

Visual Impact Provision Sixth Annual Report

June 2019 – May 2020



nationalgrid

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 1. Construction in the Dorset AONB, photograph: Lorenzo Zuccaro
 2. Snowdonia National Park, photograph: Benjamin Graham
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 4. Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB, photograph: Benjamin Graham

Foreword by Chris Baines



Chris Baines,
 Independent
 Chair, Stakeholder
 Advisory Group,
 Visual Impact
 Provision project

VIP means undertaking major infrastructural engineering in some of the nation’s best loved and most sensitive landscapes.

This complex challenge needs input from a whole range of different individuals and organisations, and from the very beginning the programme has been dedicated to consultation and partnership working. This is undoubtedly paying off.

The first major undergrounding scheme has progressed dramatically through the year, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group visited the temporary trenches that are snaking their way across the Dorset Downs. Some of the mysteries of this ancient landscape are now better understood thanks to the remarkable collaboration between National Grid and archaeologists, and there are plans to share that understanding with the public.

In Snowdonia and the Peak District, the amount of technical work has been tremendous, and so has the commitment to local dialogue. The need for engineering innovation is “all in a day’s work” for National Grid’s professionals, but members of SAG have been impressed by the way that those same individuals have embraced the importance of “listening to the locals”. This is time consuming, but the emerging VIP schemes are a testament to the value of true stakeholder engagement, and this promises to be an important legacy of our work together. That experience is now being put to good effect as we progress the next scheme in North Wessex.

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative has also continued to gather momentum, and the funding of numerous relatively modest schemes is spreading the value of VIP across a wide range of much-loved landscapes.

Foreword by Michelle Clark



Michelle Clark,
 Visual Impact
 Provision project
 manager,
 National Grid

The sixth annual report for VIP covers an extraordinary 12 months, characterised by strong progress against a highly challenging backdrop.

When the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in national lockdown, we adapted swiftly and adopted appropriate safety procedures which protected both workforce and communities. As a result, we continued construction work in Dorset, keeping on track for pylon removal in 2022.

In the Peak District and Snowdonia, planning applications were submitted before the pandemic hit. It is a credit to the determination and resilience of both VIP teams and the planning departments at the four local authorities involved that constructive discussions continue, and the projects are progressing towards summer planning committees.

Following Ofgem’s confirmation that provision for visual mitigation projects will continue for the period 2021-2026,

preparations for the next tranche of projects is under way. North Wessex Downs will be submitted for planning approval in 2021 and scoping work has begun in the Cotswolds AONB. Streamlining the funding process for Landscape Enhancement Initiatives from 2021 will mean that new projects are approved more quickly.

This exciting progress would not have been possible without the commitment of the Stakeholder Advisory Group. Their expert advice and willingness to challenge ensures that the landscape and the people who enjoy it are the winners overall. I thank them again for their support.

The VIP initiative exists because consumers want to see visual improvements to our natural heritage. It is fitting therefore that the first VIP schemes are underway at a time when the nation has turned to AONBs and National Parks in even greater numbers as lockdown has eased.

1. Visual Impact Provision project

National Grid's Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project is developing plans to place existing overhead transmission lines underground in nationally important landscapes in England and Wales. Its aim is to help to reduce the visual impact of electricity transmission infrastructure in these landscapes.

There is a £500m Ofgem¹ provision to carry out this work in National Parks, English and Welsh AONBs and Scottish National Scenic Areas. National Grid is making use of this provision as the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales to develop projects in the Dorset AONB, North Wessex Downs AONB,

Peak District National Park and Snowdonia National Park.

The provision also provides for our Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI), a grant scheme for smaller local improvement projects open to all 30 AONBs and National Parks which contain or are impacted by National Grid overhead transmission lines.

While we need to build infrastructure to connect homes and businesses to the energy they need, we are passionate about playing our part in conserving and enhancing natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. The most important task for us is to use this provision to achieve the maximum enhancement to landscapes


affected by our network while ensuring that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result. We are working closely with stakeholders to achieve this aim.

This sixth annual reports records our progress and key activities between June 2019 and May 2020. It builds on the progress described in our five previous annual reports. To read them, or to find out more about how the projects were selected, please visit our website: www.nationalgrid.com/uk/electricity-transmission/planning-together-riio/visual-impact-provision.

Project statistics

- 571km of electricity transmission line in AONBs and National Parks assessed for visual impact
- 30 AONBs and National Parks in England and Wales eligible to benefit
- 53.7km of line within eight protected landscapes judged to have the highest impact
- Four sections of overhead line prioritised for undergrounding
- Landscape Enhancement Initiative provides funding of up to £200,000 for smaller projects

£500M provision to benefit National Parks, AONBs and National Scenic Areas



- ◆ Dorset AONB
- ◆ Peak District National Park
- ◆ North Wessex Downs AONB
- ◆ Snowdonia National Park

2. Working with stakeholders

Stakeholders are key to the success of the VIP project; their views are essential in helping us to make decisions on how we should use the provision to maximise its potential benefits.

As well as seeking the views of a wide variety of local stakeholders including local groups, communities and landowners, we established a national Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) at the start of the project to guide our work.

2.1 Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Stakeholder Advisory Group advises National Grid on key decisions and the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders. The group is chaired by leading environmentalist Chris Baines and its members are senior representatives from organisations committed to enhancing the landscape. National Grid and Ofgem are also members of the group.



Stakeholder Advisory Group members:

¹ Ofgem is the government regulator for gas and electricity markets in Great Britain. As part of the RIIO-T1 price control period (covering 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2021), Ofgem set aside a £500m (2009/10 prices) provision for the three transmission owners in Great Britain to address the visual impact of existing transmission infrastructure. The size of the provision was based on a 2012 Willingness to Pay study.

2.2 Stakeholder Advisory Group activities

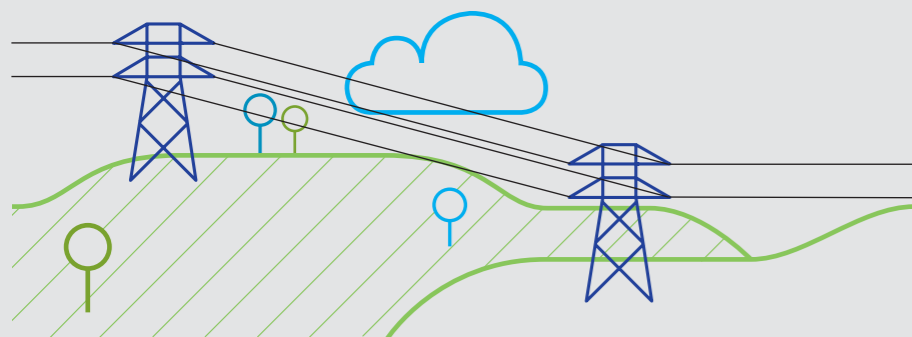
The group has met twice over the past year and below is an overview of the key activities and issues considered. If you would like more details, the minutes of these meetings are on our website www.nationalgrid.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision

15th Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting

2 July 2019, held in London with some members joining by video link

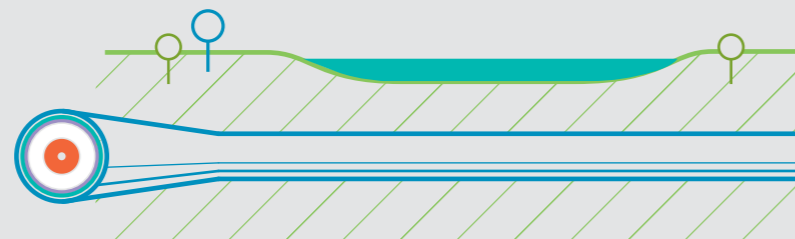
Main items of discussion

- National Grid presented the content of the planning application for the Peak East National Park project and gave SAG members the opportunity to comment.
- National Grid gave an update on the progress and feasibility of early delivery of the North Wessex Downs AONB project.
- National Grid gave an update on the reaction to the pause in the New Forest National Park project and there was a discussion of potential ways forward.
- Confirmation that Ofgem have agreed to retain the VIP in the next price control period (RIIO-T2) and there was a discussion about the project's potential future.
- An opportunity for the VIP project to collaborate on a University of Winchester research project looking at tranquillity and the impact on of the removal of the overhead line was outlined.
- Updates on the SP Energy Networks and SSE projects being carried out under the Ofgem provision in Scotland.



Over
£3m
of LEI funding
granted to date

51 pylons
to be replaced by
underground cable



50+ Stakeholder meetings
held in the year



16th Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting 5 & 6 November 2019, held in Poole, Dorset

Main items of discussion

- The two-day meeting was held in Dorset AONB and included a visit to the section of overhead line proposed for undergrounding between Winterbourne Abbas and Friar Waddon.
- Tom Munro, Dorset AONB Manager, gave a presentation on the specific features and challenges facing the area, the AONB's work and how the VIP project aligns with their vision for the future.
- National Grid presented the content of the planning application for the Snowdonia project and gave SAG members the opportunity to comment.
- Updates were given on the Dorset AONB and the Peak District National Park projects.
- Landscape Enhancement Initiative update, including progress of the latest applications and changes to the approvals process agreed for RIIO-T2.
- National Grid gave an update on the progress and feasibility of early delivery of the North Wessex Downs AONB project. Despite significant progress and strong local support, it was reported that it would not be possible to progress the project as a RIIO-T1 scheme. The SAG gave its support for National Grid to continue developing the project in RIIO-T1 with a view to delivery in RIIO-T2.
- Professor Denise Hewlett of Winchester University gave a presentation on research in Dorset which is part of an Economic & Social Research Council funded project looking at tranquillity.
- National Grid gave an update on the latest Willingness to Pay research which indicated a continued willingness by the public to pay for the VIP projects.
- An overview of potential timelines for RIIO-T2 projects in North Wessex Downs AONB and other potential locations provided by National Grid.

