

VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Meeting notes of the eighteenth meeting held on 3rd November 2020

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Cadw** Dr Jonathan Berry, Senior Inspector of Ancient Monuments
- **Campaign for National Parks** Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager
- **CPRE** Tom Fyans, Director of Campaigns and Policy
- **CPRW** Carys Matthews, Operations Manager
- **Historic England** Amanda Chadburn, Senior National Infrastructure Adviser
- **Landscape Institute** Mary O'Connor, Fellow of the Landscape Institute
- **National Association of AONBs** Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
- **National Grid** Rhian Kelly, Acting UK Corporate Affairs Director
- **National Parks England** Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National Park Authority
- **National Parks Wales** Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning and Land Management, Snowdonia National Park
- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **Natural England** Gary Charlton, Landscape Senior Advisor
- **Natural Resources Wales** John Briggs, Specialist Advisor: Landscape
- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist
- **Ramblers** Alison Hallas, Policy & Advocacy Officer

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Michelle Clark, VIP Project Manager; Ben Smith, VIP Project Manager (South); Eloise Frank, VIP Project Manager (Snowdonia); Stephen Fedzin, VIP Project Manager (Peak East); Chris Carr, replacing Stephen Fedzin as Peak East VIP Project Manager; Andrea Key, Consents Officer; Steve Lam, Regulatory Submissions Manager; Aled Rowlands, External Affairs Manager
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

Apologies:

- Kate Roberts, Cadw; Caroline Cotterell, Natural England; Keith Davies, Natural Resource Wales; Lawrence Manley, Visit Wales

The purpose of the meeting on 3rd November was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Hear updates on the projects 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.
- Receive an update on the future of VIP in RIIO-T2, and review progress on emerging T2 projects.
- Consider wider communication plans for VIP.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this meeting was held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

1 – Covid-19 update from National Grid

Michelle Clark gave an update on how National Grid has been continuing to operate under Covid-19 restrictions. Over the previous weekend, the UK Government announced that new national restrictions will be introduced in England from 5 November until 2 December. In addition, the Welsh Government revised restrictions in Wales. The measures are designed to restrict the spread of coronavirus following rises in the rate and number of infections.

The Government said that “everyone who can work effectively from home must do so. Where people cannot do so (for instance people who work in critical national infrastructure, construction or manufacturing) they should continue to travel to work/attend their workplace.” This means National Grid’s operational staff can continue to work on sites, in the field, and in our control rooms and offices. Since the beginning of the pandemic, National Grid put strong controls in place to protect our both staff and the local communities in which it works, ensuring safe and efficient delivery of our critical work programme across the country. These controls have proven to be effective to date, so we are therefore confident that we can continue to work safely on the VIP projects (including Dorset, which is well into delivery on site). National Grid will continue follow the latest Government guidance and adapt processes accordingly as required.

The main impact of Covid-19 restrictions has therefore been on the plans for local engagement. This issue was discussed in more detail later in the meeting [see Sections 2.4 and 6].

Session 2 – Update on the schemes shortlisted for underground projects

Members of the National Grid VIP project teams gave an update on the progress of the schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward for undergrounding. A summary of progress and specific issues for each of the schemes is outlined below.

2.1 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7

Construction work is now well underway. The road crossing has been completed via horizontal directional drilling, the majority of the haul road has been installed, cable ducts are being placed into the trenches, backfill is starting to go in and the plates that are used to protect from accidental cable-strike are being installed. The Stakeholder Advisory Group was shown a number of photographs showing the progress on the project since their site visit in November 2019, including some of the specialist machinery/equipment that is being used. This includes a new cable-reel laying machine which avoids the use of a crane and increases safety, and a ‘spider digger’ that is being used to deal with the construction challenges in the steeper areas of the site.

The Advisory Group was shown photographs of the archaeological works and the finds to date which have far exceeded expectations. The project team is continuing to work closely with local archaeologists, and, despite the scale of the works, it is not envisaged that there will be any significant issues that will impact project delivery. Camargue confirmed that they are looking at holding a webinar on the archaeological works and, in the future when Covid-19 restrictions allow, more will be done to showcase some of the finds.

