

Review of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership

This document presents an external review of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership – established as part of the siting process for a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF).

Personal information has been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and the UK's data protection legislation.

A separate 'Review of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership – Actions' document is available on the Community Partnership website.

Statement from Nuclear Waste Services: *"NWS commissioned an external review of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership to ensure that it is effectively fulfilling its purpose and meeting the needs of the local community."*

"As set out in the UK Government's Managing Radioactive Substances and Nuclear Decommissioning Policy Framework, Community Partnerships play a key role in facilitating discussions about geological disposal with the community."

"The findings and recommendations within the report have been carefully considered, and a set of actions established."

"NWS looks forward to working as part of the South Copeland GDF Community Partnership to take forward actions to address the matters highlighted in the report."

Review of South Copeland GDF Community Partnership

Executive summary

The South Copeland Community Partnership was established 3 years ago and has, over the past 18 months, become dysfunctional, chiefly because of the different emphasis and interpretation that members place on policy and priority of activities.

Following a significant number of interviews and review of partnership documents and activity, three options have been suggested to address the challenges identified.

The reviewer's recommendation is Option 2 South Copeland Partnership refreshed, a facilitated change managed process to resolve the highlighted issues and rebuild a partnership able to deliver within its identified community.

1. Introduction

South Copeland GDF Community Partnership search area covers the Cumberland electoral wards of Millom and Millom Without. It has a population of c8,000. Millom town is considered to have significantly more contributing factors to deprivation scores than the neighbouring areas. Millom without tends to be more affluent, often with commuters to Barrow or Sellafield and has a higher number of 'off comers'. This electoral ward also contains areas either in the LDNP or identified for the expansion of the park. Whilst the whole area is beautifully situated between fells and coast, it is relatively isolated with people looking south towards Barrow rather than feeling part of Cumberland.

Community Partnership membership

The Community Partnership is currently made up of the following members:

- Ged McGrath – Chair
- Kelly Anderson – NWS representative
- Cllr Bob Kelly – rPLA representative
- Kate Wilshaw – Friends of the Lake District representative
- John Sutton – Sustainable Duddon
- Carl Carrington – Millom Without Parish Council representative
- Chris Gigg – Drigg and Carleton Parish Council representative
- Maggie Cumming – Whicham Parish Council representative
- Cllr Andy Pratt – Millom Without Cumberland Councillor and CALC representative
- Ben Daniels - Individual

Review Scope

In December 2024, a review of the South Copeland Community Partnership (SCCP) was commissioned by Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) following concerns raised by Millom Town Council in a motion where they voted to step down from the Community Partnership.

The review brief was shared with NWS employees and Community Partnership members and is as follows:

Purpose:

Review the approach of the South Copeland Community Partnership to provide confidence that it is fulfilling its purpose, as defined in UK Government Policy, and meeting the needs of the community.

The key point of reference for the review shall be the UK policy framework for managing radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning, hereafter referred to as ‘the Policy’¹.

Scope:

1. *Review progress made by the South Copeland Community Partnership against the role of the Community Partnership as defined in the Policy (Appendix 1, paras 30-53, page 97-103).*
 - a. *As part of this, the review will consider the extent to which all members are contributing to the progress of the Community Partnership.*
 - b. *Additionally, for the rPLA, NWS and the Chair, this will also include consideration against the role descriptions set out in in the Policy at Appendix 1, Table 2, page 101.*
2. *Consider what amendments could be made to the CPA to address matters identified in part (1) above.*
3. *Recognising that the Policy defined role of a Community Partnership takes precedent, review the South Copeland Community Partnership against the concerns raised by Millom Town Council in their letter of 28/11/24 and repeated below:*
 - *Public engagement in Millom & Haverigg is currently non existent*
 - *There is no evidence of engagement with our young people who ultimately will be the generations that will deliver the project if it goes ahead.*
 - *The makeup of the partnership does not reflect the community as the voices that dominate it are from outside on the town.*
 - *The poor behaviours of members in meetings have been witnessed by several councillors who have reported back on an obsession with minutes and documents rather than focusing on actions that benefit the community.*
 - *It has been observed that members of the partnership are pushing an agenda of not trusting the developer which undermines the principle of putting the decision making in the hands of the public.*
4. *Where required, develop recommendations for changes that will assist the South Copeland Community Partnership in being able to operate effectively in meeting its Policy defined role.*

