

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

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**SUBJECT:**  
**PROPOSED UNDERGROUNDING OF EXISTING OVERHEAD UTILITY SUPPLIES  
AT ST NON'S**

**INTRODUCTION**

As a result of extensive lobbying by this Authority and others, Western Power Distribution have allocated a total of £1m within their current 5 year business plan commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010 to underground those sections of their existing overhead electrical supply network which are considered the most damaging to the special qualities of four protected landscapes, namely the Gower AONB, The Wye Valley ANOB, Brecon Beacons NP and the Pembrokeshire Coast NP. 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.

The selection criteria has therefore been set at a very high level to achieve the best possible outcomes. 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, The Countryside Council for Wales and Western Power Distribution. To date the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park has successfully delivered schemes under this initiative at Strumble Head, West Angle and Martins Haven. The next scheme which your Officers are recommending is at St Non's.

**BACKGROUND:**

St Non's Chapel & Well is an historically important site situated immediately to the south of St David's within a sweeping coastal landscape and abutting the coastal footpath. This combination of factors attracts significant numbers of visitors on foot and by car along the single track road which connects St David's to St Non's. At the seaward end of the road there is also a terminal for the coastal shuttle bus.

Traversing this otherwise unspoilt iconic landscape and running parallel to the road are Western Power and BT overhead power lines which serve a single customer, the St Non's Retreat. The negative visual impact of these existing overhead utility supplies which run for a distance of approximately 0.5km have identified this section of overhead line as a candidate scheme as detailed in the attached selection criteria paper. The Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel have endorsed the selection of this scheme resulting in funds being provisionally allocated, whilst BT Openreach have also agreed to use the opportunity of Western Powers proposed undergrounding to fund the cost of undergrounding their own network by sharing the same trench. Obtaining any necessary statutory/ legal consents, as well as

undertaking the actual work on site would be undertaken by Western Power and BT Openreach and could be completed during the early part of 2012.

In summary, your Officers are of the opinion that the scheme represents an outstanding opportunity to achieve permanent landscape benefits in one of the Park's most iconic and publicly accessible locations via the mechanism of external funding. It also offers the potential to be the fourth undergrounding scheme delivered under this WPD initiative within our National Park.

## **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 St Non's as soon as reasonably possible.**

*(For further information, please contact Gary Meopham, [garym@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](mailto:garym@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk))*

## **St NON'S UNDERGROUNDING SCHEME – SELECTION CRITERIA**

The identification and selection of the St Non's candidate site 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 St Non's has been identified as a landscape of very high quality which attracts large visitor numbers due to its proximity to St David's, the coastal path and St Non's Chapel & Well. Furthermore, the opportunity to underground both the existing electricity and telephone lines in this location as part of a single scheme is considered an opportunity that is unlikely to be repeated. It is accordingly advanced as the Authority's preferred fourth scheme for funding under the WPD

