



Bradwell B: have your say

Do you want a vast and costly nuclear station so close to 1.5m people in this area when renewable energy is becoming cheaper and more effective? Are you happy to have cooling radio-active waste stored on the low lying site for many decades, while sea levels rise? Would you like, as proposed, 500-700 HGVs to thunder through Danbury to Bradwell via Maldon every day for at least three years during peak construction, before returning through South Woodham Ferrers to the A130? This is not a done deal so make your voice heard.

Bradwell B, a new nuclear power station proposed by the Chinese-led General Nuclear System Limited (GNSL) in partnership with French company EDF, has been off the radar for many people for some time – although when it was originally mooted, it aroused concerns about the risks to national security and safety from a nuclear power station constructed and controlled by a foreign power. Now it is back with a bang. Last month saw the sudden announcement of a pre-application public consultation across our region – long before detailed discussions with

the nuclear regulators are concluded and years before an application for development could be made. The shiny, optimistic presentation is available to view on the Parish Council website (www.danbury-esssex.gov.uk) and gives the impression that the project is almost a done deal. Yet this is not true, as Professor Andy Blowers, chair of the Blackwater Against New Nuclear Group (www.banng.info) which has campaigned against the project for the last eleven years, points out.

“It seems the Chinese developers are taking a risk in

trying to present the public and politicians with an apparent ‘fait accompli’ well before major design and environmental hurdles have been crossed,” he says. “This looks like a surprise assault to steamroller the public into acceptance of Bradwell B.”

Now Coronavirus has drastically curtailed the public consultation – a meeting was planned for the 28 March in Danbury – yet the date for responses has not been extended. So it is vital that members of the public view the plans and interrogate them incisively.

Let’s take a look at the bigger picture. While Germany turned its back on the technology following the 2011 Fukushima meltdown, the UK government still sees nuclear power as part of the answer to a carbon-reduced future – a way to replace the fossil fuels that endanger our planet. But alongside the obvious impacts to nature and landscape in building power stations, how can something which generates toxic waste be seen as environmentally friendly? It seems a contradiction in terms. Moreover, the cost of construction – and dealing with that ongoing waste – is huge and increasing as renewable technologies become cheaper. Back in 2016, the Office for Budget Responsibility questioned the value for money of such investment. And in September 2019, Nick Butler, an energy commentator for the FT and chair of The Policy Institute at King’s College London, wrote: “The basic issue is whether nuclear power can be provided at a cost that does not damage industrial competitiveness or impose an unacceptable burden on consumers.”

The price agreed in 2013 for future electricity from Hinkley Point C in Somerset, for example, was £92.50 per MW hour. “That looked extremely expensive then, but the real burden will come from the agreed index-linking of the price for 35 years – giving a number way above those for competing sources of power such as wind, solar and natural gas.”

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has suggested that this price could be reduced through a surcharge on consumers from the moment construction starts: a “regulated asset base” system. Butler points out the unfairness in lumbering consumers with the risk involved in what is a very risky construction project. He cites EDF’s fault-stricken nuclear project at Flamanville, already eight years behind schedule and probably another three years from commissioning, with costs estimated to have risen from €3.3bn to €10.9bn. “Under the proposed funding system, consumers would have been paying a surcharge on their bills since 2007 with nothing to show for it. They would have no leverage over the company building the plant and no scope for compensation. And they would also, of course, have to pay in addition the cost of buying the power they need from someone else.”

And what of Bradwell as a site for a similar project? Professor Andy Blowers, chair of BANNG, believes the site is wholly unsuitable and unsustainable. And he should know – with considerable experience of the sector

through membership of Government committees dealing with the management of radioactive waste and as co-chair of the Department of Energy and Climate Change/ NGO Nuclear Forum, which brings together Government and NGOs, both national and local. At the end of 2018 during scrutiny of the proposed project by the regulatory authorities, BANNG pressed its concerns about three key issues.

The first is that the site is threatened by the increasing impacts of the climate emergency, with the high probability risk of flooding ‘especially during the later stages of operation and decommissioning of a potential nuclear power station’. The coastline at Bradwell is likely to be



overwhelmed by predicted rising sea levels, storm surges and coastal erosion in coming decades. “It is difficult to see how the redundant reactors and highly radioactive wastes including spent fuel in stores could be safely managed under extreme conditions.”

Second, he said, is the issue of providing the vast quantities of water needed to cool the reactors. “Whichever option is chosen would threaten the survival of the ‘protected’ Colchester Native Oyster and severely damage other marine life and those species dependent on it.”

The third issue is the environmental destruction the project would cause. “This is a rural, tranquil and understated landscape with a sense of spiritual isolation conveyed by the 7th century St Peter’s Chapel,” says Professor Blowers. “The area is rich in ecology, with multiple designations, an estuary rich in salt marshes, reedbeds, ancient grazing marshes and deciduous woodlands, a haven for migrating birds, rare flora, fauna and invertebrates. All of this would be endangered and the area transformed into an industrial landscape.”

