

**VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group**  
**Minutes of the twelfth meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

**Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:**

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Campaign for National Parks** Fiona Howie, Chief Executive
- **CPRE** Tom Fyans, Director of Campaigns and Policy
- **CPRW** Geoff Sinclair, Trustee
- **Landscape Institute** Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director
- **National Association of AONBs** Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB [6<sup>th</sup> September only]
- **National Grid** George Mayhew, Director of Corporate Affairs
- **National Parks England** Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National Park Authority
- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **Natural England** Liz Newton, Director Strategy Development
- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist
- **The Ramblers** Alison Hallas, Policy and Advocacy Officer (Countryside and Access)

**Apologies:**

- **Cadw**
- **Historic England**
- **National Parks Wales**
- **Natural Resources Wales**
- **Visit Wales**
- Visit England

**Guest:**

- **Peak District National Park Authority** Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive (5<sup>th</sup> September only)

**Secretariat in attendance:**

- **National Grid** – Michelle Clark, VIP Project Manager; Ben Smith, VIP Project Manager (South); Eloise Frank, VIP Project Manager (North); Andrea Key, Lead Consents Officer; Sheena Froggatt, Development Engineer; Christopher Hawkins, Development Engineer; Steve Lam, Regulatory Submissions Manager
- Professor Carys Swanwick, Independent Advisor to National Grid
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

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The VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group carried out a site visit to the Peak District National Park on the afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> September, followed by a series of presentations and a full day meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> September.

The purpose of the meeting was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Provide input to National Grid to help them shape their submission to Ofgem for the next price control period (RIIO-T2) and consider options for future projects that could be pursued.
- Provide National Grid with sufficient guidance to produce the appropriate levels of information for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to decide on potential projects for RIIO T2 at the Group's meeting in December 2018.
- Hear updates on the four schemes prioritised for replacing existing overhead lines with underground cables in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks in England and Wales.
- Receive an update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative and consider measures to increase uptake.
- Review current membership of the group.

## **1 – Presentation from the Peak District National Park Authority**

Following the site visit to the Peak District project site, the Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority gave a presentation to the Stakeholder Advisory Group outlining the vision, purposes and duties of the UK's National Parks, and the specific features and challenges facing the Peak District National Park in particular. National Grid was thanked on behalf of all National Parks for the work it is carrying out through the VIP project, and the benefits that undergrounding of line section ZO.2 will bring to the area around Dunford Bridge. Support for undergrounding of the western section of line at Longdendale during the next price control period was also noted.

Endorsement was given to issues discussed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group around the need for better alignment and more joined-up thinking between infrastructure providers (including Highways England, the Department for Transport, distribution network operators (DNOs), United Utilities and others) and Sarah Fowler offered to help in facilitating that interaction.

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## **2 – Future of the VIP programme and looking ahead to RIIO T2**

At the previous meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018, the Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed the future of the VIP programme and how it might look during the next price control period (RIIO T2). The main purpose of today's meeting was to provide input to National Grid to help them shape their first submission to Ofgem for RIIO T2, and to discuss the options for future projects that could be pursued if there were ongoing consumer support for the VIP programme to continue.

### **2.1 – Presentation on possible options for T2**

Michelle Clark from National Grid gave a presentation outlining the topics that were discussed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group at the last meeting. The key themes were:

- Unanimous support for continuing with the VIP scheme.
- Keep the core of the current policy/process but use the learning from this first round to evolve and improve the process.
- Use the original detailed landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) as the basis for identifying potential projects for the next price control period, but also review the weighting of other factors before shortlisting potential projects (e.g. impacts on communities, visitor attractions, other heritage/ecological effects / issues, degree of local support, engineering feasibility, etc.).
- Consider widening the scope of the scheme beyond AONBs and National Parks to include, for example, World Heritage Sites, National Trails, coastal paths and areas of social deprivation.
- Evolve the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) by broadening its remit and opening it up to a wider range of stakeholders.
- Better collaboration with the distribution network operators (DNOs) and other utility/infrastructure providers in order to provide more integrated project outcomes.

Since the last meeting, the National Grid project team has looked at other designated areas to see whether there is any existing National Grid infrastructure that could be considered for inclusion in the VIP programme. A plan of World Heritage Sites was overlaid on the National Grid transmission network. For World Heritage Sites, the majority of overhead lines have already been considered as the areas where they cross designated World Heritage Sites occur in AONBs or National Parks. There are two areas however that have not been considered to date:

- A section of line in the English Lake District World Heritage Site – this section is also now within the National Park due to the Lakes/Dales boundary extension which took place after the last LVIA was carried out.
- The Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (Hadrian's Wall).

