

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 11th March 2026
Item: 7
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:

- GDF Community Partnerships;
- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update; and
- Nuclear Energy All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG).

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 The **Mid Copeland GDF Community Partners** has set up a youth group. Aimed at those aged 16 to 25 and living in the Gosforth Ward, the group got underway with a free event held on the 18th February. The meeting was 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.

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>

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 was established to bring fresh perspectives by involving young people and increasing their understanding of GDF. Over the past year, the partnership has worked with a group of 12 young people who formed the first National Youth Forum.

1.2 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 £4million over the past four years to a variety of local projects⁵.

The **South Copeland Community Partnership** have also published a summary of funding awarded through CIF, this also amounting to £4million pounds over the last four years. 20 projects were awarded funding in the last 12 months, and 98 projects in total⁶.

2. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

2.1 The NWS Board has appointed Simon Hughes as their new GDF Executive Director, beginning in January 2026. They have stated that *'Simon will lead the GDF programme at an important time – guiding the next steps of the GDF programme, reviewing our work, and ensuring we are structured in the best possible way to speed-up decision-making, strengthen accountability, and our focus on delivery'*.

2.2 The period between now and the summer is a critical one for the GDF programme. NWS are considering their recommendation to the Secretary of State (SoS) at the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) on whether a community or communities should progress to Site Characterisation including deep borehole investigations. It is expected that they will submit their conclusions this spring, with a decision from the SoS anticipated in the summer months.

The current context was discussed by Elected Members and officers from Cumberland Council at Nuleaf's quarterly GDF Local Authority Group meeting in February. At that meeting it was requested that Nuleaf draft a letter to the Secretary of State outlining the views of Nuleaf on the current situation and the range of possible options that the SoS will consider. In summary, members view is that the process must maintain momentum, whether a decision is made to continue in West Cumbria or to look elsewhere. A pausing or slowing of the process is not desirable.

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<https://www.nuclearwasteservices.uk/2025/09/national-youth-forum-giving-young-voices-a-say-on-the-uks-long-term-plans-for-nuclear-waste-management/>

⁵ [£4million Community Investment Funding awarded in Mid Copeland over past four years - Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

⁶ [£4 million Community Investment Funding awarded to local projects in 4 years - South Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

2.3 The possibility of constructing an unmanned and automated nuclear waste disposal facility is being explored by NWS. Speaking at the Nuclear Industry Association's (NIA's) annual conference, 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).

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

2.4 **Nuclear Waste Services** has recently published a series of briefing notes and supporting videos on the six siting factors that are considered as part of the site evaluation process to identify a suitable location for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

The most recently published, **the Value for Money Siting Factor** describes how as part of its Site Evaluation studies, NWS needs to understand whether the delivery of a GDF at a particular location could offer Value for Money, considering local, regional and national economic factors. The value for Money Siting Factor uses information provided by the other five siting factors (Engineering Feasibility, Safety and Security, Community, Transport and Environment as well as wider information) to understand the potential timescales, costs and benefits involved in delivering a GDF at a given location.

These briefing notes are published on the NWS website, with supporting videos available on NWS YouTube channel: [GDF Siting Factors - YouTube](#)

3. Nuclear Energy All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

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

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'*⁷

⁷ [Completing the nuclear fuel cycle - Nuclear Waste Services](#)