

Electrical Infrastructure Wales



Countryside Alliance survey results

January 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Countryside Alliance was pleased to see the formation of an Independent Advisory Group on Future Electricity Grid for Wales.

We note from the group's statement that "Welsh Government have committed to working with representatives of all sectors and regions of Wales to develop a set of principles for grid development and that these will be founded on the framework of the Well-being of Future Generations Act." Your statement tells us that you "will consider community requirements, environmental impact, visual impact, cost and technical constraints" with an intention to consider the proposed principles for incorporation into Planning Policy Wales.

However, we are deeply concerned that despite initial promises made to "reach out to others for the community perspective", this has not been undertaken. Whilst community groups engaged in proposals for new electrical infrastructure across Wales have taken it upon themselves to contact the Independent Advisory Group on Future Electricity Grid for Wales (IAG) there has been *no formal* invitation to contribute to the group's work. There has been *no engagement* with community groups and other organisations other than those listed as members of the IAG. The people and communities feel badly let down and uninformed.

Government advisory groups play a vital role in shaping future policies, and engaging with the public during the development of policy papers ensures that these policies are well-informed, transparent, and widely accepted. Public consultation allows diverse perspectives to be considered, helping to identify potential challenges, unintended consequences, and opportunities for improvement. It also fosters trust in the policy-making process by demonstrating accountability and responsiveness to community concerns. By incorporating input from citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders, advisory groups can create more balanced and effective policies that address real-world needs while promoting social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Ultimately, meaningful public engagement leads to stronger, more inclusive policy outcomes that better serve society as a whole.

To begin the public engagement process that has been so desperately sought by our members and supporters, the Countryside Alliance has undertaken a survey on Electrical Grid Infrastructure and duly presents the findings to the group.

Survey demographics

The survey was presented to Countryside Alliance members and supporters in Wales. There was a total of 1,151 responses from a combination of residents, resident business owners, and landowners.

Demographically, the highest number of responses came from Carmarthenshire, Powys, Ceredigion and Anglesey.

87% of respondents were not living in an area where pylon infrastructure was present whilst 12% of respondents were living in areas where there were already pylons in situ.

KEY FINDINGS

- Proposals for using pylons as infrastructure have already had a significant impact on people's health and well-being. Respondents cited how their mental health is already deteriorating and are expecting that to continue. Respondents told us:
 - The prospect of this project is already affecting people's mental health very negatively, creating stress and worry.
 - Effect on mental health of farmers as to loss and the devaluation of their property.
 - Negative impact on mental and physical health benefits of unspoilt open spaces.
- Less than 1% of businesses felt that economic opportunities would be created by the installation of pylons and 81% felt that there would be no opportunities. Respondents told us:
 - Little benefit if any to local business. Profits will go to the companies putting forward these proposals. Companies who have no connection with the area, care little or nothing for the effect these proposals will have on communities, only care about the profit they will make.
 - The energy produced will not benefit the local community, as it will be exported to England, leaving residents in rural Wales with no tangible advantages.
 - The pylons would be used to transport energy from nearby, very inefficient windfarms across beautiful countryside to National Grid substations, whilst offering no benefits to businesses along the route.
- Less than 1% of respondents were supportive of the proposals to construct pylons in their area whilst 93% were very opposed. Respondents told us:
 - It is heartbreaking to imagine the visual destruction of some of the most beautiful parts of Britain which have been cared for and protected by the people that live here.
 - We have a gas pipeline through our village that we have no access to. We have no option but to use oil. This still won't benefit the local community yet we will have to put up with the awful view of these pylons spoiling our countryside and thus reducing local businesses ability to earn money from tourism.
 - The area would become an industrial site, the concerns over particular species of plants and insects and house prices would drop.
- The landscape and the environment featured heavily in respondent's answers across the board. A staggering 96% said that they had concerns about the environmental impact of constructing pylons. Respondents told us:
 - There will be an impact on the migratory patterns of birds of prey; impact on the habitats and behaviours of multiple species of bat; while the construction phase will unsettle countless habitats across the route.
 - They would ruin the environment by changing the shape of the landscape, the feel and love we hold for these valleys.
 - This affects wildlife, especially as there are some fragile communities in the Towy Valley.

- 89% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that the construction of pylons would have a positive impact on tourism in their community. Respondents told us:
 - They will cause a very high visual impact & distract from the environment causing less people to visit so less money into local communities.
 - Deep scar on the landscape. Catastrophic effect on the many self-catering small businesses in the area.
 - People holiday here due to the fantastic views of Brecon Beacon National Park, pylons will significantly decrease tourists desire to holiday here.
- When we asked respondents, many of whom are landowners critical to delivering any future supply increase in Wales, if they would support undergrounding via cable ploughing. 94% said they would, with only 6% opposed.

