

From: [REDACTED]
To: [SizewellC](#)
Subject: Denise Johnson Ref 20025555 - Response to Invitation to Preliminary Meeting/Draft Examination Timetable
Date: 07 March 2021 14:53:08
Attachments: [20025555 Prelim Mtg + Draft Examination Timetable response.docx](#)

Dear SZC Case team

Thank you for your email of 24/02/21.

I am attaching my letter written in response to the Preliminary Meeting invitation and Draft Examination Timetable.

I hope this is all satisfactory. Thank you for registering my comments.

Yours sincerely,

Denise Johnson
Ref 20025555

Sizewell C Case Team
National Infrastructure Planning

07/03/21

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: EN010012 – The Sizewell C Project

My reference: 20025555

Thank you for your email of 24/02/21, with my invitation (as an Interested Party) to the Preliminary Meeting, and details of the Draft Examination Timetable. I am grateful for the opportunity to attend but I regret this will not be possible for me on either of the Preliminary Meeting dates, due to existing commitments.

Having read the letter and the Draft Timetable, I do have some concerns about certain order of items and timings, which are outlined below, and have made some suggestions which I believe will facilitate public participation and representation, and attendance by local Council staff.

1. Preliminary Meeting 1 on 23rd March Agenda: suggest reverse the order of items 4 and 5

If there is going to be an Initial Assessment of Principal Issues (Agenda Item 4) then is it not logical to have this AFTER the Applicant's proposed changes to the application (Item 5) have been heard? Apart from these changes in Item 5 possibly introducing new Principal Issues, they may potentially change the material substance of the application, so it seems 'back to front' (as well as perhaps unfair and a possible waste of time) to try and assess Principal Issues without considering the nature of these further changes first?

2. Suffolk - Local elections 06/05/21: affecting ability of Councillors and Officers to fully communicate/attend around this date: suggest hiatus in proceedings or push back procedural dates from mid-April onwards a couple of weeks to accommodate this

As I am sure you are aware, local elections (all in Suffolk County and East Suffolk listed below – Ipswich not included but also affected) will be taking place during the earlier part of this timetable (06/05/21), and pre-election or 'purdah' restrictions will apply to all candidates' communication activities, as per government guidance below. Essential Council duties must still of course be discharged, but communications must be restricted, due to the heightened sensitivity of any statements they may make. This, plus the additional time commitment the elections themselves will require, will affect SZC planning proceedings by limiting the availability of Councillors, and their associated Officers and support staff resource, (also bearing in mind their involvement in the local East Anglian Wind Farm ongoing planning application). This must affect their ability to prepare and contribute as fully and as freely as they could without an election dropped into the middle of proceedings. The date of the elections cannot be changed, but if SZC proposed Planning Meeting dates after the Preliminary Meeting Part 2 were pushed back by a couple of weeks, and a 'hiatus' held until after the elections are settled, this would address this unfortunate clash and allow Council staff to have adequate time to meet, discuss and finalise key reports. This is quite obviously a major infrastructure planning process involving potentially what could be the most colossal construction site in Europe, with environmental effects that could last for many decades. Surely a couple of weeks cannot make significant difference considering how long this has already been going on, if it makes the process more democratic and meaningful, and not all of the timetable would be affected.

Thursday 6 May 2021

[Suffolk County Council election](#)

[Police and Crime Commissioner election](#) (postponed from 2020)

[East Suffolk Council by-election - Framlingham ward](#)

[Neighbourhood Planning Referenda](#)

- Bredfield NPR
- Kesgrave NPR
- Reydon NPR

[Town and Parish Council by-elections](#)

