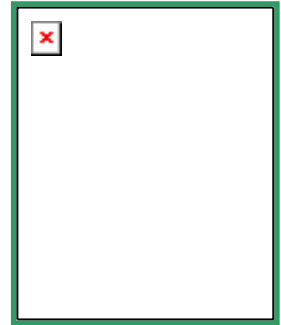


25 January 2010

Mr Andy McKenzie  
Chair of Parish Council  
Puxton Parish Council  
c/o 84 Beach Road  
Kewstoke  
Somerset  
BS22 9UQ



**John Penrose MP**

Thank you for contacting me about the plans for new power lines between Hinckley and Avonmouth. I should start by saying that, since I can see the existing power lines from my house (which would also be one of the proposed replacement routes as well), I'm well positioned to represent local people's views as I have a personal interest in the issue as well. So you can be certain I understand why you're concerned!

As I'm sure you'd expect, I've already taken up local people's concerns with National Grid. In particular, people want to know whether they've considered routing the new power lines along the floor of the Severn Estuary, or burying parts of them underground where they go through our local AONB. I've pushed them to provide more information on the costs of these options, although so far there are too many questionable figures for local people to be confident they've got the full picture. I'm continuing to push for more detailed and verifiable figures so we can check whether they've approached the issue correctly. It's very important that everyone can make sure this decision is being taken openly, and that all the various cost, environmental and health factors have been taken into account. I believe that complete transparency is the only way to achieve a decision which local people can have confidence in, and which has the potential for the right kind of vision for our area.

Of course, once we've got reliable figures of what the various different options will cost, we must make a decision on which one is best. It looks as though putting the lines underground or under the sea will cost more than pylons, but we've got to match those costs against the value of our beautiful countryside. We live in an officially-designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), so local people are entitled to ask 'if our area isn't worth saving, where is?'

Obviously we shouldn't prejudge the results of the official consultation, or the final and definitive sets of costings, but my current hope is that either the underground or undersea options will win through. We shall have to wait and see but, in the meantime, as you'd probably expect I'm liaising closely with the two other neighbouring MPs whose constituencies are affected by these plans (ie Liam Fox to the north, and David Heathcoat-Amory to the south). They're strongly engaged on this and we're working together on dealing with this issue. I have enclosed details of a recent Parliamentary debate which the three of us took part in on this subject, so you can see how we've been approaching it so far.

Yours sincerely,

John Penrose  
*MP for Weston-super-Mare*

Enc.