

THE ALDEBURGH SOCIETY

Edited Version of the Presentation at Open Floor Hearing 7, 20 May 2021

The Aldeburgh Society is the civic society for the historic coastal town and cultural centre of Aldeburgh. We have over 200 members and work closely with the Aldeburgh Town Council on all matters Aldeburgh. The objects of the Society are to encourage public interest in and care for the distinctive character of the town and its surroundings, and the preservation, development and improvement of general public amenity in the area. We comment on planning applications. We follow up on planning enforcement and take a keen interest in the built environment as well as the natural environment.

Aldeburgh lies 5km south of Sizewell along the coast beyond Thorpeness. It is a seaside town of approx 3,000 full-time residents with a considerable number of second-home owners and a busy tourist trade. EDF's proposals for Sizewell C conflict with the fulfilment of the Society's objectives.

The Society is not opposed to nuclear power, and it supports the Government's net zero target for energy production. **But this is the Wrong Location** This coast cannot take another power station. The Society views with great concern the damage to the Suffolk Heritage Coast, including the important nationally and internationally protected sites RSPB Minsmere Nature Reserve and Dunwich Heath, and the AONB generally, which the construction of this very large industrial project would entail. We fully share the concerns expressed by the RSPB, the Minsmere Stakeholders Group, and STOP SZC.

If there were no existing nuclear power station on this coast, the proposal to develop one here would be unthinkable in today's heightened awareness of environmental issues. Imagine for a moment what the reaction would be to an application to put this project at Cowes on the Isle of Wight or at St Ives in Cornwall - or at Dartmouth in Devon! Completely unthinkable...

We ask the Planning Inspectorate at all times to focus on the **cumulative effect** which the many energy projects being considered for our coast would have on our town of Aldeburgh. This Examination is inevitably complicated by the simultaneous (and regrettably recently extended) Examination of the DCO applications by SPR for two offshore windfarms, which would involve the siting of large industrial buildings in this same area of rural Suffolk to connect the offshore power to the National Grid. The Aldeburgh Society, the Aldeburgh Town Council and the Aldeburgh Business Association, together with many other local organisations, have emphasised to the Planning Inspectorate Examination of those projects that the cumulative impact of all these major energy proposals with their converging timelines would be too hard for this fragile area to bear.

Climate change, coastal erosion, the possibility of numerous extra National Grid projects in the area only add to the spectre of devastation this application would unleash. It needs to be said in addition that EDF have underestimated the construction phase impacts on the AONB

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and the enduring harm to the special qualities of tranquillity, scenic beauty, cultural heritage, relative wildness, and dark skies that would ensue.

The threat to the local economy and tourism is substantial. Both the prospective industrialisation of the area to the north of Aldeburgh and the process of construction of these facilities risk damaging the whole economy and social fabric of the town. Aldeburgh relies heavily upon visitors for the vitality of its High Street. The Energy Coast report states “..it doesn’t require much of a downturn in visitors or spend to severely impact local businesses and the viability of the local visitor economy.” (The Energy Coast report of September 2019: The Energy Coast, National Coastal Tourism Academy, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. <https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/shares/The-Energy-Coast-BVA-BDRC-Final-Report-2019.pdf><https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/shares/The-Energy-Coast-BVA-BDRC-Executive-Summary-2019.pdf>). The same report found that of business respondents 58% expected annual turnover to decrease during the 9–12-year period of construction of Sizewell C and the SPR onshore infrastructure projects.

The report also found that of the businesses that foresee a loss in turnover, a majority expect their revenue to fall by at least 20% per annum with 23% of businesses anticipating annual decreases of more than 50%. If businesses had known quite how much disruption was being planned, their responses would have been even more negative. Overall the Suffolk Coast Destination Management Organisation research on the impact of the energy projects on the Suffolk coast calculated that there would be a net 17% decrease in visitors likely to come to the Suffolk coast. (The Energy Coast report of September 2019: The Energy Coast, National Coastal Tourism Academy, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. <https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/shares/The-Energy-Coast-BVA-BDRC-Final-Report-2019.pdf><https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/shares/The-Energy-Coast-BVA-BDRC-Executive-Summary-2019.pdf>)

Another study states the value of the tourism industry in the AONB was £228M in 2019 supporting 5,056 jobs (Economic Impact of Tourism Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB – 2019: Destination Research). This would be significantly impacted due to the loss of defined AONB characteristics which provide the canvas for much of the tourism industry on the Suffolk Coast to thrive

Visitors are drawn to Aldeburgh in the AONB not only for the attractions of the beach, they come for the birds, to walk and to pursue a wide variety of interests, not only in the summer peak but at all times of year. Two yacht clubs and a notable golf course attract many visitors. The (recently upgraded) Moot Hall Museum and the Red House (long-term home and archive of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears) are important world-class destinations for visitors. In addition the Jubilee Hall, where some of Britten’s operas were premiered, hosts numerous theatre and musical events throughout the year.

