

## **PROTECT HALE PURLIEU MOVEMENT**

### **THE NATIONAL GRID “PAUSE”**

The letter sent to Residents on 29<sup>th</sup> March by Ben Smith of National Grid requires a response.

First of all our thanks to all those residents who have given such strong support to our opposition to the undergrounding proposals. We are obviously delighted that the work will not proceed at the very least in this round of VIP projects.

However, the contents of the National Grid letter demonstrate a staggering ignorance about why they have had to pause and an unbelievable self-righteous arrogance.

The law is blamed for not being able to proceed and it is stated that the law did not intend to stop such work. The “emerging complexities” referred to have in fact been fully known since February 2018 when Natural England spoke of the “adverse effects” at the Stakeholder Reference Group meeting. The law has done exactly what was intended. As we have been pointing out for months, the undergrounding proposal could not meet either UK or European legal requirements. The regulations to enable any breach of those laws requires stringent tests to be met. This undergrounding proposal was never one which could meet those tests.

To blame European law is simply pathetic. In this country we have had systematic conservation laws since the latter half of the nineteenth century for example the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1872 and National Parks and their protection commenced in 1949.

The European laws which National Grid doesn't like were all incorporated into UK law and were based on the Berne Convention of 1982. This is an international legal instrument which fifty countries and the European Union have signed in order “to commit to and promote national conservation policies, consider the impact of planning and development on the natural environment, promote education and information on conservation, and coordinate research.”

Moreover, the selection of SACs, Special Areas of Conservation, for this Convention is a matter for our own Government to determine and so it is the UK which has selected, using strict criteria, the New Forest as one of those special areas. Who would want it otherwise?

In December 2017, National Grid updated its own document, Visual Impact Provision. Section Two describes what VIP can be used for. It gives examples of how the funds could be used and also schedules five aspects which VIP does not apply to. The third of these states, “other landscape, heritage and ecological designations – such as World Heritage Sites, Heritage Coasts, conservation areas, scheduled monuments, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas for Conservation – although these are likely to be factors for consideration where they are located within or adjacent to a National Park or AONB.” It is therefore clear that sensitivity for SACs was recognised so we have to ask why it was ignored for so long in this case as the entire project is over a Special Area for Conservation?

The letter to Residents claims that many local people have supported the proposal, and that support has also come from stakeholders. Any mature and objective assessment in the letter would also have noted the extensive local opposition to it and also that of at least two of the stakeholders referred to in the National Grid December paper, those being the RSPB and the local Wildlife Trust.

Most surprising and disappointing of all is the quotation from the Chairman of the Stakeholder Advisory Group, Chris Baines. He is a prominent ecologist, naturalist and environmentalist. He is also an Honorary Vice President of the Wildlife Trusts whose local body objects so strongly to the undergrounding proposal. The fact is that the case has not been made for the visual improvement because of the overriding damage to the ecology, nature and environment of the Purlieu.

We have repeatedly stated that many in our Movement would be very content to see the pylons go and the visual impact improved. The question is at what cost to the environment. It has been and remains our view that the National Grid proposals to improve the visual impact on Hale Purlieu were totally out of balance with the extensive and long term, not short term, damage to the environment of this small part of the New Forest. Some, even grudging, acknowledgement of this would have been welcome instead of the carping, sanctimonious communication from Ben Smith.

In the interests of democracy and fairness to all the parishioners of Hale we wish that both the letter to Residents from Ben Smith and this statement from PHPM should be recorded on the Hale PC website.

If “pause” is a face-saving way of saying “Stop” then we may hear no more and these two statements represent a summary of the conclusions. However, it is suggested that National Grid wish to spend even more on legal fees to try to come back again. If the proposal remains the same we will be equally vigilant and strong in our opposition next time round, and hope that the sitting Councillors on Hale Parish Council at that time will take more cognisance of the sentiment of Parishioners and the information given to them.

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