



Report to Nuclear Issues Board

Meeting Date – 7 March 2024
Key Decision – No
Public/Private – Public

Portfolio – Nuclear
Directorate – Place
Lead Officer – Darren Crossley

NUCLEAR ISSUES UPDATE

Summary: This Report is a summary of current developments on nuclear matters relevant to the Board's remit and includes data contributed by Sellafield Ltd and Nuclear Waste Services.

Recommendations: That the Nuclear Issues Board should routinely receive a written update on a range of nuclear sector topics relevant to Cumberland.

Tracking

Executive:	Not Applicable
Scrutiny:	Not Applicable
Council:	Not Applicable

1. Sellafield Ltd

- 1.1. **PFCS retrievals:** Waste retrievals due to restart imminently following modifications to the crane's grab.
- 1.2. **MSSS retrievals:** Silo retrievals continue with 15th skip now filled & awaiting consignment to interim store. Silo Emptying Plant machine currently retrieving waste into Skip 16.
- 1.3. **First Generation Magnox Storage Pond:** In February six skips were exported from the FGMSF to the skip size reduction facility: the first skip exports in two years and another step towards returning to full retrieval operations after an 18-month retrievals operations standdown. ONR recently granted licensing permission to commence transferring skips of

zeolite from the pond to of the new Interim Storage Facility where they will be stored in self-shielded boxes for up to 10 years ahead of storage in the Box Encapsulation Plant.

- 1.4. **Pile Fuel Storage Pond:** The Skip Handler machine returned to full service in January allowing the pond microdigger to be removed for repair and maintenance. Project work has progressed to create access in Bays 3 & 4 ahead of next phase of retrievals. Historic fuel consolidation within the pond continues, achieving circa 900kg of fuel into skips.
- 1.5. **Highly Active Liquid Waste Vitrification Plant:** Vitrification Line 1 – in operation, processing highly active liquor stocks into liquid glass and filling storage containers. Vitrification Line 3 – unavailable. In planned outage – return to service scheduled for June. 107 units/waste containers filled and placed in store. 115 year end forecast.
- 1.6. **High Hazard Reduction/Remediation:** Pile 1 Chimney dismantling – load testing completed on tower crane. Assembly of the mobile demolition platform continues at Leconfield Industrial Estate. AGR Windscale Turbine Hall - waste removals and soft strip has commenced. Calder Turbine and Blower Houses - asbestos surveys have started: will facilitate future demolition activities. Waste Monitoring & Compaction Plant (WAMAC) – skip size reductions operations continue: 25 skips processed this financial year. Chemical collections, loading and dispatch to off-site facility continues. Special Nuclear Materials can repackaging - Finishing Line 4 successfully re-packed the last of the 916 cans ahead of the 2023/24 financial year key target/milestone. This represents the conclusion of a decade of work in preparation and delivery of the re-packaging programme and a significant risk reduction achievement for the site.
- 1.7. **VRR (Vitrified Residue Returns) programme:** Preparations continue ahead of the second return to Germany in early 2025. 4 flasks, out of 7 have been packaged for delivery, with 28 containers placed in each flask.
- 1.8. **Media activity / Stakeholder issues:**
- While The Guardian's Sellafield investigation remains open, coverage has reduced significantly since the turn of the year.
 - SL is continuing to seek opportunities to engage proactively with the media to build more positive portrayals of the Sellafield mission.
 - BBC Radio 4's PM programme will broadcast live from Sellafield on 29 February, featuring news reports on decommissioning and spent fuel management.
 - Filming for the BBC's One Show feature on robotics at Sellafield took place on 1 March. The content is due for broadcast during March / early April.

2. Low Level Waste Repository

2.1. Cumberland Council visit: The Leader / Nuclear Portfolio Holder visited the LLWR site in January, accompanied by senior officers, and received a detailed briefing on current and planned operations at the site including progress on the project to cap the trenches and vaults.

2.2. Capping Project: The Environment Agency (EA) has issued an Action Required warning letter to LLWR Ltd over the continued delay in completing closure of previous disposals at the LLWR site on the basis that this represents a failure to apply Best Available Techniques. In response, NWS is reviewing the schedule and funding of the capping work. The NWS CEO provided a presentation to the September meeting of the Nuclear Issues Board on the LLWR capping project in which he explained the background to the delay to the original schedule for the work. NWS aims to appoint a main contractor for the next phase of the project in May with work starting in July.

