VISUAL IMPACT PROVISION

nationalgrid

First Annual Report
July 2015

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Foreword - Chris Baines

It may sound simple, but deciding how best to make use of a £500 million allowance by the energy regulator Ofgem to improve England and Wales's most precious landscapes is actually quite a challenge.

Reducing the visual impact of existing electricity transmission lines in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks is highly desirable, but it is very expensive, very disruptive and technically complex.

It was an imaginative decision by National Grid to involve a group of stakeholder representatives. All the members have great landscape expertise and their personal judgement has been combined with the professional expertise of consultant landscape architects to select the most deserving landscapes from among all those that are directly affected by National Grid's transmission lines. In the first year we have managed to agree a shortlist of very special landscapes ranging from farming downland to coastal estuaries, and from wild uplands to wooded lowlands. The process of landscape and visual impact analysis has been extremely thorough and I am confident that it has been as fair and transparent as possible.

Once the shortlist had been agreed, a thorough process of engagement with local stakeholders has added to the group's understanding of each chosen landscape. We have benefitted from the knowledge of a large number of local specialists from public authorities and the voluntary sector, as well as a wide range of individuals who live and work in the shortlisted landscapes. In my experience, the thoroughness of this process is quite exceptional. It is a model that deserves to be adopted by others in similar circumstances.

The shortlisted landscapes are all, by definition, very beautiful and very sensitive. They also present significant technical challenges as we consider the options for tunnelling, trenching and other ways of reducing the impact of transmission lines. National Grid's specialist engineers and their consultants are rising to the challenge, and again supporting the Stakeholder Advisory Group in paying particular attention to such issues as archaeological and ecological sensitivity and our wish to deliver multiple benefits and models of good practice.

From the very beginning, the Advisory Group members have been particularly keen for the allowance from Ofgem to benefit the widest possible number of affected landscapes. We are delighted that our recommendation to offer small grants for landscape enhancement has been enthusiastically accepted by National Grid, subject to confirmation by Ofgem, and we hope to see some early results in the coming year.

A great deal has been achieved in the first year, and although there is much more work to do, I am confident that this combination of technical excellence, local knowledge and skilled judgement will deliver great results on the ground. We are at the beginning of a very exciting process and there are high hopes that our early success will encourage continuing support for bold landscape enhancement across Britain's most treasured landscapes.

Chris Baines

Chairman of the Stakeholder Advisory Group
Visual Impact Provision project

Foreword - Hector Pearson

As far as I know, the Visual Impact Provision project is the first known initiative in the world to mitigate the visual impact of existing high voltage electricity transmission lines in a substantive way.

As the owner of the electricity transmission system in England and Wales, National Grid's network is vital to our way of life, but this project provides a real opportunity to help reduce its impact on our most treasured landscapes.

National Grid has supported National Parks for many years, and is committed to the protection and enhancement of the environment in AONBs and National Parks. We are passionate about playing our part in conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of these landscapes.

We have always seen the project as being stakeholder-led with key influences coming not from National Grid but from those who know and care the most about our landscape. As a result, the project's Stakeholder Advisory Group under the expert chairmanship of Chris Baines was formed. Their task has been a challenging one and I would like to thank each one of them for their hard work and dedication in making some difficult decisions already, with more tough choices to come.

To enable the Group to make its decisions, the project team and its advisers have been extremely busy over the last 12 months gathering information and seeking input from wider stakeholders. We have:

- Surveyed over 130 sections of our high-voltage transmission lines covering 571km in English and Welsh AONBs and National Parks
- Met face-to-face with all 30 AONBs and National Parks affected
- Identified 12 sections within eight protected areas as the most adversely affected
- Held nine technical workshops attended by nearly 100 stakeholders with an in-depth knowledge of local issues
- Engaged with around 450 local stakeholders at ten public events.

This is just the tip of the iceberg and it is testament to the project team and the tremendous support we have had from the AONB and National Park community that we have been able to achieve so much in such a relatively short period of time.

The future is equally exciting with the decisions in September 2015 on which of the 12 shortlisted sections should be prioritised and taken forward for more detailed technical investigations. Add to that our hoped for autumn launch of the Landscape Enhancement Initiative to extend the potential benefits of the Visual Impact Provision allowance to all 30 areas affected by our infrastructure, and it points to another busy year ahead.

