

Energy Security and Net Zero Committee

Oral evidence: [Planning for nuclear energy generation](#), HC 1212

Wednesday 10 September 2025

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Bill Esterson (Chair); Ms Polly Billington; Sir Christopher Chope; Torcuil Crichton; Wera Hobhouse; Luke Murphy; Mike Reader; Claire Young.

Questions 1-124

Witnesses

I: Alastair Evans, Director of Corporate Affairs and Investor Relations, Rolls-Royce SMR (in person), Julia Pyke, Joint Managing Director, Sizewell C (in person) and Tom Greatrex, Chief Executive, Nuclear Industry Association (in person).

II: Catherine Anderson, Board Member, National Infrastructure Planning Association (in person), Mike Finnerty, Chief Executive and Chief Nuclear Inspector, Office for Nuclear Regulation (in person), and Rebecca Phillips, Interim Chief Planning Inspector, Planning Inspectorate (in person).

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Sizewell C](#)
- [Nuclear Industry Association](#)
- [National Infrastructure Planning Association](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Alastair Evans, Julia Pyke and Tom Greatrex.

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee where we have a one-off session on the national policy statement on the nuclear industry. Will our first panel please introduce themselves?

Alastair Evans: Good afternoon. I am Alastair Evans, director of corporate affairs for Rolls-Royce SMR.

Tom Greatrex: I am Tom Greatrex, chief executive of the Nuclear Industry Association.

Julia Pyke: I am Julia Pyke, joint managing director for Sizewell C.

Q1 **Chair:** You are all very welcome. Today's inquiry seeks to assess whether EN-7 provides a coherent and effective framework for enabling the UK's nuclear ambitions. Before we get into that, we just had the Government reshuffle and I am interested in knowing how you feel about the changes in ministerial appointments and how they sit with the nuclear industry in particular. Does anybody want to give an opinion?

Julia Pyke: We are very pleased that Lord Vallance will have the nuclear brief as part of his portfolio. We have been through a period without a Nuclear Minister, so we are very pleased to have one.

Tom Greatrex: I think the most important thing is consistency in policy. There is no indication that that is changing, so I welcome the new Ministers to their briefs.

Alastair Evans: It is positive to have consistency with the Secretary of State and a consistently supportive cross-party position on nuclear.

Q2 **Chair:** Splendid. That was very straightforward. I will just ask a few questions about the balance between small modular reactors and large-scale. There is a suggestion that the support for small modular is motivated by the potential to avoid planning burdens and political risk. Does EN-7 open the door to SMRs because we really need them, or because gigawatt-scale plants have become too difficult to build?

Alastair Evans: I am going to start, if I may, on what it means for small modular reactors. The first thing to say is that our intention, alongside Great British Energy—Nuclear, is to build on existing known nuclear sites that were identified in EN-6. That is the important first priority point to make clear. EN-7 is needed because the Government needed to update the policy criteria and the selection models that were utilised for identifying them in the first place. It provides policy support, but we will have to go through the same planning processes as Sizewell has just been through. So the first thing I would say to this Committee is that we provide a test case, a really good first opportunity for the Government to



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work with us to show that the reforms they are putting in place under EN-7, the reforms being put in place on judicial review, and the reforms that they are suggesting or consulting on across Government are working.

We can learn a huge amount from what the Sizewell business has just been through on planning. We can look at what has happened at Lower Thames Crossing and at what has happened on HS2 in the planning processes and learn the lessons of why it costs more to plan-consent in this country than in many others, and why it will take longer to plan and consent than to build a small modular reactor. So we provide a real test case to show that it can be more efficient and that the reforms are working.

Q3 **Chair:** Tom?

Tom Greatrex: EN-7 helps where there are sites that would not be suitable for large-scale but could be suitable for SMR. A process with criteria that help to identify those is very welcome, but I don't think you should see this as being about large-scale versus SMR. To get to the level of capacity we are likely to require will need a mixture of both. For those reasons, protection of EN-6 sites for potential developments, including large-scale, alongside the criteria being utilised in EN-7 for further sites, is both welcome and required.

Q4 **Chair:** So if it is to help with sites other than those suitable for large-scale, why choose SMRs over a gigawatt fleet at Wylfa or other EN-6 sites?

Tom Greatrex: For the capacity that is likely to be needed, we will probably need to have more sites than those identified in EN-6. There are sites, for example, that have very strong community support that are not in EN-6, where there is a desire for, potentially, SMR to be deployed. When you think about advanced reactor designs that may be used primarily for industrial processes or data centres or those types of things, they may be in different sites from those that are identified in EN-6. There is a range of different opportunities that I think require more sites, but I don't think it should be characterised as large-scale versus small-scale, because we will need both for the likely capacity we are going to require.

Q5 **Chair:** Sure. Before I come to Julia, I just want to check that you are confident that the decision is not being made for regulatory reasons—because it will be quicker and easier—rather than being driven by an optimal use of the tech.

Tom Greatrex: It will enable sites that did not fit the EN-6 criteria to be potentially utilised for power generation, and that is what we need to be able to get to the level of capacity that we will need for the system.

Q6 **Chair:** Thank you. Julia, the former head of EDF, Henry Proglio, called the reactor design at Sizewell “phenomenally complex” and “almost unbuildable”. What is your response to him?

Julia Pyke: The EPR is just a pressurised water reactor, and that is also what the Rolls-Royce SMR reactors are. They are pressurised water reactors, of which there are more than 400 around the world, and they are



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obviously of different sizes. A lot of Sizewell C will be modularised, so we could describe it as a large modular reactor, were we to wish to do so. Thinking about the EPRs that are already in operation, in Finland it is very successful; it has reduced Baltic electricity prices, it has enabled Finland to reduce and eliminate reliance on Russian gas, and it has been branded “Finland’s greatest climate act” and works very well. In Taishan, the reactors are working very well; Taishan Unit 2 appears periodically in the World Association of Nuclear Operators’ list of top-performing reactors.

There have obviously been issues with the prototype at Flamanville, and a very important point about building any nuclear reactor is that reactor designs are altered in-country. So, the design of Hinkley Point C is not exactly the same as the design of a European reactor. For example, it has to comply with UK fire regs. This is not just about the Office for Nuclear Regulation and particular nuclear requirements; this is about compliance with UK law and practice. If, for example, the Hitachi design at Wylfa had gone ahead, there would have been issues around whether it is legal in the UK to work under a suspended load, which is the chosen method of constructing that form of reactor. It is not legal, so it would have had to be changed.

There is a big in-country context issue, and Hinkley Point C has provided, heroically, that in-country design for Sizewell to copy, which is why the Sizewell design is a copy; it is 85% replicated. It is in Sizewell copying Hinkley that we have been able to finance Sizewell. If you think about what has really stopped nuclear going ahead, as would be desirable for having abundant low-carbon electricity, it isn’t that people don’t know how to build nuclear—they do; it has been that it can’t be financed. I think there should be recognition that, in financing Sizewell, because it is a copy, we have done a great thing, and there is a huge amount of international interest in the financing of Sizewell as other countries look at how they can bring private capital into their nuclear programmes.

Q7 Chair: Does the interest in financing Sizewell mean that there could be a confident prediction that financing of future versions of the same design would be successful in the UK?

Julia Pyke: Yes. If you look at the extremely successful cost reduction trajectory of offshore wind, why has that been? It starts off expensive but ends up costing less. That is because it is a build-and-repeat model. Nuclear, being so much bigger, is so much slower, and we are the first repeat of Hinkley. But if you look at the productivity gains between Hinkley Unit 1 and Unit 2, you can see that people learn by doing. Hinkley Unit 2 is faster; they are able to bring in more innovation and modularisation. We see ourselves as Hinkley units 3 and 4, effectively, bringing all of that learning and copying the design, with the very active co-operation of the Office for Nuclear Regulation in allowing us to build a copy. A lot of these regulatory issues that are held against—they are cited as concerns for financing, about regulatory creep; but because we are building a copy of Hinkley Point C, there has been enough confidence in our cost estimate to allow us to finance.

Q8 **Chair:** Thank you. It took three years to build Calder Hall, which was the first nuclear power station in the world. Why is it taking so much longer now?

Julia Pyke: Do you want me to start? We have a lengthy planning system, which I know the Government are looking to address. We are a democracy. We have a lot of rights of challenge. There is a lot of judicial review.

Chair: We were when Calder Hall was built.

Julia Pyke: Maybe the right to bring judicial review—I am not sure—but certainly the appetite to bring judicial review has increased, and of course the costs that are held against parties who lose judicial review are capped by the Aarhus convention. There is relatively little disincentive to bring judicial reviews.

On top of that, we are building to stringent safety regulations. Whether or not those add time can be debated, but I think it takes a long time partly because we have a lot of planning to get through, partly because we build more complex structures than when Calder Hall was built, with more safety systems, and partly because UK productivity for the construction sector as a whole—not particular to nuclear—lags behind other countries' productivity.

Q9 **Chair:** Alastair, is there anything you want to add?

Alastair Evans: Julia is absolutely right in everything she said. To give you some tangible examples from today, to our final investment decision, we will have a minimum of seven public consultations that will take place. It will probably be around 11 or 12 formal public consultations. In addition, we will have local consultations. The public becomes snowblind with the amount of process that is involved, because there are so many different agencies asking them to take a view. We have a very complicated process. That adds time and that adds cost and complication.

I come back to the Lower Thames Crossing, because it is a great example. We spent £300 million doing planning permission to secure a road bridge. The Norwegians planned, designed and built the world's longest road infrastructure for £267 million. It is choices. It is the choices we make to balance, as Julia rightly said, the importance of consulting the public, but that does have a time and a cost and a burden.

Q10 **Chair:** Tom, anything else?

Tom Greatrex: I would add that if you want to build nuclear power stations more quickly, what you don't do is build one, wait a generation, think about it and then decide to build another one, because each time you do that, you are effectively having to reinvigorate your supply chain and start again. We have just gone through that process for Hinkley. Sizewell will get the benefit from that. The first SMRs will get the benefit from that, and anything that comes after will get the benefit as well. What we should see is that the time taken to build subsequent projects is shorter.

Chair: Thank you; that is very helpful.

- Q11 Luke Murphy:** Welcome to our guests. EN-7 expects strong economic, social and community benefits, but we know that SMRs and AMRs tend to have smaller workforces and fewer visible local benefits. Do you agree with that? How would you propose remediating that and ensuring that EN-7 does deliver the socioeconomic benefits expected?

