



Newsletter October 2014

Campaigners bid to block EU deal over Hinkley

03 Oct 2014, Western Morning News

Last month, the country's first new nuclear power station in a generation – at Hinkley Point – cleared a major hurdle after an agreement was reached between the European Commission and Whitehall. [See story page 2]

But the news angered and dismayed opponents, including the Green Party, the Stop Hinkley Group and Greenpeace UK, who vowed that the fight against the EDF plant would go on.

Stop Hinkley have now written to competition commissioner Joaquin Almunia, who is in charge of state aid, urging him to reconsider and claiming that the subsidy deal had been “stitched up without any sort of competitive process”. [<http://www.stophinkley.org/Temporary/Dear%20Comissioner.pdf>]

“Surely the job of the European Competition Commissioner is to make sure taxpayers’ and electricity consumers’ money is spent on the most cost effective measures to reduce carbon emissions and provide energy security,” Valerie Davey, the group’s treasurer, wrote.

“If Hinkley Point C had been subjected to a proper competitive process it couldn’t possibly have progressed beyond the drawing board.

“There are many far most cost effective ways to provide the heat and light we need in the UK at the same time as reducing carbon emissions.

“Please urgently reconsider this decision, and order the UK Government to subject the Hinkley proposals to a proper competitive process.

“If you don’t you will be allowing UK consumers to be saddled with eye-wateringly high electricity bills for decades to come.”

Green MEP Visits Hinkley

MEP for the Southwest, Molly Scott Cato, paid a visit to Hinkley Point on Friday afternoon 26th September. She was joined by many members of Stop Hinkley as well as SWAN (South West Against Nuclear) in Bristol and various Green Party representatives from around the southwest. She spoke about the ongoing controversy surrounding the strike price/subsidy being offered to EDF in order to build Hinkley C.



As this newsletter goes to press, 28 EU commissioners will be deciding, behind “closed doors”, whether to allow the British government to subsidise this proposed nuclear power station. The EU had earlier decided that new nuclear power would only be granted permission if there were no public subsidies. This is a shocking U-turn.

At the moment, Hinkley C is estimated to cost over £16 billion pounds to build. As Molly Scott Cato pointed out, this money would be better spent on funding for renewables and energy conservation. It can be done and, as she rallied support, she claimed “the fight is still on. There are members of the EU who strongly oppose this deal, particularly in Austria. We must all do what we can to rally support from all corners!”

[Report by Suki Lilienthal]

Stop Hinkley’s Legal Challenge Fund

Towards the end of September, European Competition Commissioner, Joaquin Almunia, let it be known that he was proposing to recommend backing the UK Government’s planned support for EDF to build a new generation of Nuclear power stations. This was in spite of previously claiming the Hinkley deal was unfair competition.

If the Commission is rushed into a decision before Almunia's term as Commissioner has ended on November 1st, Stop Hinkley will consider joining forces with anti nuclear academics to appeal the decision using the Stop Hinkley legal challenge fund.

We await further developments. '

Leaked paper shows Commission could grant unprecedented taxpayer funding for Hinkley nuclear power station

Greenpeace Press Release, 1 October

A leaked paper disclosed by German magazine der Spiegel has shown the EC is on the verge of approving eye-watering amounts of public funding to build nuclear reactors at Hinkley Point, saddling taxpayers with the financial and environmental cost.

Without opposition from a majority of European commissioners at a vote on 8 October, only days before the current Commission leaves office, the European Union could, for the first time, allow taxpayers to fund the construction of nuclear power plants in Europe.

Austria has already reacted angrily to the plan, threatening to challenge it at the European Court of Justice. Outgoing energy commissioner Günther Oettinger last year described the plan as "Soviet".

