

ITEM 10: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY SITING PROCESS

Report to the RWPG, 28th January 2026

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
- Nuclear Energy All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG).

1. Introduction

1.1 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.

2. GDF Community Partnerships

2.1 **Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership** is planning to set up a youth group. Aimed at those aged 16 to 25 and living in the Gosforth Ward, the group will get underway with a free event being held on the 18th February. The meeting is being supported by Inspira, which provides career guidance, skills development and employment support to young people and adults in Cumbria, and is also a member of the Partnership.

Andy Pratt, Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership Chair, said: '*We want to build on the strong work we have already established in the area working with young people through our development of shaping a community vision. Creating a youth group to meet with the Partnership will take the youth voice to the next level in discussing and debating what they think a GDF could mean for them and their area, while feeding that into our programme of activities going forward.*'

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>

This initiative builds on the work of the **National Youth Forum**⁴, launched a year ago by Nuclear Waste Services (NWS), working in partnership with Arup and The Young Foundation. The Forum, involving 12 young people, was established to bring fresh perspectives and increase young peoples' their understanding of GDF.

2.2 The Mid and South Copeland GDF Community Partnerships have published the results of research undertaken on resident attitudes between March and July 2025⁵.

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%) 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.

2.3 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, through Mid Copeland Community Partnership. The new centre will continue to offer

⁴ [National Youth Forum - Nuclear Waste Services](#)

⁵ [Mid Copeland Community Partnership Resident Research 2025 - Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

a wide range of activities including youth clubs, one to one support, informal education, over 50s groups and social action⁶.

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 (LLWR).

Overall, the **Mid Copeland Community Partnership** have published a summary of funding awarded through CIF in the fourth year of the programme - £1million in 2025, and £4 million over the past four years to a variety of local projects⁷.

3. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

3.1 The Environment Agency and the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) have published their latest joint scrutiny report on radioactive waste disposal⁸. 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 process relating to the impacts of the 2025 Spending Review on the GDF programme and the limited number of potential host communities.

3.2 The possibility of constructing an unmanned and automated nuclear waste disposal facility is being explored by **Nuclear Waste Services (NWS)**.

Speaking at the Nuclear Industry Association's (NIA's) annual conference in December, NWS chief technical officer John Corderoy discussed the technological innovations the organisation was looking into for the future of disposing nuclear waste, including the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF)⁹.

Although initially doubtful to the idea of having an automated, robotic facility capable of disposing nuclear waste, Corderoy admitted he is more open to the idea of late. *'I was sceptical five years ago about the idea of an unmanned geological facility. Something that's fully automated and run by robots on the ground. My view has changed in the last five years, advances in the technology have been so fast,*

⁶ [Shackles Off breaks new ground as work under way on community centre - Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

⁷ <https://midcopeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/4million-community-investment-funding-awarded-in-mid-copeland-over-past-four-years/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/geological-disposal-scrutiny-of-rwms-work-annual-reports/regulatory-scrutiny-and-engagement-for-geological-disposal-annual-report-2024-to-2025>

⁹ [UK's long-term underground nuclear waste facility could be 'unmanned' | New Civil Engineer](#)

couple that with intelligent robots and artificial intelligence (AI) then we could conceive of a very different facility.'

3.3 **Nuclear Waste Services** have recently published a briefing note¹⁰ and supporting video¹¹ on the Safety and Security siting factor – one of six siting factors that are considered as part of the site evaluation process to identify a suitable location for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

A GDF will require sub-surface and surface facilities, and accessways to connect them. The briefing note explains the studies being undertaken for each of these, as part of the early stages of site evaluation, considerations include safety during investigation, construction, operation and closure, security and safeguards.

Briefing notes have previously been published on the NWS website on the Engineering Feasibility, Transport and Environment siting factors.

4. Nuclear Energy All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

4.1 Members of the **Nuclear Energy All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)** have visited the Onkalo site in Finland. Onkalo will be the world's first geological disposal facility (GDF) for spent nuclear fuel and higher activity radioactive waste¹².

Charlotte Nichols MP, Chair of the Nuclear Energy APPG said: '*Seeing first hand how other nuclear economies like Finland can use innovative technologies to address the challenge of radioactive waste offers a vision of the future for our own programme for the safe and secure disposal of radioactive waste in the UK.*'

¹⁰ <https://www.nuclearwasteservices.uk/2026/01/site-evaluation-the-safety-and-security-siting-factor/>

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EgoUFE_ihU

¹² [Completing the nuclear fuel cycle - Nuclear Waste Services](https://www.nuclearwasteservices.uk/2026/01/completing-the-nuclear-fuel-cycle)