

Title – Allerdale and the geological disposal of radioactive waste

Sub-title – A Working group has been formed in West Cumbria to begin the conversation about the possibility of hosting a geological disposal facility (or GDF) in Allerdale

The Allerdale GDF Working Group was formed to start discussions locally about the possibility of hosting a deep geological facility within the area for the disposal of the UK's radioactive waste.

Let us emphasise from the outset that having a GDF in Allerdale is not a done deal. It will be years before any siting decisions are taken or construction could begin so there will be many opportunities for local people to share their views, express their concerns and ask questions.

There's every likelihood that other parts of the country will also step forward to weigh up interest in hosting the facility. The eventual decider, if discussions continue beyond the Working Group stage, will be a test of public support. Nothing will go ahead without a clear expression of local support by people living in the area around a prospective site.

As many readers will be aware, West Cumbria is already temporary home to around three-quarters of the UK's radioactive waste, at Sellafield in neighbouring Copeland, home to the most complex nuclear site in Europe. Around 11,000 residents in West Cumbria including 3000 from Allerdale already work there, and many other Cumbrians and businesses supply goods and services.

You may also know that West Cumbria was involved in a similar siting process back in 2013 and at the time it was claimed that the geology of the whole of West Cumbria was unsuitable for a GDF. Although some areas of West Cumbria were deemed unsuitable on the basis of geology, we do know that parts of Allerdale have potential for a suitable site, particularly deep below the seabed, but we won't know for sure about the deep geology until such time that more detailed investigations are conducted.

The Working Group are neither for or against a GDF in Allerdale, but all of the Working Group members, some of whom live in West Cumbria and Allerdale, believe we ought to be part of the conversation, recognising that economically, many residents and businesses are already involved in the nuclear industry. What the Working Group want to explore with the people of Allerdale are the opportunities that a GDF could bring to the local economy and how it could help to protect the environment and contribute to a sustainable future through significant employment, skills, investment and infrastructure improvements.

For those who may not be familiar with the concept of a GDF, it is a highly engineered facility made up of vaults and tunnels up to 1,000 metres deep underground or under the seabed; solid radioactive waste would be placed in robust containers, safely isolated and contained from people and the environment for thousands of years until the radioactivity naturally decays away and is no longer a hazard. In a suitable geology and at these depths, waste is protected from the impact of climate change and any other events that could undermine the safety of surface-based facilities.

International scientific consensus recognises deep geological disposal as the best long-term solution for dealing with high level radioactive waste, and other countries are already taking a similar approach including Sweden, Finland, Canada, France, and Switzerland.

Environmentally, scientists and the UK government's expert advisors believe it's the right thing to do to transfer waste from above-ground stores that require constant maintenance and eventual replacement, into a permanent facility designed to remain undisturbed for thousands of years, thus

removing the economic, care and risk burden of passing the waste onto future generations to manage.

Our Working Group aims to identify an area where a GDF could potentially be built, led by a broader Community Partnership representative of local people and groups. Despite COVID restrictions, we want to understand local views and in time, we hope to organise events where we can meet people face to face, but in the meantime we will engage through digital channels via our website, social media, virtual exhibition, and newsletters.

We're probably 10-15 years away from a siting decision, so please join the conversation to understand the facts, and talk to the experts who can help build a more informed picture.

Who are involved on the Working Group?

The Allerdale GDF Working Group is made up of a representative from a local business, Genr8 North Ltd, Allerdale Borough Council, and Radioactive Waste Management Ltd (RWM), and the group is managed by an independent chair.

The Working Group have three main tasks - start the conversation, identify a potential search area for further consideration, and identify local people and groups to form a more enduring Community Partnership that could take the conversation forward. We're not alone in Allerdale as we expect more groups, just as they have done in Copeland, to form in other parts of the country over the coming months.

Considering whether a GDF might be right for Allerdale could be a long journey – come with us and tell us your views. If you want to find out more, please visit our website ([Welcome | Allerdale GDF Working Group \(workinginpartnership.org.uk\)](https://www.workinginpartnership.org.uk)), write to us, email us or get in touch via our contact centre (contact details [here](#))

Thank you for your interest and taking the time to read this article.

From the Allerdale GDF Working Group

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Councillor Marion Fitzgerald, representative of Allerdale Borough Council
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