

REPORT TO:	Planning Committee
REPORT NO.	HCWD/43/12
DATE:	30 July 2012
REPORTING OFFICER:	Head of Community Wellbeing & Development
CONTACT OFFICER:	Simon Greenland (Ext. 8781)
SUBJECT:	Application p/2009/0330 132 kv single circuit flat formation overhead line reinforcement between Legacy substation, Wrexham and Oswestry substation (also within Esclusham, Chirk & Erbistock communities)
WARDS:	Esclusham, Ponciau, Ruabon, Marchwiell, Penycae and Ruabon south, Chirk north, Chirk south

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise Members of the progress of the application and amendments, and to seek clarification of the Local Planning Authority's views to be put to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

INFORMATION

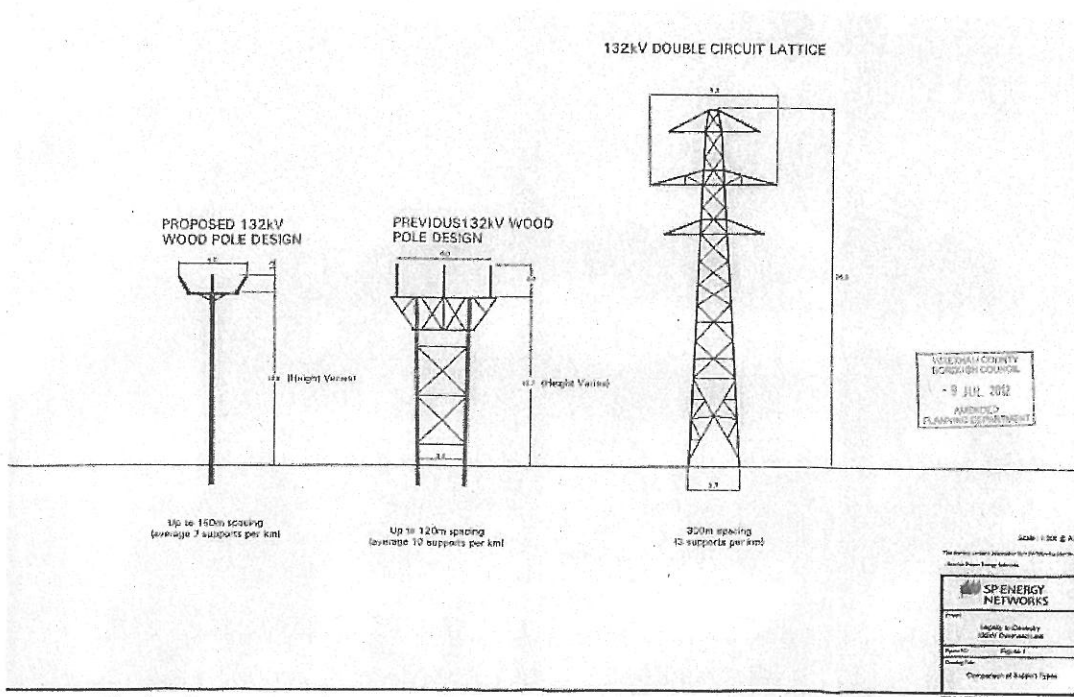
The original application

- 1 The total route length is 20.6 km overhead, 3 km underground (approximately half within Wrexham and half within Shropshire). A plan of the route is attached (appendix 1)
- 2 The Council is a statutory consultee, and in turn carried out its own consultations and publicity.

