Apologies	ACTION
1.1	<p>The Chair welcomed members and noted the excellent attendance by both Members and officers.</p> <p>He recorded that apologies were received from: Darren Crossley (Cumberland Council); Nik Hardy (Cumberland Council); Cllr Mark Fryer (Cumberland Council); Cllr Joseph Ghayouba (Cumberland Council); Cllr Jonathan Brook (Westmoreland and Furness); Phil Park (Stroud Council); Jonathan Holland (NWC); and Jon Severs (South Gloucestershire Council)</p>	
2.	Minutes of the previous meeting	
2.1	Minutes were agreed to be an accurate and approved. They will be uploaded to the website.	CA
3.	Matters Arising	
3.1	<p>The Executive Director noted a number of outstanding actions, related to requests for information. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of slides on Small Modular Reactors from an IAEA meeting. The slides have now been received and would be circulated to any member who requested them. • Information on the estimated economic benefits of the Chapelcross redevelopment. Phil would ask NRS again for this information. 	PM & CA

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information on Fuel Element Debris (FED) and Sizewell A. Phil had asked John McNamara for this and would ask again. 	
4.	Low Level Waste management: NRS	
4.1	<p>The Chair welcomed Paul Skelton, Programme Director at Nuclear Waste Services (NWS). Paul introduced himself and noted that his NWS colleagues Howard Faulkner and Sam McKenzie were also on the call.</p> <p>Paul’s presentation reviewed the past year's activities around Low Level Waste (LLW) management and also looked forward.</p> <p>He began by focussing on operations at the LLWR (Low-Level Waste Repository) site. This covers 270 acres and is located near the village of Drigg in Cumberland. It was a military site during WWII and has been involved in nuclear waste management since the 1950s. The site and the techniques of waste management have evolved significantly over time.</p> <p>One important area of focus has been the plutonium (Pu) contaminated material drums, something NWS has been working on for a number of years. A significant part of this has been recharacterization, which has proven that much of the material is not actually contaminated with Pu. The result is that some of this material is able to be managed on the LLWR site rather than be sent to Sellafield.</p> <p>Another key area of focus is the preparation for capping activities at Vault 8, which are soon to be formally closed off. A major part of the capping preparation has been on drainage which has now been finished – lagoons have also been installed to manage run off. Membranes will also be used to help cap the Vault and minimise the water flow that goes into the Vault.</p> <p>Work is also underway to develop stockpile areas that will enable the large amounts of aggregate that are required for capping to be brought on to the site; and a new road has been constructed that will separate the construction traffic and operations from day to day operations. Safety is of paramount importance and underpins these actions. Around 97% of aggregates will be brought on to the site by rail, again with the aim of enhancing safety and reducing the impact on the community and environment.</p> <p>Howard then continued the update. The LLWR has 30 contracts with 50 sites across the UK, including not just reactor sites but those covering the fuel cycle, defence and research facilities.</p>	

He spoke about the success the site had achieved in the diversion of waste along more sustainable routes, preserving the capacity of the Repository. Overall around 100,000m³ of Low Activity Low Level Waste (LALLW) had been diverted and disposed of at permitted landfill, and lots of other material such as metal had been managed elsewhere. In total around 300,000m³ of space had been preserved at the Repository.

Howard highlighted examples of work that had been undertaken for other clients, such as the Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), where they have been engaged with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) around the management a large number of redundant tanks. This has resulted in the tanks being sent to the Lillyhall site, where they have worked with Cyclife to develop a new capability.

More widely, the NWS team is focussing on providing support and advice up the supply chain to all clients. The aim is to start the conversation early – while most of what the site deals with is legacy waste, there are opportunities to avoid the mistakes of the past when new waste is being generated. Howard noted the work that has been done with Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) and the supply chain at the Berkeley site where a waste handling facility has been constructed and will be used to characterise waste and prepare it for off-site transport.

Paul concluded the presentation by offering some thoughts on the recent changes in UK decommissioning and waste policy, and the implications these have. At the centre of the changes is a move towards a risk informed approach to waste management. This enables waste to be managed in the most appropriate way, which is not always the case when reliant on standard classifications of radioactive waste.

