

RESERVOIRS IN GOYT VALLEY

Our Parliamentary Staff

The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959); May 21, 1930;

Stockport's Water Bill and its Aims.

PERMANENT SUPPLIES.

Amenities Improved by the Scheme.

(From our Parliamentary Staff.)

WESTMINSTER, TUESDAY.

A scheme for the building of reservoirs in the Goyt Valley to supplement Stockport's water supply came before a Select Committee of the House of Commons to-day, when consideration was begun of a bill promoted by that Corporation. Mr. Gibbins presided.

The following were the petitioners against the bill:—Cheshire County Council, Buxton Corporation, London Midland and Scottish Railway Company, and a number of urban and district local authorities.

Sir Lynden Macassey, K.C., who appeared for the Corporation, in outlining the bill, said that Stockport had to supply an estimated population of 202,000 with water, 60 per cent of that population being in Stockport and 40 per cent in the 11 urban and rural districts for which the borough was statutorily responsible. "Stockport," Sir Lynden said, "is only supplying the demands upon it to-day for water by gambling on rain." He explained that the available yield of a water undertaking was based on the yield of three consecutive dry years. On that basis Stockport's undertaking had a yield of 4,850,000 gallons daily. The actual consumption was 6,400,000 gallons, so that there was a deficit of 1,550,000. About 300,000 gallons of the 4,850,000 was supplied by Manchester, but that could not be relied upon as a permanent source of supply.

The Choice of Goyt Valley.

After investigating all sources of supply from which it might obtain a permanent quantity of water the Corporation had decided to ask for power to construct certain reservoirs in the Goyt Valley. This was obviously an area from which Stockport was entitled to draw water. Under its statutory powers Stockport was placed in a position not merely onerous, but of special responsibility. According to their Act of 1899 the borough had to charge the same domestic rates for those supplied outside their boundary as those inside. In addition, if, after all the districts had been supplied by Stockport, there was a deficiency, it had to be borne entirely by the citizens of the borough. That was a very valuable privilege enjoyed by the local areas supplied.

Mr. A. A. Somerville (a member of the Committee): How did these obligations arise?

Sir Lynden replied that when the Corporation acquired the water undertaking in the borough in 1899 from the private company in whose hands it was they also took over the obligations of that company. Stockport's deficits on the water undertaking since 1899 had totalled no less than £457,603, all of which had to be borne by the borough.

Exhaustive investigations had been made, and the borough authorities were satisfied that the scheme they were submitting was the best under the circumstances. Reservoirs in the Goyt Valley would provide by far the cheapest water at the earliest possible moment, the latter being an essential consideration. In this way they would be relieved from the responsibility of having to gamble upon rain. There would be two reservoirs, Errwood reservoir, in the upper part of the valley, and Fernilee reservoir, in the lower part of the valley. The total new drainage area was 5,900 acres. Calculations had been made, and it was estimated that the rainfall available for storage would be between 4,800,000 and 6,500,000 gallons a day. The Corporation had already bought or come to an arrangement regarding 4,863 acres, leaving 1,037 acres to be dealt with.

Alternative Schemes.

The main argument of the opponents was that they wanted water cheap, although the Corporation proposed to obtain the cheapest water. One suggestion was that reservoirs should be constructed in the Sett Valley and Hollingworth Clough. That had been considered, and the cost had been found too high to be reasonable. It was therefore rejected. Another source suggested was the wells at Wilmslow. That also had been con-

sidered, and it had been decided to increase the pumping power at Wilmslow while the Govt reservoirs were being constructed. That would help the present water supply to carry on but was not an adequate solution of the problem. To suggest that Stockport should take a permanent supply from Manchester was to ignore several important facts. The Minister of Health, reporting on this suggestion, had pointed out that by doing so Stockport would be making no use of the supplies at the door of the borough. It was a question of the best utilisation by a public authority of the available water supplies. The Govt water could only be used by Stockport and not by Manchester. The consideration that definitely ruled out the question of supplies from Manchester was one of price.

Sir Lynden referred to the joint petition against the bill by the councils of Alderley Edge, Bredbury and Romiley, Hazel Grove and Bramhall, Marple, Cheadle and Gatley, Handforth, Wilmslow, Bucklow, Disley, and Macclesfield, all within the area supplied by Stockport. At present the ratepayers of Stockport were subsidising the water undertaking to supply these districts with water at below cost. It was not proposed to affect the charges for bulk supplies but domestic supplies.

Charges to Local Authorities.

The petitioners complained that under the bill they were absolutely at the mercy of the Corporation, so far as prices were concerned. The bill provided though, that the charges should be such as would make the water undertaking self-subsisting. The Corporation were entitled to charge rates, not differential rates, that would make the undertaking self-subsisting.

The Chairman: Is it possible for the Corporation to convert this into a profit-making concern?

Sir Lynden pointed out that no profits could by statute be applied to the relief of rates. The petitioners, he said, had raised another point, suggesting they might become liable to a burdensome water rate as a result of any unthrifty conduct of business. If the Corporation did not carry on the undertaking in a proper way, then when Stockport next came before Parliament seeking powers the local authority would have the right to call attention to any mismanagement.