We have carried on working with our Stakeholder Reference Groups, which were set up to inform project development in each of the areas and keeping local people up to date on progress.

We describe in more detail how we have done this in each of the project updates that follow.

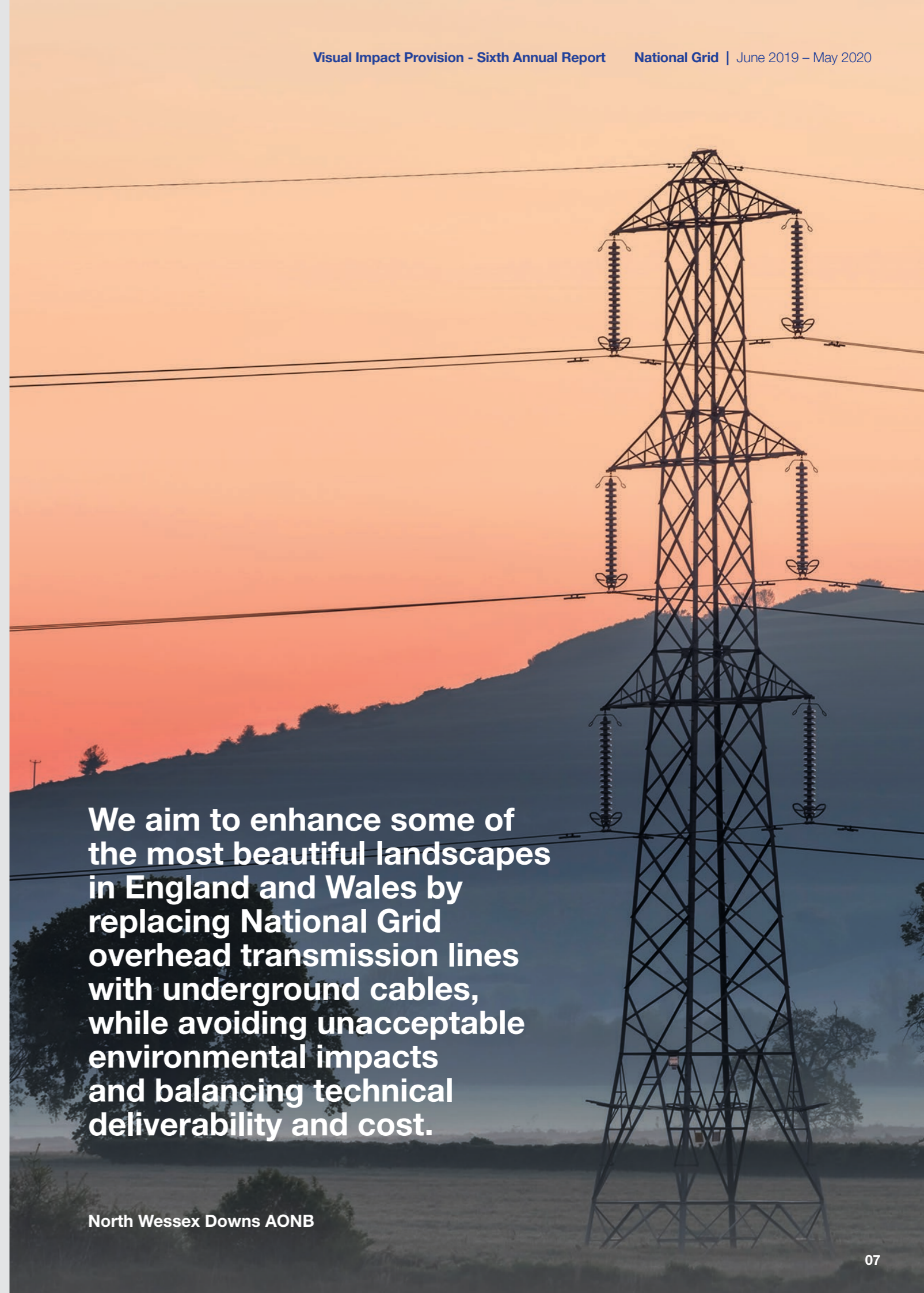
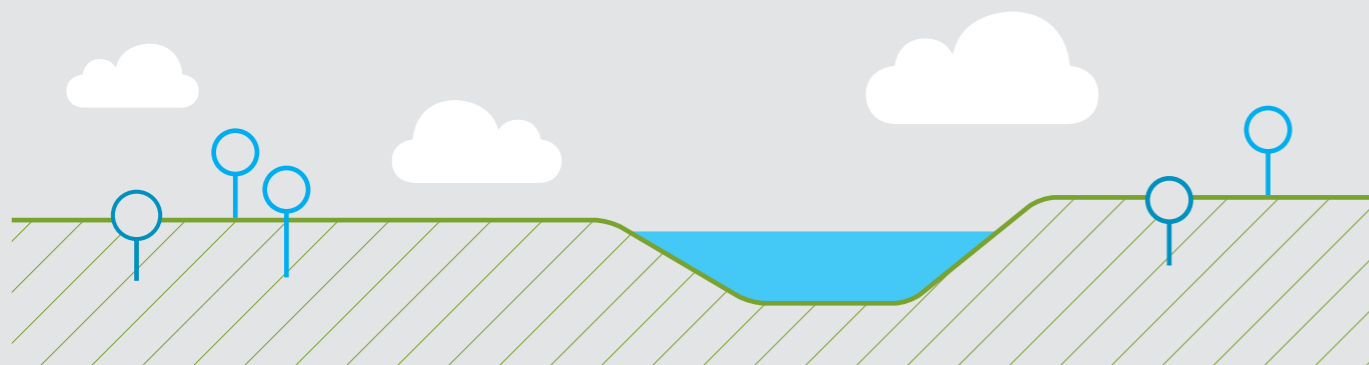
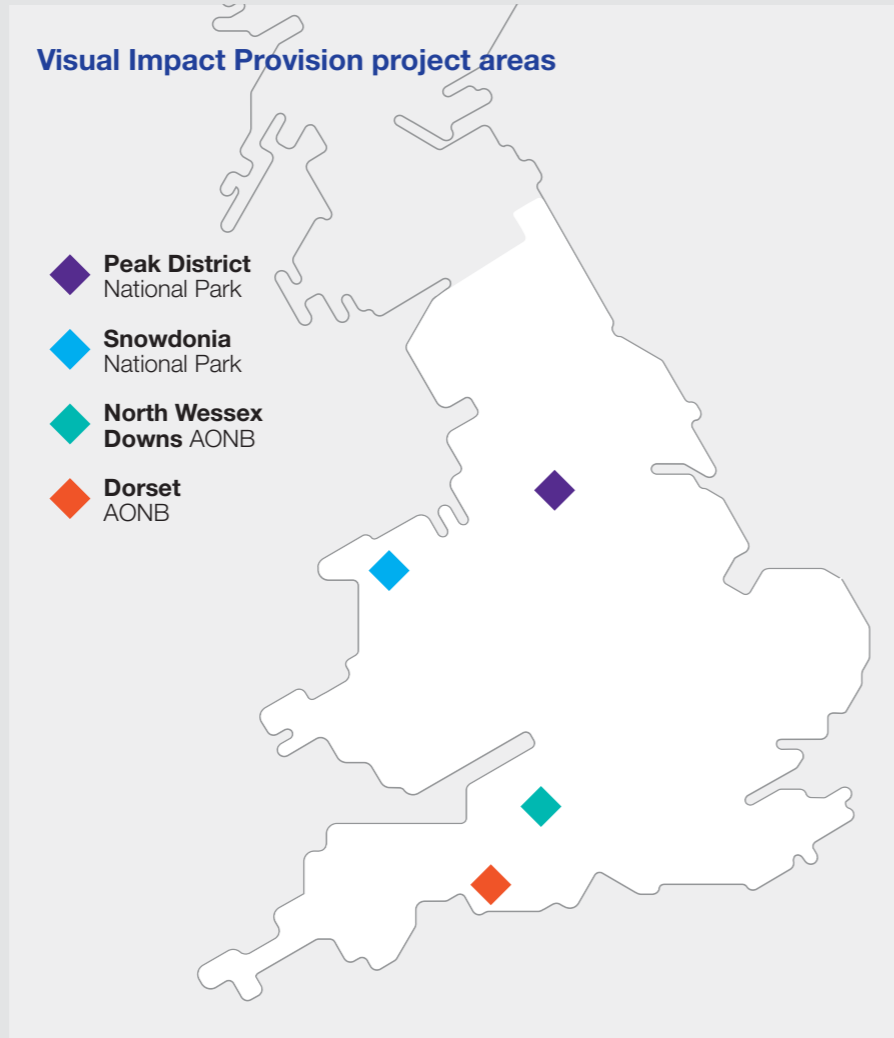
3. VIP project updates

Our Visual Impact Provision projects aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales by replacing National Grid overhead transmission lines with underground cables, while avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts and balancing technical deliverability and cost.

We are doing this through a transparent process which is led by the Stakeholder Advisory Group, drawing on input from technical experts, local stakeholders and communities. The VIP project is supported by National Grid's project team and external specialist advisors.

Over the past year, we have continued to make good progress on the projects, building on work undertaken previously. This has been informed by technical and engineering design work as well as discussions with stakeholders, landowners and communities.

The following pages provide an update on each of the projects as well as a look ahead to activities planned for 2020/21.



We aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales by replacing National Grid overhead transmission lines with underground cables, while avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts and balancing technical deliverability and cost.