It was confirmed that these areas should be considered only where they fall within AONBs and National Parks. Including them as standalone designations would require a change to the VIP policy which explicitly excludes them as it is currently written.

A map plotting National Trails against National Grid transmission lines also revealed a strong correlation between the Trails and the areas that had already been surveyed. It was also pointed out that the views from National Trails were taken into consideration when the original LVIA was carried

out and where a viewpoint from a National Trail was affected by a subsection of pylons, this would have increased its score.

In terms of coastal paths, again many of these were covered in the original survey as they run through AONBs and National Parks. National Grid also pointed out that its lines tend to run inland from the coast rather than along it.

With regards to including areas of social deprivation, National Grid has considered this as a potential measure. There are numerous factors contributing to social deprivation, and the existence of transmission lines as a factor has not been tested and is consequently unproven. It is therefore difficult to see how the impacts of overhead power lines and the potential for 'improvements' in social deprivation through removing them could be identified or assessed.

There was a reminder from Ofgem that the primary aim of the VIP funding is to improve visual amenity, and that there is a statutory basis for the work that is going to be done within the AONBs and National Parks.

The potential benefits of addressing areas of high landscape quality within AONBs and National Parks that are near to areas of social deprivation were however acknowledged, and it was suggested that social deprivation could be a factor that is used to weigh up the relative merits of potential projects.

## 2.2 – Presentation on technical/engineering options

Sheena Froggatt and Christopher Hawkins from National Grid gave a presentation reminding Stakeholder Advisory Group members of the technical and engineering requirements for different types of projects including:

- Types of pylons (including conventional lattice pylons, low-height lattice pylons and T-pylons).
- Sealing end compounds.
- Access points/routes for engineering works.
- XLPE insulated cables/Gas Insulated Line (GIL).
- How underground cables/GIL are installed.
- Link pillar boxes.
- Tunnelling and tunnel head houses.

Discussions were also held around other aspects of project design including paint colours for pylons and fences, clearance heights required for overhead lines (including the balance between the number of pylons vs the distance between them), the materials that can be used to backfill trenches, the techniques for removing pylons and the lifespan of the infrastructure.

## 2.3 – Potential 'long-list' of projects for RIIO T2

Michelle Clark from National Grid presented an overview of:

- The projects from the original shortlist that were not taken forward in 2014 but by virtue of scoring 'very high' (purple) in the original LVIA remain in consideration for RIIO T2.
- A 'long-list' of potential projects that included those above that were categorised as Purple plus the next 11 on the list. These scored 'high' (red).
- Two additional locations i.e. the Lake District (where the new National Park extension gave one of the existing sections of National Grid line a 'high' score) and Hadrian's Wall (where a number of subsections either enter or affect the setting of the Northumberland National Park (see Section 2.1 above).

National Grid and Ofgem confirmed that the RIIO T2 price control period which begins in April 2021 would run for five years. The current RIIO T1 price control period runs for eight years from 2013 – 2021.

Michelle Clark then ran through a headline overview of each of the schemes for consideration in alphabetical order. These are summarised below:

- **Anglesey AONB 4ZA.1(RED)** – Prominent short section seen from many nearby heritage assets that crosses the Anglesey AONB and over the Menai Strait, adjacent to Pont Britannia to reach the mainland.

