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## **Minsmere Levels Stakeholders Group.**

**Newsletter No 8. December 2013**

### **A very busy year with both progress and frustrations.....**

Welcome to our 2013 Newsletter. When we issued our last Newsletter it was anticipated that the New Cut and Sluice repairs would have been completed, but it was not to be; the contractors working for the EA were late starting and continual bad weather delayed everything. The EA managed to find more funds and there is every probability that the work will be completed this winter. The other main topic is the very slow progress on the proposed new Nuclear Power Station Sizewell C. The stage one consultation finished on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013, but EDF and the British Government only agreed a strike price for electricity from Hinkley Point C on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2013, some 7 months after planning approval was granted for that site.

### **Minsmere New Cut and Sluice works**

Many of you will have seen the construction activity around the dam bridge in Eastbridge, and at the sea sluice at the Minsmere coast. Last winter the Environment Agency contractors planned to complete rebuilding of the sea sluice to repair damage and allow access again for maintenance work. They also planned to cover the exposed asbestos piling along the New Cut, east and west of the dam bridge. However a late start in November and bad weather, together with a series of incidents, meant that neither target was achieved. This year more careful planning and starting work towards the end of August allowed work to proceed rapidly on the New Cut. The contractors have built an access track on the north bank from the dam bridge west to the first bend, allowing them access to the two Mumberry sluices, and with the aid of an amphibious digger, access to the south bank by the first bend, which was severely damaged by deer crossing the New Cut some years ago. New granite stones have been placed over a geotextile membrane, and the whole covered with soil and biodegradable cloth to establish new growth. Below the normal river waterline circular tubes of biodegradable material are trapped behind wooden posts to reduce erosion.



**New Cut repairs by first bend ( EA photo )**



**New Mumberry 2 sluice entry trap.**

The steel pipe which lay for about 11 years just north of the dam bridge was finally moved to its planned location, and on 19<sup>th</sup> November laid in a foundation of ballast over a geotextile covering. The Mumberry 2 sluice gate and the pipe are shown below.



**New Mumberry 2 sluice gate**



**New Mumberry 2 sluice being laid in position.**

The asbestos sheeting on the north bank east of the dam bridge was partly covered last winter, however the contractors ran out of time and also discovered a large scour hole about 275 m east of the dam bridge. This can be seen in a photo provided by the Environment Agency, taken in March 2013. This shows that the exposed asbestos sheeting inserted to prevent water flow from the New Cut (on the right) was capped with a GRP channel section and foam filler, a temporary blue mesh was placed round the scour hole. It is planned to complete the GRP cover over the asbestos sheet as far as the tupenny arch and fill in the scour hole in the next few weeks.



**EA photo taken 6<sup>th</sup> march 2013 of north wall east of dam bridge**

The original plan at the sea sluice was to use Aqua dams (see [www.aquadam.net](http://www.aquadam.net)) to block water flow from the New Cut and Leiston Drain into the sluice chamber, and to plug the exit pipes with inflatable circular rubber plugs. The river water runoff would be pumped over the sea bank to allow the sluice chamber to be effectively drained. Aqua dams are two rubber tubes which can be filled with water, placed inside a third rubber tube, with the ends above water level. If the water level gets too high, one end of the tubes can be released (the other remains tied to the bank) and the water discharges. However the contractors had difficulties in setting up the Aqua dams, and during one weekend the Aqua dam in the New Cut collapsed, went through the sluice gate and sluice chamber, out to sea and was recovered (severely damaged) along the coast towards Aldeburgh. In addition the discharge tubes from the pumps were originally laid directly on the beach into the surf, and rapidly produced a large scour hole. With spring tides, several of the tubes were also washed down the coast. A new strategy was then adopted; the five discharge tubes were plumbed into the air vent on the beach, discharging through the permanent fixed tubes of the sluice beyond the surf line.



**One of 5 electric driven water pumps**



**Three pumps in New Cut for discharge to sea.**



**5 discharge tubes from sluice site**



**5 discharge tubes over the sea bank**



**Original scheme: discharge directly to sea**



**Revised scheme: use air vent in beach to outflow**

An alternative design of inflatable tube; Water dam ([www.water-dam.co.uk](http://www.water-dam.co.uk)) was then tried which have sealed ends. The New Cut Water dam failed despite several attempts and is now blocked by ballast in crane bags, below right. The Leiston Drain Aqua dam is holding even with high rainfall and can be seen in use below, left.



**Leiston drain with Aqua dam**



**New Cut finally blocked with crane bag dam**

The work plan was delayed by about three weeks, but is now progressing well, and inspection of the drained sluice chamber showed less underwater damage than anticipated in the 2010 diving survey. The two photos show the inside of the sluice chamber. The left hand photo shows the remains of the sluice gate on the Leiston drain, with two holes, one about 40 cm high. The inflatable rubber plug for one exit tube can be seen in the right hand photo.



