

## **Chair's Monthly Progress Update**

**Report on DGAP activity from July – September 2015 by Alan Jones,**

### **Aim**

DGAP's aim is to provide a region wide focus group to oppose the inappropriate use of overhead lines and pylons that negatively impacts the environment through factors such as, but not limited to, visual amenity, cultural and historic heritage, flora, fauna and wildlife. It also opposes the inappropriate siting of substations.

### **Introduction**

In future this monthly report will take the form of briefly commenting on activities undertaken during the preceding month together with an indication of what is intended for the following month. This first report covers the initial activity up to the point of becoming an unincorporated body governed by a constitution.

### **Communities**

Presentations were given to Dunscore, Auldgirth, Kirkton, Collin, Carrutherstown and Corsock and Kirkpatrick Durham Community Councils to inform concerned residents of the potential impacts of SPEN's proposal, the reasons for the project and alternative options and, above all, the need to submit objections. Several hundred people throughout the region attended these sessions including many from areas outwith those mentioned above.

A presentation was also made to the Lower Nithsdale Federation of Community Councils and from this meeting the need for a group CC objection to SPENs proposals emerged. DGAP was mandated by this group to present and gain commitment for such an objection. This initiative gained support from 38 CCs in the region by the 31 August 2015 and was submitted to SPEN. The figure today stands at 47 CCs with only one on the proposed corridor not yet having signed up. We are confident that once the new CC elections are held in November 2015 this last CC will come on board.

### **Elected Representatives**

Meetings have been held with Alex Fergusson, Elaine Murray and Joan MacAlpine to seek their support and without exception this has happened in one or other forms. Meetings have also taken place with David Mundell and Richard Arkless and again support in opposing the current proposals has been forthcoming.

### **Publicity**

Maureen Johnstone, chair of the Lower Nithsdale CC Federation funded a stand at the Galloway Fair and with support from a number of local residents managed to publicise our concern for SPEN's proposal to the extent that upwards of 200 people signed an objection.

Car stickers objecting to the plans have been distributed and several CCs and individuals have erected banners. Some have been taken down, temporarily, following a request from D&G planning department.

## **Web Site**

The early website has been re-structured by our Communications Manager, Mathew Aitken, to reflect the need to improve our communications capability going forwards. There is also a Facebook page publicising our activity.

## **Outcomes**

Following our meetings with elected representatives the Scottish Conservatives have issued a statement opposing SPEN's current plans. Elaine Murry MSP has also issued a statement and has had a further meeting with SPEN to present our concerns and alternative solution to SPEN. Joan MacAlpine MSP has issued a similar position statement and following our meeting has written to Ofgem and Fergus Ewing. She has also written to SPEN to seek a meeting for us to present our concerns and alternative proposals. SPEN have agreed to meet us and Joan will facilitate the meeting.

We have arranged a meeting with Steve Rogers, head of D&G Planning together with members of his team in November and all three party MSPs have agreed to attend.

## **Freedom of Information Request**

A FOI request has been made to the Scottish Government to obtain copies of the minutes of the three stakeholder meetings that have been held to discuss SPEN's project proposal. The timescale for the request was not met but they arrived today, 8 October 2015. You can read the minutes at [www.dumgalagainstpylons.org/news/](http://www.dumgalagainstpylons.org/news/).

A further FOI request has been made to D&G NHS for information on well-being but the reply does not provide the level of information hoped for. A follow-up will be requested.

## **Use of Petitioning**

The use of asymmetrical petitioning has begun and from this we are aware that several organisations including the National Trust for Scotland, South Ayrshire and Galloway Biosphere and the John Muir Trust (JMT) have objected to SPEN's proposals. Discussions have taken place with the JMT to learn from their experience.

## **Other Matters and Plans**

The group was formally constituted in the last couple of days. You can read more about this at: [www.dumgalagainstpylons.org/about-us/](http://www.dumgalagainstpylons.org/about-us/). You can join the group and there are details on the website explaining how to do so.

I attended an interesting presentation at the Wigtown Book Festival entitled "Get off our Land" on the 3 October 2015 describing how unwanted developments by large organisations have been successfully opposed by local residents.

Yesterday we met with Richard Arkless and he invited me to join him at a subsequent meeting with SPEN. I will report more on that meeting soon.

A presentation has been requested by Amisfield CC and this will take place on 13 October 2015. If you know of any other CCs or groups that would like a presentation, please let us know.

I will be giving a presentation to the Nithsdale Branch of the Labour Party on the 26 October 2015.

Apart from meetings with politicians, there are many other ideas being developed. Please keep checking the website news section and the Dumgal Against Pylons Facebook page for the latest information.