Commenting on the leak, **Greenpeace EU legal adviser Andrea Carta** said: *"If this deal is approved, the outgoing Commission will be leaving Brussels in a getaway car after the heist of the century. Taxpayers would be left paying for one of the most expensive power stations in the world, and for the consequences when things go wrong, while EDF rakes in subsidies. What's worse, they want to do this in the name of climate change, locking in support for nuclear for decades, just as major banks are telling investors the smart money is in renewable energy. European commissioners voting next week should think hard about the threat to generations of Europeans and put a stop to this madness".*

The leaked paper, drafted by outgoing competition commissioner Joaquín Almunia with the support of Commission president José Manuel Barroso, recommends that the project submitted by the UK government be approved almost entirely unchanged. In a preliminary response to the submission in December 2013, the Commission raised doubts on almost all aspects of the project, stating that the *"aid would in principle be incompatible under EU state aid rules"*. In a U-turn from this statement, the leak includes:

- A guarantee for EDF to sell electricity at more than twice the current wholesale price for an unprecedented duration of 35 years – with the possibility to review the price up after 15 and 25 years if operation costs are higher than expected.

- A state guarantee if, EDF and its Chinese partners were to default.
- An 'insurance' against any future changes to UK policies on energy, nuclear power or the environment.
- No change to conditions if construction is delayed by up to four years.

The leaked Commission paper does not say how much EDF would pay towards waste disposal and decommissioning of radioactive nuclear waste, leaving taxpayers to pick up the tab.

Conflict of interest concerns over EDF's Hinkley nuclear project approval

The Guardian, 1 October

Nuclear experts receiving EDF pensions were involved in the official safety review of the company's planned Hinkley Point C plant in Somerset, sparking concerns about a conflict of interest over the approval of the project.

The involvement of senior executive grade officers at the Office of Nuclear Regulation (ONR) made it "very difficult" for the regulator to take a critical eye, warned another independent industry consultant.

The revelations, obtained via a series of freedom of information (FoI) requests, raise wider concerns about the use of consultants due to a lack of experienced staff inside the ONR and come a week after the Hinkley project got a go-ahead from the European competition directorate for a proposed UK subsidy scheme.

EDF plans to use a new European pressurised reactor (EPR) design for the Somerset plant that was successfully submitted for approval to the ONR, a statutory body which boasts of holding the nuclear industry to account on behalf of the public.

But the standards of the safety and regulatory sign-off of the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant has been called into question by experts, who believe the construction will run over budget or fail.

Critics argue that vital safety issues highlighted in the regulatory process were ignored, which may have happened to ensure the project's approval met the deadline set out by the UK government.

"The ONR bypassed a number of safety issues with the rationale of 'although it is not solved we think it will be solved by the time we need'" said nuclear industry consultant John Large. "I suspect the political pressure was on them. The government was putting the pieces in place to

give an announcement [that Hinkley Point C had been approved] in January 2013.”

The safety regulator said two of its staff had EDF pensions but refused to disclose if other employees and contractors, who were not receiving pensions, had worked at EDF or the other firms involved in the project such as Areva, China General Nuclear Power Group and China National Nuclear Corp.

The ONR stated it could not release this information because the files holding these details are “in deep storage and away from the ONR’s main office location” but it said that all its staff were obliged to comply with the civil service code of conduct.

Large is not the only one concerned with the speed at which the ONR’s safety assessment was carried out. “I don’t know how it is feasible,” said Mika Johansson, a senior inspector at STUK, the Finnish nuclear regulator which is overseeing the construction of another EPR reactor in its own country. “I don’t know how they [the ONR] did it so fast.”

The ONR did indeed flag up problems with the instrumentation and control system during its design assessment process. In its quarterly updates on progress, each aspect of the plan was graded by a traffic light-style alert system that represented the difficulty of solving the issues raised.

In August 2012, six issues related to the instrumentation and control system were highlighted. Four of these were given a red alert, which, according to the report means the resolving of these issues are “in serious doubt with serious risks apparent”. By December the nuclear regulators approved the EPR design, signing off all of these alerts without much explanation.

Climate Change March



On Sunday 21st September we joined up with the SWAN (South West Against Nuclear) Radioactive waste barrels to join the Climate Change march through the centre of Bristol ending on College Green.