There is potential to manage some wastes that would have previously gone to the LLWR in other ways; and enable wastes that would have been destined for the GDF to be managed at the low level waste repository. NWS is undertaking a lot of work in this area at present but the Budget and Spending Review may have an impact on how this progresses.

4.2

Question: Do the aggregates you are using on site originate from Cumbria or further afield? *The aggregate for Vault 8 capping is coming via the quarry at Shap, but it includes materials from Penrith and other parts of the UK. Specific sourcing details are limited due to commercial sensitivity, but the supply is balanced from multiple locations.*

Question: what is the timescale for the entire programme of capping? *The capping programme is expected to run until 2038. Paul offered to discuss the wider issues offline with the member (RW).*

Question: to what extent are recycled aggregates used, in line with the NDA's recycling and sustainability objectives? *We use different types of aggregates in different phases. We are keen to use recycled material whenever possible but the primary driver must be to get the optimum material for the capping.*

Question: Does work done for other government departments (e.g., MOD at Aldermaston) or private contractors generate revenue? *It's a mixed picture – we do charge for some services such as waste disposal, and expert services like disposability assessments for intermediate-level waste do have charges to help recoup costs.. However the bulk of our work is for the NDA Group of which we are a part so it wouldn't make sense to change for that.*

Question: I saw the recent government announcement on plutonium, which will see it managed as a waste rather than used as a potential fuel. A lot of people seem to think we should reuse the material – can you offer a view? *There are a lot of claims made about the scope for Pu to be used in a variety of ways. However, many of these technologies are Gen IV and not yet at a state of maturity where an honest assessment is possible.*

Question: Can you clarify if Near-Surface Disposal falls under the Town and Country Planning Act regime or is it subject to the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) process? *It falls under TCPA. We recognise there will need to be engagement with local authorities impacted by any such proposal. However I would stress that, while LLWR is considering near-surface disposal for certain waste materials, it is still in the investigative phase. The team is assessing whether the potential benefits justify the investment and evaluating the difference between a vault for low-level waste versus one that could accept a broader inventory. The decision will depend on understanding costs, necessary permit changes, and alignment with the environmental safety case, which will be updated in about a year. Several hurdles remain before moving forward.*

5	Update on national developments in radioactive waste management	
5.1	<p>The Executive Director presented the National Updates paper and highlighted a number of items including:</p> <p>The upcoming Nuleaf Annual Gathering in Stratford, London. The event would include a seminar on the current and future nuclear landscape addressed by Lord Hunt and representatives of the NDA, EDF and GMF Europe. Interest in the event had been high and all places had now been taken up.</p> <p>The UK Government has committed to immobilise the 140 tonnes of plutonium. There were mixed views in West Cumbria as to whether this was the correct decision.</p> <p>A consultation had been launched on National Policy Statement (NPS) EN7 covering nuclear power. Nuleaf would draft a response.</p> <p>Great British Nuclear has announced the final three candidates for developing SMRs in the UK: Holtec, Rolls Royce and GE Hitachi. A final decision was expected this summer.</p> <p>Louise Martin had taken up the role of SCCORS Co-ordinator on a 12 month secondment from Somerset Council. Louise will work 3 days per week and be part of the Nuleaf team. She would also provide strategy and policy support for Nuleaf.</p>	
5.2	<p>Question: Can you offer an explanation for the significant delays in decisions regarding nuclear energy projects, particularly Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)?</p> <p><i>There is a real desire from developers for this process to be speeded up. However, there have been delays in Great British Nuclear's (GBN) assessment process and there have been further impacts from the spending constraints imposed on GBN by the budget.</i></p>	
6.	Update on the Geological Disposal Facility siting process	
6.1	<p>Philip Matthews presented the paper.</p> <p>He focussed on the announcement by East Lindsey District Council that they are withdrawing from the Lincolnshire GDF Community Partnership due to dissatisfaction with the engagement process. Lincolnshire County Council remains involved at the present time.</p>	

