



## Cardiff University and University of East Anglia PRESS RELEASE

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### **COMMUNITIES CLOSE TO EXISTING NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS SHOW ONLY QUALIFIED SUPPORT FOR NUCLEAR NEW BUILD, AND ALSO EXPRESS A STRONG DESIRE TO BE CONSULTED FULLY ON ANY PLANS.**

As the Government and Energy Companies press ahead with preparations for a new generation of nuclear power plants in Britain, the results of a new study show that many residents living near to existing nuclear stations give only qualified support to the construction of new nuclear power stations in their locality.

The five-year study focused on people living near nuclear stations at Bradwell (Essex), Oldbury (Gloucestershire) and Hinkley Point (Somerset), exploring their attitudes towards and concerns about nuclear power. The results of the study are published today, 30th September 2008.

A key factor in siting new nuclear stations will be public acceptance amongst local communities at the existing sites. Professor Nick Pidgeon of the School of Psychology at Cardiff University, who led the research team, explained: "It is clear that the proponents of nuclear power have made the assumption that it will be far easier to develop new stations at the existing sites, because, among other factors, they believe that local communities will be very supportive.

"However, we know very little about what members of such communities in Britain really think and feel about nuclear power today. This new research, which combined extensive interviewing with a major survey, helps us to understand more about this critical aspect of the current nuclear energy debate."

The study was carried out by researchers from the School of Psychology and the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University, and from the School of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia.

The results, which are being presented this morning (30<sup>th</sup> September) at the Royal Society in London, include the following key findings:

#### On Experiences of Living with Nuclear Power

Interviews with residents living close to Bradwell and Oldbury revealed that:

- On a day-to-day basis residents view their local nuclear station as familiar and unremarkable. This sense of ordinariness, combined with a belief that local operators can be trusted to keep the plants safe, underpins local confidence in nuclear power.
- However, the reassuring narrative of familiarity is disrupted at specific moments when residents are reminded by external events such as terrorist activity that there might be risks associated with their local plant. In such moments people can, and do, experience anxiety about living with nuclear power



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### On Support for Local New Build

- The survey showed that 50% at Oldbury and 61% at Hinkley Point supported new nuclear build at their local site. Opposition to local new build was significantly greater at Oldbury (31%) than at Hinkley Point (23%).

### The Need for Local Consultation

- Regardless of their opinion on nuclear power, the vast majority of people surveyed (84%) wanted the industry and Government to fully involve local people in plans for siting new nuclear power stations locally.

### On Differences within Communities

Although attitudes towards nuclear power were generally positive, the researchers found important differences in attitudes which showed that local residents are not simply pro- or anti- nuclear power. At all three locations we identified four distinctive points of view, which were confirmed by the survey conducted around Hinkley Point and Oldbury. These points of view were as follows.

- Beneficial and Safe. This group (34% of the survey respondents) believe that nuclear power brings local benefits and invest high trust in local operators to keep the plants safe.
- Threat and Distrust. This group (16%) believe the risks of nuclear power far outweigh any benefits, want to see renewable energy developed in response to climate change, and are highly distrustful of both the nuclear industry and government.
- Reluctant Acceptance. This group (38%) are ambivalent about nuclear power. They view it as risky but are prepared to accept it locally because it may be needed for addressing climate change and energy security. The ambivalence voiced by this significant segment of the local populations surveyed suggests that, for many, their support is highly provisional and potentially subject to change.
- There is No Point Worrying. This group (12%) although barely noticing the power station, and expressing few concerns about it, are highly critical of those in authority and unsympathetic to critics of nuclear power who they see as exaggerating the issue.

Commenting on the results, Professor Pidgeon added: “The findings suggest that failing to consult in a proper manner, or in a way that does not fully recognise and respond to local people’s concerns, would almost certainly undermine the local confidence and trust in local plant operators which has been painstakingly built up in all of the locations that we studied over a considerable period of time.

“Despite the apparent level of support for nuclear power that exists in these communities, our research also demonstrates that many remain ambivalent towards nuclear power, and strong mistrust of both the industry and Government is voiced by a further significant minority of residents. Accordingly, any such erosion of local



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confidence could have adverse consequences for relations between the nuclear industry and local communities, and for the nuclear new build programme as a whole. This clearly argues against complacency about the future.”

The research was funded primarily by the Social Contexts and Responses to Risk (SCARR) priority network of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC: [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)) co-ordinated by the University of Kent, with additional support for the survey stage from The Leverhulme Trust ([www.leverhulme.org.uk](http://www.leverhulme.org.uk)).

**Ends**

### Notes for editors

1. For further information or to arrange an interview with Professor Nick Pidgeon or the other Principal Investigators (Dr Karen Henwood or Mr Peter Simmons) please contact Victoria Dando at the Cardiff University press office: tel: 029 2087 9074, e-mail: [dandov2@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:dandov2@cardiff.ac.uk).
2. A full copy of the report will be available from 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008 at [www.kent.ac.uk/scarr](http://www.kent.ac.uk/scarr). The full title of the report is Pidgeon, N.F., Henwood, K.L., Parkhill, K.A., Venables, D. and Simmons, P. (2008) *Living with Nuclear Power in Britain: A Mixed Methods Study*. School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
3. Fieldwork comprised three phases: 61 in depth narrative interviews with residents living near Bradwell and Oldbury held between 2004 and 2007; a Q-sort interview held with 84 residents near Bradwell and Oldbury in 2007; and finally a major household survey held in July 2008 (n=1326) of residents living near to Oldbury (n=680) and Hinkley Point (n=646) nuclear power stations. For more details of the methodology used see the full research report.
4. The ESRC is the UK's largest funding agency for research relating to social and economic issues. It has a track record of providing high-quality, relevant research to business, the public sector and Government. The current budget of £203 million (2008/2009) funds over 4000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and policy research institutes throughout the UK.  
<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk>
5. The Leverhulme Trust, established at the wish of William Hesketh Lever, makes awards for the support of research and education. The Trust emphasises individuals and encompasses all subject areas. With annual funding of some £40 million, the Trust is amongst the largest all subject providers of research funding in the UK.