VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Meeting notes of the twentieth meeting held on 24th March 2022

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

• **Chairman**	Chris Baines
• **Campaign for National Parks**	Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager
• **Historic England**	Amanda Chadburn, Senior National Infrastructure Adviser
• **Landscape Institute**	Sue Sljivic, Fellow of the Landscape Institute
• **National Association of AONBs**	Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
• **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 (dialled in)
• **National Grid**	Aled Rowlands
• **National Trust**	Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
• **Natural England**	Gary Charlton, Landscape Senior Advisor
• **Natural Resources Wales**	Keith Davies, (dialled in)
• **Ofgem**	Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist (dialled in for the morning session)
• **Ramblers**	Alison Hallas, Policy & Advocacy Officer

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Michelle Clark, VIP Project Manager; Steve Ellison, Senior Project Manager – Snowdonia; Paul Hamnett, Senior Project Manager - South; Leanne Evans, Senior Project Manager - Peak East; Pete Abson, Public Affairs & Policy Senior Manager; Ben Smith, VIP Project Manager - South; Eloise Frank, VIP Project Manager - Snowdonia; Bronwen Kalsi, Consents Officer; Mohammed Farooq, Regulatory Development Manager
- Professor Carys Swanwick, Independent Advisor to National Grid
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

Apologies:

- Jonathan Berry, Cadw; Tom Fyans, CPRE (present for day one site visit); Jon Parker, CPRW; Jonathan Cawley, National Parks Wales; Caroline Cotterell, Natural England

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The Stakeholder Advisory Group carried out a project site visit to Peak District National Park (eastern section – ZO.2) on 23rd March.

The purpose of the meeting that followed on 24th March was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Hear updates on the other 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 (LEI).
- Receive a presentation from National Grid on its 'Journey to Net Zero'.
- Discuss plans for activity around the removal of the first pylons in Dorset.

Session 1 – Updates on the schemes shortlisted for underground projects

Steve Ellison and Ellie Frank (Snowdonia), Paul Hamnett, Ben Smith and Bronwen Kalsi (southern projects) from National Grid gave updates on the progress of the other schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward for undergrounding. A summary of the progress and specific issues for each of the schemes is outlined below.

1.1 – Snowdonia National Park – 4ZC.1

This project involves constructing a tunnel under the Dwyryd Estuary to carry the connection from Llandecwyn to the sealing end compound at Garth to join up with the existing cables that run under the Glaslyn Estuary to the northwest. In addition to the tunnel, construction requirements include two new tunnel shafts and tunnel headhouses, one new sealing end compound, and reconfiguration and expansion of an existing sealing end compound.

1.1.i – Project updates

As advised at the previous Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting, following revised Government targets for electricity generation from offshore wind farms, offshore wind leasing and other potential future requirements, it was agreed that the specifications for the tender for the Snowdonia scheme would be amended to construct a tunnel with sufficient capacity to facilitate offshore wind.

Planning permission had previously been granted for the original scope of work in 2020, so the subsequent changes to the scheme had to be discussed with the two planning authorities (Snowdonia National Park Authority and Gwynedd Council) to ensure that the original consents were still valid. The planning authorities agreed to the changes as being non-material, and the National Grid project team is currently working on discharging the remaining planning conditions. The SUDS amendment has also been submitted.

The Ofgem funding application has been submitted, and the team is working closely with Ofgem on their questions. It is hoped that approval will be granted by the end of May 2022.

The revised tender process has also now been completed, and the construction contract has been awarded to Hochtief UK. Hochtief has a strong background in building tunnels and scored highly on both the technical and commercial aspects of their submission.

Pre-construction works are now being undertaken so that construction can start as soon as the funding decision has been made. Ongoing activity includes working up the contractor's detailed design, construction of temporary site cabins at Trawsfynydd substation, additional ground investigation works, ongoing environmental surveys, reptile translocation (slow worms), ecological mitigation and archaeological trial trenching.

The CPO has also been granted. There have been a few complications with regards to unregistered land, but as provisional voluntary agreements are now in place it is hoped that the CPO will only be required as a back-up if voluntary agreements cannot ultimately be reached.