Drawing on the allowance provided by Ofgem, National Grid's Visual Impact Provision project is proving a highly effective and productive way for industry, stakeholders and local communities to work collaboratively together for the benefit of those landscapes most valued by people. Through this, we believe it is possible not only to mitigate the impact of our transmission lines but also to enhance the landscape, deliver value for money and provide wider socio-economic benefits.

Hector Pearson

Visual Impact Provision Project Manager
National Grid

Stakeholder Advisory Group members

"We are committed to using the Visual Impact Provision in a collaborative and transparent way."

High Weald AONB

01: What is the Visual Impact Provision?

National Grid's Visual Impact Provision project makes use of an allowance of £500m by Ofgem across Great Britain to carry out work which will help to reduce the impact of existing electricity transmission lines in English and Welsh AONBs and National Parks.

The most important task for us is to use this allowance to achieve the maximum enhancement to the landscape in England and Wales, whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts. To ensure that we get this right and bring the most benefit from the Visual Impact Provision project, National Grid is working closely and collaboratively with stakeholders.

A group, known as the Stakeholder Advisory Group, has been set up by National Grid. It comprises organisations dedicated to conserving the landscape and countryside throughout England and Wales. The group is helping National Grid to make decisions, and these will be made according to the guiding principles set out in the Visual Impact Provision policy document which are explained below. By adopting this approach we aim to ensure fairness and balance in our decision making to help select the projects which we undertake.

This first annual report provides an overview of the Visual Impact Provision and of key project activities during the year 2014/15.

02: National Grid Visual Impact Provision Project

2.1 How it came about

All electricity transmission owners are funded by a price control mechanism which is agreed with and set by Ofgem, the electricity and gas markets regulator. Ofgem has agreed a set of price controls and incentives for the period from April 2013 to March 2021. The new price controls and incentives include an allowance of £500 million to mitigate the visual impact of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes in Great Britain.

For National Grid, which is the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales, this means considering the visual amenity of our existing infrastructure in AONBs and National Parks. We call this 'Visual Impact Provision'.

2.2 Enhancing our treasured landscapes

AONBs and National Parks are nationally important landscapes which have statutory protection. At National Grid we are passionate about playing our part in conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of these landscapes.

We want to seize the opportunity the fund creates to work collaboratively with stakeholders to achieve this. We are of course working in accordance with our statutory duties and licence obligations and national planning policy. In particular, we have duties to maintain our network in an economical and efficient way, to preserve amenity, and to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONBs and National Parks.

Project dimensions

- **571km** of National Grid electricity transmission line in **AONBs** & **National Parks**
- **30 AONBs** and **National Parks** in England and Wales included
- **53.7km** of line in **12 sections** within eight protected areas = highest impact

£500M ALLOWANCE TO BENEFIT AONBs NATIONAL PARKS AND NATIONAL SCENIC AREAS

2.3 How the fund can be used

The Visual Impact Provision project applies to existing electricity infrastructure – principally high-voltage overhead electricity lines – in AONBs and National Parks in England and Wales. It can, in special cases, also be applied to lines running adjacent to these protected landscapes where the lines impact on the visual setting.

The fund could be used for:

- Landscaping enhancements
- Screening substations or overhead lines from public viewpoints
- Re-routeing existing lines
- Replacement of existing overhead lines with underground cables
- Innovative painting techniques to reduce pylons' visual impact
- Initiatives in AONB or National Park management plans which mitigate the impact of our electricity infrastructure
- Other visual impact measures recommended by stakeholders.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group will have the difficult task of deciding with National Grid which projects to select and how the funds could be allocated.

The fund cannot be used for:

- The construction of new infrastructure
- Other National Grid infrastructure such as gas transmission
- Other landscape, heritage and ecological designations
- Infrastructure owned by other businesses
- Any areas not yet designated AONBs or National Parks.

2.4 Guiding Principles

Our Guiding Principles are to prioritise potential projects which:

- Result in greatest landscape enhancement benefits
- Result in greatest opportunities to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts
- Result in greatest opportunities to encourage public understanding and enjoyment of the protected landscapes, including positive socio-economic impacts
- Are technically feasible in the context of the wider transmission system
- Are economical and efficient.

As these principles may sometimes conflict with one another and each scheme is likely to perform differently against them, we will need to carefully balance the choices we make, with the help of stakeholders, against the Guiding Principles.

