ITEM 7: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to the RWPG, 22nd October 2025

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) Update; and
- CoRWM update.

1. Introduction

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

2. GDF Community Partnerships

2.1 Recent media reports have suggested that the UK Government may be considering changes to the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) siting process, including ending or amending the requirement for local consent before any such development could proceed. It has been suggested that a review of the siting process is currently being undertaken by DESNZ (Department of Energy Security and Net Zero), but it is unclear when this will report.

This news follows the exit of Lincolnshire from the GDF process and the publication of a report by the **National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (Nista)** which concluded that expected costs of between £20Bn and £53Bn would make a GDF 'unaffordable' and noted that the Infrastructure and Projects Authority had dropped its confidence rating from amber to red[4].

[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/geological-disposal-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-guidance-communities
[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-policy-statement-for-geological-disposal-infrastructure
[4] Report

Responding, **UK Energy Minister Michael Shanks MP** stated that the Government remained committed to delivering a GDF[5]. He commented *'I know at times these things seem like they move very slowly, but we are making progress on this. When we're successful, this will bring thousands of skilled jobs, investment and economic growth to the local area.'* He added that Nista was part of the process to speed up decision making and he was hoping the GDF would be *'a very good example of that when we get it over the line'.*

The **Nuclear Industry Association (NIA)** later remarked that *'A functioning GDF is key to the credibility and sustainability of the UK's nuclear programme. Developers need confidence that the back end of the fuel cycle is being responsibly and sustainably managed….to secure investor confidence and public trust.'*

2.2 A steel–signing ceremony took place on the 11th September, to celebrate a milestone in the development of a new leisure centre in Millom, funded in part by GDF Community Investment Funding (CIF). The new facility is one of four projects that make up the Millom Town Deal which secured £20.6m from the UK Government's Town's Fund alongside match funding – including from Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA).

Andy Pratt, Chair of the **South Copeland GDF Community Partnership**, said: *'This new leisure centre will be a real asset for Millom and the wider South Copeland community. It's a place where people of all ages can come together, stay active, and improve their health and wellbeing. We're pleased to have supported this project through Community Investment Funding, and it's great to see what can be achieved when local people, organisations and funders work together for the benefit of the community.'*

CIF contributed £500,000 towards the leisure centre, while the Copeland Community Fund gave £1 million towards the project and the NDA provided a £3.1 million grant, as part of its investment in its site communities.

3. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

3.1 NWS has published an updated **Inventory for Geological Disposal[6].** The inventory is based on the 2022 UK Radioactive Waste Inventory but looks in a more strategic way at waste streams that may be destined for a GDF. Overall it identifies 574 Waste Streams currently stored at locations across the UK (see overleaf) and notes that 87% of the total packaged waste volume for a GDF will come from existing sites, with 13% from new nuclear power stations.

[5] Minister backs Cumbria nuclear plan despite cost fears - BBC News
[6] Latest Inventory for Geological Disposal published - Nuclear Waste Services

3.2 The BBC published an in depth article on waste storage and the search for a GDF on the 9th September[7]. The article includes comment from former Nuleaf Chair Cllr David Moore.

3.3 Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) began Aerial Surveys in October 2023 to understand the presence and number of birds and marine animals off the West Cumbrian coast. These surveys are intended to provide information on the local environment and help to inform the permissions required for future investigations into the area's suitability for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

4. Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) Update

4.1 The UK and Devolved Government's independent adviser, CoRWM, has published a policy paper on **Radioactive waste burning by nuclear transmutation – considering 'waste burner' nuclear reactors for the UK[8].**

The paper looks at claims from vendors that waste burner technology could potentially treat this long-lived radioactive waste to shorten the timescale over which

[7] Where will the UK bury nuclear waste for 100,000 years? - BBC News
[8] Radioactive waste burning by nuclear transmutation: CoRWM position paper - GOV.UK

it is radioactive and reduce its heat generation. This in turn could reduce the footprint of a GDF.

CoRWM concludes that '*realising any practical benefits could be achieved only with significant capital investment in new waste management and fuel fabrication infrastructure. The UK already has a significant inventory of vitrified high level waste, which would be impossible to burn and which would need to be safely isolated and contained in a GDF for 100,000 years. These factors combined call into question the material and economic benefit of waste burning in the UK context.*'