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FAO: New Nuclear NPS Team

A National Policy Statement for Nuclear Energy Generation, EN-7: A response from Suffolk County Council

As a local authority with substantive experience of the consenting and development of a large-scale nuclear project, and which is also supportive in principle of the use of nuclear energy to ensure the UK's energy security¹, Suffolk County Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the new National Policy Statement EN-7.

Notwithstanding the Council's in principle support for nuclear energy, and the transformative socioeconomic and skills benefits which these projects can provide; the Council recognises the substantial impacts on the environment and communities caused by the development of large-scale nuclear projects. The Council also recognises that nuclear projects, of any scale, can be a source of significant public concern.

Therefore, the Council considers that any policy framework dealing with nuclear power must be conscious of the special characteristics and issues associated with this category of development, which (other than the long-term storage of nuclear waste) is unlike any other project type consented under the Planning Act 2008, or any other regime.

¹ Tabled Paper - Item 7 - Amendment to Motion 1 210324

Therefore, in summary, the County Council considers that:

- Any nuclear fission project, including those under the 50MW threshold, should, *in the first instance*, be considered nationally significant, given the complexities of nuclear technology, the resources and expertise of Local Authorities to manage the consenting of such projects, the unique sensitivity of such projects, and the critical need to maintain and enhance public confidence around emerging, small scale, nuclear technologies.

However, the Council recognises that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, offers opportunities for a more considered and gradual approach to local consenting of micro-fission projects. This potential approach is set out in detail in the appendix, (Question 1).

- There is a need to consider cumulative impacts for potential future site expansion. (Question 3)
- That it is critical for nuclear developers to engage early with host authorities and communities. (Question 7)
- That there is a need to ensure public confidence in infrastructure development generally, and especially nuclear projects, by setting rigorous standards for genuinely effective and participative community engagement and supporting these standards with new guidance. (Question 8)
- There should be greater clarity in the draft policy for the legacy EN-6 sites for new nuclear development. (Question 3)

The Council's detailed responses to this consultation are set out in the appendix to this letter.

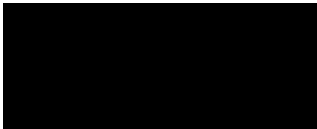
Suffolk County Council recognises the transformative potential of nuclear projects for the lives and opportunities of thousands of people. It also recognises the potential synergies between not only SZC, SZB, and the decommissioning of SZA, but also the potential synergies and opportunities that these have with emerging or potential proposals for nuclear projects at Bacton in Norfolk, and at Bradwell in Essex.

However, these major developments, in combination other energy infrastructure projects, put enormous strain on local communities, who suffer the brunt of the construction and residual impacts on the behalf of the UK. Whilst the term "Energy Coast" is used in some circles, this now has increasingly negative connotations locally. From the perspective of those who live and work here, this is their home and they must be treated with the respect and the care they deserve, if they are to endure further transformative change on behalf of both the rest of the country and future generations.

Therefore, this potential renaissance of nuclear power can only be realised if new nuclear projects are supported by robust policies, and the full application of the mitigation hierarchy, which will prevent, minimise, and mitigate, adverse impacts on communities and the environment, and critically, secure and enhance public confidence in new nuclear projects.

The Council looks forward to continuing to engage with the government, and other partners, in the development of policy for nuclear projects in the UK.

Yours faithfully,



Richard Rout

Cabinet Member for Devolution, Local Government Reform, and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

Appendix – Response to the Consultation Questions

Q.1. To what extent do you agree with the modification of this approach in light of the consultation feedback:

To retain the < 50 MW (electric) threshold in the existing planning framework and to review our position in the future?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the question

Disagree.

Most Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) do not, currently, have the expertise or resources to directly handle an application for a nuclear generating station, with nuclear fission being tightly regulated and having a unique set of considerations. Furthermore, public confidence in the development of nuclear projects is at best weak, with significant public concern in any nuclear development. Micro nuclear reactors would be a new technology, and as such would need to secure public confidence in the first instance, which could be undermined if they are not treated as Nationally Significant.

Therefore, in these formative stages of a renaissance of nuclear energy in the UK, Suffolk County Council considers that any nuclear fission project should be considered Nationally Significant, even if under the 50MW threshold.

Given the intention being to review National Policy Statements frequently, as set out in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025, a threshold could be reintroduced at a later stage if sub 50MW nuclear generation becomes more commonplace and the issues to which they give rise, are understood sufficiently that it would be appropriate for LPAs to be the default decision-makers.