Alastair Evans: Our model is to build central facilities and to use the supply chain so you are minimising the workforce at site and you are minimising the impact at site. You would still have a significant number of high-quality jobs in those communities, in the construction process. We will build temporary facilities. We would have people working in a site factory for around five years and for the first unit. Then you would have enduring jobs in operations. You still have high-quality, high-value jobs, but our model is to make sure that we use centralised supply chain facilities so that we are minimising disruption and minimising the boom and bust that you see at nuclear sites.

- Q12 Luke Murphy:** There are fewer.

Alastair Evans: *indicated assent.*

Luke Murphy: Yet the policy statement still expects very strong socioeconomic benefits. I appreciate that there will still be high-value jobs in the supply chain, but as you said, you used the words minimise on site. So there will be fewer jobs. How would you envisage that gap being bridged to fulfil the requirement in the policy statement?

Alastair Evans: We have made a range of commitments to Great British Energy—Nuclear in our procurement document around social value. It is a really important part of the procurement process. Those commitments range from central facilities that we have talked about and employing a diverse range of people from the communities where the factory site is based. It provides a range of commitments for the host community. I can't go into the details of those, because they are still under the procurement, but to make the point clear, we are going to be held to account to ensure that we deliver social value benefits in the community directly.

- Q13 Luke Murphy:** Julia or Tom?

Julia Pyke: I would add two points. When energy generation costs are looked at, there is a case for the value that a nuclear power station brings to an area to be taken into account much more explicitly. We have very high UK content—70% construction and 90% through life. We will pay an awful lot of tax. I think our tax take is forecast at £38 billion through the life of the plant, because it is a 60 to 100-year plant. Having social value valued in the business case would help encourage people to make more effort with that. There is a case, when you are going to build something that is large and will be consumer-funded, to draw together Government thinking more actively.

In order to build Sizewell C, because we are bringing in 60% of what we need by rail and sea, we are actually building and improving the railway



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into Leiston. The opportunity to join up with the Department for Transport to leave a passenger station in a town that is currently very badly served by public transport is a sort of hidden value, and would be the sort of thing that would actually please the community. It would give to the community in return for the construction disruption that any community, whatever you are building, undoubtedly will suffer.

Tom Greatrex: In terms of numbers of jobs, there are still significant numbers of operational jobs that will endure for generations, because the power stations will last for at least 60 years. There are a lot of jobs that will come often to areas that are very keen on SMR, because of the economic benefit it brings. If you talk to some of those communities around Trawsfynydd or Hartlepool, for example, why are they keen on there being an SMR there? Partly, it is because of the economic benefit that brings. That might not be the same quantum, but then the power output is not the same quantum. That does not mean it is not welcome and significant in those sites and communities.

Q14 **Luke Murphy:** Would you welcome or support binding requirements in development consent orders for measures like local apprenticeships or community benefit funds?

Julia Pyke: We do have binding obligations; we are legally committed to take at least one third of the workforce from the region, and to offer one third of the apprenticeships to people in the region. I think that is right and proper. They bear the construction disruption; they should be principal beneficiaries of the economic benefit.

Alastair Evans: I don't know which community I am building in yet, but we would, of course, welcome conversations with GBE-N on exactly that point.

Tom Greatrex: I think generally, across the nuclear industry and the whole of the fuel cycle, we are not bad in terms of apprenticeships. When you look at a lot of those apprenticeship schemes, they are heavily over-subscribed at the moment. We have a good record on that and would be keen to continue it in whatever sites we are working in.

Q15 **Luke Murphy:** So in whatever site you are working, I have heard that you are not opposed to binding requirements in DCOs. I think that is what I have heard.

This is my final question. An SMR might mainly serve a private offtaker, like a data centre. Do you think it is fair that the economic upside could accrue hundreds of miles away, while the construction and safety burden falls locally?

Alastair Evans: Our first projects will be national grid-based projects. That is likely to be the case for the first three units; it may be the case for an additional fourth, fifth or sixth units. In the medium term, could there be data centres teamed with SMRs locally through private wires? Certainly, but there are no immediate projects setting out to do that today. I would

also suggest that a private wire would tend to be an immediate benefit—that is, a co-located facility. It would not be hundreds of miles away.

Julia Pyke: We have done some polling on exactly this question, which we could share with the Committee, if it is of interest. Unsurprisingly, it shows that support for building a nuclear power station to power homes is quite a lot higher, at 71%, than support for building nuclear specifically and only to power data centres. I would say that if you are going to build a big reactor like Sizewell C, you can power homes and a data centre, because we make a lot of electricity.

Q16 Ms Billington: This goes back to some of the questions that Luke was asking about the elite construction jobs. There tends to be a Monday to Thursday operation on that, which means that the very highly skilled workers are not in a place—they are very temporary. That reduces the potential social value of those jobs and the construction overall. What observations do you have about that as a model?

Julia Pyke: I think that is a very real historic problem. One of the issues we have discussed a lot with the community in Sizewell is the perception, which I have no reason to doubt was a reality, that predominantly lower-value jobs were given to people in the local area, and the higher-value—particularly engineering—jobs were, as you say, Monday to Thursday jobs.

We are very committed to making sure that the full range of jobs is available. I am delighted to say that AtkinsRéalis is opening offices in Ipswich, to support us, which will be a very good thing for Ipswich—to have a global engineering firm based in the county. Because they are doing that, it gives strength to our work with schools.

Remembering that we are going to operate for 60 to 100 years, we are interested in people of all ages, including the as yet unborn, and we are very interested in working with primary and secondary schools. People talk a lot about skills, but I would say that skills need to go right back to aspiration-raising, so that people coming out of school at 16 actually want to acquire these skills and can see the opportunities, including the opportunity to have good, long-term careers where they live.

We are building an FE college in the town, near the power station, because at the moment, access to further education by public transport is very limited. There is an 11-16 school in Leiston, but it takes an hour and a half to two hours to get public transport to the further education colleges in Ipswich and Lowestoft, and there is a 50% drop-out rate for post-16s who go into FE.

It is through that co-ordinated, holistic approach of working with people through primary and secondary—and then having engineering careers and work experience in the county, accessible to people—that we fully intend to change what I think has been a reality, as well as a perception, of the commute-in, commute-out higher-value jobs.

Q17 Ms Billington: I obviously share and respect your commitment to that long-term approach. When do you think we might be able to see, in



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Sizewell, a shift from that Monday to Thursday reality to something that is more entrenched and more seven days a week, 365 days a year—people who love to live and work in that part of the world?

Julia Pyke: I hope it would be in the next couple of years. We are moving all the engineering activity to a mix of offices in Ipswich and at the site itself. We do not want to over-burden the site, so we will do as much as we can in Ipswich. We very much hope that people will relocate and make their lives with their families in the very beautiful county of Suffolk. We hope to make that very attractive for people; these are long-term, good jobs.

We are actively taking apprentices specifically from the local school in Leiston and looking to upskill people into all areas of the project. We offer degree apprenticeships, so it is not too intimidating for people—they don't have to go off, at their own expense, and start a civil engineering degree. We will pay for people to do civil engineering degrees on the basis that they come back and work on our project.

Q18 Ms Billington: I have one final question. Obviously, this is what you are doing already at Sizewell. If we were to ask other nuclear projects to learn from what you have done and replicate the good practice, what do you think should be the kind of obligations that a Government might put on these projects, in order to be able to achieve the outcomes that you are striving for?

Julia Pyke: I think that asking developers to show, and then fulfil, realistic plans to change that paradigm of the drive-in, drive-out workforce is a very sensible thing to do. We can't pretend that having a nuclear power station, whether a European pressurised water reactor or a Rolls-Royce SMR, built in or near your town is without impact in terms of traffic and noise pollution—it isn't. We owe something to that community, and I think that we owe jobs at all levels, which are accessible to people who live and work there.

Q19 Ms Billington: Tom, do you have anything to add to that?

Tom Greatrex: The only thing I would add is this: once the power stations are built, the long-term jobs there—which are well paid and highly skilled—last for a very long period of time. Those people then don't come from Monday to Thursday. For example, at Sizewell B—I was there a few weeks ago—I think it is, or has been, a requirement that people live within 25 miles of the site. Is that right?

Julia Pyke: Yes.

Tom Greatrex: That is not just because they might be needed to come in at short notice; it is also about recognising social value. I think that there is also a distinction between the construction period and the operation period. The operation period is likely to be at least 60 years, and probably 80 years and beyond, so there will be long-term, secure, reliable jobs. Obviously, people will live there or close by to be able to fulfil those jobs.

Q20 Mike Reader: Still dealing with Polly's question, and Julia, this is



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specifically for you: there is a challenge in deploying high-quality engineering skills—project management and cost management—in that the way taxation works, if a company deploys that person long term, after two years they start getting hit by taxation on accommodation and travel. People have to make a choice about moving their entire family to the middle of nowhere in the east of England to build Sizewell, or we get very short deployment of resource by your supply chain, because they get hit on taxation.

Would you support proposals to change taxation arrangements for in-need workers so that we can deploy people for much longer terms without companies being hit with large tax bills on accommodation, travel and so on?

Julia Pyke: From what you say, it sounds as though I would, in principle, but I don't know enough of the detail to say definitively. I would add that £220 billion of infrastructure is planned for the east of England. It is not just Sizewell C on its own; there are actually several nationally significant energy projects, and I believe the Committee had the opportunity to see some of them when they visited east Suffolk.

We are working hard to make sure that we join up with National Grid, ScottishPower Renewables and Anglian Water, all of whom are building major infrastructure and require a similar skillset. There is a real case for a much more place-based approach, encouraging people to relocate and to make their careers in the east of England, because, within commuting distance, there are decades of planned infrastructure builds.

Q21 **Claire Young:** EN-7 retains the Semi Urban Population Density Criterion, but evidence we have taken from the industry calls it outdated and a barrier to new nuclear. Should it be kept, removed or updated? I will start with Julia.

Julia Pyke: I think it is always sensible to look at these things, and the different designs of nuclear over time will merit that. If genuinely "passively safe" small advanced modular reactors come on to the market, I definitely think we should be relooking at these rules.