Following the funding decision, the next stages will be to execute the option agreements to buy/lease land, sign the second Section 106 agreement (biodiversity net gain) and start ordering equipment. The detailed results of the borehole work will start to arrive around September/October 2022 and these will feed into the detailed design, allowing construction works to commence on site at both Llandecwyn and Garth at the start of 2023.

1.1.ii – Overview of the construction works and tunnelling process
The Stakeholder Advisory Group was shown a number of images and maps outlining the indicative site set up for construction works at both Llandecwyn and Garth, including schematics of the sites for the tunnel head houses, the tunnel shafts themselves, and the new/reconfigured sealing end compounds. These schematics included what will be in place at each end of the tunnel during construction, and what the sites will look like once the project has been completed. The Stakeholder Advisory Group was also shown comparative images and videos from the now completed Feeder 9 project which involved the construction of a 5km tunnel under the River Humber. Steve Ellison was the Senior Project Manager on the Humber scheme and brings his considerable experience to VIP in Snowdonia.

The tunnel boring machine (TBM) will go in one direction only from Garth in the west to Llandecwyn in the east. The original plan was for the tunnel to be bored from east to west, but the Stakeholder Reference Group asked for it to be constructed in the other direction, and this also fed into traffic management requests from the local council. The site set-up within existing National Grid land at Garth will therefore be more extensive than that at Llandecwyn.

The tunnel needs to slope due to drainage, and the depth of the tunnel will go from 15m at Garth to 65m at Llandecwyn. The tunnel is designed to be dry, but there will be a facility to pump out water. The cable lifespan is approximately 40 years, but the tunnel design works on the basis of a lifespan of 120 years, therefore it is also constructed with a view to the cables being replaced at some point.

The full length of the TBM is 160m and it is made up of lots of small sections that are dropped in at the start and pulled out at the other end. These sections include the cutter heads at the front of the machine, operator and welfare sections, a refuge, gantries, electric cables, fresh air ducts, telescopic sections, joints etc. The TBM that will be used for this project has just been used in Singapore. It is a tried and tested German-built machine and will be re-conditioned and refurbished at the factory (effectively re-manufactured) prior to being transported to North Wales.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group members were given an overview of the tunnel boring process, including images, schematics and explanations of the construction process for the tunnel shafts and the tunnel itself, the cutter heads at the face of the TBM (including how they are replaced), how the spoil will be removed, application of the primary and secondary tunnel and tunnel shaft linings, how the TBM is manned/operated on a 24-hour basis, and the stringent health and safety precautions that are in place. They were also shown videos of the Feeder 9 TBM in action, and the removal of the final section of the TBM at Paull in East Yorkshire.

With regards to timescales, a year has been built into the programme for the tunnel boring process, with the TBM operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week throughout. The exact timescale will depend on what is actually faced during construction, as boreholes can only tell you so much. A rock drill will probe approximately 30 metres ahead of the machine to identify what is actually ahead at each stage. There is one particular area under the estuary that is expected to be particularly challenging, but reassurances were given that the TBM is designed to cope with potential water pressure, and stringent health and safety features are built into the TBM to cater for this and other eventualities.

1.1.iii – Pylon and foundation removals
On current timescales it is envisaged that pylon removal will commence in 2028 and continue into 2029. There are some restrictions on when works can take place in the estuary due to over-wintering birds and this may impact the overall timeline for project completion.

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) has already been completed, and the approach for the removal of all of the towers and their bases has been agreed in principle. A mix of cranes and derricks will be used to remove the pylons themselves, with the exact approach depending on the location in the estuary and the ease of access. With regards to the foundations/piles, National Grid has committed to take out as many as possible. The estuary has changed a great deal in the last 200 years and will continue to do so during the timescales of this project. It is therefore acknowledged and accepted that changes to the current proposals may need to be made, but the project team will continue to monitor and reassess where necessary.

In response to a question about whether it is still deemed to be worth removing the foundations, Natural Resources Wales and the National Grid project team confirmed that this has been agreed as the preferred approach.

1.1.iv – Reinstatement, use of spoil and biodiversity net gain

The Stakeholder Advisory Group were shown a series of schematics and before/after images for Garth, Llandecwyn and the estuary itself, as well as images from Feeder 9 showing how everything was reinstated there. It was also noted that reinstatement plans for the scheme are in line with the Habitat Management Plan and Landscape Implementation & Aftercare Plan.