03: Working with Stakeholders

Stakeholders hold the key to the success of this project. We believe that the views of our stakeholders and consumers will be vital in making decisions on how we should use the Visual Impact Provision to maximise enhancement to the landscape from the available funds.

3.1 Creation of a Stakeholder Advisory Group

A key milestone during 2014/15 was the launch of our Stakeholder Advisory Group for the Visual Impact Provision project in April 2014. Chaired by leading environmentalist Chris Baines, the group advises National Grid on the evaluation and ultimate selection of the projects proposed for delivery. The Stakeholder Advisory Group comprises representatives from organisations dedicated to enhancing the landscape and countryside throughout England and Wales as well as Ofgem. They advise the project not only on the key decisions but also on the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders outside the main group.

The role of the Stakeholder Advisory Group is to:

- Help to identify initial priorities for the use of the Visual Impact Provision, based on our guiding principles
- Consider the technical inputs provided by National Grid
- Consider the input of wider stakeholders who are not directly represented on the Stakeholder Advisory Group (e.g. specific comments on where use of Visual Impact Provision funds might be beneficial, or where there is evidence of public support)
- Identify the specific infrastructure and locations which would most benefit
- Define the projects which should be taken to development phase by National Grid
- Re-consider or re-assess priorities and use of the fund, as development of projects progresses.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group generally meets on a quarterly basis and the minutes of these meetings are available on our project website. The table below provides an overview of the key activities and issues considered by the group during 2014/15.

Peak District National Park

Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting	Main items of discussion
1st Meeting (1-2 April 2014)	■ Agreement of the Group's Terms of Reference ■ Consideration of the communications plan and stakeholder engagement programme for the project ■ Discussion and approval of the draft methodology for the landscape assessment of National Grid transmission lines in AONBs and National Parks
2nd Meeting (24-25 July 2014)	■ Site visit in the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB to see existing National Grid infrastructure in a nationally designated landscape ■ Consideration of general options available for visual impact mitigation and enhancement ■ Update on progress of the methodology for the landscape assessment
3rd Meeting (29-30 October 2014)	■ Presentation on the results of the landscape assessment by Professor Carys Swanwick ■ Agreement of a shortlist of sections of transmission lines in AONBs and National Parks to be taken forward for further investigation ■ Feedback from sub-working group on a fund for smaller landscape enhancement projects ('Landscape Enhancement Initiative')
4th Meeting (3-4 February 2015)	■ Tours of National Grid's Gas Control Centre and Transmission Network Control Centre ■ Presentation of a feasibility study for options in the Tamar Valley AONB and update on work for all other shortlisted areas ■ Consideration of a proposal for the Landscape Enhancement Initiative
5th Meeting (13-14 April 2015)	■ Update on ongoing feasibility work and feedback from stakeholder workshops and public engagement in the shortlisted areas ■ Discussion and agreement on selection criteria and information required to support decision making around the prioritisation of schemes from the shortlist ■ Agreement of the Landscape Enhancement Initiative proposal for submission to Ofgem


Snowdonia National Park


Brecon Beacons National Park

Attendance at the Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings

Organisation	Meeting attendance 2014/15	Organisation	Meeting attendance 2014/15
National Trust	5 out of 5	Campaign for National Parks	5 out of 5
Natural England	5 out of 5	CPRE	5 out of 5
Natural Resources Wales	3 out of 5	CPRW	4 out of 5
Ofgem	5 out of 5	English Heritage/Historic England	5 out of 5
The Ramblers	3 out of 5	Landscape Institute	5 out of 5
Visit England	2 out of 5	National Association for AONBs	5 out of 5
Visit Wales	3 out of 5	National Grid	5 out of 5
Chairman	5 out of 5	National Parks England	4 out of 5
Cadw	4 out of 5	National Parks Wales	3 out of 5

