

Plugging a leak has put Sellafield on a path to a safer future

The leak, from a sump in the Redundant Settling Tank area of the Sellafield site, was discovered last year.

Although the issue posed no immediate risk to people, it required urgent work to fix.

Despite a multitude of challenges, including the COVID-19 lockdown, the job was completed in just 9 months. And the work has helped accelerate decommissioning of the wider site.

Dorothy Gradden, Sellafield Ltd's head of legacy ponds, explains:

If this had happened in the 1990s, it could have taken us years to fix it.

But because we've spent the last decade removing radioactive waste and sludge using remotely operated systems in other facilities, we were able to start fixing the problem in record time.

Working with our regulators and supply chain partners The Decommissioning Alliance, we decided the safest solution was to reseal the tank.

Simply pouring concrete in would have locked in the radioactive material, creating a decommissioning problem for future generations.

The Redundant Settling Tank

The Redundant Settling Tank is a relic from the 1950s. It sits next to Sellafield's First Generation Magnox Storage Pond building and was used to store radioactive sludge taken from the outdoor pond.

The pond stopped operating in 1986 and the Redundant Settling Tank area was put into a care and maintenance regime in the 1990s, with decommissioning planned for the 2030s.

But that all changed on 19 October 2019.

Surveillance work found the level of liquor in a sump tank was reducing at a rate of approximately 80-100 litres per hour.

As there were no signs of a leak in the pipes connecting to other plants, it had to be assumed that the liquor was being lost to ground under or around the tank.

Experience gleaned from similar incidents indicated the liquor would bind itself into the clay in the soil underneath the facility, rather than migrating underground.

Dorothy added:

The focus was on keeping the engineering simple, fit-for-purpose and safe.

In total, 15 cubic metres of sludge and 15 cubic metres of solid waste needed to be moved.

Waste retrievals operations needed to be performed at a safe distance for humans while minimising any airborne contamination.

The Decommissioning Alliance came up with the idea of covering the area with a canopy and placing a remotely operated crane on a gantry above the tank to lower the necessary tooling to remove sludge and waste.

Larger waste items beyond the crane's load bearing capacity would be cut up in situ before being lifted out and relocated in a 'chop and drop' system.

Within 9 weeks of the leak being discovered, we had defined the strategy, completed all off-site trialling and designed, procured and constructed the equipment needed to carry out the work.

So far, so good. But then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic intervened and the lockdown caused operations to be suspended.

Dorothy said:

We had to formulate a risk assessment to allow us to manage the additional risk of COVID-19.

This meant a new way of working which incorporated social distancing. Waste retrievals work restarted in June 2020 and by August 2020 we had successfully removed all the waste and sludge.

This allowed us to re-concrete the base of the tank to reseal it.

In September 2020 we installed an access point in the tank to help with future maintenance and officially retired the risk.

Next we will be using the new canopy and crane system to permanently remove the waste and sludge from other parts of the Redundant Settling Tank area therefore accelerating the decommissioning work to make the plant safe forever.

Lessons learned from the work are helping change the way decommissioning is carried out across the Sellafield site.

Dorothy added:

The need to address the immediate risk changed the parameters of the way the nuclear industry normally operates; everything had to be condensed and accelerated, while still being safe.

To have fixed a problem of this magnitude within a year of discovering it while also working around the new threat from COVID-19 has taken a tremendous effort.

There has been a huge amount of learning which we can take forward and use to improve our approach for other projects.

Our response to this serious incident has ultimately helped make Sellafield a safer place for the future.

Adrian Gate, project manager for the Decommissioning Alliance, said:

From developing the concept last October through design, infrastructure installation, waste retrievals operations, and the final phase of installation the integrated team from the Decommissioning Alliance and Sellafield Ltd have worked together seamlessly in a sustained effort to overcome a multitude of issues and technical challenges.

The successful outcome to this project in permanently resolving the problem and sealing the tank was hard-earned and fully deserved.