It was the largest mobilisation on Climate Change in history, six times larger than anything done

before. Hundreds of thousands of people marched in New York, London and all around the globe over 2000 groups joined in.

It brought together numerous campaign groups representing many more people concerned about the various ways we are damaging our planet and how we can make different choices for the future. Being part of such a broad mix of people and their passions was a very empowering and uniting process. This movement is building, it’s not difficult, it will succeed, it makes sense!

[Report by Jo Smoldon]

EDF’s Hinkley Bat House

On the September 2014 Witch Watch a few of us had planned to walk out to see the purpose built EDF bat house. We chose dusk as it is a favourite time for bats to feed. The intention was to view the bat population and assess their views on the new bat house by their movements. The wooden bat house was built as their old habitats were demolished, being in the way of the plans for the Hinkley C site.

At first we thought the bats must be few in number or non-existent as none were seen, but after a short while a bat flew over my head. Within a short space of time a significant number of bats could be seen looking for food above us. It soon became obvious that the bats were not appearing from the new purpose built building but from an old barn a short distance away. On studying their flight pattern we walked to the old stone building. Corrugated sheeting proud from the window frame provided a nice entrance for them, as well as where the eaves were lifting. We were convinced that they were preferring this to the new wooden structure EDF had built.

It is possible, someone suggested, that they roost in summer in ivy in the hedgerows and only go to buildings when the weather is much colder, which may also explain the lack of movement around the wooden bat house.

It was an interesting and enlightening exercise.

EDF reported to us, “No bats were seen within the bat barn during the monitoring visits in January, February and June 2014. However, the amount of droppings found within the barn indicates that usage by bats is steadily increasing, with a greater number of droppings found in June 2014 (likely to pipistrelle species) scattered throughout the upper level and within the cool room. A second summer visit and re-entry survey is programmed for July 2014.”

We look forward to their next report!



[Report by Marilyn Markall]

A renewable fair, organised by Transition Langport and Transition Athelney, took place at the Williams Hall, Stoke St Gregory on the afternoon of Saturday 27th September. The event was opened by Molly Scott-Cato, the South West's new MEP.

A wealth of background information was available through a series of short talks:

- o Professor Keith Barnham on his book The Burning Answer, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/22/burning-answer-solar-revolution-keith-barnham-review>
- o Eva Bishop from Tidal Lagoon Power, www.tidallagoonswanseabay.com
- o Christopher Maltin of Organic Power Ltd <http://www.organic-power.co.uk/home.aspx>
- o James Watt from the Centre for Sustainable Energy in Bristol. <http://www.cse.org.uk/>

There were battery cars and bikes (Zero Carbon Britain) on display and a number of stands, including Stop Hinkley's, which generated lots of discussion and networking. A very interesting and positive afternoon – very well attended.

[Report by Helen Grant]

The Solar Alternative to Hinkley Point C Wed. October 15th 2014

7.30 pm

Victoria Park Community Centre,
Victoria Road, Bridgwater TA6 7AS

An illustrated talk on the science, politics and truly sustainable future of solar renewable energy by

Keith Barnham

Emeritis Professor of Physics at Imperial College London, and author of "The Burning Answer".

All welcome. Free.

Further information from Bridgwater and West Somerset Green Party 01278 425451



On Saturday 27th September 2014, as part of a national call out, members of Stop Hinkley protested outside Bridgwater Railway Station against the movement of nuclear waste on our railway network. Working well as a team, we made some new banners and created a highly visible display.

Despite being one of the most difficult places to stage anything anti-nuclear, we gave out info and were generally well received. Many people were surprised and unaware that the waste is loaded in Bridgwater. Even the most pro-nuclear of people, if they engage, tend to gale when they realise the proximity of the nuclear loading gantry to the local primary school.

[Report by Wanda]

Events

Stop Hinkley meetings
Mondays 20 October and 17 November
at 7pm [Note earlier time]
West Bow House, Milton Place
Off West Street, Bridgwater TA6 3RT

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