Geological Disposal Facility Project Update

LEAD OFFICER: Pat Graham  
REPORT AUTHOR: Steve Smith

Summary and Recommendation:

This paper provides an update on the Governments intentions for the provision of a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) for higher activity radioactive waste.

Members are asked to;
1. note the current position with the regards the launch of the Government process and the contents of the revised ‘Working with Communities’ policy paper,
2. agree to the suggested programme of Member briefing sessions with a view to determining a Council position on the Governments process,
3. provide any comments relating to RWM’s proposed ‘Site Evaluation’ public consultation and agree to delegate the response to the consultation to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Nuclear and Commercial Services and the Chair of SNEB.
4. Note the publication of a range of related technical position papers published by the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM).

1. Geological Disposal Infrastructure Siting Process

Members will be aware from media coverage and previous Member bulletins that just prior to Christmas on 19th December the Government launched the policy document ‘Implementing Geological Disposal: Working with Communities: An updated framework for the long-term management of higher activity radioactive waste’. The document was launched by a Ministerial Statement, a copy of which is attached as Appendix A for Members information. Following the statement by Richard Harrington (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for Business and Industry) and the publication of ‘Implementing Geological Disposal - Working with Communities’ by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Radioactive Waste Management (RWM), a subsidiary of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, will now begin the search for a willing host community and a suitable site to construct a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF). A copy of the ‘Working with Communities’ document can be accessed via the following link;


This document replaces the 2014 White Paper and is produced following extensive consultation in 2018 which included responses from this Council. Also published at this time were a suite of
documents including regional reports from the Government’s national geological screening exercise. A copy of the regional report covering northern England is accessible via the following link:


RWM also published a draft site evaluation document for consultation, which describes the factors that it will take into account in evaluating prospective sites for a GDF as the process moves forward and which is referred later in this report.

Hard copies of the documents referred to can be made available to Members prior to or at the meeting.

1.1 ‘Working with Communities’ policy document

The final published version follows the format and structure of the consultation draft. In summary the document covers:

- The purpose and status of the document
- The contextual information for the document including background to the policy of geological disposal, the inventory for disposal and how it is currently managed and information on the technical perspectives of geological disposal
- The process of geological disposal and how it will be regulated
- The Working with Communities Policy and how RWM will work in partnership with communities to identify a suitable site for a GDF

1.2 The Siting Process

Chapter 6 of the Working with Communities policy document describes the process of engaging with communities. The following diagram illustrates the stages within the process and the projected timescales.
Initial discussions – this is the start of the process when ‘anyone with a proposal for an area to be considered for a GDF’ can initiate discussions with RWM, to explore and obtain more information. At the end of this initial work RWM may decide that there is little or no potential to host a GDF in this area and will cease the process. If, however both parties wish to proceed they must inform all relevant local authorities before going public with the proposals and starting a dialogue with people in the local area.

1.3 Forming a Working Group and identifying a Search Area

To commence a process of engaging with the community the interested party, RWM, an independent chair and an independent facilitator will form a Working Group. All relevant principal local authorities must be invited to join the Working Group. Although local authority membership is not a requirement it would be preferable. The costs of local authority engagement will be reimbursed by Government and the activities of the Working Group generally will be funded by Government, subject to further advice and guidance being provided by RWM. Parish Councils could also be invited to be involved at this stage. An early task of the Group will be to define a Search Area, which is the geographical area within which RWM will seek to identify potentially suitable sites to host a GDF and will be based on electoral ward boundaries. Defining the boundaries of the Search Area is important in order to identify appropriate membership for the Community Partnership, including relevant principal local authorities, and to determine eligibility for Community Investment Funding. Projects, schemes and initiatives within the Search Area may be eligible for this funding.

1.4 Role of the Working Group

The Working Group will work to identify members of the community who may be interested in joining a Community Partnership. This work will include:

- gathering information about the different people and organisations in the area who will have an interest or who are likely to be affected;

- gathering information to understand the existing geographic, social, economic, environmental, cultural and administrative structures of the Search Area;

- understanding the community’s issues, concerns and questions about geological disposal and the process for identifying potential locations for a GDF;

- engaging with relevant principal local authorities within the Search Area (if they have not joined the Working Group).

