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my reference
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15th January 2010

Dear Mr Bryant

**Proposed Electricity Transmission Route: Hinkley Point C to Seabank.
Consultations under s42 of the Planning Act 2008 – Route Corridor Study**

Thank you for your letter of 8th October 2009, notifying Somerset County Council of the National Grid intention of making an application to the Infrastructure Planning Commission for a Development Consent Order (DCO) under s37 of the Planning Act 2008. The County Council has the following comments on the Route Corridor Study.

Firstly, whilst we appreciate that the potential development of a new nuclear power station at Hinkley Point triggers the requirement for significant reinforcement and upgrades to the National Grid system in the area, it is our view that the evidence and justification for the selecting each of the route corridors should more explicit within the consultation report. It is not clear from the report, and importantly the maps and plans included, which other routes that have been identified and discounted by National Grid. This would help all stakeholders to understand the process that has been gone through and clearly demonstrate why the current route corridors have been selected.

We have a number of concerns that relate to the impact upon the visual amenity of Somerset as a result of the potential new power distribution network. As a result we wish to raise concerns over the potentially damaging impact of an overhead power line on the unique environment of Somerset and in particular the special character of the designated Mendip Hills AONB landscape. It is encouraging to read in the route corridor study that National Grid's under grounding policy means that consideration would be given to the use of underground rather than overhead transmission in 'exceptionally constrained areas' such as AONBs. We wish to remind National Grid that it has a duty to have regard to the desirability of preserving amenity and to do what it reasonably can to mitigate amenity impacts when formulating relevant proposals. With particular reference to the Mendip Hills

AONB, national planning policy confirms that AONBs have the highest status of protection in terms of landscape and scenic beauty. An overhead line for any the proposed route would clearly have a significant impact on the landscape. Even where there is an existing 132kV line, given the scale of a 400kV overhead line proposal with approximately 47 metre high towers, compared to 25 metre high of the current existing towers, inevitably the visual impact would greatly increase.

Whilst we are encouraged by the statement about consideration being given to under grounding cables in areas such as AONBs, it is our view that consideration should be given to under grounding the proposed power lines over a wider area to protect the visual amenity of Somerset. Whilst we are aware that installing underground cables may have adverse effects on the environment due to the wide swath of ground disturbance that is often required, at this early stage in the development of routing options, the environmental impacts associated with under grounding cables should be given full consideration. This would enable a fair comparison to be made with the impacts associated with developing each of the routing options, both including and excluding sections of under grounding.

We would encourage National Grid to consider the implications of routing the new power lines through the Severn estuary, together with other over ground and underground routing options. Whilst this option may have its own significant financial, technical and environmental drawbacks it should not have been discounted without being included at this early stage of public consultation.

It is not clear from the route corridor study whether flooding issues have been fully considered at this stage. It is our view that the potential flood risk associated with any development required as a result of a new section of electricity distribution network should be considered. If the evidence suggests that there are no flooding issues associated with the proposed development, a clear explanation as to why this conclusion has been reached should be included in the supporting information.

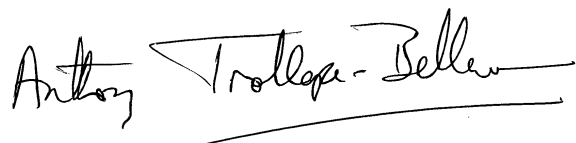
Also, it would have been beneficial for the Route Corridor Study, and the supporting information provided by National Grid to explain the wider planning mitigation and community benefits associated with hosting a development of this type. In developing both associated community benefit and mitigation packages it should be recognised that there is a need to offset the consequences of hosting a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project of this type. It is essential that a number of overarching objectives for mitigation and community benefit are agreed at the earliest opportunity.

Finally, we are concerned about the co-ordination with other Hinkley C related consultation activity, and avoidance of the risk of over-consulting, and indeed the order of the consultations. As we have previously stated, it would seem very odd to members of the public for National Grid to be consulting prior to consultation about the National Policy Statement and the proposed power station development at Hinkley Point. Further thought should be given as to how the timetable could be managed to improve the process for customers / consultees, and to aid the quality of the responses back. This point and others were raised with National Grid in a

joint response on behalf of Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council and West Somerset District Councils to the Statement of Community Consultation in September 2009. It is not yet clear how you have taken these comments into account. To aid our response to the Infrastructure Planning Commission at the point at which you will submit your application, it would be useful if you could respond to the Councils on the points that were raised.

We trust that you find these comments helpful and informative. If you require any further clarification in relation to any of the points that have been made in this response please contact Alyn Jones, Group Manger Environmental Resources (contact details above). We would be most grateful if you could confirm receipt of this letter by return.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink. The name 'Anthony' is written in a cursive style on the left. To its right, 'Trollope-Bellew' is written in a more formal, slightly cursive script. A horizontal line is drawn underneath the entire signature.

Cllr Anthony Trollope-Bellew
Cabinet Member for the Environment
Somerset County Council