

Lord Vallance of Balham

Minister for Science, Innovation, Research and
Nuclear
Department of Energy Security and Net Zero
55 Whitehall London SW1A 2HP

cc Matthew Pennycook Minister of State (Minister for
Housing and Planning) and Joseph Ghayouba Chair
Nuclear Legacy Advisory Forum (NuLeAF) and Nigel Cann
CEO SZC Co.

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Manager

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Date: 29/01/2026

BY EMAIL

Dear Minister of State,

Nuclear Regulatory Review 2025, the characterisation of Local Government and its role in the development of new nuclear projects

I'm writing to you on behalf of the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group, (NNLAG) the Local Government Association Special Interest Group that provides a supportive national network for local authorities that are, or are likely to be, affected by new nuclear development. The objectives of NNLAG are to share good practise and experience and make representations direct to government and elsewhere on all matters related to nuclear new build and advanced nuclear technologies, including the production of nuclear-related hydrogen and other low carbon synthetic fuels, and nuclear-related transmission projects.

Further details about NNLAG are appended to this letter, as is a short case study relating to Local Authority involvement with the development of Sizewell C.

NNLAG have very significant concerns regarding the content, tone, and approach to local government, of the Nuclear Regulatory Review, and its failure to meaningfully grasp the positive role that local government has in enabling the development of new nuclear projects.

The characterisation of Local Authorities by the Review

The Review fundamentally misrepresents the involvement of local authorities in the decision-making process, by misplacing the blame for project delays:

'While they play a vital role in nuclear development, cost recovery...leads to perverse incentives in which local authorities and their consultants, can protract disagreements.'
(paragraph 490)

No evidence is provided to support this claim. In the absence of evidence, the Review undermines and contradicts its stated aim of improving trust and efficiency, because on this matter it fails to provide, or engage transparently, with evidence.

Planning Performance Agreements

Furthermore, such an approach is at odds with the development of policy and practice that is emerging in relation to Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs). Local Authorities are working closely with MHCLG and the Planning Advisory Service to develop a robust framework for PPAs, to ensure that Local Authorities are properly resourced and equipped to support the delivery of the government's infrastructure, energy, and economic growth objectives. And ensure that existing and emerging Mayoral Combined County Authorities can fulfil their economic development role effectively.

NNLAG members do not understand how the 'vital' role the Review considers a local authority has, should be provided over a lengthy pre application and development consent process for free (at the expense of local taxpayers and local services), or, in the absence of effective cost recovery through a PPA, sporadic and limited funding initiatives from government. It should be noted that engagement with NSIPs is not considered a new burden by government for local authorities, as the great majority of the process is not a statutory duty, which means no additional funding is provided.

While paragraphs 396 and 397 acknowledge the resourcing challenges faced by local authorities in responding to NSIPs, they do not sufficiently recognise the value of their unique expertise. Overall, therefore, given para 490, the Review incorrectly assumes that local authorities can absorb this NSIP engagement within existing budgets.

The capacity and resourcing of local authorities to meaningfully engage in the development consent process, without degradation to statutory planning and other services, has consistently been raised as a concern since the first nuclear NSIP at Hinkley Point C in Somerset was consented in 2013.

Local Authority capacity and skills for consenting

The Review also overly focuses on the need for regulatory bodies to recruit and retain the scientific skills and capabilities necessary to engage in the development consent process (paragraph 488 – 490). Whilst scientific expertise is undeniably important for nuclear safety, risk assessment and environmental assessment, this narrow focus overlooks other critical local knowledge, skills and capacity required to make the development consent process for new nuclear fairer and more efficient.

Local authority engagement is central to fully realising the social and economic benefits from new nuclear, and in providing local understanding that supports applicants in their local community and political engagement; the reliance of applicants on consultants with no local knowledge means this is a critical project need.

Local Authorities' role the discharge of requirements

Disempowering local authorities from making meaningful engagement in the development consent process, by withdrawing access to PPAs, whilst at the same time centralising the management of the post consent process, as set out in Recommendation 30, is contrary to the government's strategic objectives, particularly around reducing regional inequality and delivering greater local autonomy and capacity through local government reorganisation and devolution.

The critical need for public trust in the development of new nuclear projects

The Review significantly underestimates the importance of public trust, transparency, and co-creation in fair and efficient decision-making which, historically for any new nuclear development. Rather the Review applies a top-down and scientific-led approach, which leads to low community buy-in, perceived lack of fairness and fuels resistance and consequent delays due to poor social licence for change.

Our local communities expect us to be fully engaged in the development consent process, including the post consent implementation of any DCO. Effective collaboration with local authorities is essential to build trust, transparency, and public acceptance with host communities. It is also the cornerstone of delivering long term value through education, skills, and employment led growth that is self-sustaining beyond the construction period.

Conclusion

Therefore, the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group requests that government clarifies its position in relation to paragraph 490, and recommendation 30.

We would urge the government to respond to paragraph 490 and Recommendation 30 of the Review and in doing so explain how a reduced role for the local authorities in the development consent process would create fairer and more efficient decision-making for new nuclear NSIPs.