- **Brecon Beacons National Park 4YU.3 (PURPLE)** –The overhead line runs through the dramatic scenery of the Clydach Gorge outside Abergavenny through isolated villages and across the A465 Heads of the Valley Road.
- **Chilterns AONB ZL.2 (RED)** – A long section south of Aylesbury passing through a chalk river valley close to towns and villages and following the line of the proposed HS2.
- **Cotswolds AONB ZF.2 (RED)** – A long section in the west of the Cotswolds running north / south to just outside Cheltenham. The line runs through a rural but well-populated landscape past ancient woodland and designated sites and passes numerous heritage assets which would benefit from the line removal.
- **Dorset AONB 4YA.5 (PURPLE)** – The line section passes through a classic open chalk downland landscape. The area is highly designated with important ecological and archaeological assets.
- **Dorset AONB 4VN.2 (PURPLE)** – The overhead line passes east of Weymouth through a largely agricultural, undesignated open chalk downland landscape. It is similar to the RIIO T1 VIP Dorset scheme which is located three miles east.
- **High Weald AONB 4ZJ.1 (PURPLE)** – The overhead line runs through a small, highly-designated ancient wooded landscape enclosed by the Battle ridge to the north. Views of the line can be seen from historic sites including the much-visited Battle Abbey.
- **New Forest National Park 4YB.1 (RED)** – The line crosses the open, highly-designated Avon Valley floodplain joining in the east with the RIIO T1 VIP project across Hale Purlieu.
- **North Wessex Downs AONB YYM.4 (PURPLE)** – The line section runs through mainly undesignated agricultural land along the broad flat Vale of Pewsey below a succession of hills from Pewsey in the west to Burbage in the east. A DNO line runs close in parallel for much of its length.
- **North Wessex Downs AONB YYM.5 and YYM.6 (RED)** – A long section adjacent (east) of (and contiguous with) YYM.4 running through mainly agricultural land in open downland along the Vale of Pewsey from Burbage at the foot of the scarp and rising up to an elevated downland plateau. Part of YYM.5 (like YYM.4) has a DNO line running close in parallel for some of its length.
- **North Wessex Downs AONB YYM.1 (RED)** - Short, most westerly overhead line section in the North Wessex Downs. The line runs through open downland along the foot of the scarp terminating just north of Devizes.
- **North Wessex Downs AONB 4YG.2 (RED)** - Short section to the north east of the AONB, north of (and adjacent to) a section of undergrounding through the Goring Gap. The line runs past villages and isolated properties through typical chalk landscapes above the Thames floodplain.
- **Peak District National Park 4ZO.3 & 4ZO.4 (Western section) (PURPLE)** – A long section running west from the Woodhead Tunnel along the Trans Pennine Trail / Longdendale Valley to Tintwistle. The highly-designated, wild moorland landscape is dominated by five drinking water reservoirs and the Woodhead Pass.
- **Snowdonia National Park ZK.1 (RED)** – Long section from Trawsfynydd through remote, highly-designated heath and moorland which passes important Roman sites.
- **Tamar Valley AONB YF.1 (PURPLE)** – The overhead line dominates the tranquil landscape as it crosses the Tamar and Tavy estuaries and Bere Peninsula. Highly-designated and within the Cornish Mining World Heritage site.
- **Wye Valley AONB 4YU.2 (RED)** – Short section in rural south Herefordshire close to small villages and ancient woodland which is contiguous with an underground section under the River Wye.

The two additional potential areas that have been identified for consideration in RIIO T2:

- **The Lake District National Park** – A section of line was assessed during the original LVIA as it was on the boundary of the proposed Lake/Dales extension. With the extension now in place, the scheme is now 'red' (without the extension it scored amber in the original assessment). As the extension had not been confirmed at the time, this scheme was not included in the 2014 report.
- **Hadrian's Wall** – The central 45km section of the wall (and associated National Trail) is the most heavily visited with some of the overhead line adjacent to/affecting the setting of the Northumberland National Park. The subsections of overhead line that are in/adjacent to the

Northumberland National Park or in the Solway Coast AONB at the western end of the wall were assessed during the original LVIA and scored mainly amber and yellow.

Stakeholder Advisory Group members were provided with a set of information sheets about each of the previously assessed schemes including route and constraints maps, photographs, the original LVIA score (and breakdown), and an overview of the engineering options and technical/environmental issues for each project.

The Advisory Group then split into sub-groups to discuss the relative merits of the schemes, whether they should be taken forward on a long-list and what further information the Group required from National Grid and its consultants before the next meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Group in December 2018.

There was a reminder that the Stakeholder Advisory Group was not being asked for a definitive shortlist, and that the focus of the discussions at this stage was to provide National Grid with a steer on where to focus its attention and identify what needs to and can be done before the next meeting in December 2018 to facilitate more detailed discussions and decisions.

It was pointed out by Group members that the following should be considered in determining which projects to recommend:

- The importance of going back to the original LVIA assessments and making decisions that are based primarily on landscape and visual impacts.
- Whether schemes that are in close proximity to the four undergrounding projects that are already being pursued should be prioritised or not, both from a point of principle but also in relation to causing further disruption for the local communities.
- Whether priority should be given to one or possibly two large projects as opposed to several smaller ones.
- The degree of 'early asset write-off' (i.e. where consumers are still paying for an asset that has only recently been built or refurbished).

It was also noted that a significant learning point from the current projects has been the challenge in identifying suitable locations for the sealing end compounds, and this issue should therefore be given more detailed consideration during the early stages of assessing potential projects.

Following the sub-group and plenary discussions it was agreed that the following schemes should be prioritised for further investigations in advance of more detailed discussions at the December meeting:

Purple sections:

- North Wessex Downs AONB YYM.4
- Peak District National Park western section
- Tamar Valley AONB

Red sections:

- Anglesey AONB
- Cotswolds AONB
- North Wessex Downs AONB (YYM.1 or YYM.5 and YYM.6 together – possibly in conjunction with YYM.4)

Plus

- The Lake District National Park

For further consideration:

- High Weald AONB
- Hadrian's Wall

***Reasons for selection***

### **The 'purple' very high scoring sections**

The Stakeholder Advisory Group kept the VIP's guiding principles and the LVIA undertaken in 2014 at the core of their decision making.

