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Credit to the North Somerset Times

North Somerset village urges re-think on EDF salt marshes

A North Somerset village is urging bosses at the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station to drop plans to turn huge swathes of local farmland into a salt marsh.

EDF, who are building Somerset's new nuclear power station, are proposing creating new salt marsh habitats along the Severn to compensate for the number of fish that will die by being sucked into the power station's cooling systems. But the sudden announcement of plans has shocked communities where the salt marshes are planned — such as Kingston Seymour in North Somerset.

Martin Sewell of Kingston Seymour Parish Council compared the plans to a “surprise attack” at a packed public meeting with EDF bosses in the village hall on Monday October 14. About 230 people attended the meeting — filling the hall to capacity — with another 300 watching online.

Mr Sewell said he and others had only found out about the plans on September 9. He said: “The consternation you have created in this community since that date is phenomenal. The time, the effort everyone's had to put into this just being here tonight to put their views over is massive. Putting aside where this might go, just up until now the disruption this has caused to our day to day lives is devastating.”

A representative of EDF told the packed village hall: “This is not a foregone conclusion but if we move forward with anything here, we are really clear that we want this to be a collaboration. Any environmental habitat must work for nature but it must also work for people.”

He added that any plan would have to be “bulletproof” in terms of preventing flooding, and would involve current sea defences replaced by better ones. EDF is aiming to create 340 hectares of salt marsh along the Severn, and is also looking at other sites at Arlingham and — across the river — Rodley in Gloucestershire and Littleton-upon-Severn in South Gloucestershire.

Local farmer Sophie Cole told the EDF representatives in the room: “Your salt marsh boundary proposal includes my cottage and my land holding. I am a third generation young farmer in the village. This will destroy my home and my future farming here which is what I am fully invested in physically, emotionally, and financially.

“Why do you think that your problem has the right to take that away from me and others?”

EDF representatives said they would have more discussions with her. A “very rough” map shown at the meeting outlined about 360 hectares which EDF representatives said showed the general zone they would potentially consider. EDF added that a map previously circulated to landowners had shown the extent of the ecological surveys, not the full area that could become salt marsh.

Wells and Mendip Hills MP Tessa Munt told the packed meeting: “I stand with you.” She added: “There are a number of questions and a great deal of detail that needs to be very very much clearer.”

A statement was read out from North Somerset MP Sadik Al-Hassan, who said: “EDF clearly aren't familiar with this area or its people if they think we aren't every bit up to the challenge of

stopping a proposal so clearly at odds with sensibility and which threatens farms and rural communities going back generations and whose contributions are the lifeblood of North Somerset.”

Claire Stuckey told the Local Democracy Reporting Service after the meeting: “We listened to what EDF had to say and it is clear that they have no understanding of the impacts associated with what they are proposing. Their lack of detail and clarity on what will be a “major” engineering project to somehow modify existing sea defences is shocking.”

EDF have said they are holding meetings with local people well ahead of creating formal plans so there are no defined plans for the total area or final location. The energy company insisted that the project would not be approved without full evidence to conclusively prove that flood risk to the local area would not be increased.

Originally, EDF planned to use underwater speakers to keep fish away from the inlets. But the company said this would mean 280 speakers would be needed to make a noise louder than a jumbo jet taking off round the clock. The speakers would also be “dangerous to install” underwater far out into the Bristol Channel, EDF warned, and would have an unknown impact on marine life such as seals and dolphins.

The company first proposed creating a salt marsh at Pawlett Hams as a new habitat to compensate for the 44 tonnes of fish expected to be killed but, after major local opposition, the plan was dropped and EDF began looking at locations further from the power station to locate salt marshes.