2. Methodology

The following methods were used to collect evidence against the review scope:

1. One to One interviews with an option of teams or face to face were offered to all CP members. Interviews took place in December 2024. Two CP members were not available
 2. Review of Community Partnership agreement and sub- groups terms of reference.
 3. Selected review of CP minutes and meeting notes,
 4. Review of content of web site, newsletters etc
 5. Reference to UK Policy frame work for managing radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning as in ‘Brief’
 6. Role profiles
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3. Scope Point 1: Review progress made by the South Copeland Community Partnership against the role of the Community Partnership as defined in the Policy

Facilitate discussion with the community

There is evidence that discussion has taken place in a number of formats, including larger exhibitions, one to ones, community forums and using a variety of media. There has been an opposing voice in the area which at times has been challenging to partnership engagement.

There is a feeling that there is little more to tell people, but the visioning work could compensate for that. However, the blockage may well be the attitude of the partnership whose focus is elsewhere. There are new NWS staff in post and it is essential that they have a meaningful role and could address the current lack of engagement in Millom and Haverigg by building on the recent visioning survey. There remains a lack of engagement with young people which needs to be planned with imagination and support.

There is a desire in the partnership to commission a social impact survey. Whilst the method of doing so is one of the contentious issues amongst some Partnership members, some thought could be given to how this could be achieved within the restraints of procurement or potentially there could be a sharing of NWS work already undertaken. This should not prevent meaningful dialogue on GDF topics within the community.

Suggested action; The CP could develop a new engagement plan for reaching all sections of the community. Audience segmentation, timings and methods should be agreed.

Identify relevant information that people in the search area and potential host community want or need about the siting process.

The partnership has produced some good newsletters which evidence responses to concerns which have been highlighted or information which has been requested. There is useful information on the web site. NWS subject matter experts and senior staff have visited both the partnership meetings as well as community events.

It is not always helpful that work in progress is shared by NWS at a very early stage as this then highlights the delivery time lag and appears that they are withholding information. This is then capitalised on by those within the Community who wish to challenge policy or competence of NWS. There was, during the interviews, a limited view of visioning and the information people, particularly business and young people, might require to be able to contribute in a meaningful way.

Suggested action; Explore available information that particularly businesses and young people would be interested in knowing more about and review and agree the communications plan to meet those needs.

To be the key vehicle for community dialogue with NWS

This is tricky if the role of the partnership is viewed as holding NWS to account. There was evidence that it was other agendas rather than community concerns that were being prioritised. This is partly demonstrated in the public engagement at the partnership meetings. Questions raised are often confrontational and then some expressed that it was difficult to respond to appropriately because people quickly took various stances.

Suggested action; There is a need to revisit and understand the NWS timeline and ensure that information exchange between NWS and the Partnership is better planned.

Review and refine the boundaries of the search area as NWS investigations progress.

The partnership has needed to address the movement of Drigg and Carlton into its search area because of ward boundary changes. Although not a natural fit, the representative for Drigg and Carlton Parish council is actively engaged.

It is unlikely this will be a priority in the near future, unless the boundary changes again with the current local Authority electoral review.

Identify priorities for Community Investment Fund

The partnership has awarded the £3m available over the last 3 years with a healthy pipeline for year four. One of the surprising finds from interviewing members was that the majority of the partnership members don't want to engage with the Community Investment fund and there is no recognition that they have a duty to sign off the awards. Until recently, the panel had only NWS, rPLA and the chair as members but recently two others have joined. A significant portion of each years spend is towards the community hub project which carries a commitment until 2026. The Panel follows policy criteria without any local analysis built into their decision making.