The community liaison group has been operating virtually, and the most recent meeting that was held in September was very positive. There is also a community helpline which people can use to contact the National Grid team. It was noted that the lines of communication with local people and community representatives/stakeholders are very good, and this has helped to maintain positive relationships despite a number of issues that have inevitably occurred during construction. It was noted that the level of pre-construction engagement and consultation, and the ongoing liaison with local councillors, stakeholder groups and residents, has been instrumental in achieving the level of

support that there is for the project. It was also noted that despite the inconvenience of the construction works, the support from the community remains strong because of what will be achieved for the landscape in the longer-term.

Other initiatives in the wider community have included:

- **Project Information Centre** – The visitor/project information centre has now been completed but, due to the continuing Covid-19 restrictions, it has not yet been possible to open it up for visitors or groups. It is hoped that it can be used in the future to showcase the work that is being carried out on the project, and for local groups to use for meetings/events. The concept for the centre was taken from the Hinkley C Connection Project, and similar centres will hopefully also be constructed at other VIP project sites.
- **Community Grant Fund** – This fund is available to all communities where National Grid is working. To date at the Dorset site, the fund has provided the local cricket club with a £10k community grant for a new all-weather strip and practice nets. At the recent Community Liaison Group meeting, members were encouraged to spread the word locally and encourage more projects to come forward.
- **Engineering Positive Futures** – As part of this initiative, the project team has been working with local schools to provide grants for STEM equipment and talking to the nearest school to the work site in Winterbourne Abbas about improvements that could be made via the Community Grant Fund. Once Covid-19 restrictions allow it is planned that members of the team will visit schools and talk about the project and career opportunities for those taking STEM subjects.

Work is still on track for removal of the pylons by the end of 2022.

Action:

- **Camargue/National Grid** – Share the information about the archaeology webinar with Stakeholder Advisory Group members.

2.2 – Peak District National Park (eastern section – ZO.2)

As advised at the last Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting, planning permission for the Peak District scheme was unanimously approved in June 2020. A revised funding application was submitted to Ofgem on 24th August 2020 and a funding decision is expected within the next few months.

The construction contract was awarded to Morgan Sindall 12 months ago, and since that time they have been working with the National Grid project team on pre-construction activities. Over the last 3-4 months, activity has focused on further design and ground investigation work, ecology and landscape surveys, seed harvesting around Wogden Foot Local Wildlife Site, providing further evidence and support for the planned works and planning consents, and lands/consenting activities including working up the final terms and conditions for lands agreements. National Grid has also been working with Northern Powergrid to assist and coordinate with their own project to remove the wooden pole distribution line in Dunford Bridge, and planning for the refurbishment of the overhead line to the east of the VIP project. The team has also been finalising the TPT Management Plan, and meeting with Barnsley Highways with regards to ongoing liaison on highways consents.

The planning approval from Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) was subject to a Section 106 agreement to secure delivery of 12% biodiversity net gain. Since the last Advisory Group meeting, National Grid's consenting team has been working with BMBC's legal team to finalise this agreement. National Grid's proposals to achieve the required net gain through a combination of works on the site itself and a management plan for the Crow Edge site approximately 1.5km away

from the site were completed in September 2020, and the final planning decision with the legal agreement in place came through on 21st September.

In addition to the planning application for the main undergrounding works, the planning application for the car park enhancement scheme in Dunford Bridge has also now been approved by both BMBC and the Peak District National Park Authority (NPA). Final approval by the Peak District NPA was subject to the addition of two electric car charging points and BMBC had requested minor amendments to the picnic area layout, as well as a few other refinements to the proposals. All of the officers were happy with the final scheme which has now been approved. In addition to the electric car charging points, other elements that will be added to the car park include cycle parking, improved disabled access, horse box parking, a picnic area, additional wildflower planting and a footpath linking the trail and the pub.

Subject to the Ofgem funding decision, National Grid and Morgan Sindall are now working towards construction starting on site in the spring of 2021, and the pylons being removed in autumn 2022. The car park enhancement works will be carried out after the undergrounding / pylon removal has been completed.

Action:

- **Andrea Key** – Send Camargue a copy of the TPT management plan to send on to Alison Hallas.

2.3 – Snowdonia National Park – 4CZ.1

The planning applications for all of the different elements of this project were submitted prior to the last Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in June 2020, and all of the applications including the marine licences have now been approved. The National Grid project team is currently finalising a Section 106 agreement with Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) and the planning conditions with both SNPA and Gwynedd Council. Thanks were expressed to Chris Baines and Councillor Gareth Thomas, ward member for Penrhyndeudraeth, for speaking at both the SNPA and Gwynedd Council planning committee meetings, and for all others who have contributed to the unanimous approval of the project.

