

Thinking Ahead – Workshop Report

22nd February 2023

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Workshop Details

Date:	22 nd February 2023
Time:	17:00 – 20:00
Location:	Kirksanton Village Hall
Attendees:	Partnership members: Ged McGrath (Chair), Kate Willshaw, Carl Carrington, John Sutton, Cllr David Moore, Jonathan Cook (Copeland officer) NWS: Anne Broome, Rob Ward, Lucy Clarke, Dawn Walker
Apologies:	Maggie Cumming, David Savage, Kelly Anderson, Cllr Fee Wilson, Cllr Doug Wilson

Purpose

This report captures a record of a workshop attended by Community Partnership members to consider how the GDF Siting Process might conclude in South Copeland, identifying opportunities to ensure that a positive legacy is secured for the local community and area and identifying any Exit Strategy requirements.

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1. Background

Following a workshop in January attended by Community Partnership (CP) members to review progress during the first year of CP operations and to outline a work plan for year 2, this Thinking Ahead workshop aimed to look further into the future, to consider how the Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting Process could play out in South Copeland.

2. Chair's Introduction

The Chair introduced the purpose and objectives of the workshop:

Aim: To consider short, medium and longer term scenarios for how the GDF siting process could end in South Copeland, in order to identify:

1. Activities to be included in the South Copeland CP's work plan
2. Opportunities for Nuclear Waste Services/GDF to leave a positive legacy in South Copeland
3. Exit strategy requirements for different scenarios

The Chair explained that the workshop was designed based on the understanding that:

- There are two pathways for South Copeland – with or without a GDF
- The GDF Siting Process needs to deliver benefits in either situation
- Nuclear Waste Services must leave a positive legacy, whatever happens

3. Local Context

The Chair facilitated an initial discussion of two questions to establish a common understanding of the current local context. Responses are summarised below.

What are the priority challenges for South Copeland?

While there is a desire for diversification of the local economy, in particular around expansion of tourism and encouraging greater local opportunities for young people, the following key themes of challenges were identified – many of which are interconnected and are seen to act as barriers to attraction of investment in development of the local area:

Infrastructure: Lack of investment over the long term due to a lack of local demand (since the decline of historic local industries) has resulted in a downward spiral in the condition, capacity, accessibility and fragility of infrastructure. The issues are anecdotally understood to prevent investment due to the challenge they pose to the cost of doing business and the liveability of the local area. Aging road infrastructure with bottlenecks and single points of failure (closure of the Duddon bridge) can result in major disruption, and there are constraints on rail capacity, limitations on services and aging rolling stock (e.g. diesel engines). Grid capacity is a real constraint on any new development that requires electricity supply.

Rurality: The rural, coastal location of South Copeland presents challenges around connectivity with the wider UK via major transport networks and into the national grid. The cost of

overcoming these challenges (for example, via infrastructure upgrades) is seen to be a cost barrier to investment into the area, despite the need for investment to connect (physically, socially, digitally) rurally isolated people and communities. This has led to the perception locally that South Copeland is a “forgotten community”.

Geography: Crossing the Duddon estuary is a challenge – to travel from Millom to Barrow (9 miles as the crow flies) entails a 24 mile (45 minute) journey. This is an issue locally now, is a barrier to inward investment into the area, and would be a constraint on the GDF project in future. A Duddon estuary barrage was previously mooted to support industrial development on the west coast of Cumbria – this could provide a solution to road accessibility and grid transmission constraints, but will divide opinion due to the potential environmental impact of such a project.

Age demographics: There is an aging population in Copeland generally, which is the district area with the highest outflow of young people in the UK, and especially in South Copeland which anecdotally attracts retirees and returners, due to limited opportunities for young people. There is a desire to increase opportunities for education and employment to encourage local young people to stay and to attract incomers to the area.

Health: The health inequalities of coastal communities were outlined in the 2021 Chief Medical Officer’s report. There is concern in South Copeland that an insufficiency of healthcare provision and long travel distances are widening this inequality gap, and particularly whether the provision serves the needs of an aging population.

Social Challenges: There has been low/no recent major housing development due to grid capacity constraints. Old housing stock is a barrier to upward movement in the housing market and to entry for young and first-time buyers. Anecdotally, many smaller houses are being turned into second homes and holiday rentals/AirBnB-type accommodation, further reducing the availability of accessible first-time homes for younger people and families.

