

Speech to a meeting hosted by TEAGS (Stop Sizewell C) and Theberton & Eastbridge Parish Council on 14 September 2019

Hello My name is Richard Cuttall.

I am here today as Chairperson of West Hinkley Action Group, shortened to WHAG, and as a resident of the tiny hamlet of Shurton which is on the boundary of EDFs Hinkley Point C development in Somerset.

Shurton, Burton and Knighton are the closest hamlets to the site and they consist of about 100 properties with 300 residents.

This presentation is prepared with information provided by some of these residents.

I have tried NOT to make this presentation a completely negative experience, but positives are, in my opinion, difficult to come by unless you want employment, education or have a relevant business that can take advantage of the proposed development.

I hope to give you an idea of what we have endured as EdF obtained permission and then started to build twin nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point and the impact this has had on our community.

We had three rounds of consultations with the developer which were preceded by many other meetings with councils, MP's, various agencies and other interested parties. During the consultation it seemed that the local community could have their voices heard with the ability to influence the planning process. EdF even promoted the idea of being a 'good neighbour' and 'listening to our needs and concerns.'

It became clear by Stage 2 that EdF were not going to listen or be good. The consultations were repetitive with a lack of new information. There was no mention of the major factors that would diminish our quality of life for years to come.

The local community saw this process as being a tick box exercise to satisfy the statutory requirements in the lead up to the Development Consent Order application. Everybody was becoming weary and stressed even at this early stage. Objections had to be repeated otherwise EDF would put a spin on this to their advantage claiming that their mitigation had resolved the concerns of their neighbours.

The Parish Council and WHAG after many months and numerous meetings were successful in gaining assurance from EdF that a piece of land between Shurton and the site would be left as a buffer. Many different people including French engineers and planners were involved. One engineer in particular was surprised at the area of land that EDF were intending to acquire. He was categorical that the area we wanted as a buffer was not needed as a laydown area. Many of these early meetings were not minuted. Subsequently this was omitted in the Development Consent Order application. For whatever reason this was not contested and we now have no access to this area.

There was also a separate application to West Somerset Council for permission to start site preparation works. This would involve the destruction of the hedgerows, woods, farmland and paths that we had enjoyed for years. Approval for this was granted on 27 January 2012 the final Government decision to allow HPC to be built was over 4 years later. As the fences went up it became clear just how big an area was to be used for the build. Over the next few years over 3 million cubic metres of rock and earth was to be excavated and stockpiled in 35 metre high mounds. These initially were classified as bunds to reduce noise levels from the construction. This changed to being a visual barrier with a complete denial that noise reduction had ever been mentioned. Later in the project an application was submitted to the council to increase the height of these stockpiles to accommodate additional spoil. This work was done

on the basis that should permission to build the power station be refused the land and all vegetation was to be restored to the original condition.

This area is now known locally as The Alps.

This preparatory work should have been part of the main application and was seen as provocative and arrogant by the local community. EDF argued that this would get them on a firm footing for a quick start once approval had been granted. Even at this stage EDF seemed confident that they would be building the power station.

EDFs PR department put out a photo of an inoperative road roller with a nesting bird under the seat. This showed them caring for nature.

Double glazing was supplied FoC to a limited number of properties close to the site. This should have been triple glazing and it doesn't work in the summer when you open the windows.

In October 2011 an application was made by EdF to National Infrastructure Planning which was accepted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

The size and complexity of this application document must not be underestimated.

The application consisted of 55,000 pages of detailed information, including thousands of maps, charts, graphs, plans, tables and specialist reports.

This can be read on line but with continuous cross referencing to other sections the process is slow.

The maps are not readable on your average home computer. The detail on an AO map measuring 84 X 119 cm reproduced digitally is unreadable. The only way for us to study any large documents was to travel to West Somerset Council offices or to EdF in Bridgwater.

Neither venue was suitable as many hours needed to be spent studying the details and cross referencing to the numerous documents. When visiting the council offices you had to know in advance what you wanted to view as the complete application was not on public display.

Our community spent as much time as possible studying and researching but with our limited resources, and manpower, we struggled.

We had to put our faith in Andrew Goodchild of West Somerset Council plus the other statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and many others to be diligent and to look after our interests.

Incidentally Andrew now works for EDF in their planning operation

At this time EdF used all the personnel at their disposal. All the specialists who support their case, a team of solicitors and barristers with lead members of the EdF planning team.

They were all supported by a large team ensuring the hearings went smoothly.

These people's sole job for the last few months has been the preparation and complete understanding of the DCO application. Within their group there will be at least one specialist on any given subject. They will know which page and paragraph in the report shows the relevant information.

No expense is spared to maximise the potential for being granted permission to build.