On land rights, good progress is being made on voluntary agreements, and most of the heads of terms have been agreed or the land rights are in place. As advised at the previous meeting, the compulsory purchase order (CPO) process is now underway running in parallel with work on reaching voluntary agreements. National Grid is currently waiting to hear from BEIS for a date for the CPO Inquiry, which may be required due to a small number of objections that have been received. National Grid reminded the Group that pursuing a CPO is standard practice for large projects such as this where the lands rights are very complex and there is unregistered land. Whilst the aim is for agreements to be reached voluntarily, having a CPO in place means that National Grid will not end up in a situation where they are not able to deliver the project. The CPO process forms part of the negotiations with landowners, and as none of the objections are believed to be in principle objections to the project itself, National Grid is optimistic about reaching voluntary agreements before a Public Inquiry is necessary.

The tender for the main contractor has been extended to December 2020, with the contract likely to be awarded in the spring of 2021. The reasons for this extension were a change to the commercial model, changes to scope as a result of the planning process and programme changes. The funding application to Ofgem will be submitted in December, with a decision expected in 2021.

In response to a question about how much the local economy will benefit from the project, it was confirmed that National Grid has been working with the local authorities on producing a strategy document re the use of local supply chains, accommodation providers, etc. It was noted that these issues are high on the Welsh Government agenda, and National Grid advised that they have regular catch ups with the Energy Minister in Wales, specifically around jobs, local employment and the local supply chain. CPRW also offered to help publicise the focus on local employment through their membership.

The indicative programme is for construction to start on site in late 2021, and the overhead lines to be removed in 2027.

2.4 – North Wessex Downs AONB – YYM.1

The North Wessex Downs project is being developed as a RIIO-T2 project. Drawing on lessons learned in the RIIO-T1 projects, an early contractor involvement contract has been awarded to Balfour Beatty, which is now working closely with National Grid on the detailed project design. Ground Investigation works will commence in December 2020 including borehole rigs and trial trenching to confirm the viability of the proposed cable route, and work on agreeing the siting of the sealing end compounds is ongoing. Conversations will also be taking place with the Highways Authority to further explore the road crossing options.

It is hoped that the project will be relatively straightforward from a planning perspective, with a combination of planning applications for the sealing end compounds (SECs) and the permanent access roads to them, and the underground cable works falling under permitted development rights.

With regards to ecology, the scope of surveys has been agreed with the Wiltshire Council ecologist, and baseline surveys have been completed. Key findings to date include numerous badger setts, no evidence of dormice but sightings in 2019 at a nearby industrial estate, two locations with a low population of reptiles, eDNA evidence of great crested newts in a pond within the proposed temporary works area (but not along the cable route or at the sites identified for the SECs), and a number of bats roosts in trees (although these are likely to be avoided). The landscape includes lots of open farmland with hedgerows, and the project team will now work towards completing the environmental/ecological surveys before agreeing appropriate mitigation plans with local ecologists.

From an archaeological point of view, a number of geophysical, fieldwalking and metal detecting surveys have been completed. Possible Bronze Age to Roman British Age features have been identified including ring ditches and trackways. There is no evidence that a potential shrunken medieval village is in the fields that the underground route is likely to go through, but on the downside this means that the local archaeologists are unlikely to get the dig that they wanted to find out what is there. Archaeological finds to date include cannonballs and lead musket shot from around the site of the Battle of Roundway Down (1643), a Roman brooch and a James I farthing. National Grid are agreeing the forward strategy with Historic England and the Wiltshire County Archaeologist team in relation to the GI works.

The planned public engagement activities have been impacted by Covid-19, however there are already very good links into groups in the area, and positive contacts were made with local councillors and stakeholder groups before restrictions prevented further face-to-face meetings. Alternative approaches are now being implemented including e.g. online stakeholder reference group meetings, development of a 360° tour across the project site area [see Section 6.2], project webinars on specific topics, and promotion through online as well as conventional channels. There are also plans to leverage local networks to engage with people to tell them more about the project and promote the Community Grant Fund.

The indicative programme is for the planning submission to be made in May 2021 and the Ofgem funding submission in July 2021. Under current timelines, construction would commence on-site in the spring of 2022 and the pylons removed in early 2024.

