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Annwyl Mr Cadeirydd ac aelodau'r Pwyllgor

Cable Ploughing Electricity Transmission Lines

I am confident that the Committee will be giving serious consideration to the challenges Wales faces in upscaling its electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure to help achieve our net zero ambitions, increase energy security and drive the transition away from fossil fuels.

The scale of the challenge has been outlined by two far reaching reports. The 'Future Energy Grids for Wales' report by the Welsh Government last July identified the need to increase electricity capacity in Wales by 41.6% by 2035 to meet domestic requirements (from 14 terawatt hours in 2021 to 24 terawatt hours by 2035). Welsh Government policy is to meet this extra demand by increasing renewable energy production which would of course require corresponding investment in the ability to move produced electricity from its generation source to consumer.

The UK Governments Electricity Networks Commissioner, Nick Winser, in his report 'Accelerating Electricity Transmission Network Deployment' identifies the need to vastly increase strategic transmission infrastructure and streamline delivery so that increased electricity generating capacity is not left idle.

As I mentioned earlier, I am sure the Committee in its various work streams will be considering the implications of the challenges we all face.

I write as a constituency MP with a particular issue relating to plans by Green Gen Cymru to build a new 132kv double circuit overhead line along the Tywi Valley floor. The Green Gen Towy Usk project will link Bute Energy's Nant Mithil Energy Park near Builth Wells to the National Grid network near Llandyfaelog between Carmarthen and Pont Abraham. This is a distance of 60m and critically the preferred route is to travel through the Tywi Valley from Llandovery to Carmarthen.

Feeling in the local community is extremely strong on this issue, in particular the visual damage metal pylons will make to the beautiful Tywi valley. As policy makers we have to endeavour to take communities with us when grappling with the major strategic challenges we face.

As a Member of Parliament, I have previous experience relating to proposals to connect the Brechfa TAN 8 zone with the National Grid, by the then Western Power Distribution in 2018-19. Matters in those days were a responsibility for the UK Government and in particular the UK Infrastructure Commission. After a long campaign we were able to

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reduce the visual impact of the development, with metal pylons replaced for wooden structures, and critically the floor of the Tywi valley section of the development undergrounded.

That undergrounding work was undertaken by a Carmarthenshire company ATP Cable Plough, based in Pencader. ATP is one of the largest companies of its kind in Europe and undertakes work all over the UK and the continent undertaking cable ploughing techniques which is far cheaper and less environmentally damaging than traditional undergrounding methods.

Decisions over electricity transmission infrastructure in Wales are now a matter for the Welsh Government and in particular its agency Planning and Environment Decisions Wales. The Committee therefore has a vital role in scrutinising Welsh policy.

I recently visited the company, and its Owner Jason Thomas has informed me he is willing to come before the committee in a formal or informal setting to explain how cable ploughing technology works.

Regrettably the Winser report didn't consider cable ploughing in its works and finds heavily in favour of overground pylon structures as opposed to undergrounding. The Welsh Governments policy is as I understand it that new transmission infrastructure should be underground, where possible. Welsh policy also states that costs should be considered when making decisions.

Considering this, and with particularly the concerns I have expressed in relation to the Tywi Valley in my constituency, I am anxious that cable ploughing has been fully considered at haste so that Welsh policy is as informed as possible. I am asking that the Committee as it undertakes its various work streams find a way to consider cable ploughing as a way forward for us in Wales.

Campaign groups have been set up across the constituency to fight the erection of pylons and one of their asks are that an evidence session be held on this issue. I would be grateful if the Committee would consider this and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yn gywir iawn,



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