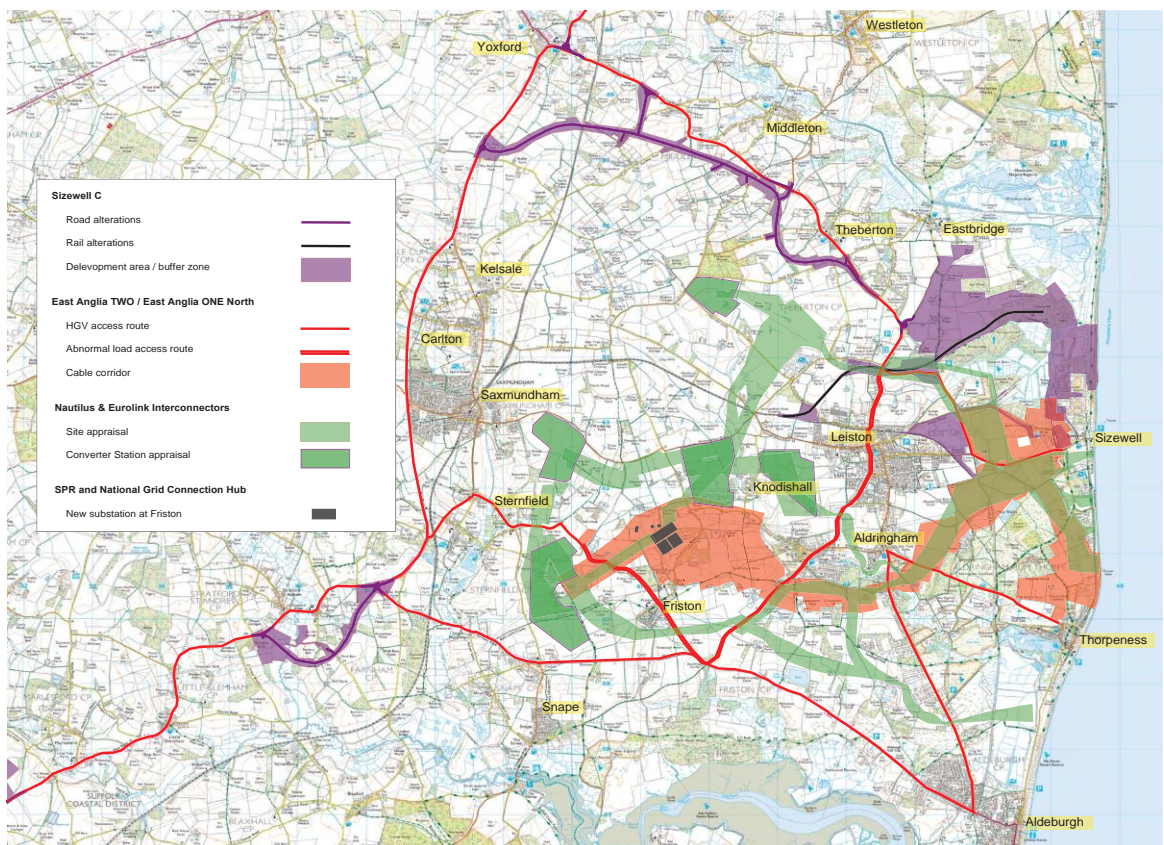


Update on Sizewell C
Report to the Annual Parish Meeting 17 April 2024

At last year’s APM, I reported that our small bit of Suffolk Coast was being deluged with proposed energy projects. I wrote that this included not only one of the world’s largest nuclear power plants and accompanying desalination plant, but windfarms with on-land sub-stations for the national grid, the landing site of power cables from mainland Europe and interconnector cables with Kent, and solar panel farms. Last year’s report included the map below showing what might befall us.

Since then, things have gone from bad to worse. It now seems clear that there is a concerted effort by our national government, National Grid, EDF and others to turn our little bit of pristine coast, peaceful villages and environmentally protected landscapes into a gigantic energy infrastructure site.