Tom Greatrex: I certainly think it should be looked at again and revised. The criteria are based on previous generations of reactor technology and a whole number of factors that have significantly changed. The evidence has changed since that time. It was done in 1967, so it is certainly ripe to be updated. It has been recognised by the Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce, which the Government set up and has been looking at this, alongside many other professionals, that this is one of those areas that should be updated, including for EN-7.

Alastair Evans: I agree with the other witnesses. It is also an element consulted on in great detail by the Office for Nuclear Regulation under the nuclear site licence process. You could have an instance where a site would not be applicable under the EN-7 rules, but would be applicable once the details were discussed under the nuclear site licence principles. So it is a topic that is looked at in great detail by the ONR.

Q22 Claire Young: Do you think there still needs to be some measure of excluding it from built-up areas though, given that there is always some radiological risk?

Alastair Evans: Yes, I think so, but it is a methodology that should be reconsidered and updated.

Q23 Claire Young: Okay. Is it accurate to say that the SUPDC assessments by the Health and Safety Executive are slow and complex? We will start with Tom.

Tom Greatrex: Yes. There is a very complex, slow process involved. It is not like there is any sort of online tool that you can use; you have to make an application, and there is a small team in the HSE, a handful of people, who then consider that. If they have a lot of work—they do other things as well—it can take a very long time. That is one of the frustrations. Again, that is probably because the methodology dates from 1967, and I think the processes date from not much after that. That is another reason why it should be looked at again.

Claire Young: Julia, do you have anything to add?

Julia Pyke: No; I agree with Tom.

Q24 Claire Young: Okay. Do you think there could be an alternative test that might ensure public safety and maintain confidence? For example, the REPPIR are already site-specific and proportionate. Some people have suggested that a simple fix would be to scrap the SUPDC and simply fold REPPIR requirements into the national policy statements criteria.

Alastair Evans: That was one of the recommendations, I believe, in the Nuclear Regulatory Taskforce's documents, and it is consulting on those principles at present, but that sounds eminently sensible.

Tom Greatrex: There are other approaches that different international regulators take that I think are worth considering. For example, if you are applying for a licence for a nuclear power plant in Finland, the regulator requires you to indicate to the authorities what kind of protection zones would be needed to guarantee safety for that design, rather than something that is generic and based on very old data.

The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission considers all those aspects—safety, environmental, economic and other factors—in determining the acceptability of a potential nuclear site that is located away from a very densely populated area, but not an area of low density. Different approaches are used internationally, and I think they are worth considering. I understand that the regulatory review that is part of the next stage of the work will look at that, and I think that is to be welcomed.

Q25 Claire Young: On the Finnish one, it sounds like the manufacturers are setting their own requirements. What sort of outside checking is done?

Tom Greatrex: The regulator will check it, but it is based on the specific technology, an application for a particular technology on a particular site,



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as opposed to being based on something that is generic and, I would argue, outdated. It is more specific, and therefore can be tied into a lot of the other work that the regulator will do in relation to a specific proposal.

Q26 Claire Young: So is the manufacturer saying, "This is what we think the exclusion zones need to be," and then the regulator is checking that?

Tom Greatrex: I would argue that that is much more objective and probably more comprehensive than doing it on the basis of a reactor design that is never going to be built again and criteria that were set 40 or 50 years ago.

Claire Young: Julia?

Julia Pyke: I don't have anything to add to what Tom and Alastair have said.

Q27 Mike Reader: I will start with you, Alastair. Do we actually need EN-7? There is still a criteria-based approach, so you are driven to choose sites that are safe and secure. There are operational requirements, which means you need cooling and a transport network. There is also the issue of brownfield sites. Surely you are just going to stick the SMRs on existing nuclear sites anyway. Why do we need a separate document?

Alastair Evans: The Government do need to update EN, because it sets the policy framework that is then used to determine the development consent order. So it does need to be updated, and it is right that nuclear is now being considered and consented in the same way as other energy technology. The way they have adopted the criteria-based assessment is right, and updating it is of course right.

On your question about sites, "Is it necessary?", I would again say yes, it is. Yes, we will seek to work with GBE-N to prioritise the known nuclear sites, the simple reason being that we think that is the fastest way to bring these projects forward. The sites that we are talking about—Oldbury, and Wylfa on Anglesey—have had consenting processes on them already. They have had boreholes. The communities understand the technology. So those are the sites that you can likely move fastest on, and we would build multiple SMRs on a single site.

But as Tom rightly said at the beginning, the UK needs to increase its overall nuclear output, so we are going to need more sites in the medium term, and EN-7 takes the right approach to achieve that.

Q28 Mike Reader: Tom, the selection criteria do not pick up a lot on suitably qualified and experienced persons resource availability, and it was a key recommendation of the independent taskforce report that we have this kind of challenge around SQEP. Should that have been more of a consideration about where these sites go?

Tom Greatrex: I don't think it necessarily needs to be directly linked to the sites. As was reflected in part of the previous discussion, a lot needs to happen to make sure that we have the right number of people with the

right level of skills, but I don't think that should be directly linked to an assessment of sites.

Alastair Evans: May I pick up on that point? Apologies, Julia. This is the first time that the UK has had a proper nuclear programme for a generation. Hinkley is happening; Sizewell is happening; and the Rolls-Royce SMR now has the certainty to proceed. So this is the first time that the young people that Julia talked about earlier can see a pipeline of programmes and can see an opportunity. Now we have to capitalise on it with all the various training schemes that we need to do. It needed that signal, and this is the first time that we have had that clear signal.

- Q29 **Mike Reader:** Does that not fly in the face a bit of the Government's place-based approach? If you are going to stick an SMR in the east of England, Bedfordshire, you are competing for resources with a theme park, a railway, and airport expansion. Shouldn't this be part of the consideration on the DCO—can you build the thing with the resources available in the area? People do move, but surely they are not going to move at that scale—at that level.

Julia Pyke: I think a place-based approach is a really important part of considerations. You can argue two ways the point you have made. You can say, because there is an awful lot of construction work around, "Happy Days! Mace will open some offices in Bedford," and people will have careers based on infrastructure in the east of England. Indeed, AtkinsRéalis is opening offices in Ipswich. Or you can take the opposite view, saying, "Well, in this particular area there will be a concentration." But the concentration of lawyers in London does not seem to disable the recruitment of lawyers in London. So I would say that it definitely cuts both ways.

I would also say that these power stations are expensive pieces of consumer-funded infrastructure and the Government could look more broadly at the connection between, for example, power and water. Increasingly, as climate change bites, except in so far as reservoirs provide, we are likely to see an increase in things like effluent retreatment plants or desalination, all of which are power-hungry and would benefit from proximity to major sources of power. There is obviously a case for making sure that data centres are located near to sources of power and taking an industrial strategy approach about where we want our industry to grow.

- Q30 **Mike Reader:** Coming back to the DCO process, does EN-7 go far enough to reduce the time it takes to get to DCO? Could more have been in there to speed up both the pre-application and the DCO process itself?

Tom Greatrex: One area that has been highlighted in the feedback so far is that the EN-7 process envisages early engagement with local authorities and communities, but not so much via central Government. That is potentially an area that could cause some problems in terms of the strength of signal being sent about importance, particularly with national

or critical infrastructure. That area is being evaluated during the consultation on this, and is something that we have strong views on.

- Q31 Mike Reader:** In the Nuclear Industry Association's response to the taskforce, it highlighted concerns over detailed and outline emergency planning zones. Does EN-7 go far enough on that? Could it have done more to deal with some of the challenges that you raised in your report?

Tom Greatrex: The short answer is yes, more could be done on that. That is part of the discussion that is ongoing at the moment from the consultation on the final EN-7. What we want to see from EN-7 is a process that enables sites that will be suitable and applicable for nuclear development to be identified, but also dovetails with other measures being taken at the moment from different bits of Government to ensure that that is done as quickly, efficiently and effectively as possible. That is what we want to see.

When Government issues a consultation on something, there are issues in there to be evaluated to make sure that they are consistent with other bits of Government policy. That is what we want to see happening. I am reasonably confident that we will get to that position because these are issues that are being raised, discussed, evaluated and at least acknowledged as things that need to be looked at.

- Q32 Mike Reader:** My final question is: does EN-7 go far enough to incentivise the Planning Inspectorate to really prioritise a fleet-based approach? There will be an open market with different people applying for SMRs. Should we see a preference in planning for the encouragement of the fleet-based approach to deployment of SMRs in the country within EN-7?

Julia Pyke: As a general point on planning, the weight given to national policy statements could be higher so that things are not endlessly relitigated. Given that the overall aim is to bring low-carbon power generation online as soon as possible, any siting issue is very connected to things like the length and quantity of pre-application consultation and other things that, as Alastair referred to, will take a very long time before we have even put in the development consent order.

- Q33 Torcuil Crichton:** Thank you for coming in. It is good to see you again, Tom, after so many years. I have some questions following up on what Mike said about where small modular reactors can be built, but, Alastair, from a basic point of view, can they be built? Can this be done?

Alastair Evans: Absolutely. Rolls-Royce SMR is building on 60 years of knowledge and heritage of building nuclear reactors. Julia said it perfectly earlier: nuclear projects can be delivered, but it is about learning, repetition and pace. What we have now is clarity and certainty for the UK. We will get to the end of our regulatory processes and clearance. We have time now, as we go through these planning processes, to build up our workforce and our supply chain and then deliver. So yes, we can, and we are building on decades of knowledge and know-how.

- Q34 Torcuil Crichton:** Julia, is the money there to build them?



Julia Pyke: Looking at the question of how to build nuclear power stations holistically and whose money you are hoping to deploy in the build, you would be wise to learn the lessons from the financing of Sizewell C, which we have successfully financed. As I said, we have had a lot of international attention on how we have done it. Finance has been the main barrier to the nuclear programme, so as we have spent a long time working closely with Government going through the process of making nuclear genuinely financeable, I definitely think there are lessons to be learned. Fleet build is very important to financing.

Q35 **Torcuil Crichton:** Tom, is the political will there to build them—globally and domestically?

Tom Greatrex: If you look globally, you have seen in the last couple of years across the globe that a lot of countries that had either previously slowed down or removed their nuclear ambitions have revisited them. You have seen lots of countries that have not had any nuclear adopting policies to develop nuclear. It is for the same reason, fundamentally, which is that energy security is probably more acutely understood now than it was three or four years ago. Any elements of complacency have been removed from people's experience of what happens when you don't have energy security, alongside the imperative to reduce reliance on burning fossil fuels to produce electricity.

