

TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKERS: Roger Johnson, Annabel Tiffin, Gill Dummigan, Paul Deighton, Charlotte Roule, Alison Gerrard.

Roger Johnson: Well staying in Cheshire, well under it in fact, because winter is on its way and keeping the UK supplied with enough gas to get it through a long winter has been a challenge. The country keeps comparatively low supplies in gas stored compared with most of Europe.

Annabel Tiffin: But now a huge new gas storage facility in Cheshire's underground salt caverns could be the solution as Gill Dummigan reports.

Gill Dummigan: It was mild, if a little drizzly, for the minister's official visit but it's in the depths of winter that this place should come into its own, when we're all turning on the gas. Early last year the UK was reportedly within 6 hours of running out, a situation no one's keen to see again.

Paul Deighton, Commercial Secretary to the Treasury: For us, it's one of our key objectives is security and supply, having a big and flexible storage capacity, I mean, it speaks for itself, is obviously an important component of that strategy.

GD: Two huge underground storage caverns are already open. Ultimately, there'll be twenty. They're hollowed out of the salt deep underground by pumping in water to dissolve it, then replacing that hole with gas. The salty water that comes back out is shipped off to the nearby chemical firm to use there.

Charlotte Roule, MD of Storenergy UK: The Salt area is perfectly adapted and adequate for the use that we need it to have there, and we will be the biggest onshore underground gas storage for the UK.

GD: Until now the UK has had a gas storage capacity of 4.6 billion cubic metres. That might sound like a lot but it's only about 6 percent of what we need. Considerably less than the EU average of 22 percent. This project has faced stiff opposition in the past, the salt mine next door tried to have it stopped two years ago on safety grounds.

Alison Gerrard, Mayor of Northwich: It's not really been anything that I've certainly heard a lot of recently, so you know, I think initially the concerns were, like you say, you know, that everything as going to go boom, but they seem to have addressed those issues full on.

GD: Three more caverns are expected to open by 2016. Gill Dummigan, BBC North West Tonight, Northwich.