Education: There is no dedicated further or higher education provision within South Copeland, though Furness College is within commuting distance. There is concern that this contributes to reduced educational attainment and lack of opportunities for young people. Education provision needs to be accessible geographically and financially/socio-economically for local people.

An action was identified to consider whether/how to commission work to define the key challenges/needs/wants facing South Copeland within the timeframe of the GDF Siting Process.

What strategies and plans to address these challenges exist?

There was consensus that the starting point for understanding the local vision for how to address the identified challenges should be via the vision and strategies of the Local Authority, which has a democratic mandate and the capability and capacity to undertake this future planning on behalf of local people and businesses.

A number of other sources of information were identified:

- Local Authority vision and strategies e.g. Cumberland Council Plan, Copeland Vision 2040, Local Plans
- Local Town and Parish Community Plans
- Millom & Haverigg Town Deal/Town Investment Plan
- Local Health Plans
- Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership strategies
- Strategies of major employers/sectors – health trusts, HM prison, tourism, nuclear
- Third Sector strategies and plans
- Local housing organisations’ strategies and plans
- Local/regional education strategies and plans
- Cumbria Tourism’s strategies
- Cumbria Coastal programme
- Heritage, arts and culture programmes

4. Scenario Testing

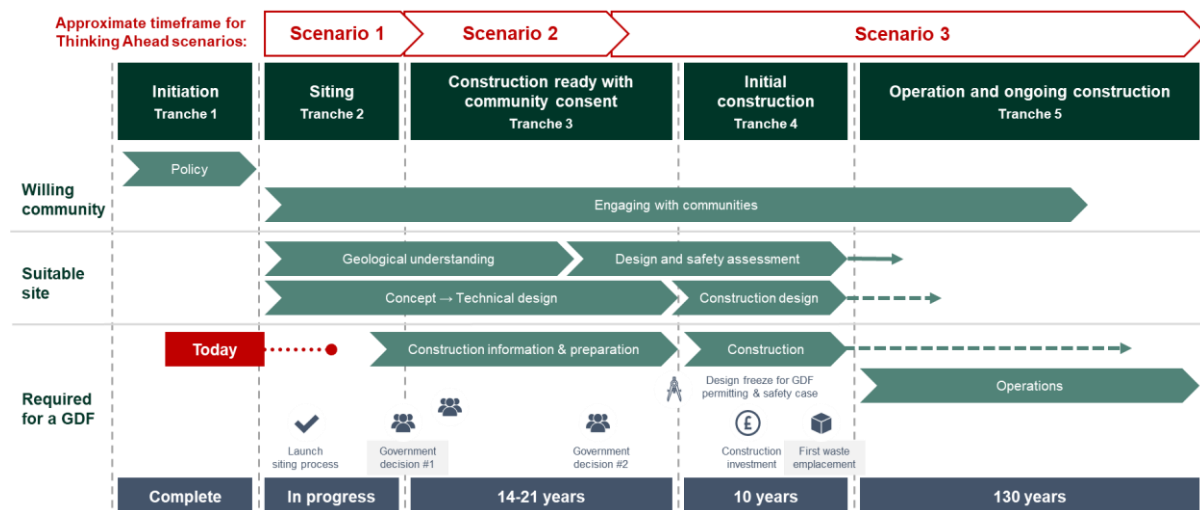
The workshop approach involved considering three scenarios, broadly aligned to the stages (or “tranches”) of the GDF programme:

Scenario 1 – Early Withdrawal of South Copeland from the Siting Process (during Tranche 2)

Scenario 2 – South Copeland progresses to Drilling Boreholes (Tranche 3)

Scenario 3 – A GDF to be delivered in South Copeland (Tranches 4 and 5)

The approximate timeframe for these scenarios is shown below:



Three groups each considered all three scenarios, building on each other’s discussions of three key questions:

1. What would the scenario look/feel like for people in South Copeland?
2. What opportunities exist to leave a positive legacy in South Copeland?
3. What considerations would need to be made for withdrawal/exit from the process?

Please note: the scenarios described below are a theoretical tool for considering different possible futures in order to help the Community Partnership to plan its activities. The consideration of these scenarios does not presuppose any particular outcome of the GDF siting process in South Copeland.

The following pages capture the discussion of each scenario by Community Partnership members during the workshop, as well as comments and input provided via correspondence.

Scenario 1 – “Early Withdrawal”¹

The siting process comes to an end in the next 2-3 years. This could be as a result of NWS Withdrawal or Community Right of Withdrawal, enacted by the Principal Local Authority following consultation with CP members. It could also be the result of Principal Local Authority termination of the Community Partnership Agreement.

