



Notes from a meeting with Aileen McLeod MSP 8 January 2016

Present:

Aileen McLeod MSP (AMcL)

Rob Davidson (RD)

DGAP

Alan Jones (AJ)

John Thomson (JT)

Penny Coles (PC)

Purpose

The meeting was arranged to brief AMcL on DumGal Against Pylons (DGAP) campaign group and their opposition to SPENs plans, as well as to seek advice and support.

Discussion

DGAP is an unincorporated body formed to provide a focus for region-wide protest against SPENs plans for an overhead 400kV transmission network through Dumfries & Galloway where none has existed before. While DGAP recognise the need to upgrade the present transmission system the proposed solution needs to be sympathetic to the special needs and nature of the area.

Fifty Community Councils have so far signed up to DGAPs joint objection to SPENs plans on the basis that the current proposal will blight the area, negatively impact the economy and jobs, and affect the unique natural, cultural and historic heritage as well as the health and well-being of its residents. DGAP has proposed an alternative which will mitigate many of these negative impacts.

A number of influential bodies, such as the National Trust for Scotland, the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, and the John Muir Trust have also objected to SPENs proposals.

AJ gave an overview of the existing transmission network and an estimate of the need for increased transmission in the future. However, the removal of public subsidy for on-shore wind farms since SPEN published their preferred option is changing the pattern of renewables development in the region. The most suitable sites have already been utilised and this will mean a shift in the type of renewable energy being pursued by developers. The second part of Scotland's renewable electricity target is therefore more likely to include, off shore wind, tidal, wave and biomass. PC added that it is likely that only the larger sites with higher and more consistent wind speed will be suitable for development and these tend to be in the west of the region.

SPEN initially identified a range of network options, including sub-sea, but dismissed them as more expensive. DGAP believes that a potentially more expensive but nevertheless affordable option would safeguard the economy of D&G. DGAPs option of a sub-sea cable, either running

direct to England or connecting into the Western HVDC link, would allow renewable energy from the west of the region to be directly exported while the network east of Newton Stewart could be facilitated by an upgraded 132kV overhead line with less visual and environmental intrusion. Connecting directly into the Western HVDC link could be considerably cheaper, and is likely to be cost neutral against SPENs proposal. DGAP believe that there is likely to be spare capacity on this 2200MW link to accommodate the projected electricity generated in the west of the region.

DGAP also wish to avoid Dumfries & Galloway becoming another Beaulieu-Denny. Here, although the transmission network was designed and built to carry 2300MW from the north to the south of Scotland, National Grid calculate the maximum winter peak for transmission in 2015/16 on this line is only expected to be 550MW, which is well below what was expected and only occurs for 1-hour on a single day each year. Consequently the blight to the region is much greater than it needed to have been.

The problem comes down to developers of renewable energy projects being able to apply for a connection agreement which transmission operators have to grant. This leads to unrealistic amounts of generation needing to be accommodated and planned for even though in practice many may not proceed for a variety of reasons. The difficulty is exacerbated because data bases of wind farms in D&G all vary and PC said it will be interesting to see SPENs Technical and Economic Needs Case as soon as possible to check the accuracy of the predicted growth.

The discussion then turned to the need for a data driven approach to support the argument for alternatives to SPENs proposal. The question of commissioning independent research on the benefits and dis-benefits to the region, including tourism, was discussed. This is a proposal DGAP intend to pursue and which they are seeking funding for. Stakeholders will be needed to ensure the research findings (most likely undertaken by the Crichton Institute) have credibility and are acceptable to the whole community, including SPEN. There was discussion on whether this should be funded by SPEN given a) it is their proposal that is driving matters, and b) they have been allowed to spend over £10m by Ofgem to develop their proposal.

AMcL suggested that supportive letters from various stakeholder groups may help persuade SPEN to finance the research. She said that lessons had to be learnt from the experience of the Beaulieu - Denny line and from the developments of undergrounding in Denmark and other parts of Europe. She said that it would be best to have any development being a consensual exercise and all having confidence in the process and the outcomes. A brainstorm session by AMcL and RD identified a potential list of stakeholder groups to talk to about their support for such research.

PC agreed to make contact with a number of these organisation

All parties agreed that the future of the region is at stake if this project goes ahead as planned and that the focus should be on protecting (and growing) the tourism sector which is vital to the economic well-being of D&G. To this end AJ introduced his research findings which show that D&G is the only local authority in the UK that is carbon neutral. This is due to a combination of the low industrial base for CO₂ emissions and sequestration; D&G has one of the largest wooded land areas. This information should be shared and celebrated, and used as a major attraction for inward investment of capital and people as well as eco-tourism. AJ said he would be putting this information into the public domain via an article for the Chamber of Commerce.

The discussion then turned to the fact that SPEN are only one small part of the equation and AJ introduced a diagram showing the roles, responsibilities and relationships of the Scottish Government, Ofgem, National Grid, D&G Council and SPEN. AJ explained DGAP were hopeful that Joan McAlpine would be arranging a meeting with Ofgem but that what was required – to cut through the complex relationships - was a meeting between the Scottish Government, Ofgem and SPEN. **AMcL agreed to explore whether such a meeting might be possible.**

The meeting closed and AJ, PC and JT thanked AMcL and RD most kindly for their time and attention.

Post Meeting Notes

1 Meeting with the Wigtown Chamber arranged for 20 January.

2 To date there have been five Stakeholder Liaison Meetings with a sixth planned for early February 2016. However, the only bodies represented at these meetings are statutory consultees. The wider stakeholder groups are excluded at this point and while it might be argued that wider engagement will occur at a later stage we believe this will be too late. By then the decision on the means of implementing the project as well as the specific route will have been taken. DGAP would like to enquire whether AMcL can use her influence to accelerate an expansion of the membership of the Stakeholder Liaison Group to include, amongst other, DGAP, ahead of the 2nd Consultation which is scheduled for Q2 2016?