- Lowestoft Town Council (Lowestoft Gunton Parish Ward) by-election
- Lowestoft Town Council (Elmtree Ward) by-election (postponed from 2020)
- Lowestoft Town Council (St Margarets West Parish Ward) by-election
- Framlingham Town Council by-election (Two seats)
- Nacton Parish Council by-election
- Oulton Parish Council (Oulton West Parish Ward) by-election
- Southwold Town Council by-election (Two seats)
- Beccles Town Council (Beccles Darby Parish Ward) by-election (Two seats)
- Beccles Town Council (Beccles Rigbourne Parish Ward) by-election
- Woodbridge Town Council (Woodbridge Seckford Parish Ward) by-election
- Woodbridge Town Council (Woodbridge Riverside Parish Ward) by-election
- Beccles Town Council (Beccles Common Parish Ward) by-election
- Oulton Broad Parish Council (Oulton Broad North Parish Ward) by-election

"It is important to note that pre-election rules restrict activity wider than just publicity. Use of council facilities and resources; the member's code of conduct, developing new policies and holding of events - including some meetings - featuring elected officials should all be carefully considered during a period of heightened sensitivity." (<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/pre-election-period>)

3. Need for Virtual Open Floor Hearings ends after lockdown lifted on June 21st : suggest push back date of Open Floor Hearings 19 – 21 May to after June 21st 2021 and hold them face to face

Announcement of the end of lockdown must be the greatest news for PINS (as for us all). Whilst many of us have got used to (at different levels depending on ability...) online communication during this pandemic, there are still significant numbers of people who are not at ease with it or indeed, ever use it. They must have been deterred by or lost so far to this process. They may not deal well with virtual communication, but would be willing to contribute in a face to face open floor hearing (remembering many people will have had both their COVID vaccinations by then and so feel more secure to come out to be able to verbally express themselves). We cannot just 'ignore' this 'COVID effect', and need to make processes in planning procedures adaptable to at least take measurable account of any fallout from the recent sweeping conversions to online communications, and adjust for any digital exclusion effect as a result of this. To put back the date of the May 19 – 21st Open Hearing Meetings for a couple of weeks, to allow for them to be held after Lockdown ends, and so face to face, would seem a very reasonable action given the extraordinary circumstances. It would also make the process less open to criticism as regards inclusion.

Virtual meetings on Zoom or Microsoft Team, for example, will work better in the workplace, as employees working from home have become trained and familiar with the different online applications (though even here signal issues can still be a persistent nuisance). But realistically in a system like the public planning process where there is a much wider range of access issues and abilities, participation will not be so consistent.

There are always with virtual meetings the risks of technology failure or unstable signal or complete signal loss, (1.14% of properties in Suffolk have broadband speeds of less than 2mbps – Community Action Suffolk Oct 2020).

Behaviourally, the artificiality and absence of natural pauses and body language signals in online meetings alters spontaneous and natural interactions, which can lead to reduced participation (a sort of passive voyeurism) and misinterpretation. People with sensory or speech issues may not always be able to participate equally, particularly if needing extra time, explanation, or assistance to make comments, for example. If held in English and this is not a participant's first language then they may not understand all of proceedings either. Virtual meetings are never played on a level playing field. The host may be the Chairperson but the technology is always in control.

*"Technologies devoted to virtual forms of collaboration are becoming more sophisticated but have yet to achieve the richness and depth of face-to-face interactions in terms of efficiency of communication, transmitting tacit forms of scientific knowledge, and establishing trust, cohesion, continuity of purpose, and clear working role" (Cooke and Hilton **2015**).**

Nothing will be lost, apart from the need for a few bureaucratic adjustments, by changing the order of two agenda items, and pushing back dates by a couple of weeks to accommodate local election demands, and by holding the Open Floor Hearing face to face after Lockdown ends on June 21st but much could be gained, in terms of promotion of diversity of participation, increased attendance, and not least increased confidence in the Planning system itself.

Thank you for registering my concerns.

Yours sincerely



Denise Johnson 

* Ref Cooke, N. J., and M. L. Hilton, editors. 2015. *Enhancing the effectiveness of team science*. National Academies Press, Washington, DC.