Discussions also focused on the treatment and potential uses of the spoil arising from the tunnel boring. The geology under the estuary is predominantly mudstone with some fluvials and aluvials, and as the expectation is that the majority of the spoil will be clean-washed aggregate/ground-up rock, there are multiple options for how it can be re-used. It is therefore less likely to be seen as waste but as a viable building product for re-use. A carbon model was developed for Feeder 9 and the project achieved over 92% re-use of materials on site. A similar carbon modelling approach will be followed for construction of this project.

With regards to the process of dealing with the spoil, it will initially be stored on site where it will then be tested before being taken away. Possible receptor quarries have already been identified, and other people have been ringing in to ask if they can have some of the spoil, including the local council and the RSPB. Once the project has gone past the notice to proceed, contracts can be entered into to look at where the spoil can be re-used and where it will go.

In response to a question as to why this had not been given more consideration during the planning process, there was a reminder that these questions have been asked since 2018 and they are under consideration – but until the project has certainty on timescales it has not been possible to put them in place.

With regards to biodiversity net gain, the current figures for Llandecwyn are 0.44% on site and 10% off site. At Garth, 10% net gain was not required, but the team are continuing to push for more anyway.

1.1.v – Community engagement

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was given an overview of the ongoing and planned stakeholder and community engagement. This has included and will include:

- An updated dedicated website
- A significant amount of STEM activity in local schools including a programme called ‘Making Science Simple’, VR technology (including VR tunnels), talks/lectures to secondary schools and colleges, and promoting engineering as a career – particularly in relation to the future need for technicians and engineers to work on the North Wales energy network, and shaping the future climate world to achieve net zero.

- Open days for the local community to be able to look around the site.
- TBM naming competition.
- Newsletters.
- Safety visits, including working in the local community to make them aware of what wagon drivers can and cannot see.
- National Grid Community Grant Programme – extensively used on the Feeder 9 project which has powered a new energy system for a local hospice, development of a playground for local special schools, habitats work, fences around the bowling green and AEDs supplied to the local community, the programme will be actively promoted on the Snowdonia Project

As on the Dorset and Peak East projects, the Stakeholder Reference Group will now evolve into a Community Liaison Group. The first meeting will take place in June. More technical conversations will still take place with the local councils and statutory stakeholders.

People and organisations are already applying for funding through the Community Grant Programme. Penryndeudraeth Football Club has applied for various improvements to their facilities, and Talsarnau Village Hall and Harlech swimming pool are considering applications for funding for a new heating system and general improvements respectively. It was noted that the local councillors have been very good at promoting the opportunities from this fund.

National Grid project team members are becoming involved in local volunteering opportunities including beach cleans, plans to run or marshal at the up and coming Llandecwyn 10k race, and getting involved in tree planting. Contact has also been made with the RSPB, the National Park and Ffestiniog Railway about other volunteering opportunities.

There has been interest from BBC Wales which is keen to follow the progress of the scheme.

Discussions also focused on the scope for cross-referencing with the offshore industry, coming in on the back of the recent granting of World Heritage Status to the nearby slate mines, linking in to 'Dark Skies', and ways to further promote and encourage uptake of the Community Grant Programme.

It was noted that local councillors would like National Grid to work through existing groups including Facebook and other social media groups rather than doing it all themselves, so further work is going in to identifying and exploring how to work through existing local channels alongside the National Grid website and usual contact/engagement methods.

National Grid re-affirmed its commitment to the Welsh language. All non-technical communications with the community and stakeholders are in dual language including the website.

On a separate note, a member of the Group raised concerns about some of the messaging to communities about the investment going into this project, when there are increasing concerns around fuel poverty. Consideration was given to how some of the longer-term benefits could be used to counter these concerns, including e.g. the future-proofing of the project in terms of potential new energy generation demand/capacity, the positive impact on tourism.

1.1.vi – Site visit
It was suggested that another site visit to this project would be useful once construction has commenced, partly as a reminder for the group as to the technicalities of undergrounding, potentially to see the TBM in action, and also for the benefit of newer members of the group.

1.2 – North Wessex Downs AONB – YYM.1

This scheme focuses on a section of line north of the Wiltshire market town of Devizes at Roundway Hill near the Millennium White Horse, and on the edge of a Civil War battlefield site. The project involves the undergrounding of approximately 4.5km of overhead line, and the removal of up to 13 pylons.

