

National Grid provides update on Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project to reduce the visual impact of overhead lines in AONBs and National Parks

Latest stage of a £500 million project to reduce visual impact of electricity infrastructure in protected landscapes

15 Sep 2015

- Four locations in England and Wales prioritised by a leading stakeholder group for detailed technical work
- £24 million initiative for smaller landscape enhancement projects set for Winter launch

Plans to reduce the visual impact of electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes across England and Wales have reached a new landmark, following decisions by the project's independently chaired Stakeholder Advisory Group.

In November 2014, twelve sections of high voltage lines in eight Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks were shortlisted as having the most significant landscape and visual impact, following a study overseen by leading landscape expert Professor Carys Swanwick.

Since then, National Grid and independent landscape consultants have done further technical work with considerable and highly detailed input from local stakeholders in each location. This has enabled the Stakeholder Advisory Group to prioritise four projects from the shortlist.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group's decisions were made after a rigorous review of each shortlisted section of line. Members at a two-day meeting considered each project using a set of five guiding project principles from the Visual Impact Provision project's policy.*

These four projects will be taken forward over the next 12 months for detailed technical feasibility works which will include environmental studies, archaeological studies and engineering work 'on the ground'. There will also be further significant engagement with local stakeholders and communities.

National Grid transmission lines which have been prioritised in protected landscapes are:

- Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty near Winterbourne Abbas
- New Forest National Park near Hale
- Peak District National Park near Dunford Bridge

- Snowdonia National Park near Porthmadog

Using a £500 million allowance made available by Ofgem until 2021, National Grid plans to reduce the visual impact of sections of high voltage overhead lines in these locations. A range of different ways of doing this has been considered in each location.

Given the sensitive nature of these protected areas, replacing existing overhead lines with underground cables has generally proved to be the preferred option both technically and in discussion with local stakeholders.

Chris Baines, Chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Group, said: "Reducing the visual impact of pylons and power lines in our most precious landscapes is highly desirable, but it is also very expensive and technically complex so we have had to make some difficult decisions. Although four schemes have been prioritised, none of the locations on our original shortlist have been dropped and they will remain under consideration for future work to reduce the impact of National Grid's transmission lines under the Visual Impact Provision project."

Hector Pearson, Visual Impact Provision Project Manager, National Grid, comments: "This is a unique stakeholder-driven project, and it continues to represent a major opportunity to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, cultural and environmental heritage of some Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. We will continue to work in partnership with stakeholders to not only mitigate the impact of our transmission lines in these areas but to also enhance the landscape, and deliver value for money."

The Stakeholder Advisory Group is chaired by environmentalist, Chris Baines and comprises senior representatives from organisations including the Campaign for National Parks, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, Historic England, Cadw, Natural England and the National Trust. It was established to help National Grid identify which transmission lines should be prioritised to make use of the £500 million allowance.

The protected landscapes that have not been prioritised are the Brecon Beacons National Park, High Weald AONB, North Wessex Downs AONB and the Tamar Valley AONB. These locations will remain under consideration for future work using the VIP allowance.

National Grid is also set to use part of the £500 million for smaller localised visual improvement projects which can be accessed by all AONBs and National Parks with existing National Grid electricity infrastructure.

Set to be launched in the Winter, this landscape enhancement initiative will provide up to £24 million over six years. The aim will be to reduce the visual impact of National Grid's existing infrastructure in AONBs and National Parks and improve the related visual quality of the landscape. A range of local visual improvement projects could enhance biodiversity, benefit cultural heritage or raise awareness of natural and historic features of a landscape.

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Notes for editors

About Visual Impact Provision

All electricity transmission owners are funded by a price control mechanism which is agreed with and set by Ofgem, the electricity and gas markets regulator. Ofgem has agreed a set of price controls and incentives for the period from April 2013 to March 2021. The new price controls and incentives include a provision of £500 million to mitigate the visual impact of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes in Great Britain.

For National Grid, which is the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales, this means considering the visual amenity of our existing infrastructure in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

*The project's guiding principles are to prioritise potential projects which:

- Result in greatest landscape enhancement benefits
- Result in greatest opportunities to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts

- Result in greatest opportunities to encourage public understanding and enjoyment of the protected landscapes, including positive socio-economic impacts
- Are technically feasible in the context of the wider transmission system
- Are economical and efficient

More information about the Visual Impact Provision project can be found at:
www.nationalgrid.com/vip

Notes to Editors:

National Grid is pivotal to the energy systems in the UK and the north eastern United States. We aim to serve customers well and efficiently, supporting the communities in which we operate and making possible the energy systems of the future.

National Grid in the UK:

- We own and operate the electricity transmission network in England and Wales, with day-to-day responsibility for balancing supply and demand. We also operate, but do not own, the Scottish networks. Our networks comprise approximately 7,200 kilometres (4,474 miles) of overhead line, 1,500 kilometres (932 miles) of underground cable and 342 substations.
- We own and operate the gas National Transmission System in Great Britain, with day-to-day responsibility for balancing supply and demand. Our network comprises approximately 7,660 kilometres (4,760 miles) of high-pressure pipe and 618 above-ground installations.
- As Great Britain's System Operator (SO) we make sure gas and electricity is transported safely and efficiently from where it is produced to where it is consumed. From April 2019, Electricity System Operator (ESO) is a new standalone business within National Grid, legally separate from all other parts of the National Grid Group. This will provide the right environment to deliver a balanced and impartial ESO that can realise real benefits for consumers as we transition to a more decentralised, decarbonised electricity system.
- Other UK activities mainly relate to businesses operating in competitive markets outside of our core regulated businesses; including interconnectors, gas metering activities and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) importation terminal – all of which are now part of National Grid Ventures. National Grid Property is responsible for the management, clean-up and disposal of surplus sites in the UK. Most of these are former gas works.

Find out more about the energy challenge and how National Grid is helping find solutions to some of the challenges we face at <https://www.nationalgrid.com/group/news>

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