**Inside sluice chamber towards Leiston drain**



**View inside sluice chamber towards sea**

The inside of the New Cut entrance to the sluice chamber is seen below on the left photo, there is some damage to bricks below the waterline, but it is in generally good condition. The two vertical steel posts were put in by the diving team in 2010, in an attempt to allow timber panels to block the water flow. The right hand picture shows the ballast bag dam from the sluice chamber looking up the New Cut.



**Entry from New Cut into sluice chamber**



**View up the New Cut with ballast bag dam**

The water levels in the New Cut and Leiston drain are controlled by the 5 pumps. Normally only one pump is used for each channel, it is electrically controlled, pumping until the water level is low enough. They run intermittently and are draining the rivers irrespective of the tide level.



**Three pumps working under flood conditions**



**Old Leiston Drain sluice gate on flat bed truck**

The three spare pumps provide additional capacity for heavy rain conditions, such as on 20<sup>th</sup> November, when some 12 mm rain fell, see photo above with all pumps running (22<sup>nd</sup> November) or if one of the pumps fails. The old sluice gate for the Leiston drain is shown lying on a flat bed truck after removal.

The contractor's planned deadline for completion of work is the end of January 2014, but they had a month in hand for overrun and provided there are no more major delays, work on both sites should be completed and construction equipment tidied and cleared away before the bird breeding season starts. We would like to thank the staff of the EA and the contractors for the very open way that they kept us informed of the progress (and difficulties) of the project. We also appreciate the willingness with which they have given us access to the works sites and allowed us to take photographs.

## **Sizewell C Developments**

The first round of public consultation ended on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2013, and nearly 1300 replies were received and are currently being analysed by EDF. The comments made by MLSG are available on our website.([www.minsmerelevelsstakeholdersgroup.onesuffolk.net](http://www.minsmerelevelsstakeholdersgroup.onesuffolk.net)) The Environmental Report, with some 150 pages and 35 figures, was by far the most comprehensive document submitted for consultation, but MLSG, and many others, say that it was impossible to provide informed comment on many studies which had not been completed and in some cases barely started. Of major concern to MLSG are:

1. EDF's preferred location for a single massive accommodation block proposed for some 3000 workers is currently planned to be very close to Eastbridge.
2. The area proposed for construction work lay down is about twice that required to build Sizewell B.
3. The initial transport analysis suggested that the A12 would receive some 12 % extra traffic, and proposed that the sharp bend in Farnham could be realigned. Suffolk County Council states that they want a full four villages bypass constructed. All that traffic would then come down the B1122, which would cause chaos, and no plans were proposed to mitigate this.
4. The plans propose a jetty to be constructed on the shore to accept large items and bulk load transportation. The idea is welcomed in that it would reduce the number of truck deliveries to the site, but no details of the design, size and method of construction were presented in the stage one submission. Colin Taylor, a consultant employed by EDF, did say to MLSG that following the problems experienced with a solid block landing stage built for the construction stage at Sizewell B, and then removed, the new design would be on piles and take the landing area further out to sea, avoiding the interruption of shingle along the shore, and the need for regular dredging to keep the landing stage open. He also indicated that EDF may wish to retain the jetty for future repair and renovation work during the life of the power station. However he also said to MLSG that EDF were basically not interested in maintaining the shoreline to the north of the Power station site, and that the continued viability of the Minsmere Sluice was not of interest to EDF.
5. Colin Taylor also said that MLSG and other people's concerns about Leiston Sewage works not having additional capacity for the new power station and accommodation block were unnecessary, as EDF would provide their own water treatment plants as required.
6. The discharge of rain water from the site, with large areas of hard standing is also of concern. The natural consequences of increased rainfall, rising sea levels and climate change will accelerate the point at which the existing gravity fed sluice will no longer be able to handle the volume of discharge. Alternative solutions, including the permanent installation of pumped discharge, must be examined, and funding plans prepared. We wish to be assured that EDF will recognize its responsibility to make a major contribution towards such mitigation. We also need to know a great deal more about the projected impact of the development on the Minsmere coastline, both during the

construction phase and also over the lifetime of the station. (About 150 years in total until its final removal).

EDF have not published the comments received; they say that the complete set will be published at the stage two submission. At the end of the stage one consultation EDF also said that future negotiations would only be with the statutory authorities (this includes local authorities, the Environment Agency and Natural England); no further dissemination of studies or plans would be circulated to the public in advance of the stage 2 submission date. This date is not yet clear but will probably be in Autumn 2015.

At a national level the strike price for electricity supply from the new Hinkley Point power station was finally agreed by the government on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2013, some 7 months after Planning Approval had been granted. Currently two Chinese organisations, CGN and CNNC, Areva and other possible partners are in discussions with the Government and EDF to assist EDF in financing the project. These negotiations will also require approval from the European Commission.

