

HINKLEY POINT – EXPLORING SALTMARSH HABITAT

The meeting was organised to allow representatives from Hinkley Point to explain their thinking and for residents of the parish – and others – to ask questions and raise their concerns.

Attendees:

Hinkley Point Representatives	Andrew Cockcroft (AC), Will Gilbert, Jo Manley, John Kingston & Ross Pettigrew
Parish Council Representatives	Chairman: Mike Sewell (MS), Vice Chairman: Richard Barber, Susie Humphries, Paul Cox, Andy Gillam, Fred Malton, Zoe Bartlett
	Tessa Munt MP Steve Bridger, District Councillor
Members of the Public	230 people were in the hall and 300 more watched the online stream

Mike Sewell (MS), Chairman of Kingston Seymour Parish Council, opened with a statement welcoming our MP, our District and Parish councillors, members of the action group, those with a specialist interest and knowledge and all of the members of the public both present in the village hall and watching the broadcast on Facebook live.

In welcoming the HP team MS stated that we were concerned about the loss of livelihoods of many of our citizens and a significant increase in flood risk for the area. Whilst we are at sea level, we do not flood because of our sea defences and our ancient but effective field drainage systems and gripes ditches and rhynes.

We are concerned about disturbing this equilibrium. There was a tsunami in 1607 which wiped out the village, there was significant flooding in 1981 and on the somerset levels in 2014 there was massive flooding because the systems didn't work

We understand that the HP solution included an acoustic fish deterrent which the project no longer wished to introduce and asked to remove. The then DEFRA minister refused that application. An alternative way forward was identified and an area in Somerset was identified but was fought off by local pressure. HP have now set their sights on four more areas – including KS – allegedly to fulfil a requirement handed to them by the Environment Agency. Yet that same agency withdrew from a plan to manage setback in 2011 and by 2013 was apologising to the village and investing in higher sea defences!

MS told the HP team that:

- their scheme is unclear,
- that creation of successful saltmarsh in our location had already been dismissed by expert opinion,
- that the replacement of one food source with another made no sense
- that through their precipitate actions already, our whole community had already been damaged

Andrew Cockcroft (AC), Head of Stakeholder Relations – Hinkley Point C (HPC) introduced his team of WILLIAM Gilbert, Jo Manley, John Kingston and Ross Pettigrew and led with an apology to the landowners for the tone and timing in the letters they had received – stating that the timescale they were working to had forced their hand in getting the environmental surveys started.

AC worked through their slide pack (available on the KS website) stating how nationally important HPC is and that it is intended to come online in 2029. The nuclear reactors need a huge amount of cooling water and two inlet pipes are placed 3.5km offshore in the Severn estuary. They had been especially designed with a sideways orientation and fish return system which should help the more robust fish escape back into the estuary. This was the first nuclear station in the UK that has any fish mitigation measures built into it.

The original DCO (Development Consent Order – effectively the request for planning permission) had stated that an Acoustic Fish Deterrent (AFD) system would be installed to dissuade fish from being ingested into the inlet system. In the ten years since that was put into the DCO, further work by HPC has determined that the system will not work and will put human life at risk as divers will have to service the equipment for the entire design life of the station – 60 years.

In asking to remove the AFD from the DCO, the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England have asked HPC to mitigate the loss of fish that will inevitably be sucked into the system and will perish. It is estimated that this will amount to 44 tons of fish per annum.

The HPC response to this demand is to improve 4 weirs further up the Severn, introduce natural seagrasses and oyster beds in some locations AND to deliver 340 hectares of new saltmarsh habitat. This could be delivered from up to four locations – all four of which are being investigated.

HPC studies have suggested that Kingston Seymour has the correct ingredients for saltmarsh to successfully form and that when the sea defences are set back to allow this environment to form, that the replacement sea defences would be of a higher standard than those in place now. The EA maintain their position that the area is suitable for managed realignment and to allow natural processes to occur. They have also stated to HPC that future maintenance allocations may not be sufficient to cover the work that will be required on the sea wall in the future.

AC confirmed that now that they had been made aware of the sewage works, the Pier to Pier route and the nascent Coastal Footpath, and that all of these factors would be taken into account as their work progressed. AC reiterated the timetable that they were working to.

AC handed back to MS to continue the meeting with statements and Q&A.

MS firstly referred to a letter from the North Somerset MP – Sadik Al-Hassan (letter available separately on the KS website) which had been drawn up in collaboration with the MP for Kingston Seymour – Tessa Munt. Tessa was present in the meeting and confirmed that she and Sadik were aligned on the content of the note and that she stood fully behind the village in resisting the proposal

District Councillor Steve Bridger added his support for the parish and had spoken with NSC's cabinet member on the subject. He admonished HPC for heaping a great deal of stress on members of the community and felt that HPC's careless use of the initial map had brought more concerns to more people than necessary. He was pleased to see that Sadik is going to meet with the EA Director for Wessex to get a clear position on the EA stance on this.

The Chairman of the North Somerset Levels Internal Drainage Board (IDB) stated that the proposals would massively affect the drainage infrastructure in the area and that HPC will be obliged to approach the IDB for permission.

The Country Land and Business Association representative stated their concern over the effect on local businesses and on the mental well being of business owners. An offer was made for the association to work with HPC to find a set of alternative mitigations.

A Clevedon Town councillor who is also a member of the IDB expressed his dismay that the EA position appears to be at variance to previous statements and applauded the MPs for seeking straight answers.