1.5 The Community Partnership

The Policy document describes the setting up of a Community Partnership as follows:

‘A Community Partnership can only be formed and continue to operate if one or more relevant principal local authorities in the Search Area agree to participate. There must be at least one relevant principal local authority representing each district or unitary authority electoral ward in the Search Area. In an area with two tiers of local government (i.e. district and county) in order to maintain flexibility, it is not a requirement that both join. It may be, where two tiers of local government exist, that one of the relevant principal local authorities is content for a Community Partnership to continue its work without
it being a member. Where a relevant principal local authority decides not to be a member, the Community Partnership would need to keep it informed of its work. Any relevant principal local authority that does not initially join the Community Partnership may decide to join at any point in the future.

All of the Search Area must be represented by a relevant principal local authority on the Community Partnership. If a relevant principal local authority decides to leave the Community Partnership with the result that part of the Search Area (or, once identified, the Potential Host Community) is no longer represented by any of the relevant principal local authorities on the Community Partnership, then it will no longer form part of the Search Area (or Potential Host Community). The figure below summarises the role of relevant principal local authorities in the process.

The role of the Community Partnership is to:

- facilitate discussion with the community;
- identify relevant information that people in the Search Area and Potential Host Community want or need about the siting process;
- be the key vehicle for community dialogue with RWM;
- review and refine the boundaries of the Search Area as RWM’s investigations progress;
- identify priorities for Community Investment Funding;
- make recommendations to the relevant principal local authorities on the Community Partnership on whether to invoke the Right of Withdrawal and if and when to launch a Test of Public Support;
- agree a programme of activities to develop the community’s understanding of the siting process and the potential implications of hosting a GDF.
• develop a community vision and consider the part a GDF may play in that vision;

• monitor public opinion in relation to siting a GDF within the Search Area and the Potential Host Community.

The Community Partnership could include representation from parish and town councils and other organisations such as the National Park, Local Enterprise Partnership. The proposal is that RWM are members of the Community Partnership.

1.6 Decision making within the Community Partnership.

The document notes that principal local authorities play a crucial role in respect of planning, infrastructure development and service provision in a local area. As such and to ensure democratic accountability the Government has decided that the relevant principal local authorities on the Community Partnership will take two key types of decisions;

• whether to seek to withdraw the community from the process through invoking the Right of Withdrawal (RoW)

• if or when it wishes to seek the community’s views on whether it wishes to host a GDF through the use of a Test of Public Support (ToPS)

All relevant local authorities must agree before any of the above can be invoked and they must be members of the Community Partnership to have a say. Where relevant local authorities do not agree on the way forward in relation to RoW and ToPS then RWM could fund mediation to ensure concerns are heard, understood and attempts are made to address them.

1.7 Community Partnership Agreement

A Community Partnership Agreement will set out how the Community Partnership operates and how it will take decisions. Once signed Community Investment Funding will be made available.

1.8 Community engagement activities

A key activity that the Community Partnership is expected to direct is engagement with the community through for example stakeholder forums, exiting networks and social media.

1.9 Communicating the inventory for disposal

This will be an important issue to communicate to the community. A process of agreeing any future material changes to the inventory would need to be agreed before a Test of Public Support.

1.10 Funding to support the activities of the Community Partnership

Engagement Funding is intended to cover the costs of the Community Partnership’s activities. The scope could include;

• activities through which communities learn about geological disposal;

• commissioning of reports on specific issues;
• accessing independent scientific and technical advice;
• communications activity, such as a stakeholder forum, websites, information leaflets, social media and outreach and information events.

1.11 Access to scientific and technical information

RWM will be the first port of call for technical information on geological disposal and the Community Partnership will be able to call on the Government’s independent advisory body CoRWM and regulators. The Community Partnership may also wish to commission reports and research on specific topics from independent experts.