Locally several things have happened recently:

1. MLSG is very pleased that the non-statutory conservation organisations National Trust, Suffolk Wildlife and RSPB have formed a joint group: Sizewell C Suffolk Environmental Stakeholders Group, together with other environmental groups and Suffolk Coastal District Council (who do have a statutory right to consultation). This grouping is explained in a feature article in the EADT on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013, 'to ensure that Sizewell C is the best it can be from a landscape and wildlife perspective and that Suffolk is not short-changed.'
2. MLSG have been active in discussing the next stages with the EA. At a meeting in Ipswich on 9<sup>th</sup> September, with Simon Barlow (EA Nuclear new build Project Manager), Will Todd (flood risk) and Garry Watson (EA engineer covering Norfolk and Suffolk), the EA explained that they had 2 roles; granting licenses for particular areas of the site construction and operation, and secondly as respondents in their own right to the EDF proposals. Simon Barlow led the EA 32 page response letter signed by Charles Beardall, dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 to EDF identifying nine areas of interest to EA and offering advice and help. Will Todd will be involved in the impact of sewage, ground water, station drainage and the new access road. The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) would be involved in advising on any work below the high water mark, and specifically the proposed jetty for landing bulk supplies and large items. The MMO will also be looking at issues affecting the sea around Sizewell. The EA told us that they were responsible for land areas down to Low water level but the MMO cover sea water applications up to High water level, so there is some area of overlap of responsibility.
3. At a meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Forum on 10<sup>th</sup> October we had the opportunity to express our concerns about the lack of any input from the MMO to the consultation to Roger Mason, the Marine Area Manager Eastern at the MMO. He said they would only get involved at stage 2. However we were rather alarmed to subsequently receive a letter from Jonathan Peters (MMO Senior Marine Licensing Manager) saying that MMO would have nothing to do with the Sizewell C planning. "Nuclear power stations are classified as significant infrastructure projects. They don't require planning permission, marine licences or other consents in the standard way and the MMO does not anticipate giving any regulatory approvals for the project."
4. MLSG has been very concerned at the lack of information about what happens after the stage 2 consultations. The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) would only become involved when EDF submit an application for a development consent order. However we knew nothing of the procedures and policies that PINS would then follow. We were very fortunate to make direct contact with the Infrastructure Planning Lead in Bristol, Mark Wilson who, on 24<sup>th</sup> October, gave a presentation to

MLSG and to SPLG (Sizewell Parishes Liaison Group) , representatives from RSPB and Suffolk Wildlife, Counsellor Andy Smith (Vice chair SCDC) and Philip Ridley (SCDC Head of planning and coastal management ). Mark Wilson had also been the PINS lead officer for the Hinkley Point C enquiry, and gave a very clear explanation of the next stages of the planning procedures, and the timescale. The presentation is available on:

<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/eastern/sizewell-c-new-nuclear-powerstation/?ipcsection=folder>

Once the application is accepted there is a very short time for the five inspectors to reach a decision. He also commented that it is essential that local councils and others agree in advance what their negotiating stance with EDF should be. It therefore appears that the unsatisfactory response by EDF to local representations made to it at the stage 1 and stage 2 planning consultations at the Hinkley Point C could at least be least partly explained by disagreements between the local authorities. It also seems that EDF was under pressure to minimise its costs on the consultation process.

5. On 20<sup>th</sup> November we met Counsellor Richard Smith of SCC, now cabinet member responsible for Economic Development, Environment and Planning, and also council member for Leiston and Aldeburgh. Previously he had been chairman of Sizewell Stakeholder group so is well aware of Nuclear energy matters in a local and national context. He is strongly supportive of constructing a new road from the A12 near Saxmundham to Leiston, an idea developed when Sizewell B was being planned, and known then as option D2. He opposes one residential block for 3000 workers, instead proposing several smaller sites,( this idea is also proposed by the local MP, Dr Therese Coffey), but he did point out that the government rules currently do not allow for funding for legacy housing. [The Olympic village in London was covered by another set of planning rules]. For Hinkley Point C, EDF had originally proposed one accommodation block, but now has planned four, with only 510 beds on site and three blocks in Bridgwater, (population about 34000) some 5 miles away. By comparison Leiston has a population of just over 6000!

EDF's latest newsletter (November 2013) says that they will engage in focussed consultation with local Parish representatives and residents near the lead sites early next year, to identify ways to limit the inconvenience and impact of construction and operation. MLSG feel strongly that these local discussions must take place well in advance of EDF's submission of the revised application to the Planning Inspectorate.

*We await 2014 with a feeling of some hope.*

## **STOP PRESS**

On the night of 5<sup>th</sup> December, following a very strong gale centred over Scotland, the East of England coastline was subjected to a storm surge with a predicted height of 2 m, a similar level to the January 1953 flood event which caused severe loss of life and damage to properties. All of the East Anglia coastline was affected, with the worst area predicted to be on the north Norfolk coast. Unlike in 1953, when the wind direction was North East, this time the wind was almost Westerly, and Suffolk was partly protected from the worst of the surge tide. This time, the sea only overtopped the sea bank just south of the Dunwich cliff, unlike the sea bank on the Dingle marshes to the north of Dunwich which suffered a significant breach. The work of the Environment Agency in funding and managing the work on the north wall of the RSPB reserve, and on the Minsmere Sluice is appreciated and gratefully acknowledged.