

Battle with the elements as crew lay first section of Western Link cable

First section laid offshore and work onshore will continue in 2015

18 Dec 2014

- First section of cable (36km) successfully laid
- Cable-laying barge rides out storm in Liverpool Bay with winds of up to 100mph
- Main work to continue on Wirral in 2015

The first 36km of power cables for the Western Link project have just been successfully laid on the Wirral foreshore and out into Liverpool Bay.

Two power cables and a fibre optic cable were pulled on shore from the cable-laying barge *Atalanti*, grounded approximately 1km offshore, under the sea wall at Leasowe through pipes installed in 2013.

Senior Project Manager Cables, Peter Roper, said: "This was a major task that required very careful planning, as we could only pull the cables through the pipes at low tides and we were also reliant on the weather. It involved not only the main cable laying vessel, *Atalanti*, but also a number of support vessels, and liaison with the Port of Liverpool."

Having successfully pulled the cables beneath the sea wall, the *Atalanti* then started simultaneously laying and burying the cables in bundle configuration in Liverpool Bay, for a total of 36km and an approximate depth of 2m below the seabed. For the burial operations a plough was used fed with cable from the barge. Here the expertise of the cable-laying crew from Prysmian and their contractor Assodivers came into its own, as Peter explained.

"Part way through the process the UK experienced winds of over 100 miles per hour," he said. "To cope with this type of weather ships need to have some flexibility to manoeuvre, and being effectively 'tied' to the cables and the ploughing machine was not safe for the crew or the cable.

"The crew therefore decided to lay the cables on the surface of the seabed and seek shelter, then recover and bury them once the storm had passed. This made the process longer, but safety is our priority in all our activities."

During the storm the wind whipped up the waves to as high as 10 metres. Once the winds subsided, the crew retrieved the cables and buried them as planned.

Cable-laying at sea will resume in 2015. On the Wirral peninsula, work has scaled down during the winter months; however, next spring will see an increase in activity right across the peninsula, as preparation work continues in some areas, and cable laying begins in others.

"Our cable contractor Prysmian has been keeping local residents up to date where they may be affected by the work, and they'll continue to do this as the project progresses," said Peter.

In the meantime, if anyone has queries about the project, they can contact the Community Relations Team by emailing westernlink@communityrelations.co.uk or calling 0800 021 7878.

Ends

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