

25 Jan 2017

## **Sizewell C Proposed Nuclear Development: Stage 2 Pre Application Consultation Response of Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership**

### **The AONB Partnership**

The Partnership was formed in 1993, it comprises public, private and voluntary organisations who are committed to conserving and enhancing the Natural Beauty of the AONB. The Partnership's role is to oversee delivery of the AONB Management Plan. It meets twice a year to discuss significant issues in the AONB, and delivery of the Plan.

The AONB Partnership consists of;

Suffolk County Council, Essex County Council, Babergh District Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Tendring District Council, Waveney District Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Country Land and Business Association, The Crown Estate, Defra, Historic England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Haven Gateway Partnership, National Farmers' Union, National Trust, Natural England, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Suffolk Association of Local Councils, Community Action Suffolk, Suffolk Coastal Business Forum, Suffolk Coast Ltd, Suffolk Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Suffolk Preservation Society, Suffolk Coast Against Retreat, Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

It should be noted that many of these partners are public bodies or statutory undertakers which have the duties to conserve and enhance the Natural Beauty of the AONB as set out in section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). Therefore, AONB interests will be raised by a number of partners. Furthermore, whilst the AONB team is not a statutory consultee, those partners with the statutory responsibility for the AONB and who are such consultees, will continue to identify relevant issues between stages 2 and 3.

### **The Partnership Response to the Stage 2 Consultation**

This is a Partnership response and in that regard has sought to address issues in a level of detail that all Partners can support. However, given the membership of the Partnership includes members of local authorities and statutory agencies many partners will be making their own responses, as bodies that have statutory duties to the AONB.

Many partners are custodians of Natural Beauty indicators and special qualities of the AONB, this AONB Partnership response should be seen as complementary to those responses, rather than the only response addressing AONB issues. Many partner responses will also address AONB concerns.

The Suffolk Coast & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty AONB Partnership have seen the *Consultation Summary Document* and *Consultation Document* (both dated Autumn/Winter 2016) relating to the Sizewell C Proposed Nuclear Development.

The consultation documents relate to a proposal in which both the operational site and the construction area are within, and much of the associated development is adjacent to, the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB, which is nationally designated under the *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949)*. The legal framework for AONBs in England and Wales is provided by the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000)* which reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance Natural Beauty.

In summary the response from the AONB Partnership is:

- The consultation process contains significant faults and omissions
- The development proposals have not been adequately measured against the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the nationally designated AONB
- The stage 2 consultation documents are lacking in sufficient information to make informed consultation responses
- Stage 2 proposals, while still requiring further work, are grounds for very considerable concern amongst the AONB Partnership, with the potential for significant residual impacts on the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB, not least through:
  - Off-the-shelf power station design (lift and shifted from Hinkley Point C),
  - Unacceptable stockpile height which given current proposals would have an unacceptable impact on sensitive views across the AONB
  - Severance of the AONB
  - Significant impacts on the wildlife interests of Minsmere-Walberswick SPA and the Sizewell Belts SSSI, many of which show no signs, in Stage 2, of being able to be adequately mitigated
  - Loss of tranquillity for a 'long-term' construction period, severing the AONB west – east in an area well known for its dark skies, quiet walks and wildlife

Each point the AONB Partnership makes is accompanied with a request for clarification, further explanation in subsequent consultations or a requirement for further detail to make an informed response.

The AONB Partnership make this response in connection to two main areas:

1. The treatment and status of the AONB in the stage 2 consultation
2. Specific topics of interest to the AONB Partnership

## 1. The treatment and status of the AONB in the stage 2 consultation

The consultation material (documents and public exhibitions) did not adequately identify the boundary of the AONB or its status and sensitivity as a nationally designated landscape; neither did it adequately identify the extent and status of the Heritage Coast.

Furthermore, the consultation appears to downplay the likely impact of the AONB in decision making, in stark contrast to the weight given to it in the National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation Guidance relating to this development (EN6 – see below).