6.2	<p>Comment: There is frustration locally that NWS hasn't provided the sort of information that the Community Partnership and the two local authorities have felt was needed.</p> <p>The move of the Area of Focus from the brownfield site at Theddlethorpe to a greenfield site has also caused major issues and has further reduced the confidence of the community.</p> <p>The opposition does seem to be from a vocal minority rather than from across the community. This can stifle the inquisitiveness that there is to learn more. However, pressure is building on the County Council to consider its position.</p> <p>Comment: It would be useful to learn more about the French GDF siting process. <i>It was agreed that a presentation on the French process would be sought for a future meeting.</i></p> <p>Phil also highlighted the publication of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) Annual Report. This offered a positive assessment of aspects of the siting process but suggests that Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) should strengthen its social science resources. The report also raises concerns about the feasibility and cost of a repository far offshore and suggests that consideration should be given again to an onshore repository.</p>	PM
7.	Date of next meeting	
7.1	The next meeting will take place at our Annual Gathering in the Stratford Hotel in London on the 10 th of June.	
8.	Any other Business	
8.1	No other matters were raised.	
9.	Presentation on NDA research on SSGs and engagement: NDA	
9.1	<p>Following a break for lunch, the Chair welcomed John McNamara of NDA to provide an update.</p> <p>John began by noting that discussions were still ongoing with the Site Stakeholder Groups (SSGs) on the report that has been prepared, and so he was not able to present the final report at this stage. He also noted that Nuleaf had shared a draft of its engagement report, which he felt had some useful ideas in it. He would provide comment back to Nuleaf on the report.</p> <p>Looking forward, the plan was that the SSG report would be released in the near future. There would then be a Communication Phase (informing stakeholders and issuing a public press release) which would be followed by an</p>	

Implementation Phase (embedding changes over 9 months to a year, with a working group to ensure adherence).

The key findings of the SSG report were:

Governance and Accountability: There are opportunities to improve communication and support from the NDA to strengthen the relationship with SSGs.

Representation: There is scope to enhance outreach and diversity, particularly engaging seldom-heard groups and young people.

Membership Composition: There would be a benefit to increased participation from unions, local authorities, parish councils, residents' associations, businesses, regional organizations, schools, and environmental groups.

The main recommendations were:

Governance Improvements: Update NDA guidelines and standardise policies; and ensure SSG websites are user-friendly.

Diversity and Inclusion: Provide support to engage seldom-heard groups. Encourage attendance from underrepresented groups. Use virtual or hybrid meetings for accessibility.

Accountability and Relationship with NDA: Introduce annual one-on-one meetings between NDA and SSG chairs. Consider an annual review process and report.

Improve communication with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ).

Support and Communication: Develop community engagement plans. Organize sponsored events and use press releases for publicity.

Other actions were:

Enhance Communication and Representation:

- Ensure SSG viewpoints are included in official messages.
- Leverage websites and social media for better engagement.
- Increase Support for SSG Chairs and Vice-Chairs.
- Review support and payments for chairs and vice-chairs.
- Provide opportunities for SSG representatives at industry events.

Building and Enhancing SSGs' Reputation:

- Leverage international recognition for best practices.
- Ensure SSGs have a platform to showcase their work.

Governance and Terms of Office:

- Update guidelines to include terms of office for chairs and vice-chairs. Continue discussions with SSG chairs for further refinements.

The Chair thanked John and invited questions.

Question: How can we improve community and stakeholder engagement in important discussions about local projects, for example around the Hinckley site?

There is an importance in communicating better what the reasons are for having Site Stakeholder Groups (SSGs), particularly in relation to decommissioning and the future of local areas post-nuclear. Improving communication and engagement strategies to make these issues more relevant and accessible to young people is also crucial.

Question: How can the NDA incorporate lessons from international examples, like in the Netherlands, and findings from the review on deliberative democracy to improve stakeholder engagement and reform SSGs? *We are waiting for the final report from Aberdeen University on their review, which could provide valuable insights for improving stakeholder engagement. We are considering various approaches, including regionalized panels and partnerships, to improve engagement.*

Comment: *At the Hinkley Point Site Stakeholder Group (SSG), many members are older and will eventually retire, leaving a gap in experience and knowledge. Engaging local colleges and schools with the Hinkley Point SSG has been challenging. More work needs to be done to reach out, and the SSG report offers some ways to do this.*

Comment: *Local government reorganisation (LGR) can impact local authority involvement in Site Stakeholder Groups (SSGs). Noted. One challenge for some SSGs is the lack of local authority engagement. This is perhaps an area that we can work with Nuleaf to address.*

