

Summer 2024

Community Newsletter

North Wessex Downs Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project



Welcome & project introduction



Amardeep Malhi
National Grid
Project Manager



Hello and welcome to the first of our regular community newsletters, that will keep you updated throughout our work to transform the landscape across the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

Over the last three years we've enjoyed working with experts and members of the local community, and have taken on board your feedback throughout the planning stage of this unique project. We recently started the works on site and we know local people are excited about the scheme so it's great to be finally getting spades in the ground.

Over the next two years we'll be working with our construction partner Balfour Beatty to install the new underground cables.



Once completed, we'll be able to remove around 4.6km of overhead electricity line and 13 pylons. The engineering challenges are significant, but we're going to be minimising disruption wherever we can. This once-in-a-generation opportunity will transform the skyline in Devizes, enabling spectacular views from the Millennium White Horse and across Roundway Down.

In this first edition we'll remind you of the background to going underground, tell you how the community can benefit from us being here and what's coming next.

We're always keen to hear your views so please get in touch with comments and feedback using our contact details on the back page.

"The North Wessex Downs is a particularly beautiful stretch of rolling English countryside and we're going to be removing pylons and power lines from a whole stretch of that landscape. It's a very important historic landscape and we're working very sensitively with local people and experts. When the landscape loses its pylons and is restored to its former beauty, I think people will be absolutely delighted".

Chris Baines, Chair of National Grid's Independent VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group



Going Underground – key facts

- Removal of 13 pylons in 2026
- Underground around 4.6km of overhead electricity line in the North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Transformation of the Devizes skyline, including classic downland views from the Millennium White Horse
- Two year construction project
- Construction of a temporary haul road along the route from summer 2024 to minimise traffic on local roads

To read more about VIP, visit:
www.nationalgrid.com/northwessexdownsvip

Going Underground – what's it all about?

The Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project is a world-first national initiative. It aims to significantly enhance the landscape in National Landscapes (formerly AONBs) and National Parks in England and Wales by reducing the visual impact of National Grid's existing overhead lines. It presents a major opportunity to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and environmental heritage within our most protected landscapes.

Our work to deliver a landscape and visual enhancement project in the North Wessex Downs began in spring 2019. The section of overhead line near Devizes was earmarked for removal from over 100 alternatives as having a major landscape and visual impact following an independent study. Planning permission for the scheme was granted in autumn 2023.

The underground route for the new connection runs near to the existing line from north of Conscience Lane in the west, along the end of the Roundway Down battlefield site and under

the A361 to the south of Horton Road in the east.

We'll also need to build two sealing end compounds, one at each end of the new underground line, to connect the cables to the overhead line that will remain.

Two VIP projects have been completed in the Dorset National Landscape and the Peak District National Park. Construction is well underway on another scheme in Eryri National Park, while plans are being finalised for a new project in the Cotswolds National Landscape.



Meet our contractor

National Grid has appointed Balfour Beatty as its delivery partner for the North Wessex Downs VIP project. The teams will work closely together to install the new underground cables and remove the existing overhead line and pylons.

Matt Taylor, Senior Project Manager at Balfour Beatty said, "Balfour Beatty is proud to be working

alongside National Grid to deliver this exciting project that will transform the landscape in Devizes. This important project will bring long term environmental, recreational and landscape benefits to the area, for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, now and for generations to come".

Balfour Beatty

National Grid in the community

We'd like to thank everyone who is helping with our project. Engaging with stakeholders and local communities is important to us and we'll continue to work with you throughout the project.

In March we held three public information events in Bishops Cannings, Devizes and Rowde. We spoke to more than 200 people over three days, answering questions about the project and telling people about the construction work and what they can expect to see in the next two years. There was a lot of enthusiasm for the project and positivity among the people we spoke to.

We'll be hosting further similar events so please look out for details and updates on our website. We're also keen to support your local events so please get in touch and tell us what's on.

Amardeep Malhi speaking to BBC Wiltshire, Devizes drop-in event



We hosted our first Community Liaison Group (CLG) meeting in January, where we briefed stakeholders on the project's background and the construction programme. The group will meet and provide a forum for discussion throughout the construction phase. It has been set up so that local groups and organisations can hear the latest on the project, report any problems and provide feedback. Members include representatives from local schools, town and parish councils, community and user groups, and wildlife organisations. Meetings are by invitation only.

North Wessex Downs CLG



Community Grant Programme

The Community Grant Programme is aimed at community organisations and charities in areas where National Grid's work is impacting on local people. It supports initiatives that will benefit communities close to the scheme.

Communities impacted by the construction of a new substation or a new underground tunnel that result in a significant increase in heavy goods traffic,

noise and other impacts can apply for grants of up to £20,000.

If you think your group could benefit or if you know of a project that meets our criteria we'd love to hear from you.

Check our website for more information on who can apply and how to do it.
www.nationalgrid.com/responsibility/community/grant-programme

Digging deep under the Downs

Prior to starting the main construction works we appointed Wessex Archaeology to conduct archaeological works on site. Using a 'Strip, Map and Record' method seven sites have been excavated along the route and expert archaeologists have been working by hand to locate and assess any archaeology present. Only archaeological remains that would be affected by the project are investigated, with an aim to not disturb any remains unnecessarily.

Initial excavations began at the main compound area before moving into the western and eastern ends of the site. Across the site, ditches, postholes and pits have been uncovered indicating settlement activity dating back to the Iron Age and Romano-British periods.

One of the most notable finds has been the well-preserved skeleton of a large dog from a Romano-British ditch.

At the eastern end of the site, some interesting signs of prehistoric activity were uncovered including a series of large postholes that possibly indicate a remnant of a structure.

All finds will be carefully recorded and archived at the Wiltshire Museum. We're organising an archaeology workshop on 13 July to coincide with the Festival of British Archaeology, coordinating with the Wiltshire Museum. Check our website for further details.



Well-preserved skeleton of a large dog

Walking and talking pylons at the North Wessex Downs Walking Festival

Members of National Grid's project team swapped their hard hats for walking boots on Saturday 8 June to take part in a five mile walk exploring Roundway Hill when the team returned to the North Wessex Downs Walking Festival for the third successive year.

Members of the team were on hand to answer questions and explain why and how the landscape around the Millennium White Horse has been singled out for special attention. They also discussed the engineering and environmental challenges involved when removing an overhead line and replacing it with cables buried underground.



North Wessex Downs Walking Festival, June 2024

Get in touch

Engaging with stakeholders and local communities is really important to us and we will continue to work with you during the lifetime of the project. We're committed to providing updates throughout construction and will be sending regular newsletters.

If you want to find out more about the VIP project, meet the team, or if you would like any further information about any of the stories you've read about, please do get in touch using the details below.

Please get in touch by calling: **0330 134 0051**
or by sending an email to: **visualimpact@nationalgrid.com**
You can find out more about the project on our dedicated website:
www.nationalgrid.com/northwessexdownsvip



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