Government investment in homes and jobs tops £1.8bn to support a housing-led recovery

Investment delivered by Homes England through the government's Housing Infrastructure Fund Forward Funding (HIF FF) has passed £1.8bn since its launch in 2017. Overall, £2.7bn of investment will be contracted through the fund, helping to accelerate the delivery of almost 175,000 homes outside of London.

Councils have been working hard to secure the investment that will support

the government's target to build 300,000 new homes every year, while supporting jobs and local economies. So far, sixteen local authorities across England have secured a share of the Forward Funding.

The fund provides government money for local authorities to unlock land for new homes by building roads, bridges and sustainable travel links such as new cycling and walking routes. Better transport links will enable housing development in places that people want to live and work, while bringing brownfield sites back to life and creating new garden towns. Funding can also be used for schools, healthcare facilities and green infrastructure, such as parks.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government introduced the HIF Forward Fund in 2017. Upper-tier local authorities in England were invited to apply for capital grants of up to £250 million for infrastructure to unlock development land.

County councils and combined authorities have worked closely with city and district councils to use public funding to leverage additional commercial investment and in some cases, the fund has led to the creation of joint venture partnerships between local authorities and private sector companies. These partnerships have been key to enabling the removal of long-term barriers and viability issues.

The fund gives local authorities a financial certainty to enable them to plan for the future, as they work up schemes from design through to construction and beyond. Most projects will be delivered by March 2024.

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, the Housing Secretary, said:

"We are delivering the well-designed, quality homes the country needs and unlocking home ownership for local people. But in order to build more homes, we need to provide the infrastructure and public services to match.

"This investment through our Housing Infrastructure Fund will help to build homes where we need them the most while also supporting existing communities by ensuring they get the new roads, schools and other public services that are needed."

Peter Freeman, Chair of Homes England, said:

"Despite having to deal with the impact of Covid-19 on their communities, we're delighted to be working with local authorities across England to support significant government investment in key infrastructure projects. These projects protect and create jobs, support local economies and enable the long-term supply of development land to ensure we can build much needed new homes."

Case studies

Cumbria County Council was awarded £134m to build the Carlisle Southern Link Road, which will help to open up development land needed to create St Cuthbert's Garden Village. The scheme includes a cycleway, bridges over a

railway line and two rivers, a linking highway to Durdar/Carlisle Racecourse and a cycle link to the Cumbria Way. The infrastructure will unlock land on which 10,325 new homes will be built at St Cuthbert's Garden Village, which will be developed around the existing villages of Carleton, Birsco, Durdar and Cummersdale.

Cambridge City Council (working in partnership with Anglian Water) was allocated £227m of forward funding to enable the delivery of around 8,000 homes and 20,000 new jobs over the next 20-plus years on a large-scale brownfield regeneration site on the edge of Cambridge. The bid was submitted by the Council last year and was promoted by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, working with Anglian Water and South Cambridgeshire District Council. In an LLP joint venture with Anglian Water, the Council overcame a long-standing major barrier to make the development viable, when it will relocate an existing wastewater treatment plant to a new site, only made possible by using HIF FF funding.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority received approval for £51.6m of HIF forward funding, to unlock the first phase of 5,557 new homes on a site of 20 hectares in the Northern Gateway, Manchester. The infrastructure works comprise land acquisition, highways, city river park, flood defences, land remediation and utilities upgrade. The Northern Gateway area covers 155 hectares of north Manchester with the overall potential for around 15,000 new homes on re-purposed industrial land, comprising a series of distinct neighbourhoods that can support the city's growth ambitions.

Oxfordshire County Council agreed a £218m funding package with Homes England to provide greater access to the Didcot Garden Town area, improving sustainable travel for local communities and businesses. The infrastructure project will support the creation of thousands of new homes in the area and create and protect jobs. Measures will be implemented to ensure non-motorised traffic can be prioritised and active travel by walking and cycling has been planned into the schemes. Oxfordshire County Council worked in partnership with South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse district councils to deliver the infrastructure and the HIF funding is seen as essential to deliver sustainable growth in the area.