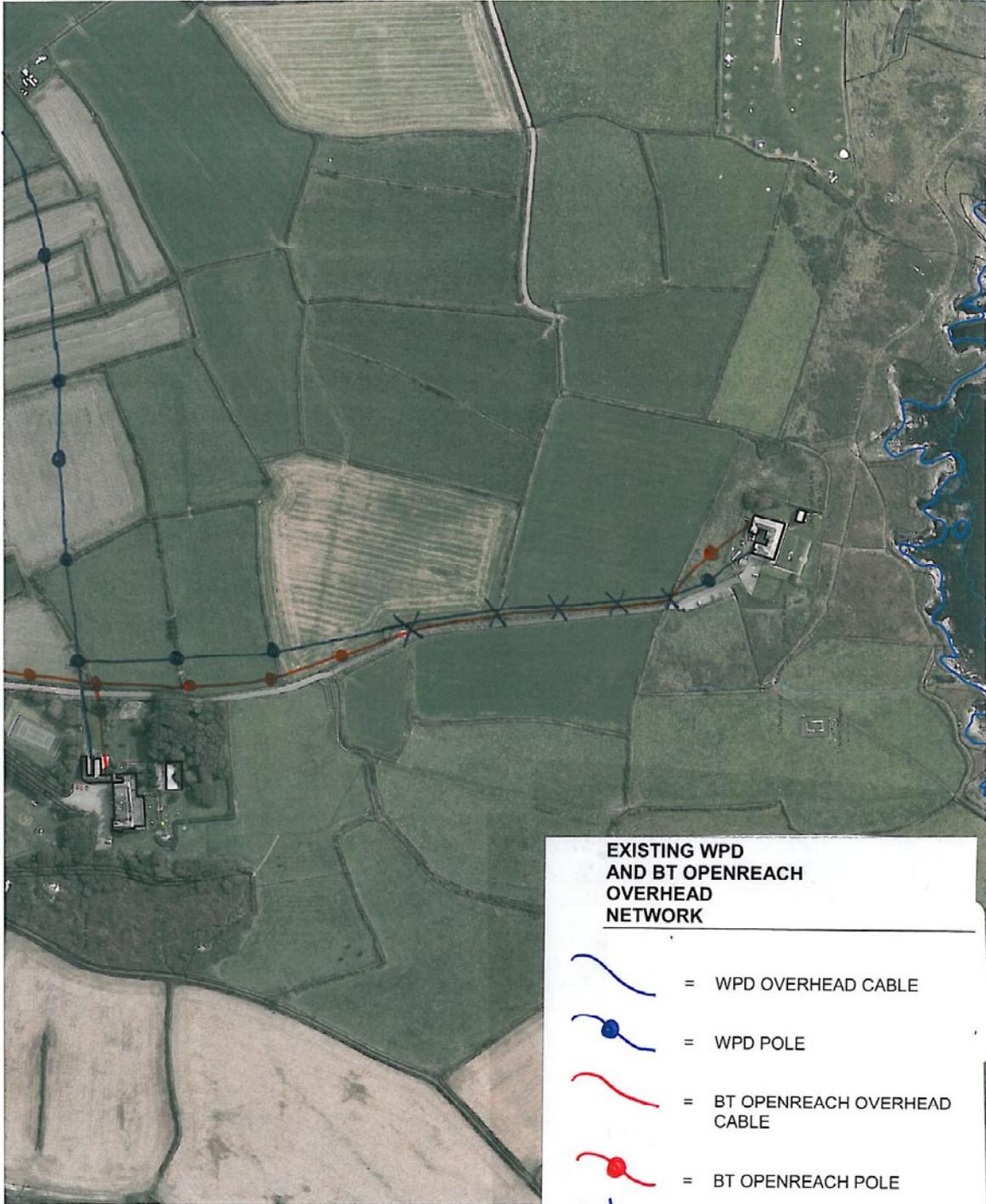
initiative following successful schemes which have already been completed at Strumble Head, West Angle and Martins Haven.

In selecting and promoting the St Non's Scheme, Officers have had particular regard to the following.

- a. The Authority's Development Planning Officers have extensive case specific evidence that members of the public find the landscape impacts of overhead lines unacceptable. It has long been recognised that towers, poles and overhead lines associated with electricity supply are intrusive in the landscape and detract from both its natural beauty and enjoyment of it. 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 policies are to be found in the National Park Authority's 14 Conservation Area Appraisals, which form supplementary planning guidance.
- b. As part of the preparation for the recently adopted Local Development Plan, Landscape Architects acting in the capacity of external consultants were appointed to undertake a character assessment of the National Park to independently identify those areas of particular quality within the Park. Their report identified that the coastal views around the St David's Headland are considered to be of both National and International importance.
- c. The proposed undergrounding route lies within the St David's & Ramsey Island Registered landscape of Historical Importance.
- d. The National Parks Archaeologist has advised that whilst the route of the proposed excavation does not encroach over any Scheduled sites, the known history of the immediate area suggests a realistic prospect of encountering archaeology when excavating the trench. It is therefore recommended that Western Power Distribution maintain an archaeological watching brief along the entire length of the trench during its excavation and prior to its back filling, and that they adapt their working methodology in accordance with any recommendations made to them during the period of that watching brief.
- e. The Authority's Recreation Management Officers are very aware that the proximity of St Non's to the city of St David's, its iconic coastal setting and status as the reputed birth place of the Welsh patron saint combine to make St Non's a significant honey-pot for general public recreation, cultural visitors and religious pilgrims alike.