1.12 Funding for the Community in the Search Area and the Potential Host Community

In addition to community engagement funding, there will be community investment funding through the project in the long term including investment in local infrastructure and facilities. In the shorter term though once the Community Partnership Agreement has been signed, the Government has committed to make available up to £1million per annum per community as Community Investment Funding. This will increase to £2.5million per year where deep borehole investigations take place to assess the geological suitability of a site.

It is proposed that such funding could be used to:

• improve community well-being, for example improvements to community facilities, enhancement of the quality of life or health and well-being of the community;
• enhance the natural and built environment including cultural and natural heritage, especially where economic benefits, for example through tourism, can be demonstrated; or
• provide economic development opportunities, for example employment opportunities, job creation, skills development, education or training, promotion of local enterprise, long-term economic development or economic diversification.

Further guidance on how this money will be managed will be made available but it is expected that the funds will be spent on projects relating to the local economic vision and socio-economic strategies and plans. Funding will be accessed through an open and transparent application process and considered by a Community Investment Panel appointed by the Community Partnership.

Significant additional investment for the host community, which will replace the Community Investment Funding, will be made available to the community chosen to host the GDF. This could include improved local education and skills capacity, improved transport infrastructure or improved recreational facilities. The document states – ‘this additional investment will be significant – comparable to other international GDF projects’.

1.13 Property Compensation

RWM will work with the local Community Partnership in the siting process to assess whether there is likely to be any impact on property prices and consider whether a property support scheme would be appropriate.
1.14 Potential Host Community

The Potential Host Community is the community within a geographical area that could potentially host a GDF. Based on electoral wards the Potential Host Community would include all places where the following would be located;

- proposed surface and underground elements of a GDF;
- any associated development (as defined under the Planning Act 2008 in England) and any land required to mitigate impacts;
- transport links/routes from the GDF site to the nearest port, railhead or primary road network (i.e. out to where minor roads meet the nearest A roads);
- direct physical impacts associated with underground investigations, construction and operation of the GDF (identified though environmental impact assessment work carried out to support RWM’s engagement with communities and its development consent applications).

In some instances, it is recognised that the Potential Host Community may straddle two or more local authority boundaries. The final boundary will be determined by the Community Partnership and may need to change in the future to reflect any future changes to local government electoral boundaries. It is the Government’s view that only residents within the Potential Host Community will have the final say in whether they wish to host a GDF, through a Test of Public Support (ToPS).

1.15 Right of Withdrawal

The community can withdraw from the siting process at any point up until a Test of Public Support (ToPS). The decision on whether to withdraw will be taken by the relevant principal local authorities on the Community Partnership and they have to agree to invoke the Right of Withdrawal (RoW). If one principal local decides to leave the Partnership, then this area will no longer form part of the Search Area but the process would continue in the remaining area. The local authorities may wish to seek the views of Government and the local community prior to taking a decision to withdraw. It is noted that RWM can also choose to withdraw from the process if they concluded that there were no longer prospects of finding a suitable site within either the Search Area or the Potential Host Community.

1.16 Test of Public Support

Government policy is not to impose a GDF on a community. Before RWM seeks regulatory approval and Development Consent to begin construction of a GDF in a particular community there must be a Test of Public Support (ToPS) of residents within the Potential Host Community to determine whether the community is willing to host a GDF.

The relevant principal local authorities on the Community Partnership will take the decision on of or when to hold a Test of Public Support (ToPS) and they must be in agreement. The Community Partnership will choose the mechanism for carrying out the Test of Public Support (ToPS) which could be by local referendum, a formal consultation or statistically representative opinion polling. Funding
will be available to cover the costs. The Government says that there will only be one opportunity for a Test of Public Support (ToPS) in a Potential Host Community but Community Partnerships are expected to monitor public opinion throughout the process. The community’s Right of Withdrawal will cease following the Test of Public Support (ToPS). If the outcome from the ToPS is positive, then RWM will be able to proceed with the necessary consents including the Development Consent process which in itself includes opportunities for public participation. Following the ToPS the Community Partnership may take on the role of a liaison group to provide an enduring interface between RWM and the local community through the process of development, operation and closure of the facility.

