

**Meeting:** Nuleaf Steering Group  
**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2025  
**Item:** 7  
**Subject:** Update on Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) siting process  
**Author:** Philip Matthews



## 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:

- GDF Community Partnerships; and
- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update.

**Recommendation:** This report is for noting.

## Background information:

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>.

## 1. Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process

1.1 The **Mid and South Copeland GDF Community Partnerships** have published the results of research undertaken on resident attitudes between March and July 2025.

In **Mid Copeland** 71% of respondents stated they could recall seeing, reading or hearing something about nuclear waste or a GDF over the past year (compared to 61% in 2024).

Over half of Mid Copeland respondents (55%), accurately described how the UK managed its most hazardous radioactive waste (stored at interim surface or ground-level storage facilities), compared to 40% last year. And nearly two-thirds (62%)

<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/docs/desh/publications/190116-geological-disposal-of-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-working-with-communities-en.pdf>

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

were able to identify the accurate description of a GDF (compared to 48% in 2024, 41% in 2023).

78% said they were aware that a Search Area covering Gosforth electoral ward and that areas underneath the seabed off the coast of Copeland had been identified for further investigation of its suitability for a GDF, compared to 75% last year.

Over half of the survey participants (54%) would support the potential construction of a GDF in the Mid Copeland Search Area, while 13% would be opposed. These figures have not changed significantly over the last year.

Regarding **South Copeland**, in July's survey, 81% of respondents recalled seeing, reading or hearing something about nuclear waste or geological disposal over the past year, compared to 75% of respondents in March 2025. However, the July survey indicated that a degree of uncertainty persisted, with 25% unsure of the current approach (a decrease from 40% in March) and a further 21% incorrectly believing that the UK's most hazardous radioactive waste was already held in vaults deep underground (compared to 16% in March).

Following the identification of the South Copeland Areas of Focus earlier this year, 59% of respondents claimed to be aware of the Areas of Focus in July, which was an increase from 38% in March. When considering a potential GDF in the Search Area, 35% opposed it, 31% were supportive, and a further 34% were neutral in July's survey. These figures are similar to those found in March of this year.

1.2 Over half a million pounds of **Community Investment Funding (CIF)** has been awarded to the construction of a new youth and community centre in Seascale. The new centre will continue to offer a wide range of activities including youth clubs, one to one support, informal education, over 50s groups and social action.

A further £150,000 funding was awarded to the project from **Copeland Community Fund**, which is administered by Cumberland Council and funded through the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority for hosting the Low Level Waste Repository.

## 2. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

2.1 The **Environment Agency** and the **Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR)** have published their latest joint scrutiny report on radioactive waste disposal (October 16<sup>th</sup>)<sup>4</sup>. Both have established agreements with Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) to provide regulatory advice and scrutiny.

The report notes delays to the planned submission of applications for permits for intrusive investigation and the Development Consent Order (DCO), with the first permit application now expected in 2028; and also the 'significant uncertainty' to the

---

<sup>4</sup> [Regulatory scrutiny and engagement for geological disposal: annual report 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

process relating to the impacts of the 2025 Spending Review on the GDF programme and the limited number of potential host communities.

*It also states 'Important factors in the case for new nuclear and engendering public confidence are demonstrating that the industry is able to effectively manage the complete lifecycle of nuclear facilities through site clean-up and restoration, combined with the appropriate treatment and disposal of spent fuel and higher activity wastes. Both the Environment Agency and ONR believe that providing a final disposal solution is a crucial enabler in achieving this. Final disposal facilities are becoming a reality for a number of established nuclear countries. These nations are demonstrating a clear commitment to completing the lifecycle for higher activity waste by implementing a final solution.'*