

Hinkley Point C Community Forum: 19 January 2023

I attended this forum on behalf of Holford Parish Council.

A series of presentations and updates were made by Hinkley staff and plenty of time was given to questions from attendees.

Safety: A fatality at the site in November related to moving earth and the bus crash last week were under investigation and nothing could be said further yet. Bus passengers and emergency services were praised re the latter.

Construction: the project was moving into the complex phase of installing electrical cables and mechanical pipework etc plus work on the reactor units was reaching a key period. Staff numbers needed would reach a peak in 2023. The first reactor core pressure vessel (RPV) had been made in France and would arrive via Combrich wharf (improvements to which had been completed). Polar cranes specially built are needed to install the reactor vessels. Both domes covering the reactors are finished and will be lifted into place at the right time. The first reactor and dome should be installed by end 2023. There will be more escorted movements on the road C182 (Rodway) to the plant during this period.

Staff and accommodation: The construction is said to be employing 22,000 people across Britain with 8000 workers on site now, 9000 last November. Numbers of workers are counted as people who spend more than 5 days a month on site; many staff work some of the week at home or elsewhere. The labour market is challenging with decommissioning going on at the same time. There are 50 nationalities in the workforce with 60-70% being more local. Some more specialised staff come from France. Training local people is an ongoing requirement and benefit. The effect of so many staff on availability of rental accommodation is recognised and Hinkley are trying to provide their own accommodation. They are refurbishing Pontins in Brean which will supply accommodation for 900 by the summer. A package of mitigation for impacts of loss of tourism there is being considered. After the peak in 2023 staff numbers will fall.

Marine Works and Cooling Water Tunnels: a detailed presentation on the extraordinarily complex and ground breaking business of installing the cooling water tunnels under the seabed was given by a Balfour Beatty engineer involved. The 6 concrete heads needed to secure the tunnels are now installed on the seabed and the connection tunnels have been made. There are 4 intakes and connection tunnels for inflow and 2 larger outflow tunnels. The big challenge is connecting them safely and securely but how to do this has been carefully planned. Completion is expected summer 2025 or so.

Planning Update: Defra SoS had decided against Hinkley's appeal to remove the environmental permit requirement for Acoustic Fish Deterrents at the turbine condenser cooling water inlets due to adverse effects on the integrity of the special biodiversity sites (SACs and Ramsar) in the Severn estuary; this applies to both migratory fish and other marine fish. Hinkley are not challenging this decision but are now going to work with the Environment Agency on an alternative compensatory scheme to boost fish populations in the estuary. They hope work on this will finish in 2024. If successful compensatory projects can be found it might then be possible to remove the requirement for the fish screens which Hinkley claim lead to operational health and safety problems and are not as effective as once thought.

Hinkley Logistics Hub: Hinkley have taken a 5 year lease on the former Argos distribution centre near Junction 24 M5. They will keep equipment there and provide another park and ride facility. Hopefully this will better spread traffic load between J23 and J24.

HPC Community Fund: the Somerset Community Foundation (CEO Justin Sargent) is administering community grants set up under a S106 planning requirement. About £7m covering 215 projects has been provided including a big grant to Bridgwater Carnival charity. Small grants £5-10k are available. The programme manager dealing with small applications is peter.stolze@somersetcf.org.uk

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20 January 2023