It was acknowledged that three of the projects – Brecon Beacons, Peak District West and Tamar Valley – relied on a tunnelled solution and would require very high levels of funding to achieve.

However, it was also pointed out that Tamar Valley was the highest scoring subsection in England and Wales for negative impact, with the Peak District West subsections coming in a close second, and that it would be sensible to explore these further and consider them in December.

All the 'purple' high-scoring projects remain on the shortlist for further consideration except the Brecon Beacons. The group decided that technical difficulties and environmental constraints associated with the project in the Brecon Beacons combined with the problems in locating a suitable location for the sealing end compounds and tunnel head houses within a reasonable distance of the shortlisted subsection of line meant that this should not be taken forward at this stage.

There was acknowledgement that with one scheme already under way in Dorset and the other high-scoring sections located in relatively close proximity, it would not make sense to attempt to progress these projects in RIIO T2. The Group agreed that both Dorset projects in the very high category should remain on the shortlist for future consideration, potentially in RIIO T3.

Concerns remain over the close proximity of the DNO line with YYM.4 in the North Wessex Downs. The Stakeholder Advisory Group asked National Grid to contact the DNO operator of the line and explore with them the potential for a joint project in the Vale of Pewsey. The cumulative impact of National Grid's existing infrastructure in this location should also be taken into consideration with both YYM.5 and YYM.6 – see below

See below for the Stakeholder Advisory Group's thoughts on the project in the High Weald AONB.

### **The 'red' high scoring sections**

The Group considered all of these on their merits but, as there was still a fair amount left to consider on the purple list, decided to focus primarily on those at the higher scoring end of the list, namely Cotswolds ZF.2 and the North Wessex Downs YYM.6 and YYM.1.

In the case of the North Wessex Downs, it was clear that with five subsections of overhead line falling within the top 20, that the VIP project ought to look at finding a way of mitigating the effect on the landscape in this most highly-impacted area. Additionally, the fact that four of the lines occur in a relatively focused geographical area in the downland of Wiltshire led the Group to focus its attention to finding a solution in this area rather than in the more isolated Goring Gap where 4YG.2 is located.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group asked National Grid to explore a solution involving YYM.4, YYM.5 and YYM.6, which are contiguous and include the highest scoring purple section. Any solution will however involve working with the DNO to resolve issues around YYM.4 and YYM.5 (see above) and it was acknowledged that the open landscape will make finding a suitable location for sealing end compounds challenging. The Group also asked National Grid to look at a smaller scheme at YYM.1 near Devizes as a possible alternative option if the YYM.4 – YYM.6 option is not feasible.

The potential for a third road crossing over the Menai Strait prompted the Group to ask National Grid to speak with Welsh Government over the possibility of co-locating cables to replace the existing overhead line in the new road bridge. It was acknowledged that pursuing this VIP project was wholly dependent on the bridge and that National Grid should explore this to ensure that an opportunity for collaboration between government and utility businesses was not missed.

### **Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)**

Both the very high scoring section of overhead line in the High Weald AONB and the lower amber / yellow scoring line sections affecting Hadrian's Wall were considered by the Group.



It was agreed that rather than being considered for major undergrounding projects – the former was not favoured by the AONB Partnership locally in 2015 and the latter did not score high enough on the LVIA – these projects should be looked at in the context of LEI. In these cases, the VIP project team would work with the relevant organisations locally to identify potential schemes under LEI to see what measures could be taken to mitigate the visual impact of the existing line – see section 3.2.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the list above, National Grid will undertake further work to ensure that equivalent amounts of information are available on each potential project ahead of the December meeting. This will not include any ground investigations at this stage but may include:

- For all projects, summarise the history, provide outline costings (including any early asset write-off costs) and carry out some landowner and stakeholder mapping. Where relevant, begin conversations with DNOs to explore opportunities for collaboration, and revisit previous work on residual scores if the DNO infrastructure cannot be removed.
- Peak District West and Tamar Valley – Provide a reminder of the work done to date (including the Long Term Futures Study for Peak West) and summarise the history of the Advisory Group's previous discussions on these schemes.
- Anglesey AONB and Peak District West – Find out more about any future infrastructure projects including the proposed timings and the potential for linking in with them.
- Hadrian's Wall – Review the work submitted by the Northumberland National Park Authority during RIIO T1 and the LVIA work undertaken during the original assessment with a view to identifying a potential option for an LEI type project.
- Lake District extension – Revisit the results of the previous LVIA and carry out further assessments if required. Develop engineering solutions and explore potential sealing end compound locations.
- Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs – Develop engineering solutions and explore potential sealing end compound locations.
- For all projects, hold conversations with the respective AONB Partnerships, National Park Authorities and other local stakeholders to understand more about their views on the potential schemes.

