



Notes of a meeting with SP Energy Networks, Friday 22 July 2016

Present

SP Energy Networks

Cathie Hill (Transmission Development Manager, SP Energy Networks)

Frank Mitchell (CEO, SP Energy Networks)

Pearse Murray (Director, SP Transmission)

Dumgal Against Pylons

Penny Coles

Alan Jones

William Morgan

John Thomson

Introduction

SP Energy Networks introduced their company and their role in meeting statutory obligations by planning 15-20 years ahead to maintain and develop the network in their area.

Dumgal Against Pylons introduced themselves and their aim; to seek a more sympathetic solution that minimises blight to the region - a goal shared by 59 Community Councils. Dumgal Against Pylons said they were pleased with the recent announcement to reduce the scope of the project following changes in UK energy policy. SP Energy Networks has listened to the concerns of residents in the consultation process by expanding the Tongland to Glenlee corridor in the west. Dumgal Against Pylons said this message would be relayed to Ofgem during a meeting in August.

The remainder of the meeting explored some of the detail and thinking behind SP Energy Networks reduced scheme of the Kendoon to Tongland Reinforcement.

Background to the Reduced Scheme

SP Energy Networks said they do not expect to be re-visiting the Dumfries & Galloway Reinforcement Project, particularly between Dumfries and Harker. The current proposal has been tested against National Grid's future energy scenarios and it also meets the need for security of supply to all parts of the region. SP Energy Networks plans, developed in conjunction with National Grid, are based on other infrastructure developments, such as the Eastern HVDC Link, going ahead. Additionally, the connection capacity to the Moyle Interconnector, under the Reduced Scheme, does not give Northern Ireland equal access to the GB market as the GB market has to theirs, but SP Energy Networks has taken legal advice that says they only need to increase capacity if it is economic to do so.

Dumgal Against Pylons suggested that the network diagrams published by SP Energy Networks fail to illustrate the existing and planned network development in the area around Kendoon, the absence of which may cause confusion in the minds of some people. Dumgal Against Pylons asked if future maps could include this detail and SP Energy Networks agreed to look at the best way to do this.

SP Energy Networks plan is also dependent on electricity generator's connection agreements changing in future so as to provide restricted access that may be constrained off by National Grid on a commercial basis. Ofgem's approval will be required.

The Kendoon to Tongland Reinforcement (KTR)

SP Energy Networks outlined the KTR scheme. This will involve a new double-circuit 132kV overhead line, capable of accommodating 500MW of generation, supported on pylons up to 30m tall, from Tongland to Glenlee, and the replacement of the single circuit overhead lines from Carsfad to Kendoon and Earlstoun to Glenlee. Once the new line is commissioned the existing line between Kendoon and Tongland as well as the line between Tongland and Dumfries will be removed. In the light of public consultation SP Energy Networks preferred corridor has been expanded further to the west so that some of the southerly corridor can be routed through the Laurieston Forest. Development at Glenlee substation means that it will be expanded by approximately one third of the current size. The existing 132kV line will require on-going remedial work, especially to the insulators, to keep it functioning until the new line is operational in 2023.

Dumgal Against Pylons raised concerns for the impact on the Glengap area and the potential for a wirescape around Glenlee substation. SP Energy Networks explained that the next stage of the process is for a series of possible overhead line routes, with one route being identified as their preferred route, to be produced for public consultation later this year. After receiving feedback from the public, statutory consultees and other interested groups SP Energy Networks will review and possibly revise their preferred route. The final route will be published in 2017 which will be taken forward into a formal planning application to the Energy Consents Unit of the Scottish Government.

SP Energy Networks explained the difficulty of following the existing route as a separation distance, usually in the order of 50-100m or possibly more, depending on the terrain, is needed to meet their safe working practice. In addition, the existing route crosses a Special Protection Area which must now be avoided under the Holford Rules when determining a route of a transmission line.

