

REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE PROPERTY & PROJECTS GROUP

SUBJECT: TREGINNIS FARM, ST DAVIDS: PROPOSED UNDERGROUNDING OF EXISTING OVERHEAD POWER LINES

Purpose of Report

To seek the endorsement of Members for the proposed undergrounding of existing overhead power lines at Treginnis Farm, St Davids.

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 1st 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 ANOB's 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 successfully delivered five landscape improvement schemes during the period 2010/15 at Stumble Head, West Angle, Martins Haven, St Nons & Caerfarchell respectively. The next scheme which your Officers are recommending under the new funding initiative is at Treginnis Farm, St Davids.

Background

Treginnis Farm is located within a sweeping coastal landscape on the St Davids Peninsula approximately 2 miles southwest of St Davids. The farm buildings and farm yard comprise one of the most extensive farm groups on the St Davids peninsula, with a history dating back to 1284. The houses and extensive buildings of both Upper and Lower Treginnis are listed and prominently visible in the expansive landscape. Collectively the buildings are a 'model' Victorian farm group with two yards.

A very well used network of definitive and permissive public footpaths provides access across the farm yard into the open countryside beyond as well as linking into the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail. Treginnis Farm is owned by the National Trust and leased to the 'Farm for City Children' Charity who operate it as residential educational facility for groups of visiting urban children. The farm is also very well supported within the wider local community as evidenced by its hugely popular annual summer open day.

The farm buildings, along with a single cottage on the coastline are served by an overhead WPD spur line. The negative visual impact of this existing utility network has been identified as having a significant detrimental impact on the immediate site and setting of the listed farm buildings and the landscape which they cross. In addition, part of that network is also visible to walkers on the coast path itself within an otherwise pristine seascape.

A scheme has now been identified by your Officers, and endorsement by the Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel, to remove those lines from the immediate coastal landscape and listed farm yard by undergrounding them from the coastal cottage back to the landward side of the farm buildings, a distance of approximately 400m. The relevant property owners have also given their in principle support. Subject to obtaining any necessary statutory/ legal consents, the actual work on site would be undertaken by WPD and could be completed during 2015/16.

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 Parks most iconic locations via the use of 100% external funding. It also offers the potential to be the sixth 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

No significant issues

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 Treginnis Farm as soon as reasonably possible.

(For further information, please contact Gary Meopham, extension 4858 or at garym@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk)

TREGINNIS FARM UNDERGROUNDING SCHEME – SELECTION CRITERIA

The identification and selection of the Treginnis Farm 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 the Treginnis Farm and its immediate surroundings have been identified as a built environment and land/ coastal seascape of very high quality with excellent public accessibility. It is accordingly advanced as the Authority's preferred sixth scheme for funding under the WPD initiative. In selecting and promoting the Treginnis Farm Scheme, Officers have had particular regard to the following.

- a. The scheme offers the opportunity to remove an entire overhead electrical network over a distance of some 400m 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 route of the proposed excavation does not encroach over any Scheduled sites. However, the known history of the immediate area does suggest a realistic prospect of encountering archaeology when excavating the trench. It is therefore recommended that Western Power Distribution be asked to supply this Authority with a copy of any desk top assessment or advice received from their retained Archaeological consultants in advance of the work commencing and that they adapt their working methodology in accordance with any recommendations made to them during the period of any watching brief that might be required.
- d. The National Park Authority's Ecologist has advised that the proposed route of the underground cables raises no major bio-diversity concerns on the proviso that WPD appoint an appropriately qualified surveyor to establish whether any badgers are present. WPD should also be asked to adopt best practise whilst working on site to avoid disturbing any nesting birds and minimising any adverse impact on hibernating reptiles and restoration of any disturbed linear features such as hedge rows.
- e. The proposed route of the scheme will not encroach into any protected habitats.

- f. The removal of the overhead network will be a direct and immediate benefit to the site and setting of the listed farm buildings
- g. The removal of the overhead network will be a direct and immediate visual benefit to the coastal landscape
- h. In addition to securing the support of the Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel, the Authority's Estates Officer has also successfully promoted the scheme to all of the private and public property owners across whose land the existing overhead network runs.
- i. 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 sometime during 2015/16.