### **Action:**

**National Grid** - prepare materials to enable a prioritised list of potential future projects to be drawn up at the next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in December.

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## **3 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)**

Ben Smith from National Grid gave an update on progress with the LEI.

### **3.1 – Project application updates**

Monitoring began in March 2018 on the three projects that received funding in Window One and which are already underway (High Weald AONB Partnership, Peak District National Park Authority and North York Moors National Park Authority). Photographs from these projects will be available on the LEI website from December 2018 onwards. These will be presented to the Group at the December meeting.

Seven projects from Window Two were approved by Ofgem and are now underway (they are located in the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB, Dorset AONB, New Forest National Park, Peak District National Park and Snowdonia National Park (three schemes).

Four projects from Window Three were submitted to Ofgem for approval in April 2018 (Kent Downs AONB, Dorset AONB, Peak District National Park and New Forest National Park) and funding decisions are expected in September. The submission of two further projects has been postponed until a later date (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Shropshire Hills AONB).

The LEI Approvals Panel met in June 2018 to review applications submitted during Window Four. Five projects were approved subject to minor alterations to the applications and these are now

nearing readiness for submission to Ofgem. It is hoped that these will be approved and funding released in December 2018/January 2019.

Expressions of Interest have now closed for Window Five and there has been just one application\*. National Grid may open a further window during 2018 (Window 5.5) following discussion with some of the eligible areas. Expressions of Interest for Window Six will open on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019, and for Window Seven in June 2019.

[\* There has subsequently been a further application and the Approvals Panel will meet by video conference in December to assess both submissions.]

The issues around the time that it has been taking for projects to be approved and for funds to be released have been discussed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group at previous meetings, and it was noted that there have been some further comments from applicants about the delays.

### **3.2 – Encouraging more applications**

A total budget of £24m (equating to around £4m per year) was allocated from the VIP provision for LEI projects, however the value of projects that have been approved to date is just £1.6m, and the projects that are waiting to be approved are worth approximately £1m.

The LEI project team has been talking to potential applicants to find out why the level of applications is not as high as hoped. A consistent message has been around the lack of resource for the work involved in identifying projects and putting an application together, as well as issues around working with partner organisations and the timing/resources of those organisations. The amount of notice that has been given for the opening of the windows for Expressions of Interest has also been problematic for some organisations, and National Grid advised that the LEI website has now been updated with this information to give plenty of notice to potential applicants.

Other ongoing activity to try to increase participation includes:

- Lengthening the windows for submitting Expressions of Interest and completing full applications.
- Increasing publicity/promotion – including feature articles in Walk (the Ramblers magazine) and Viewpoint (CNP publication).
- A workshop is due to be held in London in November 2018 aimed at getting the message about the LEI to a wider audience and to help them understand the application process. The workshop is being targeted at organisations such as Wildlife Trusts, the RSPB, National Trust, Woodland Trust, CPRE/CPRW, Ramblers and any other relevant organisations. Howard Sutcliffe suggested that the NFU and FLAG should also be targeted for this event.

At the previous meeting, the Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed whether the three schemes per applicant and/or the £200,000 maximum funding limit should be reconsidered in order to encourage further applications, but no decision was made at the time. Members were reminded that the initial reasoning for the caps was to prevent the larger/better-resourced organisations from using up the bulk of the allowance, and it was noted that the New Forest National Park Authority, Snowdonia National Park Authority and Peak District National Park Authority have now reached their maximum number of approved schemes.

After some discussion it was agreed that the limits should be kept within the same boundaries but that more latitude/flexibility would be provided by redefining it as *either* a maximum sum of money *or* a maximum number of schemes.

A discussion was also held about whether further support could be provided to potential applicants by providing funding for carrying out further landscape assessments, the provision of expertise from specialist landscape architects to help identify and design potential projects, and/or allowing the cost of the work involved in putting a funding application together to be covered. Ofgem confirmed that the terms of the scheme do not allow for this kind of work to be funded. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties associated with this, it was reiterated that the funding can only be used to pay for delivery of the project and that – as with other Ofgem funding – applicants cannot be paid for the work involved in pre-development.



There was some debate about whether it would be better to invest in promoting the LEI scheme as opposed to carrying out further landscape assessments, and there was also a reminder that overhead lines that are outside of an AONB or National Park but within their setting and having an impact on the setting of the AONB or National Park are eligible for consideration under the LEI scheme. There was, however, broad support for finding a way to help organisations identify and develop ideas for schemes, and for a greater number of bigger/more ambitious projects to be put forward. It was noted that other grant funds do allow for this kind of work, and there were a number of suggestions about how it could be facilitated. These included:

- Looking for a partner organisation that is able to provide funding for that kind of support (e.g. the Esme Fairburn Foundation, John Muir Trust, HLF).
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) schemes including National Grid's own.
- Identifying potential LEI T2 projects (eg High Weald AONB / Hadrian's Wall – see above) and asking Gillespies and/or LUC to help organisations come up with ideas for projects.

