

Cross Sector Plant Protection Interactions

Annual Report 2023





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Introduction

Every day our skilled and dedicated colleagues do their very best to keep our 7.5 million customers safe and warm, with a gas network they can rely on and a level of service they can trust. We don't sell gas; instead, we use our extensive network of pipes to transport gas to homes and businesses throughout Wales and the Southwest of England.

We respond to gas emergencies, and we invest £2 million every day across our network, connecting new properties and upgrading old metal pipes to new long-lasting plastic pipes, to make sure the communities we serve receive a safe and reliable gas supply for generations to come. It is a vital service, and one we are extremely proud to deliver. We supply 2.5 million customer meter points on behalf of gas shippers.

Our network consists of 2,500 km of high-pressure pipes known as the Local Transmission System (LTS) operating at pressures between 7-70 barg, and 31,000 km of distribution pipes that transport gas to homes and businesses operating at pressures up to 7 barg. In addition, there are around 4,000 above ground installations which control pressures or allow inspection and maintenance of our pipelines. Our company priorities and values play a central role in guiding our key business decisions and are reflected in our day-to-day work.

This report details how we have supported the safety of third parties in our region through efficient engagement, sharing of data between relevant approved parties and delivery of works. This reduces the risk of damage to our assets or structures being built within the safety proximity zones.

Our Obligations

We produce a Safety Case to demonstrate compliance with the Gas Safety (Management) Regulations 1996 (GS(M)R). This is supported by a set of Plant Protection Management procedures and work instructions which are designed to ensure compliance with the New Roads and StreetWorks Act 1991, Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015, and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) publication HS(G)47 'Avoiding Danger from Underground Services'.

Putting Customers First

We recognise that customers want to receive timely information and advice so as not to delay their planning and operations.

Through our partnership with LSBUD (Linesearch Dial Before You Dig), we can respond to a customer's enquiry providing scales plans showing our assets and supporting safety advice within 2 minutes.

We advise third parties that all work near any asset operating at 2barg and above should have a site visit prior to work commencing on site. The plans and information provided to third parties require customers to contact us at least 10 days ahead of any works to arrange a site visit. However, a more reactive service is provided for unplanned emergency works.

Some types of work in proximity to our higher-pressure assets may require site supervision. We have introduced simple contracts and clear costs that can be agreed prior to works avoiding delays on site.

Where our assets are likely to be impacted by third party works, physical protection may need to be installed on site, such as a concrete slab to protect our network. Where a pipeline cannot be protected, and the customer wishes to proceed with the works, the pipeline will require an alteration or diversion.

We are proud that we take a proactive approach with customers and other stakeholders. We provide Geographic Information System (GIS) shapefiles to local authorities as part of their planning processes and work with other utilities and developers presenting at their safety days on the risks and controls required when working near our assets.

During 2023 we continued to promote the DIG (Dial, Investigate, Go Ahead) plant protection safety message, as well as continuing to issue our safety business cards.



In addition, 2023 saw the introduction of two new safe digging guidelines that to differentiate between the complexity of work undertaken by homeowners and ground workers. The homeowner's guideline provides safety advice and information relating to works typically undertaken within private gardens. Whereas the ground workers guideline provides information regarding more complex and invasive excavations works.



New safety business cards containing a QR code for our specification T/SP/SSW/22 were also introduced in 2023. These cards were provided during all above 2barg Plant Protection site visits, with the aim of reducing the requirement for our specification to be printed and offering a digital link that customers keep and use freely.



UKOPA

As a UKOPA (United Kingdom Onshore Pipeline Operators' Association) member, we also issue good practice guidelines which have been produced by the pipeline operators and supported by the Health & Safety Executive. The purpose of the good practice guidelines is to ensure the safe design and operating of more complex sites such as wind and solar farms, which are becoming more frequent across our network as we move to a more sustainable energy future. We also attended UKOPA member meetings where industry updates and changes are discussed, along with providing opportunities to hear direct from key stakeholders. In addition, we also attended the Infringement Working Group meetings, that are designed for members to share pipeline infringements and best practices, along with how we can continue to raise awareness of pipeline safety.