10.	The Canadian GDF siting process: Michael Borelli, NWMO, Canada
10.1	<p>The Chair welcomed Mike Borelli from the Canadian Nuclear Waste Management Organisation (NWMO).</p> <p>Michael began by noting 'land acknowledgement', that is that he was delivering his presentation from land in Canada that is a traditional territory of a range of First Nations.</p> <p>NWMO was formed in 2002 to develop a long-term plan for used fuel management, focusing on deep geological repositories. The organisation engaged thousands of Canadians to determine the best plan for managing used nuclear fuel, leading to a decision to proceed using an 'adaptive phase management' approach in 2007.</p> <p>This was initiated in 2010, involving extensive consultations with communities, including First Nations and Métis groups. The 'learn more' program led to 22 communities expressing interest, narrowing down to two final sites.</p> <p>One of these was Ignace, a small town in Northwestern Ontario, which had stepped forward to learn more about the project, seeing it as compatible with its vision for tourism and recreation.</p> <p>In 2024 both the local municipality and First Nation community in the Ignace area voted to proceed with the GDF process. The other municipality, South Bruce, also voted narrowly to proceed. A vote of the indigenous community there has not yet taken place, but NWMO decided to select Ignace as the site for its repository.</p> <p>Looking forward there will now be additional site characterization, impact assessments, and updating of the transportation planning framework.</p> <p>The timeline includes aiming for impact assessment approval by the early 2030s, and starting construction in the 2030s, with transportation and operation beginning in the 2040s. There will be wider investment in the community, and the project emphasizes future benefits for residents, youth, and future generations.</p>
10.2	<p>Question: What lessons have you learned about engaging non-nuclear versus nuclear communities in the process – South Bruce being a nuclear community, Ignace a non-nuclear community? <i>Initial conversations are easier in nuclear communities. It took about 15 years to build</i></p>

similar knowledge levels in Ignace. Interestingly, the non-nuclear communities resented external activists campaigning against the repository more. Overall, in any community, you need trained staff and an active form of engagement that seeks conversations, on-to-one, with as many people as possible.

Question: How long did it take for people in a non-nuclear community to become advocates for the project, given that currently there are very few willing to lead the pro-GDF conversation? *Setting up Community Liaison Committees (CLC) around 2014 helped recruit members willing to learn about the project, leading to the emergence of advocacy groups like 'Willing to Learn' that lasted nearly 10 years.*

Question: What was the role of municipalities and the Community Liaison Committee in identifying and addressing community information concerns before the test of public support, and how did the independent collaborative peer review process contribute? *Community Liaison Committees (CLCs) played a crucial role in identifying and addressing community concerns, organising engagement activities, and ensuring a robust process for public support, while NWMO aimed for community ownership and openly communicated limitations.*

Question: At what stage did municipalities start getting involved in understanding the types of studies needed to address community concerns before the test of public support? *Municipalities started getting involved around 2012, after initial outreach and presentations, and it took about 3-4 years for them to have a strong understanding of the types of studies needed to address community concerns.*

Question: Did the local municipality at South Bruce or Ignace ever have to demonstrate active support for the project? *Municipalities maintained a neutral stance until signing hosting agreements in mid-2024, after which they demonstrated willingness to proceed, supported by community well-being studies and infrastructure assessments.*

Question: How can we address scaremongering and help a non-nuclear community understand that the nuclear industry is well-regulated and safe? *Tours and firsthand experiences were crucial in helping communities understand the safety and regulation of the nuclear industry, complemented by transparent presentations from scientists and the use of natural analogues to demonstrate long-term safety measures.*

	<p>Question: What are the key strategies for effectively engaging young people in multi-generational, technical projects, and what has proven to be the most successful approach from your experiences? <i>Including youths in decision-making bodies, engaging parents and teachers, organizing interactive and tactile activities, and being transparent about the project's safety and impact are key strategies for effectively engaging young people.</i></p> <p>The Chair thanked Michael for his informative talk and closed the meeting.</p>
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ACTION LIST

2025			
Item	Action	By	Outcome
2.1	Update minutes and upload to the website.	CA	Done
3.1	Circulation of SMR slides and response sought from NRS/NDA on two outstanding issues.	CA&PM	Slides circulated. Other information requested again but not yet received.
6.2	Presentation on French geological disposal process.	PM	Presentation on Bure site noted as a topic for a future meeting.