Suggested action; An action for the whole Partnership could be to agree local priorities, such as supporting local regeneration, and revise the CIF plan based on those priorities.

Make recommendations to the relevant rPLA on the partnership on whether to invoke the right of withdrawal and when to launch a Test of Public support.

It is too early in the process for this but it should be noted that recently one parish undertook a survey and there has been questioning around when a test of public support will happen and in what format.

Agree a Programme of Activities to develop the community/understanding of the siting progress and the potential implications of hosting a GDF.

There was a delivery plan for 23/24 and 24/25 with all targets being met. These were not ambitious but realistic given the challenge of getting commitment from the partnership to move forward. The delivery plan highlights the difference between partnership deliverables and what is discussed in partnership meetings and also occupies the time of the sub-groups.

Suggested action; Key components of a Programme of Activities could include; creating a vision, allocating CIF monies and a comprehensive community engagement plan. Good practice would make sure the Partnership has a delivery plan with milestones which the Partnership could use to define their agendas and measure progress.

Develop a community vision and consider the part a GDF may play in that vision.

Despite visioning being a requirement and the available support being in place since the Partnership was formed, this has only just begun to be addressed. The methodology used to kick start the process was to door drop post cards to be returned to NWS. There has been a good return rate and now the challenge is to take this work forward ensuring that a cross section of people from all sectors are involved. This needs to be the priority work for stakeholder and community engagement but it is not seen as such by some members.

Suggested action; The Partnership could build on the initial work to develop an action plan and explore potential for joint working on visioning with Mid Copeland.

Monitor public opinion in relation to siting a GDF within the search area and potential host community.

Yonder, a contractor of NWS, has undertaken several surveys and the partnership have also collected their own data at events. There has been a vocal group opposed to the development whose views have been captured. Myths around the prison site and other areas have needed to be addressed. In general the feedback is much as expected, with wider issues of 'spoil heaps', traffic noise and questions regarding workforce dominating. Several interviewees thought the identification of the areas of focus would be helpful as it would 'concentrate minds'.

Suggested action; The partnership could consider timing of when the next yonder survey is appropriate and allow the Partnership to work with them to produce a meaningful report.

Comment.

On initial investigation this appears to be a well organised and managed partnership with everything in place. However, undertaking the interviews with Partnership members, rPLA and NWS team soon illustrated a very different picture of deep-seated dissatisfaction with almost every aspect depending on personal views and beliefs, delivery responsibilities or simply a sense of frustration of non- action.

Although the supporting documentation is in place, it is not 'owned' by the Partnership and is in need of updating in line with Policy and onward reporting requirements.

Everyone spoken to was very open and honest about how they viewed the situation, and all were keen to move forward albeit on different agendas. The interviews planned for 30 mins each, actually averaged over an hour. These demonstrated that progress will not be straight forward as the understanding of policy, the role of the NWS local team and the role of the partnership members is viewed very differently. There is a cluster who believe their role is to monitor the developer or even hold them to account and see the developer as a barrier to doing the work they identify needs to be undertaken. Whilst there are others who are keen to do more engagement with a wider diversity of the population.

The local NWS employees are placed in an impossible situation torn between an organisation that requires delivery and a partnership that wants different objectives depending on personal views and aspirations. One very noticeable point was that NWS staff were referred to as the 'secretariat' (also in the CPA) and seen very much as an administration function with little concept of their skill base or job descriptions.

Two case studies were considered in some depth as they were raised by almost everyone interviewed, whether partnership members or NWS employees.

The first related to whether the Partnership should have its own web site. This was the result of an apparent lack of response to the question of extracted waste material from underground working.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This led to the Partnership requesting their own web site, built and managed locally. Instead of explaining why and closing down the request speedily, NWS allowed this to rumble on with the rPLA becoming involved. This has led to other issues around procurement, challenge to policy and the 'us and them culture'.

