

THE ALDEBURGH SOCIETY

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PLANNING INSPECTORATE EXAMINATION OF THE SIZEWELL C APPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT CONSENT BY EDF

DEADLINE 5 STATEMENT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY ISSUES 23 JULY 2021

As the civic society for the historic coastal town and cultural centre of Aldeburgh, the Aldeburgh Society has registered its grave concern over this DCO application for the construction of two further nuclear reactors at Sizewell. The objects of the Society are to encourage public interest in and care for the character of the town and its surroundings, and the preservation, development and improvement of general public amenity in the area. EDF's proposals conflict with the fulfilment of these objects.

The Society is not opposed to nuclear power, and it supports the Government's net zero target for energy production. However, it views with great concern the damage to the Suffolk Heritage Coast which the construction of this very large industrial project would entail. Sizewell enjoys a unique location, sandwiched between the two small and very special historic coastal towns Aldeburgh and Southwold, and adjacent to the internationally renowned RSPB Minsmere nature reserve and the National Trust's Dunwich Heath cliff-top estate.

This whole coastline is part of one of England's 23 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, so designated in 1970 with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the habitats and biodiversity of the special heathlands, woodland, estuaries and coast. Large-scale industrial development here would conflict totally with the Government's stated intention to add provisions to the Environment Bill currently before Parliament to ensure that new nationally significant infrastructure projects in England, such as future transport and energy projects, will provide net gains for nature. The plain fact is that, 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.

The Government's previous designation of the Sizewell site and its more recent announcement that it proposes to go ahead with nuclear power station development mean that the greatest care must be taken in examining the full implications of this DCO application. This Examination is inevitably complicated by the recently completed Examination of the DCO applications by SPR for two offshore windfarms, which would involve major substation development in the same area of rural Suffolk to link the power generated offshore to the national grid and potentially provide connections for numerous other offshore projects. 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 would be too hard for this fragile area to bear.

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The impact of EDF's proposals upon the town of Aldeburgh would be extremely damaging. 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. A recent study estimated there to have been over four million trips per year to the area, creating a spend in excess of £160 million (*Source: The Energy Coast report of September 2019: The-Energy-Coast-BVA-BDRC-Final Report-2019.pdf*). Visitors come not only for the attractions of the beach, they include numerous bird watchers and walkers, and others pursuing a wide variety of interests, not only in the summer peak but at nearly all times of the year. The world-class music venue of Snape Maltings attracts visitors with concerts throughout the year and provides a major centre for the development of young professional musicians. Two yacht clubs and a notable golf course also 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 also important destinations for visitors.

In research for the preparation of the Aldeburgh Town Plan 2015 (*appended to our Deadline 1 submission*) visitors cited 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, featured highly in responses. Residents, a significant proportion of whom moved to the town in retirement, prize these features very highly too. All of these aspects are fundamentally threatened by EDF's proposals, causing concern that the rest of many residents' lives would be scarred by construction noise, dust, vibration, light pollution, traffic congestion, and social disruption.

The traffic impact is particularly troubling. While road access to the development site would not pass through Aldeburgh, the fact that a significant share of the very large volumes of construction materials required for a project of this size would be delivered over a rural roads system some distance away from major traffic routes would inevitably cause widespread congestion. The operation of the construction site would also generate a notable increase in staff bus, car and van traffic throughout the surrounding area, causing delays, parking problems and general frustration. We understand that all these issues have been observed at the Hinckley Point site, even though this is much closer to main traffic arteries. These problems would inevitably impact upon prospective visitors, who would cease to see Aldeburgh as a desirable destination.

The applicant's claim that the construction and operation of Sizewell C would create important local employment opportunities also raises doubts. This relatively sparsely populated area is fortunate in suffering relatively low unemployment, which suggests that the promised creation of new, probably higher paid jobs would attract people away from their existing employment in local businesses such as the hospitality trades, which are already suffering from the loss of job-seekers from EU countries.

For the construction phase, EDF envisages that a significant number of professional and skilled workers would move on from their existing jobs at Hinckley Point C, requiring them

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to set up home in East Suffolk. Accommodation for longer-term rental is in short supply in the vicinity of Sizewell, and short-term rentals of holiday homes and apartments make up a significant share of the visitor accommodation available in Aldeburgh. These properties are unlikely to become available for Sizewell workers since the accommodation is required by visitors for most of the year, at much higher rents than normal rental properties, and not just for the summer season.

The proposed accommodation campus at Sizewell also causes us concern. The projected numbers of workers lodging at the peak there would exceed the total population of Leiston, the nearest town, and would be more than double that of Aldeburgh. While on-site health facilities and social welfare provisions are envisaged, these workers would surely also wish to spend some recreation time off-site but would find very limited shopping and entertainment options in the vicinity. They would be unlikely to spend much time and money in the type of shops which visitors on holiday like to visit, and only a minority would be likely to be satisfied by the offerings of our small local cinemas, Snape Maltings, and the Jubilee Hall. Moreover, any workers requiring urgent hospital treatment would face a minimum half-hour transfer to Ipswich Hospital.

This set of circumstances is already unfavourable enough for the construction process without the fact that the project itself is fatally flawed. It is based on a concept drawn up more than ten years ago, before renewable energy generation became viable and so was designed for circumstances which are now very different. We are not opposed to nuclear power, but this project is too large for our eroding 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.

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 storm surge 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 are documented and cannot be ignored. We recognise that different technologies are envisaged for Sizewell C, but we note that so far no EPR reactors are operating successfully in Europe and projects to build them are being seriously delayed by complex technical difficulties. The end treatment and storage of nuclear waste is also an issue of enduring concern on an eroding coastline. The fact that there are already two existing nuclear power stations here, one being laboriously decommissioned and the other scheduled to continue

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in operation for 15 years, cannot be taken to justify tripling the presence of these known risks.

In short, this is the wrong project, in the wrong place. The Aldeburgh Society believes that the future of energy generation should lie in wind, solar and tidal power, together with the option for the smaller-scale nuclear units now being developed, combined with new forms of electricity storage capacity.

Whether or not combined with the cumulative impact of Scottish Power Renewables' 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 have faith in the integrity of the Planning Inspectorate Examination process and we trust that, despite all the consultations carried out by EDF and our County and District Councils, and the extensive preparatory works already undertaken, it will conclude that this project is unsustainable and should not be recommended for development consent.