



**Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson, Executive Director - Place**

Report to:	<b>Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>16 April 2024</b>
Subject:	<b>Theddlethorpe Geological Disposal Facility Working Group – 6 Monthly Update</b>

**Summary:**

This paper is the regular update to councillors on the proposals for a Geological Disposal Facility at Theddlethorpe. It recognises that since the previous meeting there have been three main developments in the sector locally:

- 1) Establishment of a programme of Community visioning for Mablethorpe, Withern and Theddlethorpe which will help to provide an evidence base for significant additional investment by government if the Geological Disposal Facility goes ahead.
- 2) Undertaking of public opinion surveys on geological disposal in the area by Nuclear Waste Services.
- 3) Continued liaison with STEP Fusion as they start to implement their siting programme in West Burton, Nottinghamshire, and wider sector development which includes economic opportunities for Lincolnshire businesses and communities.

**Actions Required:**

Members of the Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on the contents of the report.

## **1. Background**

### **Geological Disposal Facility**

At its meeting in November 2021 the Executive of the Council agreed to three recommendations in a paper concerning a geological disposal facility. These were that the Executive:

- 1) Approves acceptance by the Council of the invitation from Radioactive Waste Management (now Nuclear Waste Services (NWS)) to join a Working Group to explore the potential for a geological disposal facility in eastern Lincolnshire;

2) Approves the Council taking up membership of any subsequent Community Partnership that may be formed; and,

3) Identified a Councillor to represent the Council on the Working Group and subsequent Community Partnership. Councillor Martin Hill OBE was identified as the Councillor to represent Lincolnshire County Council (LCC).

The Environment and Economy Scrutiny is asked to remember two critical points regarding Geological Disposal Facilities (GDF):

- Firstly – joining the working group does not mean that LCC supports the concept of a geological disposal facility.
- Secondly – the working group is not where any decision about locating a geological disposal facility would be taken. It is the local community, through a Public Test of Support, who would determine whether a geological disposal facility should be located in the area.

LCC's involvement in a working group and subsequent community partnership has been concerned with ensuring appropriate communication of the facts relating to geological disposal facilities, their impact and potential benefits for local residents, businesses, and organisations, so that when local people make a decision via the Test of Public Support, they are fully informed.

### **Visioning**

The Community Partnership (CP) have acknowledged that the creation of a community vision is important in the process to a test of public support. As one of the most important workstreams of the CP, over the next 18 months the development of a community vision will be a significant piece of work. One significant aspect of the vision is that it must be driven by local people, and the CP have plans to allow and enable the sharing of feedback for several months about the proposed areas within the vision.

Of particular interest to LCC is that the community vision is seen by government as the strategic basis for the consideration of investment in Significant Additional Infrastructure – i.e. roads, flood protection, potentially rail services. This vision is to be funded by NWS, but led by the CP, and intended not to be dependent on a GDF. LCC are represented on the visioning sub-group by officers who will support the CP in achieving an effective and inclusive visioning process to enable residents and businesses to have their voices heard.

Draft visioning statements have been generated by this CP visioning subgroup, and will be developed through engagement with the community:

### **Overarching Mission Statement:**

To create a community led vision, that maximises opportunities for the future, with a view to improve & enhance our Place, our Economy, our Education & our Environment. A vision that celebrates our valued strengths & aims to improve our weaknesses to benefit the lives of all.

#### **Four 'headline' visioning statements:**

- 1) Our Place** - To create a Resilient, Sustainable connected Coast & Countryside, that is a thriving & vibrant place to Live, Work & Visit, a unique destination of choice.
- 2) Our Economy** - To create sustainable all year round employment, harness innovation & maximise all opportunities to reinvigorate our Coastal & Countryside economies, to benefit all.
- 3) Our Environment** - We aspire to protect & enhance our natural & built environments, to create thriving communities, living together in harmony within our natural landscapes.
- 4) Our Education** - To forge new relationships & partnerships, to improve education & skills based employment opportunities to improve the lives and social mobility for all.

#### **Public surveys**

Since March 2022, NWS have commissioned a company called Yonder to oversee regular surveying of residents over the age of 16 within the wards of Mablethorpe and Withern and Theddlethorpe. For each survey, limited scale face-to-face interviewing, of up to 250 people has been conducted by Teamsearch – an independent research agency with expertise in in-person face-to-face surveying – on behalf of Yonder.

This is an NWS commissioned activity and therefore whilst NWS have shared the relevant results with the community partnership, the CP have no influence or involvement on this work. However, In February 2024, the CP agreed to lead a much more detailed local general public engagement plan, to be delivered from June 2024, and also to conduct its own annual survey to monitor public opinion.

LCC is working with the CP to ensure that their work builds upon the existing information, and outcomes are addressed before any Test of Public Support.

Current headline takeaways from the NWS Yonder work are that:

Public Awareness, Understanding, and Engagement with information about geological disposal have all decreased amongst respondees between Mar-22 and Nov-23. When questioned on their understanding of what a GDF is, 20% of respondents provided the correct answer, this indicates that understanding of the geological disposal proposal should be increased for the community to make an informed decision.

When asked what information they wanted to receive regarding the siting process, people most wanted information on: Safety, House prices, and General information on geological disposal. However, 40% of respondees wanted no more information about the siting process.

