

Meeting with Geological Society, London, 19th June 2012

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Present:

Edmund Nickless (Executive Secretary of GSL)
Nic Bilham (Head of Strategy and External Relations of GSL)
Prof Peter Styles, Keele University
Dr Richard Shaw (Fellow)
Andrew Bloodworth (Fellow)
Guy Richardson, CALC
Richard Griffin, Allerdale Borough Council
Rhuari Bennett, 3KQ

Introductions were made, including the Partnership thanking the Geological Society of London (GSL) and three of its Fellows for making the time and trouble to meet.

A general discussion was held about the role and scope of GSL, and also the history of the West Cumbria MRWS Partnership and why it requested this meeting.

The agenda had been agreed in advance. The main 4 points are covered below, with some additional business towards the end of the meeting.

1 - **GSL views on the level of geological uncertainty**

- GSL stands by its views in its letter sent to the Partnership in PSE3. The submissions from Prof Smythe and Prof Haszeldine do not change this. GSL still believes that "the Partnership is correct in asserting that the consensus in the geoscience community is that the whole of West Cumbria cannot be ruled out at this stage".
- Everybody recognizes the breadth of view expressed in the consultation submissions. However, GSL doesn't necessarily agree with the consultation submissions provided by both Prof Smythe and Prof Haszeldine.

Other points covered included:

- The **Criteria Proposals Group** agreed criteria to screen out clearly unsuitable areas, avoiding places where water might be affected, or where

mineral resources might be located (thereby reducing intrusion risks in the future). It did not aim to identify criteria to find a suitable site.

- The **Nirex Inquiry** investigations focused on a surface area of roughly 1km², and the subsurface accessible from this area. The results of that work might represent the neighbourhood within 10km of that. Farther afield, the deep geology is not well known, although reasonable inferences can be made from evidence such as surface geological mapping, geophysical surveys and boreholes.
- **Order of voluntarism and geological assessments.** The Partnership understands that CoRWM discussed a national BGS screening exercise being done first, before communities are asked to express interest.
- Government did not choose to do a national geological screening survey, mainly on the basis of cost, recognising also that work to the same effect would occur later in the process.
- Sweden did a national geological screening survey before seeking willing communities, but the process followed cannot be directly compared because Sweden, for example, has a geology that is very simple to characterise – it is virtually all granitic rocks. In contrast, the UK has a very varied geology: it would therefore be more challenging and more expensive to conduct a comparative survey.

2 – Sufficient prospects of finding a suitable site?

- The Partnership is considering whether it is worth doing extra work on geological suitability at this point to satisfy itself that there are ‘sufficiently good prospects’ of continuing to Stage 4. There are various options that could be considered.
- Although no decision was taken today, GSL might be able to write a briefing note to give some reassurance on this point. Such a briefing note might be able to give a sense of how good the prospects are of finding a site, but it would not be able to gauge a specific probability as this would need to be evidence-based, and the full evidence base does not yet exist.
- If the Partnership, or councils, were to ask NDA to do a formal assessment of the West Cumbrian data to assess how good the prospects are (before Stage 4), GSL would be willing to organise a peer review if requested. Importantly GSL would not *conduct* the peer review, but *coordinate* it.

3 - Scrutiny arrangements

- The Partnership is considering how any future partnership should review and check NDA’s work, including on geological assessments: options have been considered, but not yet agreed.
- GSL scrutinize NDA’s progress in their own right as a learned society with a public service remit, and will make their own criticisms proactively if and

when they are required. To date GSL has found the NDA responsive in terms of taking on board suggestions and improvements.

- There is a potential shortage of professional geologists with the breadth of skills that will be required to fulfil scrutiny functions if the process proceeds, as the community is small and there will be a significant demand for 'independent' views. However, there are different views as to how big an issue this is and how quickly the skills gap can be filled. A clear commitment from Government as to how it will support the geological disposal programme, including sustained research funding and the prospect of attractive career paths in academia could ensure a growing community of research geologists in the area. Work already underway by learned societies and others to stimulate the next generation of the radioactive waste research community is starting to show signs of progress.
- In conclusion, it is difficult to define the best system of scrutiny of geoscience in the process at this point, but GSL are happy to stay in touch and advise in future as the process develops, and are confident that they are well placed to identify and highlight any problems in this area as they emerge.

4 - NDA's plans to assess geology in Stage 4

- NDA have listened to concerns from GSL on plans for later stages of siting process, which in part focused on the presentation of the plans being at too high a level.
- NDA have recognized that a closer engagement with GSL would be useful.
- GSL are engaging with them on the issue of publishing the criteria of how they will assess 'geological setting', and will soon meet with NDA to review their plans, but it is too early to tell how this discussion will conclude. GSL would be pleased to update the Partnership following the planned meeting.

5 – AoB

- **Independence and funding.** GSL do not do consultancy work or receive Government money so they can maintain their independence unambiguously. Their funding derives from Fellowship fees, publications, investment income, and conferences.
- **Work with NDA.** GSL is discussing with NDA how they can communicate geological uncertainty in the process, and assisting with this thinking.