



## Midlands Engine APPG – Midlands Nuclear Industry: 12 July 2022

**Time: 13.00 - 14:00**

### **Attendees:**

- Midlands Engine APPG Co-Chair: Lord Ravensdale, Crossbench Peer
- Midlands Engine APPG Co-Chair: Darren Henry MP, Conservative, Broxtowe
- John Spellar MP, Labour, Warley
- Nigel Mills MP, Conservative, Amber Valley
- Heather Wheeler MP, Conservative, South Derbyshire
- Pauline Latham MP, Conservative, Mid Derbyshire
- Baroness Golding, Life Peer
- Baroness Verma, Life Peer

### **Guests:**

- Gayle Aughton, Senior Executive Officer, Midlands Engine
- Steve Reece, Head of Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) Siting, Nuclear Waste Services
- Karen Wheeler, Chief Executive Officer, Radioactive Waste Management
- Guy Esnouf, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Director, Radioactive Waste Management
- Matthew Neal, Service Director, Nottinghamshire County Council
- Leon Flexman, Director, Lodestone Communications
- Orlando Wind-Cowie, Senior Account Executive, Lodestone Communications
- Christina Nielsen, Senior Researcher, Henham Strategy
- Lillie Grant, for the office of Darren Henry MP
- Arthur Virgo, for the office of Phillip Dunne MP
- Oliver Lee, for the office of Ruth Edwards MP

### **Opening Remarks**

**Darren Henry:** Welcomed attendees to the meeting and said that the purpose of the APPG is to champion the Midlands Engine in Parliament, and to ensure that the region remains a Government priority. Then said that he would very much like to see additional sub-groups established within the APPG and encouraged parliamentarians to propose topics for new groups. He concluded by mentioning the Midlands Engine APPG parliamentary reception, scheduled for Tuesday 13 September in the Jubilee Room in Westminster Hall.

**Lord Ravensdale:** Welcomed attendees and explained that this session would be about the potential of the nuclear industry in the Midlands, and he declared his particular interest in the subject.

**Lord Ravensdale:** Explained that the nuclear sector has seen a real revitalisation in recent years, and that now is the time to remind the Government that the Midlands region is a real hub of expertise in this area. Further, said that he is currently working with the Energy Research Accelerator on a nuclear review, as a part of which, the Accelerator is looking specifically at the potential of the sector in the Midlands. He reminded the audience, that nuclear energy remains vitally important to the UK's wider net zero ambitions.



**Lord Ravensdale:** Said that during this session, attendees would hear from two exciting projects, one focused on nuclear waste and from the STEP Fusion Programme. Then handed over to presenters.

### **Presentation - Nuclear Waste Services (Geological Disposal Facility (GDF))**

Karen Wheeler, Chief Executive Officer, Radioactive Waste Management; and Steve Reece, Head of GDF Siting, Nuclear Waste Services

- **Geological Disposal Facility:** Opened the presentation by explaining that the focus would be on the project to build a geological disposal facility in the UK. Explained that this type of nuclear waste disposal is not just a mine, but a highly engineered facility, intended to be a permanent solution to the UK's nuclear waste programme. Said that then intention for this facility would be for it to last in excess of 100.000 years, and that the storage would be around 500m into the ground. As such, highlighted that identifying the right area in the UK with the right geology would be critically important for building such a facility safely.
- **Sustainable Solution:** Said that the over ground storage of nuclear waste is ultimately an unsustainable solution, and then explained that a key part of moving forward with a geological disposal facility is to find a solution which can gain community consent. Explained that the team had been learning from similar projects in places like Sweden, France and Canada, who are all much further along in the process, to identify the kinds of communities which would be suitable.
- **Community Engagement:** Said that the project is currently working with three communities in Cumbria, and one in Theddlethorpe in Lincolnshire. Explained that strong relationships have been established with these communities, and again stressed that community engagement and consent are absolutely key throughout the process. Then said that the next stage would be testing the geology in these locations before any safety cases are applied for. Due to the extensive timescale of this project, highlighted that two of these communities will be in this process for decades before a facility is ultimately built. Explained that the group expects to be drilling boreholes in the 2020s, and that the facility will likely be built between 2040 and 2050.
- **Regional Opportunities:** Explained that this project is a hugely exciting opportunity for the communities involved, as it has the potential to bring thousands of jobs to the local area. Further, highlighted that these will not be short-term jobs, as the facility is expected to take around 10 years to build and will require site management for over 100 years. Moreover, also said that the project will sit alongside significant community investment in assets like transport, infrastructure and flood defences. As such, concluded that the project, if developed at the Lincolnshire site, would be a huge opportunity for the wider Midlands region, both from a job-creation and investment perspective.

### **Presentation – STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production) Fusion Programme**

Matthew Neal, Service Director, Nottinghamshire County Council

- **STEP Fusion:** Opened the presentation by explaining that the STEP Fusion programme is a Government project to construct a commercially viable fusion powerplant, which is part of

the Government's 10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. Further, said that the project builds on the work on fusion done at Culham in Oxfordshire and is being led by the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). Moreover, explained it is one of just three similar projects in the world, and that fusion has significant advantages over phising given that it does not produce any waste. As such, explained that fusion has the potential to play a part in the UK's net zero transition and to contribute significantly to the UK economy.