As we understand it the principle purpose of the consultation was to inform the public about the proposed development. However, in order for the consultation to be effective it is essential that designations and sensitivities of the landscape in which the development is proposed are also explained. The Stage 2 consultation has completely failed to put the development into a proper environmental context, thereby negating the public's opportunity to fully appreciate the likely impacts of a development of this scale in such a sensitive location. In the absence of this information the public cannot properly understand the likely effects of the development or their significance.

In terms of the likely impact of the proposal, EN6 *National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation*, identifies that the proposal may have such significant impacts as to compromise the purposes of the AONB designation itself. Based on the information provided at stage 2 the AONB Partnership would endorse this statement.

Furthermore, EDF Energy's failure to use the Stage 2 consultation to describe the development in light of the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities document that they themselves commissioned, is not only disappointing, but also, in the opinion of the AONB Partnership, a missed opportunity to properly describe the likely impacts of the proposal on the AONB.

In addition, it is disappointing that although a detailed document capturing the character and special qualities of the AONB has been agreed between EDF Energy and the consultees, including AONB officers and has been published, this was not included in the consultation or cited by it. Again this undermines the public understanding of the sensitivity of the landscape around the development and therefore the effectiveness of the consultation.

The document can be found here:

<http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/assets/Planning/AONB-special-qualities-document-Sizewell-C.pdf>

Not only does the consultation fail to identify the AONB effectively or clarify its sensitivities it goes further and actively seeks to minimise or even perhaps undermine the significance of the designation in the design of the project or decision making. For example, section 3.6.4 states: "...the fact that the Sizewell area is designated as an AONB and a Heritage Coast in local designations [sic] 'may well' be important and relevant." [Our emphasis]

***Action required before the stage 3 consultation: Effective recognition of the status, significance, sensitivity, character and special qualities of the AONB and Heritage Coast, in accordance with the findings of EN6 and the Appraisal of Sustainability for the nominated site.***

## 2. Specific topics of interest to the AONB Partnership

### Design

The AONB Partnership consider that the design of the buildings makes no acknowledgment of their unique location within a nationally designated landscape. The damage to the AONB is acknowledged in the National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation (EN-6) and as such, it is disappointing that the design does not seek to avoid or even minimise this residual damage, but is rather largely a lift and shift from Hinkley Point C. If this design is what EDF Energy take to Development Consent Order then in the Partnership's opinion the likely residual landscape and visual impacts will be greater than if EDF Energy had taken a more bespoke approach as was done with Sizewell B.

***The AONB Partnership request that future consultations outline how the development will avoid, minimise and mitigate against the damage caused by a design that does not acknowledge the setting within a nationally designated landscape.***

### Tranquillity

The AONB Partnership notes that only one reference was made to tranquillity following a search of the Consultation Document. This is disappointing and somewhat surprising as 'Relative Tranquillity' is a factor of the Natural Beauty indicators, that EDF Energy themselves commissioned, that form the reasons for designation of the AONB and hence what development proposals should be judged against.

Furthermore, the Appraisal of Sustainability, (AoS), for the Sizewell C site nomination identifies that: "The Countryside Agency and Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) county tranquillity map identifies the nominated site as lying within a tranquil part of the East of England region" (para 4.5.6).

In the AoS at Table 1.1: Sustainable Development Themes and AoS/Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) Objectives, tranquillity is identified as one of the objectives under the landscape theme.

***Action required the before stage 3 consultation: In addition to Landscape, Seascape, ecological and socio- economic assessments of the impacts of the development there should also be an assessment of the tranquillity of the landscape around the site and likely effects on this of both the construction and operation of the project.***

### Ecology

As identified in Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) EN6, the Appraisal of Sustainability and the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) the ecological designations around the site are a very significant and sensitive issue for this project.

In particular, the European site designation at Minsmere and the Sizewell Marshes and Minsmere-Walberswick SSSI will be impacted by development proposals. The lack of evidence about levels of impact at this stage of consultation makes it difficult to offer appropriate consultation comments and indeed a strongly held concern as to the ability to mitigate these impacts.