Furthermore, given that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill creates what might be described as a reverse section 35 process, certainly in the immediate future, micro fission projects could be reviewed in terms of consenting route, on a case-by-case basis by the SoS, in discussion with the Local Planning Authority concerned. Therefore, a select number of experienced and confident Planning Authorities could well be in the vanguard of such local consenting for micro fission, given their long-term experience of the nuclear sector and the place of that sector in the community and politics of their region. This approach would also build up skills and knowledge of this type of consenting among leading LPAs, who could then support other LPAs who are without this experience.

Q.2. To what extent do you believe the draft National Policy Statement is adequately future proofed to accommodate advancements in nuclear technologies?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the question

Agree

Q.3. Are there specific planning or siting considerations that should be addressed to ensure the National Policy Statement remains flexible to deployment of nuclear in diverse locations?

Yes.

The Council is supportive that the new draft of EN-7 includes reference to these sites, but it is not clear how the new draft EN-7 *'aim[s] to encourage the development of those sites listed in EN-6 even though EN-6 is no longer the primary National Policy Statement.'* (paragraph 3.5.11 of the consultation). Section 1.7 of draft EN-7 notes that the EN-6 sites *'continue to have advantages'*.

The Council's view is that the policy support for EN-6 sites should be clearer and framed more positively than this. The policy should attribute positive weight towards the EN-6 sites. Additionally, EN-6 sites should be excluded from the requirements to assess against alternative sites in paragraphs 2.7.29 and 2.7.63 of draft EN-7.

Given that SMRs are modular by nature, EN-7 should specifically address how developers approach cumulative impacts where there is potential, reasonable likelihood, or expectation, that sites to be expanded over time with additional units. An initial application for development consent should, therefore, assess the site's suitability for future expansion to allow for an informed decision on, for example, the inclusion of additional ancillary and supporting infrastructure in the DCO to enable future expansion of the site, such as access roads.

Q.4. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to remove the distinction between previously exclusionary and discretionary criteria (see paragraph 1.1.7 (v) for more information)?

Agree

Suffolk County Council considers that the previous distinction between exclusionary and discretionary was unhelpful. The removal of this distinction makes the NPS clearer.

Q.5. The government currently plans to retain the Semi-Urban Population Density Criterion in EN-7. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the inclusion:

The Council considers that it is reasonable to retain this criterion. Given that new fission technologies and systems are only emergent at this stage, and regular reviews of NPSs are to be established by forthcoming legislation, this is a reasonable and precautionary approach that can be revisited in future.

Q.6. We are open to revising the Semi-Urban Population Density Criterion in the future. How should this criterion change in the future to better support the deployment of advanced nuclear technologies, and what evidence supports your suggestion? Please reference your sources. Please use the text box to answer (free text, max 500 words).

No comments (see Q5)

Q.7. If it's not already addressed elsewhere (for example in EN-1 and the Planning Inspectorate Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project Guidance), are there any specific areas of the draft EN-7 where further clarity or guidance is needed to help ensure successful implementation by developers, planners, and regulators?

Yes.

Though it is briefly mentioned at 3.4.1 of the consultation documents, EN-7 should give greater prominence to the need for nuclear developers to engage early with host authorities and communities. Developers stand to gain important insights into local conditions and issues, which can positively influence their design, environmental assessments and approach to development. This will be particularly important in the context of EN-7 taking a criteria-based approach, which aims to open nuclear development to places and communities which are not yet familiar with nuclear, and its potential for positive impacts.

Section 2.2 of draft EN-7 would benefit from the specific inclusion of a reference to the mitigation hierarchy.

The draft NPS only covers the need for water as part of the operational cooling systems (para 3.6.27/28) and groundwater protection (3.8.5 ff), but not specifically for the water which is needed for construction. Suffolk County Council considers that water requirements during construction can be significant. This was recently demonstrated at Sizewell C, for which a desalination plant was proposed toward the end of the examination. Therefore, the Council recommends that the NPS should introduce a requirement for applicants to assess the availability of water for construction of their project, particularly in water-stressed areas.

Q.8. Would additional support or information from the government be beneficial and assist developers intending to apply for Development Consent in implementing EN-7 and proceeding through the Development Consent Order pre-application process?

It would be helpful if the government could provide robust guidance to promoters as to improve the quality of engagement with host communities.

Whilst the nuclear sector in Suffolk has generally delivered a high standard of engagement with communities this is not common across many other major Infrastructure projects, and given the emerging technologies and systems there will be new entrants to the market. Therefore, to ensure public confidence in infrastructure development in generally and nuclear projects in particular, guidance on, *and* standards for community engagement, are essential.

Q.9. (OPTIONAL): If you wish to be kept informed of the development of the supplementary information to the National Policy Statement, please share your contact details (email address preferable) in the text box provided (max 150 words) so that we can seek your views.

NSIPs@suffolk.gov.uk

Q.10. Please identify the single main sector or interest you represent in relation to the siting of new nuclear power stations

Local government