2.3. Grout Campaign Completion: The LLW Grout Campaign concluded early February with 251 containers grouted and ready for disposal at the Repository - the first grouting campaign in almost four years providing stock to fill the last remaining spaces in Vault 8.

2.4. TRS Drums: The final shipment of the Treated Radwaste Store (TRS) Drums from Nuclear Restoration Services' Winfrith site was received on 25 January and all of the 1068 drums are now emplaced in Vault 8 – the conclusion of an eight year programme of work.

3. Geological Disposal Facility Programme

3.1. The UK Government announced on 25 January that a further community (South Holderness) had joined the GDF siting process, establishing a Working Group to consider whether to move to the next stage of forming a Community Partnership. Cumberland Council's position on that development was to welcome it and be ready to engage with the relevant local authority involved (East Riding of Yorkshire Council) to share information about our own experience of participating in the GDF siting process. However, following opposition from local influential stakeholders, including the local MP, a motion was tabled calling on the Council to immediately withdraw from the GDF siting process. The motion was debated and voted on at a meeting of full council on 21 February with the result that the Council decided to withdraw. NWS is now winding down the South Holderness Working Group. Further information is provided in this BBC article. NWS also issued a statement on the matter.

3.2. The Leader has provided a "view from the Council" opinion piece for publication in forthcoming editions of the Mid and South Copeland GDF Community Partnership newsletters. The text has been posted on the Community Partnership websites and a copy is attached to this Report as a background document.

3.3. On 1 February, Millom Town Council responded to the Nuclear Free Local Authorities group's letter of December which had urged them and other Parish & Town Councils in the GDF Search Areas to undertake a ballot of residents on the GDF issue. Millom Town Council copied its response to the Leader of Cumberland Council and kindly agreed to our including their letter as a background document to this Report to the Nuclear Issues Board.

3.4. On 11 December, Cumbria Crack published an informative article reporting on a visit to the deep geological disposal facility currently under construction in France. The article is well worth a read for anyone interested in the technical aspects of geological disposal of radioactive waste and provides a helpful insight into what a UK GDF might look like.

3.5. Community Partnerships (CPs) updates:

South Copeland

- Two film nights were held in November to help the community understand the GDF siting process (Millom 24th Nov, Drigg 25th Nov).
- Two geology events were held to help the community understand the latest findings from the seismic surveys (Millom 31st Jan, Drigg 1st Feb).

Mid Copeland

- In February, two Partnership events were held in Beckermeth and Gosforth to help people find out more about Community Investment Funding and meet successful applicants who have already provided new facilities. GDF drop-in events also continued in February with 3 events in Beckermeth, Seascale and Gosforth.
- Youth engagement continues with a programme which includes Seascale Scouts.
- Partnership members are to visit the British Geological Survey (BGS) headquarters in Nottingham in March.

Mid and South Copeland

- The NWS engagement team held GDF drop in events in the areas of Whitehaven, Egremont and Cleator Moor in January - 44 people attended. A further event in Whitehaven is planned for a Saturday, June 1, at The Beacon Portal.
- In February, NWS commissioned Yonder to carry out a telephone survey across Cumbria aimed at obtaining information about levels of awareness, understanding and support for the work of NWS with 525 telephone interviews over a 2-3 week period.
- Aerial surveys off the coast continue (five so far since October) to capture information on the presence and numbers of birds and marine wildlife in the area helping to provide necessary baseline environmental data.

4. NuLeaf Update

4.1. Nuleaf submitted a response to the NDA consultation on their Business Plan 2024-27 and to the NDA Social Impact and Communities Strategy.

4.2. Nuleaf's Radioactive Waste Planning Group meeting on January 31st included discussion with DESNZ on possible reform to Environmental Impact Assessment for Decommissioning Regulations (EIADR); discussion with Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) on the Master planning approach adopted for the Winfrith site; and discussion with NWS on the planning aspects of the GDF process.

4.3. Nuleaf's Annual Gathering will be held in North Wales on the 18th and 19th June 2024 and will include a site visit to the NDA's Trawsfynydd site and presentations on socio-economic projects.