Whilst it was noted that the current policy would need to be reviewed to ensure that it would allow this approach, National Grid confirmed that the scheme's administrators Trust CSR would have the capacity to administer it, and it was agreed that the options should be investigated further.

A discussion was also held about the need to provide more examples of the types of project that can and cannot be carried out, and for applicants to be encouraged to share details of their projects as well as their more detailed applications. National Grid confirmed that High Weald AONB has given approval for its application to be shared with others, and that they can pass on other organisations' contact details where approval has been given. It was also noted that the AONBs have a network (Basecamp) that can be used to share their applications and experience. There was a reminder that Gillespies and LUC have produced a guide for applicants and that there will soon be photographs of the schemes that are underway available on the LEI website.

It was also noted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has just closed its Landscape Partnerships scheme and this might result in more interest for funding through the LEI scheme.

#### **Actions:**

- **Stakeholder Advisory Group members** – Advise Ben Smith of any organisations that should be invited to the November workshop, and any suggestions for other organisations/funders that could provide additional funding to applicants.
- **National Grid** – Explore whether National Grid's CSR scheme could be used to pay for external expertise.
- **Chairman** – Consider and approach potential partner organisations e.g. John Muir Trust, Esme Fairburn Foundation.
- **LEI Project Team** – Check who has already been sent the guidance produced by Gillespies and LUC.  
Ensure materials and information on the LEI website are updated to include case studies and photographs

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#### **4 – Update on the four schemes shortlisted for underground projects**

Ben Smith, Eloise Frank and Andrea Key from National Grid gave an update on the progress of the four schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward. A summary of progress and specific issues for each of the four schemes is outlined below.

##### **4.1 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7**

The planning application for this scheme was approved in June 2018 subject to a unilateral undertaking being agreed. The funding submission to Ofgem was made in April and received a positive response. The required consultation was due to close on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018 and it is anticipated that formal agreement will now be received from Ofgem before the end of 2018.

Preferred bidder status has been awarded to the main contractor Morgan Sindall, and monthly meetings are taking place with them to agree the project detail and construction methodology. Archaeological investigations are ongoing with circa 150 trial trenches being dug, and phase 2 of the archaeological and geophysical works will help to identify the necessary construction mitigation

requirements. This work has already begun and there have been some small finds – arrow heads (possibly Bronze Age) and a funerary urn – but nothing major.

With regards to ecology, National Grid is continuing to liaise with stakeholders on the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan and is working with Morgan Sindall on the mitigation licencing for badger setts and dormice.

It is anticipated that preparatory works will commence in January 2019 and that construction will start in April 2019. The new circuits should be energised in Autumn 2021 and the overhead pylons removed in 2022. A small visitor centre is also due to be constructed on the site, and this will be used to highlight Dorset as the flagship VIP project.

#### **4.2 – Peak District National Park (Eastern section – ZO.2)**

Following the Stakeholder Advisory Group's visit to the project site, discussions focused on progress since the last meeting on the key issues facing this technically challenging project. Ground investigation works are now underway, with the planning application and EIA documents being prepared. Locations for the sealing end compound and temporary laydown areas within Wogden Foot nature reserve have been agreed, and negotiations with landowners regarding land rights and the Trans Pennine Trail diversion are ongoing. Discussions with stakeholders regarding ecological, landscape and archaeological mitigation are also continuing.

Public consultation activity is planned for later in 2018, and the planning application is due to be submitted in early 2019. Planning approval is anticipated in spring 2019 and pre-construction works will commence shortly afterwards.

Full construction will now commence in the summer of 2020. This is due to another National Grid project requiring an outage earlier than VIP and the need to avoid clashes in these planned outages. This change in the project timescales does however allow for some flexibility in the planning decision-making process and removes some of the critical path issues. It also means that better pre-construction mitigation can be carried out including mitigation for willow tit habitat and better opportunities for seed harvesting. With this new timescale it is currently envisaged that the new circuits will be energised in 2021 and the pylons removed in 2021/2022.

As reported at previous meetings, this scheme has been identified as being suitable for the use of Gas Insulated Line (GIL). National Grid is currently rescreening for EIA to check whether it is needed due to this change from the original design, but it is anticipated that it will not be required. Ofgem requested a fact check to ensure that the most cost-effective solution is being put forward. National Grid confirmed that the rating studies for this scheme are being revisited to reflect changes to wider network flows. Since work on the project commenced, the preferred rating has decreased; this will be re-checked against the latest Future Energy Scenarios (published July 2018).

