

REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE ASSET MANAGEMENT GROUP

**SUBJECT: PROPOSED UNDERGROUNDING OF EXISTING OVERHEAD
UTILITY SUPPLIES AT MARTINS HAVEN**

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 1st 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.

BACKGROUND:

Martins Haven is the gateway to the iconic landscape of the Deer Park and the offshore islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm. The negative visual impact of the existing overhead utility supplies leading from West Hook farm to Martins Haven over a distance of approximately 575m 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 approved the selection of this scheme resulting in funds being provisionally allocated and the necessary work time tabled for completion during the latter part of this year subject to obtaining the endorsement of Members of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. 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 second such undergrounding scheme delivered under this WPD initiative in any of the four designated areas. The first was the recently completed and much publicised scheme at Strumble Head.

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 Martins Haven as soon as reasonably possible.

MARTINS HAVEN UNDERGROUNDING SCHEME – SELECTION CRITERIA

The identification and selection of the Martins Haven 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 Martins Haven has been identified as a landscape of very high quality which attracts large visitor numbers due to its role as the embarkation point for the offshore islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm and the magnificent coastal scenery of the Deer Park. It is accordingly advanced as the Authority's preferred second scheme for funding under the WPD initiative.

In selecting and promoting the Martins Haven 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 the coastal views within the Marloes Peninsula of being of particular importance to the visual landscape value of the area.
- (c) Martins Haven is the gateway to Skomer Island which is a registered landscape of Historic Interest in Wales, one of only eight in the National Park.

- (d) The National Park's Archaeologist has advised that while the route of the proposed excavation does not encroach over any Scheduled sites, the proximity of two Scheduled sites within the Deer Park raises the realistic prospect of encountering archaeology when excavating that section of trench coloured pink on the attached aerial photo. It is therefore recommended that Western Power Distribution maintain an archaeological watching brief along the relevant section of trench during its excavation and prior to its back filling.
- (e) Despite the remote location of Martins Haven, the Authority's Recreation Management Officers are very aware that it is a significant honey-pot for those who use it as the embarkation point for the off shore island nature reserves, as well as those seeking to enjoy the iconic landscape of Martins Haven itself and the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path (a National Trail) which passes through the area.
- (f) The National Park Authority's Ecologist has advised that the proposed route of the underground cables raises no biodiversity concerns and that the removal of the existing overhead network would be entirely appropriate having regard to the rich and diverse ecology of the area. This includes porpoises and seals which inhabit the waters of Jack Sound, the valuable coastal grass and heathland habitat of the Deer Park which supports populations of Chough and the combined wonders of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm which between them provided one of the finest seabird viewing opportunities in the UK.
- (g) The local CCW Field Officer with specific responsibilities for the SSSI designated headland at Martins Haven has been consulted and is 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 'C' on the attached aerial photo) which must remain in situ for technical reasons, the scheme offers the opportunity to remove the entire existing overhead utility network to the seaward side of West Hook Farm. The length of the required undergrounding scheme will extend over a distance of approximately 575m between points 'A', 'B' & 'C' as shown on the attached aerial photo.
- (i) The Authority's Estates Officer has successfully promoted the scheme to the National Trust across whose land the existing overhead network runs. As a result the National Trust have now reached provisional agreement with Western Power for the laying of the required underground lines on their property.
- (j) Subject to obtaining the endorsement of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority that this is a suitable scheme, Western Power Distribution would plan to complete the laying of the new underground network and removal of the existing overhead network later this year.

Gary Meopham
26 May 2011

MARTINS HOVEN UNDERGROUNDING OPPORTUNITY



-  = EXISTING O/H NETWORK OF ELECTRICITY POLES + CABLES
-  = PROPOSED ROUTE OF REPLACEMENT UNDERGROUND ELECTRICITY CABLES
-  = ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF RECOMMENDED