North Wessex Downs AONB

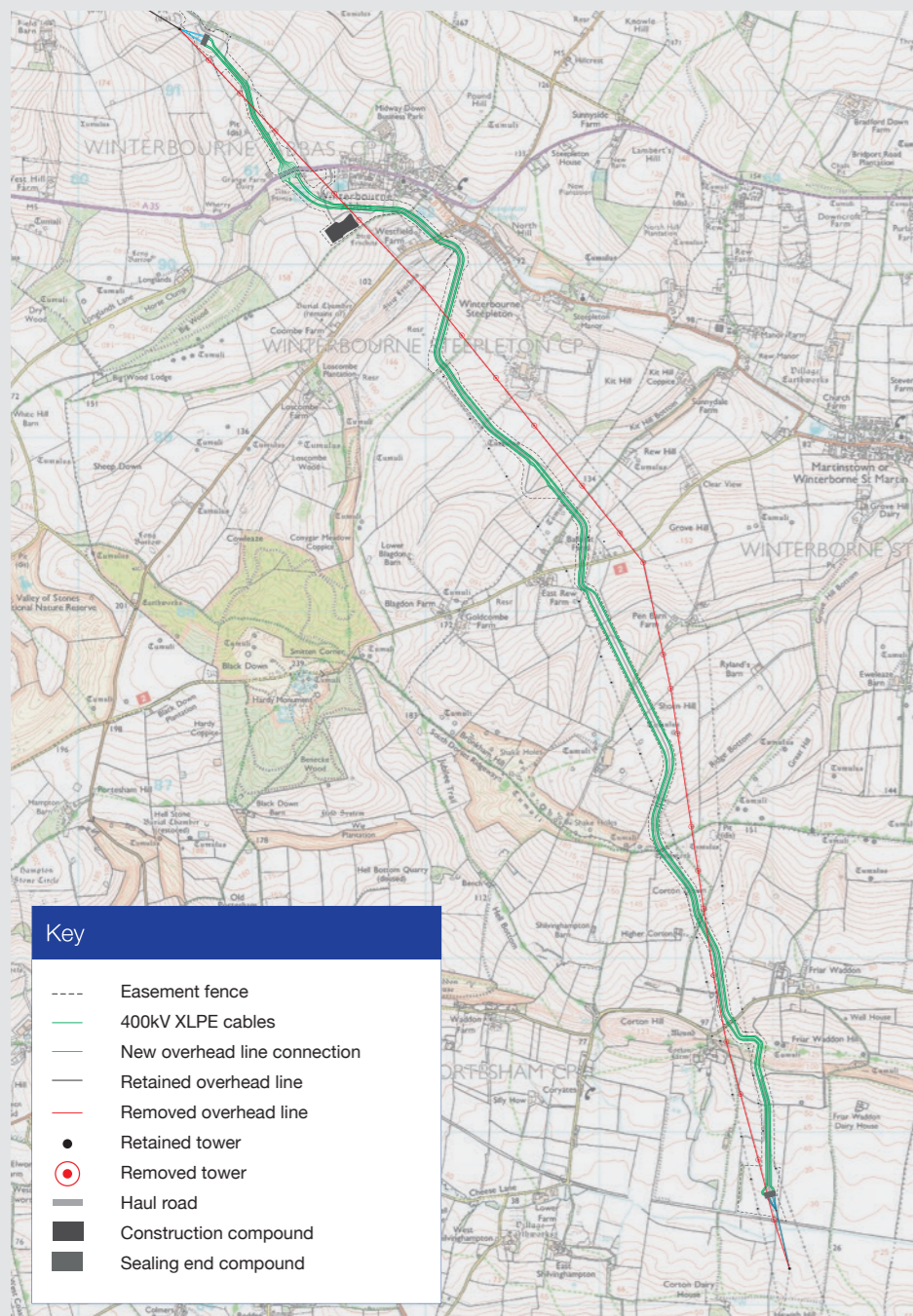
Dorset AONB



The Dorset project will replace 8.8km of overhead line near Dorchester with an underground cable, permanently removing 22 pylons from the landscape.

The route for the underground cable runs from Winterbourne Abbas to the edge of the South Dorset Escarpment at Friar Waddon. To connect the cable to the remaining existing overhead line, sealing end compounds and associated terminal pylons will need to be constructed at Winterbourne Abbas and Friar Waddon Hill.

Project route



Preparation work for ducting:



Dorset AONB



Progress to date

Planning permission for the project was granted by West Dorset District Council in June 2018, subject to the meeting of planning conditions. Over the last year, the following progress has been made:

- Liaising with Historic England and the Dorset County Archaeologist on the potential for archaeological discoveries, including an agreement that National Grid will undertake to excavate a large number of archaeological trial trenches.
- Agreeing with landowners the terms that give National Grid the rights to build, operate, access and maintain the new underground cable and remove the existing overhead line.

- Developing plans to keep the public and local residents informed during the project's construction, such as establishing a Community Liaison Group, a local newsletter and an updated project website providing project information and key construction dates. Plans also include setting up a Project Information Centre where visitors, schools and local interest groups can learn more about the project.
- Appointing Morgan Sindall as the main contractor for the project. Their team are making good progress constructing the bellmouths which provide access to the site compounds on the Roman Road and A35. The haul road is in place and work is beginning on the ducting that will carry the cables.
- Fitting out the site compound off the A35, including setting up the Project Information Centre. Unfortunately, the centre's opening has been delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions but it is our intention to open as soon as it is safe to do so.
- Implementing environmental mitigation measures, such as bat surveys, bird nest removal from the pylons (outside the breeding season) and measures to discourage badgers from creating setts along the cable route.



Covid-19
Work stopped on the project site when the Covid-19 lockdown was announced by the UK Government in March 2020.

To enable essential work to safely resume, National Grid has worked with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and its contractor, Morgan Sindall, to implement strict safety measures. The safety measures are designed to protect the workforce and the local community. Work on site resumed in April 2020 in accordance with these measures.

Dorset AONB



Dorset VIP project - archaeological finds

Extensive archaeological work has continued and a watching brief remains throughout the construction works with National Grid, Morgan Sindall and specialists, Oxford Archaeology continuing to work closely with the Dorset County Archaeologist and Historic England.

This year, we have found

- Four Bronze Age round barrows (burial chambers). They are relatively common in the area but these had been completely obscured by plough soil.
- A rare earthen long barrow containing human remains which dates back to the Neolithic period (4000 – 2500BC).
- Neolithic flint axes which point to Winterbourne Abbas being occupied during the stone age.

In November 2019, members of the team took part in an Archaeology School run by Dorset Council and presented the finds to an interested audience.

Information and images of the finds will be available for the public to view at the Project Information Centre and where possible the finds will be put on display in local museums.



National Grid Community Grant Fund: Martinstown Cricket Club

National Grid's community grant fund is proving popular with the local community.

Martinstown Cricket Club, Dorset, received £9,286 from the National Grid Community Grant Fund to install brand new practice nets and a state-of-the-art artificial surface.

The Club's aims to encourage wider participation in the sport have benefitted from the improvements which include a new surface which is particularly beneficial for disabled cricketers.

Club chairman David Gargrave said "We are delighted with the support from National Grid and the benefits that will be gained not just for the club and cricketers in Dorset but the wider community."

"Over the last few years, we have broadened the usage of the ground to include Dorset Disability, local schools and the developing Dorset Women's League. Our aim is to establish the club and its resources as a widely available community asset."

"We are delighted with the support from National Grid and the benefits that will be gained not just for the club and cricketers in Dorset but the wider community."

David Gargrave, Club Chairman



Dorset AONB



Stakeholder and public engagement

A Community Liaison Group meeting was held in November 2019 and was attended by:



CHESIL BANK PARISH COUNCIL

Winterbourne Abbas & Winterbourne Steepleton Parish Council

Dorset Local Access Forum

Winterbourne St Martin Parish Council



A public drop-in event was held in July 2019 at the request of the Community Liaison Group. The event was staffed by the project team who provided information on the construction timetable, traffic management arrangements and the archaeological work undertaken to date.

In November 2019, the Stakeholder Advisory Group visited the project and saw the site preparatory work at first hand. Tom Munro, AONB Manager for the Dorset AONB Partnership joined the visit and gave a presentation on the AONB and its work.

Looking forward

Project construction will continue throughout 2020 and into 2021. It is anticipated that by 2022 the new underground cable will be in service and that the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed.

National Grid will continue to work with the community and our local and national stakeholder partners throughout the construction phase to ensure that the scheme delivered achieves the maximum possible enhancement for the landscape.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared on our Dorset project website: <http://dorset.nationalgrid.co.uk>.