5. Future Nuclear

5.1. The Government published its Civil Nuclear Roadmap to 2050 on 11 January along with two associated consultations on the proposed revised approach to siting new nuclear power stations and on alternative routes to market. See separate Report for more detailed analysis of the Roadmap and advice on the two consultations.

5.2. It was announced in early February that Community Nuclear Power and the Westinghouse Electric Company had signed an agreement to develop a project in Teesside aimed at constructing 4 Westinghouse AP300 design SMRs. Community Nuclear Power stated that it will continue to engage with stakeholders, including Rolls Royce SMR, about a potential SMR project in Cumbria. The Westinghouse press release on the Teesside project can be found [here](#).

5.3. A body called the Chiltern Vital Group has agreed to buy a section of the former Berkeley Magnox power station site in South Gloucestershire from current owners, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College and plans to create a hub for businesses involved in Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) working in partnership with Rolls Royce SMR. For further details, see the [BBC news article of 29 January](#).

5.4. On 25 January, the Department for Energy Security & Net Zero announced that it had awarded a grant to the value of £33.6 million to GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy under the Future Nuclear Enabling Fund (FNEF). The grant funding will support GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy take its BWRX300 SMR design through the UK nuclear regulators Generic Design Assessment process and develop it for deployment in the UK. In December, it had announced a similar FNEF grant of £30.05 million to Holtec Britain to support development of its SMR160 design based on Mitsubishi and Hyundai technology.

5.5. On 20 January, the Daily Telegraph carried an article suggesting AMR developer Newcleo was withdrawing "plans" for an AMR project in Cumbria and is instead

concentrating on plans for a similar project in France, suggesting this decision was prompted by the UK Government's Civil Nuclear Roadmap ruling out considering AMR proposals that involve fuel made using UK stocks of civil plutonium. As the separate Report on the Roadmap says, the Government has indeed make clear to market participants it will not support proposals that involve fuel made using UK civil plutonium. Newcleo is not one of the six SMR / AMR developers shortlisted by Great British Nuclear (GBN) to bid for Government contracts and it is not clear to what extent it may have previously developed any specific plans for a project in Cumbria.

5.6. A group called Britain Remade held a public meeting in Whitehaven in January to examine and promote the prospect of new nuclear power developments in West Cumbria. The meeting was attended by Trudy Harrison, MP and by prospective candidates for the Parliamentary seat of Penrith and Solway. The Council did not attend the event.

6. NDA / UK Policy / Regulatory Developments

6.1. The Council submitted responses to the consultations on the NDA's updated Business Plan and Social Impact & Communities Strategy. The responses are attached to this Report as background papers. The Council also contributed to development of the separate responses from NuLeaf and the West Cumbria Sites Stakeholder Group.

6.2. Other developments include:

- UK Government's updated consolidated policy on Radioactive Substances & Nuclear Decommissioning is due to be published in final form shortly;
- NDA is beginning to develop its Strategy 5 and is engaging on it through the Critical Enablers Theme Overview Group;
- NDA is holding a national supply chain event on 27 June in Telford;
- ONR guidance on site delicensing is due to be finalised and published later this year - reflecting legislative changes introduced by the Energy Bill;
- The process to establish Nuclear Waste Services Ltd as a single legal entity is due to complete at the beginning of April 2024.

Implications: None.

Contribution to the Cumberland Plan Priorities – The Council has a responsibility to monitor nuclear sector developments relevant to Cumberland and to engage on these matters with the Government and nuclear sector participants, supporting the economic development and environmental sustainability priorities in the Cumberland Plan.

Relevant Risks – No risks arise from the proposals.

Consultation / Engagement – No other parties need be consulted about the proposals.

Legal – The proposals raise no legal issues.

Finance – The proposals have no financial implications.

Information Governance – No restrictions apply to this information.

Impact Assessments – No impact assessment is required.

Contact details:

Contact Officer: Jonathan Cook Ext: 01946 598472

Appendices attached to report:

- None

Background papers:

- Council Leader article for GDF Community Partnership newsletters.
- Millom Town Council response to letter from Nuclear Free Local Authorities group.
- Council response to NDA Business Plan.
- Council response to NDA Social Impact & Communities Strategy.