As the WALL group is reporting separately on Lionlink, this report focuses on Sizewell C.

Over the past two years, the Government has given Sizewell C greater amounts of taxpayer money. It has now invested in excess of £2 billion. With Hinkley C delayed for at least another 7 years and its costs spiralling from £18 billion to nearly £50 billion, French state-owned EDF is not likely to put its own money into Sizewell C. This is leaving the UK government as the majority (or only) shareholder and therefore the UK taxpayer as the

project's financier. In this financing arrangement, any supposed local "benefit" from Sizewell C will come not from EDF largesse, but rather will be a transfer from our own taxes and from the nuclear tax that will be added to every utility bill in the country. Basically, not only will we have to suffer the massively negative impact of construction, but we will have to pay for it out of our own pockets.

Staying engaged in the fight remains worthwhile. The twin scandals of HS2 and the Post Office's Horizon IT system provide cautionary lessons. It is also possible that the ballooning financing needed for Sizewell C and the massive time and cost overruns associated with its troubled EPR technology (which EDF will not use in France), could stop the project. But Government and EDF are not waiting. Early construction has already begun with the destruction of the natural environment underway around the site and the temporary closure of the roads as far as the A14 for movements of abnormally large loads (ALLs) on our inadequate roadways already being felt. Sadly, the experience from Hinkley C promises that we are looking at a 15-20 year construction timeline, costs more like £50-£60 billion than £20 billion and a project whose design and technology will likely be obsolete before it is even completed.

As for the role of WPC, we continue to engage wherever and to whatever extent we can. The WPC is represented on the B1125 Working Group that was set up under the Sizewell C Deed of Obligation to work alongside Westleton, Blythburgh, Suffolk Highways, ESC and EDF to try to mitigate the impact of potentially tens of thousands of extra cars and light vans every day using the B1125 to reach Sizewell C and its related facilities (such as worker campuses) or to rat run around the A12. The WPC has agreed with a plan to close the B1125 at Blythburgh at the water tower junction as a means of providing some safety and assurance for drivers trying to get in and out of Walberswick. This scheme would include better turnings at the A12 and work on the road surface of the B1387 from the Water Tower to the A12 to make the road fit for purpose (See attached WPC Report that sets out details of the scheme.). Going forward, the various community forums are expected to be the avenue by which local concerns can be raised and addressed. However, early experience with these forums has been widely seen as unsatisfactory including the exclusion of Walberswick from the Northern Transport Forum. WPC will continue to work on ensuring that we have a voice as/when this project goes forward.

Cllr. Bassinette, 3 April 2024

Annex – B1125 Working Group Proposal for B1387 Junction

Traffic Mitigation Measures in the Event of Sizewell C Construction Closure of the B1125 at the Water Tower Junction

Background

Walberswick Parish Council is a member of the B1125 Working Group established under the Deed of Obligation between Sizewell C and Suffolk County Council and East Suffolk District Council. This working group, comprised of Blythburgh, Walberswick and Westleton Parish Council representatives was established under the Deed of Covenant with the purpose of mitigating some of the traffic and road safety issues of the B1125 associated with the Sizewell C construction.

With regard to the B1125, it is acknowledged that the roadway will bear very significant additional traffic as a result of the building of Sizewell C. Given that the construction period will be for a minimum of 10-12 years (and very likely many years more based on the experience of EDF at Hinkley C which is already 10 years over schedule) and will involve on a daily basis some 7500 workers travelling to the area in addition to thousands of coaches, lorries and vans, it is expected that the B1125 will experience hugely increased volume of Sizewell traffic as well as rat running to avoid the main route which will consist of the B1122 (to which the B1125 connects) and the A12. Eventually, the huge pressure on the B1122 as the primary route to Sizewell is expected to subside once the Sizewell C link road is built further south, but all routes – and especially those that allow motorists to rat run from an overwhelmed A12 – will see unprecedented volumes of traffic throughout the long construction.