- **Location:** Explained that work is currently underway to determine the site for the development of the powerplant, and that in 2021, Nottinghamshire County Council put forward two suggested locations: Ratcliffe on Soar and West Burton. Then said that the West Burton site remained under consideration and has received visits from stakeholders and the UKAEA management board. Moreover, said that the Secretary of State is expected to announce the final site in late 2022, and that the powerplant is expected to be operational by 2040.
- **Regional Benefits:** Went on to explain that the benefits of having the powerplant located in the Midlands would be significant, and that it would be expected to attract in the region of £1.5bn of inward investment to the Midlands. Moreover, said that it would create around 4000 jobs annually while under construction and 500 when operational. Also said that the location would help to strengthen the nuclear industry throughout the Midlands by developing supply chains and advanced capabilities. As such, explained that the project could also benefit the area from a skills development perspective, particularly in the manufacturing sector.
- **Community Support:** Said that the support for the project from the local community in and around West Burton has been astounding, with many people excited to see something different being brought into the area and about the benefits that nuclear fusion could bring to the UK more broadly. Also highlighted that local and regional organisations and stakeholders, including the Midlands Engine, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), universities, businesses and local MPs, all have been very supportive.

## Questions

**Lord Ravensdale:** Thanked presenters and echoed the point around the huge amount of support for the STEP initiative in West Burton. Then opened the floor for questions.

**Baroness Verma:** Asked if the proposed fusion powerplant in West Burton could potentially lead to water shortages given the significant water usage required for fusion?

- **Matthew Neal:** Stressed that he is not the technical expert but said that a key attribute of the site is access to the River Trent, which is where the water required would be sourced from. Invited Leon Flexman to comment on the technical aspect.
- **Leon Flexman:** Explained that water availability is key for site choice, however also said that there would be net reduction in water usage at the site, given that the current coal-powered power station at West Burton would shut down.

**Heather Wheeler:** Asked about the importance of community engagement when determining a site for the geological disposal facility?

- **Karen Wheeler:** Said that the current process very much focuses on community engagement, and that it allows local areas to take their time thinking about whether the process is right for them. Reiterated that no facility would be built where a community has said no. Explained that she fully understands that communities may see the facility as a big burden, and that the onus is on her team to convince communities of the benefits of the project and the safety of it.
- **Steve Reece:** Added that the process of engaging with communities very much remains open, and that the team involved would be happy to start conversations with new communities.

**Darren Henry:** Asked how parliamentarians could best champion the Midlands nuclear industry in Parliament?

- **Steve Reece:** Responded that it is really important that the Energy Bill continues through Parliament, and that he would also encourage parliamentarians to spread the word about the nuclear waste programme around the Midlands to create more community awareness of the benefits of the programme.
- **Karen Wheeler:** Said that she would encourage parliamentarians to take the opportunity to link the nuclear industry and nuclear waste management to the green agenda, and to talk more about the importance of the sector to the UK's wider net zero ambition. Added that when possible, she would like for parliamentarians to explicitly discuss the safety of the geological disposal facility programme and to highlight the opportunities it brings.
- **Matthew Neal:** Explained that he would like MPs to keep the narrative going about the importance of fusion and indeed how it differs from phising. Also encouraged parliamentarians to raise their support of the West Burton site in any direct conversations that they may have with the Secretary of State. Moreover, said that if parliamentarians would like to learn more about the West Burton site, they would be very welcome to get in touch and arrange a site visit.
- **Leon Flexman:** Said that it would be useful if the Midlands Engine could draft a set of key messages around the importance and potential of the nuclear sector in the Midlands, which would then allow MPs and peers to speak to a common set of messages.

**Lord Ravensdale:** Thanked speakers for their responses and said that he would be happy to speak to the importance of the nuclear sector as the Energy Bill progresses through Parliament, and that he would stay in touch with Karen and Steve on this issue.

### Concluding remarks

**Lord Ravensdale:** Thanked all of the speakers for their excellent presentations and concluded that the session had come back to the core aim of the Midlands Engine, namely, to close the productivity gap in the region. He said that to fulfil this ambition, it is clear that the region needs to attract and develop more high-skill, high-growth industries, and the nuclear industry would be an important part of this.

**Lord Ravensdale:** Reiterated that it would be important for MPs and Peers to remain focused on driving forward this agenda in the coming weeks and months. Additionally, reminded attendees that the Midlands Engine APPG will be hosting a parliamentary reception on Tuesday 13 September, in the Jubilee Room in Westminster Hall. Said that the Midlands Engine Chairman, Sir John Peace, would be speaking and that a Secretary of State would be invited. Concluded by saying that the next



formal meeting of the APPG would be on Tuesday 20 September, and an agenda would be circulated in due course.