3.2 Wider Stakeholder Engagement and Empowerment

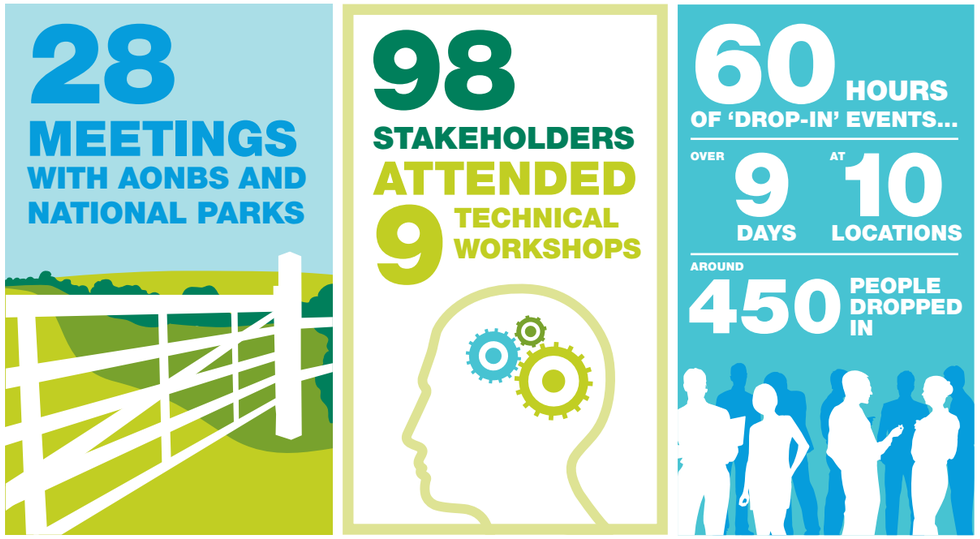
In addition to working with the Stakeholder Advisory Group, we have engaged with a range of other stakeholders with an interest in AONBs and National Parks to keep them informed and to establish their priorities for using Visual Impact Provision funding. The Stakeholder Advisory Group has been instrumental in helping to shape our approach to this wider stakeholder engagement.

The bodies responsible for managing the designated areas and other stakeholders in the areas are key partners for the project. During 2014/15, we held meetings with representatives of all of the 30 areas covered by the project to explain the Visual Impact Provision project and to seek their views. We also attended and gave presentations at relevant events, including the annual conferences of the National Association for AONBs and of the National Parks Societies.

North Wessex Downs AONB

In the eight AONBs and National Parks shortlisted for further investigation (see below), we ran technical workshops with stakeholder representatives from these areas to consider options available for reducing the impact of our transmission lines. We also held public 'drop-in' events where anyone with an interest in the project could find out more and share their views and suggestions with the project team.

We are using a number of communication channels to share project information, updates and documentation, including a dedicated website (www.nationalgrid.com/VIP), an online blog and Twitter. Stakeholders have also been kept up-to-date through media releases, letters to local stakeholders and MPs, articles in national and local media (including broadcast), journals and magazines as well as publications such as our *Visual Impact Provision – The Project Explained* brochure.



New Forest National Park

04: Shortlist of designated areas – Making choices together

Our objective for the Visual Impact Provision project is to achieve the maximum possible enhancement to the landscape of designated areas in England and Wales from the available funds, whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts. We do this through a transparent process which is led by the Stakeholder Advisory Group, drawing on the input from technical experts and local stakeholders.

4.1 Independent landscape and visual impact assessment

During summer 2014 a comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment was undertaken to help identify those sections of our existing overhead lines in AONBs and National Parks that have the greatest impact and offer the greatest opportunities for mitigation and enhancement. This work was carried out by independent landscape planning consultants under the guidance of Independent Landscape Adviser Professor Carys Swanwick.

The study assessed all sections of existing transmission lines in the 26 AONBs and National Parks with National Grid infrastructure. The assessment also included four areas with National Grid transmission lines outside, but in reasonable proximity to, designated landscapes which were nominated by the authorities responsible for each designated landscape. The landscape consultants reviewed relevant documents and carried out field survey work in all of the 30 areas.

The aim of the assessment was to identify the stretches of existing transmission lines in designated areas that have the most important adverse impacts on the landscape and on people's views and visual amenity. The outcome of this work was a suggested shortlist of 12 sections of overhead lines in eight designated areas. These were put forward for further consideration by the Stakeholder Advisory Group in order to decide which ones should be taken forward for more detailed technical assessment. The landscape assessment report is available on our website.