Those two things, allied with the significant economic benefit that you get from the projects, have meant that we have seen a resurgence of interest in nuclear across the world. We have seen projects happening in various different stages in countries that have not done nuclear before, or that have not done nuclear for a very long time.

In some ways the UK is very well placed, because we have had continuous nuclear activity since the 1950s and some of our expertise is incredibly marketable, usable and exportable across the world. That is what we are starting to see happening in helping countries to develop their processes and, in the medium term, exporting some of our reactor technology and other technologies to other parts of the world.

Q36 **Torcuil Crichton:** I will move on to the "where" question. The Nuclear Industry Association has said that the Government should look at other sites beyond EN-6 and EN-7. Surely we are just going to build these things where nuclear plants already exist.

Tom Greatrex: The first ones are being done—Hinkley is a site that has a nuclear power station adjacent to it, as does Sizewell, and Rolls-Royce SMR will likely do their first on a site that has had nuclear. That will certainly be the case to start with, but I think over time there will potentially be interest in having industrial clusters, which might get the benefit of having the output—whether it is the heat output, the electricity output or both—available to them, that might not have had nuclear before.

There are sites that have had significantly sized energy infrastructure in the past that are well placed for electricity generation of different technologies. Those are places that have grid connections and that have



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had coal or gas-fired power stations in the past, which may be sites that would be appropriate and that people would be interested in. I see EN-7 as being about ensuring that the criteria are right, but not closing down options too narrowly to limit the opportunity for meeting the ambition that the Government—indeed, successive Governments—have set for nuclear as part of the future mix.

Julia Pyke: Tom highlights a really important point, which is the grid. It is really important that as the grid is being planned—with the great grid upgrade—it takes into account the potential locations of significant quantities of nuclear generation.

Q37 **Torcuil Crichton:** Tom, let me ask you a political question. Is there any reason, apart from a political one, why new nuclear power stations could not be built in Torness and Hunterston?

Tom Greatrex: There is a political reason. Torness, as an example, is a very good site. It has space. It has the most productive low-carbon piece of infrastructure that exists in Scotland, and that has ever existed in Scotland. It is the backbone for the clean generation that exists from Scotland. There are lots of nuclear professionals in Scotland coming out of Scottish universities who I am sure would very much welcome the opportunity for there to be new nuclear capacity in Scotland.

Scotland has always been a significant part of nuclear. It is a real shame that, at the moment, there is a political reason why that seems to be being blocked, even against—actually, when you look at the polling, you see this—the wishes not just of the electorate but of the people who, historically at least, might have voted for the party of government in Scotland.

Q38 **Torcuil Crichton:** One last question, Alastair. We have done “when” and “where”, but how quickly could we do this if you got the go-ahead?

Alastair Evans: We know that it will take longer, at current rates, to plan and consent than it will to build. Our first unit will take around five years to build. That is the first one; it will take the longest time. However, that is only three and a half years of build and assembly, and 18 months of commissioning. The first one takes longest, then the time comes down to four years, and eventually to a bit less. What we want to see is these planning reforms being delivered at scale and at pace, and the improvements made that the Government have talked about, so that we can deliver in the mid-2030s.

Q39 **Chair:** The introduction to EN-7 points out that nuclear has lower carbon emissions over its life cycle than offshore wind or solar. Should we be building a lot more nuclear?

Julia Pyke: You have a group of witnesses who are pretty clear that the answer is yes.

Q40 **Chair:** Should that be at the expense of wind and solar?



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Julia Pyke: The costs of an electricity system could be much better understood, including in the media. The case for Sizewell is that it brings down electricity bills, even though it is, undeniably, an expensive piece of infrastructure to build, as indeed is any capital-intensive form of electricity generation.

Q41 **Chair:** I have a feeling that Tom and Alastair are going to agree. Do you have anything to add?

Tom Greatrex: All I would say is that when you look at the costs of electricity, you have to look at the system as a whole. There is a balance to be struck between different forms of generation. Nuclear has the lowest carbon intensity because it has a very long lifetime, is very energy-dense, and operates from a relatively small geographical site.

That is why nuclear, which uses a lot of concrete and steel, is still significantly lower in lifetime carbon emissions, from mining through to decommissioning, than wind or solar. That does not mean that that should be the only criterion applied. We want to get a balance in the system that ensures there is a secure, reliable system. In a world where we are minimising the amount of fossil fuels we burn for electricity, a significant proportion will come from nuclear, but it does not need to be the biggest proportion.

Alastair Evans: I would of course agree, but I will add that, looking at the NESO numbers, you are going to double the installed electricity capacity on an electrification basis. That means that you have to rebuild almost everything that is already operating today—not just build the new stuff, but rebuild almost everything that is on the grid today, to get you to that doubling. That is a huge challenge, and we have to have nuclear as part of the mix.

Q42 **Ms Billington:** May I follow up on that? You talk about that rebuild and this great grid upgrade, which is absolutely essential. I am interested in Ofgem's finally having allowed people to build ahead of demand. But the fact that they can only do that five years in advance means that, because the demand is growing, quite a lot of developers are going back to places where they had already done stuff within five years. Do you have views, and are you representing them to Ofgem, about possibly doing a longer-term thing, so that we do not have to revisit and rebuild things within such short timeframes?

Alastair Evans: We are not, but on the basis of this conversation, I will.

Julia Pyke: We are in active dialogue with the National Energy System Operator on the topic of grid, nuclear and future nuclear sites. We are also in dialogue with Ofgem about the spatial planning work it is doing, for the reasons I mentioned and for the reason you cite.

Q43 **Ms Billington:** Because you guys work in the long term, you may well have more of an opportunity than others to make that case to Ofgem. Frankly, the waste of money is epic. We do not have a framework that facilitates people to think big and long term.

Alastair Evans indicated assent.

Julia Pyke indicated assent.

Tom Greatrex: There is also an important point around what NESO is doing. It has the spatial work, and it has the projections that it produces, but it is not always consistent. One of the big issues, as I reflected before, is that if we are effectively trying to build a whole system, the system operator has to be properly aware and accommodate where we are likely to require significant concentrations of nuclear generation. It is not always clear that the system operator necessarily gets that. That is an area that we are constantly seeking to help NESO—and, in other areas, Ofgem—understand.

Julia Pyke: If we had better spatial planning, we would avoid planning issues where each project is looked at on its own merits. For example, in east Suffolk we are told to put in a roundabout at a particular junction, but ScottishPower Renewables is told to put in traffic lights. It cannot all make sense. A degree of holistic planning would save money for consumers.

- Q44 **Wera Hobhouse:** May I bring the discussion back from that high-level question of whether we should have more or less nuclear to the old sites under EN? I understand that we should not look at the whole issue as a matter of small versus big nuclear. You have also already explained, through the previous questions, why the existing and already identified sites are ultimately preferable because all sorts of things have already been established. But how much competition will ultimately be there? Julia and Alastair, you are both planning to build on old EN-6 sites. What is going to happen there? What should be happening on Wylfa? Will it be the bigger sites or the smaller ones? What do you think is going to happen? Why are there currently no new sites properly identified under EN-7?

Julia Pyke: Momentum is really important when building out nuclear. We are at this moment where Hinkley has heroically undertaken the work of reskilling the UK nuclear workforce and the construction workforce to build nuclear, and we have this opportunity to regain our reputation as a nuclear engineering superpower. That would be a great thing for us, but we need momentum, so we need the sites in EN-6 because we don't have to go through more process to put them into the allocation round of sites.

On Wylfa, there is a question for the Government about retaining the optionality to have another gigawatt plant within the existing site. Wylfa is probably the only suitable site for gigawatt. It is my understanding that if configured and planned from the start, Wylfa could actually accommodate a mix of gigawatt and a number of small modular reactors, so it does not have to be an either/or discussion. But certainly if the Government wish to retain the optionality to capitalise on the learning journey of having a buildable UK design with Hinkley, and the opportunity to copy the Hinkley design and benefit from the workforce, and therefore finance Sizewell C with a lot of private capital, that requires a site to be available for gigawatt.



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Alastair Evans: It is probably worth saying that the Oldbury and Wylfa sites—the EN-6 sites that we have talked about—are now in the ownership of Great British Energy—Nuclear. That puts the onus on the Government to determine whether they want to see small modular reactors built in this Parliament and delivered as quickly as possible at the Anglesey site or Oldbury site. Both sites work, both are viable, both are desirable. There are pros and cons to both.

Anglesey is obviously a larger site. At Oldbury, you benefit from the local supply chain and the developed skills. Both have benefits and detriments. Particularly with the Anglesey site, it is important that that community have clarity, because that community have been let down by projects that have not come forward. They have been in stasis—in limbo—for a great deal of time without clarity on whether they will have a large or a small project. It is particularly unhelpful to see media articles speculating on those points.

It is essentially going to come down to whether GBE-N wants to develop its first project at Anglesey or Oldbury. Both work, but it is important that the community at Anglesey have clarity.

Q45 **Wera Hobhouse:** But if there are relatively few, or fewer, options for the big gigawatt sites, do you think that ultimately Wylfa should be ringfenced for a big nuclear site?

Tom Greatrex: That depends on whether there is a policy desire for more gigawatt projects beyond Sizewell. If there is, I don't think it is controversial to say that Wylfa is the best site for that. To build on what Alastair was saying, a lot of this will be determined, effectively, by the policy decision on where the Rolls-Royce SMR first units will be based.

If you want to do a large-scale, gigawatt-scale beyond Sizewell, Wylfa is, I think, almost universally accepted as the best site for it. But if you are not going to, you have a community there that is very supportive and that has been let down in the past, as Alastair said. It wants to have nuclear development, for all the reasons that we have talked about. In that situation, you could use that site for SMR and, as Julia says, if you do it correctly you may well be able to do both. It is a big site.

Q46 **Wera Hobhouse:** Okay, but what does it depend on that would mean you could do both and there is no competition?

Julia Pyke: Planning to do both from the start, so that you configure the site in a way that can support the building of both.

Q47 **Wera Hobhouse:** Are you genuinely looking beyond the old EN-6 sites?