1.17 The Way Forward

The Working with Communities policy document identifies a complex process to identify a suitable site for a GDF. As has previously been suggested a programme of Member workshops is being planned to ensure all Members are provided with an opportunity to understand the process and contribute to developing a Council position. The first of the workshops has been arranged for 14th February at 4pm at the Falcon Club in Egremont. Further workshops will be planned over the coming months.

2. Site Evaluation

In addition to the launch of the Working with Communities policy paper in December, Radioactive Waste Management Ltd (RWM), the subsidiary of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority charged by Government to deliver a GDF for higher level activity wastes, launched a public consultation on ‘Site Evaluation’. A full version of the consultation document is available to view by following the link: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766912/RWM_SiteEvaluation_ENGLAND.pdf.

The consultation closes on 31st March 2019. A number of events to support the consultation will also be organised.

The purpose of the Site Evaluation document is to bring together in one place the key relevant existing policy, legislative and regulatory requirements that will apply at various points throughout the Siting Process in order to support a consistent and understandable approach to the evaluation of sites which may be suitable to host a Geological Disposal Facility (“GDF”).

The document briefly explains the background and the history of the accumulation of higher level radioactive wastes and how RWM are to be responsible for the siting, construction, operation and eventual closure of the facility, adhering to the UK’s standards of safety, security and environmental protection.

It then summarises what information they have used to shape their final choice of site evaluation factors including siting process requirements, National Policy Statement requirements and legal requirements before exploring the scope of those factors, how RWM will use the criteria to evaluate areas and sites including comparative assessments and implement the siting process.

2.1 Site Evaluation Factors

The Site Evaluation has been designed to enable:
o a consistent and transparent approach to the evaluation of potential areas and sites;

o an appropriate level of evaluation for each potential area and site against the existing and applicable Requirements, and to support:

o RWM’s future applications for permissions, including land use planning consents, environmental permits and a nuclear site licence.

The six factors that have been developed cover the broad topics of Safety, Community, Environment, Engineering Feasibility, Transport and Cost as set out in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Siting Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety - the characteristics of both the surface environment and sub-surface geological environment at any given geographical location and the safety implications on construction, operation, closure and post-closure of a GDF at that location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community - the potential socio-economic implications of constructing, operating and closing a GDF at any given geographical location, including potential opportunities to enhance the wellbeing of the Potential Host Community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment - the characteristics of both the surface environment and sub-surface geological environment at any given geographical location, and the potential environmental impacts of constructing, operating and closing a GDF at that location and the ability to mitigate those potential impacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Feasibility - the characteristics of both the surface environment and sub-surface geological environment at any given geographical location, and the feasibility of constructing, operating and closing a GDF at that location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport - the potential implications for national and local transport networks of constructing, operating and closing a GDF at any given geographical location, including any enhancements to local networks that may be required at that location and the ability to mitigate those potential impacts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost - the characteristics of both the surface environment and sub-surface geological environment at any given geographical location and the implications of those characteristics on the potential cost (including value for money assessment) of implementing a facility at that location.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The document then goes on to describe those items that would need to be included in each of the siting factor considerations as below.
### Table 2 Evaluation Considerations for the Siting Factor - Safety

The characteristics of both the surface environment and sub-surface geological environment at any given geographical location and the safety implications on construction, operation, closure and post-closure of a GDF at that location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety Case Requirements</th>
<th>The ability to respond to the High level Management Requirements for a GDF to ensure that it can be designed, constructed, operated and closed in accordance with those Requirements.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction Safety</td>
<td>The ability to construct a GDF in accordance with all Requirements relating to safety (i.e. in accordance with a design described in an appropriate safety case).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Safety</td>
<td>The ability to operate a GDF in accordance with all Requirements relating to safety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Closure Safety</td>
<td>The ability to close a GDF in accordance with all Requirements relating to safety (i.e. the potential of a site to isolate and contain radioactive waste away from people and the biosphere for the time required for the radioactivity to naturally reduce).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3 Evaluation Considerations for the Siting Factor - Community