> "As a landscape planner the Visual Impact Provision project has posed a really interesting challenge. The key was to find an acceptable and achievable way of identifying the sections of existing electricity transmission line that had the greatest landscape and visual impacts on the designated landscapes that were affected. The approach had to be seen by all stakeholders to be fair and transparent and it had to lead to clear outcomes. We devised an approach described as a "reverse" landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) - rather than the normal application of the LVIA process to proposed schemes and developments that do not yet exist. The aim in this case was to judge the relative impacts of existing electricity transmission infrastructure.
>
> There were major challenges in delivering the scale of the work required in a short timescale – we had to survey a total of 50 sections of electricity transmission line, divided into separate subsections for assessment, covering 571 km of line in 26 National Parks and AONBs, plus a further 82 km of line adjacent to another four designated landscapes. But everyone rose to the challenge and in less than six months we were able to deliver a shortlist which all parties have accepted.
>
> It has been a very satisfying process and one which I believe has shown that the independent assessment by landscape planning professionals enabled agreement of a shortlist of areas in a clear and objective way.

Professor Carys Swanwick

Landscape Adviser
to the Visual Impact Provision project

4.2 Shortlisted areas endorsed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Stakeholder Advisory Group considered the outcome of the landscape and visual impact assessment at its meeting in October 2014. The group endorsed the shortlist and agreed that sections in the following eight areas should be taken forward to the next stage:

- Brecon Beacons National Park
- Dorset AONB
- High Weald AONB
- New Forest National Park
- North Wessex Downs AONB
- Peak District National Park
- Snowdonia National Park
- Tamar Valley AONB

Since then, we have been working with stakeholders to develop options for potential solutions that would reduce the landscape and visual impact of our lines in the shortlisted areas. This includes further assessment of technical feasibility, cost, potential impacts of the work on ecology, cultural heritage and other environmental issues. We have also run stakeholder workshops and public events in all of the eight shortlisted areas to draw on information held by local stakeholders and to explore their views of the possible solutions.

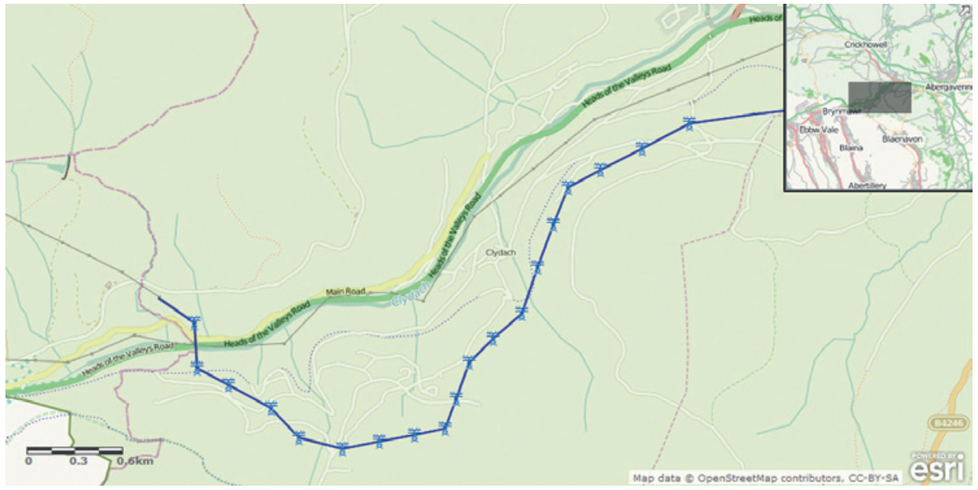
The aim of this engagement was to gather early stage information and intelligence on the areas to inform the options assessments and to gauge local attitudes and opinions on the work. We believe that involving local groups and individuals at the outset will help not only to identify any potential problems and challenges, but also to give the local community a sense of ownership. Although this does not constitute formal consultation, any scheme taken forward to major engineering work should have the support and involvement of local people from the outset. Full project-specific consultation would be undertaken before seeking to secure the necessary planning permissions and consents on any of the schemes that are taken forward.

Drawing on stakeholder views and technical studies, further feasibility works will be carried out on the emerging options for all of the shortlisted areas during summer 2015.

The following pages introduce each of the shortlisted designations and provide an overview of the technical work and stakeholder engagement activities carried out to date.

Tamar Valley AONB

Brecon Beacons National Park



The Brecon Beacons National Park was designated in 1959 and covers a large area of southern Wales. Including the uplands of the Beacons themselves, it also encompasses Black Mountain and Fforest Fawr to the west, the fringes of the industrial valleys to the south, the Usk Valley and the Black Mountains in the east.