The second related to the honorarium for the Chair and the need to change the CPA. This was an agenda item in the closed part of a community partnership meeting but without a paper explaining the context. This made it a personal issue for the current chair. The proposal was then taken to Parish Council meetings for councillors to vote on again with only verbal reference. The point that the honorarium was to alleviate expenses claims was totally missed and a decision made by non-partnership members. This is an excellent example of the need to be clear regarding representation and decision making.

Membership of the Community Partnership

There is guidance in the Policy at Appendix 1, Table 2, page 101 and in the Community Guidance booklet page 39-40.

Relevant Principal Local Authority is now Cumberland having become a unitary authority 1/4/23 replacing the District Council of Copeland. The elected councillor representative is Cllr Bob Kelly (Millom electoral ward) who is supported by Jonathan Cook as the officer with nuclear responsibility. Both Bob and Jonathan attend meetings and provide feedback into Cumberland.

Cumberland Unitary authority have considerable interface with the nuclear industry because of the siting of Sellafield, Drigg and the various supply chain industrial sites and science parks. They are keen that the community is well informed and that any opportunities are taken to enhance the infrastructure and other benefits that may ensue. They understand their role in the withdrawal process and the test of public support.

There is regular engagement between NWS and Cumberland with both officers and elected members. There is an NWS funded but jointly managed consultancy led project to consider the wider opportunities a GDF may present for Cumberland and this work includes a focus on South Cumberland.

Cumberland Cllr Andy Pratt (Millom Without) also sits on the partnership but in the role of the nominated CALC representative for the parish councils in his ward.

NWS representative on the partnership is the Community Engagement Manager (CEM), providing continuity from working group to the Partnership over the past three years. They are an experienced community engagement Manager having previously worked for the NDA. The CEM and has acted as the conduit between the partnership and NWS supporting the Chair.

There is a difficult balance between NWS senior people attending meetings or not being present as in this partnership it is seen as an opportunity to challenge, yet NWS's role is to inform. It was also suggested that it can appear that the Chair needs support from NWS to ensure he 'holds the line'.

From the minutes of meetings, it is clear that there have been presentations in a timely manner on all the key issues e.g. Property Compensation Scheme. Consistently over the past year, minutes are not only challenged but considerable action points are raised. Following these through is time consuming, particularly as an additional factor has been the delay in recruitment to vacant posts. This has meant that the staff in post have needed to cover tasks that have compromised their own higher-level work.

At partnership level, The Community Engagement Manager, and her team, have delivered what was asked but felt restricted by the partnership members who 'wouldn't let them do certain things'. This is difficult to understand and bottom out in the interviews as NWS could have taken the lead on, for example, engaging in schools or with young people. However, it became more evident that this was underpinned by partnership members who questioned the 'Policy', the role of NWS and reinforced the secretariat labelling. A key factor in preventing certain actions is the need for (stated in the CPA) the partnership to give unanimous support or a majority vote in a culture that has created its own agenda of challenge to NWS.

The Community Engagement Manager and her team should have been more strongly supported by their NWS line managers and a much firmer stance taken in ensuring the policy is understood and adhered to. The delay in appointing staff has also contributed to non- delivery.

Suggested action; Consideration should be given to the NWS representation on the Partnership.

Community Members are defined as organisations and individuals that reflect the make -up of the community. Suggestions of who these may be are indicated in the Community Guidance.

The Working Group influenced the membership of the Community Partnership by basing it on Town and Parish Council representatives. This model had worked well for the representative groups/committees at Sellafield. However, this gave an imbalance of representation which over time has become more of an issue because of the different aspirations of the communities. It is seen as unfair representation with Millom having c7,000 population and only one seat. It also means that the balance between the urban and rural influences alongside deprivation and affluence are not reflected in the engagement with stakeholders and the wider population.