#### **4.3 – Snowdonia National Park – 4CZ.1**

The preferred option for this scheme that has been agreed with local stakeholders is to construct a tunnel to carry the cables from Cilfor to Garth under the Dwyryd Estuary, extending the existing sealing end compound at Garth to join up with the existing cables that run across the Glaslyn Estuary to the northwest.

The key area of focus for this project in the last six months has been more detailed work with local stakeholders on how to remove the pylons and their concrete foundations from the estuary, as well as the foundations that still remain from the old pylon (4ZC30 that was replaced after the foundations were undercut about five years ago). Agreement has now been reached on the preferred methodology, and some more work needs to be done to explore the use of helicopters as an option for pylon removal. A specialist company is being brought in to look at the logistics for this in more detail.

The project team has also been looking at the micro-siting of the tunnel head house and the sealing end compound at the Cilfor end of the tunnel and exploring whether these can be integrated to allow the tunnel head house to screen the siting of the sealing end compound connections. Similar work at the Garth end of the line is also ongoing, including further work on how to join this section of line to the adjacent one.

Marine boreholes have been undertaken and the works have determined that the tunnel will have to go slightly deeper at the eastern side than originally thought, and shallower at the western side. Engineers have been considering amendments to the tunnel alignment, alongside more detailed work to identify the detailed technical and most cost-effective solutions for construction of the tunnel. Specialist consultants for waste management and operational noise have also been appointed.

Other work has included further planning discussions with the local planning authorities, NRW and stakeholders. Letters have been sent to residents who live close to the proposed tunnel head house sites, offering to speak to them before going out to public consultation to see if any of their views can be fed in to the plans.

The next steps for the project are to submit the screening and scoping reports to the local authorities and NRW, agree the tunnel head house locations with landowners and stakeholders, and carry out a public consultation in late 2018.

It is currently anticipated that the planning application will be submitted in 2019 and that approval will be given in the summer. The funding application to Ofgem will be submitted in summer 2019 and construction will commence in the summer of 2020. Under these timescales it is anticipated that the tunnel will be completed in summer of 2024 and the towers will be removed shortly afterwards.

In response to a question from Ofgem, National Grid agreed to revisit costs for all VIP projects at the Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in December.

**Action:**

- **National Grid** – Review costs for all four major projects and confirm these to the Stakeholder Advisory Group at the December meeting.

**4.4 – New Forest National Park – 4YB.2**

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was reminded of the challenges facing this project which is in a highly-designated and ecologically-sensitive area. Since the project began National Grid has amended its preferred route (originally running straight across the Purlieu in parallel with the overhead line) in response to stakeholder requests.

The preferred route agreed earlier this year (Route C) still caused concern among local stakeholders (including the Verderers of the New Forest, Natural England, the National Trust, the Parish Council and some local residents). As a result, local stakeholders identified potential alternative routes to the north and south of Route C. The southern route (Option D) could not be taken forward due to engineering and ecological issues associated with the mire system. The Stakeholder Reference Group for the project had given its agreement for National Grid to explore the route to the north of the existing line (Option E) as the most likely option to take forward – subject to survey work looking at ecology, geology, hydrology and hydrogeology and discussions with commoners and residents about access and safety issues. This route avoids an area of mire but brings it closer to an area of residential homes.

Since the last meeting two campaign groups opposing the plans have been established (Protect Hale Purlieu Movement and Pylon Hugger (<https://haleprotection.uk> and [www.PylonHugger.co.uk](http://www.PylonHugger.co.uk))).

The campaign groups' main areas of concern can be summarised as:

- Concern that construction works will cut off the Purlieu and prevent free movement of animals and people – particularly for residents on Forest Road, Tethering Drove and Lady's Mile.
- Safety of livestock.
- Disturbance to the properties and people during construction/traffic/road closures.
- Negative impact on property values.
- Environmental damage – heathland 'destruction' (and the ability to restore it), impact on SPA breeding birds, removal of trees and impact on the mire system.
- Longevity of the cables and the need to replace/maintain them.
- Impacts of heat from the cables and changes in soil pH from materials used.

- There is no need to do it in landscape terms.
- Overall cost of VIP.

The Protect Hale Purlieu (PHP) Movement has also asked for consideration to be given to the alternative solution of replacing the existing pylons with T-pylons painted green instead of proceeding with undergrounding. This was considered by the Stakeholder Advisory Group but it was felt that the landscape benefits of proceeding with this alternative would not be sufficient to justify the work.