Peak District National Park

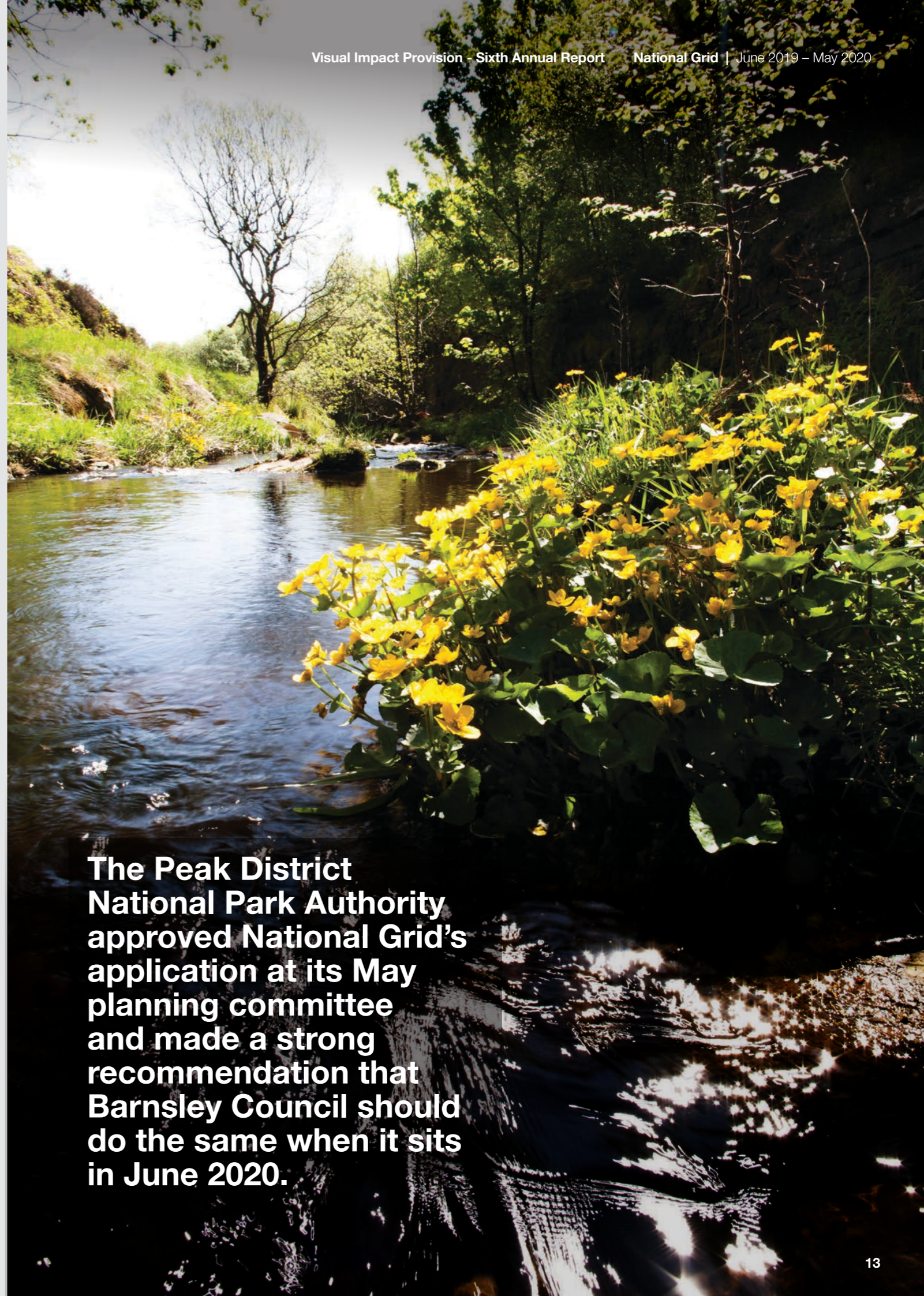
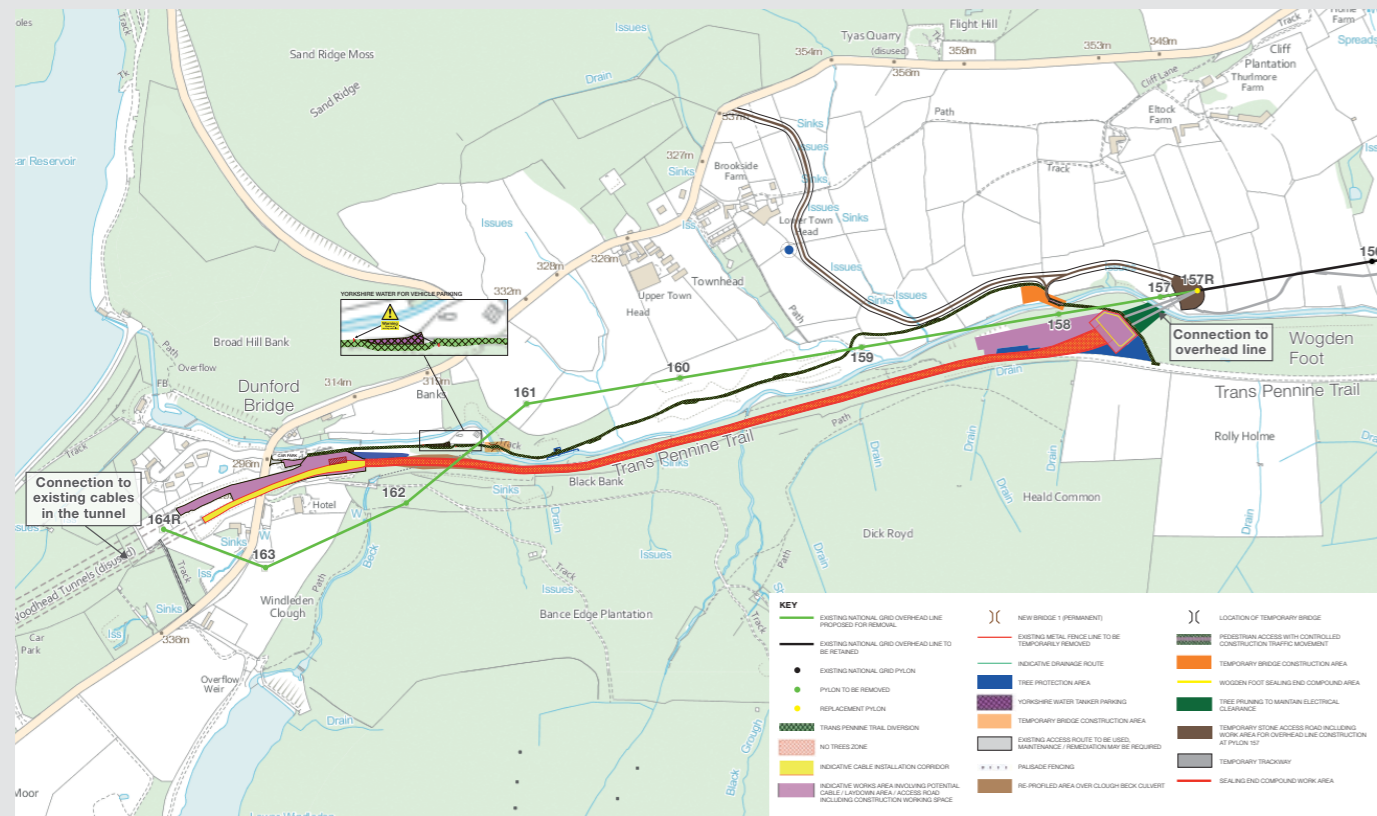


The Peak District National Park (East) project will replace a 2km section of overhead line east of the Woodhead Tunnel near Dunford Bridge with an underground connection, permanently removing seven pylons and a sealing end compound from the landscape.

The preferred route for the connection runs along the Trans Pennine Trail to the south of the River Don to join the existing cables in the Woodhead Tunnel. To connect the remaining existing overhead line, a sealing end compound and associated terminal pylon would need to be constructed at Wogden Foot.



Project route



The Peak District National Park Authority approved National Grid's application at its May planning committee and made a strong recommendation that Barnsley Council should do the same when it sits in June 2020.

Peak District National Park



Stakeholder Reference Group members



Dunford Parish Council

Progress to date

A planning application was submitted to Barnsley Council in August 2019 for a new sealing end compound in Wogden Foot, the temporary Trans Pennine Trail diversion, two new bridges (one temporary and one permanent) and a northern access road from Brook Hill Lane.

Following submission of the application, there were objections to the proposals from rail groups who wanted to see the line re-opened and ecology groups concerned about the impact on Wogden Foot and the loss of habitat for the rare willow tit.

Barnsley Council sought further information and clarification from National Grid on three key areas: the amount and location of measures to deliver biodiversity net gain; the impact on the potential future reopening of any rail connection in the valley; and climate change and carbon impacts of the project.

National Grid has worked extensively with landowners in the area and within a 5km radius of the site and local stakeholders including the ecologists from Barnsley Council, the Peak District National Park and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to deliver close to 12% of biodiversity net gain.

In response to concerns around the potential re-opening of the former railway line (now the Trans Pennine Trail) under which National Grid's cables would be buried, National Grid met with stakeholders including Sheffield City Region's Strategic Transport Team and Transport for the North's Northern Powerhouse Rail's Director as well as other interested stakeholders. Plans to reopen the line do not feature in Transport for the North's published transport strategy.

National Grid was able to indicate that the project would not prevent the reintroduction of a railway line in the future and that its carbon and climate change impacts could be mitigated.

Survey work undertaken this year has included repeating breeding bird surveys and a further assessment of the area by local willow tit specialists. Willow tits are red listed species and two breeding pairs are known to nest in the project area. National Grid's work with these specialists has enhanced the wider understanding of willow tit behaviour.

To deliver the project, the Trans Pennine Trail would need to be temporarily diverted to allow for construction work. National Grid is fully committed to ensuring that the trail remains open and accessible for users throughout construction. We have been working with the Trans Pennine Trail Office and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council to develop a temporary diversion. The temporary diversion runs across agricultural land to the north of the River Don and discussions with landowners are progressing well. It will be fully accessible for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. It will require the construction of two new bridges, one temporary and one permanent.

A planning application was also submitted to both the Peak District National Park Authority and Barnsley Council for improvements to the car park at Dunford Bridge. Improvements comprise more planting, improved signage and furniture, measures to prevent antisocial behaviour, dedicated horsebox and disabled parking together with an improved link to the Stanhope Arms and two charging points for electric vehicles.



Peak District National Park



The Peak District National Park Authority approved the application at its May planning committee and made a strong recommendation that Barnsley Council should do the same when it sits in June 2020.

The tender process concluded and Morgan Sindall were appointed as main contractor.

