

## **Planning to Ensure Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects Realise Tangible Legacies**

### **Introduction**

The Hinkley Point C (HPC) Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) has presented multiple, significant challenges across the planning field and across many years. In order to address these challenges head on, Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) led the delivery of an award winning Planning Performance Agreement linked to the Bridgwater Vision 2050 and with key development objectives established at the outset. These were embedded through commitments known as the Dillington Visions, through our leadership on the project and the concurrent Local Plan processes. These key objectives for legacy benefits were consolidated through the Local Impact Report (LIR) submitted as part of the Development Consent Order (DCO) process that then flowed into the two s106 Agreements for the HPC project, into the Residual Impacts Analysis Report and into the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and annual Priorities Plans. The documents are produced each year by the SDC Major Projects Team to monitor and secure the legacy benefits against the originally agreed objectives.

A key challenge has been the operation of two planning processes for the project - the DCO process and the traditional Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) process. Managing these processes, understanding the interaction between the two frameworks and having a clear vision of how to ensure the benefits of the project are maximised and the impacts are minimised, through delivering a robust policy framework, have been essential for securing the legacy benefits that are now being realised.

The main elements of the project, which make up the planning policy context, are the Major Infrastructure Policies (MIP), specifically MIP 2 - HPC Associated and Ancillary Development and Policy B1 - Bridgwater, within the Sedgemoor Core Strategy 2011-2026 as well as the joint West Somerset Council (WSC) and SDC HPC Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). These policies and the SPD provided the framework to allow the delivery of the first of a new generation of nuclear power stations and ensure a meaningful legacy for its host communities.

Principal components of this legacy that are now either in operation or under construction include:

- The National College for Nuclear (NCfN) southern hub- App. No. - 13/16/00014
- The Somerset Energy Innovation Centre and Somerset Low Carbon Energy Hub (SEIC) App. Nos. 09/16/00022 & 23
- The Bridgwater Gateway employment site- App. Nos. 37/15/00087, 88 & 89
- EDF Energy Low Carbon, Leadership Training Campus, Cannington Court - App. No. 13/12/00036
- Bridgwater & Taunton College's Advanced Engineering Centre (App No. 08/15/00135) & Construction Skills Centre (App No 13/14/000002)

Delivery of these developments is just one result of many years of hard work that has gone in to planning to ensure the local community derives maximum benefit from the HPC project. The aim throughout has been to leave a long term and worthwhile legacy across the social, economic and environmental aspects which are the foundations for sustainable and well planned growth. This project represents examples of planning excellence and can be seen as a trailblazer for best practice for its

use of planning policy, implementation and delivery of wide-ranging positive outcomes to ensure a transformational impact.

## **Planning Context and Skills**

Since the National Policy Statements EN-1 and EN-6 identified Hinkley Point as a potentially suitable site for the development of a new nuclear power station in 2011, SDC has been taking a proactive approach to planning in order to devise solutions to the key issues and problems that are presented by the HPC project. An early example of this work is the HPC SPD.

The SPD allows the Council to ensure there is advice in place that draws together relevant policy to inform the proposals for the HPC project. The SPD promotes a coherent planning and development approach that is consistent with national planning policy and aligns with local spatial plans. The approaches set out in the SPD seek to ensure that the potential benefits of the project are realised and that the construction of Hinkley Point C does not result in unacceptable economic, social and environmental impacts and harm to local communities and businesses.

The SPD also contains The Dillington Visions, agreed between SDC, Somerset County Council (SCC), WSC and EDF Energy, which is a series of objectives set out as part of a Planning Performance Agreement, in collaboration with the developers, EDF Energy. The Dillington Visions focused on five topic areas. These included: Economic Development; Developing a Low Carbon Future and Education, Employment and Skills. Each set out various priorities for the vision in order to achieve a positive legacy from the project, across each of the topic areas. This proved invaluable during early negotiations with EDF Energy to ensure the approach was not simply to take the line of least resistance or the most economically advantageous route. The Councils took a hard line and although there were difficulties, the outcomes are ensuring that legacy benefits are delivered.

Policy MIP 2, within the SDC Core Strategy, also set the context for how the Council would respond to proposals for development associated with, ancillary to, or related to, the HPC Project. The policy covers various topics including accommodation and the impact upon the housing market, measures to avoid, minimise and mitigate transport impacts, appropriate community facilities, investment in infrastructure, buildings and green infrastructure and the delivery of education, employment and training opportunities.

