

**REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE PROPERTY & PROJECTS GROUP**

---

**SUBJECT: DINAS HEAD: 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 within the Valley between Cwm- yr- Eglwys and Pwllgwaelod, Dinas Head.

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 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 Dinas Head.

Background

The Dinas Head Valley is a narrow low lying marshy strip of woodland with the coastal village of Cwm-yr-Eglwys and the coastal hamlet of Pwllgwaelod at its eastern and western ends respectively. A very popular all weather surfaced definitive public footpath runs along the valley bottom and links these two settlements. Its particular qualities and characteristics mean that this path is actively promoted as one of only 17 'Easy Access Walks' within the National Park.

Running above this path in an east/west direction along almost its entire length is 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 valley landscape and the experience of people using this 'Easy Access' walking route.

A scheme has now been identified by your Officers, and endorsed by the Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel, to removing the east/west lines from above the path by undergrounding them along a distance of approximately 800m. Discussions with the relevant property owners are progressing well and subject to obtaining any necessary statutory/ legal consent, 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 seventh 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 Dinas Head as soon as reasonably possible.**

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

## **DINAS HEAD UNDERGROUNDING SCHEME – SELECTION CRITERIA**

The identification and selection of the Dinas Head 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 Dinas Head Valley has been identified as a natural landscape of very high quality with excellent public accessibility. It is accordingly advanced as a preferred scheme for funding under the WPD initiative following successful schemes which have already been completed at Strumble Head, West Angle, Martins Haven, St Nons & Caerfarchel.

In selecting and promoting the Dinas Head Scheme, Officers have had particular regard to the following.

- a. The scheme offers the opportunity to remove an overhead electrical network over a distance of some 800m 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. The known history of the immediate area does not suggest a realistic prospect of encountering archaeology when excavating the trench. However, it is still recommended that Western Power Distribution seek the advice of their own 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 route of the proposed excavation will encroach over the Cwm Dewi Site of Special Scientific Interest which is designated for Geological Interest. Your officers have made informal enquires to NRW who have advised that providing the line of the undergrounding remains in the area immediately adjacent to the public footpath it is unlikely to damage the special features of the site. It is therefore recommended that WPD should make their own direct enquires to Natural Resources Wales in advance of any work commencing on site.
- e. The National Park Authority's Ecologist has undertaken a desk top analysis and has advised that the proposed route of the underground cables raises no major bio-diversity concerns conditional upon WPD undertaking a badger survey of the proposed route and adopting 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.
- f. The proposed route of the scheme will not encroach into any protected habitats.
- g. The removal of the overhead network will be a direct and immediate benefit to the site and setting of the 'Easy Access' walking route
- h. The removal of the overhead network will be a direct and immediate visual benefit to the Valley landscape
- i. In addition to securing the support of the Western Power Undergrounding Initiatives Panel, the Authority's Estates Officer is conducting positive discussions with all of the private and public property owners across whose land the existing overhead network runs.
- 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 sometime during 2015/16.