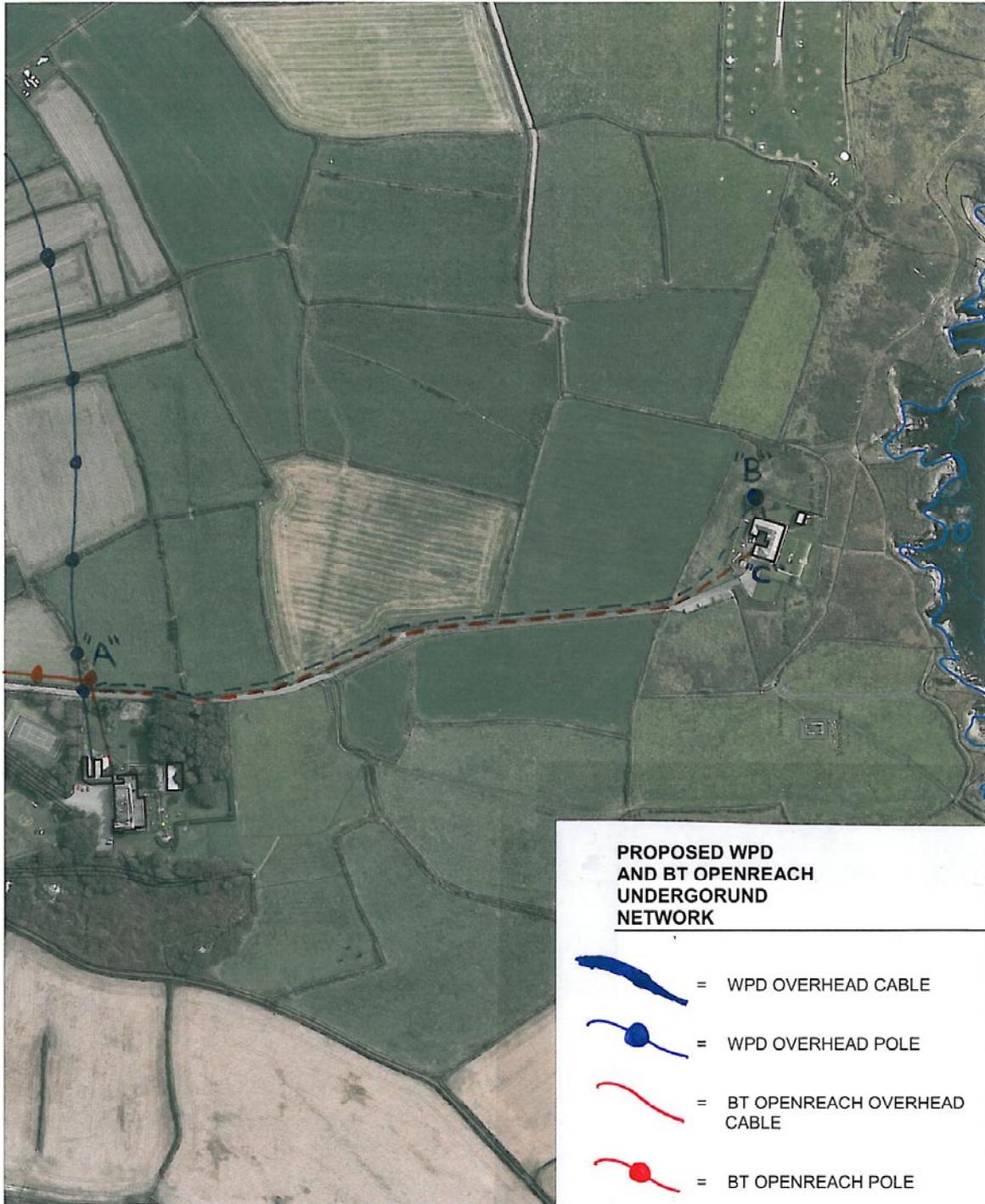
- f. The National Park Authority's Ecologist has advised that the proposed route of the underground cables raises no bio-diversity concerns on the proviso that best practise is followed to avoid disturbing any nesting birds and minimising any adverse impact on hibernating reptiles.
- g. The local CCW Field Officer has advised that the proposed route of the scheme will not encroach into any protected habitats. That Officer is also fully aware of the works required in relation to the scheme and is supportive.
- h. With the exception of a single pole mounted transformer (marked 'B' on the attached aerial photo) which must be erected for technical reasons, the scheme offers the opportunity to remove the entire existing overhead utility network to the seaward side of the Warpole Court Hotel out to the St Non's Retreat. The length of the required undergrounding scheme will extend over a distance of approximately 500m between points 'A' to 'C' as shown on the attached aerial photo. The resulting landscape benefits are illustrated on the attached 'Before' & 'After' photos.
- i. The Authority's Estates Officer has successfully promoted the scheme to the owners of the St Non's Retreat across whose land the existing overhead network runs. As result the owners of St Non's are in the process of documenting the necessary legal agreements with the utility companies for the laying of the new underground cables across their land.
- j. Subject to obtaining the endorsement of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority that this is a suitable scheme, Western Power Distribution & BT Openreach would plan to complete the laying of the new underground network and removal of the existing overhead network during the early part of 2012.