Policy P1 of the Core Strategy also identified land to the south of Bridgwater, adjacent to the A38, as a preferred greenfield location in a situation where the construction of a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point required the additional release of employment land to meet the associated transport and employment requirements and supply chain businesses. This site is now occupied by the Bridgwater Gateway development, which is currently in construction to deliver nuclear related growth to support the HPC project and facilitate the supply chain occupying local sites.

Providing this robust policy framework required strong and effective leadership from the team at SDC, including Nick Tait, Stuart Houlet and led by Claire Pearce. Their resilient and meticulous involvement throughout ensured that the MIP policies made up part of the adopted development plan for the area and that both planning regimes operating in the area were able to integrate for the benefit of the community to deliver exceptional outcomes. This represented a completely new challenge for the planners involved, given that HPC is the UK's first nuclear new build for a generation and the first to progress through the 2008 Planning Act process.

The subsequent legacy projects championed by planning colleagues in the Major Projects Team are examples of the real difference that planners have made to the success of the project. The NCfN was opened in February 2018 and the £15m capital investment is now providing a state-of-the-art nuclear training facility, including a virtual reality environment, a reactor simulator and computer-equipped training rooms; recreation and collaboration space and sports facilities. The design of the building is

exemplary - its construction has already won Project of the Year at Michelmores Property Awards - but it is the role it will play in meeting the national need for nuclear related skills that is critical and will ensure the greatest legacy benefit for the community. The NCfN represents a partnership between industry, national regulators, skills bodies and training providers. It is set to revolutionise the way that training for the nuclear sector is delivered, while ensuring that the UK maintains its enviable global reputation for top quality, safe and reliable civil and defence operations, underpinned by a world-class regulatory regime and an expert workforce.

The NCfN is complemented by more traditional training facilities constructed and now operational to support the construction and operational needs of the HPC project. The Construction Skills Centre offers training in a range of necessary skills from steel-fixing to machine operation, while the Advanced Engineering Centre expands and enhances existing training facilities to offer a level of specialised engineering training, and specifically for apprenticeships.

All of these successes are monitored and reported on through the HPC Annexe to the Council's AMR, which ensures that the objectives are being met and reviews can take place annually to identify and change priorities or areas which should be the focus of the team over the coming year. This links back to the Bridgwater Vision, which sets out a regeneration framework for the town, demonstrating how the town's environment will meet the highest 21st century aspirations of its people and businesses and underpins the Core Strategy and Local Plan. Monitoring around compliance is rigorously addressed to ensure that EDF Energy deliver upon their targets and partners are working successfully to deliver the best legacy outcomes for the local community as well as meeting national needs in terms of skills and experience in the nuclear new build sector.

## **Sustainable Development**

The delivery of sustainable development is the golden thread running through the Bridgwater Vision and the development plan for Sedgemoor. It is central to improving the quality of lives of current residents, delivering a higher value economy and ensuring the high quality environment that exists within Sedgemoor is preserved and enhanced.

The project has delivered and will continue to deliver multiple short, medium and long-term public benefits across a range of economic, social and environmental objectives. The SEIC is a catalyst for collaboration and innovation, providing dynamic space and expert support to the businesses at the heart of the growing low-carbon energy supply chain. The SEIC ambition is to create a sustainable economic legacy through the growth of a South West low-carbon energy cluster. The building currently in operation is also constructed and operating to BREEAM Excellent standards, which is the highest environmental accreditation for new buildings of this nature.

The NCfN will deliver significant social benefits through the training that it offers and the opportunity it provides to the young people of Sedgemoor to gain the essential skills needed to work within the nuclear sector. Much of the UK's existing nuclear expertise lies in operation and decommissioning rather than construction. The nuclear industry will not only need to reskill its workers but also compete with other sectors to attract the talent it requires. It will also need to increase the proportion of women it employs not least because of the sheer volume of engineers required to deliver the UK's new nuclear rollout. The NCfN will be central to addressing these challenges, to the significant benefit of the local community.