2.5 – Engaging with contractors

The Chair suggested that there might be merit in arranging a webinar for the key personnel from the main construction contractors, to give them a better understanding of some of the core philosophies of engagement, collaboration and partnership that underpin the approach to the VIP projects. This could include input from some of the Stakeholder Advisory Group representatives so that the messages are not just coming from the National Grid project team members, and it was also noted that it would be useful to hear from the contractors about their own constraints/limitations. National Grid welcomed this idea and acknowledged that whilst they try to instil these messages, hearing it from members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group would really emphasise the importance of these key concepts.

3 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

Eight applications were received in Window Eight and the LEI Approvals Panel is meeting on 25th November to consider them. The applications from Windows Six and Seven are still with Ofgem for final approval.

A discussion was held about the continuing issues with delays to the release of funding from Ofgem for projects that have already been approved. The delay between the LEI Approvals Panel approving the full applications and the funding being released continues to cause significant frustrations for applicants, with several of them chasing to find out when they will receive the funding. Key impacts of the delays in receiving funding include planned working windows being missed (e.g. due to bird nesting seasons), and the potential for the loss of match funding as a result of unexpected delays. It has also been particularly difficult for many of the applicants over the last few months as a lot of projects rely on volunteers who are currently not allowed to carry out planned work due to Covid-19. Applicants have asked that they be given advance updates about what is happening with the funding, so that they can build any delays into their work programme and let their partners know.

National Grid agreed that the delays to the funding being received are not acceptable. The LEI project team is working on communicating what is happening and why, and with the revised approvals process that has been agreed with Ofgem for RIIO-T2 it is hoped that the majority of the issues will be resolved for future applicants.

Windows Nine and Ten are due to be launched in T2, and a webinar is being planned for February 2021 in order to promote the scheme and emphasise the changes that have been made to the application approvals process. The primary aim of the webinar will be to generate renewed enthusiasm for the scheme and attempt to restore faith amongst potential applicants. Promotion of the webinar during November to January will emphasise that National Grid has been listening to feedback from applicants and that the application process will be much more streamlined during RIIO-T2. The LEI website is also due to be updated and will focus on the successes achieved in the projects to date.

Stakeholder Advisory Group members were shown a series of photographs from completed and ongoing projects in Dorset AONB, High Weald AONB, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB, North York Moors National Park and Snowdonia National Park. It was noted by National Park and AONB

representatives on the Advisory Group that the LEI fund has provided a fantastic opportunity for work to be undertaken that would otherwise not have been possible.

A discussion was held about further opportunities for communication/promotion of the LEI scheme, and it was suggested that this could tie in with national plans for communication of the larger VIP projects [see also Section 6]. It was agreed that it would be useful to produce a pro forma feature article and a catalogue of images to speed up the process for lifting content into a feature or membership magazine.

A further discussion was also held about the potential for wider promotion of the scheme through e.g. collective NGO umbrella organisations, local partners, farmer cooperatives and parish councils. It was noted that some of the groups/organisations that have attended earlier LEI workshops have not always been kept updated, and National Grid committed to make sure that this is resolved.

Gary Charlton also gave an update on progress with attempting to find a way of funding extra resource to help applicants put project bids together. Work on this is continuing within Natural England, potentially through the development of Nature Recovery networks, and the Advisory Group will be kept updated on any further progress.

Action:

- **All** – Forward any suggestions for wider promotion via other bodies or umbrella organisations to Chris Baines or Stuart Fox.

4 – Update on RIIO-T2

The draft determinations for a visual amenity provision in RIIO-T2 were published by Ofgem on 9th July 2020, and an expenditure cap of £465m over 5 years in 2018/2019 prices is being proposed [equating to £491m in 2020/21 prices]. This figure is based on the 2019 joint willingness to pay study plus consideration of the pipeline of potential future projects, and is balanced against the impact on household bills, the costs associated with Net Zero, and the potential economic shock resulting from Covid-19. The scope of the provision will remain the same as in RIIO-T1. It was confirmed that this figure would enable National Grid to continue to pursue the North Wessex Downs and Cotswolds projects that are already under consideration.

The provision for the LEI will be up to 2.5% of the expenditure cap which equates to between £11m and £12m.

The funding submission process for the larger capital projects will remain the same, whereas LEI projects that have been approved by the Approvals Panel will no longer need to be sent to Ofgem for approval [see also Section 3].