EdF constantly minimised anything and everything we said in conversation, at meetings and in print, pointing always to the supposed benefits. This was morally very wearing.

During a Specific Hearing a Parish Councillor was taken to one side by WSC to be informed that EDF had advised if the objection to the on-site campus was not dropped, then the mitigation money would have to be re-examined. A snap decision was taken to drop the argument against the campus and accept the 510 bed unit.

Throughout, phrases and words like minimising, limiting, temporary, and reducing impact as much as possible are frequently used. When looked at in context, temporary can be as long as 4 or 5 years. Limiting and other similar words are not quantifiable but the impression given is that there will be only minimal nuisance.

After all the hearings had taken place the Inspectorate provided a report to the Secretary of State. About a year later permission was granted by the Secretary of State to build . There was a formal protest at this stage but this was dismissed.

Some of our concerns were about Noise, dust and light pollution from the site and local roads. We needed to know how it was going to be monitored. We established that there would be 4 monitoring stations. These are positioned just outside the perimeter fence. What we didn't know was that 2 of the 4 would be inoperative for many months and that the data would be transferred to WSC in a format difficult to read. Nor did we know what a logarithmic recording scale meant. What appears to be a small increase of 3dB corresponds to a doubling of intensity. 83dB is not just over 80 dB but is in fact twice as intense. The anticipated noise levels for both day and night were published but we did not appreciate what impact this would have on daily life. We were not aware that baseline noise levels before construction were lower than average in our hamlets so being 10 dB above average was a considerable increase. We should have requested a simulation of the noise levels anticipated at night, this would have stirred more protestors in to action rather than complaining after the event. All construction traffic should be fitted with white noise reversing sounders. On many occasions they were not fitted so the noise could be heard all around the area. I could see and hear them from my house and would have to phone to complain and tell EDF where the offending vehicle was working. The excuse was that there was a high turnover of personnel and machinery.

Strangely even when all the receptors have been working there have been very few exceedances. From my understanding the sampling has to be a continuous noise for a given time and there is also an averaging of the levels. Therefore a one off loud noise will not trigger a violation. Most of the violations are blamed on local farmers or the dawn chorus. Those that are genuine are "thoroughly investigated" and the contractor is told not to repeat the offence.

Light pollution is most noticeable when there is a low cloud base. The whole sky glows and can be seen for miles. The local stables no longer have to use floodlights. Lights shine into people's houses. Complaints are made and sometimes the light is redirected. EDF will say in their application that lights are directional, angled in towards the site and only used when appropriate at minimal intensity to create a safe working environment thus minimising and mitigating the impact.

Dust covers a wide area with regularity. Windows are always dirty. On more than one occasion EDF offered free window cleaning which they have denied. My neighbour has to clean out his gutters on a regular basis. Footpaths in the area are dust laden and at this time of year the blackberries are spoilt. This includes the Coastal Path diversion which adds a considerable distance to the route. We have been told this will not be reinstated "until there is a suitable safe path for both walkers and workers" even if the sea defences are complete.

This could mean the diversion remaining in place for years.

The monitoring and control of traffic for our narrow quiet roads and lanes is covered in some detail. The application will have you believe that EDF are doing everything in their power to minimise and mitigate the impact of traffic.

We have ANPR cameras monitoring the HGV route. Three consolidation and holding points. 6 park and ride sites. A team of EDF parking marshals. Numerous road improvements. A village by pass. Speed limit reductions. Traffic calming. Cycle routes.

Wide load escort vehicles and a £16 million transport fund given to Somerset County Council by EDF.

The reality is that the cameras only monitor HGV's. All other traffic including Cars, coaches, double decker buses, motorbikes, mini buses and vans all travel on the access road and the surrounding lanes. Added to this are the vehicles from HPA and B, the National Grid power line contractors, farm traffic and of course the local people.

Lorries were released from site at two minute intervals to avoid convoys. EDF say the DCO does not require this interval and it was only voluntary.

Stones fly off lorries damaging vehicles. Tailgating is common, which intimidates other road users. Many of the locals now have dash cams.

The roads are being damaged with deep ruts and potholes on the shoulders. Drainage gulleys that lead to the ditches have been filled in by lorries climbing the verges. Subsidence even on new roads is commonplace. The unsuitability of the only narrow route to site was highlighted but this was not ignored. Now SCC are using Transport Fund money to repair the over run which should have been negated by EDF being required to build a by pass or widen the road.

One section of redesigned road which cost £1.2 million is too narrow allow lorries to pass so they use the new cycle path. Despite encouraging cycling to work the new cycle route stops about 5 miles from Hinkley Point.

