

Meeting: Nuleaf Steering Group
Date: 9th December 2020
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 Geological Disposal Facility and activities at RWM. It covers:

- Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process;
- RWM Update;
- CoRWM update; and
- International 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 It was announced on the 4th November that a GDF Working Group would be formally established in Copeland⁴. This will take forward local engagement on

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 <https://www.copeland.gov.uk/node/45383>

whether Copeland could be a suitable location for the facility, a process that will take a number of years.

Mark Cullinan, a former Chief Executive of Lancaster City Council, has been appointed as the independent Chair. Copeland Borough Council, RWM and representatives of the three interested parties sit on the Group. Cumbria County Council has requested to join the Group⁵, while others including the Cumbrian Association of Local Councils (CALC) could be invited to join⁶.

Cllr. David Moore, Copeland Borough Council's Portfolio Holder for Nuclear Services and Nuleaf's Vice-Chair commented "*Copeland Council's participation in the Working Group means that the council, on behalf of our whole community, will play a key role in the process to establish whether there is a suitable location and willing host community for a GDF in Copeland. Regardless of a final location for a GDF, the Copeland community is affected fundamentally as the vast majority of materials that would go for disposal are located here, and the Sellafield site will be at the front end of the operational phase for decades to come. The fact that there are interested parties within the borough and now on the Working Group means that the time is right for Copeland - as a borough - to enter into the dialogue too.*

We set out our stall that the Lake District National Park should be excluded from any consideration, and I am pleased that this exclusion is fully established in the Working Group's scope from the outset. If there is a potentially suitable location and the process is taken forward, it would absolutely require the community's support before any decisions were made.'

Neighbouring Allerdale Borough Council announced in September that they had also opened formal discussions with RWM on the possibility of establishing a Working Group. It is understood that RWM is also engaged with interested parties in other parts of the country. Nuleaf is happy to provide independent advice to any local authority on the GDF siting process.

1.2 Nuleaf has prepared an article on the GDF siting process which will be included in the December edition of the Local Government Association's First magazine. The article is intended to raise awareness of the GDF among non-Nuleaf local authorities.

⁵ <https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/18898556.cumbria-county-council-group-seeks-join-nuclear-disposal-facility-working-group/>

⁶ <https://copeland.workinginpartnership.org.uk/>

2. RWM Update

2.1 RWM has published its **Annual Review 2019-20**⁷ which sets out the progress made on delivering RWM's mission and plans for future work. The organisation has also launched **A permanent solution for Higher Activity Radioactive Waste**⁸, which outlines RWM's belief in the urgent need for action on the management of the UK's HAW, and added a range of other information to its website⁹.

3. CoRWM Update

3.1 Nuleaf's Executive Director was invited to join a CoRWM panel discussion at the NDA's **Integrated Waste Management event** held on the 20th November. The panel discussed the NDA's approach to stakeholder engagement and what lessons could be learned from experience in other nations.

Nuleaf's Executive Director also delivered a presentation to a closed CoRWM plenary on the 23rd November. This focussed on the role of local government within the siting process. It was agreed that CoRWM and Nuleaf should continue to engage and discuss issues of mutual interest as the siting process moves forward.

4. International update

4.1 The Swedish municipality of **Östhammar** has voted to give the go ahead for a planned repository for Spent Nuclear Fuel (SNF) at Forsmark. The application for the repository and an encapsulation plant (to be located in Oskarshamn) was submitted by the Swedish radioactive waste management organisation, SKB, in 2011. It involves the disposal of 12,000 tonnes of radioactive waste at a depth of 500 metres.

Construction could only proceed if both the communities of Östhammar and Oskarshamn gave their consent – Oskarshamn gave its approval in the summer of 2018. The proposals have also been given the green light by the nuclear regulator (SSM) and by Sweden's Land and Environment Court.

⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/916520/RWM_Annual_Review_2019_20_English.pdf

⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dealing-with-the-uks-higher-activity-radioactive-waste-is-the-right-thing-to-do?utm_source=573e7542-2dd1-4f1c-b992-de147362bc66&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

⁹ https://www.gov.uk/guidance/geological-disposal?utm_source=70cc69c4-7c84-4f48-bcc0-3cf8e6d04329&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

A final decision on whether to proceed now rests with the national government. If this is granted it is expected that construction of both the encapsulation plant and repository will begin in the mid-2020s and take about 10 years to complete.

4.2 Nuleaf's Executive Director participated in an international event on borehole disposal held on the 25th November¹⁰. The event was hosted by SITEX, a European network, and involved Waste Management Organisations (WMOs), regulators, researchers and civil society organisations from 18 countries.

Current UK policy, informed by CoRWM, clearly supports geological disposal over the use of boreholes, but does allow for their consideration in future if technological advances enhance their viability as a disposal means. The seminar heard that while boreholes offer some benefits, for example eliminating the need for workers to be employed underground, there are challenges and risks. These include the potential for waste to become stuck in the borehole above the disposal zone or falling within the vertical section.

¹⁰ <https://www.sitex.network/sitex-network-topical-day-2020-on-deep-borehole-repositories/>