

Community Representation Working Group (CRWG) Q & A

Q. How were the members of the CRWG appointed?

A. DECC has engaged external support by convening a Community Representation Working Group (CRWG) to help develop practical processes for how community representation, the test of public support, and community investment will operate throughout the siting process for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF). It is chaired by DECC and also includes the developer (Radioactive Waste Management Ltd) and other relevant government departments. The Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) will attend the group as observers.

Members, who volunteer their time, bring a range of expertise and experience including from the following areas:

- International experience in siting a GDF
- Community engagement, representation and investment
- Climate and energy communications
- Radioactive waste management and disposal
- Sustainable development
- Environmental psychology
- Civil engineering
- Public relations and stakeholder engagement
- Academic theory
- Ensuring implementable processes

Q. Are you taking into account international examples for working with communities within the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) siting process?

A. Yes, the CRWG is examining international examples, and has members with international experience in this area. This information will be used to inform the best approach for the UK.

Q. How does the CRWG's work fit in with the rest of the Initial Actions in the White Paper?

A. Informed by the review of the previous siting process, Government and the developer are carrying out three 'initial actions', to provide better information to communities before they are asked to get involved in a revised siting process.

The CRWG will be delivering the Working with Communities initial action project which will develop the detailed processes of working with communities, including an approach to community representation, community investment, and the test of public support. Formal discussions between interested communities and the developer will not begin until the initial actions have been completed. The outputs will provide more information to communities before they are asked to get involved in the siting process, with greater clarity on issues like geology and development impacts, community investment and community representation so that communities will be able to engage with more confidence in the process.

Q. What's changed since the previous siting process?

A. The Government has published the 2014 Implementing Geological Disposal White Paper that sets out a number of initial actions that are being undertaken by the UK Government and by the developer to help implement geological disposal. It also sets out a number of key principles and commitments that will shape the subsequent process of working with communities to identify and assess potential sites. We've listened to stakeholders and made a number of changes to the previous process, including a national geological screening exercise, early community investment for interested communities and a clear planning process. Our policy is still that geological disposal is the safest and most secure way of dealing with our radioactive waste in the long-term.

Q. Who will represent local communities in this process?

A. The White Paper does not seek to prescribe the detailed process of how community representation will operate. Instead, it sets out how this process will be further developed, so that it is ready when formal discussions are expected to start.

No decisions have been made yet as to who will represent local communities in the new process; this is for the work of the CRWG to inform.

Q. DECC's consultation excluded County Councils from the decision-making process, but the White Paper is vague on this issue. Has Government changed its mind?

A. The previous process did not give any explicit role to County Councils, and the proposals set out in the consultation were just that, proposals for consultation.

We listened to responses and as a result revised our approach to community representation. We recognise the variety of community types and local authority structures around the UK, and that designing a clear, uniform process of community representation that will carry broad support is not a simple matter.

We have set out in the 2014 Implementing Geological Disposal White Paper our view that all tiers of local government should have a voice in the process of community representation, and also that no one tier of local government should be able to prevent the participation of others in that community. No decisions have been made as to how this will be done; this is for the work of the CRWG to inform.

Q. Why are you cutting local authorities out of the planning process?

A. We are not. The development consent process for nationally significant infrastructure projects is the most suitable route for an infrastructure project of this scale and importance. The Planning Act 2008 enshrines the roles of local authorities within that process, requiring the developer to consult local communities, local authorities, statutory bodies, and other interested parties before any application for consent is made.

Q. Can communities volunteer to participate in the siting process now?

A. We are not engaging with communities yet to find a site nor do we have a site in mind. The White Paper includes important actions that will be completed before formal engagement with potential host communities can begin, including development of national geological screening, bringing GDFs (in England) within the definition of nationally significant infrastructure projects, and details around how community engagement will work. Potential volunteer communities need to know all this information before starting formally in the process.

Q. Why is Government trying to force a GDF on an unwilling Cumbria?

A. The west Cumbrian involvement in the previous process ended in January 2013. We are beginning a revised national process designed to address lessons learned from the previous experience in Cumbria and elsewhere. There are currently no preferred sites either in Cumbria or anywhere else.

Q. What is the test of public support?

A. The final decision to apply for development consent will not be taken until, and unless, there is a positive test of public support for a GDF at the site in question. The precise mechanisms and timings for the test of public support will be informed by the advice of the CRWG.

The Government anticipates that the test of public support would be taken shortly before a development consent application for a GDF itself (at a specific site) was made – as this would be when the most information, prior to construction, was available to the community.

Q. You've said the siting investigations will take many years. Will there be any benefits for communities who participate in this process ahead of a final decision?

A. As set out in the White Paper, the UK Government will make investment available early on in the siting process for a GDF, in order to support the development of communities that engage constructively with the process to find a site (or sites). This will be in the order of up to one million pounds (£1m) per involved community, per year, and will be made available in the early stages of the siting process. The amounts will rise to two and a half million pounds (£2.5m) per year for the community (or communities) that progresses to the stage of intrusive, borehole investigations to assess a potentially suitable site (or sites). This early investment would be retained by the community even if development of a GDF did not proceed in the area in question.

Q. The Government has made vague statements about community benefits for an area that hosts a facility but what can they really expect to get?

A. A community that hosts a GDF will receive a number of benefits over many decades, in the form of skilled employment for hundreds of people, spin-off industry benefits, infrastructure investments, benefits to local education or academic resources, and positive impacts on local service industries that support the facility and its workforce.

The UK Government has also committed to provide significant additional investment to the community that hosts a GDF – comparable to other, international GDF projects, and capable of generating intergenerational benefits specific to the community that hosts a GDF.

Following that, as communities enter the process, the developer will work with community representatives to develop a locally specific plan for how additional funding could best be invested in their area.