Lorries and buses should not park in lay byes, except in an emergency, as there are rest areas on site and at the freight logistic centres. They are seen on a daily basis in the badly damaged lay byes which are prone to flooding. This leaves less space for cars or agricultural machinery to get off what is now a busy road. EDF will investigate if the registration number of an offender is passed to them along with place and time. This isn't very easy when driving or when taking evasive action to avoid a 40 ton truck on the wrong side of the road while the driver is texting.

Vehicles leave site with their amber beacons flashing which is confusing for oncoming traffic. Many complaints have had no impact and despite this being an illegal practice the Police have issued no fines or cautions.

Many road improvements have been carried out across the County. If we need to access the road to Bridgwater we only have two junctions where this is possible. A request was made during consultations and at the Inquiry for junction improvements. One request was ignored, we turn onto a road with a 60 mph speed limit with a blind bend to our left and the brow of a hill to the right. It can take up to 10 minutes to exit this junction.

We thought we had more success with the second junction. A drawing showing redesigned splays for improved visibility was in the application. SCC spent about 6 weeks carrying out this work. Once finished there was no improvement. Blind corners both sides but with the word "slow" painted on the road. There have been accidents but fortunately nothing fatal unlike a motorbike accident further up the road.

Fly parking is an area wide problem. Workers drive to the EDF bus stops and park in the village streets. These areas are already congested with workers who are renting rooms.. Alternatively they drive to site and park in lay byes and on the verges. The drivers then walk to get on a bus to the site. The parking wardens are not able to access the Police computer and just put advisory notes on the windscreens. Some houses have been converted to multiple occupancy without planning consent. This exacerbates the parking problems in the hamlets.

Recently coaches that transport workers locally were stopping wherever they liked. It was agreed with EDF to identify specific stops. However they did insist on two stops within 100 yards of each other because it was too dangerous for the workers to walk on the country lane. We have to walk contending with the extra traffic.

Wide load escorts are common. Some are more effective than others. The exceptionally wide loads are overseen by the Police in an efficient way. Some of the contractor escorts have been shambolic. Vehicles have to drive on grass verges or cycle paths to allow safe passage. Complaints can be emailed or phoned. The phone system has been revised many times and now calls are diverted directly to the site out of normal office hours. In its infancy the calls would divert to Sunderland EDF customer call centre. The call handlers had not even heard of Hinkley let alone any complaint line.

Later the calls diverted to EDF in Bridgwater. The security guards invariably had no idea of the complaints procedure. This was blamed on staff turnover.

A common verbal reply to complaint is a reminder that “we are building a power station”

Many people have moved away. Some have been lucky to sell privately but some have sold to EdF at what is reported to be significantly below market value. Properties close to the site have been damaged with cracks appearing in the walls. Currently EdF own 15 properties. EDF workers have rented some of these properties but as their contracts come up for renewal they are being asked to leave. EDF are then putting the property up for sale. Rental property is at a premium and illegal caravan sites are appearing in many locations.

This upheaval has had an impact on the cohesion of the villages

We have always been encouraged to get a legacy from the construction of HPC. Section 106 money amounted to over £100 million and organisations applied for funds for numerous projects. Stogursey Parish primary benefit is a new village hall which should be built by 2021. However a new village hall in Stogursey does not take away the impact of daily disruption which many people suffer.

Some charities and organisations have benefited which EDF will always promote and advertise as a benefit that has been provided. Contrary to popular belief there is no direct compensation for anybody unless you move, and are very close to the site, then £5000 is offered to assist with costs. There is no compensation like the Heathrow Expansion scheme. Perhaps there is an argument that both HPC and Sizewell should have similar compensation

The development may be a foregone conclusion unless there is a major reversal of policy, funding, or government but you can still influence what happens in your area.

We had to fight for everything that we achieved and with the benefit of hindsight, subject to both financial and physical limitations, could have done more.

A united approach from our various groups and local council may have been more effective. We needed more than one spokesperson at the hearings. Specialist interpretation with the numerous reports could have given us a greater understanding of some of the more complex proposals. Perhaps legal representation could have brought about a better outcome.

As the development proceeds EDF have put in for Variations to the DCO. Most of these are listed as Non – Material. Many of them are in this category and do not have a major impact on the build. But in amongst one such application was a vague reference to the spent fuel store. This was to change the design from wet to dry storage and increase the size of the store significantly. This part of the application has now been removed. The change is now listed as a Material Change which will need to be put in for approval at a later date. Numerous applications are also submitted to Discharge Planning conditions. The planning department can get overloaded unless additional staff are employed which incurs additional costs.

The development of Sizewell could bring various opportunities but this has to be at a price that is acceptable to the people who are to be adversely affected during construction, whilst producing electricity and the eventual decommissioning .

In conclusion I would recommend that you assume nothing, question everything and keep fighting.

If there are any questions I would be pleased to try and answer them.