Gary Meopham



**EXISTING WPD  
AND BT OPENREACH  
OVERHEAD  
NETWORK**

-  = WPD OVERHEAD CABLE
-  = WPD POLE
-  = BT OPENREACH OVERHEAD CABLE
-  = BT OPENREACH POLE
-  = SHARED WPD AND BT OPENREACH POLE



**PROPOSED WPD  
AND BT OPENREACH  
UNDERGROUND  
NETWORK**

-  = WPD OVERHEAD CABLE
-  = WPD OVERHEAD POLE
-  = BT OPENREACH OVERHEAD CABLE
-  = BT OPENREACH POLE
-  = ROUTE OF WPD & BT OPENREACH UNDERGROUND NETWORK



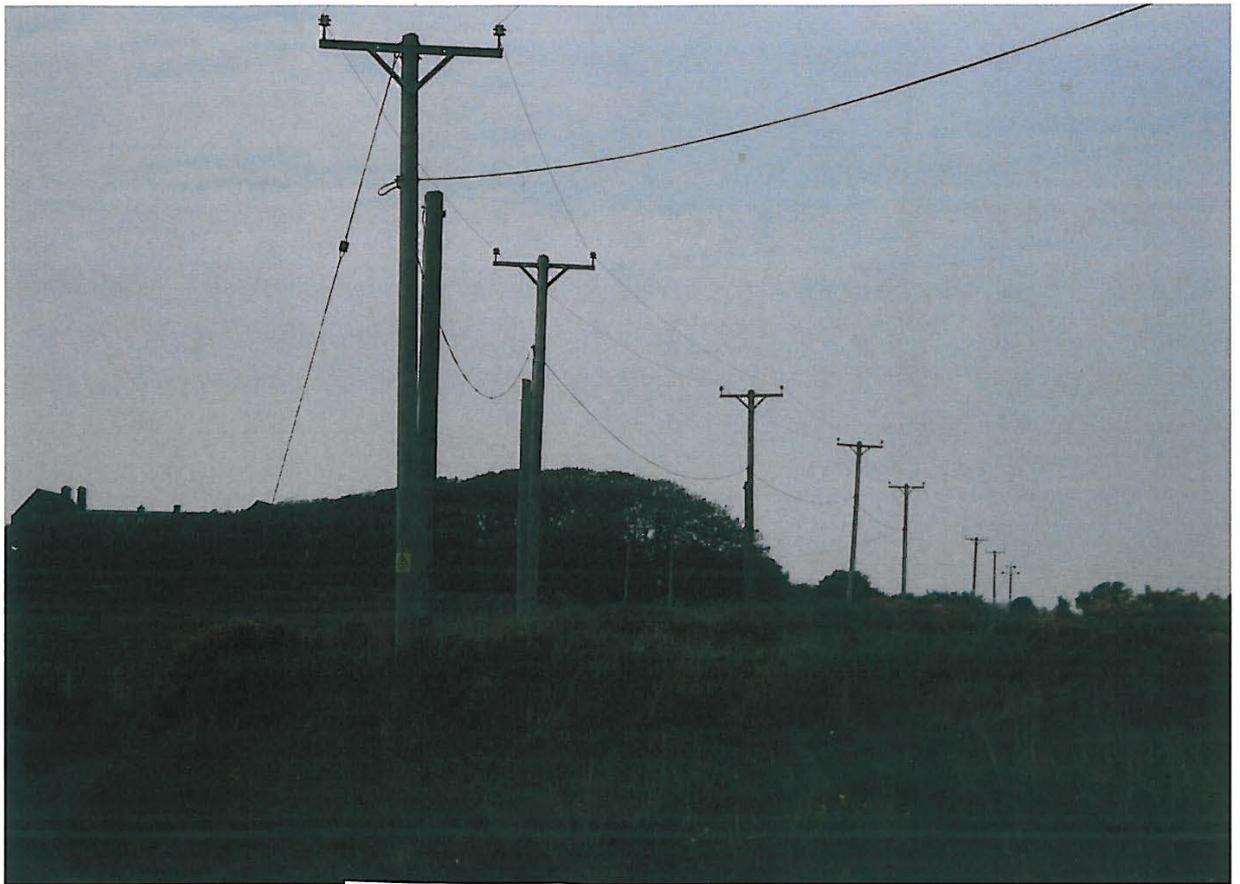
BERFORE AND AFTER AT ST NON'S RETREAT





BEFORE AND AFTER LOOKING SOUTH





BEFORE AND AFTER LOOKING NORTH