1.2.i – Update on project development

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was shown before/after pictures for the scheme and given details of the emerging cable route. The proposed route is relatively straightforward as it is all across arable land. There are a couple of restrictions/constraints including water pipes in/around the area and a water source protection zone, but the main constraint is the main road that the cable route would need to cross. The plan is to carry out a horizontal directional drill under the road as opposed to an open cut, in order to minimise disruption to road users.

The proposed location for the western sealing end compound is in Rickpiece plantation, and this will also work well as screening. The eastern sealing end compound location is very close to the Kennet & Avon canal. The project team is currently looking at screening options, but essentially whilst users of the canal would no longer see the pylons, there would be a new sealing end compound relatively close to the canal. Conversations are ongoing about this with Natural England and the Canal & River Trust.

The site compound for the works would be in a local industrial area, and no main construction traffic would be required to go through Devizes or along the narrow lanes near the site.

In addition to identification of the cable route and sealing end compound locations, ongoing design progression has included the identification and more detailed development of aspects such as joint bay positions, road crossings, haul road and construction access, and public rights of way crossings.

With regards to other project development, works that have been completed to date include: ground investigations, environmental and ecological surveys, archaeological trial trenching, topographical and ground penetrating radar surveys, an unexploded ordnance survey and pylon foundation inspections.

During detailed design, discussions within National Grid identified an increase in generation requirements due to new connections on the system. This meant that a greater capacity would be required on these circuits, and that what had been designed would not be able to take what was required in the future. The scheme has therefore had to be redesigned to cater for a larger cable and extra joint bays. National Grid is now working closely with Balfour Beatty on what needs to be done to align this scheme with future requirements and give the greatest certainty on costs for consumers.

The current indicative timetable for this scheme is for the planning application to be submitted as soon as these revisions to the design have been completed, followed by completion of the detailed design and the Ofgem funding submission before the end of 2022. Ofgem determination and early survey work (including archaeological surveys) will take place in 2023, with site preparation, installation and commissioning of the new cables in 2023-2025. Pylon removal and reinstatement will take place in 2026.

1.2.ii – Planning application and associated documents

Subject to the final stages of redesign work with Balfour Beatty, the National Grid project team will submit the planning application for this scheme which will be determined by Wiltshire Council. The

Stakeholder Advisory Group was given an overview of the planning application, including the individual documents and associated work that has been carried out to prepare for the submission.

Planning permission is required under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for the two new sealing end compounds, the permanent access roads that are required to support them and the temporary bellmouth access points off classified roads. The remainder of the scheme – including the underground cable section, the temporary access tracks and haul roads, the site construction compounds and the temporary bellmouth access points off unclassified roads and private roads – all falls under Permitted Development Rights.

The replacement of the overhead line to the cable sealing end compounds are believed to be exempted under The Overhead Lines (Exemption) (England and Wales) Regulations 2009 – this is to be confirmed with the local planning authority through the notification process.

The removal of the existing overhead line is not applicable as it does not constitute 'development' and falls under National Grid's statutory undertaking as it relates to 'renewing' the existing line.

National Grid has screened for the project twice, and there was a potential impact on a Source Protection Zone (in relation to water extraction). They have therefore carried out significant engagement with both the local water company, Wessex Water, and the Environment Agency (EA).

With regards to the planning submission documents, lessons have been taken from the other schemes that have already been through planning and the approach has been streamlined as much as possible.

All of the standard information is now ready for submission. The Archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation has been drawn up in consultation with the Wiltshire County Archaeologist and Historic England. It is also based on the results of the evaluation and the learning that came from the Dorset scheme.

The protected species surveys found no presence of great crested newts, but did identify badgers, water voles and bats.

Other work that has been carried out includes a water resources appraisal, a traffic and transport appraisal, a flood risk assessment, an agricultural assessment, and a lot of work on protecting trees, etc.

A hydrogeology risk assessment was done in consultation with the EA and Wessex Water – this falls under Permitted Development but the EA was keen for this to be addressed through the planning process as well.

With regards to landscaping proposals, the plans include woodland planting, the creation and management of species-rich grassland, and hedgerow planting. There has also been lots of work on enhancements for commuting bats (particularly the Lesser Horseshoe which has a maternity roost not far from one of the sealing end compounds).