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Notes to Editors

The Housing Infrastructure Fund is administered and monitored by the government's housing agency, Homes England. The programme is helping to deliver up to 300,000 new homes across England by providing local authorities with grant funding for new infrastructure, to unlock homes in areas of greatest housing demand.

Sixteen local authorities across England have secured a share of the 20 Forward Funding agreements signed so far:

Cheshire East, Kent, Oxfordshire, North Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Swindon, Cumbria, Medway, Surrey, Cambridgeshire/Peterborough Combined Authority,

[UK and Iceland to step up cooperation on fisheries](#)

The UK has today signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Iceland to boost cooperation on fisheries matters.

As the UK prepares to leave the EU's Common Fisheries Policy at the end of December, this Memorandum of Understanding is the first fisheries agreement the UK has made with Iceland, and it follows [the recent agreement with Norway](#), [the agreement with the Faroe Islands](#) and [the bilateral arrangement with Greenland](#). It ensures that the UK, as an independent coastal state, has a bespoke arrangement in place with each of its principal fisheries partners across the North-East Atlantic.

The agreement, which will come into effect on 1st January 2021, was signed by Fisheries Minister Victoria Prentis and Icelandic Minister of Fisheries Kristján Þór Júlíusson, who both participated via video conference.

The agreement will establish a UK-Iceland Fisheries Dialogue, whereby both countries can share best practice and cooperate on a range of issues, including product innovation and food waste reduction. Businesses will also be able to exchange knowledge on the adoption of new technologies, and ways to enhance the value, traceability and marketing of seafood products.

Fisheries Minister Victoria Prentis said:

As an independent coastal state, we are committed to ensuring a sustainable and prosperous industry for the future.

This agreement demonstrates the strong relationship between our two nations on matters including trade and fisheries. I would like to thank our Icelandic counterparts for the constructive approach they have adopted throughout these negotiations. We have already seen the potential of working together given the number of shared issues and objectives our countries have on fishery management, and we look forward to continuing this constructive dialogue.

The Fisheries Minister for Iceland Kristján Þór Júlíusson said:

With this Memorandum of Understanding we are ensuring that Britain's exit from the European Union results in enhancing further the good cooperation Iceland has had with the United Kingdom. I am pleased to note that there is clear mutual interest in the two countries to have close coordination and cooperation regarding fisheries.

There is great friendship among our nations and we have had close relations for centuries. These relations have not least centred on to fisheries. From the Icelandic side, Britain is an important market for many Icelandic companies and the British government is an important partner for us in many international organisations. I'm convinced that this Memorandum of Understanding is the start of a very good cooperation.

This Memorandum of Understanding reaffirms and builds on the fisheries commitments both the UK and Iceland made within the UK-Iceland Joint Vision for 2030 that was signed earlier this year.

As part of this vision, the UK and Iceland recognise the need to promote responsible fisheries to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, and endeavour to use a science-based approach to fisheries and aquaculture management in order to minimise the impacts on the marine environment.

[Newly trained dogs heading for prison wings to sniff out illegal drugs](#)

- 176 new drug-dogs trained to stop illegal items entering the most challenging prisons
- 1000s of items, including sim cards and spice, diverted by dogs each year
- part of the government's £100 million package to bolster security in prisons

The new pack adds to the 630 dogs already in place across the estate which have proven to be crucial in the battle to keep illegal drugs, phones and tobacco out of our prisons.

In the past year alone more than 2,000 illegal items, including over 100 kilograms of drugs such as heroin, cannabis and spice, have been stopped from getting onto the wings by drug dogs currently in post. The new dogs are expected to aid this work even further.

