



Cumbria's tourism board has joined the growing clamour against any further research into the burying of nuclear power station waste within the borders of the Lake District national park.

The board – which oversees the park, the county's largest earner and one of the most-visited group of attractions in the UK – has also stated its strong opposition to investigations in the Solway Coast area of outstanding natural beauty on the West Cumbrian side of the famous lakes and fells.

Eric Robson, chair of Cumbria Tourism, has written to Baroness Verma, the junior energy minister handling the controversial issue.

He told her the board remains neutral on the overall question of burying waste in Cumbria, pending detailed investigations which are under way.

A crucial meeting of the three councils potentially affected – Cumbria county and Allerdale and Copeland districts – will decide on 30 January whether to agree to full-scale preliminary planning for a repository whose underground facilities would cover an area larger than the nearby town of Workington.

The three councils are the only ones in the UK still considering a government request to provide underground nuclear storage, but Cumbria's fractured geology has already narrowed potential areas to limited parts of the western coast, including the Ennerdale valley in the national park.

There were gasps at public meetings in November when mock-ups of the possible construction project were shown.

The projections, based on a French scheme, showed how construction and surface maintenance buildings might irrevocably scar the beautiful foothills of legendary fells such as Great Gable and Pillar.

The Lake District national park authority has already signalled its opposition to any incursion, with heavyweight allies such as the National Trust ready to provide support.

Bill Jefferson, the authority's chair, wrote to Verma in November warning of potentially disastrous effects on both the landscape and the tourism economy.

He said after the public meetings: "Tourism brings in far more than Sellafield [nuclear power complex] ever would, and let's face it, there are going to be more than enough jobs in dealing with the clear-up and improvement of above-ground storage which is happening there.

"We have 15 million people coming to the park every year, and the prospect of having the world's largest nuclear waste dump could make that considerably fewer."