Conclusion

The overwhelming response from the community highlights deep concerns about the proposed construction of pylons and its far-reaching impact. From the deterioration of mental health and well-being to the economic disadvantages for local businesses, respondents made it clear that they see little to no benefit from these proposals. The near universal opposition, particularly regarding environmental damage, the visual destruction of cherished landscapes, and the negative impact on tourism, underscores the need for decision-makers to reconsider the approach to infrastructure development in rural areas.

The evidence presented in this report should serve as a clear message: local communities feel unheard, undervalued, and are deeply troubled by the consequences these pylons will bring. Any future developments must take into account the voices of those most affected and seek alternative solutions that respect both the people and the landscapes they call home.

Bearing in mind the Countryside Alliance's appreciation of the need to increase the grid supply across Wales to meet future demands, we are keen to look diligently at the possibility of undergrounding by the cable ploughing method. This option has been widely promoted to the public by both the Countryside Alliance and community groups through social media, newsletters, and video footage demonstrating the process. We believe the public is now well informed about cable ploughing and can make an informed decision about its viability as a credible alternative to outdated pylon infrastructure. When we asked respondents, many of whom are landowners critical to delivering any future supply increase in Wales, if they would support undergrounding via cable ploughing, 94% said they would, with only 6% opposed.

We ask the Independent Advisory Group on Electrical Infrastructure to take these survey responses into consideration and urgently and widely consult with the public on the true cost of pylon infrastructure in Wales. The future of our grid supply cannot be measured in pounds and pence alone. People's health and well-being, the fragile rural economy, our precious landscapes and habitats, and the flora and fauna that depend on them must all be considered meaningfully. Furthermore, Wales has an opportunity to take a globally responsible approach, one that embraces modern, less intrusive technology rather than persisting with outdated, harmful infrastructure.

Survey results

Of those who were residents and business owners in areas where pylons were in situ, we asked if the pylon infrastructure has had a positive or negative effect on their community. 3% said that the pylons had a positive effect on their community whilst 88% said that they had a negative effect. We asked respondents to expand on their answers and a selection of those answers are below:

- The Pylons in my area have been here for years and are acceptable to me.
- They are a blot on the landscape.
- I feel that the negative impact is still to be felt on the intrusion of power lines.
- Personally I find them visually intrusive.
- Field behind my property has a pylon, it is not the best to see but worse than that in the high winds mostly through autumn and winter it emits a high pitched wind noise.

We asked business owners who responded to the survey “How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Pylon’s will have a positive impact on businesses in my area”.

Respondents were predominantly from the hospitality, retail and tourism sector.

- 81% of tourism businesses strongly disagreed with the statement whilst 5% agreed.
- 58% of retail-based respondents disagreed with the statement whilst 3% strongly agreed.
- 74% of the hospitality sector strongly disagreed that pylon infrastructure had had a positive impact on business whilst 1% felt that they had.

We asked respondents to expand on their answers and have a selection of those below:

- Visual impact. Massive landscape damage. Damage to businesses of tourism providers and their property values. Less related employment and spend in the area.
- The Towy Valley is an unspoilt landscape. Pylons would destroy the landscape, affecting not only farmers but those who rely on a pristine landscape for their business. Pylons will have a devastating and wholly negative impact on my community's tourism business.
- Visual impact would put off potential visitors to the area who are looking to get away from city life, infrastructure. Many people come to our area for the views. This would in turn have an effect on the footfall to many other local businesses.
- Will impact the unspoilt nature of the area that visitors find so attractive. The detrimental effect on both tourism and agriculture will push the fragile rural economy over the edge!
- Visual impact and construction would have an immediate & long term negative impact on my caravan park. Enforced infrastructure would lock up my ability to run my current and future tourism business.
- Visitors to our area come for the fact we are a remote and unspoilt landscape with hugely varied wildlife, flora, fauna, and historical value. We are also one of the last remaining dark sky sites in Europe. This will all be lost, destroyed for future generations for what is nothing more than pure predatory capitalism, with the proposals for the massive wind farms and pylon routes. We are all here completely for saving our planet, and support the major infrastructure overhaul, but we also believe there are better alternatives to the destruction of countryside across Wales, and we are angry that our voices are simply being ignored!

