

A Thomas Plant Hire Ltd

T/a ATP Cable Plough

Pencader

Carms

SA39 9BX

31 August 2023

Mr Huw Irranca-Davies SM

Dear Mr Irranca-Davies,

Thank you for your email 29 August.

I am pleased you have viewed one of the ATP videos on line. The Dunstable Downs project, referred to in your email, involved the use of cable plough to lay new electricity lines, working closely with National Trust and under the direction of Natural England.

I confirm I am the sole director and owner of the company 'A Thomas Plant Hire Ltd' (ATP Cable Plough). The Company has been involved in many projects, some of which are detailed on our web site and referenced on our linked in profile. The company is based in Pencader, Carmarthenshire. We operate throughout the UK and Europe.

You correctly identify that placing cables underground using cable plough methods would result in less visual intrusion on the landscape. This is becoming a national issue. I have been contacted recently by a number of interested parties seeking information. Your email contains an enquiry as to cable ploughing and whether the costs involved could be closely comparable to the cost of pylons and overhead lines. You will understand that in responding to enquiries I have been careful not to share any commercially sensitive information derived from projects in which my company has been involved; my commercial contacts would expect nothing less than the highest standards of confidentiality, integrity and trust, which my company has always offered.

I have been asked relevant questions about cable ploughing:

- a) How does it work?
- b) Is it functional and available?
- c) Is it proven technology-with reference to recent and current projects in Wales, the UK and Europe?
- d) Can it minimise impact?
- e) What does it cost?
- f) How does the minimised environmental impact, the carbon footprint, and the costing relevant to cable plough compare to the older method of pylons with overhead lines?
- g) Is it a feasible, viable or beneficial alternative to pylons?

In responding to enquiries to date, my preference has been to discuss general information on method and technique. In this context, I would be pleased to appear before a joint session, of the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee and the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee, or before each committee separately if preferred, as it is important both on a

local and national level to deliver an appropriate and balanced grid system while achieving minimised impact.

You will understand that I have to exercise caution in reply to questions about costings for projects in which my company has a past or current involvement, or relating to specific fees. In a climate of competitive tendering, there is a need for sensitivity. Before consenting to the release of information, I may need to speak with commercial partners or contractual parties if material could be considered commercially sensitive or confidential. It may be that assurances of confidentiality would be required, as a condition of the release of information. However, in the right circumstances I would welcome the opportunity to inform and share my knowledge on costings, and to share my knowledge and understanding, based on many years of relevant experience.

I am aware that the CCEI Committee and the ETRA Committee are both cross party. It would help if either or both committees could initiate and commission a small study group to conduct a full and careful investigation, gathering information relevant to the comparative costings and impact, of undergrounding by way of cable ploughing, and of drilling, compared to pylons with overhead lines, examining the manufacture, design, transport, delivery, installation, erection, whole life costs including projected outages, loss of energy in transmission, maintenance and repair, projected longevity and de-commissioning, together with associated costs in consequence, such as placing underground or re-routing service/utility media in proximity. I would be comfortable to contribute with costing information in a forum of this nature.

It should help if information is gathered widely from energy companies, contractors, sub-contractors, financiers and funders, involved in cable plough and overhead projects, in the UK and in Europe, as to technical implications and financial costs. Viability is not just about comparative costs. It is also about how the costs of a project can be satisfied, in the context of margins and returns and the funding support available. Information of this nature may be given more freely for an official and protective enquiry.

A full and sufficient investigation would be very important. There are figures and opinions thrown out in the media and elsewhere which may be out of date or which do not reference the technology which is now available. For example, the costs and impact from the old method of open trenching are significantly greater than the method of cable plough/drilling.

As to an assessment of the costs of cable plough, in terms of your reference to being broadly similar to the costs of pylons with overhead lines, and whether the impact on environment and bio-diversity from cable ploughing could be considerably less, I would encourage that the evidence which is available is collected as outlined, to inform in a sensitive, careful and effective way. It would be so important for a cross party group appointed group, to consist of individuals, with the expertise to secure relevant information, and with sufficient objectivity to ensure an impartial and independent collection of data to provide a true analysis. It would help to have a balance of contributions. The handling of information could be agreed with sources and participants, providing a level of assurance as required.

As the model of an objective and expert study group, with cross party reference and accountability, would reflect the national importance of getting this right, and could take evidence and obtain information and input from as many relevant sources as possible, my company would be prepared to participate with information as to costings, within this type of controlled forum.

To re-iterate, if the information and clarification which I can share, in terms of an evidence session before a combined or individual committee would be of assistance, please contact me to take this

forward. Just as an indication of the evidence which I can provide to an open committee,(quite apart from information to be separately provided as to costings), I am able to discuss method and procedures, technical viability, and delivery, including how the equipment, technology and operation can minimise impact.

I would make the same offers of assistance to any relevant committee of the UK Parliament, or to any study group commissioned as to costs and viability.

As your email was by way of an initial enquiry, and neither the enquiry nor this reply is sensitive, I will provide this reply as an open letter which I can share with others as required. If shared, this reply can serve to summarise my position for others, taking into account the enquiries already received, the potential for further enquiries, the need for transparency for my commercial contacts, and as my time for individual reply is necessarily limited. I have received contact and interest from leading politicians and industry figures, with whom it will help to share this response.

Yours sincerely

Jason Thomas

ATP Cable Plough/A Thomas Plant Hire