Alastair Evans: We are speaking to a range of developers that are doing exactly that. If you look at the Berkeley site, which is an existing nuclear site with a decommissioned unit, it is owned by an entity that wants to bring investment to that community and needs a significant amount of power, so that could provide an opportunity.



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If you look at a site like Dungeness, which was excluded from EN-6, it is a site with a very supportive community. The same is true in Cumbria: Braystones was excluded, and a second site in Cumbria was excluded. There is also a range of sites, like Teesside, that Tom talked about earlier, that would be viable for the UK. However, we are focused squarely on this first project with GBE-N for now.

Q48 Wera Hobhouse: But you are talking as a small nuclear developer. What about the size of Sizewell? Are you looking genuinely beyond the existing identified sites?

Julia Pyke: My job is to be the managing director of Sizewell, not to engage in further nuclear development. However, as Tom said, there needs to be a policy decision on whether the Government wish to retain the optionality to build further gigawatt. If they do, there is a momentum issue.

We have been permitted by the Office for Nuclear Regulation to build a copy of Hinkley Point C, and that is foundational for fleet build. It also exists within a timeframe, so if we were to build again there is an opportunity to discuss with the ONR building another copy. The further out in time that any decision to build another gigawatt goes, the more likely it is that we end up making a very significant number of changes to the design to accommodate changes in regulation. So there is a timing point about whether the UK wishes to have more gigawatt, and there is a point about financing. It is by copying that we have been able to finance.

Q49 Claire Young: As the Member representing Oldbury, I feel obliged to say that the community there has missed out as well, because it was involved in the STEP fusion bidding process and narrowly missed out. However, I want to pick up on something that Alastair said about Berkeley. Part of that STEP fusion proposal, and more recently of the Severn Edge proposal by the now-demised Western Gateway, was looking at how you bring together the two sites. Should the Government be looking at those sites and elsewhere in the country where clusters of expertise can be brought together?

One proposal was that, as you mentioned, Berkeley could be enhanced as a training and demonstrator site, potentially attached to a data centre so that you have a private off-taker, with Oldbury as the grid-connected operational site. Is that something the Government need to take into consideration, and how should they accommodate that? Is there a way of accommodating that in EN-7?

Alastair Evans: Yes, I think there is, because it becomes part of the planning application overall. Exactly as you have done, you paint the picture of what the demand is locally. At that site in Berkeley, you have phenomenal training and some of the best training centres I have ever seen. You have growing demand for electricity and investment in factories going in, all of which have significant demand. You could deliver that through investment in Oldbury and through private wire, or through additional units at Berkeley. There is a range of options you could take forward.

As you say, I think Severn Edge painted an extremely compelling picture of what the community could see delivered. Again, it comes down to: "How do I deliver units 4, 5 and 6? How do I work with GBE-N? How do I work with Government and the private sector to ensure that we are delivering that fleet?" It is important to reinforce that GBE-N owns two sites. This is not all about being focused on a single site; it is about delivering successfully at that first site and making progress at that second site as well.

Q50 Chair: Thank you. Does EN-7 enable the industry to deliver 24 GW of electricity from nuclear?

Tom Greatrex: EN-7, with consideration given to the factors we and others have raised, and that the Committee has touched on today—with those caveats—should help provide the route to ensure that we can reach that target and any others the Government set for overall gigawatt capacity. We will not get 24 GW from EN-6 sites only.

Chair: Thank you very much to our first panel. We will take a break while we change over.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Catherine Anderson, Mike Finnerty and Rebecca Phillips.

Chair: Welcome to our second panel of this afternoon's session of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee. Please introduce yourselves.

Catherine Anderson: Good Afternoon. My name is Catherine Anderson, and I represent the National Infrastructure Planning Association.

Mike Finnerty: Good afternoon, Chair. I am Mike Finnerty, the chief nuclear inspector and chief executive for the Office for Nuclear Regulation.

Rebecca Phillips: Good afternoon. I am Rebecca Phillips, the interim chief planning inspector at the Planning Inspectorate.

Chair: Thank you very much; you are all very welcome.

Q51 Mike Reader: I would like to explore the balance between national energy security and local consent under EN-7's critical national priority presumption. Considering the famous political phrase "For the many, not the few", how do we ensure that Government represent and recognise nationally important projects over the local concerns of a few residents or businesses? Let's start with Rebecca.

Rebecca Phillips: Clearly EN-1 already gives significant weight to critical national infrastructure such as nuclear and low-carbon energy. That is set out there as a Government priority and Government policy. Within that, there are always local considerations on a project-by-project basis in terms of security, environmental impact mitigation, landscape and visual heritage impacts, and so on. It is certainly a case for the examining authority, which I represent, the Planning Inspectorate, to balance those considerations on a case-by-case basis.



Q52 Mike Reader: Catherine, this week I met with a chief exec of a major infrastructure programme—not a nuclear scheme—who is fully preparing for a judicial review, because there are a few rich landowners somewhere in the scheme and they know they will do it, so they are planning to have to go straight to review. Surely that is not right. If we are delivering schemes in the national interest, shouldn't EN-7, EN-1 and others be stronger in the presumption on national priority?

Catherine Anderson: In relation to EN-7, it is really important that it focuses on matters of nuclear safety and nuclear security. They may or may not be the subject of judicial reviews, but we have seen other reasons for judicial review in relation to not only nuclear schemes, but other major energy infrastructure. There are other mechanisms for judicial reviews, such as the DCO process. EN-7 should be very clear and focused on the matters that relate to siting and matters of nuclear safety and security.

Q53 Mike Reader: Mike, for nuclear and other complex infrastructure projects, the combined planning and regulatory approvals process is very costly, burdensome and risky. Would there be merit in decoupling the planning consent process from the later regulatory approvals within the context of EN-7, so that promoters can progress sites while still working on the final technical environmental licensing separately?

Mike Finnerty: EN-7 is Government policy, and we provide advice to Government from our regulatory and technical point of view, using our expertise to advise on that policy. The next stage is where it has to be separate, and is separate, as part of our statutory duties on licensing. It is through the licensing process that we scrutinise the safety and security of a particular site, plus the technology that will be on that site.

Q54 Mike Reader: Would decoupling help to deliver the schemes that EN-7 is designed to bring forward more quickly?

Mike Finnerty: It is difficult, I think, because what EN-7 does at the moment, from our point of view in the advice we give through the inspectorate through to Government, is about whether this is a go or a no go, but it is just guidance at that stage. It is through the licensing process, which is more complex and more costly, that we get a much more robust assessment regarding the safety and security of that technology on a specific licence site.

Q55 Mike Reader: Rebecca, when considering nuclear infrastructure, what does it mean that the critical national priority for low-carbon power will in general "outweigh" residual impacts not addressed by the mitigation hierarchy?

Rebecca Phillips: We make recommendations to the relevant Secretary of State. As I mentioned earlier, it has the highest priority in terms of overriding, overarching critical Government priorities on low carbon and other things. You mentioned local considerations, but there are also safety considerations, highways impacts and ecological, environmental, landscape, and heritage impacts, and so on. It might be that the relevant Secretary of State feels that those outweigh the benefits provided.



Q56 Mike Reader: I have a broader question beyond EN-7, since I have two fantastic planning experts here: are we not getting that balance wrong? National energy security is critical—it is critical for my constituents in Northampton and reducing their energy bills. Why is their voice not as important as the voice of people who might live next door to a construction site?

Rebecca Phillips: As it stands, the consenting regime is intended to be front-loaded. Of course there is an opportunity for local voices and so on to be heard as part of a wide-ranging consultation process; all of that is part of the consultation process before the examination, and it is designed to lead to a swifter examination, within the six months.

Q57 Mike Reader: But nuclear schemes benefit the nation, so why can my constituents not have a say about reducing their energy bills by delivering nuclear schemes? Do we not have a flawed process at the moment, not representative of the benefit of the schemes we could be delivering?

Rebecca Phillips: What we have at the moment is an opportunity for all voices to be heard in that consideration, through the examination process. We make the recommendations looking at what is a critical national priority, but we also have to compete that against planning balances, which include the mitigations and the issues that I mentioned, on a case-by-case basis.

Catherine Anderson: To build on that, there is a key opportunity: EN-7 outlined early engagement in relation to regulators and stakeholders, but there is a key opportunity with local communities, especially in relation to the security and safety of the nuclear facility. We need to bear in mind that, when we talk about small modular reactors, that includes not just Rolls-Royce, as we have just heard, but down to the micro scale as well, the 5 MW and 20 MW as well. That has to be proportionate. There is a key difference between the scale of EN-6 sites, and the gigawatt and multi-gigawatt schemes that we have just heard about, and those proportionate to the scale of a smaller reactor, which could be in the region of a Last Energy 20 MW reactor, for example.

There is a key opportunity for early engagement on site identification; with a private nuclear vendor or developer, the site is deemed acceptable early in the siting process, and there is almost a regulatory thumbs up. That can be a key engagement tool with communities at an early stage. Leaving it to the latter stages of the statutory consultation process of the DCO is often too late. Having a nuclear reactor in a local community is obviously going to raise certain questions, so having that approval earlier is really important.

Q58 Mike Reader: The intention of consultation is to represent the views of the whole community, not just a vocal minority, so what more could EN-7 do, and what more could we do generally, to ensure that consultation is representative, using representative surveys or structured engagement panels, as opposed to the process that there is now, which favours those who have the time to complain?



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Catherine Anderson: In the DCO process—obviously, planning reforms are in place in relation to that—the onus is very much on the applicant. There is an opportunity in two aspects. One is through the planning process and that early engagement. There is an opportunity in EN-7 to focus, as I said, on the siting criteria on nuclear safety and nuclear security. All the other criteria, which used to be described as discretionary criteria, either are covered by EN-1 or, given the scale of projects we have seen to date, are not barriers to deployment. So there is an opportunity to streamline there.

The second opportunity, depending on the scale of planning reforms, is to look at opportunities to combine regulatory and community engagement. As Alastair mentioned, in Rolls-Royce he will have to go through multiple consultations. There are processes via the DCO, the GDA, the nuclear site licence and the environmental permit, so there is an opportunity to combine those.

Q59 **Mike Reader:** As we have you here, Rebecca, I will ask you this broader question. Should the Government not do more to encourage representative engagement in consultation, as opposed to favouring the loudest voices?