NNLAG remains ready to work with government, (and project promoters) on the delivery of its of nuclear power in the UK, and recognises the vital role of nuclear in energy security, and economic growth for the UK and our communities, whilst representing and supporting those communities, to ensure that the adverse impacts of the construction and operation of these projects is reasonably minimised and mitigated.

Finally, I have been invited to attend a hearing of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, on behalf of NNLAG, to give evidence regarding new nuclear projects and localities, on the 25 February.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,



Richard Rout

Chair of the New Nuclear Authorities Group

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

Appendix 1

Sizewell C and Suffolk's Local Authorities – a case study

As portfolio Holder for NSIPs in Suffolk County Council's Cabinet, by way of a rebuttal to the accusation made in the report, I would also like to take the opportunity to precis the development of Sizewell C on the Suffolk coast, to provide further context for the concerns of the New Nuclear Local Authorities Group.

The first consultation on the current iteration of Sizewell C took place in 2012. From that time and beforehand, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk Coastal/ East Suffolk Council has worked collaboratively with both British Energy, and subsequently EDF, on the development of proposals for new nuclear at Sizewell, including on the shelved proposals for Sizewell C on which there was a public consultation in 1989.

As set out in the Joint Councils' response to the phase one consultation on the current project in 2012.

“The Councils recognise the significant scale of the proposals being developed by EDF, as the largest infrastructure project in the East of England, and its importance at a local, sub-regional and national level. The contribution to the nation's energy resources and the economic opportunities it could afford locally are acknowledged to be positive benefits. These benefits have to be balanced against the impacts on the environment, the pressures on our communities and the transport network. The local authorities see their role as maximising the potential benefits whilst minimising the inevitable negative impacts of a project of this magnitude.

The Councils continue to support the development of nuclear power stations in principle and support the Sizewell C proposal on the basis that EDF should provide a lasting legacy for the economy and the local communities, act as an environmental exemplar, and make appropriate provision for transport and the funding of wider community benefits.”

Principally using their own officers, rather than external consultants, Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk Council have consistently engaged with the project team to improve the quality of outcomes in relation to the design and function of both the main site and the supporting infrastructure, as well as ensure that systems are in place to mitigate the impacts of construction on the communities and environment of East Suffolk. Engagement has always been professional robust and cordial. In many cases the long-term relationships between Council officers and the project team have been invaluable in agreeing, and securing, better outcomes for project design, environmental mitigation and transport and construction solutions.

The Councils' officers understand the social and environmental characteristics of the locality and have been able to bring that understanding to the project team, and their external consultants, to support their development of the project and the contents of the submitted Planning Application to the Secretary of State.

The costs of the Planning Performance Agreement with SZC Co have always been transparent, and are only based on recovery of costs, as legally prescribed, in order that local taxpayers and local services, including Adult Social Care and Children's Services, are not adversely affected by the costs of delivering Critical National Infrastructure.

Appendix 2

New Nuclear Local Authorities Group (NNLAG) Objectives and membership (2024)

NNLAG (New Nuclear Local Authorities Group) is the local government representative body on new nuclear development and a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association. The aim of NNLAG is to provide a supportive national network for local authorities that are or likely to be affected by new nuclear development to make representation direct to Government and elsewhere on all matters related to nuclear new build and advanced nuclear technologies, including the production of nuclear-related hydrogen and other low carbon synthetic fuels, and nuclear-related transmission projects. For future reference the use of the term 'new nuclear development' purposively includes all these matters.

The UK Government is committed to a program of new nuclear development as part of simultaneous electrification and decarbonisation of heat, power and transport to reduce emissions and transition to net zero by 2050. This will cost billions of pounds and take place over prolonged timescales, presenting both significant opportunities and challenges for local authorities and their communities.

NNLAG believes that local authorities and their communities should be central to the decision-making process, which requires early and effective engagement in the formulation of policy, strategy and practice. NNLAG works to promote the best social, economic and environmental outcomes for existing and future nuclear communities. For existing nuclear communities this includes (where appropriate) future development opportunities promoted by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, and which accord with the Government's ambition for 'greener, better, faster' short term economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and long-term sustainable growth.

The objectives of NNLAG are to:

1. be the principal local authority forum for debate and the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice on new nuclear development.
2. facilitate access to advice and the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice on new nuclear development between member local authorities.
3. seek to influence national policy, strategy and practice for new nuclear development in the interests of affected communities.
4. provide a mechanism to identify, where possible, a common local government view on all key matters related to new nuclear development.
5. represent that view, or the range of views from our member local authorities, in discussion with national bodies, including Government, Great British Nuclear, UKAEA, industry and the nuclear and energy regulators.
6. develop the capacity of our member local authorities to engage with new nuclear development at the local level.

Current members and secretariat (May 2023)

NNLAG is chaired in 2023/24 by Suffolk County Council. The charring organisation also host its secretariat.

Current members of NNLAG are:

Anglesey County Council
Bassetlaw District Council
Cumberland Council
East Suffolk Council
Essex County Council
Folkestone and Hythe Council
Maldon District Council
Somerset Council
South Gloucestershire Council
Suffolk County Council