Local Authority Engagement

We continually engage with the 42 local authorities in our geographical area on local development plan consultations. These take the form of consultation responses and workshops to review the potential impact on our assets. In addition, our planners attend local authority coordination meetings to minimise the impact of our works on the communities that we serve. We also held a stakeholder workshop aimed at seeking feedback from Local Authority Representatives and others involved in safety. The main purpose of this workshop was to obtain feedback on our approach and efforts to ensure safety in emergency situations and pipe replacement operations.

Our Performance

This section details our performance in working with third parties during 2023. Our mapping performance standards are:

Team	Enquiry type / service	Standard of Service	Regulatory/ voluntary	Cost of service
Plant Protection	Initial enquiry for plans	10 working days	Voluntary	Free – except for £47+VAT* for companies who charge their customers for the service

*Price increase to £57+VAT from March 4th 2024

Plant Protection Enquiries

We are committed to continue with our proactive approach to damage prevention, by reducing the risk to our network, through greater interaction with customers.

2023 saw a continued increase in the number of plans and safety advice issued through the LSBUD system to approved users. This resulted in over 63,000 searches being reviewed directly by the Plant Protection Team where additional information was requested to confirm how work could proceed safely.

	2023
Plant Protection Requests Raised	3,587
Self-serve via LSBUD	633,251
LSBUD Searches Reviewed by WWU	63,456
Number of approved users to self-serve	44,205

Plant Protection Site Visits

Published SLA: 10 working-days.

	LTS Network	Intermediate Pressure	Medium Pressure	Low Pressure	Total
Number of site visits	661	676	1371	5	2713
Number completed within 10 days	599	563	1151	4	2317
% responded to within 10 days	91%	83%	84%	80%	85%

