

case study

British Energy - New Nuclear Build

Following the government's decision in early 2008 to put nuclear power at the heart of the country's energy policy, British Energy urgently needed to start engaging the communities around its four favoured sites for nuclear new build. To nominate these sites for development, it needed to demonstrate that it had actively and meaningfully reached out to those communities to understand their concerns and to answer their questions.

British Energy was looking for a communications agency that had the skills and capacity to plan and deliver four separate intensive engagement programmes in Suffolk, Somerset, Essex and Kent over a seven month period from July 2008-January 2009. Following a recommendation from Royal Haskoning, who were conducting environmental impact assessments at each site, Athene was chosen to pilot an approach at Sizewell, Suffolk in July 2008 and then to roll out the programme to the other three sites.

Athene's Approach

Working with British Energy and Royal Haskoning, Athene began by developing detailed plans for the delivery of a series of public meetings at each site over a three week programme. The plans had to be broad enough to set out with clarity the general objectives of the engagement programmes, but also detailed enough to deal with issues from the size of the rooms required for each meeting to contingency plans in the event of a meeting being cancelled.

In planning for each engagement programme, Athene had to:

- develop detailed timetables of activity and budgets
- collate comprehensive stakeholder databases
- research up to seven venues at each location
- establish PO Box addresses, email boxes and 0800 numbers for responses
- co-ordinate attendance and speaker lists for each event
- co-ordinate the development and delivery of materials, including leaflets and exhibition boards for display at each event

All this over four sites, with three of the programmes running back to back from September to January, meaning that whilst one set of meetings was being delivered, the others were being planned.

Results

In total Athene delivered 24 meetings across the four sites with over 1,000 attendees, representing a broad cross section of the local communities to time and to budget. A snapshot report of each meeting was delivered to British Energy within 24 hours, summarising all feedback and listing all questions asked. Athene also produced a final report for each location, which summarised all publicity activity (showing how extensively British Energy had reached out to its communities, including lists, for example, of where every poster was put up), collated all questions and summarised the feedback from all events at that site.

All attendees at events were, subject to data protection constraints, added to the stakeholder database and received a newsletter, produced by Athene, summarising the results of the public engagement.

Feedback from the events was overwhelmingly positive with 90% of respondents (average across all four sites) rating the roadshows good or excellent. As a result of this extensive engagement, British Energy is now well set to nominate successfully all four sites for nuclear new build as part of the Strategic Siting programme in spring 2009.

Testimonial

"It is vital to us to be able to reach out to the communities around our nuclear sites and explain our new build plans. Athene has provided us with an excellent strategic framework within which to conduct this work and, through consistent attention to detail, have also shown that they can deliver well attended and well organised public meetings - as shown by the very positive feedback."

Julie Bennett
British Energy