



Newsletter January 2009

Council's 'unethical' request for £750,000 from nuclear firm

Western Daily Press
Tuesday, January 20, 2009

A council secretly asked nuclear energy firms for a £750,000 handout as they prepare to submit plans for a controversial new power plant in Somerset.

Sedgemoor District Council has been branded "unethical" after it asked energy giants to help it cover the costs of taking a "lead role" in dealing with plans to build a new reactor at Hinkley Point.

Details of a letter from one of the authority's corporate directors, Doug Bamsey, to British Energy and EDF have been released, showing he asked them to consider handing over money to cover the cost of investigations into a new reactor – Hinkley Point C.

The council says it was trying to avoid burdening local taxpayers. In the letter, made public following a Freedom of Information request, Mr Bamsey said: "Sedgemoor District Council is willing to provide a lead role and work with adjacent councils to provide the process with strategic and coordinated responses to local issues through the agreed Nuclear Energy Board."

"It is however unable to bear the financial burden of this. I therefore request that you consider making funds available to help us create an energy policy/planning officer who would be the key coordinating point, with admin

capacity and a working fund for meeting rooms and so on.

"I estimate this to be in the order of approx £100k pa [per year] over the next five years."

The revelation has exposed the council to allegations of unethical practice from anti-nuclear campaigners and neighbouring authorities who say Sedgemoor is over-stepping its jurisdiction.

Independent planning consultant Hugh Richards said: "It clearly conflicts with the ethical and professional standards of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

"There is a procedure for legitimately levying a fee on planning applicants, and it is this procedure that should be followed."

Following discussions with the industry, Mr Bamsey made the formal request in July. He also asked for money for a technical and consultancy budget which he estimated would cost between £200,000 and £250,000 over a two-year period.

Critics say the proposals were not discussed with the Somerset Nuclear Energy Board, a consortium of three councils with an interest in Hinkley issues. One of those is West Somerset District Council, which said Hinkley fell into its boundaries and it knew nothing of Sedgemoor's requests.

West Somerset councillor Jon Freeman said: "None of us knew anything about this, we were all shocked and horrified. It is West Somerset District Council which is the planning authority covering Hinkley, not Sedgemoor."

The companies say they did not solicit the request and have not agreed to it.

But anti-nuclear group Stop Hinkley spokesman Jim Duffy said: "It's easy to imagine nuclear companies expecting a smoother passage for Hinkley C had they paid this premium."

"Sedgemoor made a bad mistake here, not least in doing this behind the backs of its own and West Somerset councillors."

Sedgemoor says the Government has since agreed to put up the cash as it will be Westminster that decides on any future planning application, not the district.

A spokesman said: "The suggestion of resources from the nuclear industry was made in July 2008 and pursued by Sedgemoor District Council."

"Since that time, Sedgemoor District Council together with West Somerset Council and Somerset County Council have made direct approach to the Government seeking resources."

"It is the view of council that it is right and proper, with robust safeguards, to seek other resources to fund this assessment and challenge."

In a joint statement EDF, which has recently signed a deal to buy British Energy, and British Energy said: "EDF Energy and British Energy have not entered into any agreements in relation to these proposals. EDF Energy and British Energy believe the planning process to assess new build projects must be robust, fair and open and serve the interests of the local community."

Ed: Top BBC Points West news item.

West braced for nuclear future

Western Daily Press
Friday, January 23, 2009

Three reactors could be built in the West in a new wave of nuclear power stations with Oldbury to be nominated for a plant.

The South Gloucestershire site would join Hinkley in Somerset, where two reactors are being planned – although anti-nuclear campaigners yesterday vowed to fight the plans.

Gordon Brown indicated his firm support for the new generation of nuclear power when he visited Sellafield, in Cumbria, where there could be two new plants. On Tuesday, Climate Change and Energy Secretary Ed Miliband will ask for nominations for potential sites and publish the criteria used to assess suitability.

Yesterday, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) said it expected to nominate land near Oldbury, Sellafield, Wylfa on Anglesey and Bradwell in Essex. It is auctioning the land, which would be worth much more as a new nuclear site than for any other use. The NDA will not develop new nuclear plants itself, nor apply for planning permission, but believes nomination will enhance the value of the land, generating more income to pay for the decommissioning programme. Acting chief executive Richard Waite said: "Our aim is to secure value from our assets for the benefit of the taxpayer."

Mr Brown said: "Nuclear is crucial to our low-carbon future; it is crucial to our energy security and at the same time it represents a massive opportunity for the UK economy and jobs."

"Industry are investing billions into the UK economy, jobs are being created and supply chain opportunities are developing. The NDA's announcement on potential new build sites is good news."

Derek Simpson, joint leader of the Unite union, who joined Mr Brown on his visit yesterday to Sellafield, said pushing ahead with nuclear would address the concerns of ordinary people who wanted cheaper household bills.

The Government claims each new nuclear power station could be worth £2 billion to its region, bring 9,000 jobs during construction and employ 1,000 skilled workers when operational.

