

SZC – preliminary hearing

I am speaking today for myself and my wife, Marilyn Hands. We are both residents of Middleton, a small village about three-and-a-bit miles north-west of Sizewell. Both of us were chartered surveyors holding senior positions in the private and public sectors – but we are now retired.

Government has identified Sizewell as potentially suitable for a nuclear power station development. This is not an unequivocal endorsement. Neither should it be, if this examination is to serve its proper purpose and not merely be a rubber-stamping exercise. The principal reason for Sizewell being identified is that the local population are inured to nuclear development. In environmental, ecological and economic terms, one would be hard pressed to find a less suitable site.

Our grounds of objection are legion and principally relate to the construction of the scheme – not its operation. However, today I shall confine myself to four topics: economy, environment the so-called Sizewell Relief Road; and lastly EDF's risable public consultation.

First, the economy. EDF has made much of the benefits of the scheme to the local economy and job creation. But unemployment in our part of Suffolk is low. Most of EDF's workers will be parachuted in from Hinkley. Very few jobs will be truly local. EDF defines local as being within a 90-minute drive time – so its figures for local employment are ridiculous. I reckon we have something like 20,000 people within 10 miles of the site – about 8,000 of whom are of working age and the vast majority of these are happily in gainful employment already. The development will simply overwhelm the local economy. The local tourism industry will be irreparably damaged. Tradesmen are already in short supply. Higher wages for those in cleaning and catering will lure service industry workers from the local hospitality businesses. Rents and house prices will rise as properties are let to the construction workforce - forcing out locals.

One way or another – by way of electric bills or subsidy - the British Public will pay for this development. If we look at the scheme in terms of job creation, the cost of £20bn equates to about: £800k per temporary post created; £300k *per man year* of construction employment; or £20m per permanent job created. These figures represent appalling value by any standard – especially in an area which does not need the jobs.

Some in the district council and local chamber of commerce can only see pound signs. Some have likened them to whores in a gold rush – an unkind but a very apt analogy. During construction, the local economy will boom. Once construction stops, it will collapse – just like a goldrush. EDF may tell us differently. But the developments of SZA and SZB have left Leiston as one of the poorest small towns in Suffolk. Why should SZC be any different?

Now the environment and ecology. The construction site will sever the AONB – in a place which many around here value highly for walking, recreation and nature watching, including me – a keen bird photographer and my Marilyn – a keen walker.

The stretch of coast and inland areas between Thorpeness and Walberswick represent a rare combination of habitats - coastal cliffs and dunes, marsh, woodland, scrub, pasture and arable. They form a critical mass which supports a wonderful diversity of flora and fauna. Nothing EDF says gives me any confidence that this unique combination of habitats will survive the onslaught of the construction of SZC – with an immediate development area of well over 1,000 acres comprising the construction site, a huge concrete batching plant, massive borrow pits, spoil heaps over 100 feet high, a five storey portacabin campus for 2,400 workers along with a large caravan site, marshalling yards, car parks and freight depots. How can such a development not seriously impact on the local ecology?

Some of our valuable local species may be lost to the area for ever. EDF says it is providing compensatory habitats. One of these is in West Suffolk – not much good for our local wildlife. Habitats take time to mature. And they won't necessarily attract displaced wildlife. How are our bearded tits, marsh harriers, stone curlews and bitterns going to know where to go?

And now for the Sizewell Relief Road. Right from the off, locals have been concerned about the impact of construction traffic on the B1122. If the development were to go ahead, they wanted to see EDF build a new

road, which would minimise severance and disturbance and have lasting value. The relief road appeared out of the blue at Stage 3 of the consultation process. Locals could not believe it. EDF gave us the choice of their new road or nothing. It was a bit like saying to us, "You are going to die: do you want to be shot or hung?" Reasonable and rational alternatives were cursorily dismissed without any real explanation – though we have seen some attempted post-event rationalisation. But it is really all about money and EDF's relentless pursuit of cost reduction.

The road will offer no lasting benefit; it is unsustainable. It will sever several quiet cross-country lanes, paths, tracks and farms. It will destroy attractive countryside. If it is built, it should be dug up on completion. The question we should be asking is "Would we want build this road once construction is completed?" As things stand the B1122 is operating well below capacity. Would the new road be needed to take the marginal increase in traffic along the B1122 from the operation of SZC over general traffic growth? Of course not. So, it should be dug up and the land restored, and the lanes and byways reopened.

Lastly, consultation. What EDF claims to have been consultation has been an absolute joke. Even the County and the District said they had too little information on which to base an opinion. EDF asked the public questions like "Should we have a long thin pier, or a short fat one?" We would suggest that, unless one had a degree in hydrology, this was not a question on which one could give an informed opinion. Important matters were overlooked while diversionary minor issues were brought to the fore. For example, in the first round of consultation, we were asked where the visitor centre should go. EDF failed to address the really big issues such as "Should we build a relief road, and if so, where?" In fact, it told us that under government planning policy, it could not build a relief road unless commanded by government!

Moreover, EDF has kept the feedback secret. It says that it has framed its proposals in the light of this feedback. But given its record to date, we have no faith in what it says at all.

Come what may, the community has neither been properly nor fully consulted on EDF's proposals. More consultation was needed – and it needed to be transparent.

So, to conclude, Sizewell C will be disastrous for the local economy; it will probably irreparably damage the local environment and fragile interlinked ecology; the crazy Sizewell Relief Road should be dug up and the land reinstated once construction is complete; and lastly EDF's token, box-ticking exercise has made a mockery of public consultation.