It is hoped that the draft determinations will be confirmed in Final Determinations and the relevant transmission licence conditions, and that this will allow the VIP works to continue for another 5 years. Thanks were expressed to all of the Stakeholder Advisory Group members who took the time to respond to Ofgem's consultation. It was acknowledged that this is very good news for the future of VIP, but the shorter period of time for RIIO-T2 (5 years as opposed to 8 in RIIO-T1) will be very challenging. The importance of continuing to gain permission from Ofgem to carry out pre-development work on future projects was noted.

5 – Emerging T2 projects and LEI+

National Grid gave an update on the current status of the plans and ambitions for potential projects in RIIO-T2. As discussed at the previous meeting, in addition to the project in North Wessex Downs AONB which is currently being developed as a T2 project, the next major project on the list is in the Cotswolds AONB [*now rebranded as Cotswold National Landscape*]. Further discussions have also been taking place within National Grid regarding the potential for non-undergrounding engineering projects.

5.1 – Cotswolds National Landscape – ZF2

Following publication of Ofgem’s draft determination in December, the National Grid project team is ready to hit the ground running in the early part of 2021 to start working up the detail for this project and commence wider stakeholder and landowner engagement.

This section of line in question is in the western Cotswolds and extends to 44 pylons over a distance of 17km. As outlined at the previous meeting, the line has been split into three smaller sub-sections to allow for more detailed route appraisal and assessment of the landscape and visual impact of the separate sections. The middle section of line – sub-section B – scored most highly on landscape and visual impact.

A meeting on the 2nd of November with senior officers from the Cotswold National Landscape was very positive, and there was considerable enthusiasm for a scheme in the area. There was also recognition of the wider opportunities that VIP could create including the potential to augment the ongoing grassland restoration project in the area and wider archaeological works. The officers agreed that undergrounding sub-section B was a sensible option.

Advisory Group members were reminded about the issues that have previously been discussed surrounding local stakeholder management, particularly in relation to the political context of appropriate development in rural areas and planning reforms. The importance of engaging with local opinion leaders early on in the process was reiterated, and Camargue reassured the Advisory Group that they are being guided by the AONB about how, with whom and when the potential project should be discussed.

5.2 – Non-undergrounding engineering projects in T2

The concept of LEI+ was discussed at the previous meeting, arising from the Scottish TNO successes in carrying out smaller-scale capital works that do not involve undergrounding. National Grid has been discussing the concept in more detail internally, specifically in relation to what the visual amenity provision can be spent on.

The LEI will continue in RIIO-T2 and will continue to cover landscaping measures such as path diversions, tree planting, moving viewpoints, etc. This process is led by landscape stakeholders, with project applications being approved by the LEI Approvals Panel.

In contrast, major VIP projects involve modifications to transmission assets, and will be led by National Grid. The current National Grid VIP projects all involve major undergrounding activities, but there are alternative technical options such as line diversions and in-situ pylon modifications that could be considered for other priority sections of overhead line. There may also be opportunities for innovative engineering solutions including options that would enable tower height reduction and developments in camouflage painting.

An example of a new engineering solution that is currently being developed is the Retrofit Insulated Cross Arm (RICA) which can reduce pylon height by 20-25%. Testing of this new design is being carried out, and National Grid is potentially looking at deploying it in other parts of their network in

2024/25. The National Grid innovation team is continuing to work with other partners and academic institutions on this and other new technology/innovations that could potentially be adopted within VIP.

It has been determined that smaller/medium-scale engineering alternatives do fit within the VIP provision, and the National Grid project team is proposing to revisit the higher-scoring purple and red sections of overhead line to retest whether medium-scale projects might be attractive in some of those areas where undergrounding is not practical or has been rejected by stakeholders. The need to constantly review and look at new methods and technologies that are less intrusive and that could potentially open up opportunities in other landscapes was reiterated. It was also noted that options that can be implemented more rapidly than undergrounding might work better in the five-year timescale of RIIO-T2.

With regards to the issues that have been raised for a number of VIP projects around residual distribution network lines being left behind in the landscape following undergrounding of National Grid's overhead lines, there was a reminder that the DNOs have their own equivalent of the VIP fund, but it is currently viewed quite differently. The DNOs are about to start the submission process for their next price control period, and this provides an opportunity for stakeholders to lobby and encourage them to include their own projects in the distribution-equivalent of the VIP scheme in order to achieve greater alignment.

