

GEOLOGICAL DISPOSAL

Policy Statement 3

June 2019

1. Background

The UK and Welsh Government believe that Geological Disposal is the best solution to the long-term management of the UK's Higher Activity Radioactive Wastes (HAW). Their position is informed to a significant degree by the 2006 **Managing Radioactive Waste Safely**¹ report of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM), the key elements of which were reaffirmed by CoRWM in a series of position papers on geological disposal published in late 2018 and early 2019².

Government accepted CoRWM's view that any siting process for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) cannot be imposed on a community: instead communities must be able to choose whether to enter the siting process, and then offer their consent based on a good understanding of what is proposed and its implications. It has also been acknowledged that local authorities, as democratically elected bodies with clear roles and responsibilities in land use planning, economic development, transportation, waste planning, community engagement and environmental protection, must be involved.

Following the unsuccessful conclusion of the previous Managing Radioactive Waste Safely (MRWS) process, a White Paper on Geological Disposal was published in 2014 leading to the launch of a new GDF siting process at the end of 2018.

Nuleaf and our member local authorities have been actively involved in shaping the current process:

- Nuleaf's Director sat, in a personal capacity, on the Community Representation Working Group (CRWG) established by Government to develop the approach to **Working with Communities**.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-our-radioactive-waste-safely-corwm-doc-700>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/committee-on-radioactive-waste-management>

- We submitted detailed responses to all relevant consultations and used our Steering Group and Radioactive Waste Planning Group (RWPG) as a forum to engage with and advise Government.
- We provided written and oral evidence to the BEIS Select Committee on the **National Policy Statement (NPS)** on geological disposal.

The GDF siting process gives a significant role to local government. Nuleaf will engage with the siting process as it progresses, representing the view of local authorities to RWM, the UK and Welsh Governments, regulators and other interested parties.

To help guide our work we have developed a Policy Statement on Geological Disposal, set out in Section 2. This statement has been developed through discussion with our members and was formally approved by Nuleaf's Steering Group in June 2019.

Further information on the issues that underpin this Policy Statement can be found in:

- **Briefing Paper 17: Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process** which explains current policy on geological disposal in England and Wales, and the role within that for local authorities and communities.
- **Briefing Paper 19: Guidance on Geological Disposal from the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)** which explains the Committee's appraisal of the various options for disposal of Higher Activity Waste (HAW) and the considerations that a GDF siting process must address.

2. Nuleaf's Policy Statement on Geological Disposal

Nuleaf believes that any successful siting process for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) must place local authorities, and the communities they represent, at its heart.

As the Local Government Association's representative body, we will continue to engage with the UK and Welsh Government, GDF developer (RWM) and the regulators to advocate our members' interests; and to build the capacity of our members to engage in the siting process if they wish. We will:

- Support impartially any local authority in England and Wales that, on whatever basis enters, or is impacted by, the GDF siting process.
- Continue to make the wider case to Government and RWM for the best economic, social and environmental outcomes to all communities involved.
- Support and advocate effective and inclusive local siting processes, where communities are able to discuss and learn about all aspects of the proposals, and also to question and challenge.

- Press Government and RWM to recognise the significant concerns that communities have regarding the long-term storage of HAW at Sellafield and other sites across the UK. These communities will host wastes for many decades to come and their role must be acknowledged within the siting process. Community benefits and investment should be provided on the basis of their service to the nation.
- Encourage Government and RWM to engage with and listen to communities on the issue of retrievability of waste.
- Advocate to Government and RWM the need for the transportation impacts of the GDF siting process to be fully recognised and addressed.
- Engage with and represent local government and community interests in any parallel process for the management of HAW through Near Surface Disposal (NSD). Nuleaf believes that any siting process for NSD facilities must be based on voluntarism and community consent.

Our engagement will reflect the diversity of views within our membership and our central role as a supporter of local government. Our meetings will be a forum for open debate and discussion on all aspects of geological disposal. All perspectives will be presented, including the views of those who advocate alternative solutions to the long-term management of Higher Activity Wastes (HAW).

We believe that government should undertake regular reviews of policy to consider alternatives, informed by both physical and social science research, and practical learning from the UK and across the globe. A strong commitment should be made to undertake R&D to reduce uncertainties about long-term safety.

Finally, steady progress with the GDF siting process must be demonstrated, underpinned by a strong commitment from Government and RWM to deliver the facility in a timely manner. Regular reporting on progress is required to reassure local authorities and communities that the development of a GDF is a national priority. Government must also give a clear explanation of what it intends to do if the current siting process is unable to deliver a GDF.