

Energy in Cheshire - Pipeline Meeting Minutes

ACTON BRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL

Proposed Pipeline Development by NPL Special Meeting on Wednesday 30. May 2007 at 7:30 in the Parish Rooms

Abstract from the Minutes of the Meeting for Press Release

Residents crowd special Pipeline meeting - route still not fixed - threat of Compulsory Purchase remains

A special meeting of Acton Bridge Parish Council was called at short notice for a presentation by NPL Estates of their proposed brine pipeline through the village. Members of the Parish Council were delighted that between 30 and 40 Parishioners also attended the meeting, which began with a welcome and introduction to the village by Parish Council Chairman, Bob Holt.

The Chairman invited Mr Simon Towers, Managing Director of NPL Estates, to make a presentation of their proposals, with maps and description of the project, the need for the pipeline, and its effects on Acton Bridge and neighbouring communities. Mr Towers was accompanied by Mrs Nicola Vose, a Surveyor from P. Wilson & Company who are acting as agents for NPL, and she also made a presentation about the various proposed routes of the pipelines and the consultation process.

Mr Towers said the project was at an early stage, and NPL would provide layers of detail as they were made available. NPL accept that change brings issues and affects local communities, and they like to work in good communication and cooperation.

This is project for gas storage in NPL's King Street site near Morrisons distribution depot. The site already has consent for brine extraction and gas storage. Cavities are created in the rock salt and a good supply of water is needed, so the plan is to bring seawater and return brine across country between the Mersey Estuary and Northwich.

NPL submitted a Scoping Report to Cheshire County Council in March, and hope to make planning applications to the Local Authorities between September and December this year, after ecological, environmental and engineering surveys. The pipes would be 800 mm diameter in a 15 to 20 metre wide construction corridor, buried 900 mm deep, with one or two pumping stations.

Mrs Nicola Vose introduced her firm, P. Wilson & Co, as a land agent / surveyor working along with MWH (an international engineering firm specialising in power, water and wastewater issues). They had been given a line on a plan which looked like a suitable route, which was 'referenced' by identifying the landowners concerned from the Land Registry or just by writing to them.

At this point, a show of hands was called for to see how many people present, and who might be directly affected by the proposed pipeline, had been contacted by NPL. There were very few. When the show was for people who thought they might be affected and had not been contacted, there was a much larger number, and several people said that they had had no communication whatever from the developers, despite the fact that the indicated routes passed directly through their property.

Asked why more people had not been contacted, and whether Compulsory Purchase powers would be used, the answer was that NPL itself would not use Compulsory Purchase to go through people's gardens, but such powers might be used, under the Pipelines Act, to go through agricultural land where agreement could not be reached.

Questions from the Parish Council had been prepared and submitted to NPL in advance of the meeting. These were to be put by Parish Council Vice-chairman Steve Pardoe, and included:-

Consultation Process and "planning blight"
Historic Buildings and Orchards (e.g. Lower Green) in Acton Bridge
Proposed routes of the pipeline(s)
Operational timetable and remediation works
Property matters - compulsory purchase or consent?
Scoping Report presented to Cheshire County Council
Consultation with other Parishes along the proposed route(s)
Planning applications and timetable

Most of these points had been covered in the presentations by Mr Towers and Mrs Vose, and others were raised as the meeting progressed.

The Chairman invited other Parish Councillors and members of the audience to put their own questions to the representatives of NPL Estates and P Wilson & Co. More than 20 questions were asked, ranging from the material of the pipes, why they could not be laid in the bed of the River Weaver, and what would happen in the event of a major brine spillage; to the financing of the project and the construction timescale. Unfortunately, the Parish Council felt that answers given by NPL and P. Wilson were not entirely consistent in some crucial aspects.

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Regarding finance, Mr Towers conceded that NPL, as a small company, was only fronting the project, and would be backed by a major 'gas shipper' like Transco or E-on, though he was not able to name the partners they are considering. He conceded that such a body would have its own powers of Compulsory Purchase, which was a serious concern to several residents, and completely undermined the assurances previously given by Mr Towers that NPL itself "were not looking at private compulsory purchase orders".

Nicola Vose said that P. Wilson & Co were given the original northerly route as a line on the map by MWH, but closer inspection had revealed that it would have an impact on domestic properties. The Chairman of Little Leigh Parish Council was present, and asked whether the proposed pipeline still came through his village. The answer was that the final route will have to be defined before the planning application is submitted, and anyone affected will be consulted. NPL would not need to obtain consents from landowners beforehand, they would only have to be notified. Neither Mrs Vose nor Mr Towers would confirm that the original northerly route had been abandoned completely, though they did say that private gardens would be avoided.

Some residents were concerned about disruption to traffic during construction, but Mrs Vose said that although there are lots of roads to be crossed in the village, the pipes can routinely be driven under a road without impeding traffic. On the other hand, a pipe burst discharging brine would be a major problem, and it might be necessary to excavate and replace the soil, and replant crops. NPL agreed to make a further presentation to the Parish Council and community, once a firm proposal for the route and consultation process could be brought forward, perhaps in two to three months' time.

Mr Towers thanked the Parish Council for the invitation to address the community, and thanked the residents for their attendance and questions. He hoped that NPL could build a 'trustful' relationship, and invited members of the audience to forward any questions to him.

Mr Bob Holt thanked our visitors from NPL for making their presentation and answering questions, and thanked the parishioners for their attendance at the meeting, which closed at about 9 pm.