

By email: info@greengentowyusk.com

April 2023

Dear Bute Energy

Countryside Alliance response to the consultation 'Green Gen Towy Usk'

The Countryside Alliance works for everyone who loves the countryside and the rural way of life. Our aim is to protect and promote life in the countryside and to help it thrive. With over 100,000 members and supporters, we are the only rural organisation working across such a broad range of issues.

The Countryside Alliance recognises the need to embrace renewable energy and to have energy security in Wales, particularly after the impact high energy costs have had this last winter on households and businesses. However, we have seen the community reaction to the Green Gen Towy Usk proposal to install an overhead electricity distribution network via 60 miles of steel pylons and will use our consultation response to represent those views.

We have consulted widely with our Welsh members and supporters regarding this consultation and enabled thousands of others to respond to your consultation by co-signing our letter supporting the burying of cables and wholly opposing the use of overhead pylons. Our consultation response and the co-signed letter give a very clear indication of the level of opposition to your proposal.

The Countryside Alliance fully supports the Welsh Government's policy that cables should be placed underground as confirmed by the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, in the Senedd on 8 February, who stated that "the policy is that electricity transmission cables should be placed underground where possible, not just in designated landscapes". The Countryside Alliance, along with thousands of people firmly believe that Green GEN Cymru must include underground cabling in their plans to deliver this resource. In fact, nearly 60% of National Grid's electricity distribution network is via underground cables.

The Welsh landscape has a plethora of benefits for the people of Wales and beyond. It has health, economic, historical, and cultural values which should be maintained and protected. People from all over the world visit Wales for the experience of being absorbed in well-managed picturesque landscapes, and this in turn ensures a thriving tourism economy which is essential for rural communities the length and breadth of Wales. Tourism is worth £6.2 billion to the Welsh economy, 13% of the total economy, and in mid-Wales 13% of employment is in tourism which demonstrates the reliance this area has on this important industry. Furthermore, people who have been brought up here or chose to live here and make Wales their home, also embrace the very same benefits as those who holiday with us.

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A large number of Countryside Alliance members and supporters visited the drop-in sessions that were held across the proposed route. They have returned the following remarks:

- People felt uninformed at the consultation sessions stating that there was no further detail available to them than what was already in the documents that had been provided.
- They are concerned that there was no mechanism for recording their comments made to Bute energy staff and wish to note that the paper questionnaire was heavily weighted for positive responses to climate change rather than the proposal itself.
- They have complained of “mixed messages” at the various tables when they have asked about the burying of cables with some staff saying that the burying of cables was a possibility and others stating that there was no option for this due to the costs involved.
- Many have responded saying that there was not enough adequate information provided as to how local jobs would be created
- Many noted that the offer of a community benefit financially carried little weight as they felt that there would be significant financial losses to the area due to the aesthetic damage pylons would cause to the landscape which could not be recuperated fairly, business-to-business, through the financial incentives offered by Bute.
- They felt that there were not enough staff present from Bute to answer the number of people who attended the sessions, particularly in Builth, Llandeilo and Llandovery and many left without speaking to a representative personally.

The Countryside Alliance separately note that:

- There was a lack of information on why the preferred route was chosen and why the other routes were discounted.
- There was no Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) to provide comparisons of other locations chosen.
- The online maps were illegible.
- There was no information relating to the impact on biodiversity and protected species, or flood risk.

In the absence of this information, the Countryside Alliance is unable to provide a fuller response to this consultation. I am aware many others also felt it was impossible to respond more fully.

We note that this is a scoping exercise and we would be happy to respond to a more detailed consultation should Bute Energy reach the stage whereby you have obtained the necessary licence from Ofgem and are in a position to progress with further discussions on your proposals.

Thank you for your engagement with the Countryside Alliance and we look forward to further correspondence whether successful or not.

Yours faithfully

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