

ITEM 9: UPDATE ON GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL FACILITY (GDF) SITING PROCESS

Report to the RWPG, 29th April 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; and
- Nuclear Waste Services (NWS).

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 The GDF Community Partnership in **Mid Copeland** has shared a summary of previous approaches to disposing of radioactive waste in a GDF – namely the **Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive (NIREX)** programme, and **Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS)**⁴.

The article also provides links to material **Nuclear Waste Services (NWS)** has published on **Site Evaluation**⁵ and **Site Characterisation**⁶, ahead of an expected decision about next steps in the GDF process this summer (see below).

2.2 Both **Mid Copeland**⁷ and **South Copeland**⁸ have also published reports on their progress over the last year.

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 [Partnership shares summary of Cumbria's previous approaches to disposing of radioactive waste in a GDF - Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

⁵ [Site Evaluation | Nuclear Waste Services](#)

⁶ [Site Characterisation | Nuclear Waste Services](#)

⁷ [Snapshot of Community Partnership progress over past year - Mid Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

⁸ [Snapshot Update - The Partnership's work in 2025 - South Copeland GDF Community Partnership](#)

3. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

3.1 The NWS Board has appointed Simon Hughes as their new GDF Executive Director, stating 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'*.

3.2 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, we argued 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.

A response to Nuleaf's letter was received from **Lord Vallance** on the 13th April. In it the Minister thanked Nuleaf for the support the network provides to engagement between local government, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and Nuclear Waste Services (NWS), and looked forward to future engagement around the **Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce Review** and any updates to the **National Policy Statement (NPS)** for geological disposal infrastructure that may arise.