Work has also been carried out with the Countryside Access Officers, primarily around dealing with the excess spoil coming out of the scheme. Some of the key stakeholder concerns were about screening, and there have been lots of conversations about how the bund around the existing plantation might look. The team is continuing to work on making it look as natural as possible.

1.2.iii – Biodiversity net gain
As yet, there is no specific figure for biodiversity net gain as the ecologists are still working with stakeholders to develop a plan. A lot of work has however been done with regards to this, including onsite and offsite enhancements. The AONB Partnership has drawn up some plans for offsite enhancements for National Grid to look at, and they are still exploring those opportunities. The Wiltshire ecologists are also keen for National Grid to explore some of these.

It was also noted that within the Landscape & Environmental Management Plan (LEMP), there is a 30-year management plan, plus a series of surveys throughout that period.

Discussions also focused on e.g. the plans for ongoing management/maintenance of the newly created wildlife meadow within the new sealing end compound, opportunities for educational involvement through the nearby school in Rowde (the sealing end compound is within walking distance), and preservation of native/ancient trees.

1.2.iv – Stakeholder engagement and communications
Due to Covid restrictions, lots of virtual stakeholder engagement has taken place to date, and there has been a huge amount of support from politicians, parish councils, local stakeholder groups and the wider community. A stall was also set up in the Shambles market in Devizes where the team spoke to more than 200 people over two days. The vast majority of people were positive/in support of the scheme (only one of the people spoken to was not in favour) and a lot of useful intelligence and contacts were gathered.

Site visits to the scheme in Dorset were also carried out with key landowners and tenants, plus members of the SRG, and local ward/parish councillors.

The project team are taking part in the North Wessex Downs 50th Anniversary Walking Festival on 18 June 2022, with plans for two walks, including 'The Pylon Walk' (i.e. a walk along the pylons while people still can).

1.3 – Cotswolds National Landscape – ZF.2(B)
This scheme was selected to be taken forwards as an emerging project for RIIO-T2. The focus is on the central section of a longer section of overhead line, which runs across the Cotswold Plateau just to the north-east of Cheltenham. The scheme would involve the undergrounding of approximately 7km of line and the removal of up to 20 pylons.

The development of this scheme is progressing well but still in its early stages. The area on the top of the plateau is relatively straightforward from an engineering perspective, but there are some challenges around access to the plateau itself as the surrounding terrain is very steep, and there are few existing roads for access. There are also a number of rivers, including the River Chelt, that would need to be crossed with a haul road.

There is an extensive network of well-walked public rights of way throughout the area, including the Cotswold Way and the Winchcombe Way. According to data from Natural England, walks on the Cotswold Way National Trail are among the most downloaded from its website by a considerable margin.

Activities that have been carried out so far include constraints mapping, stakeholder mapping, public rights of way (PRoW) considerations, identification of the potential cable route and sealing end

compound locations, initial contact with landowners, and establishment of the local Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) (the first meeting was held in Cheltenham in February).

The local land ownership and stakeholder picture is very complex, with more than 100 landowners (more than any other project) and multiple local authorities (four in total as well as the AONB Partnership).

The AONB Partnership is in favour of the project and are being very supportive. It is also very involved in the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI – see also Section 4). The AONB has advised on membership of the SRG and has put National Grid in touch with a number of stakeholder groups, including umbrella groups that represent a range of user groups.

Overall, there has been really positive engagement from both landowners and stakeholders, and the scheme has been well received. Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust is part of the Stakeholder Reference Group but has no major concerns at this stage. There are plans to do more engagement with local stakeholder groups and organisations in April/May, and more engagement with members of the public is planned for June/July. There are no villages along the route, so current plans include a drop-in event at Winchcombe (market town to the north of the project) on one of its market days, and taking gazebos/information stalls to some of the main car parks in order to capture users. The project website is due to be launched on 25th March **[post meeting note – the site www.nationalgrid.com/cotswoldsvip is now live]**.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was shown pictures of the proposed cable route and potential sealing end compound locations. With regards to the sealing end compound locations, a number of sites have been considered at both ends of the proposed cable route, and the group were given an overview of the potential options and the preferred locations that have been identified.

