Stop Hinkley at Surround Springfields, 27 April 2019

Thank you for inviting a representative from Stop Hinkley to speak today as we gather here to show our opposition to nuclear power.

'Hinkley' refers to the three sites at Hinkley Point on the North Somerset coast, 40 miles west of Bristol and looking across the Bristol Channel towards Cardiff. With the second highest tidal range in the world and predicted sea level rise liable to inundate the entire site, this is a risky place for nuclear reactors. The recent David Attenborough TV programme, the Extinction Rebellion protests and the visit by Greta Thunberg, Swedish climate activist, have drawn people's attention to the urgency of combatting climate change. One thing is certain: new nuclear is not the answer, its waste only adds to the problem!

Let's look at what's happening with the three stations. The first, Hinkley A, stopped generating long ago and is being decommissioned. At the same time, our local paper has run a front page story this week about how Magnox, the site operators, want to store waste at Hinkley A from other reactors (Dungeness, Sizewell and Oldbury). Whilst taking high level waste away from Hinkley has involved a short road trip to the railway station in Bridgwater, this unwanted incoming waste will travel by road half way across the country. Even usually compliant local Councillors are concerned about this unnecessary risk.

Hinkley B is still working long after its sell-by date. Its sister reactors at Hunterston are currently closed down, plagued with cracks in the graphite blocks essential to safe working. It is surprising that Hinkley B is allowed to continue generating, albeit with more 'outages' than normal. Anyone unfamiliar with nuclear reactors, and that includes most of the public who have been misled that they work 24/7/365, might be surprised that they only generate at best 80% of the time. The rest is 'outages', more or less scheduled shut downs when hundreds of additional workers descend on the site to maintain and repair the reactor.

Hinkley C is the biggest building site in Europe. Whether its new European Pressurised Water Reactor will ever work is another matter, as Olkiluoto in Finland and Flamanville in France testify.

Our objective is exactly what you'd expect. We worked to stop the first attempt at Hinkley C. In 1989, the Thatcher Government gave up on Hinkley C mark 1. Having privatised electricity, Thatcher found out too late that no private financier would pay for new nuclear. And that's how things were. Now we've got the French Government, disguised as Electricité de France, and the Chinese Government, a.k.a China General Nuclear, trying again to build a Hinkley C. Again, no UK financier will touch Hinkley C with a barge pole. The sums don't add up!

If our Government told EdeF and CGN to stop building Hinkley C today, it would cost about £2billion to scrap it, but it would save us £50billion in the long term. The reactor EdeF are trying to build is already eight years late. It will be 2025, at the very earliest, before Hinkley C can have any impact on keeping the lights on. The budget has escalated from £8billion to at least £22billion. And the price we must pay for the electricity? Well, it was £92.50 per MWH when the Government struck a 35 year index linked deal with EdeF. Now, it's £105 per MWH and it will keep on rising whilst electricity from renewables just gets cheaper and cheaper.

I live in Cannington, the last village on the road to Hinkley C. I'd like to give you an idea of what it's been like living with the phases of building what is likely to be the one and only new nuclear reactor in the UK. Those people here today from potential sites should know what they're facing.

We've had a meaningless Consultation phase, when EdeF ticked the boxes it needed for the Planning Inspectorate whilst ignoring local people's views.

The planning process was a farce. The local Council, bankrupt and desperate to secure future business rates, gave permission for the site preparation. EdeF fought tooth and nail to avoid building a proper bypass, so thousands of HGVs trundled through congested towns and villages. Next came the Planning Inspectorate, which basically rubber stamped EdeF's plans and passed them on for the Minister's seal.

In July 2016, we got the spectacle of the French Government trying to twist the new British Government's arm to get the go ahead, whilst the Chinese looked on bemused. Sadly, Theresa May's well founded concerns about security with the Chinese involvement evaporated in the face of Chinese threats to our economy in the wake of Brexit.

Now we're in the 'Gold Rush Economy' phase, when seven new hotels are being built in and around Bridgwater, a town of 40,000 people, to accommodate some of the workers who will be drafted in temporarily to build Hinkley C. Only 30% of the trumpeted 25,000 jobs are going to local people. Oh, and there aren't 25,000 jobs either, just 5,000 at any one time and only 900 permanent ones. So that's 24,100 redundancies! Few jobs will last more than a couple of years but that hasn't stopped lots of local people from quitting jobs they've had for years and rushing to the much better paid ones at Hinkley. Good for them, but local employers are left with vacancies they can't fill unless they pay more and put their prices up.

The traffic continues to be horrendous. Doesn't matter whether you work at HPC or not, it still takes twice as long to get anywhere. The pressure on the local rented property market has been tremendous. The rent for one bedroom properties has risen by 50% in the last 18 months, making them unaffordable for anyone not working at Hinkley C.

All this for a reactor which EdeF have proved incapable of completing in Finland or France. Because this isn't like 'Mastermind', when John Humphrys says, "I've started, so I'll finish", he knows both the question and the answer. Sadly, EdeF's reactor is so complex that their own engineers are still coming up with questions, let alone having the answers.

Don't even get me started on the nuclear waste that Hinkley C will produce! The spent fuel from these reactors is so radioactive that it will have to be stored on site for sixty years. If Hinkley C is ever finished and runs for its sixty year life span, it will be 120 years before the most radioactive waste can be removed from the site. The destination of the nuclear waste, the phantom Geological Disposal Facility, has yet to be found a home. A recent Radioactive Waste Management consultation about where the GDF might go revealed a breezy optimism that, once people had been reassured about the risks involved, they'd be happy to have it in their backyard. I'm not so sure. In the meantime, EdeF is having second thoughts about how it's going to store the waste and is doubling the size of the storage building, just a few years after getting its plans approved!

At the end of today, what I hope you'll take away is that nuclear reactors aren't cheap, aren't safe and aren't green.

Roy Pumfrey, Stop Hinkley, 27 April 2019