More specifically, key ecological concerns from this stage of consultation include:

- Potential hydrological impacts on the wetland SSSIs (resulting in possible effects on habitat type/quality) from the SSSI crossing, the cut-off wall around the nuclear site, and potential leaching from the borrow pits
- The effects of coastal infrastructure on the Minsmere coastline (see comments on coastal processes, jetty and sea defences below)
- The loss of part of Sizewell Marshes SSSI, including the potential for further loss/damage during construction, (see SSSI crossing comments below)
- Noise and lighting effects of the construction areas, transport routes and accommodation campus on the local ecology and hence the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the area

In addition, it should also be recognised that the presence of these very important habitats, flagship species and sites, are intrinsic to the character and special qualities of the AONB. Furthermore, these are a significant contributor to local identity, sense of place and the tourism offer of the AONB.

Current proposals as set out in Stage 2 give the Partnership no information, nor confidence in EDF Energy's ability to adequately mitigate the impacts on the Minsmere-Walberswick SPA, the Sizewell Marshes SSSI, nor the numerous protected & priority species and habitats that will be impacted. AONB Partners will make particular & more detailed representations in this regard.

However, we would cite and endorse the AoS and HRA which states:

1. *Given the scope for mitigation of biodiversity effects identified in the Appraisal of Sustainability for sites of national importance it is reasonable to conclude that it may be possible to avoid or mitigate impacts to an extent. However, the Appraisal of Sustainability has highlighted that the site includes land take from Sizewell Marshes SSSI that could lead to direct impacts.*
2. *Given that the Habitats Regulations Assessment has not been able to rule out adverse impacts on sites of European nature conservation importance, the Government has carefully considered whether it is appropriate to include this site in the NPS.*

And also the table in the AoS (reproduced below) which clearly sets out the sustainability challenges EDF Energy face, none of which has been explained or articulated in Stage 2.

Table 6.1: Summary of the Significance of Potential Strategic Sustainability Effects

Sustainable Development Themes:	Significance of potential Strategic effect at each Development stage:		
	Construction	Operation	Decommissioning
Air Quality	-	-?	-?
Biodiversity and Ecosystems	--?	--?	--?
Climate Change	-	++	-?
Communities: Population, Employment and Viability	+?	+?	0
Communities: Supporting Infrastructure	-	-	-
Human Health and Well-Being	+	+	+
Cultural Heritage	-	-	-
Landscape	--	--	0?
Soils, Geology and Land Use	-	-?	-?
Water Quality and Resources	-	-	-
Flood Risk	-	-	-
<b>Key: Significance and Categories of Potential Strategic Effects</b>			
++	Development actively encouraged as it would resolve an existing sustainability problem; effect considered to be of regional/national/international significance		
+	No sustainability constraints and development acceptable; effect considered to be of regional/ national/international significance		
0	Neutral effect		
-	Potential sustainability issues, mitigation and/or negotiation possible; effect considered to be of regional/national/international significance		
--	Problematical because of known sustainability issues; mitigation or negotiation difficult and/or expensive; effect considered to be of regional/national/ international significance		
<b>Uncertainty</b>			
?	Where the significance of an effect is particularly uncertain, for example because insufficient information is available at the plan stage to fully appraise the effects of the development or the potential for successful mitigation, the significance category is qualified by the addition of '?'		

DECC, 2010, Appraisal of Sustainability: Site Report for Sizewell.