Rebecca Phillips: I echo what Catherine says. Consultation and early engagement are really important. That is obviously for the applicant to do, but there are fantastic examples of really constructive engagement and consultation that we see through local plan examinations, our major casework appeals and so on, which can be done to access a different demographic—younger people and those who should have a voice and who we would love to hear from at our planning examinations and inquiries.

Q60 **Chair:** Perhaps you could send us some examples after the session.

Rebecca Phillips: Yes.

Q61 **Chair:** That would be helpful. I want to go back to my question about Calder Hall. It took three years. Why is this taking so much longer?

Mike Finnerty: Obviously, the design of nuclear power stations has evolved over many decades. The current designs that we see—for example, for Hinkley Point C—have included lots more safety features. Design has taken into account things like the recommendations following the Fukushima accident. So things have developed over time, and the designs that we now see are much more complex and have been brought up to date to meet modern standards.

Q62 **Chair:** Are you confident that you can justify all the extra time?

Mike Finnerty: Absolutely, yes.

Q63 **Chair:** So no time can be saved in the current process?

Mike Finnerty: In terms of our regulation and our assessment of designs, probably the most significant time factor is that we have to see a mature and stabilised design. The issue that sometimes can prolong nuclear power station construction is the build progressing when the design has not been

stabilised and things having to be changed as part of the build process. That means additional assessments, which can lengthen the time for completion.

- Q64 Claire Young:** Before we move on to our questions about habitats and environmental impact assessment, I want to ask Rebecca this: is there anything you think can be done? To go back to the question I asked about where sites are close together, where you may be able to do something and gain added benefit, is there any way that can be considered in the planning process?

Rebecca Phillips: This goes back to the frontloading. The more consultation and preparation that the applicant can do before coming to us and engaging with us—I am talking about wider consultation locally as well—the better, certainly. We are there to make recommendations on different projects as they come forward. Whether they come forward individually, in phases or collectively, we have to consider them on their merits when they come through.

- Q65 Claire Young:** Okay. To move on to biodiversity and habitat rules, current habitats and environmental impact assessment rules often require mitigation on or near the project site. What should EN-7's approach be to off-site or offsetting measures to meet biodiversity and habitat obligations?

Rebecca Phillips: Currently, through biodiversity net gain there is an opportunity to provide mitigation on or off site. That is something that the developer can enter into, usually with the local authority, with some approved sites to offset. It depends on the applicant's preference and what is available.

- Q66 Claire Young:** We saw at Hinkley that they tried to get out of the so-called "fish disco". They ended up proposing saltmarshes many miles away from their original site—one of them in my patch. Is it acceptable to do something so far off site? What is being done to ensure that developers actually stick to what they agreed to in the first place?

Rebecca Phillips: I cannot comment on individual projects and mitigations, but I would say that badges like "fish disco" can be a little misrepresentative of what they are designed to achieve, which is to make sure there is no harm to fish.

Claire Young: It is an acoustic deterrent. I appreciate that.

Rebecca Phillips: Mitigation should be proportionate, and our guidance is very clear on what we look for in mitigation, but there are obviously also environmental and regulatory assessments and rules that have to be adhered to. It would be proportionate but necessary.

- Q67 Claire Young:** The Committee is concerned that we have heard evidence that environmental mitigations are not being delivered. How do you ensure that they are, and that it is done in an enforceable and transparent way?



Rebecca Phillips: That might be for somebody else, or we could follow up. We make recommendations and the relevant Secretaries of State decide. As long as there are necessary mitigations, and conditions attached to what we recommend, it is for another body to make sure that they are enforced and adhered to.

Catherine Anderson: If mitigation is required to reduce or manage likely significant adverse effects, that is usually secured through DCO requirements, and therefore enforced in that way. The environmental impact assessment and the mitigation hierarchy is very clear on that, as are the requirements for those sites that are within what used to be European Natura 2000 sites, which have to go through the HRA process. We have seen good examples of that, and delivered early. Wild Aldhurst, Sizewell, is an excellent example.

I come back to the point that it is has to be proportionate. That is gigawatt-scale technology, which EN-7 no doubt supports, but there are going to be projects, especially for small modular reactors, that may be sited in industrial locations, where the requirement to have biodiversity net gain on their site may not be reasonable because there is no connectivity to ecological corridors in the wider industrialised area. The last I read, the BNG consultation proposed that offsetting was possible for nationally significant infrastructure projects, which at scale may be more appropriate for those in certain locations. Mitigation will be looked at on a case-by-case basis, depending on the likely significant effects that the project will have.

There is support more widely within EN-1 because certain site criteria within EN-7 do point to EN-1, specifically on biodiversity, geology and amenity. To your point, if mitigation is required, it is secured through those DCO requirements.

Q68 **Mike Reader:** On the subject of habitats, with the Planning and Infrastructure Bill still slowly going through the Lords, should the Government wait to publish EN-7 until that is finalised? Part 3, the habitat regulations, is obviously a big part of that Bill and it will impact nuclear quite significantly.

Catherine Anderson: In its siting criteria, EN-7 recognises biodiversity, as well as other factors, in line with EN-1. Every site is judged on its merits. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill will support and dovetail with EN-7. It should not wait because EN-7 is the siting criteria. We have seen not just nuclear projects but other large-scale energy projects sited in areas of sensitivity and they have adapted, mitigated and compensated accordingly.

Rebecca Phillips: I have nothing to add to what Catherine said. Assessment is done on a site-by-site basis.

Q69 **Torcuil Crichton:** Thank you all for coming in. We heard from the previous panel—from Alastair and Julia—about how this is can-do technology, how it can be done and the way it should be done. I guess the



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question is: can it be done safely? We have had some evidence and some scepticism that smaller advanced modular reactors will be safe on the same scale as the larger ones. Mike, that is your department.

Mike Finnerty: We hear lots of claims about small modular reactors and advanced modular reactors. You look at the safety systems that they have. They have passive safety systems, particularly for Generation IV, which is advanced technologies. However, the technology is yet to be proven. A key part of our assessment would be to look at whether those claims can be substantiated.

At the moment, this is certainly one of the reasons why we would engage with DESNZ, which sets a policy for nuclear policy siting, and that we continue to engage with it. As and when the technology does mature, and we can see some of these technologies being substantiated and demonstrated to be safe, it may be the case that there is movement on some of the criteria for EN-7, but it is too early to say at this stage because that technology is yet to be proven and demonstrated.

Q70 Torcuil Crichton: Rebecca and Catherine, as well as clean energy, we will need clean heat for industrial purposes. One of the applications of these small reactors might be to place them next to where we produce steel, pink hydrogen or whatever. Should EN-7 take all that into account, also taking into account what Mike has just said about how they are yet to be proven?

Rebecca Phillips: That is not something I can answer readily. I would say there is, through EN-7, site criteria assessment. Needless to say, we would assess it on the same basis within the planning and environmental regulatory process to make sure the mitigations were included. Obviously, we would lean very heavily on advice from the regulator, HSE and so on in any case.

Mike Finnerty: Through the nuclear site licence application, we would look to external hazards. If there are industrial hazards that might impact on the safety of a potential site of a nuclear power station, we would need to take that into account. It would be down to the developer to demonstrate that it would take these external hazards into account and still demonstrate the safety of these facilities.

Q71 Torcuil Crichton: Catherine, that makes it sound as if we will never have a nuclear district heating system or a nuclear steel plant, or anything like that.

Catherine Anderson: One of the opportunities that SMRs, AMRs and other ANTs provide is their mobility. There can be symbiotic relationships with highly industrialised areas—you mentioned pink hydrogen—especially in areas where we need to decarbonise. We have plans with Community Nuclear Power, which is looking to do sustainable aviation fuel up in Teesside.

There are plans afoot, but when it comes to siting, we have smaller modular reactors that, as we heard from the previous panel, have to go

through siting criteria, one of which is semi-urban demographics. There are other siting criteria relating to major hazards and civil and military aviation, so there are things that have to be taken into account.

Especially in highly industrialised areas, they will have COMAH and their own emergency planning procedures, processes and protocols to go through. None the less, there is a definite opportunity for smaller-scale modular reactors, but the technology has to be proven, as Mike has said, so I am not going to discount that there could be opportunities for other reactor sizes.

Q72 Claire Young: I asked the last panel about the semi-urban population density criteria that the Government retained in EN-7, but which they have said they are open to revisiting. Is the Government's regulatory taskforce right that EN-7 misses an opportunity to re-examine SUPDC?

Mike Finnerty: As I said earlier, DESNZ is responsible for setting the policy and the criteria. We provide our technical regulatory advice to them. At this stage, the criterion is essentially a relatively well-proven way of giving advice and guidance for a go/no go decision. But, in itself, that decision is no guarantee that the technology could then either go through successful licensing or a DCO application. There is much more detailed analysis to do to get to that place. So the provenance around the semi-urban criteria is well substantiated. At this moment in time, I think it is absolutely appropriate. However, we are open, and this is how we respond to the taskforce. We will continue to have engagement with DESNZ. If the technology changes and the technology can be proven, we might be able to move away from that and use another methodology and have that early decision-making process. Then we are open to having consultation.

Q73 Claire Young: How do you respond to the suggestion that we take the Finnish approach?

Mike Finnerty: I have to admit I am not familiar with the Finnish approach.

Claire Young: Is that something you could look at and get back to us about?

Mike Finnerty: We could do that, yes. We engage with international regulators on a regular basis, so it is something we could look at.

Q74 Claire Young: Mike, could you clarify how the ONR approaches emergency planning and how requirements in site licensing interact with planning policy tools?

Mike Finnerty: With emergency planning, REPPiR are the essential regulations. The developer of the site needs to come up with a set of circumstances in which they will be looking at potential offsite release. That will then be adopted by the local authority. It is down to the local authority to work with the site to develop an offsite plan that has to be implemented. The ONR will look to see how effective that offsite plan is, and it will need to be tested every three years to ensure that it is. It is all around public safety. The arrangements can look to sheltering or to



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distribution of potassium iodide tablets or even evacuation. There is a whole scheme of things within that detailed emergency planning zone that is created as part of that emergency plan.

Q75 Claire Young: Currently the HSE carries out the semi-urban criterion tests, but if asked, will the ONR review the methodology?

Mike Finnerty: It is for DESNZ to make that decision. But if DESNZ asked the ONR to do that, we would certainly consider it.

Q76 Claire Young: Should the presence of a nuclear power station affect future housing development within its population density buffer? And how should the policy interact with housing targets and the Government's planning reforms?