Action:

- **Michelle Clark** – Circulate information on how to feed into the DNO RIIO-2 process.

6 – VIP wider communications and virtual/online engagement

6.1 – Wider communications

As discussed at the last Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting, with the Dorset project now under way and the two National Park projects having achieved planning consent, it is felt that the timing is now right to be able to start talking publicly about the VIP projects and what has been achieved.

Aled Rowlands from the External Affairs Team of National Grid and Stuart Fox from Camargue gave an update on the wider communication plans that are now being discussed and developed. The key aims are: to generate more excitement and enthusiasm within communities and recreate that across other projects; to showcase how effectively the focus on collaboration and partnership has worked throughout the VIP process to date; to highlight the 'unexpected' benefits of the works (including e.g. the archaeological finds in Dorset and the North Wessex Downs); to celebrate the achievement of having gained unanimous planning approval for the Peak District and Snowdonia schemes; and to work closely with local and national partners to obtain a positive profile for the VIP programme. There is also a need to find new and creative ways to facilitate engagement in the face of Covid-19 restrictions.

It was emphasised that these wider communications need to come from a range of different groups/organisations and wider umbrella groups, including those that are represented on the Stakeholder Advisory Group. It was also noted that there needs to be a strong focus on the fact that stakeholders and communities have been at the forefront of the VIP process, including an emphasis on community engagement and householder willingness to pay.

Whilst National Grid and Camargue can create assets and documents that have core messages and themes, there will be some reliance on Stakeholder Advisory Group member organisations to come

up with places and ideas for where the information can be published / distributed. Camargue will also be able to support Advisory Group members with regards to speaking, meetings, materials/resources, proformas and so on.

Potential opportunities that were discussed included:

- Publicity via member magazines, websites and other media channels – in addition to a number of specific publications and websites (including those of Advisory Group member organisations), the media team at National Grid are keen to get information publicised in specialist trade media (including e.g. planning, environmental, landscape and engineering media). National Grid is also in discussion with the BBC programme *Digging for Britain* in relation to the archaeological works at the Dorset site.
- Award programmes – there are opportunities to submit for a number of different awards including e.g. engagement, consent/planning, and landscape awards. This could include LEI projects as well as the larger undergrounding projects. It was noted that the landscape and visual impact assessment that was carried out at the very start of the process has already won a Landscape Institute Award, and there is an appetite to celebrate the achievement of having gained unanimous approval for both the Peak District and Snowdonia planning applications through planning awards.
- Celebrating and selling the successes of the collaborative process to other regulators, major developers and the organisers of other national infrastructure projects, to encourage the adoption of a similar approach and raise aspirations about what can be achieved.
- Encouraging other scheme providers and DNOs to put forward their projects in AONBS and National Parks.

Action:

- **All Stakeholder Advisory Group members** – Consider potential routes for publicity including partner communication channels, awards programmes, conferences, specialist media and other communications channels.

6.2 – Development of digital tools and virtual/online engagement

Stakeholder Advisory Group members were shown a virtual digital engagement tool that is being developed to showcase the North Wessex Downs project. The digital tool includes an interactive ‘fly-through’ across the project area with using a combination of drone footage and CGI. It provides the opportunity to look at views from key viewpoints both with and without the pylons in place, watch explanatory videos, and select from a range of pop-ups with informational elements about the undergrounding works. A link to the finished version will be shared with Stakeholder Advisory Group members.

Similar digital tools could potentially be developed for other VIP projects, but this will also depend on how well it works and the responses that it receives. The need to work towards providing more online/virtual engagement options was acknowledged, but it was also noted that the purpose of any tool needs to be clear e.g. is to showcase something, get responses or gain publicity. The requirement for and appropriateness of a virtual tour will be judged on a project by project basis.

The development of this and other forms of virtual engagement were welcomed by Stakeholder Advisory Group members, and further opportunities for their use in this project and from a broader perspective were discussed.

7 – Any other business and future meetings

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will provisionally take place in spring 2021. It is still hoped that this meeting can take place in the North Wessex Downs so that a site visit can be carried out, but this will be subject to developments in the Covid-19 situation.

It was acknowledged that the remote Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings are working well, and the option for virtual meetings has also meant that it is now easier for organisational representatives to get together in between the formal meetings. All members were encouraged to raise any emerging issues that they feel would benefit from a collective discussion in between the full Advisory Group meeting dates.