For the northern end sealing end compound, out of six options, the preferred site within the boundary of an industrial site which has been there for over 100 years. In comparison to the rest of the route, access is good at this location as it is an existing industrial site, there is a good set of tracks leading from it to act as the haul road, and a metalled road from the main highway already has HGVs coming in and out daily.

For the southern end sealing end compound location, the area south of the A40 is better from the perspective of visual impact, but from a construction point of view it would require drilling under an old railway, the A40 and the River Chelt, and there is also a large reservoir to the east. For this reason, locations to the south of the A40 have been discounted. The remaining locations are high up on the plateau with the preferred location being close to the established Dowdeswell Wood which would provide good screening. The Cotswold Way also emerges in this area and follows the OHL pretty much all the way, so there would be significant benefits from pylon removal here.

The next stages in the development of the project are to continue with the ongoing consultations, stakeholder engagement, ecological surveys and landowner agreements, and go out to tender for the development stages of the engineering work.

Subject to continued successful project development, consultation and engagement in the remainder of 2022, the current indicative programme for this scheme remains for the planning application to be submitted in 2023, Ofgem determination and contractor award in 2024, and construction commencing in 2025.

1.4 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7

This scheme is about to reach a major landmark not just for the project itself but for VIP as a whole as it nears completion. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties that faced the scheme (not least the topography), there have also been many achievements and positive outcomes along the way, not least the achievement of being the first VIP project to reach completion, but also the archaeological findings, the community engagement and the learning that has and will arise for other schemes to follow.

The presentation focused on images that had been taken both throughout the scheme and in the last few weeks/days, and also featured a video taken only that morning of the last cable drum leaving the site compound ready to be installed.

The images included:

- A drone shot of the site compound – the compound is due to demobilised/decommissioned by the end of August 2022. The cable drum reels will be returned to the factory and the stone will be removed.
- An earlier view from Corton Ridge showing the spider excavator and the ducting being installed – 105 out of 108 duct spans had been completed by today's meeting, and by Monday/Tuesday of the following week it is envisaged that all of the cable will have been installed.
- A view of the joint bay construction (all now in place) and a photo from inside the jointing tent (28 out of 32 joints completed).
- A picture of a link pillar compound (used to maintain the cable outer layer, all now completed for the first circuit, and a lot smaller than originally expected).
- Views of the northern and southern end sealing end compound, including the temporary tower at the southern SEC that was constructed during the last outage to de-risk the project timescales for this year.

Energising of the first circuit is due to take place on Sunday 3rd April, with the second to follow on 24th June. Removal of the pylons will follow straight afterwards, starting with the temporary tower in late June/early July, and the main towers starting in the week commencing 22nd July.

There has been a lot of work with the local community, including:

- STEM work in schools
- The donation of raffle prizes
- Site visits from the Dorset AONB Partnership Board, local councillors, the Community Liaison Group, other scheme stakeholders/project team members, and the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group.
- Webinars with various groups including the local U3A.

More visitors are able to come to the site now that there are no more lockdowns and the team is ramping up activity to get as many community groups as possible to the site before work is completed.

Recently, the Community Grant Programme has funded the refurbishment and development of Martinstown Village Hall and allowed Portesham Volunteers to restore places in the community, rebuild drystone walls, plant a wildflower meadow with the village school, and carry out shrub and tree planting. Again, the team is redoubling efforts to encourage the community to apply to the grant fund before National Grid leaves the area.

The presentation finished with the video of the last cable drum reel leaving the compound that morning.

Session 2 – Plans for activity around the removal of the first pylon at Dorset AONB

As outlined in Section 1.4 above, the provisional date for the removal of the first pylon in the Dorset AONB scheme – and also the first pylon to be removed for the VIP scheme as a whole – is June/July 2022.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was asked to consider what plans they would like to make to celebrate/commemorate this key landmark moment, and whether there should be just one event or a series of events.

The pylons will be removed south to north and time lapse photography will be used to capture the removal of the pylons using cranes. Most of the pylons will however be felled. The removal of the last pylon is currently scheduled for October.

It was agreed that it would be useful to tie in the felling of the first tower with the next SAG meeting and plans for this will be finalised when the exact date is known. Further consideration will be given to the logistics and timing of subsequent events, and potentially marking the felling of the last tower.