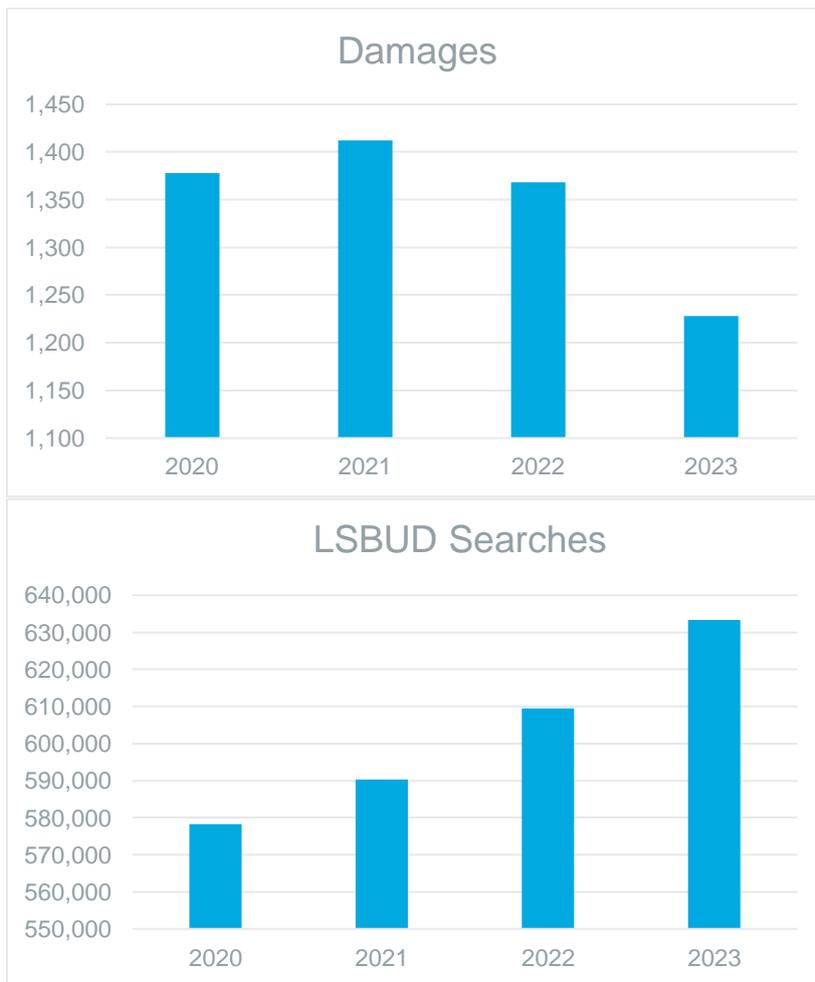
Aerial Surveillance

Throughout 2023, we continued to complete aerial surveillance of all >7bar pipelines and critical 2-7 bar pipelines, every two weeks in line with T/PM/MAINT/5 – Maintenance of Steel Pipelines and Associated Installations Operating Above 2 Barg. The surveys were undertaken to identify any ground activities that might affect the integrity of the pipeline. Ground activity, including mechanical excavation, within the area of interest (35m either side of a pipeline) or the Right of Way (10m either side of the pipeline), was reported and investigated, with follow up site visits raised to assess the impact of the work, if required.

Always more we can do

Despite the service we provide, we had 1,228 instances of damage or related incidents caused to our assets in 2023, which was a reduction of 140 compared to 2022. All but 4 of these were to low and medium pressure pipelines, with 55% caused by mechanical excavators.

However, 2023 saw our lowest ever recorded number of 3rd party damages in a calendar year. There is a distinct correlation between our increasing LSBUD searches and the reduction in damages to our network. The exception to this was in 2021 where we saw a slight increase, but this was attributed to the rapid remobilisation of ground and construction workers following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, which resulted in a peak in damages across the gas sector. As our number of LSBUD users continues to grow, our asset plans and safe digging guidelines are now reaching a wider audience than ever before.



In addition to this, we have also used our membership with LSBUD to promote our safe digging message to a wider audience through their publications and newsletters. We also attended their annual Damage Prevention Day held at St George’s Park, Burton on Trent. The aim of the conference is to actively promote the prevention of infrastructure damage to utility networks and hear directly from industry leaders. We also had the opportunity to spread our own safe digging messages on the day with an exhibitors stand, where we able to issue our plant protection documents, UKOPA guidelines and a variety of other merchandise to promote WWU.

As an LSBUD member, WWU also hold a position on their Governance Board Group and Gas Distribution Forum Group. The aim of these groups is to assist LSBUD in keeping people and its members assets safe, by helping ensure that the service is used to the highest possible level across the industry by all stakeholders with consistent approaches to safety by each of

the GDN's. The groups also provide a key stakeholder forum to promote the sharing of best practices, along with providing a direction for LSBUD.

We have continued to work in conjunction with our Corporate Affairs Team, to maintain a proactive approach to damage prevention. We regularly post updates across our social media platforms to promote safe digging and contact with WWU prior to commencing works on site. Along with our external communication, we also ensured the promotion of safe digging practices internally through our Pipeline platform with posts and blogs aimed at reminding colleagues of their role in pipeline safety.

A key focus is to continue to progress stakeholder engagement to continually improve plant protection and cross sector interactions. We maintain good contact information for landowners with local transmission pipelines running through their land and make annual contact to ensure our records are accurate.

Our ongoing aim is to keep the general public safe and drive down the number of unnecessary damage and infringement occurrences to our assets each year through engagement with those undertaken works.

Recent Engagements

As our aim is to reduce the number of 3rd party damages and infringements that occur across our network each year, we are always looking for ways in which we can improve the service we provide. Making our asset data as readily available as possible through approved data sharing platforms is one way we can ensure those carrying out works have sufficient access to information to facilitate safe working. During 2023 we had active involvement with two Government led initiatives that are aimed not only at reducing damage and infringements to underground assets, but also enhanced collaboration between organisations to minimise the cost and disruption caused by programmed works.