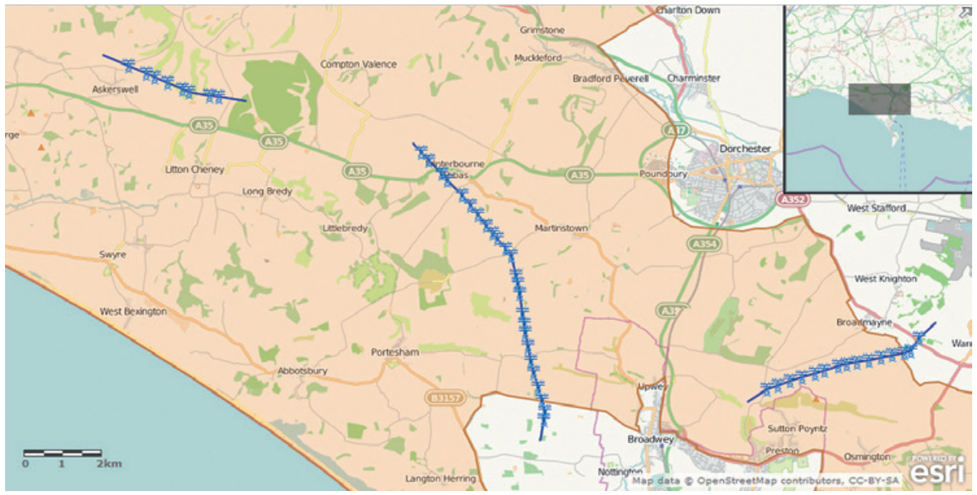
One of National Grid's overhead lines runs through the southern area of the National Park. The independent landscape assessment concluded that one section of the transmission line has landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. The subsection starts on the upper northern slopes of the Clydach Gorge near Blackrock from which point the line spans over the gorge to the south and then continues along the mid to upper southern slopes along the gorge towards the Usk Valley.

Progress to date

We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in the National Park in January 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the National Park, Natural Resources Wales and Costain – a contractor appointed by the Welsh Government to carry out improvements to the A465 'Heads of the Valley Road'.

The National Grid transmission line currently runs in the same general corridor as the A465. Stakeholders generally felt that removing the line could bring landscape and visual as well as social improvements to the area. Placing the line underground along the existing alignment was not regarded as a viable option by stakeholders, due to constraints such as rich industrial archaeology, geology, ecology and environmental concerns. There are plans by the Welsh Government to widen the A465 to a dual carriage way in the general location of the shortlisted area. Stakeholders generally favoured options around an undergrounding solution following the A465 linked to the road dualling project or a re-routing of the line using the new T-Pylon design.

Dorset AONB



The Dorset AONB was designated in 1959. It covers nearly all of the Dorset coast and significant areas inland. The geology is strongly expressed along the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site, and it gives rise to a varied landscape of downland, ridges and vales.

Two of National Grid's electricity transmission lines run through this AONB. The independent landscape assessment concluded that three sections of these lines have landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. One of these sections runs from the South Dorset Escarpment in a north-easterly direction through a shallow vale towards Broadmayne. The other two sections run from Spyway in the west to the head of Stancombe in the east, and from Winterbourne Abbas south-east to the edge of the South Dorset Escarpment at Bronkham Hill, respectively.

Progress to date

We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in the AONB in February 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the AONB, Natural England, the South Dorset Ridgeway Partnership and local parish councils.

There was a general consensus at the stakeholder event that the section of line from Winterbourne Abbas south-east to the edge of the South Dorset Escarpment at Bronkham Hill provides the best option for undergrounding works. However, stakeholders pointed out that it would be challenging to find locations for sealing end compounds in the AONB's open landscape.

Burying the cables underground was the preferred option with members of the public that attended the event. It was felt that screening or camouflaging pylons would not be beneficial to the area. Attendees highlighted the impact that undergrounding would have on the landscape and that there was a need for restoring the land if such an option were to be taken forward.

High Weald AONB

The High Weald AONB, designated in 1983, lies at the heart of South East England and covers 1,461 square kilometres across parts of Kent, Sussex and Surrey. Two of National Grid's electricity transmission lines run through this AONB.

The independent landscape assessment concluded that one section of line has landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. This section runs from the edge of the AONB at Henley Down up to the ridge north of Crowhurst Park, running through a wooded landscape enclosed by the Battle Ridge to the north. The line is in the vicinity of Battle Abbey and the designated site of the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Progress to date

We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in the AONB in February 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the AONB, local authorities, local parish councils, Natural England, English Heritage (now Historic England) and the Sussex Ramblers.