The Partnership has recruited additional members to represent Friends of the Lake District (with experience of environmental issues and community consultation), a local business man to assist the

understanding of small businesses in the area (he has since resigned), a representative from Sustainable Duddon and a representative from Drigg and Calton PC following boundary changes. Recently an independent member has been recruited with nuclear engineering experience.

Several people interviewed expressed the opinion that the partnership membership was not reflected of the community and largely self- appointed by default. Unfortunately, few people come forward to be councillors, so in these areas they are non- elected members and representation from councils is usually unchallenged. The CALC representative was the only nominee. The Chair, originally the Millom representative, was replaced on election to enable independence.

CALC representation has been challenged by parish councils, as has the agreement negotiated with NWS for reimbursement of approved expenses incurred by a parish councillor undertaking GDF related activity. It is therefore not only partnership agenda items that are questioned.

There was a feeling amongst some of the members that recruitment efforts had been half hearted and more should be done to improve diversity. When challenged as to what diversity meant and whether it would be useful to have people who could lead the work streams, it was clear these issues had not been seriously considered. Only one partnership member mentioned younger person representation and others were happy to add more members providing the Parish Council model was also maintained. This was reinforced by reference to the skills already provided by existing members, particularly the ability to interpret policy, understand local government and write commissioning bids.

From the interviews, it was clear that there was a lack of clarity as to whether the community representatives are empowered to make decisions and truly understand their role and where their focus should be. This means that any community partnership decision needs to be taken back to the parish council meeting and be discussed and potentially voted on by the parish councillors. This not only causes delays but means that people who have not been inducted or are knowledgeable regarding GDF policy or developments are having a significant influence over progress.

Some decisions may well be outside of the legal responsibilities of a Parish Council. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Definitions within the Policy were challenged strongly by four members and even seen as a tool for NWS to block original thinking and action by the partnership. The concept of a team comprising NWS, rPLA, partnership members supported by the NWS local team was replaced by the belief that NWS needed to be held to account. This means that the focus of work changed and maybe the contributing factor to the 'partnership won't let us' attitude.

Reference was made to the need to challenge the minutes, particularly since the previous administration support officer had left a year ago. It was felt that accurate minutes were essential if they are to be posted on a public web site.

NWS have never truly grasped the issue of representation and individual decision making or the need to have a policy to encompass volunteering. The lack of these has contributed to the current situation as there is no mechanism for being able to address the underlying issues within this partnership.

Equally, partnership members need to be interviewed for their role, have clear role profiles (with expectation criteria) and be properly inducted thereby managing expectations and focusing effort.

Suggested action; Consider reflecting schedule 1 part 3 of the Policy in the CPA

Suggested action; Partnership members are volunteers with expenses reimbursement. NWS should develop a fit for purpose volunteering policy which could then be referenced in the CPA.

Suggested action; The CP should review the composition of membership to enable progress of the Programme of Activities.

The Chair's role is to ensure the work of the CP is fair, unbiased and reflects the needs of the community. On a personal level, the Chair is well liked and respected resulting in his tenure as chair extended for a further two years until 3/3/25. However, as the partnership meetings have become more challenging, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The majority expressed some sympathy and were clearly fed up with the continual review of minutes and inability to discuss more important agenda items. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They look forward to the election of a new chair and are busy writing the role profile and election protocol. When challenged as to why they think this is necessary, the need to distance from NWS was the key factor. [REDACTED]

The general consensus is that the meetings need to be managed more efficiently with much stronger agenda management that reflects a more ambitious work plan with proper supporting paperwork. This will only be effective if there is clarity of representation for decision making.

4. Scope Point 2: Consider what amendments could be made to the CPA to address matters identified in Scope Point 1.

Supporting documentation

The Community Partnership Agreement is a standard non legally binding document with the opportunity to define in Schedule 1 how the partnership will operate most effectively in the identified search area. Once initially agreed, it should be reviewed annually and submitted to NWS legal team for an overview check.