A series of questions from members of the public followed and these are listed below with the immediate response given by the HPC team. *Individual questioners are not named because of Data protection regulations.*

Comment	HPC Response
What studies have HPV undertaken that say saltmarsh could be built here?	Are working through this and would welcome any previous studies
Will HPC compulsorily purchase?	Do not want to be in this position but would consider doing so if necessary.
Will you work with the IDB on this?	Yes, but (HPC believe that) the IDB is NOT a statutory consultee for this matter
Sea bass do not use saltmarsh and weirs would stop shads from reaching fresh water	The weir proposals will allow for a channel to let shad get upstream
Mining in the area since the Roman era has left a strong concentration of heavy metals in the soil – lead, zinc and cadmium have all accumulated in the area. What impact will this have	Studies will need to be undertaken
The proposed area will be just 250 metres from a fishery that relies on fresh water as do the other fishing lakes and all of the farmers in the area	Concern is noted
Our retail business will be directly affected by this proposal	If we do this, we will want to co-create solutions for businesses
Have HPC considered the Pier to Pier way and Coastal Footpath and the obvious impacts.	Yes. We would reinstate the Pier to Pier way behind any new infrastructure and have spoken to Natural England about ways of rerouting the footpath.
Some property owners in the marked zone have not been contacted at all about this	Will Gilbert offered to come an visit with any property owner.
The stated four month examination period (tabled as mid 2025) is purely with the planning inspectorate and is not the place for public influence	Agreed. If the plan is to be influenced, this must happen now.
What archaeological studies will be undertaken and what landscape preservation will be put in place? Work in 2015 by the EA destroyed a Roman settlement	We have started ecological and historical studies and will be happy to come and talk

Comment	HPC Response
I am fully invested in my home, my land and my existence. Why is YOUR problem more important than my livelihood	Acknowledged
In 2011 the EA changed their mind in the face of opposition and we have already received offers of help from the legal profession and environmentalists. We will not stop until you drop this proposal and leave us alone	We will not leave the village without robust sea defences
If Plan A was the AFD, Plan B is saltmarsh, then what is Plan C?	The EA has told us to create 340 hectares of saltmarsh
We are dairy farmers and we generate 900 tons of milk. Against 44 tons of fish, we need good sense and proportionality	Acknowledged
The current sea wall works and this project has already caused property and business values to fall. What studies have been done to validate destruction of one habitat to create another? What bio diversity gain is there?	That is why we have to carry out the studies we plan to. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is NOT a statutory requirement
I have watched the development of a saltmarsh elsewhere in the country over a period of some 60 years and the timescale for this to actually work is very long.	Acknowledged
When the HPC build began you were operating under the EU Habitats Directive but what legal directive are you now operating under?	Regulation 68 of the Conservation of habitats and Species Regulations 2017
If new sea walls have to be built there will be so much heavy traffic through the village that we simply won't be able to live here.	This will have to be part of any plan that is put together
How can casting aside the investment in the Pier to Pier way be cast aside?	The cost for changes would fall to HPC
Habitats are different now and in the spring	We will do surveys in different periods
Representing the Avon Wildlife Trust – we need to be consulted	Acknowledged
Both commercial and leisure fishing must be accounted for. There are species under threat and you must agree with DEFRA, CEFAS and the MMO to bring yourselves under the regulations and quotas. There are two fisheries management plans in place which you need to engage with.	We need to have mitigations by law. Involved parties have agreed that 44 tons is the volume of fish that are likely to perish. We are working with the University of Swansea to get more detail on the species most likely to be affected
What is the justification for trying to save 44 tons of fish?	We agree that the law on mitigations is disproportionate to the impact
Mitigating habitats can be sources anywhere and other locations in the country or Europe – e.g. East Anglia or even France	The DEFRA guidance states that there is a proximity principle
Construction and farming are higher risk than commercial diving. The AFD manufacturer offered to test the systems in 2016 but HPC declined and they now state that there is a way of managing the system without risk	70 dives a year will be required to maintain the system and HPC are not prepared to accept this risk under the Health and Safety at Work act. The AFD manufacturer has a vested interest

Comment	HPC Response
The AFD system needs to be independently reviewed – not just left to HPC to decide for itself	Noted
The AFD system won't work on some species but time has been lost over the years when other systems could have been developed to solve this issue.	Noted
You don't care about the people who live here. What about the Humanities Act?	We want to speak to everyone about their own stories, we do understand devaluation and flood risk
Why not build a new sea wall between the Yeo outlet and Sand Point – reclaiming the land to create the saltmarsh. It would be easier and cheaper	Noted
Where exactly is the high land in Kingston Seymour per your slide	It is a representative example
Dives to service the AFD should be included with your other dive operations	We do not have any other dive operations
There are 14 metre tides in the estuary and this will just wash away everything you put there	We need to understand this
Why have you chosen here and the other three locations?	A consultancy – Jacobs_ looked at a wide range of criteria and the site selection report will be published in due course
First you kill the fish we fish for and then take away the sea wall we fish from!	Noted
If this did proceed, how long would it take to build	Steart Marshes took 12 years, Pawlett Hams would have taken 4 years.
Is there a cost point at which indirect cooling would be cheaper	Yes, but we can't do that now because the design of the station we are building relies on the cooling system as designed
We need a consensual approach and do not want a "race to the bottom" amongst the four areas. We need alternatives – what about peat restoration on the somerset levels?	Acknowledged
We need the names of the EA people who are advising you	Noted

MS then provided a summary of the evening and HPC were left in no doubt how the attending community felt.

Steve Dixon
Clerk to Kingston Seymour Parish Council