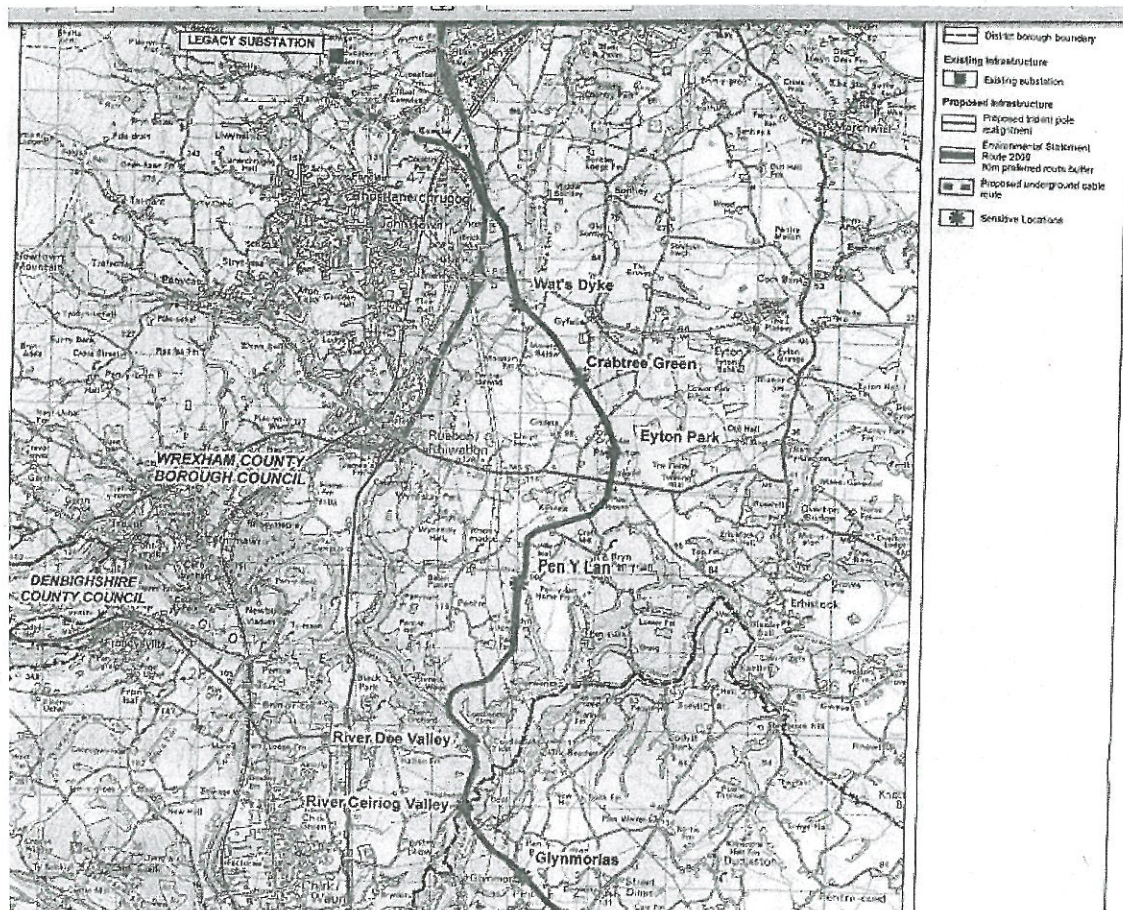
- 3 The choices available to the Council are to:
 1. To object or not object to the proposal
 2. To request that a public inquiry be held or not
 3. To suggest modifications/conditions or not
- 4 The proposal is an application under section 37 of the Energy Act 1989 submitted to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. It is accompanied by an Environmental Statement.
- 5 The line is needed to reinforce the electricity distribution network between the substations at legacy and Oswestry. The existing network arrangements are sufficient to meet current requirements for restoring power within 3 hours. However as load increases, the existing network arrangements will become insufficient, and the applicant would be unable to meet its statutory obligations.
- 6 In identifying the route the applicant has sought to combine sensitive routing with appropriate mitigation measures, to avoid or reduce environmental effects. They have consulted frequently with relevant local, regional and national bodies.
- 7 A number of alternatives were examined based on connections with other substations and reinforcing existing lines. An overhead line reinforcement between the 2 substations was concluded to be the most economic and environmentally acceptable solution.
- 8 The application was considered at the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 1/6/2009. My recommendation was:
- 9 That a formal objection is lodged to the submitted scheme, linked to a recommendation that the route through the Ceiriog and Dee valleys is put underground or modified to reduce the visual and ecological impacts identified.
- 10 Members resolved to object to the entire scheme, for the following reason:
- 11 The proposed overhead line would detract from the natural and visual character of the areas affected including Special Landscape Areas and Special Areas of Conservation and should be placed underground. For these reasons the proposal would be contrary to the policies of the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan.
- 12 A similar objection was made by Shropshire Council.

Revised information

- 13 On 9/7/2012 revised details of the proposals were received, as follows:
1. A revised design of the wooden poles, involving a single pole Trident design, rather than the double pole design. The height of the poles varies but is typically reduced from a maximum of 15 metres to 14 metres, and the maximum width from 6 metres to 5 metres.



2. An increased span of lines between each pole, requiring fewer poles (7 per km in place of 10).
3. A realignment of the route in the area of Hafod country park, to avoid the Special Area of Conservation (SAC).



4. Landscape mitigation. The revised design has enabled pole positions to be adjusted to take account of local views in the identified sensitive areas, and no poles are now proposed within the designated SACs. Areas for visual screening and woodland planting are proposed.

5. In terms of undergrounding, they advise that the cost of undergrounding the entire line would be £20m, which is significantly higher than the cost of the line itself at £6m. The suggestion put forward in my original report of undergrounding sections of the line passing through the Dee and Ceiriog valleys. It is pointed out that the underground line would follow a similar route to the overhead line, would cause more environmental disruption and would cost £3.2m for 2.2km of line. The company does not consider that this cost and impacts would be justified by the benefit of removal of sections of overhead line.

6. Habitat enhancement. The company propose to implement habitat improvements on appropriate sites on Wrexham Industrial Estate through a 5 year scheme at a value of £30,000.

- 14 Based on this revised information, the applicants request that the Council re-considers its views on the scheme and withdraws its objections.

Public Inquiry

- 15 A public inquiry into all aspects of the scheme is scheduled for 3 weeks commencing on 13/11/2012. A pre-inquiry meeting is proposed on 11/9/2012. Further details will be supplied by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). Supplementary Environmental Information will be published in late August 2012. The Council will be asked to submit statements for the Inquiry and agree a statement of common ground.
- 16 It has not been possible to re-consult with community councils, local members and local residents on the revised proposals in the time available.
- 17 DECC advise that:
...statutory consultees and third parties will be provided the opportunity to comment on the design modifications when they are included in the Supplementary Environmental Information (SEI), which will also cover the proposed minor route amendment, to be published in late August 2012. You will appreciate that it is a matter for the local authorities to decide how to handle the design modification information and if they wish to consult wider themselves before taking it to Committee.

... (we) will be writing to each person entitled to appear at the inquiry or whom we know to have an interest in the proposal with a statement of the matters to be considered and registration form as soon as possible after that (i.e. in accordance with Rule 6 of the Electricity Generating Stations and Overhead Lines (Inquiries Procedure) (England and Wales) Rules 2007).

Conclusion

- 18 The revised information is a significant response to the Council's concerns on the proposals, and reduces the impact of the scheme on the important issues raised in the decision to object to the entire scheme within Wrexham.

Corporate Objectives

- 19 Communities with sustainable, attractive settlements, neighbourhoods, buildings and spaces (PL3).
- 20 The proposed development must be judged not to harm the special character of the locality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the revised information be noted and considered by officers.
2. That consultations take place with local members and community councils over the revised proposals, with a view to preparing a further report to Planning Committee in September on the revised proposals and the Council's views on the scheme.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning application file P/2009/0330