West anti-nuclear campaigners were shocked at the nomination of Oldbury, saying the NDA had gone beyond its brief of cleaning up sites.

Jim Duffy, coordinator of the Stop Oldbury campaign, said there were health risks linked to the existing reactor, which is 40 years old and has just been given a two-year life extension. He said a new reactor would pour more radioactive waste into the River Severn, which was likely to add to the local cancer and leukaemia toll.

"The other risks are from terrorism – a fully fuel-laden airliner diverted from Bristol or Cardiff airports could cause unthinkable damage to a big target such as a nuclear plant," Mr Duffy said. "Even the Government's Sustainable Development Commission says that replacing all our old reactors will reduce carbon emissions by a feeble four per cent. It's just not worth the £5 billion cost to build each reactor, of which the public will pick up some of the future bill."

Liberal Democrat energy spokesman Simon Hughes said: "Nuclear power is an outdated and superficial answer to Britain's energy needs.

"It is dangerous and expensive and it won't fill the energy gap or help the fight against climate change."

Hinkley is now owned by French electricity giant EDF, after it bought British Energy, which had previously said it was interested in building two new reactors there, and two at Sizewell B in Suffolk.

Ed: Quoted employment figures far exceed those predicted by EdF of 2,000 construction workers and 600 full-time staff. Insiders say this was a Govt attempt to quell union fears that Sellafield will not get a new reactor.

Anger at Oldbury nuclear plant's two-year extension

Bristol Evening Post
Friday, December 19, 2008

Anti-nuclear campaigners have reacted with astonishment after Oldbury nuclear power station was given permission to carry on generating for another two years.

The atomic plant, near Thornbury, had been set to close down at the end of December. But, as previously reported in the *Bristol Post*, a delay in the defuelling schedule meant it was possible for the station on the banks of the river Severn to stay in operation, provided site regulators gave their approval.

That go-ahead has now been given by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII). The decision was welcomed by locals, who said they had lived alongside the station for the past 40 years and were happy to see it continue to provide energy and jobs.

But members of the Shut Oldbury campaign said it was a "mad idea". They said there had been safety concerns for the past six years, particularly surrounding the graphite core of its two reactors.

Joe Lamonby, Oldbury's site director, told a recent stakeholders' meeting no defects had been found in the inspection of more than 30,000 graphite bricks in the reactors.

But Jim Duffy, of the Shut Oldbury campaign, claimed decades of high temperatures, high pressure and radioactivity had "corroded vital components" at the heart of one of the

reactors. He said there could have been political pressure to "keep the flag flying" for nuclear power on the Severn as the Government planned to let the industry build more reactors at sites such as Oldbury.

Mr Duffy said: "This is an astonishing decision. "The oldest and most damaged UK reactor is allowed to keep running past its long established closure date, despite safety concerns which the regulators have recorded for the past six years."

Stop Hinkley Supporters

Membership subscriptions are due this month and renewal reminders are enclosed. We also enclose a copy of our current leaflet and would ask you to pass it on to anyone you think might be interested as we need to increase our membership at this crucial time. More leaflets are available by contacting Val.

May we take this opportunity to thank all our supporters, most of whom have been loyal to us for many years. The cost of campaigning, producing the newsletter, website and administration is entirely met by donations and subscriptions, so our ability to continue the fight against nuclear power in Somerset is totally dependant on support such as yours.

Events

Stop Hinkley Meeting
7.30pm Tuesday 10th March
West Bow House
Turn right after the Squib pub on
West Street, Bridgwater

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Health experts invited to answer Oldbury nuclear cancer fears

Bristol Evening Post
January 22, 2009 (extracts)

Health experts will be invited to South Gloucestershire answer fears that cancer cases could be linked to Oldbury nuclear power station.

Oldbury site director Joe Lamonby refuted the claims, made at a community event in Tortworth, saying there was no evidence of more cases of the disease in the area. He said studies making such allegations had not come from reputable sources and there was no reason to believe there was any increased level of cancer in areas surrounding the station, which is near Thornbury.

John Grey, who has an organic farm close to the complex in Shepperdine, told the meeting he was worried that cases of the disease in areas such as nearby Hill could be linked to the nuclear plant. Mr Grey said he was opposed to nuclear power and said he did not want another atomic plant to be built nearby

The Government is supporting plans for a new generation of nuclear stations and areas around old plants such as Oldbury are seen as likely spots for the new ones. Mr Grey said: "I really dread another power station coming to the Oldbury and Shepperdine area. It's a dangerous power."

Alan Pinder, of South Gloucestershire Friends of the Earth, said there were concerns that [a cancer problem] related to the site was possible.

Malcolm Lynden, chairman of the Oldbury Power Station Site Stakeholder Group, pledged to invite Dr Julia Verne, director of the South West Public Health Observatory, and other health professionals to the next meeting of the group so they could answer questions and address concerns raised.