The CPA has been revised for example to make changes following the creation on the unitary authority. It is currently being reviewed by the Operational Sub- group but the revised version is not ready to share. It would assist the partnership to move forward if section 8 in the main schedule was clearer.

Consideration needs to be given to section 3 within schedule 1. This could deliver the clarity required for representation, deputies and induction of new members. There needs to be thought given to the length of office of partnership members rather than removal being voluntary or because of poor performance. The thorny issue of expenses and the honorarium need to be addressed. There is no logical reason why the chair of this partnership should be treated differently from other chairs. The other items in schedule 1 just need to be reinforced and abided by. This includes the true representation of members to reflect the community. The sub -groups are mentioned but not defined. Doing so may ensure that the partnership can be structured to deliver more productively.

The mission statement is unclear and needs a vision statement and underpinning values to ensure it is the overarching aim and the programme of activities can follow. This would make a more joined up approach and keep the focus on partnership deliverables.

General sub- group terms of reference are used as a basis and then each sub -group has its own actions to deliver. A question remains as to how partnership activity is recorded, reported and monitored.

Sub groups used in other partnerships which have worked well in delivering outcomes would be communications, community engagement, youth, employment, CIP, visioning, programme of activities, governance.

Communication and community engagement have been combined to make this the delivery arm of the partnership. Although there is a strong link between these areas, the amount of work is significant. This means that certain topics emerge and appear to dominate rather than focus on the delivery plan for the year or consider the results of the various surveys and activities.

Contentious issues have been the web site and the process for commissioning a social impact report. The latter is interesting as an illustration as to difference of interpretation of Policy. Partnership members raised the question, 'If the partnership can commission independent reports, why do they need to utilise the NWS processes? The web site proposal for a partnership managed web site was mentioned by everyone as an example of what goes badly wrong.

Operations sub group has been set up to manage the partnership by encompassing the programme of activities, governance, review the CPA, membership recruitment and agenda setting. The tone being to 'manage' and therefore control rather than steer. Currently it is bogged down in redefining the chair role profile and appointment process. It was openly said that this was to deal with the relationship with NWS and some of the perceived non delivery. However not all agreed on what had not been delivered. Again, the scope of this group is too big and much better use could be made of the CP Operations Manager role to support this work.

The Visioning sub -group is relatively new but has made a good start with a door drop producing a significant return. How this is now taken forward was unclear and who will drive it.

Community Investment Panel is supporting the distribution of the £1million available to the partnership. The money has been consistently well spent over the past three years and most applications are approved, supported by a healthy pipeline. In the past six months some additional criteria has been developed but there is no policy on distribution as such. One partnership member was frustrated that little seemed to be given to the employment enhancing area. See further comment under policy.

This means that the areas of youth and employment don't have any particular focus which may explain the lack of youth engagement. A visit was made to the senior school in Millom some time ago but nothing followed. The interviews mentioned Inspira as expected to engage but for some reason this had not materialised. No one appears to have engaged with the junior schools.

There doesn't appear to have been any special focus on workforce and related issues, for example, as to how younger people may be prepared for the job roles that may occur, or discussion with supply chains as to their ability to ensure preparedness. This is key in such an isolated area. Maybe this will be picked up as part of the visioning work stream?

Partnership Meetings have occurred regularly with agendas and minutes on the web site. The understanding of the difference between public meetings and meetings held in public was raised by most interviewees.

In the past year, all expressed the opinion that the meetings had become challenging on a number of fronts. These meetings are difficult to minute because of the way the dialogue progresses. There are limited agenda items and it appears that there are no supporting papers which aim to reflect the delivery programme. Often there is a presentation or presence from NWS which appears to dominate because of the culture of holding to account. This means that despite the Policy described role of the partnership, NWS activity appears to be thought more important than local progress shaping and monitoring. There is also little time left for discussion as most of the meeting time is taken up by questioning the previous minutes. This could be handled in a much better way recognising the importance of accurate minutes but not dominating discussion that causes the majority of bad feeling. The other issue appears to be the way in which the community engagement part of the meeting is handled. Many of the questions are the same and there is little acceptance that NWS do not currently have all the answers.