It was suggested that the removal of the towers in the Peak District National Park scheme might be of more interest to those based in more northerly locations, and it was also noted that further 'events' could be considered for key stages of the Snowdonia National Park scheme e.g. when the TBM arrives on site, or when boring starts etc.

A discussion was also held about the need to ensure that the most key and the most visual milestones throughout all of the projects are captured and publicised.

Session 3 – National Grid Journey to Net Zero

Aled Rowlands and Pete Abson from National Grid gave a presentation on the Government's announcement in 2020 of their plans to increase offshore wind generation from 10GW to 40GW by 2030, the subsequent requirement on National Grid to provide the necessary infrastructure to cater for this increase in generation, and the wider implications of the Government's target of reaching 'net zero' by 2050.

The initial announcement about 40GW of offshore generation was made in December 2020, and more recently targets have been revised with the announcement of plans to achieve a fully decarbonised network by 2035. National Grid is now also waiting for the release of the Government's Energy Security Strategy which is anticipated to set even higher targets for offshore wind generation, other renewables and nuclear power.

While the Government has set out a clear direction, the full scale of their ambitions has not yet been determined. It is however clear that the scale of what National Grid will need to deliver in terms of new infrastructure is unprecedented. Transition of the energy system is one of the biggest challenges facing the UK. Doubling (or more) of energy requirements is being driven primarily by the

decarbonisation of both transport and heating, and more recent concerns around energy security. There is a rush to provide new sources of energy, including small nuclear reactors (SNRs) and offshore wind power, but the social acceptability of the infrastructure that will be required for both generation and transmission is a challenge.

Discussions with BEIS and Ofgem are ongoing, and it is clear that National Grid will need to adapt. A group was set up to undertake an Offshore Transmission Network Review in order to facilitate a joined-up approach amongst individual offshore companies. Whilst the providers are confident that they can produce 100% of the energy requirements, National Grid is regulated and licenced to provide the network that will be required for the generated power to be transmitted; the scale of this undertaking should not be underestimated. It is hoped by the summer that a Holistic Network Design (HND) will have been completed, which will look at how to coordinate the offshore grid with onshore connections.

The current focus is primarily on projects across the north-east of England and East Anglia, but there are also major plans for further offshore development in the Irish Sea and, until the new Energy Security Policy is released, the full scale of the challenge is not yet known.

Timescale and costs are both huge issues – with current targets there will be a need for 600km of new infrastructure in the next six years, and this is just for the planned East Coast/North Sea 40GW. This brings with it may issues, not least around landscape perspective and public perception. Avoiding pylons in National Parks and AONBs leads to either a push towards undergrounding, and/or moving the infrastructure further towards where people live.

There are numerous conflicting priorities – Defra, planning authorities, BEIS (etc) all have different objectives. There have been calls for these issues to receive a stronger focus in the National Policy Statement (NPS) review that is already under way, and the new Select Committee that is being set up to look at land use for housing will also need to be in the loop.

The challenge is always that there isn't enough time, but there is a strong desire from National Grid to look at how a balanced approach can be achieved and to ensure that new infrastructure is well planned and delivered.

National Grid and the Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that the only way to achieve this immense undertaking will be through collaboration with other agencies, and through engaging with stakeholders and consumers. National Grid and Ofgem are in the process of bringing together the various Government departments and stakeholders with expertise to look at the way forward. More conversations are due to take place over the summer, and the input of stakeholders will be essential in reaching an effective solution.

Further discussions took place on aspects such as: the infrastructure requirements for the move towards electric transport; pressures arising from the lead time for the 2035 targets to have no more fossil fuel boilers and no more coal-generated electricity; the nature of the infrastructure that will be required (not just new power lines but also battery storage, convertor stations, substations, road transport etc.); the impact of offshore generation on the location of new infrastructure; and community benefits including the tangible benefits that may arise for impacted communities.

The presentation concluded with an overview of 'Grid for Nature – the 2022 ambition'. The country is at a pivotal moment for environmental priorities, energy generation, landscape change, nature conservation and stakeholder management. National Grid's transmission network, both established

and anticipated, is uniquely placed and could play a leading role in facilitating and demonstrating a more 'joined-up' approach to rural land use.