Over 50 prisons are set to receive their new additions by March next year – with Bedford, Lewes, Norwich, Rochester and The Mount among the first in line. Each dog will be paired with their own dedicated handler, specially trained in detecting contraband items and further boosting the frontline.

Prisons and Probation Minister, Lucy Frazer, said:

The smuggling of contraband into prisons puts hardworking staff at risk and undermines attempts to rehabilitate offenders.

These dogs and their handlers will make prisons safer, more secure and ultimately better environments for rehabilitation.

Training for the latest cohort is currently underway, with the dogs having to complete multiple courses and assessments before being posted to the frontline. Their handlers, who are trained prison officers, will also have vigorous training and be re-assessed with the dogs yearly.

Drug dog handler, Nick Hayes who is based at The Mount, said:

Drugs dogs are a great proactive tactic to address the conveyance of illicit items into our prisons.

They are a force for good and such a powerful tool which can be used to keep all of us who live and work across the estate safe.

The dogs and handlers are being funded by the government's £2.75 billion commitment to transform the prison estate. This includes:

- £100 million to bolster prison security, clamping down on contraband such as drugs, weapons, and mobile phones that fuel violence, self-harm and crime behind bars
- £2.5 billion to provide 10,000 additional prison places and create modern, efficient jails that rehabilitate offenders, reduce reoffending and keep the public safe
- £156 million to tackle the most pressing maintenance issues to create safe and decent conditions for offender rehabilitation.

Notes to editors

- The prisons included in the roll-out are listed below
- The 176 trained dogs and 93 handlers will be in the 47 selected prisons by March 2021
- Training for this new cohort is currently underway, which sees each dog/handler complete a 6-week course before undergoing an assessment. They then complete a further four weeks training, again with another assessment, and are re-assessed yearly
- Handlers can use the dogs for people (passive) searches and area (active) searches

- Between April 2019 to March 2020 there were 2,236 finds of illicit items by dogs in prisons
- There can be more than one item within a find i.e. 2 phones in one find
- The value of illicit items varies within prisons. The current price of Psychoactive Substances (PS) ranges from £130 to £1000 for an A4 sheet of impregnated paper. Smaller pieces of impregnated paper, credit card sized, can range from £40 to £100 based on recent intelligence.

List of sites which will receive funding for dogs and handlers:

- Norwich
- Chelmsford
- Wandsworth
- Nottingham
- Doncaster
- Bristol
- Erlestoke
- Wormwood Scrubs
- Bullingdon
- Altcourse
- Lancaster Farm
- Featherstone
- Brinsford
- Brixton
- Forest Bank
- Berwyn
- Gartree
- Channings Wood
- Exeter
- Peterborough
- Hewell
- Lewes
- Pentonville
- Swaleside
- Thameside
- Bedford
- Lincoln
- Buckley Hall
- Aylesbury
- Dovegate
- Cardiff
- Onley
- Hindley
- Elmley
- Lowdham Grange
- Garth
- Ranby
- Rislely
- Swansea
- High Down
- The Mount

- Preston
 - Leicester
 - Rochester
 - Winchester
 - Birmingham
 - Northumberland
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[36th Universal Periodic Review: UK statement on Libya](#)



The United Kingdom welcomes positive steps by the Libyan Government, including support to the Fact Finding Mission, but remains gravely concerned by the deteriorating human rights situation. Indiscriminate attacks, unlawful killings, sexual and gender-based violence, risks to migrants and refugees and the silencing of journalists, activists and human rights defenders remain concerning. We urge the Government to do its part to commit to implementing the ceasefire and to the UN-led political process.

We recommend that the Government of Libya:

1. End exploitation of migrants and refugees in detention centres, working

towards closing and transitioning away from detention centres.

2. Ensure the full, equal and effective participation of women in conflict resolution and decision-making, and tackle sexual and gender-based violence.
3. Facilitate unrestricted/unfettered access for and cooperate fully with the Fact Finding Mission throughout Libya.

Thank you.

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