At this stage, £1m of Community Investment Funding is available.

There are a number of other communities still involved in the siting process in Cumberland and elsewhere, while South Copeland does not progress to “Tranche 3” of the GDF programme (drilling boreholes).

Scenario 1 – What would the scenario look/feel like for people in South Copeland?

- Early Withdrawal would mean continuity for most people within the Search Area
- GDF is a highly emotive and divisive subject – some will celebrate, others will be disappointed. There is potential to leave a divided community.
- There is a question of how much the Community Partnership knows about the opinions of local people at this stage – further surveys required.
- Losing the £1million per year of Community Investment Funding (CIF) is perhaps the biggest concern. However, there are differing opinions on CIF – some are opposed to it, others see it as an opportunity. It is not the only source of funding in the area.
- Some, but by no means all, will see not progressing to borehole stage and the £2.5 million CIF, and then the later Significant Additional Investment stage as missed opportunities.
- There is potential for South Copeland to feel left out/behind, not benefiting from nuclear investment *again*.
- It is also likely that there would be relief were the Siting Process to progress in another area (i.e. Mid Copeland or Allerdale) closer to where nuclear waste is currently being stored.
- Question raised over whether nuclear waste would need to travel through the area, depending on final GDF location elsewhere.

Scenario 1 – What opportunities exist to leave a positive legacy in South Copeland?

- Community aspirations on this timescale:
 - To appropriately inform the community and support them throughout this process

¹ **Please note:** the scenarios described here are a theoretical tool for considering different possible futures in order to help the Community Partnership to plan its activities. The consideration of these scenarios does not presuppose any particular outcome of the GDF siting process in South Copeland.

- Community benefit from CIF; aim to leave a positive legacy; deliver on CIF commitments including honouring any commitments to multi-year projects;
- To have valuable conversations, enable a vision and raise aspirations for the future of the area, with or without a GDF.
- Investment in South Copeland continuing – particularly if the siting process progressed in Mid Copeland – there should be a ripple effect. Question over whether some elements assisting the programme could still be here – skills college, offices etc.
- Oversight group in place to manage the agreed deliverables as set out in an exit agreement between the CP and NWS.
- To leave the area in a stronger position – CP should be able to demonstrate improvement in community capacity and capability (resilience) to continue to develop and sustainably grow. Do we have a baseline position on how we might intend to measure that?
- This may be best assessed against the clarity of a community vision.
- “Blight” and property evaluations assessed and independently validated. Compensation scheme is in place to address any legacy issues.
- A legacy fund could be established to promote education and skills that will be aligned to GDF skills profile, should the GDF be sited in South Copeland

Scenario 1 – What considerations would need to be made for withdrawal/exit from the process?

- NWS to have an Exit Strategy in place that the Partnership and community are happy with (public consultation needed), and which continues to support local people following departure.
- The Exit Strategy needs to be especially focused on groups strongly in favour and strongly against.
- The Exit Strategy will need to be managed sensitively; there will need to be community consultation and good communications.
- The response from the community will depend on who, NWS, the Community or the Principal Local Authority, withdraws from the process.
- Potential for political fallout – this will need to be managed. NWS and the Community Partnership will need to remain politically neutral.
- The Siting Process will have raised aspirations of what the future could look like – infrastructure improvements, skills development, jobs. Any impact and fallout from the process ending (such as house prices, people leaving the area) needs to be mitigated. Groups impacted need to be engaged with directly.
- This process has also caused division and unrest which needs to be recognised. This needs to be reflected in an alternative future without a GDF which NWS will support; not an exit but a negotiated exit. NWS must have an ethical and social responsibility towards the community impacted. Is there any way we can have an exit strategy that ensures a withdrawing community’s access to any benefits of GDF partnership does not end immediately?”
- What should NWS be doing now to prepare for this scenario?
 - Establish an Exit Strategy and engage with the Community Partnership on this as soon as possible; this must be in place now – not rushed as it happens.
 - NWS has a duty to support Community Partnership members through the process. Community Partnership members are volunteers and being involved weighs heavily on them personally. A welfare process needs to be in place.

Scenario 2 – “Drilling Boreholes”²

Following positive results from the marine geophysical surveys conducted in the Copeland inshore area during summer 2022, South Copeland is one of two communities selected to progress to “Tranche 3” of GDF programme – drilling boreholes to characterise the deep geology.