**Action required before the stage 3 consultation: An effective and robust assessment of the likely impacts of the proposal on the designated and non-designated ecological sites and protected species, which contribute to the character special qualities of the AONB.**

## Tourism

The AONB Partnership considers the lack of assessment of the potential impacts upon the tourism industry within the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB and the area of interest to the Suffolk Coast Limited Destination Management Organisation to be a significant oversight. In addition, section 5.3.20 states: “The tourism sector represents an estimated 10-12% of all jobs in Suffolk, which is significant, but similar to the tourist’s share across the UK as a whole” This is considered to be potentially misleading. The tourism industry in the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB is worth £155M per year and supports 3,199 full time equivalent Jobs (4,375 actual jobs) on 2015 figures. The AONB Partnership considers that the tourism

industry is a more significant economic driver in the area impacted directly by the proposed development (i.e. not Suffolk as a whole) than this statement suggests.

The construction phase is likely to be particularly damaging in this regard, the AONB Partnership considers that the consultation does not adequately explain the likely adverse impacts of the 10-12 year construction on the AONB and by extension on tourism. As no assessment has been presented regarding impacts upon:

- i. The areas reputation as a visitor destination
- ii. Visitor products (e.g. walking routes)
- iii. Tranquillity
- iv. Transport infrastructure
- v. Landscape quality and character
- vi. Effectively severing the AONB in two

***Action required before the stage 3 consultation: An effective focussed and robust assessment of the likely impacts of the proposal upon the tourism industry in the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB and the area of interest to the Suffolk Coast Limited Destination Management Organisation, rather than Suffolk as a whole. Including assessment on tranquillity, baseline, construction (worst case) and operation.***

## **Transport**

The AONB Partnership notes that there is little information on the preferred modal split for transport options. In addition, the options put forward do not appear to have been tested against the reasons for designation for the AONB, or impacts upon the local economy. The AONB Partnership is therefore limited in what comments it can make in relation to transport options. All options will have an impact upon the reasons for designation and to make an informed response we request the information outlined below:

***The AONB Partnership request that future consultations measure the impacts of the transport options against the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities criteria endorsed by the Partnership.***

## **Accommodation**

Whilst the proposals for the accommodation campus are outside the AONB; given their proximity and the likely impacts on setting the final proposal must minimise adverse impacts on the AONB and its setting. Proposals should be assessed using current Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) methodology and with particular reference to the Natural Beauty and Special qualities of the AONB.

In the absence of such an assessment the AONB Partnership cannot judge these proposals. The design of the campus, given the options outlined, will impact upon the AONB and we have significant concerns about the proposals of a 5 storey campus directly on the AONB boundary.

Furthermore given likely significant impacts of this part of the proposal on the AONB and its setting, as well as on the locally designated landscape in which it is sited, the Partnership considers that alternative locations and accommodation strategies should be properly and demonstrably considered.

***The AONB Partnership request that EDF Energy demonstrate that suitable alternatives do not exist before proposing an option which will undoubtedly have greater landscape impacts than others, such as spreading the campus over both sides of Eastbridge Road and moving the playing fields into Leiston.***

## **Nuclear Platform**

The AONB Partnership understand and support the need to minimise the land take of the SSSI, although the 5.55ha now to be permanently lost is in fact more than the 4.6ha in stage 1, despite EDF Energy suggesting the contrary in Stage 2. In addition, the AONB Partnership recognises the overriding need for site security and nuclear safety. It is clear that the nuclear platform is now proposed to be further east. In addition, the height of the nuclear platform now being proposed is higher than that proposed at stage 1 and the impacts of this increase in height upon the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities have not been explained.

Furthermore, as the platform has been pushed east, presumably to avoid greater SSSI landtake, this raises concerns about exposure of defences over the lifetime of the project. AONB Partners will expect detailed dialogue post stage 2 on EDF Energy's thinking regarding the position of the platform.

***The AONB Partnership request information be provided at any future consultations on the impact of these changes (since stage 1 consultation) on the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB and what other options have been investigated to accommodate minimising SSSI land take and to comply with nuclear regulations.***

## **Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Crossing**

The information provided demonstrates that whatever option is selected it will involve loss of SSSI and potentially a loss of functionality and isolation of the remaining area. On the basis of the information provided, it would appear that minimising SSSI loss should be the deciding factor. AONB Partners will comment on this point in greater detail.

