

## **Sedgemoor District Council response to GDF consultation**

1. We support the approach that would see a test of public support before a representative authority loses the right to withdrawal. It is important however that the test is undertaken in the right area or location to ensure that it is relevant to the area of impact or locality. Each option proposed has weaknesses, therefore choosing a mechanism that captures the extent of public support that is comprehensive and cross generational is important, this should be the key criteria for choosing the mechanism.
2. The proposals on the MRWS siting process are broadly welcomed.
3. We support fully the proposal for District Councils to be the 'representative authority'. This reflects properly the planning role of districts as well as the need to fully represent the communities impacted. Diluting local decision making powers by providing a disproportionate influence of communities less impacted by the proposals is counterproductive. Districts have a closer relationship to communities by scale and political representation and on this basis provide a greater justification for decisions based on localism.
4. We would support the phased approach.
5. The development of a national policy statement for the GDF would allow for a structured approach as well as criteria against which to judge individual proposals. It would also permit the Government or a government agency to provide leadership based upon those principles. National leadership and championing a particular site and the benefits to be derived to the nation as whole as well as the host locality is important. The absence of a national champion for such essential national infrastructure is counterproductive. A champion is needed to support local decision making and stress the national importance of any proposal.
6. It is essential to ensure that sufficient local authority engagement is fully funded and does not fall as a burden on local resources. This funding should be direct from Government. This would remove the need for extensive PPA support from development proposers which leaves the impression of conflicts of interest between funding and community response. Whatever arrangements are created, they will need to be in place at the outset of the process.
7. Community benefit should be clear and transparent from the outset. Allowing communities to know the level support and compensation they will receive should be adequately laid out in advance. The proposals go a significant way towards this and are supported. The commitment to reward a community through the early release of some community benefits into a community fund is welcomed.

Any community benefits package must be additional to the investment necessary to deliver a GDF and additional to the planning mitigation required to offset the impact of GDF construction and operation.

Sedgemoor would welcome this approach to other national infrastructure such as electricity transmission and would counter the perception of buying planning permission which is unfounded and unhelpful. The utility of community benefit for all infrastructure development is to be promoted in order to properly engage community's across all issues of concern that may help balance wide issues of interest across a long term, intergenerational project.

8. Bringing forward socio-economic and environmental issues is supported. This should be aligned with community benefit and be part of a wider approach to the development consent process. We would also reiterate our support for the need for full financial support for councils and communities with the development consent process.