Mike Finnerty: Again, this is a policy for DESNZ. Our responsibility is to ensure the safety of the population. That is very much linked to the technology that is on the site, the safety claims that can be made and substantiated, and the potential for offsite releases, and then looking at the emergency plan to see if, within that detailed emergency planning zone, it can accommodate adequately any potential releases. Even if that is highly unlikely, it nevertheless has to look at potential releases and whether it can be properly dealt with in that population density.

Q77 Claire Young: Rebecca, have you anything to add on that question about how the policy interacts with housing targets and the Government's planning reforms?

Rebecca Phillips: Similar to what Mike said, if a housing proposal came to us once an AMR was in place, we would have to look at that in the same way as Mike mentioned in terms of safety and security, but also the other implications in terms of environmental landscape impacts as well. Again, it would be on a case-by-case basis if that were to come forward after a nuclear reactor was in place.

Catherine Anderson: In our evidence we identified a tension between the Government's national housing objectives and the requirement for gigawatt targets for new nuclear of all kinds as well. So we would agree. One thing to point out is that HSE data used for semi-urban demographics is based on census data, which is updated every 10 years. I think the most recent is 2021. In my day job as a consultant, I have undertaken siting studies for modular technology, and we would agree with the taskforce that there are sites potentially being excluded as a result of the current guidance.

Q78 Sir Christopher Chope: Is not one of the key issues in regulation and licensing the need for applicants to have a one-stop shop? We are such a long way from that. What can you do, or what advice can you give the Government, to facilitate the creation of a one-stop shop? At the moment we have duplication and conflicting objectives. If I am an individual applicant wanting to apply for a small nuclear reactor, I am just one person, yet I have to deal with a whole range of different organisations. The personnel in those organisations change, and if it is anything like my



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local planning authority, you can get one planning officer who says x, but that officer retires and the replacement comes along and says no, definitely not x. How can we relieve the burden on applicants and give them a one-stop shop?

Mike Finnerty: It is a fair question. We have the vires and the statute under the legislation to issue a nuclear site licence to a developer, and we regulate under that licence. We work very closely with other agencies—for example, the Environment Agency as part of our generic design assessment. We also work closely with them on sites.

There are examples of us working in partnership with other regulators. Other agencies have different vires, and they have to regulate under their own statutory requirements as well. It is a difficult question, but we are trying to ensure that we can work together as much as possible within the current framework, so that essentially we can deliver to the benefit of society.

Q79 **Sir Christopher Chope:** But is it not possible to have one person in charge? If you are the chief executive of an applicant, in preparing your application, you are meant to have already taken into account all the issues around the environment, safety and so on. Why can we not have one individual appointed to decide these issues, instead of continually being held to ransom by rival organisations? In my experience, you have the Environment Agency, Natural England and Old Uncle Tom Cobley and all, each wishing to assert its own authority and importance. That is to the detriment of efficient and timely regulation.

Rebecca Phillips: If it helps, under the Planning Act there is the opportunity to bring together non-planning consents as part of a DCO, but it would require the regulatory body or the licensing authority to agree to it.

Q80 **Sir Christopher Chope:** Is that going to happen?

Rebecca Phillips: That is not for me to—

Q81 **Sir Christopher Chope:** That is a bit of a cop-out. So you are saying that these individual licensing authorities have to agree to do it? Do you think that is a satisfactory state of affairs, bearing in mind the problems?

Rebecca Phillips: As it stands and as I understand it, the Planning Act provides the opportunity, but it will depend—

Q82 **Sir Christopher Chope:** I know that, but would you like to see the legislation or guidance changed?

Rebecca Phillips: It will depend on individual regulatory bodies to agree. There are things I cannot answer, because obviously we are operating under the Planning Act, but there are different licences that could be agreed. However, we are not the authority for that.

Q83 **Sir Christopher Chope:** Are you asking for this power?

Rebecca Phillips: We have not requested it, no.



Mike Finnerty: It is part of the regulatory taskforce. There may be elements in this. I would suggest that we are not rival regulators; where we can work together, we do—and quite successfully, I think. We will see what the taskforce recommendations come out with. It is too early to pre-empt what they will say, but there may be opportunities within their recommendations for there to be further co-operation and further ways in which we can work more closely together to get to the point that you are suggesting.

Catherine Anderson: Building on that, within any project, whether it be nuclear or any sort of major infrastructure, there are behaviours in place that we are very focused on, as applicants. NIPA supports a lot of applicants in this space, and consultation fatigue is very real within both regulatory and stakeholder organisations. We have been very keen to hone things, behaviourally, within the major infrastructure space.

There are good examples out there where technical working groups within the environmental impact assessment space—bringing together both regulatory and planning processes—have worked well, ensuring that information is created once, and done well, to then support both DCO and regulatory processes. So, while it is not a legislative requirement, there are behaviours and practices in place that try to minimise that kind of fatigue.

Q84 **Sir Christopher Chope:** May I ask some specific questions? Mitigation of seismic risk is a non-negotiable requirement for a site licence, yet it is being added into EN-7 as a planning consideration. Is that really helpful? What is the point of it?

Mike Finnerty: That comes in as part of the criteria for a very early assessment about whether a site is clearly unsuitable or not. That is the go/no go situation I was talking about. Under the site licensing approach, the licence is given to a corporate body, which then looks at a specific design on that site. The assessment that goes into that is much more detailed, looking at various safety justifications made by the developer, and we need to be satisfied that they do not have the potential for an intolerable accident as a result of any seismic activity.

Chair: Yes, I think we have understood why it is a safety requirement, but why is it being added as a planning one? Why is it needed?

Mike Finnerty: Again, it is for DESNZ to comment on what the criteria are and what the—

Chair: But do you think it is needed, as a planning one?

Q85 **Sir Christopher Chope:** Would it affect safety, for example, if we did not have EN-7, and a nuclear project instead had to rely solely on the generic aspects of EN-1?

Mike Finnerty: I think the issue here is that if EN-7 did not exist and something came through the licensing process with something that EN-7 would have picked up to say, "Look, it is clearly not a sensible approach for a nuclear power station to be sited here, because of these safety



factors,” it could potentially involve a lot of money and cost to justify something that could have been picked up far earlier. That is the point: it gives a ready go/no go guidance that would then be picked up by the nuclear site licence. What we do not want is for a developer to spend a lot of money and effort on something that could clearly have been identified, at an early stage, as unacceptable from a siting point of view.

- Q86 **Sir Christopher Chope:** But you speak as though this is an exact science—“Is a nuclear power plant in this particular area going to be safe?” These are matters of judgment, essentially, aren’t they? What is happening is that you have competing regulators exercising different areas of judgment at different stages in the process. Could it not all be done at an early stage?

Mike Finnerty: A huge amount of technical assessment is required as part of site licensing. It is not judgment; it is actually a technical assessment. That is there to give those robust assurances that the site can be operated safely and securely.

- Q87 **Chair:** I think one of the questions is why people have to submit the same information multiple times. Why is there not a single application form, for example?

Mike Finnerty: As part of EN-7, it would not need the same level of detail. This looks at broad criteria, giving that initial judgment about whether the site would be suitable or not. Part of the licensing process, which is very separate, is the requirement for the developer, once they have a specific design on a specific site, to make the case about the robust safety attributes of that development.

- Q88 **Chair:** We have had written evidence that people are being asked for exactly the same information multiple times. You are nodding, Catherine; can you have a go at it from a different angle?

Catherine Anderson: I have read the other evidence and I think we would concur, because we had a similar vein in NIPA’s. There is a unique opportunity within EN-7 not only for it to streamline itself, as I mentioned earlier, in relation to how it differs from EN-1 on some of the criteria that used to be discretionary, but to recognise the condition or control mechanisms—those that can be conditioned via or required by the DCO process and are tested in the DCO process, one of which is seismics. The point about the level of information and the timing is really valid.

There are then those that are controlled via other regulatory processes and tested in those processes. It is not for EN-7 to dictate that, because it is a planning matter. There are aspects and criteria that have been added in the most recent consultation draft that are not a planning matter. They are a licensing, regulatory matter.

- Q89 **Sir Christopher Chope:** If it is not safe, you will not get a licence for it so there is no point in going through the planning processes. Surely, the person who makes the application is going to have to have satisfied themselves that they meet all these criteria, and they will have entered

into pre-application discussions with all the regulators. If all the regulators have entered into separate discussions with the applicant, why can't the regulators collectively reach a *prima facie* conclusion on the basis of those negotiations with the applicant, prior to any application being made? It can then be dealt with quickly and not sequentially.

Mike Finnerty: Because as part of the licensing approach, that is where the assessment happens. The claims will be made, but then they will be tested. It is about claims, arguments and providing evidence. My understanding is that claims may be made as part of the NPS solution, but I am not sure whether there is evidence of sufficient authority and robustness that it would be able to satisfy that licence requirement.

We mentioned advanced nuclear technologies earlier. Very big claims are made about advanced modular reactors—about how safe the safety systems are, with passive safety features and so on—but they have never been substantiated. That technology has not been proven.

Q90 **Wera Hobhouse:** I want to try to get towards the bottom of it. It is fair enough that you do not want to make any recommendations, or to say whether certain tests or other things are necessary, but do you have any recommendation on sequencing the permissions differently to avoid duplication?

Mike Finnerty: We would not advocate duplication. If, as part of the EN-7 or NPS criteria, a substantive case was made against the safety, looking at all hazards and all safety claims and so on, we would not advocate repeating that for the licensing process. I am not aware that that happens. My understanding is that, as part of licensing, the process is far more robust, and necessarily so, because you have a fixed design on a fixed site.

If there is replication, we would take the advice, discuss it with DESNZ, look at the criteria and ensure that that does not happen. But as far as I am concerned, I do not believe there is that level of duplication from the NPS and EN-7 requirements in respect of what is required as part of the licensing conditions.

Q91 **Mike Reader:** I will stick with this topic, because this is a really interesting area; thank you to the Clerks for picking it up. I want to get this clear in my head. Currently, it is not a planning requirement to do a seismic assessment, but under EN-7, if it is in there, your organisation, Mike, could object to the planning on the basis of the quality of the information provided on the grounds of seismics. We are, then, introducing additional complexity to the planning process—is that right?

Mike Finnerty: Potentially.