Towards a test of public support, the community partnership must ensure that adequate information about these concerns is available, particularly on safety and potential risks. Not only must it be available, it must also be sufficiently communicated and understood. There is an important role for LCC to play in ensuring that the issues regarding safety, both positive and negative, are properly understood.

To receive further siting information, respondents' top three preferred organisations to hear from were the Relevant Principal Local Authorities (LCC and ELDC), Local businesses,

and Environmental groups. The CP was placed 6th, and NWS was 15th. Respondents most wanted to receive this information via Post, Websites, and Social media.

The biggest perceived benefits of a hypothetical GDF were: Increased employment opportunities, Improved transport, and Community grants.

The biggest perceived disadvantages were: The impact on house prices, The danger of transporting radioactive waste, and The danger of waste within a GDF.

The preferred uses of community grant funding were on Youth facilities, Coastal erosion protection, and Flood protection.

Before a test of public support takes place, more information must be made available about all the potential benefits and risks of a GDF. As a member of the community partnership, and as a relevant principal local authority, LCC can work with the community partnership to understand the community perspective in more detail. Subsequently, requesting that NWS provide sufficient from their studies on the local suitability for a GDF. As a general consensus now exists globally that geological disposal is the most appropriate method for disposing of nuclear waste, it is also key to examine what lessons can be learnt from the 20 geological disposal programmes being developed globally.

### **STEP Fusion and wider sector developments**

LCC is also engaging with wider developments in the sector to maintain visibility on where there may be complementary opportunities and combined challenges.

A major development is the UK Atomic Energy Authority's (UKAEA) Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production (STEP) fusion plant at the West Burton site in Nottinghamshire, close to the Lincolnshire border. LCC is represented on the strategic steering group by Cllr Hill, and officers continue to engage closely and frequently with the UKAEA on the development of this programme. The government has now established UK Industrial Fusion Solutions (UKIFS), who will now lead the delivery of the prototype plant through to commercialisation beyond 2040. Visioning activities have been launched for the site and surrounding area, with good engagement from Gainsborough and throughout the county.

LCC has also been well represented in wider discussions such as transport, sustainability, skills and education, and supply chain opportunities in Lincolnshire. For both the construction and operation of a facility at West Burton, an increase in the transport of materials and personnel will be considered. LCC officers will push to develop an understanding of how this may connect with logistic facilities and urban centres within the county, such as nearby Gainsborough.

Officers are also working towards a detailed understanding of what skills are required and how these match the skills and training provision available locally. Other initiatives which may complement this are being considered, such as wider sector developments which may have an interest in Lincolnshire, and the recently announced package of public and private investment to support Destination Nuclear's 40,000 expected new jobs in Britain. LCC is also engaging with local businesses who are already looking at growing

opportunities in the nuclear sector, who LCC is now working with to uncover what a wider nuclear supply chain could look like in the county.

Sustainability and bio-diversity net gain are also key priorities for the site, such as how the STEP programme may consider and support the natural character of the West Lindsey environment within the Trent and Belvoir Vales Natural Character Area.

Additionally, officers are also engaging with multiple other players in the nuclear sector who have recognised potential within Lincolnshire. With current national focus on both Small Modular Reactor and Advanced Modular Reactor development, many developers are considering sites for both power plants and manufacturing facilities within the country, including Lincolnshire.

Great British Nuclear, the government's delivery vehicle for coordinating the UK's nuclear industry towards the national net-zero target, has an existing competition to look for an SMR developer to develop a fleet of reactors in the country. There are currently six companies shortlisted in the competition, bidding to construct their small modular reactors in the UK. If successful, these companies may also look to develop manufacturing facilities in the UK. Lincolnshire's strength in advanced manufacturing, and particularly in power engineering, may make it an attractive location for the manufacturers of components or SMR facilities.

To also consider what the wider potential nuclear supply chain looks like in Lincolnshire, LCC will continue to engage with the Nuclear Advanced Manufacturing and Research Centre (NAMRC) in Rotherham. The NAMRC help manufacturers to be 'Fit for Nuclear' supply chain accredited, and already work with multiple 'Fit for Nuclear' companies in the county, with more currently being considered. LCC is also building relationships with those companies who already separately form part of a nuclear supply chain, and will continue to look at inward investment opportunities.

It is worth noting that whilst many opportunities are developing from the nuclear sector, the vast majority of these advanced manufacturing and engineering supply chain opportunities do not involve any nuclear material on their sites.

## **2. Conclusion**

In summary, LCC is continuing to engage with the Theddlethorpe Community Partnership, to ensure that all residents, businesses, and organisations get an accurate picture and full information about what a GDF could mean for Theddlethorpe. Our role is to get the assurance that all views are heard so that when local people make a decision via the test of public support, they are fully informed. LCC will continue to push for greater information in order to understand the technical aspects of a GDF. Considering both the potential benefits and risks of a GDF, particularly with respect to safety. With at least 20 countries intending to develop geological disposal as the best solution for disposing of radioactive waste, it will be key to fully explore both locally relevant concerns, whilst also learning from those international programmes.

Officers are also maintaining an overview of other developments in the sector, such as the STEP fusion programme, the development of Small Modular Reactors, Advanced Modular Reactors, and the potential supply chain opportunities within the county.

### **3. Consultation**

#### **a) Risks and Impact Analysis**

n/a

### **4. Background Papers**

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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