Grid for Nature could lead and deliver positive change on a large scale, and will be seeking opportunities to collaborate with NGOs and other organisations who are leading work to protect, restore and enhance nature. The aim is to get to the stage where solutions have been delivered with collaboration, and to make the most of the opportunity to get pylons seen as something more positive for a lasting environmental legacy, and not just focus purely on cost. While there is a mandate to deliver a network that will address climate change, for the foreseeable future the energy bill crisis is also likely to have a huge impact on decisions that are made.

The involvement of the organisations such as those represented on the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group will be pivotal in shaping this.

Action:

- **Pete Abson to share the presentation slides with SAG members. [Post meeting note – done]**

Session 4 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

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

4.1 – Project application updates

- **Window 9** – Ten Expressions of Interest and seven full applications were submitted. The LEI Approvals Panel met on 23rd September 2021 (just after the previous SAG meeting) to discuss them.
- **Window 10** – Expressions of Interest opened in September 2021, and the LEI Approvals Panel was due to meet on 30th March 2022. Only three applications were submitted for Window 10 and two of these have been deferred.

It was noted that the continued issue with resourcing, particularly in the AONB Partnerships, is affecting their ability to submit applications. This has been further impacted as potential applicants are also now prioritising applying for funding under the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FIPL) scheme.

4.2 – Support for working up projects and submitting applications

Following on from previous discussions regarding the potential to secure a separate stream of funding to enable external support to be provided to applicants, there was a reminder that Esmée Fairbairn Foundation had previously given a positive response to this idea. The sticking point was however finding an agency who would be able and allowed to 'host' the grant funding. Natural England had been keen to get involved, but this was not possible due to statutory restrictions.

Following an approach from the Cotswolds National Landscape to act as the administrative function for any funding, Chris Baines contacted Esmée Fairbairn again to rekindle the relationship. This again received a positive response Esmée Fairbairn with the Foundation asking for a ballpark cost for what they can support, including e.g. how much, for how long and in what format.

A discussion was held about the options, including funding a national officer to support all of the applicants, providing an administrative grant to the applicants, or a combination of the two. It was also reiterated that any support that is provided must be completely separate to the LEI and

National Grid. LUC and Gillespies will still be available to advise potential applicants, but they cannot help with writing applications.

Cotswolds National Landscape has now offered to host a person to administer the funding, and this would be acceptable under National Grid's licence conditions. Group members who have been involved in the scheme to date do however feel that the provision of direct funding to the applicants to enable them to pay for resource to both work up project ideas and write the applications is crucial. This could take the form of a set amount (£5k per application was suggested), or a percentage figure.

It was suggested that acceptance of the EOI by the LEI Approvals Panel could be the gateway to receiving funding to work up a full application, and the exact sum of money could be calculated based on the average amount of time taken to complete the process by successful applicants to date. This would all be applied for outside of National Grid and the LEI, and a separate person would be employed/hosted by Cotswolds National Landscape to administer the process.

It was agreed that this process could potentially work, and that Chris Baines should pursue it further.

Session 5 – Any other business and future meetings

5.1 – Closing remarks

In the closing remarks, a number of comments were made about the significant progress that has been made since the commencement of the VIP project eight years ago, and the landmark moments that this meeting in particular had encapsulated. Chris Baines thanked and congratulated the National Grid team members and all of the members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group for their invaluable contribution and input.

5.2 – Capitalising on the outputs of VIP

There was a brief discussion about the future of VIP and how to capitalise on the outputs from the process. It was agreed that it would be useful to create a master slide deck and/or short video for individual SAG members to share with people within their organisations. This could include core messages about the landscape impact including e.g. some of the before/after images, information about the tunnel boring process that had been shared at this meeting, pieces to camera from SAG members, quotes from key guests/local stakeholders, and some of the broader value that has been achieved including e.g. the biodiversity net gain.

In an earlier discussion it had also been noted that the 'win-win' achievements in the North Wessex Downs AONB and Snowdonia National Park schemes with regards to being able to continue with these projects whilst also creating capacity for future increased generation requirements are worthy of celebrating/marking in some way, particularly with regards to ongoing debate/discussions about joined-up thinking and future funding conversations with Ofgem.

5.3 – Future meetings

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will take place in Dorset and will be scheduled to take place around the date of the removal of one of the first pylons (currently planned for July 2022).