

MINSMERE LEVELS STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

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Michael Baker
The Planning Inspectorate
3/18 Eagle Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square, Temple Quay
Bristol, BS1 6P

Dear Michael Baker

Consultation by EDF Energy re development of Sizewell C Nuclear Power Station

Thank you for your helpful, (if belated!) response of 1 July which I have now had the opportunity of discussing with colleagues.

There continues to be a great deal of mystification, confusion and uncertainty within the community about the part that your Inspectorate will play once it receives an application for any Sizewell development. Apart from your response to us, the only information we have been able to glean is from EDF itself - hardly a neutral party in the process.

We know that under the new accelerated infrastructure arrangements there will be no public inquiry to which we can make representations, We are quite unclear as to when, how and whether the Planning Inspectorate will consult with us in other ways, what we have to prepare for and what will be our rights and entitlements.

Many months before EDF moved to launch its stage one consultation, the Department for the Environment and Climate Change organised its own consultations as well as a series of public meetings in which it sought to set the plans for Sizewell in the context of a national energy strategy.

It is most regrettable that the Planning Inspectorate, as another national public body, apparently has no equivalent public information procedure in which it explains the processes that it will follow. Community groups would then be much clearer as to their rights and entitlements and the contribution that they will be able to make to the Inspectorate's enquiries and deliberations. I appreciate that I may be raising a question on a matter of policy to which you may not be able reply straight way, but it is one on which we would appreciate a response.

More immediately we have a few further queries arising from your letter of 1 July.

Question 1

Who and what are the 'prescribed' consultation bodies you refer to in your letter?

Question 2.

Does the Planning Inspectorate have permissive powers to consult with bodies other than those 'prescribed' that it judges have a necessary contribution to make in the formulation of the scoping opinion/report?

Whilst I appreciate that the Inspectorate may not regard the Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group as qualifying in this way, we work closely with other bodies which surely should do so. Here I think of:

- The East Suffolk Internal Drainage Board which has a key role under statute for managing the flow of inland water on the Minsmere Levels – quite as important as the Environment Agency itself. The Engineer has an extremely detailed knowledge of the structure of the drains and the likely impact of any development on groundwater both over the long term and during the construction phase. His previous work for the Environment Agency as a local engineer would make him a very useful local advisor with immense practical experience, both in coastal protection and inland water control.
- Conservation bodies such as the RSPB and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Over half of the Levels form part of the RSPB Minsmere Bird Reserve and most of the remainder of the Levels are managed by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust on behalf of EDF. The entire area of the Levels is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, are designated as SSI and under equivalent RAMSAR international legislation. The staff of both organisations have an unrivalled knowledge of both environmental and habitat issues that will arise from any development on the Levels.

It seems extraordinary that the Inspectorate would not wish to have direct access to the knowledge, experience and expertise of organisations such as these if forming its scoping opinion.

Question 3

Once the Environmental Statement completed by the developer is received by the Inspectorate, will this be immediately placed on the public record?

Will the Inspectorate consult with interested groups and seek representations to satisfy it that it properly addresses all the issues that were identified in the Scoping Opinion/Report.?

These questions may appear pretty basic, but you will appreciate they arise from our fundamental lack of understanding and knowledge about the Planning Inspectorate's role and procedures in the new infrastructure arrangements.

I look forward to hearing from you again

Yours sincerely

W. John Rea Price