Stakeholder and public engagement

A Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held in July 2019 along with other key stakeholder meetings. These meetings included Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce, elected members of Barnsley Council, CPRE, Friends of the Peak District and Barnsley Local Access Forum.

Looking forward

Next year, we will be working to resolve outstanding highways issues and finalising the management plan for the temporary Trans Pennine Trail diversion with stakeholders. Further design work will be undertaken by Morgan Sindall, we will update environmental surveys and complete a further round of ground investigation work. Alongside this we will be finalising our agreements with landowners.

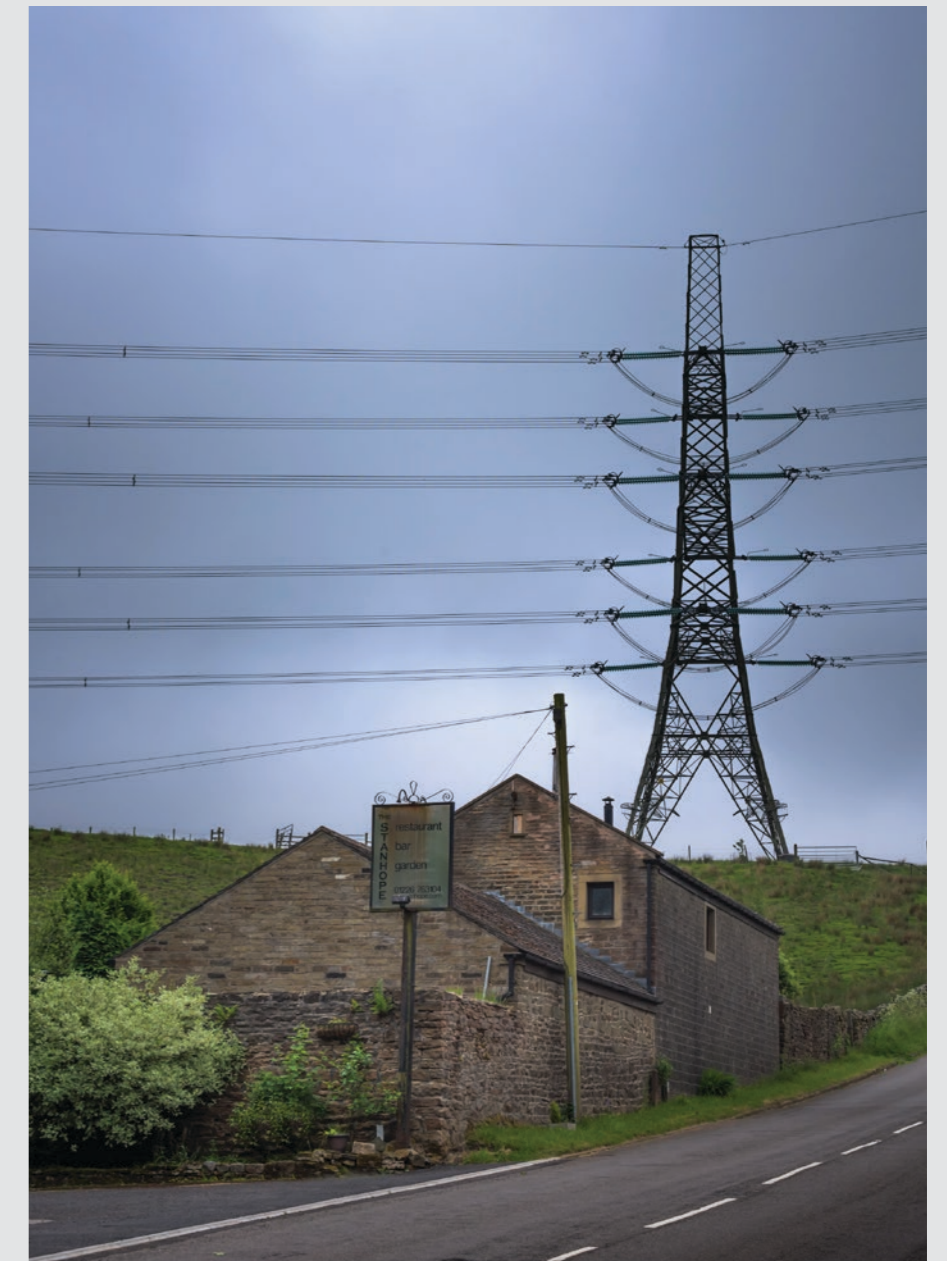
Subject to planning permission being granted by Barnsley Council, the main construction works are scheduled to start in spring 2021. This is later than initially anticipated to avoid clashing with another National Grid project that requires an electricity outage on the circuit earlier than this project. We will be updating our funding submission to Ofgem to align with the revised delivery programme.

The first major element of the project to be constructed will be the two bridges and the temporary diversion of the Trans Pennine Trail.

We will be establishing a Community Liaison Group to ensure continued collaboration with local stakeholders and the community throughout the construction period.

It is anticipated that in spring 2022 the new underground section will be in service and that by autumn 2022 the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared on our Peak District East project website: <http://peakdistricteast.nationalgrid.co.uk>.



Snowdonia National Park



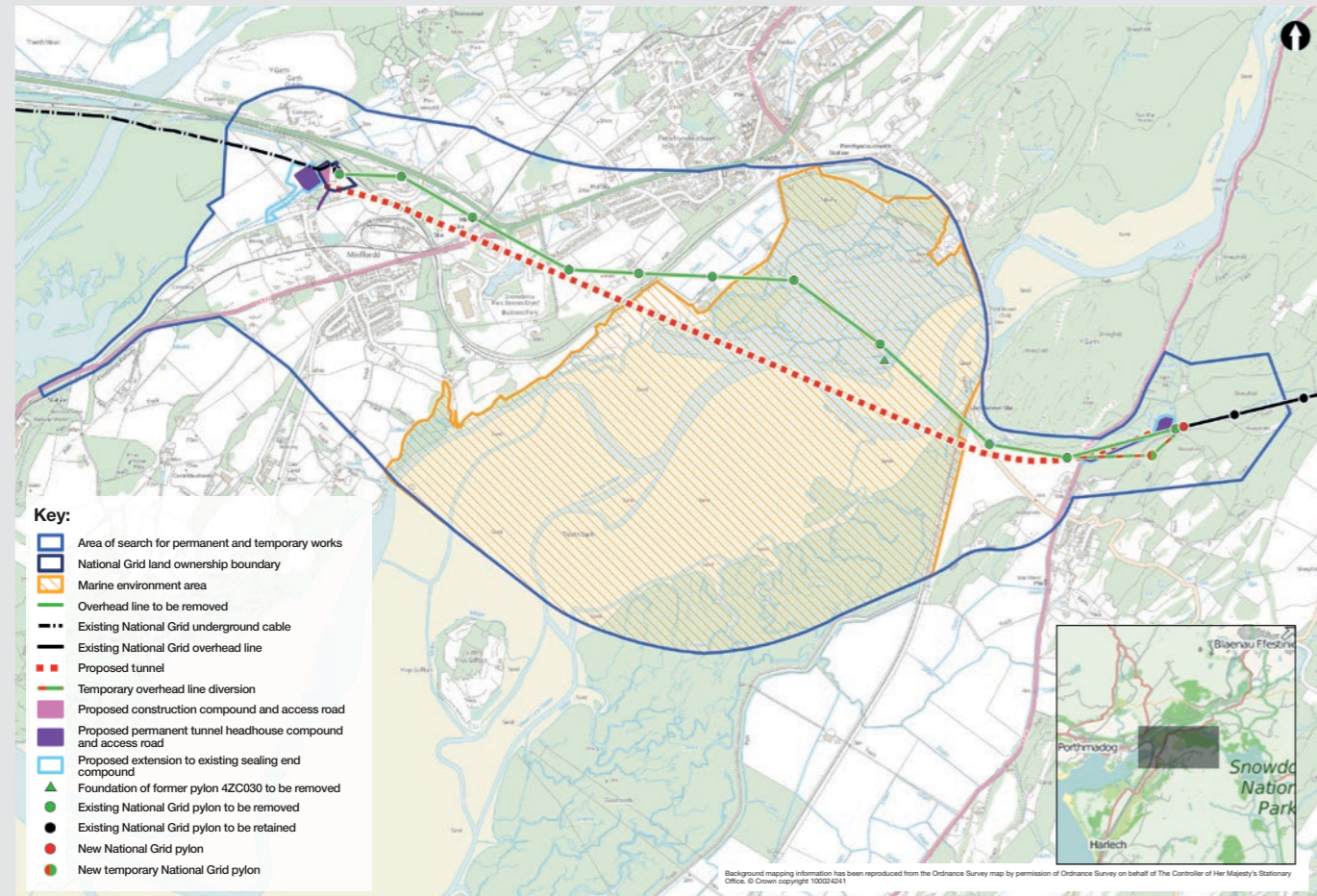
The Snowdonia National Park project will replace a 3km section of overhead line crossing the Dwyryd Estuary near Porthmadog with an underground cable, permanently removing 10 pylons from the landscape.

The new cable will run through an underground tunnel from Cilfor to Garth under the Dwyryd Estuary. A head house would be required at each end of the tunnel in Cilfor and Garth.