A Development Consent Order consultation process would be required before this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) could go ahead – a process taking around four years. Thereafter, major project delivery begins involving drilling rigs off the coast. £2.5m of Community Investment Funding becomes available per year.

The boreholes could reveal that the inshore geology is favourable or unfavourable – the GDF siting process could end at this point, or South Copeland could continue to Scenario 3 (see below).

Scenario 2 – What would the scenario look/feel like for people in South Copeland?

- Should South Copeland progress to Tranche 3 (drilling boreholes), the disruption that would be caused is highly likely to result in negativity towards the project – this will be the first true test of community willingness and will foreshadow any future Test of Public Support.
- The process would start to become very real to the local community which may cause community angst - higher level of engagement and support needed to maintain level of trust and support.
- The remote location of South Copeland renders it particularly vulnerable to being cut off e.g. by a relatively small amount of demonstrators, and specifically that Duddon Bridge is a single choke point.
- If South Copeland is withdrawn from the process at this stage, there is still potential for the community to be impacted by the ongoing GDF siting process and borehole drilling due to the proximity to the Mid Copeland Search Area.
- Other parts of Cumbria, adjacent to the area being considered to host a GDF, could experience disruption (for example, due to transport) without receiving any benefits of the GDF project, which could lead to animosity.
- The scale of traffic impact related to Drilling Boreholes on local road infrastructure is unknown at this stage, but is envisaged to significantly increase pressures on an already pressurised network
- The landscape may change from being a place of beauty to a place of protest. Opposition Groups not just local but international may increase and come to the area which may disrupt the transport infrastructure and neighbouring communities. Opposition groups could block off the whole area.
- Robust plan would be in place (agreed with the Local Authority and Developer) with knowledge of borehole and headwork locations (CP may choose to engage an Independent Planning Consultant)
- Community would need to understand:

² **Please note:** the scenarios described here are a theoretical tool for considering different possible futures in order to help the Community Partnership to plan its activities. The consideration of these scenarios does not presuppose any particular outcome of the GDF siting process in South Copeland.

- Spoil strategy would be in place with effective disposal of waste
- Transport strategy to include how the equipment would be transported, what would it look like, what can the community expect
- Environment strategy - due to environmental impact on the area confined space, Duddon Estuary (Special Area for Conservation) Hodbarrow Nature Reserve
- Associated development including impacts of e.g. worker accommodation for increased workforce
- Communications and engagement would be carried out with all communities affected, not just the immediate area
- There could be an impact on current business & tourism (boats that would usually move within the borehole area)
- Impact on Eskmeals Ministry of Defence firing range depending on where Boreholes are sited
- Community may have regrets due to the negative impact the boreholes will bring this may cause original supporters to change their minds
- CP members could be tainted by the process
- Political implications – very small community potentially going to host a massive infrastructure project

Scenario 2 – What opportunities exist to leave a positive legacy in South Copeland?

As Scenario 1, plus:

- Negotiation and agreement of Significant Additional Investment must take place during Tranche 3, before any Test of Public Support.
- South Copeland would be seen as part of the affected community, were a GDF to be located in Mid Copeland; South Copeland should continue to be part of the discussions regarding the Significant Additional Investment especially if a location is chosen in Mid Copeland or Allerdale. The rationale being that the ripple impact of such a huge development (on a scale with Channel Tunnel) will potentially impact on transport networks etc. Investment must strategically impact a huge area of Cumbria and we must all feel the benefits and not just the disbenefits
- Drilling Boreholes may result in development of a skilled local workforce, but that workforce may need to be retrained to retain the benefits locally were South Copeland not to progress to Scenario 3.
- Community building / resilience/ stewardship of land – help with long term recovery may be needed
- Reinstating and improving any transport / road and rail infrastructure following construction activity
- Ensuring that social value commitments by NWS supply chains are delivered, even if the siting process ends in South Copeland.
- In many ways Millom and the surrounding area of South Copeland looks east across the Duddon rather than north to Cumberland. How can any funding and infrastructure development be focused to deliver benefits that reflect this reality?

Scenario 2 – What considerations would need to be made for withdrawal/exit from the process?

Exit from the process during Tranche 3 could be via NWS or Community Right of Withdrawal or, should borehole investigations demonstrate favourable geology, via a Test of Public Support to determine whether South Copeland should progress to Scenario 3.

