

Excerpt from Operation Oasis – Gold Strategy

Author Assistant Chief Constable Allyn Thomas - ACC Specialist Operations

Review.

Update 24/06/08. The analysis of the protestors remains unchanged. There does not appear to be a large scale criminal conspiracy within the protestors but there does appear to be a minority whose intentions appear to cause disruption to power generation in pursuit of their objectives. This may include a range of criminal activity.

It appears unlikely that the protestors will find a landowner on the Hoo peninsula who will give them permission to have an encampment on their land. Most of the land near the power station is under cultivation and others areas are SSSIs or similarly designated. This raises two strategic options. The first is that the protest goes ahead on land without permission as a mass trespass. The second option, given this possibility, is that the police either attempt to prevent the protestors entering the peninsula to set up their protest or quickly act with landowners to remove protestors.

Any decision around these options is a balance of the harm caused and the achievement of the strategic objectives. A range of factors need to be taken into account. These include:

- The strategy is to permit lawful protest but any mass trespass would be by its nature unlawful.
- The harm caused by a trespass would depend upon the nature of the land used and the damage caused. The environmental protestors have a reputation for reinstating any damage to land that they cause during the event. However trespass on a field of crops under cultivation could cause significant financial loss to the farmer.
- If we seek to prevent one organised protest from taking place then there is the likelihood of a larger number of disorganised encampments being set up causing far more damage and nuisance.
- Public confidence could be undermined if a protest camp is set up illegally and police are not seen to take action to enforce the law, however confidence could also be undermined if police action is seen to be excessive or if dispersed protests cause more problems than one single site.
- Any such protest could have a very adverse affect on the local environment, for example either causing a nuisance to neighbours or damage to wildlife habitats.
- Some protest sites could be hazardous to protestors or passers by for example because of busy roads, a railway line, power cables or water.
- Some potential protest sites could facilitate trespass onto the power station or make it very difficult to police the protest safely or effectively.

- Some sites will present more of a hazard to public health for example through poor water supply or access for emergency services.

Taking all these factors into account the balance of public interests and the Gold strategy appears to be best served by permitting the protest to take place on a site on the Hoo peninsula. However the police cannot agree to or condone any trespass on private land and so we would in principle wish to remove all such trespassers. The priority with which we would seek to do so would depend upon the following factors:

- The value, if any, of the potential damage to crops being cultivated on the land.
- That the land is not alongside to or contains a hazardous environment.
- It is not in a location that would cause a significant adverse local community impact.
- It is not adjacent to the Kingsnorth power station and so would make the policing of the protest less effective.

These considerations should be included in the tactical planning by the Silver commander and planning team.

Other issues have also been raised for Gold consideration. Should an air exclusion zone be sought? There is no intelligence that there will be any airborne protests over the site. The most likely over flight will be from media organisations. There is a public interest argument in favour of these companies being able to report the news around the protest and their equipment is such that even if required to 'stand off' from the site by such a zone, they will still be able to film the scene in detail. There appears to be no benefit or necessity for such an application.

The second issue concerns access to the site from the River Medway. This is more problematic. There is a high risk to the lives of protestors if unqualified individuals try to navigate across the river to land on the power station site. It is not clear whether there are any legal remedies that can be adopted to prohibit such activities and if there are whether they will be obeyed by protestors. I would ask that the Silver commander and planning team look at the range of options to manage protest on the river in pursuit of the Gold objectives.