

Work paused on New Forest pylon project

29 Mar 2019

Despite strong support, National Grid has decided to pause work on its landscape enhancement project to remove eight pylons from Hale Purlieu in the New Forest National Park following advice from legal experts, the regulator and its independent Stakeholder Advisory Group.

The work is part of National Grid's Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project, which makes use of £500m provision from Ofgem as part of the current price control period to reduce the landscape and visual impact of existing overhead transmission lines in nationally important landscapes in England and Wales.

The decision has been made due to emerging complexities surrounding the European regulations designed to protect the natural habitats of protected species. While these regulations are designed to prevent the permanent loss of habitats, and not stop short-term work that we believe could have provided a net gain to the environment in which we were working, it is evident that the legal position is complex and, importantly, untested for a project of this nature. It is therefore unlikely that a planning application for this project would receive approval before the funding deadline.

David Wright, Director, Electricity Transmission, at National Grid, said: "This project would remove eight electricity pylons while enhancing a nationally important landscape, and potentially improving and extending the important habitats in this beautiful part of the New Forest National Park. It has been developed over three years with the close collaboration and support of many local people and national environmental bodies. Our extensive community and stakeholder engagement throughout has shown strong support for these plans.

"However, the current round of funding is only available for a limited time, and due to what we believe is an unintended consequence of the regulations it has become clear that we will not be able to complete this in time.

"We would like to thank everyone for their engagement and involvement to date and sincerely hope that it will be possible to return at some future date when the legal position has been resolved."

The decision was made in consultation with National Grid's independent Stakeholder Advisory Group, which comprises representatives from national organisations with an interest in enhancing landscapes and environments throughout England and Wales.

The Group's Chairman and leading environmentalist, Chris Baines, said:

"After three years of extremely intense work, it is disappointing to have to recommend pausing this project.

"There has been terrific support from many local people and environmental professionals, and I remain convinced of the long-term landscape and environmental benefits of this scheme. I do believe that it remains possible in the longer term to deliver exceptional visual improvement whilst at the same time enhancing the wildlife habitat at Hale Purlieu.

"However, there is a need to build confidence in the legal process before the project can move forward again."

National Grid will continue to progress its other VIP projects to replace pylons with underground alternatives in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Peak District and Snowdonia National Parks. Early works on the construction of the fully-consented Dorset project to remove 22 pylons near the villages of Winterbourne Abbas and Martinstown began earlier this year.

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

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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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