The PHP Movement has written to members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group and some members reported that they had responded directly. The local MP, the Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne, has written to National Grid and Chris Baines expressing his opposition to the scheme. National Grid has responded repeating its offer to brief Sir Desmond and walk the route with him and is awaiting a response. Chris Baines will respond personally.

National Grid is in the process of engaging with all property owners in the immediate area with the offer of individual meetings with a member of the VIP team and National Grid's land agents. The local parish council is supportive of this process and has offered to accompany National Grid on these visits as an impartial third party should residents wish it.

It was reported that core stakeholders remain supportive of the scheme in principle, and liaison with other local stakeholders has been very constructive. The Stakeholder Reference Group has been expanded to include an elected representative from Hale Parish Council and National Grid is working closely with the Group as well as with its constituent organisations – the Verderers of the New Forest, the National Trust, the New Forest National Park Authority, Natural England and the Environment Agency – as well as the Parish Council.

Since the last Advisory Group meeting, National Grid has also met with the New Forest Association/Friends of the New Forest, the Official Verderer, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, RSPB and Go New Forest (the area's tourism body).

As well as meetings of the Stakeholder Reference Group, there was a meeting in July with the Community Liaison Group that was set up in 2016. It was further noted by representatives of National Parks England and National Trust that National Grid's level of engagement and consultation with the public and local stakeholders has been excellent.

In July, National Grid held two public information events in Hale and Woodgreen. These were well attended with nearly 300 people in total (180 at Hale and 101 at Woodgreen). Feedback from local people at these events was largely negative (61 of 81 feedback forms were against the project with 18 in support and two undecided) particularly from those whose properties border Hale Purlieu. Post event feedback saw a further 13 forms received against the project and six in favour with four neutral. Reasons for objection largely matched those listed as raised by the campaign groups above and National Grid is currently working with the Parish Council to address these issues, particularly where they are inaccurate or wrong.

National Grid also took exhibition stands at two local shows – the New Forest Show in July and the Ellingham & Ringwood Show in August). Feedback from the shows was more positive. Nearly 100 people visited the stand at the New Forest Show with 11 supportive comments left against two negative and five neutral or unclear. 52 people visited the stand at the Ellingham & Ringwood Show with five leaving supportive comments and one against.

National Grid is working up a full EIA and its planning application will contain detail on all the key issues raised by local people and stakeholders. It is also National Grid's intention to address all of the environmental, construction, technical, access and safety issues before submitting a planning application.

National Grid confirmed that, subject to further detailed hydrological/hydrogeological surveys, they are confident that the route can be delivered and fully restored. A discussion was held about the scale and duration of disruption to local residents, and what else can be done to challenge negative perceptions about the project.

With regards to ongoing work, National Grid has been exploring the options for pylon removal and is now preparing a briefing note to explain the proposed process so that people can understand what is involved before the planning application is submitted. With regards to restoration, the specialist contractors Alaska are organising a site visit that stakeholders will be able to attend.

The next steps for this project are to carry out further engineering work including more detailed ground investigations for Option E, survey work to inform the EIA and HRA, and determining the requirements for the IROPI tests should they be required, as well as ongoing wider stakeholder engagement.

The current indicative programme is for formal public consultation to be carried out in the early part of next year and the planning application to be submitted in spring 2019. Construction would start in the summer of 2020, with the new circuits energised in winter 2021 and the pylons removed in spring 2022.

In general, the Stakeholder Advisory Group expressed its continued support for all four schemes in principle subject to the planning process and National Grid satisfactorily meeting any conditions.

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## **5 – Stakeholder Advisory Group membership**

It was confirmed that Geoff Sinclair has now replaced Peter Ogden as the representative from CPRW.

Membership of the Stakeholder Advisory Group was discussed at the previous meeting, and the issues around representation and potential gaps in expertise were revisited again at this meeting. Whilst some groups have expressed interest in being represented, it was felt that Natural Resources Wales and Natural England are on the group to represent ecological interests, and it was also noted that adding specific interest groups would create issues around how wide the membership should be broadened.

Whilst it is still felt that there is a significant gap around tourism in England, as discussed previously, Visit England has chosen not to engage at recent meetings despite several attempts by National Grid and Chris Baines to encourage them to do so. Camargue to work with the Chairman to try to engage with Visit England again.

The importance of engaging with specific interest groups at a local level was reiterated, and it was agreed that the stability in the membership of the Stakeholder Advisory Group to date has been very beneficial to the project.

Action:

- **Chris Baines and Camargue** – contact Visit England with a view to future engagement.

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## **6 – Future meetings**

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will take place on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2018 in Birmingham.

It is hoped that future Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings could include a visit to the London Power Tunnels project and a site visit to the VIP scheme in Dorset once construction is under way.