Q92 **Mike Reader:** Is that the role of your organisation—to be engaged in planning when you are going to have a role later to assess it anyway at site licensing?

Mike Finnerty: The whole point about NPS is to have that initial guidance about go/no go. Flooding is another example. If a site came forward that

clearly had serious flooding issues, it may be our recommendation that on those grounds the site would not be suitable to go ahead. If we had that go process, there would be far more detailed assessments as part of the licensing process.

- Q93 **Mike Reader:** We have had evidence that engaging with the regulators to find solutions is very difficult. Do you think there should be more engagement from regulators to be problem solving as opposed to just assessing and checking?

Mike Finnerty: We very clearly state in our regulatory approach that we are an enabling regulator, and we take that process right through from early design. We have lots of early engagements with potential developers, and we do that very much as part of the generic design assessment process. We do it right through licensing and through operation as well. We take that enabling approach right through the whole lifecycle—from very early conception right through to decommissioning.

- Q94 **Mike Reader:** Are the requirements to consider alternative sites in EN-7 proportionate?

Catherine Anderson: As part of any EIA process, alternatives are a mandatory requirement of the EIA regulations, so yes, there is a requirement to look at alternative sites. Obviously, those nominated within EN-6 will be afforded the benefit within EN-7, so the case has already been made in relation to those sites to a degree. For those new sites coming forward, yes there would have to be the argument, “Why here and not somewhere else?”, as well as, say, “Why not a coal-fired power station in this location?” It is not just alternatives in terms of the site but other forms of generation as well—so to your question, yes.

Rebecca Phillips: It is part of the regulatory process that we are required to look at alternative sites.

- Q95 **Mike Reader:** I have been looking through the interim report from the taskforce at the part on re-evaluation of the ALARP process. Do you agree with the general view that it needs re-evaluation, and that the term “reasonably practicable” is a particular challenge in planning?

Mike Finnerty: I think the ALARP process is sound. Implementation of ALARP is certainly something that we are engaging with the taskforce on, and we will continue to engage on this with the taskforce, and with HSE and other partners, to ensure that it is implemented in an appropriate way.

- Q96 **Mike Reader:** The taskforce said, “Interpretation currently fosters a culture of risk aversion and reluctance to challenge and debate, impacting costs and time.” Do you recognise that?

Mike Finnerty: I think this is something that we need to engage with industry about, because the taskforce—

Mike Reader: But do you recognise that? Do you see that it drives risk aversion and increases costs?



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Mike Finnerty: I do recognise this, but one of the things that the taskforce, as part of the interim report, has said is that it needs this healthy challenge to ensure that the risks are within this tolerable region. It needs to have a healthy balance—the tension between developers and their claims and the regulator. I think that over the years what has happened—there is evidence to show this—is that industry has sometimes been too ready to accept, or not challenge, the regulator to find the true balance between what is intolerable and what is acceptable.

Q97 **Mike Reader:** The regulatory taskforce remarked that nuclear projects often spend years in pre-application stage before an application for DCO is even submitted. Why is that? Does it reflect gaps in Government guidance or just the fact that it is a complex process?

Rebecca Phillips: It is a complex process. I mentioned that currently it is a process designed to be frontloaded to enable examination to progress efficiently within the statutory six months. That is the process for the applicant to go through to make sure that all the planning and the regulatory legal requirements are met. It is a complex process, so it has to be consulted on. All the environmental impact assessments and so on, all the mitigation and all the impacts have to be considered fully; otherwise that is the sort of thing that will have to be ironed out in the examination process, and that might mean that it is a longer examination process. The complexity of something this scale and size is likely to mean that—

Q98 **Mike Reader:** But given the scale of pre-application and the DCO process, taking years, you are talking tens if not hundreds of millions of pounds spent. Lower Thames is not nuclear, but it is a prime example. Surely, having a longer inspection process and more dialogue through the inspection process might be a quicker way to deliver it than requiring tomes of reports that just open up the opportunity for further challenge?

Rebecca Phillips: Yes, and we would encourage early engagement and dialogue not just with us, but with many others as well.

Q99 **Mike Reader:** Do you think the current requirements of the DCO are proportionate? Do they deliver the best outcome?

Rebecca Phillips: It is difficult to say. As I mentioned earlier, on a case-by-case basis, the advice is that it has to be proportionate.

Mike Reader: You say it is difficult to say, but you are the interim chief planning inspector. If anyone has a view on the planning process, surely it should be you.

Rebecca Phillips: It will depend on individual circumstances and the nature of the case.

Mike Reader: But overall, do you think the current process is proportionate and it delivers the right outcomes?

Rebecca Phillips: As I say, it is aimed to be frontloaded, and there are a lot of things to look up—

Mike Reader: Is that proportionate? Is that right, being frontloaded?

Rebecca Phillips: As I said, each case is different and it has to go through those regulatory assessments.

Mike Reader: In a general sense, is it proportionate? You can say, "I cannot say."

Rebecca Phillips: Yes, it is difficult to say. On a case-by-case basis, it has to be considered on its individual merits.

Q100 Sir Christopher Chope: You say that it is difficult to evaluate claims that are made—that applicants will claim this, that and the other, and that you as regulators have got to try and see whether those claims are valid. Instead of second-guessing that, is it not possible instead to bring in conditions to cover? If the applicant says it is going to be like this, that and the other, you can grant permission on the condition that that is what is met. You do not then have to second-guess or investigate whether the claims are valid, because you can ensure that if the claims turn out not to be valid, then the conditions will not be met.

Mike Finnerty: Rebecca mentioned the early engagement we have. I think the early engagement should go a long way for the developer to understand exactly what our requirements are, and for us to understand what the design is and what the level of those claims are. Building nuclear power stations is expensive. It would be wrong for us to say, "You go ahead and we'll take on face value what you are saying. You go ahead and build your power station," and then many years down the line, say, "You said you would build this like this. Actually, it is not like this at all. We will put an order in to stop you operating." I think that is the wrong approach.

Also, in this country, the regulatory framework is goal-setting. We are not prescriptive. We do not tell the developer how it should go about meeting the requirements. It is up to the developer, but through that early engagement we can assess, "How do you think you might meet these requirements?" We can have that dialogue and that advice. Through that enabling approach, we have a really beneficial system. Certainly, I would not want to leave it for developers to go and build something and then tell them, "You said this, but in fact you haven't done this, so we're not allowing you to operate."

Q101 Sir Christopher Chope: So because you are not prescriptive, you are not validating these claims?

Mike Finnerty: No, we do validate the claims. They have to meet a particular standard, but it is up to the developers how they meet those standards.

Q102 Sir Christopher Chope: But if they said how they are going to meet those, why is there a problem? Why does it take so long?

Mike Finnerty: Because they need to then actually demonstrate—the analysis that goes into a big nuclear power station is hugely complex. They are hugely complex beasts, and they have to look at a range of



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potential fault conditions and demonstrate the quality, and they need to demonstrate that it is built to the right specification and all these things. All of that needs assessment and all of that takes a huge amount of time.

Q103 Sir Christopher Chope: Don't we know it! A good friend of mine—a Member of Parliament, actually—made a fortune out of being counsel to the Sizewell B inquiry, and he never looked back. I thought the whole idea was that we were going to try and simplify this process so that we can get these small nuclear reactors up and running in our lifetimes. Isn't that the objective?

Chair: Did you cover this earlier, Catherine?

Catherine Anderson: I think so.

Chair: Do you want to try again? You were talking about condition or control mechanisms.

Catherine Anderson: It is important to recognise that not everything is going to be Sizewell C scale when we are talking about modular reactors. We need to remember proportionality: the scale of a small nuclear small modular reactor could be as little as 20 MW. When the same regulatory process applies—granted. So it is all about scale and proportionality.

To answer your question, Sir: there are clear opportunities for EN-7 to direct between control or condition: control through regulatory processes and condition via the DCO process. Therein lies the opportunity. That is the recommendation that we have made via the consultations to the taskforce.

Q104 Mike Reader: I have a final question; it's a nice, easy one for you all to finish on. Is EN-7, in its current drafting, perfect, or can you give us one practical recommendation in plain English that could improve it? I will start with you, Catherine.

Catherine Anderson: As I just said, we do believe there is opportunity there for refinement.

Mike Finnerty: I think there are opportunities for us to provide guidance and advice to DESNZ. I think for the moment, it is fine, but as the technologies develop and become proven, I think there will be scope for refinement of the process.

Mike Reader: So no changes at the moment, Mike. Rebecca?

Rebecca Phillips: It is clear that we would have to test it and review it from our perspective, as the Planning Inspectorate, and feed back on that.

Q105 Mike Reader: In its current drafting, you can't see anything that would improve it?

Rebecca Phillips: It is clear. It will be tested when we come to deal with applications.

Catherine Anderson: One final point I forgot to mention is that the important thing about EN-7 is that it needs to endure. It needs to ensure



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that it supports gigawatts, supports modular and supports the innovative and rapid improvement we are seeing in nuclear development right now. That would be my final point.

Q106 **Chair:** I have a final question. Mike, you just used the phrase, “the analysis is hugely complex,” which is a very similar phrase to the one you have used a number of times between you when talking about how long it takes in pre-application and so on. Should it be possible for the work of a developer who does not complete the process and stops, to be taken on by a new developer coming in? Or is that what EN-7 does? If it doesn’t, should it do it?

Mike Finnerty: Sorry; I am not quite sure I understand the question.

Chair: If a developer has put an enormous amount of work into bringing forward their case, but it does not finish the process—either by their choice or because they have been turned down—should a subsequent developer on the same site be able to come forward and use that work, rather than having to start again, or is that what EN-7 does?

Mike Finnerty: I do not see any reason why not. I don’t think there is.

Catherine Anderson: It would definitely be down to the specific nuclear technology. There may be requirements for them to start all over again, because it is a different fuel type or what-have-you.

Q107 **Chair:** If it is the same technology?

Mike Finnerty: Then I do not see any particular reason why not.

Q108 **Chair:** But it is not in there at the moment, so that is something that we could do.

Rebecca Phillips: As long as it was up-to-date, as Catherine said, we would examine the evidence, whichever developer put that forward. We would work with them as applicants.

Q109 **Chair:** So there is already potential for using previous work done by somebody else?

Rebecca Phillips: Certainly, as long as it was up to date and relevant.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence. That is the end of our session.