Proposal

The Parish Council members of the B1125 Working Group have been working with Sizewell C, ESC and Suffolk County Council Highways Department to design schemes to help slow traffic, improve safety, manage heavier flows and discourage rat running to the extent possible. A major traffic calming and road safety build is planned for Westleton which sits directly on the B1125. At the northern end, it has been proposed to close off the B1125 to the north where it meets the Walberswick Road (B1387) at the Water tower junction so that traffic cannot rat run through Blythburgh to the A12 or avoid the A12 by using the B1125. This will block the “shortcut” shown on mapping apps and instead direct traffic down the A12. The Walberswick and Blythburgh representatives on the Working Group have been the driving force behind the closure of this junction which is already dangerous under current traffic conditions. Without the closure, it is believed that coming out of Walberswick across the B1125 will be extraordinarily dangerous and difficult, with long tailbacks and compromised safety a daily event. It would also be impossible to protect Blythburgh from massive volumes of Sizewell and rat-run traffic that would bifurcate that village and create dangerous conditions throughout the village and at the turning points onto the A12.

Coming from north at the A12, road signage will show that there is no through road. The road signage on the B1125 from the south at the B1387 will show that the road is closed with a “T” sign. The closure will be with a gate or similar that will allow passage by emergency vehicles as necessary. This gate will be just north of the farmhouse on the western side of the B1125. Bicycles and pedestrians will always have access. Vehicles coming out of the B1387 from Walberswick will be instructed by signage to “Give Way” going both straight on the B1387 or turning south. This turn will be considerably safer since there will not be traffic crossing the B1387 from the north and south as there is today.

While closing the B1125 helps address the key problems, it will require changes to the condition of the B1387 where it runs alongside “Water tower Farm” and in the turning at the A12. As part of the proposed scheme, exiting the B1387 at the A12 will be widened with a dedicated left and right turn lane markings enough to handle up to three cars (or a piece of farm equipment) queuing to enter the A12. In addition, turning from the A12 into the B1387 will benefit from new lane markings, signage and “anti-skid” surfacing to handle the much higher volumes of vehicles using this turning. This should also help control the tailbacks that occur, particularly in the summer, behind cars trying to turn out of the B1387 into the A12.

The other necessary condition for this scheme is for improvements to be made in the quality of the B1387 from the B1125 to the A12. Whilst Sizewell C is not including this within its responsibility, SCC Highways department, as participants in the B1125 Working Group, have confirmed that they are aware of the poor condition of this road and that drainage and curb improvements will be necessary to make this scheme work. Currently, flooding on that road makes 2-way traffic impossible at times and it is not fit for purpose if the alternative of the northern end of the B1125 is no longer available. Therefore, in conjunction with this scheme, it is essential that SCC Highways simultaneously undertake the road improvement work.

Admittedly, many people who live and visit Walberswick use the northern end of the B1125 through Blythburgh. It should be noted that this roadway is already signed as “no through traffic”, but this instruction is routinely ignored. By closing the road, everyone will have to exit at the A12 or go south on the B1125. Whilst this may seem inconvenient, the construction of Sizewell C will fundamentally constrain the way everyone moves about and these types of delays and diversions will become a permanent aspect of living here. There is no denying that the impact will be overwhelmingly negative and of very long duration. Unfortunately, national level government is unmoved by the local impact of the project and therefore schemes like the one proposed here are absolutely essential to provide some mitigation to the most egregious traffic and safety impacts. For that reason, the B1125 Working Group recommends that the Parish Councils and communities involved support these proposals.

Next Steps

The representatives of Sizewell C at the Working Group have repeatedly said that the intention is to get these schemes in place at the very start particularly when the larger transport mitigation schemes (such as the link road, park and rides, etc) are not expected until later in the project cycle.