The potential socio-economic implications of constructing, operating and closing a GDF at any given geographical location, including potential opportunities to enhance the wellbeing of the Potential Host Community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communitywellbeing</th>
<th>The wellbeing of the relevant community will be considered in line with all Requirements relating to, for example, potential socio-economic, health and equality impacts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Host Community Vision</td>
<td>The consideration of whether the proposed development of geological disposal infrastructure can be aligned with the Potential Host Community’s objectives or vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4 Evaluation Considerations for the Siting Factor - Environment

The characteristics of both the surface environment and sub-surface geological environment at any given geographical location, and the potential environmental impacts of constructing, operating and closing a GDF at that location and the ability to mitigate those potential impacts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental impact</th>
<th>The potential impact of proposed geological disposal infrastructure on the environment will be considered in line with Requirements relating to environmental impacts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protected Habitats and Species</td>
<td>The potential impact of proposed geological disposal infrastructure on designated conservation sites will be considered in line with Requirements relating to protected habitats and species.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5 Evaluation Considerations for the Siting Factor - Engineering Feasibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Design</td>
<td>The ability to apply 'good design' to produce sustainable infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructability</td>
<td>The ability to design, construct, operate and close a GDF in line with Requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>The ability to design, construct, operate and close a GDF in accordance with all Requirements relating to security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguards</td>
<td>The ability to design, construct, operate and close a GDF in accordance with all Requirements relating to nuclear safeguards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste conditioning and packaging</td>
<td>The consideration of whether there are any particular characteristics of a potential area or site which may prevent wastes that have already been packaged from being accepted. This will include the consideration of whether there are any particular characteristics of a potential area or site that are likely to require significant changes to current waste packaging advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrieveability</td>
<td>The consideration of whether a GDF could be designed, constructed and closed in accordance with Requirements, recognising that during the operational stage waste could potentially be retrieved, if there was a compelling reason to do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6 Evaluation Considerations for the Siting Factor - Transport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transport Safety</td>
<td>The ability to design, construct, operate and close a GDF in accordance with all Requirements relating to transport safety. This will include consideration of Requirements relating to the safety of transport of both radioactive materials (regulated by the Office for Nuclear Regulation) and non-radioactive materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Security</td>
<td>The ability to design and operate a GDF Transport System in accordance with all Requirements relating to security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport impact</td>
<td>The potential impact of proposed transport infrastructure and associated traffic movements will be considered in line with Requirements relating to transport impact, including the ability to avoid, mitigate or compensate for those impacts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RWM will also consider whether a GDF is deliverable within the geographical constraints of the area and site under consideration, and the evidence gathered during this process may identify reasons for RWM to withdraw from the siting process in the area even in the event of a community being willing to continue. The information gathered under the site evaluation process will be utilised in making recommendations to Government and support the necessary applications for consents, permits and licences. As individual sites move through the siting process the level of information required will increase and the complexity of the research methods will increase likewise.

2.2 Responding to the consultation

A number of questions have been suggested by RWM that consultees may wish to use to frame their response, however additional comments are welcomed. Members are asked if they have any specific questions, comments or clarifications that they would like to be considered for inclusion in the consultation response. Responses to the consultation are required by 31st March and it is proposed that the final consultation is signed-off by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of SNEB and the Portfolio Holder for Nuclear and Corporate Services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1:</th>
<th>Consultation Question 1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any other sources of high level Requirements, other than Siting Process, National Policy Statement and Legal Requirements identified, that you think should be reflected in the Site Evaluation and why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Question 2: | Are you agree with the Siting Factors we have identified? Are there any other Siting Factors that should be included and why? |

| Question 3: | Are you agree with the Evaluation Considerations we have identified? Are there any other Evaluation Considerations that should be included and why? |

| Question 4: | Is there anything else that you think we should consider in our site evaluations and why? |
3. Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM)

Members may be aware of the work of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) which provides independent scrutiny and advice to the UK governments on the long-term management of higher activity radioactive wastes. Sir Nigel Thrift was recently appointed as the new Chair of CoRWM. On 7th October 2018 CoRWM published a number of technical position papers specifically in relation to the range of issues commonly raised through the ‘Working with Communities’ policy consultation process including; Geological disposal of radioactive waste – safety requirements, selecting a GDF site based on the best geology, Transport considerations for radioactive materials, and support for disposal rather than indefinite storage. A further paper on retrievability is expected to be published shortly. Members can access these papers via the following link;

https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/latest?organisations%5B%5D=committee-on-radioactive-waste-management

It is worth noting that CoRWM’s view in 2006 was that disposal was preferred over indefinite storage. CoRWM’s current (2018) position is that geological disposal remains the preferred option for long-term management of higher activity nuclear waste.
APPENDIX A

Ministerial Statement made by: Richard Harrington (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for Business and Industry) on 19th December 2018.