The Bridgwater Gateway is a 100 acre site consented for a mix of B1 and B2 uses, as well as ancillary uses, including a 150-bed 4\* hotel and represents a £150million investment. The site will deliver approximately 3000 jobs and plans include a comprehensive planting scheme incorporating 25,000 trees and shrubs. These characteristics will ensure that the site delivers significant economic and social benefit through the creation of high quality jobs and environmental benefit by delivering a diverse mix

of planting and landscaping that will contribute to reducing CO2 and enhancing the visual appearance of the development.

EDF Energy's Cannington Court Campus will develop EDF Energy's commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency by training staff and new engineers for a low-carbon future. Supported by the latest energy saving, low-carbon technologies, the leading-edge residential training centre, with 50 en-suite bedrooms to allow for live-in tuition, will help EDF Energy to build low-carbon skills. This understanding and knowledge will be vital in the ongoing battle against climate change. It will also regularly open its doors to academics and the local community to ensure high-quality opportunities for learning are not limited to EDF Energy staff.

Cannington Court also features the first large-scale example of a ground-source heat pump combined with solar thermal technology, which makes it possible to reduce the length of the boreholes required for the heat pumps and therefore reduces cost. Specifically adapted for constrained spaces, this system combining solar and geothermal heat is coupled with PV panels to generate zero-carbon electricity, which also feeds into electric vehicle charging points on the site.

### **Community Engagement**

All aspects of the project met or exceeded the necessary or statutory levels of engagement with the local community and stakeholders. The HPC SPD, for example, ran a six-week consultation and there were six consultation events held at Williton, Stogursey, Cannington, Combwich, North Petherton and Bridgwater. Letters were sent to all statutory consultees and members of the public who registered with the Council to receive planning policy updates. SDC worked closely with the relevant Parish Councils and supported a number of them as they made their representations on applications.

This positive and constructive engagement with local residents and businesses in the design and delivery of the project extended into the development management phase of the project, whereby further consultation on the detail of the schemes was undertaken. In order for the SEIC and the NCfN to achieve their BREEAM excellent rating, they had to undertake high quality consultation with the local community and wider stakeholders. This allowed for consideration of the views of local residents and nearby businesses through various processes as well as the statutory consultation process.

### **Inclusive Planning**

Each element of the project, from the formation of the policy background though to the developments which are now under construction or operational, have taken account of the needs of all the potential users to ensure everyone is able to participate equally, confidentially and independently in everyday activities. Through the plan making elements, this was ensured by taking the advice of the Council's Equalities Officer and making consultation documentation and events available across the district and through various mediums, as well as in different fonts or languages. The elements of the project that are under construction or in operation have also been constructed to the highest accessibility standards in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010.

The NCfN also represents a physical manifestation of a drive to promote equality and diversity issues as the building forms a cornerstone to the Government's desire to see an increase in the proportion of women employed in the nuclear industry.

SDC runs an independent, accessible and non-council-branded facility in the heart of Bridgwater known as Under Construction to engage the furthest from employment, most vulnerable and young people in construction, taking advantage of the opportunities HPC provides. Under Construction was launched in April 2017 and since then more than 700 individuals have visited, taking part in learning. In excess of 250 information advice and guidance sessions have been provided. In addition, 28 training

and recruitment events have been run for HPC contractors with many more planned. With links to the HPC Job Service, the team at Under Construction have also advertised over 200 local opportunities.

## **Outcomes**

The project has and will continue to deliver tangible and significant benefits to the local community, the local, regional and national economy and the natural environment. The approach taken, which has guaranteed there is a clear and robust policy framework in place to deal with HPC related and ancillary developments, has ensured that the development now coming forward represents a particularly sustainable form of development with multiple benefits across the social, economic and environmental aspects.

The delivery of the developments represents community benefit through the jobs delivered during construction and operation. The Gateway site, for example, is expected to deliver in the region of 3000 jobs. Sedgemoor requires developers to sign up to Local Labour Agreements (LLAs), as a policy requirement, through conditions attached to consents for developments of this nature and is the first local authority in Somerset to employ this approach. The LLAs cover labour requirements during construction and operation. As an example of this, during construction of the NCfN it delivered 98 jobs of which 87 were to employees from the TA postcode area. In addition, there were five work placements for Bridgwater & Taunton College students as well as 433 weeks of training completed by 22 employees. Experience gained allowed eight workers to secure new and additional qualifications at NVQ Level 2 or above and the workforce gained 114 new industry certifications during work on the project. Clearly the NCfN will continue to deliver significant wider benefit to the local community through access provided to high level and specialist qualifications as part of its ongoing operation.

