

## **SIZEWELL C, NATURE and HEALTH**

**Talk, 14 March 2020.**

By way of introduction I'd like to show you a little film which our Friends of the Earth group made last August. It takes you round the Sizewell C site, starting on the beach and then going inland to Sizewell Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest. I'll let it speak for itself.

*SHOW FILM*

You can see from the film how tranquil and beautiful the area now is. It also gives a sense of how very much people enjoy both the beach and the permissive paths through the woodland on the Sizewell Estate and across the Sizewell Belts.

There is something particularly calming about walking through woodland. Is it the tall trees that seem so strong and protective? Or is it the fact that they breathe out the oxygen that we breathe in? Whatever it is, we seem to have a deep connection with trees. I was walking along one of the paths on the Sizewell Estate with a friend, when suddenly she ran up to a magnificent beech tree and threw her arms around its wide girth. 'I'll tie myself to this', she said passionately. 'I won't let EDF cut this down.'

Many hundreds of local people have had similar feelings at the thought that the whole of Coronation Wood would be levelled to make way for a construction area and perimeter road, so that some of Sizewell B buildings could be moved south, making more space for Sizewell C. Well done TASC for fighting this with a Judicial Review! It's not only Coronation Wood that EDF Energy plan to cut down, but also all the trees on Goose Hill. Moreover 1.6 ha of trees at St James' Covert have already been felled to make way for a reptile translocation area. Destroying one habitat to mitigate for another is very poor practice indeed.

As for the beach, it is a joy in summer when the shingle plants come into flower. The Sea Kale produces creamy-white domes of flowers which have a perfume that smells exactly like honey. How it lifts my spirits to walk among them! All the negative thoughts that go rattling round in my head start to drift away and I can imagine them wafting along with the sea breeze. This is so healing. As you saw in the film, some of these plants are now rare, such as the Yellow Horned Poppy and Sea Pea. Among the grassy dunes you may be lucky enough to see the patches of little harebells. These are real treasures, but sadly declining as so much of their habitat has been lost. Suffolk has some of the best vegetated shingle beaches in the world and this is one of them. It strikes me as a minor miracle that somehow these beautiful, fragile plants manage to survive in such a hostile, stony and salty environment. Yet they have a way of getting their roots down just enough to find the water and nutrients that they need.

So what will happen to this precious site? As you heard in the film, it will all be dug up for new defences and a beach landing facility. This is where the Abnormal Indivisible Loads, or AIDs, would be brought in by barge and taken up to the reactor platform. EDF say that they will keep the substrate of the beach and re-plant on top of the new defences. Where would it be kept and in what conditions? How many years would it be before the new defences are built? They don't say. Planting would have to be on top of the rock armouring, i.e. non-native rock brought most probably from Norway. The whole drainage regime would be changed. Is it going to work? It's extremely doubtful.

Many families come to Suffolk's beaches, especially at weekends and during the holidays. What fun it is to go beach combing and make a collection of patterned stones or shells! Pet dogs go bounding along enthusiastically and the brave will go paddling or swimming. These are the lucky children. Psychologists now say that many modern kids are suffering from 'nature deficit disorder', because they spend most of their time stuck in front of screens. It is widely recognised that access to both green space and blue space is crucial for stable mental health. Interaction with natural environments is associated with a reduction in stress and anxiety. I certainly experience that. As I start to tune in to the slower rhythms of nature, a gentle sea breeze, the swish of shingle as the tide goes out and the waves roll back, or even the gradual unfolding of petals, everything in me slows down too. It is now well accepted that people who have regular access to nature have reduced cardiovascular disease and live longer. Walking and running about in the fresh air is, of course, also very beneficial for physical health. Moreover, while growing up, children need contact with animals and nature to be connected to the micro organisms that seem to play a role in the development of the immune system. What is that old saying about 'a peck of dirt before you die'? (A peck is the old imperial measure for about 2 dry gallons.)

The Sizewell C site is directly adjacent to the famous Minsmere bird reserve. Needless to say, birds don't recognise the artificial boundaries imposed by humans, and the Sizewell beach is outstanding for bird-watching. An area is fenced off by Suffolk Wildlife Trust to allow ground-nesting birds such as Ringed Plover and Little Tern, both now of conservation concern, to breed undisturbed. Both are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act. Despite this, they won't remain undisturbed by Sizewell C, as their nesting site will be obliterated. So where will the birds go? They will have great difficulty finding a replacement area just like this, if at all. No wonder our birds continue to decline as we take over and destroy their habitats.

As for we humans, we are remarkably adaptable. No doubt bird-watchers will find somewhere else to enjoy their favourite hobby, but it won't be near here. During the 12 years of construction, people will be forced to find their nature fix somewhere else, putting pressure on other wild places. The drop in visitor numbers for miles around is anticipated to be at least 30%, while RSPB Minsmere is expecting possibly double that.

Visiting a hide is a special experience. It's rather like entering a church or some sort of sacred place. You open and close the door very quietly, hoping it won't squeak, then tip-toe to a bench by an open window. You try not to speak, or if you can't contain your excitement at seeing an Avocet, you'll express it in whispers. But who would want to sit in a hide with a background noise of pile-driving, chain-sawing, or digging, and when, instead of a rare bird, all you will see through your binoculars is a huge crane hauling vast pieces of nuclear reactor building into place?

Last summer I went on a ramble over the Sizewell Belts and around the Sizewell Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (or SSSI) with the local group of Butterfly Conservation. It was my great ambition to see a White Admiral and I knew that the sunny woodland rides, where wild honeysuckle was growing, provided exactly the right habitat for them, the honeysuckle being the food plant of their caterpillars. We had been walking for about an hour and had encountered a number of other butterflies, including Small Copper and Brown Argus, but no White Admiral. Then suddenly there it was, flying with serene elegance, its brown wings with distinctive white stripes spread out, lazily flapping, as it soared towards its food plant. I can't describe the excitement I felt and the wonder of meeting such a beautiful and delicate creature. This was a moment to remember forever, when I felt completely taken out of myself, somewhere beyond the mundane routine of everyday life – a kind of spiritual connection. Then I came down with a horrible bump. Of course I realised that we were standing on one of the rides that would go under concrete as part of the Sizewell C construction site. I was overwhelmed with sadness.

Wild places like this are truly precious. We need them. We are ourselves part of nature, yet we seem to have forgotten this. Humans are forever intent on dominating nature, of having control over it, of owning it, of doing what we want with it for our own ends, of pushing it out, of destroying it – just like now with these plans for SZC. Oh, we'll compensate for this or mitigate for that say EDF Energy. But what if it doesn't work? It's lost forever – and we are left in mourning.

So let's now do all we can to ensure that this abominable project never happens.

THANK YOU.