

**REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE ASSET MANAGEMENT GROUP**

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**SUBJECT: UNDERGROUNDING OF POWER LINES AT BLACK TAR, LLANGWM**

**Purpose of Report**

To seek the endorsement of Members for the proposed undergrounding of an existing section of overhead power lines at Black Tar, Llangwm

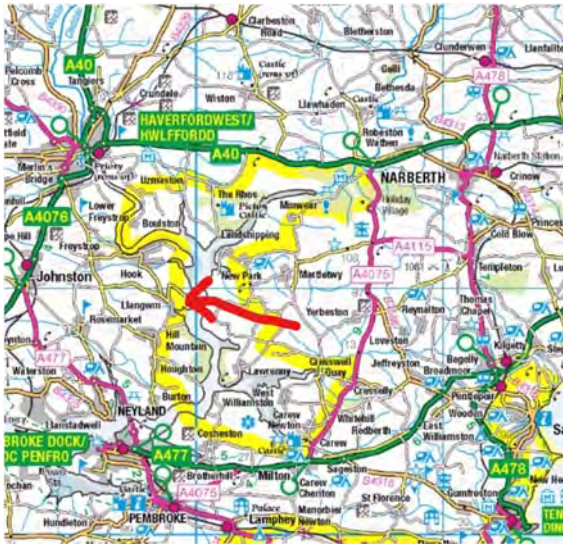
**Introduction**

Encouraged by the success of its power line undergrounding initiative during the period 2010/15, Western Power Distribution (WPD) has now extended the scheme into their current 8 year business plan commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 by allocating a further £1.3m to fund the undergrounding of those sections of their existing overhead electrical supply network which are considered the most damaging to the special qualities of four protected landscapes i.e. the Gower and Wye Valley AONBs and the Brecon Beacons and Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks. In reality this is an extremely small sum of money having regard to the high cost of such schemes and the extensive network of overhead apparatus and lines which already exist within these four qualifying areas. Identifying candidate schemes, assessing their individual merits and approving 'the best of the best' is undertaken by the Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel. This panel comprises officer representatives from each of the four candidate areas, Natural Resources Wales and Western Power Distribution.

The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority successfully delivered five landscape improvement schemes during the period 2010/15 at Strumble Head, West Angle, Martins Haven, St Nons and Caerfarchell respectively, while a further three schemes at Treginnis, Dinas Head and Porthgain have already been completed under the current 2015/23 funding initiative. Work on a fourth scheme at Newport Parrog is due to commence on site shortly, a fifth scheme at Great Castle Head has been endorsed by Members and is at an advanced planning stage. The sixth scheme which your Officers are recommending under the current funding initiative is at Black Tar, Llangwm.

**Background**

Black Tar (see red arrow below) is located within the National Park on the western shore of the Cleddau River. Its rural character, estuary location, close proximity to Llangwm village, public slipway and network of riverside and inland public footpaths make it a popular location for public access and recreation.



A heavily used section of that footpath network crosses a field of improved pasture land within a wider open landscape and passes directly underneath a high voltage Western Power Distribution spur line. When walking the path in either direction this spur line is silhouetted against an open sky and is clearly visible within the wider landscape.

With reference to the photos below a scheme has now been identified by your Officers, and endorsed by the Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel, to remove that section of the overhead cabling and poles shaded yellow on the aerial photo and replace it with an underground supply. Subject to obtaining the landowner's consent, it is anticipated that the actual work on site which WPD will need to undertake could be completed during the period 2021/22.

**Photo Schedule**

**Location & Direction of illustrative Photos**



**Existing section of overhead high voltage cabling to be removed and replaced by an underground supply**

**Public Footpath**

**Photo 1**



**Photo2**



**Photo3**



**Photo 4**



**Photo 5**



In summary, your Officers are of the opinion that the proposed scheme represents an outstanding opportunity to achieve permanent visual benefits within one of the National Park's most iconic locations via the use of 100% external funding. It also offers the potential to be the eleventh undergrounding scheme delivered under this WPD initiative within our National Park.

### **Financial, Risk & Compliance Considerations**

No issues

### **Human Rights/Equality Issues**

No issues

### **Biodiversity Implications/Sustainability Appraisal**

See comments below within the selection criteria

### **Welsh Language Statement**

No issues

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Members endorse the opinion of your Officers as summarised above and set out in the attached selection criteria paper, and authorise their ongoing**

**work towards securing the delivery of an undergrounding scheme at Black Tar as soon as reasonably practical.**

## **BLACK TAR UNDERGROUNDING SCHEME – SELECTION CRITERIA**

The identification and selection of this scheme by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority has been based on two overriding principles; deliverability and quality. So as to avoid emotional and parochial selections, an objective approach based on strict selection criteria has been adopted. The assessment has been made by Senior Officers of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Authority to reflect:

- i) Their close working knowledge of the entire geographic area within the National Park and the communities that live and work within it.
- ii) The location of all the existing overhead lines within the Park and the specific impact that those overhead lines have on the special qualities of the National Park.
- iii) The specific fields of expertise that Officers of the National Park have in assessing the merits of individual candidate schemes including Development Control, Recreation Management, Conservation, the historic built environment, community interest, visitor perception, ecology and landscape quality.

Following this approach Black Tar has been identified as a landscape of high quality with excellent public accessibility. It is accordingly advanced as the Authority's preferred 11<sup>th</sup> scheme for funding under the WPD initiative.

In selecting and promoting the Black Tar scheme, Officers have had particular regard to the following:

- a. The scheme offers the opportunity to remove a section of overhead electrical network from the landscape of the National Park.
- b. The Authority's Development Planning Officers have extensive case specific evidence that members of the public find the visual impact of overhead lines unacceptable. It has long been recognised that towers, poles and overhead lines associated with electricity supply are visually intrusive and detract from the rural and built environments through which they pass. To reflect this public concern all development plans prepared by the National Park Authority since 1999 have included policies to encourage the undergrounding of overhead lines where this proves to be the least damaging option and where it is technically feasible to do so. Similar aspirations are to be found in the National Park Authority's 14 Conservation Area Appraisals, which form supplementary planning guidance.
- c. The removal of the overhead network will be a direct and immediate visual benefit to landscape.
- d. Subject to obtaining the endorsement of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority that this is a suitable scheme and obtaining landowner's consent, Western Power Distribution would plan to complete the laying of the new underground network and removal of the existing overhead network sometime during the period 2021/22.