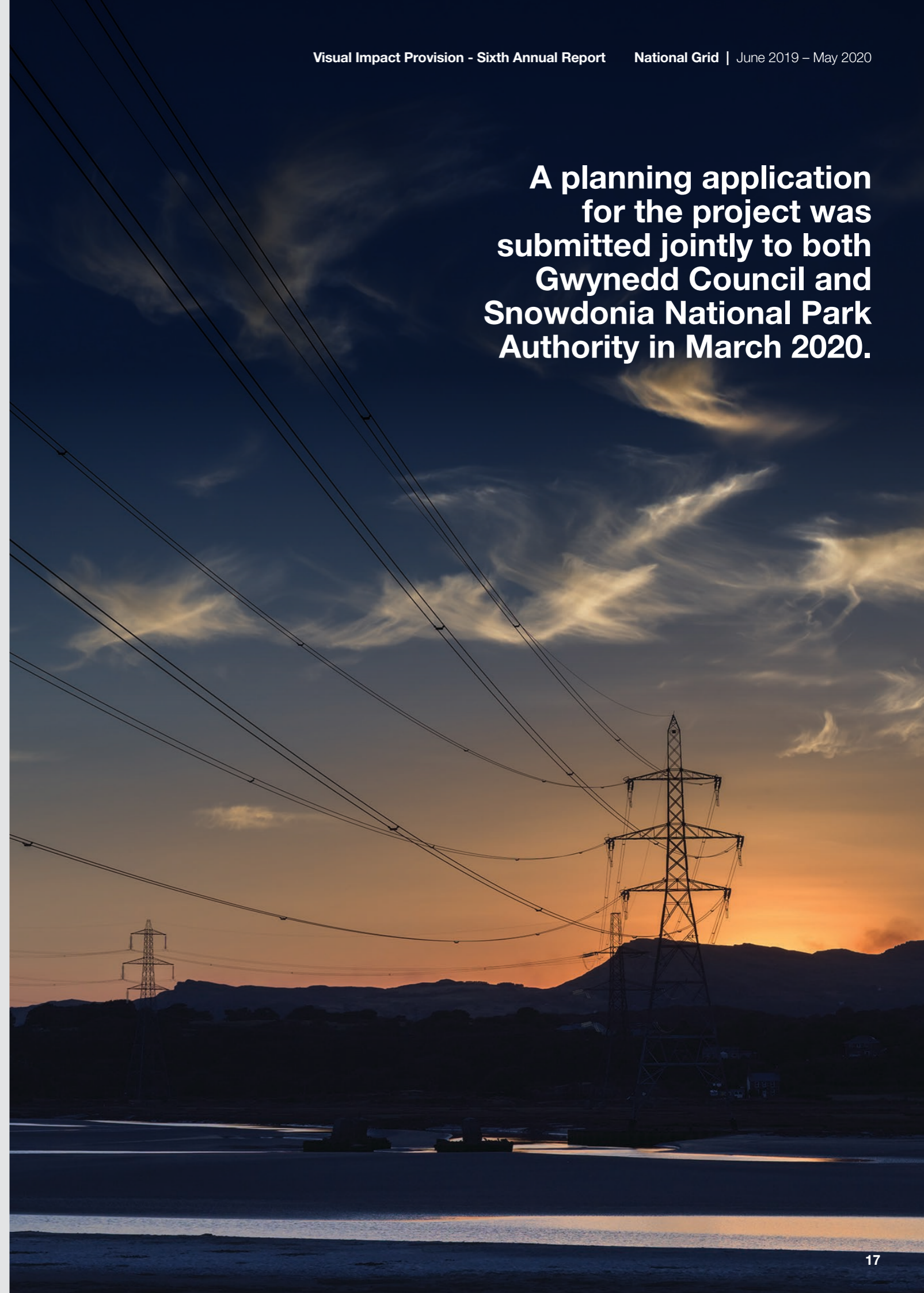
To connect the remaining existing overhead line in the east, a sealing end compound and associated terminal pylon would be needed near Cilfor.



Current route option



A planning application for the project was submitted jointly to both Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park Authority in March 2020.



Snowdonia National Park



Progress to date

Following Horizon Nuclear Power's decision to suspend works on the proposed nuclear power station at Wylfa on Anglesey and the associated reduction in power requirements for the VIP section, the National Grid team reviewed the project proposals. In light of these changes and feedback from the public, the location of the western tunnel head house has moved into the next field away from properties and existing services. This also means that the tunnel will be slightly longer. In the east, the shaft has been moved from one side of the building to the other.

We have also made progress on highways and access arrangements, landscaping, habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain as well as undertaking discussions with specialist waste contractors to identify options for reuse or recycling of the tunnel arisings.

At the Stakeholder Reference Group's request, we have continued to explore how the concrete bases the pylons stand on in the estuary could be removed. The group considered our detailed proposal for removal by helicopter but concluded there were insufficient benefits to employing this approach. Agreement has been reached on removal methodology and a Marine Licence application was submitted to Natural Resources Wales in March 2020.

A second Marine Licence application for the cable tunnel works was also submitted to National Resources Wales in March 2020.

A planning application for the project was submitted jointly to both Gwynedd Council and

Snowdonia National Park Authority in March 2020. The submission followed a period of pre-application consultation that gave the public an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed project.

As part of this consultation, a drop-in event for local people was held at the Snowdonia National Park Offices in December 2019. The event showed people the full details of the project that would form the planning application and provided an opportunity to share their views. Members of National Grid's team were on hand to answer questions and discuss the technical aspects of the project in more detail.

45 people dropped in to the event including representatives from Snowdonia National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales, the Snowdonia Society, Penrhyndeudraeth Town Council, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, North Wales Wildlife Trust and the Ffestiniog Railway as well as local residents and business owners, affected landowners and representatives of community groups.



The majority of people were very positive about the potential landscape enhancements, with the biggest concern being that something might happen to stop the project taking place. People were happy with the changes that have been made to the design of the tunnel head house at Garth. During the consultation in November 2018, people had expressed their concern that the design was not in keeping with the local style of buildings.

A tender event to find a contractor to construct the project began in mid-2019. Given the complex nature of the tunneling project, we went out to the international market to ensure it achieved best quality at the best price. The response has been positive with National Grid aiming to award a contract and begin work on site in 2021.

Both Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park Authority also undertook a period of consultation once the planning application had been submitted. No objections to the project were received by either authority.

Snowdonia National Park



Stakeholder Reference Group members



Stakeholder and public engagement

Stakeholder Reference Group meetings were held in Snowdonia in June 2019 and December 2019. Other stakeholder meetings have also taken place this year, including with Penrhyndeudraeth Town Council and the Snowdonia Society.

Looking forward

Both the Snowdonia National Park Authority and Gwynedd Council will determine the planning applications at their July planning committees.

A submission to Ofgem for funding will be made as soon as possible following the conclusion of the tender event.

We will be setting up a Community Liaison Group for the project to ensure continued partnership working with stakeholders and the community throughout its lifetime.

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents from the local authorities and Natural Resources Wales, the current indicative programme is that project construction will begin in winter 2021. It is anticipated that the new underground connection will be in service and the existing pylons and section of overhead line will be removed in 2026.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared in both English and Welsh on our Snowdonia project website: <http://snowdonia.nationalgrid.co.uk>.



North Wessex Downs AONB



The North Wessex Downs project will replace 4.4km of overhead line close to the Millennium White Horse, north of Devizes in Wiltshire, with an underground cable, permanently removing 11 pylons from the landscape.

To connect the cable to the existing overhead line, sealing end compounds and associated terminal pylons will need to be constructed close to the Kennet & Avon Canal to the east of Devizes and east of the village or Rowde to the north west of Devizes.

Progress to date

In autumn 2019, it became clear that despite the considerable efforts of the National Grid team, it would not be possible to deliver the North Wessex Downs project as a RIIO-T1 project (i.e. obtain all the necessary consents and secure funding before the end of

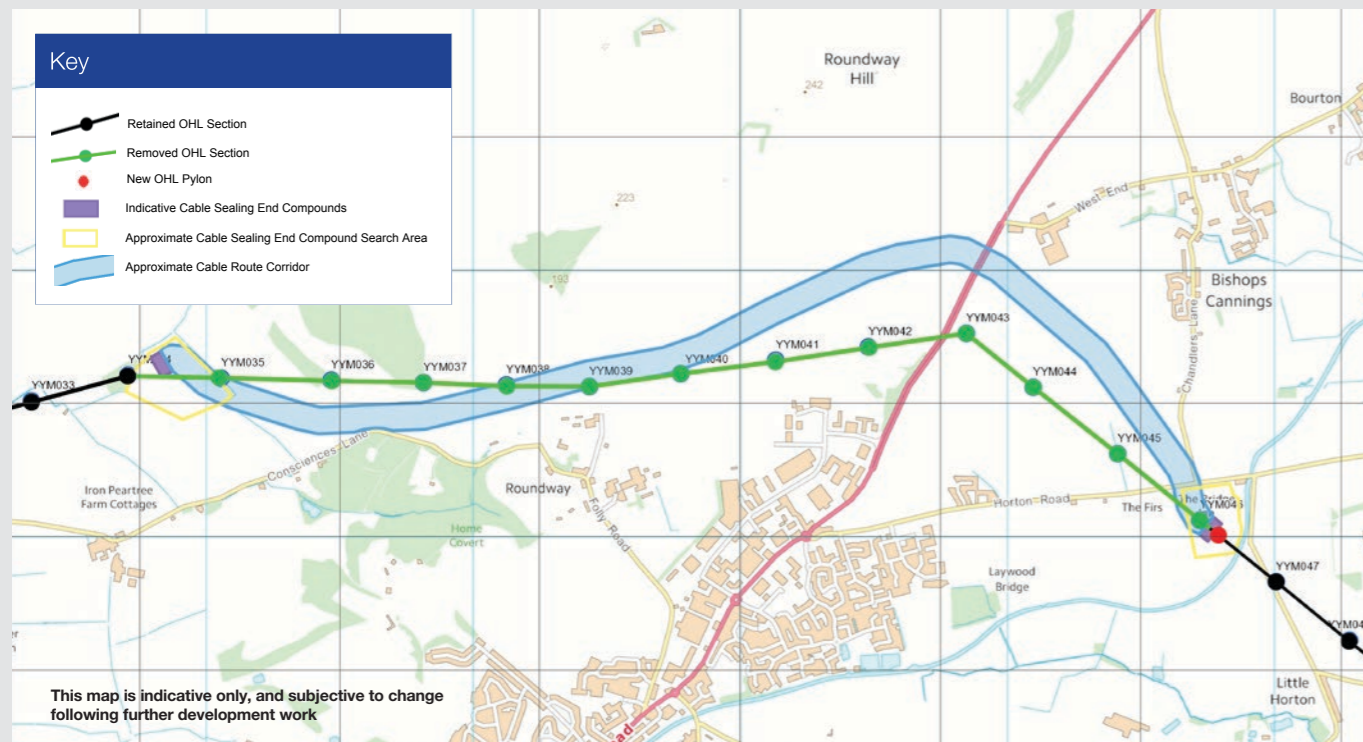
the RIIO-T1 price control period on the 31st March 2021). The Stakeholder Advisory Group asked National Grid to progress with the detailed development and consenting of the project during the rest of RIIO-T1 with a view to it becoming the first RIIO-T2 project. Over the last year, the following progress has been made:

- Locations for the sealing end compounds at both eastern and western ends of the proposed underground cable route have been identified and agreed with the Stakeholder Reference Group. In the east, this means increasing the length of the overhead line and number of pylons to be removed beyond the section of overhead line originally identified to ensure the effective screening of the compound.
- Roundway Down and Covert SSSI lies immediately under the overhead line and is designated

for its extensive unimproved chalk downland flora, as well as mixed scrub and the woodland of Roundway Hill Covert. One of the pylons targeted for removal sits within the SSSI and so its removal will create the opportunity to further enhance the designated area. Initial ecological and archaeological surveys have been undertaken, identifying many badger setts in the project area.

- An archaeological working group has been established that includes the Deputy County Archaeologist, Historic England, Devizes Museum and other local experts. Initial surveys including site walkovers, metal detecting and some geophysical investigations have been carried out. These have revealed some interesting finds including Civil War era cannonballs and musket balls, as well as a Roman brooch.

Project route

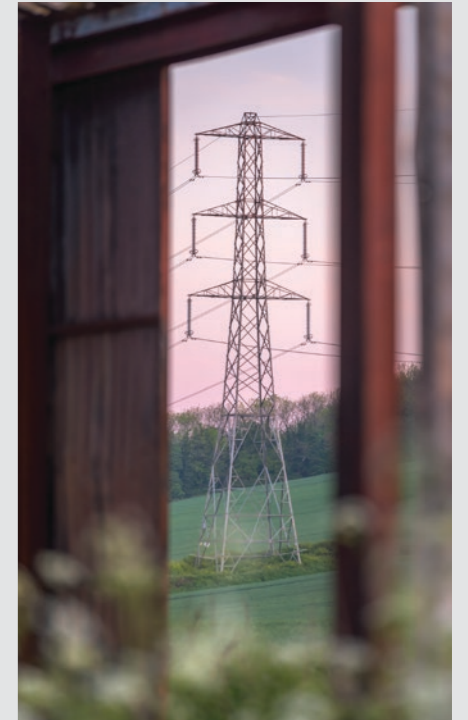


North Wessex Downs AONB



- The project has the potential to improve the setting of several sites of historic and archaeological importance, and National Grid is engaging with cultural and heritage organisations to discuss how this can be achieved. The sites include a Registered Battlefield associated with the 1643 Civil War battle of Roundway Down which lies directly to the north of the project area, with the overhead line following its southern boundary. Within 2km of the overhead line there are several Scheduled Ancient Monuments, such as Oliver's Camp, an Early Iron Age settlement, bowl barrows at Roundway Hill Covert and the Roundway Hill Farm round barrows.

- The project also has the potential to improve the setting of the Wessex Ridgeway long-distance route which passes north of Devizes and across the scarp slope, directly under the overhead line. The overhead line can also be seen when travelling west on the Kennet & Avon Canal on the approach to Devizes.
- Early contractor involvement is actively being pursued and a tender event was begun in early 2020 with a preferred development, and hopefully delivery contractor due to be announced in summer 2020.



North Wessex Downs AONB



Stakeholder and public engagement

A Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held in February 2020 in Devizes. In addition to this meeting, we have talked to a wide range of stakeholders in the area including:

- Wiltshire Councillors for the Wards where the project is proposed
- The Leader and members of the Cabinet at Wiltshire Council
- Devizes Area Board
- Rowde Parish Council
- Bishops Cannings Parish Council
- Devizes Town Council
- Bromham Parish Council
- The Canal & River Trust
- Kennet & Avon Canal Trust
- Wiltshire Ramblers
- CPRE Wiltshire

The stakeholder reaction to the project has been positive and we are planning some innovative virtual engagement events in the autumn of 2020.

Looking forward

We will continue with technical, engineering and environmental studies to determine the project's feasibility. These will take place alongside the ongoing stakeholder engagement and negotiations with landowners for the rights required to construct and operate the cables.

Public engagement events are planned for autumn 2020, these will be held virtually due to Covid-19. Ground investigation works are planned for autumn 2020, ahead of the submission of a planning application in May 2021. A funding application to Ofgem will be submitted in July 2021.

Project construction is expected to take around two years, targeted to commence in 2022 with the cables energised in autumn 2023 and the pylons removed in spring 2023.

Project information, updates and documents will be shared through our North Wessex Downs project website <http://northwessexdowns.nationalgrid.co.uk/>.

Stakeholder Reference Group members



4. Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is an important part of the VIP project. The initiative aims to use some of the Ofgem provision for smaller visual improvement projects. Its overall objective is to reduce the landscape and visual impact of National Grid's existing electricity transmission infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected designated landscapes.

Launched in May 2016, the LEI offers grants to each of the 30 National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships in England and Wales covered by the initiative for local visual improvement projects. Examples of projects that may be funded include:

- Localised tree planting
- Management of hedgerows
- Changes to trails, footpaths, cycleways and riding routes
- Rebuilding of dry stone walls
- Enhancing the special qualities of the landscape which may also benefit biodiversity

Since its Initiative, more than £3m has been allocated to projects across England and Wales.

How the Landscape Enhancement Initiative works

The LEI is driven by our stakeholders. Projects are suggested by an AONB Partnership or National Park Authority before being considered by the LEI Approvals Panel. Independently chaired by Mary O'Connor from the Landscape Institute, the panel includes experts from Cadw, Historic England, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. The panel makes recommendations to Ofgem on which projects to fund.

The initiative is supported by National Grid's project team and external specialists, including landscape advisors to offer guidance to eligible applicants on potential LEI projects



International engagement

In June 2019, a presentation on the LEI was delivered to international experts and decision-makers from the electrical power industry at an event held in Aalborg, Denmark by the International Council on Large Electric Systems (CIGRE).

Covid-19

In May 2020, Monitoring Forms were sent to all live projects to obtain an understanding of the effects of Covid-19.

For many, project timelines have slipped beyond their control and project completion dates are therefore likely to change. National Grid's project team is working to support AONBs and National Parks to update their timelines.



Landscape Enhancement Initiative

Progress to date

Window 1 projects

Ofgem funding received June 2017:

- **High Weald AONB Partnership:** Beautiful Boundaries
- **Peak District National Park Authority:** Central Longdendale Trails
- **North York Moors National Park Authority:** Over Silton to Thimbleby Bridleway

Window 2 projects

Ofgem funding received February 2018:

- **Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB Partnership:** Lost Landscapes
- **Dorset AONB Partnership:** Magical Marshwood Vale
- **New Forest National Park Authority:** Woodland Improvements and Wild Play at Holbury Manor / Warren Copse
- **Peak District National Park Authority:** Longdendale Landscape Restoration
- **Snowdonia National Park Authority:** Snowdonia Traditional Boundaries
- **Snowdonia National Park Authority:** Dyffryn Maentwrog Woodland Restoration and Landscape Improvement
- **Snowdonia National Park Authority:** Dyffryn Ffestiniog (East) Woodland Restoration and Landscape Improvement

Window 3 projects

Ofgem funding received January 2019:

- **Kent Downs AONB:** High Downs
- **Kent Downs AONB:** North Downs Living Grid project
- **Cannock Chase AONB:** Gentleshaw Common into the Future
- **Dorset AONB:** Reconnecting the Ridgeway
- **North York Moors National Park:** Arncliffe Wood and Scarth Wood Moor Restoration

Window 4 projects

Ofgem funding received June 2019:

- **Blackdown Hills AONB:** Enhancing the Hills
- **Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB:** Lost Landscapes Continued
- **New Forest National Park Authority:** Landford Bog Nature Reserve
- **High Weald AONB:** Wonderful Woodlands
- **High Weald AONB:** Beautiful Boundaries 2

Window 5 projects

Ofgem funding received January 2020:

- **Tamar Valley AONB:** South Hooe Restoring & Enhancing Watery Landscapes
- **North York Moors National Park:** Kepwick Landscape Restoration

Window 6 projects

A record ten applications for funding were received in May 2019. The LEI Approvals Panel recommending 8 applications to Ofgem for funding. Confirmation of funding is expected during summer 2020.