The National Underground Asset Register's (NUAR) pilot phase was launched in 2019 by The Geospatial Commission, with the goal of creating a digital map of underground assets, to reduce the disruption caused by utility strikes that has been estimated to cost the UK economy £1.2billion a year. Following initial pilot schemes in London and Northeast England, the minimum viable product version of the platform was launched in Wales in April 2023. As part of the launch, WWU provided GIS asset data that is currently being used on the platform, to provide users with information regarding the location of our assets. We have been actively involved in regular workshops and groups to ensure the final live version of the platform offers the safety, whilst also selecting a designated NUAR 'Champion' to promote the system internally.

DataMap Wales is a source of public sector data, which provides a shared platform to public authorities and members of the public. Along with asset information details, DataMap Wales provides geographic information that might be of interest to the user and allows this data to be displayed on top of the base map layer. Our Asset Team have been working with DataMap Wales to provide up to date asset information that will facilitate collaboration between organisations. This collaboration will reduce the risk of damage during works and provide opportunities for organisations to share planned works and achieve objectives through strategic programming.

For more information please visit:

National Underground Asset Register (NUAR) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Home | DataMapWales (gov.wales)

Case Studies

We meet the good practice principles in all our infrastructure interactions, and example case studies of recent interactions demonstrate our clear process in dealing with cross sector interactions.

HyNet North West

- We held early collaborative meetings with WSP regarding the HyNet Northwest project and the interactions with WWU pipelines. The project aim is to provide the required infrastructure to produce, transport and store low carbon hydrogen across the Northwest of England and North Wales region.
- HyNet will produce hydrogen from natural gas at a new low carbon hydrogen production plant, for this to be used in industries across the region. In addition, the project will introduce infrastructure to capture, transport and safely store carbon dioxide emissions under the seabed.
- The proposed locations for the new infrastructure provide a considerable number of interactions with WWU pipelines which were identified through initial searches. As part of the DCO (Development Consent Order) application a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) was agreed to document the discussions between WWU and the HyNet Team. The SoCG also sets out requirements for working in the vicinity of WWU pipelines, and the Plant Protection measures that are required safely undertake any works.
- Protective provisions have also been agreed to prevent damage to WWU pipelines during the construction phase of the works and for any future maintenance works that need to be undertaken.
- **For more information visit <https://hynet.co.uk>**

Mona Offshore Wind Farm

- The Mona Offshore Wind Project is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) which will consist of up to 96 wind turbines situated within Welsh waters approximately 29km from the North Wales coastline. The turbines are expected to generate approximately 1.5GW of electricity and will connect to the existing onshore Bodelwyddan National Grid substations in Denbighshire.
- The onshore cable will extend 18km from Llanddulas to the substation in Bodelwyddan along a cable corridor approximately 75m wide. The cable interacts with a number of WWU pipelines which were identified through the initial searches complete as part of the cable route selection.
- Discussions meetings have been held with the Mona Team to ensure our guidelines are documented and considerations are made during the design phase, to minimise the risk of damage to our network. Locations in which WWU supervision is required during initial ground investigation works and the construction phase of the works have been identified, with further discussion to be held throughout the project.
- Collaborative meetings have been held with our Asset Integrity Team, as the project will also include the diversion of a High-Pressure pipeline, to accommodate the extension of the Bodelwyddan substation.
- The Mona Team is currently refining their proposals and are working towards the submission of the projects Development Consent Order (DCO) application in 2024. The anticipation is that a decision will be made during 2025 with an expected construction start date in 2026.
- **For more information please visit - Welcome - Mona Offshore Wind Project (morganandmona.com)**

Further Information

Website: www.wwaterutilities.co.uk/services/dial-before-you-dig/

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