***The AONB Partnership request that at any future consultation an assessment is made of each option in terms of impacts on the SSSI. In addition, the AONB Partnership would wish to see an assessment of the impacts of climate, coastal change and coastal processes and LVIA over the operational phase of the development in relation to the Site of Special Scientific interest crossing.***



## Coastal processes

The AONB Partnership consider that the information provided at stage 2 consultation relating to coastal processes is limited and incomplete and therefore cannot make an informed comment on the likely impacts of coastal processes on the AONB.

It is a concern that the consultation documents make repeated reference to the Shoreline Management Plan for the Minsmere frontage as being managed realignment. The Partnership would not accept EDF Energy proposals in any way pre-determining or assuming the future of the Minsmere frontage. Over the lifetime of the EDF Energy development there is the potential for changed conservation policies, shoreline management policies and the need to adapt to change overtime including compensating for habitat change should not in any way be expedited by EDF Energy. However, the documents do not appear to give information on how the development proposals may impact on the Minsmere frontage in terms of coastal processes and speed of coastal change in this location.

It is unacceptable that the development should have any negative impacts on this coastline, its wildlife and designated sites which form part of the area's Natural Beauty and Special Qualities that are reasons for the AONB designation.

Furthermore, there appears to be little information provided about the impact upon coastal processes and the coast itself outside the development site following the installation of a permanent beach landing facility and the creation of a 'hard point' on the coast.

Finally, the effect of future sea level rise on the design of the SSSI crossing remains unresolved, as set out in para 7.4.77 of the stage 2 consultation.

***The AONB Partnership therefore request that any future consultations include information about the likely impacts on the coast to the North and South of the development site and any changes to the areas wildlife and designated sites that are integral to the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB.***

## Sea defences

It is noted that the proposed sea defences will be 10m AOD but with a statement that notes the sea defences could be raised to 14m AOD 'should it be necessary'.

An increase in height of the sea defences, during construction and when in operation, will have a negative impact and cause significant damage to an ecologically important stretch of dune grassland and associated negative impacts on the landscape.

***The AONB Partnership request that an assessment of the visual impact of the sea defences (at both 10m and 14m AOD) be made available at any future consultation. This should include an explanation of what might trigger a height increase of 4m.***

## **Jetty (either wide or narrow)**

The jetty is described as a temporary structure. Given the likely length of time it will take to construct, be operational and the decommissioning process it is likely to be a significant amount of time and therefore have a significant impact upon for many years on the AONB's Natural Beauty and Special Qualities.

The jetty is likely to have an impact upon the areas wildlife and designated sites and the information available at stage 2 consultation does not appear to explain what these effects are likely to be. The introduction of such a structure is likely to damage the areas existing wildlife and designated sites that form part of the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB.

In addition, the operation of the jetty is likely have significant impact upon the adjacent seascape which contributes significantly to and the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB, with an increase in ships and human activity and their associated impacts upon tranquillity, in particular noise, light, and visual distraction etc.

***Action required prior to stage 3: Effective assessment through LVIA of the impacts of the jetty and its operations on seascape and the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB at any future consultations. Justification, through clarification of modal split and soil management strategy, on the requirement or otherwise of a jetty.***

## **Beach Landing Facility**

As outlined above the Beach Landing Facility is likely to have an impact upon coastal processes by forming a hard point on the coastline. In addition, it is likely to have an impact upon the enjoyment of the AONB along public footpaths including the Suffolk Coast Path and the likely route of the England Coast Path, as well as access to the beach itself. Furthermore, this type of construction in this location may have a landscape impact on the AONB as a result of introducing a substantial built element into a semi natural landscape.

***Action required prior to stage 3: Effective assessment through LVIA of the impacts of the jetty and its operations on seascape and the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB at any future consultations.***

## **Ash Wood**

As an important landscape feature and wildlife habitat the AONB Partnership considers there to be insufficient information on the likely impacts of the stockpile area and borrow pits will be on this area.

