

Report to: **Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment**
Date: **22 February 2010**
By: **Director of Transport and Environment**
Title of report: **Response to Draft National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation**
Purpose of report: **To agree a response to Government on the Draft National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation especially in relation to the exclusion of Dungeness from the list of identified sites for new Nuclear Power Stations.**

RECOMMENDATION: The Lead Member is recommended to respond to Government that the County Council considers that it is premature to exclude Dungeness so that the environmental impact can be further reviewed, and that the economic impact of Dungeness's exclusion should be given greater weight

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There is little cost involved in preparing the response to Government and there is budget provision for overall work on strategic planning matters.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 In the Autumn of 2009 the Government published for public consultation the first set of National Policy Statements (NPS) which form the primary basis for the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) decisions on energy infrastructure applications. The Government has published an overarching NPS for Energy and 6 complementary technology specific NPSs including Nuclear Energy. The objectives of Government energy and climate change policy for the power industry are to reduce emissions, achieve security of supply, expand grid capacity, reduce costs and contribute to sustainable development. A large number of power stations are due to close in the next 10-15 years. The NPS sets out a diverse energy mix to deliver new capacity.

2.2 In 2008, the Government decided that nuclear energy would have a significant role in future energy policy. Currently there are 10 nuclear power stations in UK producing about 13% of electricity generation but all bar one will close by 2023. Government wants new nuclear energy to be operational from 2018 and, by 2025 that nuclear electricity generation could amount to 40% of new energy provision.

2.3 Before any site for a new nuclear power station is subject to a development consent application to the IPC, it should have been subject to a Strategic Siting Assessment (SSA). The NPS reports on the assessment of 11 sites. The assessment includes consideration of demographics, proximity to military activities, flooding, storm surge & tsunami, coastal processes, proximity to hazardous facilities and airports, internationally designated sites of ecological importance, amenity, site characteristics and access to cooling sources. In deciding an application, IPC must have regard to any local impact report submitted by a relevant local authority.

2.4 The SSA reports that 10 of the 11 sites were considered potentially suitable, none in the South East - (Bradwell (Essex), Hartlepool, Hinckley Point (Somerset), Oldbury (Gloucestershire), Sizewell (Suffolk), Braystones, Kirkstanton, Sellafield (all Cumbria), Heysham (Lancs) and Wylfa (Wales). The 11th site – Dungeness which is just over the East Sussex border in Kent was not included. The Government's preliminary conclusion was the nominated site would cause an adverse effect on the integrity of a Special Area of Conservation. There is also a proposed Ramsar site. The Government concluded that Dungeness is both a unique coastal system and internationally important shingle site. The Habitats Regulations Assessment concluded that losses as a result of a new nuclear power station would prove difficult to mitigate or compensate, due to

lack of suitable alternative shingle habitat available in the vicinity, the active role that coastal processes play, and the time period for re-establishment.

2.5 Dungeness has been a major power source over the last 40 years. There are economic advantages in terms of employment, skills development and indirect benefits. (It has been calculated that the station wage bill contribution to the sub region is over £30m p.a.) Dungeness currently employs over 1000 people although the split between Kent and East Sussex is unknown

3. Comments / Appraisal

3.1 It should be noted that at all 10 potentially suitable Nuclear Power Station sites, the Habitat Regulations Assessment identified adverse effects on a European Site integrity. The Government has though concluded that only 1 nominated site – Dungeness be ruled out. Natural England advised it would be “very difficult, if not impossible in some cases” to compensate for the loss of habitat at Dungeness. By ruling out Dungeness now, the Government is circumventing the opportunity for the site owner/operator to assess at a more detailed project level whether the inherent difficulties can be overcome. Whilst the County Council recognises the potentially significant environmental impact, it could be considered premature to rule out Dungeness to prevent further analysis, or to subsequently find that other nominated sites had an insurmountable environment impact.

3.2 The NPS could also be considered inflexible as Dungeness could be resubmitted with a reduced landtake which might still meet the needs of a smaller nuclear utility on the site. Dungeness may also have other advantages compared to some of the sites in the nominated list as it is considered that the site can be easily connected to the national grid and is potentially capable of coming forward by 2025.

3.3 The economic and employment benefits to an area of a new nuclear power station are a material consideration. There are marginal benefits to Hastings and E Rother. Both Hastings BC and Rother DC have submitted evidence to a Select Committee on the NPSs on environmental and, employment & wealth generation grounds. The sub regional socio-economic benefits of a new nuclear power station at Dungeness should be given more weight.

3.4 The NPSs also set out the Government’s view on the management and disposal of radioactive waste. The Government considers that effective arrangements exist to manage and dispose of waste. Higher activity waste is to have safe and secure interim storage until a geological disposal facility can receive waste. Regarding other waste categories, for low level waste, most is currently sent for disposal to W Cumbria. Other wastes will be managed according to regional requirements and current practices. The Government identifies that they should be dealt with using established disposal routes. The implications of decommissioning Dungeness A and the potential decommissioning of Dungeness B are under consideration as part of the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Waste & Minerals Core Strategy.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 The Government is seeking comments on draft NPSs for Energy infrastructure. A SSA has excluded Dungeness from potential suitable sites. This is considered premature and Dungeness’s inclusion would allow further study. The economic benefits of a further nuclear power station at Dungeness for the eastern part of East Sussex should be taken into account.

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1 February 2010

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: NPSs for Energy EN-1&6. Report C/09/68 – Shepway DC