The specifics of the proposed construction of Bradwell B, as evidenced in the plans, make obvious the huge costs and upheaval involved. Said Prof Blowers: “The scale is enormous. If built, the power station would cover an area around 230 times that of Trafalgar Square. Foundations for the power station would extend down to 60 feet below the ground and the two reactors and turbines would be

constructed on a 'nuclear island' 25 feet above sea-level. Directly opposite Mersea Island there would be cooling towers 200 feet high (higher than the remaining buildings of Bradwell A) and 500 feet wide. A building close to Bradwell Village in which the highly radioactive spent fuel would be stored for upwards of 150 years is also included. Intake and outfall pipelines would suck in water from the shallow estuary and discharge toxic effluent into the Marine Conservation Zone, imperilling its precious stores of oysters and fish.

Two jetties would project into the Blackwater: a temporary jetty during construction, just under 2,000 feet long and a permanent jetty extending 66 feet to 231 feet beyond high water springs, for boats carrying the huge components for the power station (up to four boatloads a day during the long construction phase)."

The developer estimates 10,000 workers will be on site at the peak of construction, 3,000 of whom it is hoped will be local. That leaves 7,000 requiring accommodation and much of that will be built close to Bradwell Village.

The result of all this? Local communities, like Latchingdon, Danbury and Maldon, will have to endure nine to 12 years (and maybe more) of disruption, noise, light pollution, disturbance and movement of heavy traffic while the gigantic project is being built. The developer talks glibly about mitigating traffic through the use of water-borne transport, but its map shows the two preferred options for the many lorries travelling to the site: through Danbury and through South Woodham Ferrers – both routes which are already being challenged by sheer weight of traffic.

A trawl through the proposal document makes for interesting reading. The total tonnage of construction material is expected to be in excess of 6 million tonnes, roughly half of which may be delivered by marine transport – two to four deliveries by sea every day during peak construction. Somewhat unsettling for the wildlife, then. The plan also estimates **500 to 700** HGV movements on average **per day** for at least three years, travelling in a loop from the A12 through Danbury to Maldon and onward via B roads to Bradwell before returning to the A130 via South Woodham Ferrers. A large freight management facility

to accommodate **150** HGVs is proposed – either in the Rettendon area close to the A130 interchange or near Latchingdon or Mayland.

And the construction site itself will have major implications for the marine and terrestrial environment, threatening a restoration initiative for the Essex native oysters in the Marine Conservation Zone and breeding grounds for protected bird species such as godwits, red-throated divers and little terns, hen harriers and dunlins.

And the people of these low-lying villages of Bradwell, Mersea – two miles across the water – Latchingdon, Mayland and Southminster should not be forgotten either. Their beautiful and peaceful landscape will be transformed into an industrial zone, with heavy transport on the narrow roads between villages, accommodation for both a permanent and a transient workforce and the disruption of the rich ecology of this remote area.

Throughout the presentation, the many glib references to minimising impacts 'where practicable' and 'developing mitigation proposals' through working with others simply make clear the detrimental effect the project cannot fail to have. Working on mitigation measures does not guarantee that those measures will be particularly effective – and the number mentioned highlights just how unsuitable the proposed development is.

BANNG agrees: "There is an emphasis throughout the presentation on the positives claimed for the project such as jobs, skills and investment while the significant downsides are played down: years of disruption, noise and environmental destruction followed by decades of operating a potentially dangerous and vulnerable facility within a few miles of a large population and with half a million people within a twenty mile radius. And, nothing is said at all about what will be a deteriorating nuclear complex with stores of highly radioactive nuclear wastes on a disappearing coast. And will the Chinese still be around when the risks increase?"

BANNG wants people to make the strongest possible protest against these plans now, before it is too late. Co-ordinator Peter Banks says: "Apathy is not an option! Contrary to the impression the developer wishes to convey, Bradwell B is not a done deal."

So what should you do to protest? Tell your friends and sign this petition, shared by David Thorpe from St Peter's on the Wall, Bradwell: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/302971>

Contact your local MP and your local Councillors (parish, district and ECC)

Write to the Environment Agency FAO Neil Dinwiddie

Write a letter to the local newspapers, including the Maldon & Burnham Standard and Colchester Gazette (mbsdistrict@newsquest.co.uk; gazette.newsdesk @newsquest.com) and the East Anglian Daily Times. (brad.jones@archant.co.uk)

Read <https://www.danbury-esssex.gov.uk/news/latest-news/item/bradwell-b-nuclear-power-station-consultation> and **respond** to the public consultation – which ends at 11.59 hours on 1st July. **Go to** www.banng.info for details.