The employment opportunities described above demonstrate the significant positive economic impacts of the projects. They will also promote local growth and deliver a broad range of high-value employment opportunities across their lifetimes to the wider benefit of the region and country. In terms of direct investment, the projects represent a total of some £178.5million to the area. The benefits from this level of investment will be realised for many generations to come.

The positive impacts of the SEIC and Bridgwater Gateway have been described above. The NCfN also delivers environmental benefits being designed and built to BREEAM excellent standards. This required particular concentration on materials, services, insulation levels and various design matters, as well as on transportation, consultation and considerate contracting. A major element of the scheme involves the use of sustainable energy sources, such as roof-mounted photovoltaic cells, along with a considered use of natural lighting, natural ventilation and passive solar gain.

External areas of the new NCfN are designed to create functional, attractive and ecologically rich spaces for the building's users. Within the constraints of the need to increase the areas of hard landscaping to service the new development, the design has been developed with the aim of causing as little environmental impact as possible. It has made the best use of existing vegetation that offers visual screening for neighbouring properties and a habitat for wildlife. Sensitive management operations and supplementary native planting in line with ecological recommendations for the locality have enhanced these areas.

These landmark schemes are not the only benefits. The project is delivering significant transport improvements through new walking and cycling infrastructure and a Travel Demand Management programme focused on allowing the community to make more sustainable and healthy travel choices.

## **Good Practice**

The development and adoption of the robust and supportive local planning policy framework to deliver legacy through the TCPA process but directly associated with the national DCO process represented a



highly creative and innovative technique to deliver high quality planning outcomes. These high quality outcomes are now evident in the developments described here and clearly support the case that this approach constitutes good practice. Elements of this approach are highly transferable and could easily be used by other local authorities where nuclear new builds are planned or other similarly large NSIPs are expected to come forward.

The recently published HPC Wider Benefits Realisation Plan July 2018, produced by BEIS, describes many of the benefits now being realised through this approach. It is easily accessible and can be used as a template to roll out as part of the important sectoral communication.

One of the key lessons learned from the project has been the enormous value of having a dedicated resource available within the planning team, providing capacity to ensure the timely delivery of the associated and ancillary developments and swift resolution of the consenting processes for those developments. This resource has been funded through a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) and Service Level Agreement (SLA) signed by the Council and EDF Energy. This benefits EDF Energy through ensuring the project delivers on its committed targets for local investment and ensuring that the supply chain and suitably qualified workforce is available during construction but also for operation of the power station, once construction works are complete. This resource has proved essential for maintaining prioritisation of these schemes and clear lines of communication across all stakeholders, which in turn has resulted in the positive outcomes described above.

### **Social Benefit**

Bridgwater suffers from areas of high deprivation, with the two most deprived wards in Somerset being located within the town. Improving the quality of life of these disadvantaged communities, increasing income through high quality employment opportunities and providing improved educational opportunities for the local community has been central to the drive to deliver the outcomes achieved.

The use of LLAs for construction of the schemes is delivering immediate, short-term benefits to the local community providing high quality employment opportunities and increased income. Operational LLAs are also in place across the schemes and this will ensure that local residents continue to benefit from the jobs available going forward. The creation of the policy framework within the Core Strategy and the HPC SPD is targeted at achieving transformational change for the town through addressing the deprivation that currently exists.

In March 2018, EDF Energy published their first report on how the project has been realising the wider socio-economic benefits and this document provides some positive case studies across a breadth of sectors. A recurrent theme of this document is the transformational nature of the impacts upon local education opportunities. This is evident in the number of educational and training developments described here. It is through education that real social change and social benefit will be delivered over the longer term.

All of the projects represent legacy benefits arising from the HPC NSIP that will transform the local economy and allow education and business in the town to be focused not only upon nuclear new build but upon the low carbon agenda, as well as delivering on the Government's clean growth aspirations within the Industrial Strategy. This will not only deliver an improved quality of life for Sedgemoor's residents but will also bring longer term change in the aspirations of those communities to address poverty and provide social benefits from the project across multiple generations.