There is the opportunity to undertake business without the public as was recently used to discuss changing the CPA to enable the chair to receive the honorarium.

There have been two Away Days for strategic planning and thought to have been useful by attendees. However frustration was expressed as it was questioned whether there was a good flow between the discussion and the annual delivery plan which should be reflected on to the sub groups and partnership meeting agendas.

Suggested action; The partnership could review the CPA and the Sub-Group purpose and structures to support the Chair in agenda setting.

5. Scope Point 3: Recognising that the Policy defined role of a Community Partnership takes precedent, review the South Copeland Community Partnership against the concerns raised by Millom Town Council in their letter of 28/11/24.

In exploring the points raised by Millom Town Council the issue of consistency of representation was raised. The representative had only attended a few meetings and therefore the stronger voices of the Millom Without Parishes dominated. The differences between the Millom ward and the Millom Without ward are stark and require different approaches to engagement. The findings relating to the individual points are as follows:

- Public engagement in Millom & Haverigg is currently non-existent. There is little engagement across the partnership currently. This is partly due to exploring what needs to be undertaken to promote visioning and also feeling there is nothing new to say. A plan needs to be in place that dovetails with other NWS initiatives.
- There is no evidence of engagement with our young people who ultimately will be the generations that will deliver the project if it goes ahead. - There was only one good example where an effort had been made to engage with the senior school. When challenged, everyone appeared to be waiting for Inspira to resolve this issue. The Millom representative spoke passionately about young people and has some good ideas.

- The makeup of the partnership does not reflect the community as the voices that dominate it are from outside on the town. – This is certainly the case and recognised by some of the members but all of the local team. The town of Millom could have promoted agenda items more strongly and often the stronger voices were aiming to manage NWS rather than promote their own communities.
- The poor behaviours of members in meetings have been witnessed [REDACTED] who have reported back on an obsession with minutes and documents rather than focusing on actions that benefit the community. Whilst accurate minutes are important, the methodology used to disrupt meetings to try and achieve this or even changes to minutes is unacceptable. There must be a better way found to manage queries and matters before the partnership meets again. Very little can be progressed when the bulk of the meeting and time afterwards is used for diverting effort.
- It has been observed that members of the partnership are pushing an agenda of not trusting the developer which undermines the principle of putting the decision making in the hands of the public. - There is definitely an “us and them” culture that has been fostered by some members by promoting the concept of holding the developer to account. There was evidence that this culture will continue and be reinforced by changes to the CPA and also the role profile of the chair.

6. Scope Point 4: Where required, develop recommendations for changes that will assist the South Copeland Community Partnership in being able to operate effectively in meeting its Policy defined role.

Building a Strong Partnership

The GDF process requires a Community Partnership that is functioning to Policy, utilising local knowledge and highlighting opportunities for future enhancement of the area.

The partnership membership needs to be reflective of the area in order that the views of all sections the community are heard and understood. There needs to be clarity between the DCO process and the Community Partnership otherwise the stakeholders and citizens will be lost in mixed messaging.

This is an opportunity to stand back and consider Cumberland as an entity and ensure that the GDF process is supporting the sustainability of the area whether the eventual site is here or not. The Partnership needs the support of the local NWS team in order to be effective and efficient in achieving its aims. This requires commitment to maintain the roles within the team and ensure there is clarity when roles are shared.

NWS also needs to address the issues raised regarding volunteer policy, standardised CPA (with minor local variances in schedule1) , common role profiles and further clarity around expenses including the honorarium.