Mr. Hoffman (a member of the Committee): If the local authority feels it is being wrongly charged, is there any right of appeal?

Sir Lynden explained that there was not in any ordinary case, except if the Corporation were, for instance, to charge different rates inside its boundary to those outside, in which case there would be an immediate right of appeal to the court of law for breach of a statutory obligation.

The Chairman asked what would happen if the Corporation fixed a water rate it thought sufficient to render the undertaking self-subsisting which was regarded by some as too high.

Sir Lynden said that point was covered in the bill. If by an inaccurate estimate the water rate produced £10,000 in excess of what was wanted, then that surplus had to be devoted to the reduction of the water rates.

Amenities of Goyt Valley.

The objection of Buxton, Sir Lynden said, was that the picturesqueness of Goyt Valley would be ruined. He thought the construction of these works, with the water, would add to the beauty of the valley. Evidently Buxton was afraid that their visitors who made an excursion to Goyt Valley would so have their æsthetic susceptibilities outraged by the water that they would never visit Buxton again. There was a clause in the bill giving the right to the county councils of Cheshire and Derbyshire to take steps if it was considered that the scenery or amenities of the Goyt Valley were being injured. All the local authorities had agreed to this course, being satisfied to leave this in the hands of the county councils, except the Corporation of Buxton, who wanted the right to move independently in this matter. He argued that Buxton should not be placed in any special position, but that any move should be co-ordinated in the county councils.

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Mr. R. F. Parker (for Buxton) said Buxton would be satisfied if it had power to object, as the county councils had, to works injurious to scenery. Buxton relied for its livelihood on the beauty of the countryside in which it was placed to attract visitors.

Mr. R. Hyde, Town Clerk of Stockport, gave evidence as to the possibility of the works receiving a grant from the Unemployment Grants Committee.

The Committee adjourned until tomorrow.

GOYT VALLEY SCHEME APPROVED

Reservoirs and the Scenery.

WILMSLOW SUPPLIES

Reluctance to Deal with Manchester.

(From our Parliamentary
Correspondent.)

WESTMINSTER, FRIDAY.

The bill giving the Stockport Corporation power to proceed with the building of reservoirs in the Goyt Valley to supplement their water supply, was to-day approved by a Select Committee of the House of Commons for report to Parliament.

When the scheme was first published, protests were instantaneous from such societies as the Peak District and Northern Counties Footpaths Preservation Society. Negotiations were opened to ensure the safety of the beauty of this Pennine valley. The Stockport Corporation was so successful in meeting the demands made, that when the bill came before Parliament the opposition, so far as the protection of the scenery of the valley was concerned, had virtually disappeared. The Buxton Corporation was the only champion of the charms of the Goyt Valley left unsatisfied.

Other opposition was forthcoming from the urban and district areas supplied with water by Stockport, their chief fear being that they might be partly responsible for incurring a large capital expenditure and be forced to pay high water rates.

Partners with Stockport.

Mr. F. G. Thomas, K.C., for the various local authorities, to-day explained that they were actuated by no spirit of hostility. They were partners with Stockport in this undertaking, which was accordingly just as important to them as to the Corporation. These authorities felt that every possible alternative source of water supply ought to be explored before they could share any

responsibility for this large capital expenditure. If they were faced in the future with increased water rates it could not then be said they stood aside when the matter was being discussed, and must therefore pay the consequences. It was felt that Stockport had failed properly to develop the Wilmslow bore holes. That source of supply should have been developed some time ago. If it had there would have been no shortage of water a year ago. Another objection was that Stockport had shown reluctance to find out from Manchester what they could do in the way of a water supply. Stockport had been Manchester's customer for seventy years. It might be that Manchester might not be able to give the supply required, but some effort to discover the facts should have been made.

Stockport had shown an anxiety to be independent of Manchester. The desire to possess its own undertaking could be understood, but surely it was better if water could be obtained on good terms without incurring such risks as were always run in the construction of reservoirs. The local authorities felt that they were being sacrificed to the individualistic views of Stockport. In the absence of the development of the Wilmslow wells and of negotiations with Manchester, it was premature to bring forward this scheme.

Buxton's Claim.

Mr. Parker, for the Buxton Corporation, called the attention of the committee to a clause placing the care of the preservation of the scenery of the Goyt Valley in the hands of the county councils of Derbyshire and Cheshire. Buxton, he urged, had a special interest in the valley. The town relied for its prosperity on visitors, who were attracted by the beauty of the surrounding country. He asked that Buxton, in addition to the county councils, should have power to act where it was considered that scenery was being injured.

Sir Lynden Macassey, K.C., for the Corporation, replied that Buxton was represented on the Derbyshire Council and had ample opportunity to take action if occasion arose. If an exception was made in the case of Buxton, hosts of other local authorities would be claiming a similar right.

After consultation the committee decided to approve the bill, with an amendment to give effect to Stockport's undertaking, that any future profits on the water undertaking would be devoted to making good the losses, amounting to £500,000, in the last twenty odd years.