Visitors cite the beach and sea, the town’s special atmosphere, the character of the High Street, and the quality of the surrounding countryside as the major reasons for their visits. The value of peace and quiet, dark skies, and a desire for minimal change, are real draws.

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Added to the natural capital of the area is its cultural draw. Aldeburgh hosts a significant number of special events during the year, a list of which is set out in our written representation 'Statement of Opposition' DEADLINE 1 STATEMENT OF OPPOSITION 12 May 2021 IP Ref 20026427 and IP Ref 20026431.

Many of the events involve significant numbers of predominantly young professional artists and performers, as well as diverse audiences drawn from all parts of the UK and elsewhere in Europe and beyond. Aldeburgh and the surrounding area provide accommodation through three large hotels, numerous B&Bs and letting properties, and a large caravan park. Several quality restaurants and pubs, two renowned fish and chip shops, various cafes and teashops, and three supermarkets as well as a clutch of specialist food outlets keep performers and audiences fed and watered.

The disruption the Sizewell C construction would cause to Aldeburgh and its activities is unimaginable, and the social disruption it might cause is hard to fathom. There would be severe pressures upon accommodation, road congestion, parking difficulties. Inevitably also there would be the risk of social disruption arising from the presence of large numbers of construction workers in the accommodation campus with little entertainment, shopping opportunities or health facilities on site or anywhere nearby. We truly wish circumstances, constrained as they are by the Covid pandemic, would allow the Examiners to spend more time here to appreciate the quality of life in this area – short targeted site visits will not enable you to absorb the full atmosphere.

We have already alluded to nuisance arising from the construction process. Air, light, and noise pollution would be generated by construction traffic and by onsite works extending over a period of several years. Traffic congestion on our rural roads system would be intolerable. We wish to take part in Issue Specific Hearings on these matters.

This plan cuts the AONB in half, and could gravely affect its geography. It's a fragile coast, with periodic cliff collapses and considerable movement of sand and shingle. The proposed sea wall reinforcement and the beach landing facility at Sizewell could have a damaging impact upon the coast at Thorpeness and Aldeburgh, and on the eastern bank of the River Alde, which runs parallel to the coast for nine miles. We know that sea levels are rising due to global warming, and that the North Sea is prone to tidal surges, which generate flood events such as the famous East Anglia floods in 1953 or the more recent flood in 2013 which inundated the whole of the Alde estuary as far inland as Snape.

These risks are compounded by the risks inherent in nuclear power generation. The devastation of extensive land areas and the displacement of large numbers of residents as a result of nuclear accidents at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima cannot be ignored. We recognise that different technologies are envisaged for Sizewell C, but we

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note that so far no EPR reactors are operating successfully. The end treatment and storage of nuclear waste is also an issue of enduring concern on an eroding coastline.

In short, this is the wrong project, in the wrong place. It is an out-of-date concept, initiated before renewable energy generation became viable and designed for circumstances which are now very different. We are not opposed to nuclear power, but this project is too large for our Suffolk Coast to bear and it is beset with unresolved issues such as the handling of dangerous wastes and damaging impacts upon sensitive environments both onshore and offshore. The Aldeburgh Society believes that the future of energy generation should lie in wind, solar and tidal power, with the option for the smaller-scale nuclear units now being developed, combined with new forms of storage capacity.

Many people locally have the impression that this is a done deal, with the Government already totally committed. Our County and District Councils speak and act as if it's going ahead, focussing on short-term employment benefits and mitigation measures delivering limited environmental improvements. Where is their vision for the long-term defence of Suffolk? Many speakers at the Open Floor Hearings, while expressing opposition, also seemed to make the same assumption. We shall not do that. We believe in the integrity of the Planning Inspectorate Examination process and we trust that it will conclude that this project is unsustainable.

Whether or not combined with the cumulative impact of Scottish Power's proposed onshore installations and numerous additional grid connections, this project would be excessively damaging to our area. It would wreak damage on the natural and built environment. It would harm our inhabitants. It would threaten our businesses. And it would drive away the visitors our economy relies on.

Green energy (if indeed it could be called that) cannot be allowed to wreak such seismic trauma in our collective march towards net zero.

We wish to add our support finally to those statement of opposition of STOP Sizewell C and the RSPB.

Katherine Mackie, Chair

IP Ref 20026427

Paul Bongers de Rath, Secretary

IP Ref 20026431

31 May 2021