Whilst support from subject matter experts is essential, the Chair needs to ensure that NWS issues do not dominate, and the agenda emphasis is on the deliverables of the Partnership. This will hopefully give more focus and lessen the desire to hold NWS to account.

To move forward, in which ever model is chosen, it will be necessary to identify the partnership objectives to be achieved over the coming years and progress reviewed regularly. Partnership members should be asked to reaffirm that they feel able to work to the objectives presented if the option to continue the south Copeland partnership is chosen.

Options for the future

This review has provided the opportunity to consider options to address the challenges observed. The following suggestions are made:

Option 1

Re-start all activities in the SCP and aim to address issues – This would immediately lead to conflict regarding the role profile of the chair and the changes to the CPA. From the interviews undertaken, there seems to be no confidence from the membership that the culture would change and the necessary process to deliver the elements that are required of a community partnership. It also leaves the local NWS team in a challenging position.

Given the culture that has now developed within the partnership, it may only take a couple of meetings before a more proactive solution is required.

Option 2 South Copeland partnership refreshed

The reviewer has highlighted several key issues which if resolved would enable the partnership to deliver effectively and efficiently. The partnership has had two strategic planning days, following which though implementation has been a challenge, and little has changed. A facilitated session to agree an action plan for the way forward could be convened with the outcome being a consensus approach to move forward. If any member feels that they are unable to buy into the plan, they will be able to consider their position on the partnership.

The priority topics to address (although not an exhaustive list) include: a revision of the CP agreement, the chair's role profile, role profile of members, understanding of the roles of the local NWS team, reflective membership of the community, representation role, structure of the partnership, community engagement including youth, programme of activities, approach to visioning.

It is expected that the facilitator will have a good understanding of GDF partnership working to enable the process to move swiftly. Where specialist knowledge is required e.g. interpretation of policy, expertise can be sourced in a timely manner. The partnership could then be fully functional again in three months with the election of chair taking place.

A key session will be for a presentation by NWS to ensure that partnership members understand the progress they are making in the area regarding their responsibilities to ensure that the culture of 'holding NWS to account' changes to partnership working.

Once the partnership is stable and functioning it will be necessary to consider areas of joint work with mid Copeland GDF partnership. This will assist in delivering a strong vision for the area..

Option 3

This review has provided the opportunity to either maintain the South Copeland Partnership or to take a more radical approach and move to a combined partnership with Mid Copeland. Merging the two partnerships may have some local benefit as it will be less confusing for the public when the DCO consultations begin, it may be seen as better Value For Money and could strengthen the Copeland bid to be the chosen site. It also means that visioning with regard to the significant additional investment is better coordinated and stronger cases can be made ensuring a real and meaningful focus on the south Cumberland area, important as devolution discussions progress with responsibility for key areas moving centrally. Furthermore, both partnerships have strengths and weaknesses and bringing the best of both together would be advantageous for all concerned.

Merging the two partnerships together could celebrate the best of both partnerships. The way to do this is suggested to be to establish a joint enabling task and finish group to consider each aspect including CP truly representative membership, Terms of Reference, Community Partnership Agreement adjustments, sub groups etc. This would be chaired/facilitated independently to enable the current partnerships to continue to operate.

The transition phase would be approximately 4 months. During this time Mid Copeland and South Copeland will continue focusing on completing outstanding work and commitments. South Copeland will delay the appointment of the chair and agree to facilitation at meetings to assist them in the transition phase.

NWS will be expected to honour the CIF for 2025 and also the committed funding for 2026. This means that in 2026 the £1m will be available to the new partnership.

Whilst this seems an obvious next move, it would undoubtedly bring the unresolved issues to the fore and make it harder to deliver for a bigger partnership area. The area of focus discussion need a very local focus currently with no one feeling that any site is a 'done deal'.

Next Steps

This report will need to be considered appropriately within NWS as the commissioners.

The report should be circulated to partnership members only with a date for a face to face partnership briefing session.

Mary Bradley

March 2025