As Scenario 2, plus:

- If the data from the Boreholes show that the geology is unsuitable, need longer term commitments from NWS to help the Community get back to their new normal
- If the data for the headworks state that the area is unsuitable, but the boreholes continue in the inshore area (in relation to the Mid Copeland Search Area), is there opportunity for South Copeland to still be part of the process?
- Social Value commitments made from the Supply Chain are delivered
- Funded skills & training programme including provision of retraining opportunities for local people
- Rural Impact fund in place to manage the impacts of boreholes on agricultural land
- Independent evaluation of opportunity cost/lost investment due to borehole drilling in South Copeland
- Property value protection scheme in place to address any legacy issues

Scenario 3 – “GDF in South Copeland”³

Following a positive Test of Public Support, South Copeland is selected as the location for a GDF. A Development Consent Order consultation process would be required before this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) could go ahead – a process taking around four years. The construction phase of the project lasts around 10 years.

As well as the direct and indirect investment in delivery of the GDF project, Significant Additional Investment becomes available to help to deliver the community’s vision for South Copeland.

Scenario 3 – What would the scenario look/feel like for people in South Copeland?

- Infrastructure investment would be required to deliver the GDF in South Copeland. This may be perceived as positive and could help to address some of the challenges identified for the local area but will cause major disruption that is likely to generate negativity.
- The concern will not just be about 100,000s years for disposal, but also about the impact of the long-term project itself on the next few generations of local people?
- What other investments could improved local infrastructure facilitate?
- Likelihood of significant protest by local, national and international groups – this starts at Tranche 3 during Development Consent process for boreholes – this is the point that the

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project is no longer theoretical for local area – disruption will result in a groundswell of negativity including from those in close proximity to but outside of the Search Area.

- “Chaos for local residents”
- There could be demographic changes within local population versus now – opinion could change. Difference in concerns between different age demographics?
- Risks of detriment to local house values – possibility of “trapped” homeowners while landowners potentially benefit.
- Risks of impact on landscape and tourism industry.
- Climate change – parts of South Copeland could be below sea level within timeframe for Tranche 4/5 – headworkings would be affected within 21st century.
- Impact of rising sea levels on existing and required associated infrastructure could undermine ability to deliver the project in South Copeland.

Scenario 3 – What opportunities exist to leave a positive legacy in South Copeland?

As Scenario 2, plus:

- Longer term strategy for ensuring that £multi-million CIF awarded into South Copeland by this point will create a lasting legacy by empowering local communities – local strategic oversight arrangements required to ensure sustainability. Example given of long-term programmes to help local people to connect with their locality by expressing their creativity and entrepreneurship, with benefits for regeneration of local towns/economies.
- Availability of sustainable/low-carbon solutions for local people and businesses
- Investment in town centre that promotes activity and experience – future of the high street, mental health/isolation/community benefits
- Challenge/concern around public confidence that Significant Additional Investment will materialise – to retain ongoing significant central Government funding requires ongoing broad political backing at a UK level. South Copeland is remote from Westminster and Whitehall and historically carries little political weight.”

Scenario 3 – What considerations would need to be made for withdrawal/exit from the process?

- Would the Community Partnership still have a role after a Test of Public Support? The *Working With Communities* policy does not provide for this, but the Partnership could decide to continue in another form.
- Negotiation and agreement of Significant Additional Investment must take place during Tranche 3, before any Test of Public Support.

5. Conclusions

Key Findings

What could/should/must we (South Copeland CP or NWS) start doing now to prepare for these potential scenarios?

- Local challenges are anecdotally well understood – but robust evidence is required to inform CP planning, especially in relation to understanding the potential for Significant Additional Investment to address these challenges. A piece of research could be commissioned to provide this evidence.
- Key topics requiring further work were identified:
 - Development of Exit Strategies – understand NWS’ obligation to communities in any given exit scenario and build CP exit strategies around this;
 - Development of a longer-term CIF strategy to secure a legacy of increased capability, capacity and resilience for South Copeland;
 - Community Vision – conduct a review of the Cumberland Plan and local strategies and plans, and map these against direct and indirect GDF project investment, and Significant Additional Investment;
 - Implications for South Copeland of the potential for other communities in Cumberland to progress further in the siting process;
 - Activities to understand what the borehole project and its impacts (including protest activity) will look like – via access to international experience, site visits or other means.
- NWS to provide information on the support available to CP members in recognition of personal/professional implications of being the public face of the siting process.

Next Steps

Three immediate next steps were agreed:

1. NWS support team to circulate a draft report (this document) for CP member comment
2. A final report to be produced, incorporating comments from CP members
3. Chair to arrange a follow-up workshop to review report, actions and agree next steps