As a pioneer of nuclear technology, the UK has accumulated a legacy of higher activity radioactive waste. The UK’s radioactive waste inventory is currently stored securely at various sites. However, each of these sites requires constant maintenance and protection to keep it safe and secure. Geological disposal is internationally recognised as the safest way to dispose permanently of higher activity radioactive waste.

Today I am publishing the policy paper, Implementing Geological Disposal: Working with Communities: An updated framework for the long-term management of higher activity radioactive waste. This document sets out the Government’s overarching policy framework for managing higher activity radioactive waste through implementing geological disposal and how we will work with communities to find a location for a geological disposal facility. Alongside publishing this policy paper, the Government is also today launching a new national consent-based process to find a site to host a geological disposal facility (GDF).

A GDF will be a highly engineered structure at a depth of between 200m – 1000m, which will be used to isolate radioactive waste behind several barriers to ensure that no harmful amount of radioactivity ever reach the surface environment. The structure will feature vaults and tunnels built inside a suitable, stable rock, within which packaged solid waste in purpose-built containers will be emplaced and then backfilled and sealed.

The GDF will be a multi-billion-pound infrastructure investment and will provide skilled jobs and benefits to the community that hosts it for more than 100 years. Delivering a GDF to dispose permanently of the UK radioactive waste inventory is a responsible public service to future generations and will contribute to the Government’s Industrial Strategy, which identified the key role the nuclear sector has in increasing productivity and driving clean growth.

There is no preferred location for a GDF and we are adopting a consent-based process to identify a suitable area to host the facility. A suitable site will be determined jointly by the willingness of a community to host a GDF and the suitability of the geology in the area. The process to find a location for the GDF will be led by RWM (Radioactive Waste Management Ltd, a subsidiary of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority), who will work in partnership with local authorities and other community representatives to find a suitable location. Local authorities will have a key role in the decision-making process and will be required to test public support in the local area for a GDF being located there before construction can proceed.
The policy paper we are publishing today applies to England only. Although the ‘Working with Communities’ consultation was published jointly by the UK Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, as the Northern Ireland Executive is currently suspended, a decision cannot be made at this time on further involvement by Northern Ireland in the geological disposal programme. Future policy decisions in relation to geological disposal in Northern Ireland would be a matter for the Executive.

The Welsh Government consulted in parallel with the UK Government on a similar process for engaging with communities and is separately publishing a summary of the issues raised, and their response to the consultation. Scotland has a different policy for the long-term management of higher activity radioactive waste and is not participating in the geological disposal programme.

Alongside the policy paper, I am also publishing separately a summary of the responses to the Working with Communities policy consultation that took place between 25 January and 18 April 2018 and the Government’s response to the key issues raised. The responses to the consultation demonstrated broad support for the approach to engaging with communities. We have accepted the feedback we received on the benefit of providing additional detail and clarity on parts of the process for working with communities, particularly in relation to the role of principal local authorities.

Alongside this, RWM is publishing a suite of documents that include detailed guidance on how they will work with communities and regional reports from its national geological screening exercise, which will provide communities with information about the geology across the country. RWM is also publishing a draft site evaluation framework document for consultation, which describes the factors that it will take into account in evaluating prospective sites for a GDF.

The response to the consultation on the draft National Policy Statement (NPS) for Geological Disposal Infrastructure and the BEIS Select Committee report on the NPS will be published separately in due course, alongside a revised proposal for the NPS. Overall, the draft NPS is fit for purpose and contains the adequate levels of guidance and details needed by the developer.