- **New Forest National Park:** Restoration and Enhancement of Franchises Lodge
- **Blackdown Hills AONB:** Hillforts of the Hills
- **Cotswolds AONB:** Restoring Cheltenham's Escarpment Grasslands
- **Cotswolds AONB:** West of Winchcombe Landscape Enhancements - Nottingham Hill
- **Forest of Bowland AONB:** Quernmore & Conder Valley Landscape Enhancement Initiative
- **Lake District National Park:** Healing Valley Mires
- **Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB:** Views of Minsmere
- **Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB:** Scenic sights and watery wilderness

Window 7 projects

Four projects have been recommended to Ofgem for funding. Confirmation of funding is expected during summer 2020

- **Lake District National Park:** Highlighting History at Lowther
- **Cotswold AONB:** Hampnett to Chedworth Boundary Restorations
- **Northumberland National Park:** Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail Enhancement
- **Snowdonia National Park:** Carneddau Connectivity

Window 8 projects

The application window was paused for submissions in May 2020 due to Covid-19

It is hoped that the window will re-open for applications by the end of summer 2020, with the next LEI Approvals Panel planned for winter 2020.

Lost landscapes of North Wales



Case study:

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB, Lost Landscapes project

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley form a dramatic upland frontier in North Wales, comprising scenic landscapes, dramatic summits and historic towns and villages.

The 'Lost Landscapes' project has been supported by the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to restore some key features of the AONB within 3km of two sets of overhead transmission lines that cross the area.

Beginning in March 2018, the four-year project has already started to improve the character of the landscape through hedge and tree planting, the establishment of new ponds, and drystone wall restoration.

Improvements to roadside nature reserves together with work to restore fire damaged moorland are helping to sustain important habitats, including those for black grouse and other local wildlife.

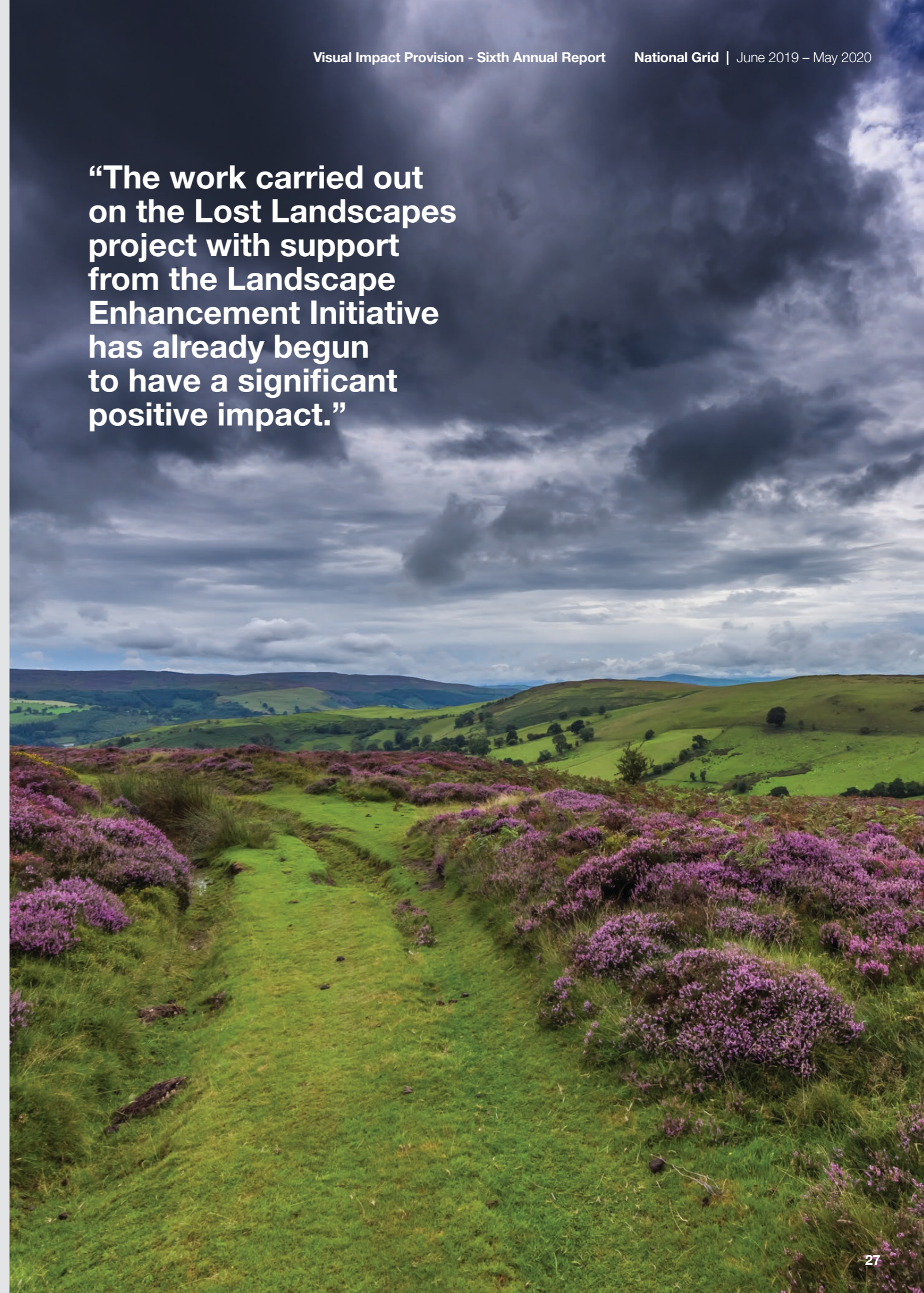
The removal of gorse and scrub from five acres of hillside has additionally improved the hallmark views for trail users along the Offa's Dyke Path above Tremeirchion. The project will also carry out works at Plas yn Ial Historic Park and Garden, a key landmark in the Morwynion Valley

Partners Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council, Natural Resources Wales, the RSPB, North Wales Wildlife Trust and Farming & Forestry Wildlife Advisory Group (FFWAG) together with local landowners are all helping to play a crucial role in the project.

"From the hillside restoration near Tremeirchion to the hedgerow planting and dry-stone walling in the Morwynion Valley, the work carried out on the Lost Landscapes project with support from the Landscape Enhancement Initiative has already begun to have a significant positive impact within the AONB. It's been fantastic to see our teams, project partners, volunteers and landowners all working together to help safeguard the character of these spectacular and treasured landscapes for generations to come."

Howard Sutcliffe,
Clwydian Range and
Dee Valley AONB
Officer and Ranger
Service Manager

"The work carried out on the Lost Landscapes project with support from the Landscape Enhancement Initiative has already begun to have a significant positive impact."



A firm footing for North York Moors

Case study:

North York Moors
National Park, Public
Bridleway Improvement

“We are delighted that the work on the existing track has now been completed with the generous support of the Landscape Enhancement Initiative. The Western side of the National Park has many special qualities and with a harder surface now in place more people will have better access to explore this unique area year-round. We’re also confident that increased drainage will help boost biodiversity, enabling indigenous species to repopulate the bare ground adjacent to the pathway.”

Debbie Trafford

Head of Recreation and Ranger
Services at North York Moors
National Park Authority

Beloved by walkers and cyclists alike, the North York Moors National Park is renowned for its heather moorland, undulating dales and stunning views.

Supported by a grant of £29,843 from the Landscape Enhancement Initiative, and partnered by the North York Moors National Park Authority, Forestry England provided a new all-weather surface for the public bridleway between the villages of Over Silton and Thimbleby near Northallerton.

The three-and-a-half-year project delivered a safe and attractive bridleway between existing good networks of quiet minor roads on the western and northern sides of the park. By providing an alternative cycling-friendly route to the A19 trunk road, the project promotes the tranquil atmosphere of the park.

Enhancing the experience of those who visit the park, cyclists no longer need cross underneath the transmission line. Instead, the upgraded route is 1km away, attractively shrouded by trees and the natural geography of the park.

Replacing the clay surface with a firmer, well-drained route means that both walkers and cyclists will be able to use the bridleway all year-round. The improved route has also created the opportunity for the re-vegetation of adjacent bare ground. This in turn will lead to enhanced biodiversity and a significantly improved aesthetic within the landscape for all to enjoy.



5. Looking forward: RIIO-T2 – the next price control period



Ofgem’s £500m VIP provision is part of the current regulatory period, known as RIIO-T1², which runs to the end of March 2021. Over the past year, National Grid has continued to shape its plans for the next regulatory period (RIIO-T2) for Ofgem’s consideration.

The plans, developed with stakeholders, include suggestions for what VIP could look like in the future. The Stakeholder Advisory Group unanimously agreed that the project should continue in RIIO-T2 and suggested it could expand its scope through consideration of other designations, such as World Heritage Sites.

National Grid has also carried out its own consultation on stakeholder priorities for RIIO-T2 to help shape its business plan. The consultation was accompanied by new ‘Willingness to Pay’ research, conducted jointly on behalf of National Grid and the Scottish transmission operators, Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc and Scottish Power Transmission plc. The research indicated

that the public continued to support the provision into T2.

Ofgem confirmed in May 2019 that a provision for further VIP projects will exist in RIIO-T2. National Grid has undertaken preliminary work on potential RIIO-T2 projects including the North Wessex Downs scheme, described earlier in this report.

Ofgem confirmed that the LEI will continue in RIIO-T2. The amount allocated to the LEI will be 2.5%

of the total VIP funding, whatever the size of the overall provision. Ofgem will retain the existing approvals process for the larger funding submissions, but LEI projects will no longer be required to be sent to Ofgem for approval. A process is now being set up that will enable the LEI Approvals Panel to approve projects, and for National Grid to report on the costs to Ofgem for the formal consultation process to be undertaken.



² To find out more about the RIIO regulatory framework please visit our website: <https://www.nationalgrid.com/about-us/how-we-are-regulated>

For further information:

Visual Impact Provision hotline: **0330 134 0051**

Visit our website at: **www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision**

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