



What is a Test of Public Support?

GDF Explained

Test of Public Support in the Potential Host Community

Nuclear Waste Services Limited (NWS) is responsible for delivering a Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) – the only viable long-term final disposal solution for the most hazardous radioactive waste. It is one of the largest environmental protection programmes in the UK and ensures we remove the costs and burden of having to keep the waste safe and secure in storage facilities for many thousands of years. A GDF will only be built where there is both a suitable site and a willing community.

The UK Government's policy seeks to build community support for a GDF through open and transparent engagement, in a community consent-based siting process.

In May 2024, the Government published the UK policy framework for managing radioactive substances and nuclear decommissioning. The consent-based siting process for the delivery of the GDF is set out in Appendix 1 - "The UK Government's working with communities policy for implementing geological disposal", which we refer to as the "Policy". The requirement to hold a Test of Public Support is set out in the Policy.

A Test of Public Support (ToPs) is designed to determine a final view from a community as to whether they are willing to host a GDF.

A ToPS would only be taken after extensive community engagement and once the community has had time to ask questions, raise concerns and learn about a GDF. A ToPS will be taken by residents in the Potential Host Community (see below for more information on the Potential Host Community). It must be taken and be positive before NWS can seek regulatory approvals and development consent to begin construction of a GDF.

ToPS is a unique element of the GDF programme. It is not taken for other infrastructure projects. It is separate from the public consultations which run as part of the usual processes in making applications for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.



What are Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)?

NSIPs are major infrastructure projects, established under the Planning Act 2008. Projects are within the six general fields of energy, transport, water, waste water, waste and business and commercial. Examples include power stations, railways and major roads – in other words, the kinds of large scale facilities that support the everyday life of the country.

The Planning Act 2008 establishes that both the deep site characterisation boreholes which NWS must drill to learn more about geology, and the GDF itself, are separate NSIPs.

The purpose of a ToPS is to determine whether the relevant community is willing to host a GDF. There is no set point in the siting process when a ToPS has to take place, but the Policy requires that a ToPS would only be taken after extensive community engagement.

The relevant principal local authority/ies on the GDF Community Partnership will take the decision on whether to hold a ToPS, and if so, at what point. It will be for the GDF Community Partnership as a whole to decide how it wishes to approach the ToPS.

A ToPS is not required to drill boreholes to better understand the geology deep below the surface. It is only required for the construction of a GDF.

ToPS Approaches

The Policy states: '...there are currently three main mechanisms that could be used for the Test of Public Support: a local referendum, a formal consultation or statistically representative polling. If new methods to test public opinion emerge in the future, the Community Partnership may wish to consider a different approach.'

Whatever approach and mechanism the GDF Community Partnership decides on, it is important that the ToPS is carried out in a way that is fair and robust.

Who can take part in a ToPS?

The ToPS will be carried out in the Potential Host Community area, which will be defined using district or unitary electoral ward boundaries, depending on the administrative arrangements in place in the area. The Potential Host Community will likely be made up of several wards. Residents must be on the electoral roll in those wards, so, for example, second homeowners may not be eligible to vote in the ToPS. The geographical boundaries of the Potential Host Community will be agreed by the GDF Community Partnership based on the information gathered through the siting process and specified criteria (see below).



The Policy requires that the Potential Host Community would include all of the electoral wards in which the following would be located:

<p>Proposed surface and underground elements of a GDF.</p>	<p>A GDF will have both surface and underground areas (see image on the next page). In all of the current communities, the underground area is located beyond the coast and so the surface site on land will be linked by either a sloping tunnel and/or shafts and tunnel.</p>
<p>Any associated development (to the GDF) and any land required to mitigate impacts.</p>	<p>Associated development is described in the Planning Act 2008. It means developments which will support the construction or operations of a GDF or help address its impacts. For example, utilities connections, temporary roads or laydown areas, noise barriers or jetties. It can also include environmental mitigation – for example, delivery of replacement habitat.</p>
<p>Transport links/routes from the GDF site to the nearest port, railhead or primary road networks.</p>	<p>This means that if new transport routes/links are required as part of the GDF, the electoral wards within which those developments are located will be part of the Potential Host Community whether they are considered associated development to the GDF or otherwise.</p>
<p>Direct physical impacts associated with underground investigation, construction and operation of the GDF.</p>	<p>These impacts will be identified through environmental impact assessment work undertaken by specialists. Understanding these impacts will also support NWS' engagement with communities and the development of its consent applications.</p>

NWS will need to have progressed the design of a site for a GDF, and have a reasonable understanding of the associated development and impacts of the development, in order to help define the Potential Host Community area.

The Potential Host Community area will likely be a different size from the Search Area, and it may be that certain aspects of the associated development are located outside the current Search Areas.



What happens after a positive ToPS?

There will only be one opportunity for a ToPS in each Potential Host Community.

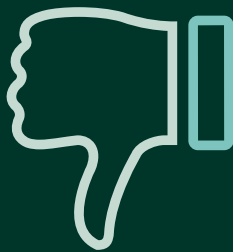
If the ToPS establishes that the community is willing to host a GDF, then NWS may proceed with applications for the relevant planning and regulatory consents required for the final underground investigations, construction and operation of a GDF.

Any further progress with the project will be subject to obtaining those consents, and a positive ToPS does not in any way prejudice or replace the separate detailed processes required by regulators and planners.

Although the community's right of withdrawal from the siting process will cease following a positive ToPS, the community and local authorities will be able to continue to express their views in the public consultation and examination processes held as part of subsequent regulatory and planning processes.

Following a positive ToPS, the GDF Community Partnership may then transition into a liaison group to provide a continuing dialogue between NWS and the local community. That liaison group could continue, in some form, through the consenting process, construction, operation and closure of the GDF.

Where a community is selected to host a GDF, the UK Government will provide Significant Additional Investment to replace the Community Investment Funding. This Significant Additional Investment will enhance the significant economic benefits that are inherent in hosting a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and recognises the long-term commitment from the community towards the national interest.



What happens after a negative ToPS?

If there is a negative ToPS, the GDF siting process will come to an end in that area. Any Community Investment Funding already made or committed for the financial year in which the negative ToPS took place will be honoured. The GDF Community Partnership's work would come to an end in a planned and respectful manner.

