

Dumgal against Pylons

Notes from meeting with Power without Pylons

2 December 2015

Rheged

Attendees

DumGal Against Pylons (DGAP)

Alan Jones - Chair

William Crawford – Vice Chair

Penny Coles - Secretary

Power without Pylons

Graham Pitts - Chair

Graham Barron

We were delighted to meet up with representatives of Power without Pylons, a group opposing a new 400kV overhead line (OHL) proposal as part of the North West Coast Connections project. The two new sections of OHL are planned to connect the proposed nuclear power station at Moorside which is rated at 3.6GW and will be built by NuGeneration Ltd. One line will run north along the coast to Harker and one south along the coast to Heysham, passing through a section of National Park. The southern section will involve a tunnel under Morecombe Bay to connect Barrow-in-Furness with Heysham. This alone is estimated to cost £500m, but is necessary as the shifting sands and protected nature of Morecombe Bay make a sub-sea cable impossible. It was interesting to learn that Heysham has little room for a new connector point and so DGAP's alternative plan may need adapting.

The transmission line in Cumbria is being proposed by National Grid and the first consultation was for stakeholders and consultees only. These discussions have been on-going for 5-years but have not included the public. The proposal consisted of three options and the preferred corridor is the one following the existing 132kV OHL. The second consultation has been public to 110,000 households within a 1km corridor of the proposed route. A series of 40 open days help throughout Cumbria gave residents further details which met with a response from 1800 individuals and groups. [Note: in Dumfries & Galloway SPEN maintain they sent the leaflet, Powering your Future, to 17,000 households and they received 1,600 items of feedback]. Many along the route do not realise how much taller the new pylons will be and with thicker, heavier and more visible cables. Power without Pylons is presently waiting for the feedback on this consultation exercise.

They have a good membership of individuals and the support of some Parish Councils in sections. The OHL crosses many District, Town and County Councils making a common objection difficult. They have had a number of successful public meetings and recommended this to us as a valuable exercise with very detailed minutes and quotes from National Grid officials. Apparently, National Grid do not like public meetings as they lose control of the proceedings. They are also fearful for their safety, requesting a safe-room!

Power without Pylons have developed good press relationships and a following on Facebook and Twitter. Publicity has included a pylon photo competition. Liaising with the Friends of the Lake District has enabled them to become part of the stakeholder liaison group and the

consultations are run as a series of workshops. Graham highlighted the difficulty of these as personnel from other consultee organisations vary from meeting to meeting, thus making continuity difficult.

Power without Pylons are contributing to the statement of Common Ground that will be accepted as part of the planning application and need little expansion or exploring in the Environmental Statement for the application to the English Planning Directorate. The application will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in 2017 with a decision by the Secretary of State in 2018 and an expectation of the whole project being complete in 2024. The Needs Case is not a term, or a recognisable output, that is being used by National Grid in relation to this project.

Unlike us, Power without Pylons is not suggesting an alternative but putting pressure on National Grid to find better solutions. Their repeated mantra is “get it out of sight”. They do not mind how – sub sea, under grounding or tunnels. All National Grid seem to be offering is mitigation by tree planting, even when inappropriate to the landscape. Sub-sea does offer the opportunity to create a maritime reserve after the cable is trenched with a no dredging zone in place.

They agreed that the added cost to consumers of £500m would add about 50p to the price of the UK utility bill.

A useful and supportive meeting and we appreciate the new ideas from seasoned campaigners.

Possible action points for DGAP:

Alter land fall of our proposed sub-sea cable to either Seaton [where there is to be a Grid Supply Point and is also much closer to Auchencrosh], Blackpool or Deeside.

Possibly run photo competition of pylon blighted areas.

Join with Power without Pylons in making connections with other groups around the country such as Anglesey, Norfolk, and Hinckley. Setting up a closed Facebook/Twitter page and/or the use of Skype to facilitate communication was suggested by Graham.

Raise issue of increased security of sub-sea cables over pylons from terrorist attacks.

Organise one or more public meeting/s where concerned residents can ask questions of SPEN. Perhaps best at the start of the second consultation period.