When questioned, SP Energy Networks said they are not against undergrounding sensitive sections if they can demonstrate that the extra cost is in the best interests of electricity consumers as it increases the cost of the project. SP Energy Networks described a range of issues, including recent changes to government, that may reduce the willingness to add more to consumer bills, so undergrounding should not be relied on for mitigation. On the other hand, SP Energy Networks outlined alternative possible mitigating measures that have been used elsewhere, such as creating paths or cycle routes. Dumgal Against Pylons highlighted the steady but growing support for a Galloway National Park and they would not like to see such a possibility being compromised. They added that, in their view, it would make sense to be

prepared to underground small sections at this stage now rather than to have to revisit them in future, should a National Park go ahead. This point will also be made to Ofgem in August. SP Energy Networks reminded Dumgal Against Pylons that National Park status is not a barrier to overhead transmission lines.

SP Energy Networks confirmed that a Community Liaison Group will be established. Dumgal Against Pylons advised that as their role continues to be one of assisting Community Councils in securing the most sensitive solution they would appreciate being included in this group (together with the Mossdale Group).

Dumgal Against Pylons said they were planning to organise a meeting of the Community Councils affected by the Reduced Scheme project together with Findlay Carson MSP. SP Energy Networks offered to attend such a meeting.

Possible changes to the transmission network in the future

The proposal for pumped storage at Glenmuckloch, together with other recently consented renewable generation in the north of the region, may lead to the need for additional transmission infrastructure. Dumgal Against Pylons asked SP Energy Networks for their thoughts on how this infrastructure may evolve. SP Energy Networks said they were unable to comment at this stage but will check the commercial position and respond.

SP Energy Networks said that in the event of more off-shore wind power developments off the coast of Dumfries & Galloway that National Grid will decide on the most appropriate grid connection point, which will likely involve bringing any line ashore in England.

Other Points

Dumgal Against Pylons highlighted a problem caused by the Scottish Government, where no consultation on the DGSR transmission line project was undertaken during the public consultation for National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3). The DGSR project was consequently added after the consultation process closed which meant that any early opportunity for the region to be aware of the project was missed. Furthermore, any transmission line of 132kV and above is automatically considered a National Development.

Dumgal Against Pylons welcomed the publication of SP Energy Networks 'Executive Summary of the Conclusions Report,' reviewing the need for the DGSR project but asked if a copy of the full report submitted to Ofgem could be made available to them.

Dumgal Against Pylons also asked for details of the nearly 30 schemes noted (page 83) in the recently published Network Options Analysis report.

There was also discussion as to when an infrastructure project should be made public. Dumgal Against Pylons suggested that too late, particularly when there is already a preferred corridor, as in the case of the DGSR project, can give the impression of a *fait accompli*. On the other hand, SP Energy Networks replied that in their experience there needs to be a reasonably firm plan, such as a corridor, in order to provide some focus. SP Energy Networks said they are constantly trying to improve their communication process.

Dumgal Against Pylons pointed out that one of the problems with electrical transmission infrastructure projects, such as the DGSR project, is the lack of expertise available to the public and, perhaps more seriously, to the range of statutory consultees in order for them to fully comprehend and, if necessary, to challenge the technical detail of such a proposal. For their part, SP Energy Networks emphasised its place within the community on a long-term basis and that it wished to see both the public and stakeholders be as well informed as possible.

Dumgal Against Pylons said that as part of their forthcoming meeting with Ofgem they would be encouraging the Regulator to take a more holistic and long-term view (over the 45-year asset depreciation life) of the impact from infrastructure projects on the environment, including the social and economic assets of the region. SP Energy Networks said that it too was supportive of these aims and agreed that it was worth exploring ways to achieve this.

Concluding Remarks

Dumgal Against Pylons expressed their gratitude to SP Energy Networks for agreeing to meet and share their thoughts in an open and frank manner. Both parties agreed that the aim is to minimise the impact on residents and the landscape, and that by working together with communities the best solution for the region will be developed.