We asked all respondents if they believed that pylons and any associated electricity lines could create opportunities for their business or businesses nearby. Less than 1% felt that they felt that opportunities could be created and 81% felt that there would not be opportunities. We asked respondents to expand on their answers

- Not a business owner but it will mean electric vehicles and heat pumps being able to be installed in areas and more of our electricity to come from domestic renewable sources. This reduces our fragility to external political instability and will result in investment and good quality employment in the UK.
- Definitely not. And the argument that electricity would become cheaper or more secure is specious. There is simply no evidence of that happening in this country, ever, no matter how energy is created.
- The work would be carried out by companies from outside the area. This infrastructure would not provide local jobs.
- The power generated and carried by these pylons will go on the open market. Another form of scarring on the Welsh landscape.
- The energy produced will not benefit the local community, as it will be exported to England, leaving residents in rural Wales with no tangible advantages.
- There are no positive impacts for businesses or residents in Wales from the proposed pylons and wind farms. These developments will industrialize some of the most beautiful areas of rural Wales, damaging the natural landscape that is a cornerstone of the region's identity and appeal. The energy produced will not benefit the local community, as it will be exported to England, leaving residents in rural Wales with no tangible advantages. This raises the question: how can anyone living in or visiting these areas benefit from such industrialization? The destruction of the natural environment, which is central to tourism, local livelihoods, and the quality of life for residents, far outweighs any supposed gains from these projects. By prioritizing energy exports over the well-being of the communities living in these areas, this initiative offers no positives to the people of Wales. Instead, it risks further marginalizing rural communities, eroding their cultural and economic foundations, and permanently damaging a unique and irreplaceable landscape.

We wanted to know if the public was aware of local proposals for new overhead electricity lines involving erecting pylons. The Countryside Alliance ran an extensive campaign informing the public of proposals put to the Alliance that were already in the public domain and were keen to know the effect of this campaign.

84% were aware of project proposals in their area whilst 15% were not aware, most of whom were from areas where no proposals are currently in the public domain.

Of those asked, less than 1% were supportive of proposals to construct pylons in their area whilst 93% were very opposed to the proposals they had been made aware of.

The Alliance is conscious of a perception of people not wanting electrical infrastructure in their immediate vicinity and felt it was necessary to explore the true depth of feeling and exactly why it was unwelcome. We asked all respondents for their specific concerns about the installation of pylons, in general terms. A selection of the responses are below:

- Negative impact on mental and physical health benefits of unspoilt open spaces. Reduced incentive for residents and visitors to use public footpaths. Noise from overhead lines cracking especially damp and wet weather conditions.
- Yes. It will affect everything - property values, farmers' access to land, camping, caravanning, walking, wild camping, festivals. The prospect of this project is already affecting people's mental health very negatively, creating stress and worry.

- Effect on mental health of farmers as to loss and the devaluation of their property.
- The noise they give out. The actual presence of them impacting on mental health!!
- Health risks associated with cancer and pylons.
- I have many concerns about health and wellbeing as I can find few positive studies that have not been commissioned by the electricity industry themselves. Property values will certainly be adversely affected as no longer will our views be of beautiful rolling countryside - as well as the health concerns already mentioned.

We were keen to know how the public felt about the effect pylons would have on their community as a whole. Less than 1% felt that they would have a positive effect on the community whilst a staggering 98% felt that pylons would impact negatively on their community.

The landscape and the environment featured heavily in respondents' answers across the board. We asked people if they had any concerns about the environmental impact of constructing pylons. A staggering 96% said that they had concerns whilst 4% had no concerns. We asked respondents to expand on the reasoning behind their answers.

- Birdlife at huge risk. This area rich in herons, egrets, kites, buzzards etc.
- Yes - these huge works will blight the landscape and destroy sensitive environmental areas.
- Biodiversity loss.
- Huge carbon footprint installing them and also the destruction of habitats and the destruction of farmland creating roads etc to install the pylons.
- Wherever you see pylons the surrounding environment is negatively impacted. There is no way to get away from that fact.
- There will be an impact on the migratory patterns of birds of prey; impact on the habitats and behaviours of multiple species of bat; while the construction phase will unsettle countless habitats across the route.

The Independent Advisory Group on Future Electricity Grid for Wales's Terms of Reference state that "The work will form base of reference for policy and planning in relation to acceptable electricity structure in Wales".

The Countryside Alliance has (like many other interested parties) had the opportunity to witness first-hand the capabilities of the cable plough method and we have disseminated this widely to our members and supporters through various means including newsletters, video footage, and public talks. We feel confident that those we have questioned are in a position to understand enough about the cable plough method and other forms of cable infrastructure to make an informed decision on how to answer the following question.

We asked respondents which included a considerable number of landowners needed to deliver new projects, "would you support the undergrounding of cables via the cable plough method?"

94% said yes, they would whilst 6% said no, they would not support the cable plough method.