

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

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EDF's prospective new nuke at Sizewell is not the only vast energy scheme threatening Suffolk's rural amenities and running laughable “consultation” exercises (Eyes passim). Only two miles away, Scottish Power Renewables (SPR) is right up there with EDF - on both counts.

SPR's “East Anglia Hub” would be a 3 gigawatt offshore windfarm complex in the North Sea. Designed to produce sustainable electricity out of sight over the horizon, the plan has broad support - in principle. However, the onshore ramifications are contentious: the location for landfall of the incoming power cables, the digging of a six-mile “cable corridor”, and two large new substations. These works would cut across a stretch of Heritage Coast, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a Special Protection Area and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Oddly, SPR is not intending to do the obvious and amalgamate its workings with those of EDF's Sizewell C project next door, with its large existing site and grid connection. (Maybe SPR is as sceptical about Sizewell's prospects as Old Sparky.)

Local residents want and could ordinarily expect a programme of public meetings - but Covid-19 has scuppered that. SPR has argued instead for online meetings to keep the process moving. The government endorses the “virtual” approach, conditional upon it being made to work for all concerned.

Many locals complain they are not comfortable with the technology involved. But the Planning Inspectorate facilitated training sessions; people determinedly made the effort; and everything seemed set for an online consultation last month. Some 100 local participants managed to deal with the new-fangled systems - but not, alas, the SPR team of legal and professional advisers, who couldn't make their technology work and were reduced to joining the three-hour meeting by phone. Compounding the irony, the invisible SPR lawyers then rehearsed at length their arguments for conducting matters virtually!

Not much more confidence-inspiring, then, than EDF's ill-fated "Sizewell consultation bus" that, too big for local car parks, became ignominiously stuck on the verge beside a lay-by (Eye 1529). Oh, and SPR still hasn't satisfied locals on why it can't use existing sites and grid facilities for its new project.

'Old Sparky'

return for decades of eye-watering repayments (*Eyes passim*). The former franchises are mostly owned or part-owned by foreign governments, mainly in the EU, and the few private ones (including the notorious TransPennine Express) hardly represent the private sector's "best elements". Still, how heartwarming that the prime minister's chief aide Dominic Cummings and his Brexiteer cabinet insist on handing more British cash to the needy German, Dutch, French and Italian governments.

THE annual report from Daft confirms that the Tories switched "capital investment" from NR to Highways England and HS2 when they cancelled mainline electrification to Sheffield in 2017 and put TransPennine electrification on ice. Cue increasing hyperbole as Daft tries to convince northerners they're getting their fair share.

NR patronisingly includes each scrap of northern spending in its "Great North Rail Project" (*Eye* 1458). The latest piece of this "vast programme of improvements to transform train travel" was a "major bridge upgrade" near Crewe – where NR and the local council installed a new deck for £5.7m. It couldn't have been simpler: a single-carriageway road over two un-electrified train tracks. These days, that apparently counts as a "major" project and "huge investment" up north.

'Dr B Ching'

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NUMBER CRUNCHING

4,192 miles Distance from central London to Ascension Island, where the Home Office reportedly considered setting up an immigration centre

27 miles Distance from central London to Brook House near Gatwick, where the UK currently has one of many immigration centres