

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 15th July 2026
Item: 5
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;
- Nuleaf news;
- High Level Waste (HLW) shipments; and
- Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) 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 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 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

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>

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](#)

and **Site Characterisation**⁶, ahead of an expected decision about next steps in the GDF process this summer (see below).

2. Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) Update

2.1 The Secretary of State (SoS) at the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) is currently considering whether a community or communities should progress to the next stage of the process to identify a site for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF). In making his decision, the SoS will consider the advice provided by Nuclear Waste Services (NWS).

In a report to **Cumberland Council's Nuclear Issues Board** in March⁷ it was stated that *'The advice is due to be submitted to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) in May 2026. NWS has made clear there is no specific time frame within which the Secretary of State must respond and while we may expect DESNZ to respond as soon as practicable, they will want to give themselves flexibility to take as long as they need to consider the matter properly before announcing decisions. DESNZ will need to decide on the appropriate form of final decisions, for example it could be a written ministerial statement to Parliament, and on how to engage with stakeholders about the conclusions they reach.'*

2.2 Nuleaf wrote to the Government in March to highlight our support for a well-funded GDF siting process that moves the UK towards the development of a Repository at the earliest practical date. In his response **Lord Vallance** 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 update to the **National Policy Statement (NPS)** for geological disposal infrastructure that may arise.

2.3 Nuleaf's Chair and Executive Director met **Seth Kybird, CEO at Nuclear Waste Services (NWS)** in Cumbria on the 2nd July, to discuss progress with the GDF programme and wider work on waste management. A verbal update will be provided to this meeting.

3. Nuleaf news

3.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director participated in a GMF Europe meeting in Osthhammer, Sweden in early June. Osthhammer is a global hub for nuclear decommissioning, and hosts Sweden's flagship nuclear waste infrastructure, namely:

- **Forsmark nuclear power plant**, with three operational nuclear reactors.

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

⁷ [Nuclear waste project progress report to councillors | News and Star](#)

- **SFR**, Sweden's existing repository for short-lived radioactive waste (now being expanded).
- **The Swedish Deep Geological Repository**, approved in 2022 and under construction since 2025, designed to store ~12,000 tonnes of Spent Nuclear Fuel (SNF) in 6,000 copper canisters at a depth of 500 metres underground. The facility will include around 60km of underground tunnels.

A presentation covering this and other recent and upcoming international engagement will be made during the October Steering Group meeting.

4. High Level Waste (HLW) shipments

4.1 At the end of June it was announced that **Nuclear Transport Solutions (NTS)**, part of the NDA, had delivered the third and final instalment of vitrified High Level Waste (HLW) to Germany⁸. Waste was taken by train from Sellafield to Barrow and then loaded onto the specialist Pacific Grebe vessel for shipment.

The waste being returned is a legacy of Sellafield's overseas fuel reprocessing programme, which came to an end in 2018. In line with UK Government policy and long-standing contractual commitments, the resulting waste is returned to its country of origin through the Vitrified Residue Returns (VRR) programme. Since returns began in 2009, approximately three quarters of the UK's programme to return more than 1,800 vitrified waste canisters is now complete. Following the conclusion of returns to Germany, the programme will continue with future shipments over the coming years. Waste is also due for return to Japan and Italy.

5. Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) update

5.1. The Government's independent advisor on radioactive waste, CoRWM, visited the **Dungeness A and B** reactor sites in June as part of their ongoing work to analyse the management of waste across UK facilities⁹.

Dungeness A is a legacy Magnox power station that was connected to the grid in 1965 and which stopped operation on 31 December 2006. Dungeness B was an Advanced Gas-cooled Reactor (AGR), operated by EDF Energy. The reactors were closed for maintenance in 2018, with an announcement in June 2021 that the reactors would move into their defueling phase.

Separately, a CoRWM sub-group visited **Sizewell A and B** to help inform a study on current and future interim storage requirements for spent nuclear fuel and intermediate level waste (ILW), considering the UK nuclear legacy, the existing operational fleet and new build¹⁰.

⁸ [Completion of UK's high-level waste return programme to Germany - GOV.UK](#)

⁹ [CORWM visits Dungeness A and B - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰ [CORWM visits Sizewell A and Sizewell B - GOV.UK](#)