***The AONB Partnership ask that any future consultations give concise and appropriate information to allow respondents to make informed comments through the consultation process on the future wellbeing of Ash Wood.***

## **Plumes**

The AONB Partnership has seen no reference during the consultation phase of any steam flumes that may be emitted from the stacks associated with the development. We consider

that this may be a negative impact on the Natural Beauty and Special Qualities of the AONB.

***Action required prior to stage 3: Effective assessment through LVIA of potential impacts of plumes from the stacks during the operational phase and how these impact upon the Natural Beauty of the AONB.***

### **Stockpile and soil management strategy**

Given the scale of the proposed stockpile and associated excavation activity, the soil management strategy appears likely to have very adverse visual impacts on the AONB.

***The AONB Partnership request that option of peat disposal at Wallasea be looked at again as soil management (stockpile, borrow pits, Cat777 movement), given the magnitude and duration of impacts likely on the AONB of the current proposals.***

### **Recreation and Access**

It is noted that the Figures 11.29 and 11.30 in the consultation document have no key and therefore are only open to interpretation.

As outlined in comments above the development will have an impact upon the Public Rights of Way network, including the promoted Long Distance Routes known as the Suffolk Coast Path and Sandlings Walk. It is also likely to have an impact upon the preferred route of the England Coast Path.

The AONB Partnership does not support the diversions proposed for the two long distance routes, as these are far too long. Suffolk County Council as Highways Authority will make substantive comments in this regard.

The AONB Partnership cannot comment with any degree of confidence on the proposals relating to access until such time that the maps provided during consultation are fit for use and information around issues such as frequency and magnitude of footpath closures is disclosed.

***The AONB Partnership request full information at stage 3 and would welcome engagement with EDF Energy on this issue prior to the stage 3 consultation.***

### **Summary**

#### **Construction phase**

Based on the information provided the construction process will have significant, and in landscape assessment terms, a long term adverse impact on the character and special qualities of the AONB, many of which, it would appear cannot be sufficiently mitigated, as identified in EN6 appendix 2, the AoS and HRA.

The AONB Partnership expects EDF Energy to demonstrate how it has followed the mitigation hierarchy but given the considerable challenges we see at this stage, and the difficulty in fully mitigating impacts as set out in DECC documents, we believe compensation during the construction stage will need consideration. Therefore, the AONB

Partnership would expect EDF Energy to reach agreement with the local authorities on a financial 'construction' compensation package, and it is suggested that this is based on the model used to deal with the residual impacts of the Dry Fuel Store on the AONB (the Access and Amenity Fund – AAF).

### Operational Phase

Furthermore, it appears likely that the operational phase will have significant adverse impacts on the AONB and its Natural Beauty and Special Qualities, as anticipated in EN6 that cannot be mitigated by embedded or secondary mitigation. The AONB Partnership expects EDF Energy to demonstrate how it has followed the mitigation hierarchy but given the considerable changes we see at this stage, and the difficulty in fully mitigating impacts as set out in DECC documents, compensation during the operational stage will need consideration. Therefore the AONB partnership would expect EDF Energy to reach agreement with the local authorities on a financial operational compensation package based on the AAF model used to deal with the residual impacts of the Dry Fuel Store on the AONB.

Based on the information presented to date such a package is essential and must be commensurate with the scale of residual impacts created by this proposal.

*This response is on behalf of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Partnership which comprises 26 organisations who all bring their particular specialism to the Partnership. As such this response should be read as a full Partnership response, rather than one in which all organisations have signed up to all components of the response. This is the nature of such a response. The breadth of the issues covered reflects the breadth of the Partnership's interests, rather than the specialism of each Partnership member. Individual organisations represented on the Partnership will respond to this consultation individually and according to their own areas of interest.*

Yours sincerely



Simon Amstutz  
AONB Manager  
01394 445222  
[simon.amstutz@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:simon.amstutz@suffolk.gov.uk)