Stakeholders highlighted that not much is known of the archaeology of the area in question as it had been undisturbed for centuries, so a significant amount of desk research would be required. Stakeholders agreed that National Grid should consider three options: Undergrounding all or part of the line (possibly including some directional drilling in ancient woodland areas), use of lower height pylons together with tree planting, or re-routeing of the line to the south with lower height towers – the latter option could serve to bring the line lower down the hill side and reducing its impact on views from Battle Abbey.

A range of views was expressed at the public drop-in. Some attendees favoured undergrounding, whilst others were concerned about the impact this would have on the woodland landscape. There was some support for using lower height towers, but others felt that this would bring significant disruption without adding much visual benefit.

New Forest National Park

Located within the county of Hampshire, on the south-central coast of England, this former royal hunting ground and immediate surrounding area was given National Park status in March 2005.

The New Forest is crossed by two of National Grid's transmission lines. The independent landscape assessment concluded that one section of line has landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. This section starts in an area of woodland at Stricklands Plantation, at the top of the Avon Valley, and heads east into an area of open access land, rising onto higher ground and crossing an open heathland ridge at Hale Purlieu before crossing the B3080 and descending.

Progress to date

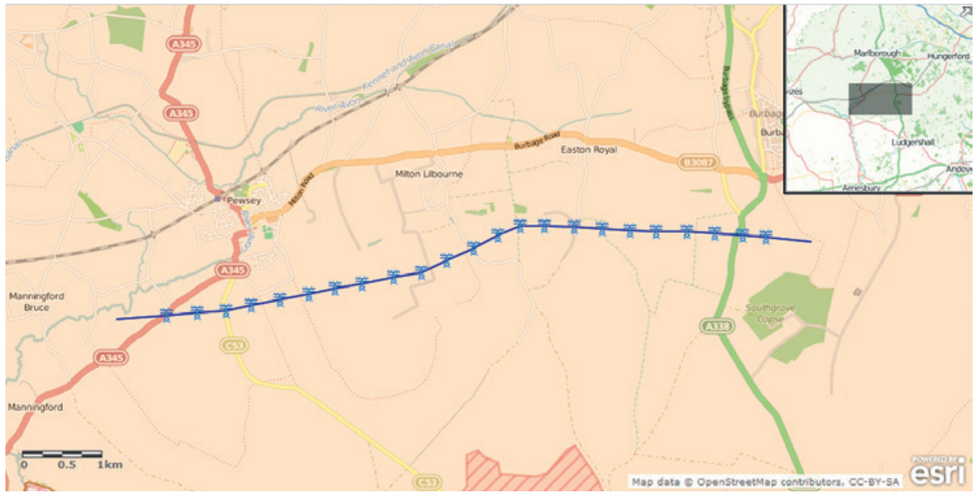
We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in the National Park in March 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the National Park, local authorities, the appointed New Forest Verderers, the Forestry Commission, the National Trust and Natural England.

The stakeholders favoured an undergrounding solution, but were aware of the challenges associated with this, specifically in relation to hydrology and its impact on both ecology and grazing animals. Re-routeing was discussed, but it was agreed that it would have to go a long distance to avoid the National Park boundary. The stakeholders considered potential locations for sealing end compounds.

Some stakeholders were concerned about the impact of constructing direct buried cables across the heathland, and National Grid agreed to investigate the feasibility of directional drilling in linked 1km sections.

Many of those attending the public drop-in were strongly in favour of placing the line underground. Some expressed concern about the level of disruption and potential damage to heathland, grazing animals and wildlife should the section of line be undergrounded. Camouflaging or screening the pylons was not considered a viable option by some attendees, due to the open nature of the landscape, neither were re-routeing the line or use of T-Pylons.

North Wessex Downs AONB



The North Wessex Downs, designated in 1972, is an ancient landscape of rolling chalk downlands, forests, woods and dales. Open expansive views are punctuated in places by clumps of beech woodland crowning the downland summits and forming prominent landmarks.

This AONB is crossed by two of National Grid's transmission lines. The independent landscape assessment concluded that one section of line has landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. This section runs from Pewsey in the west through to Burbage in the East, following the Vale of Pewsey as it begins to narrow and the vale floor becomes more undulating.

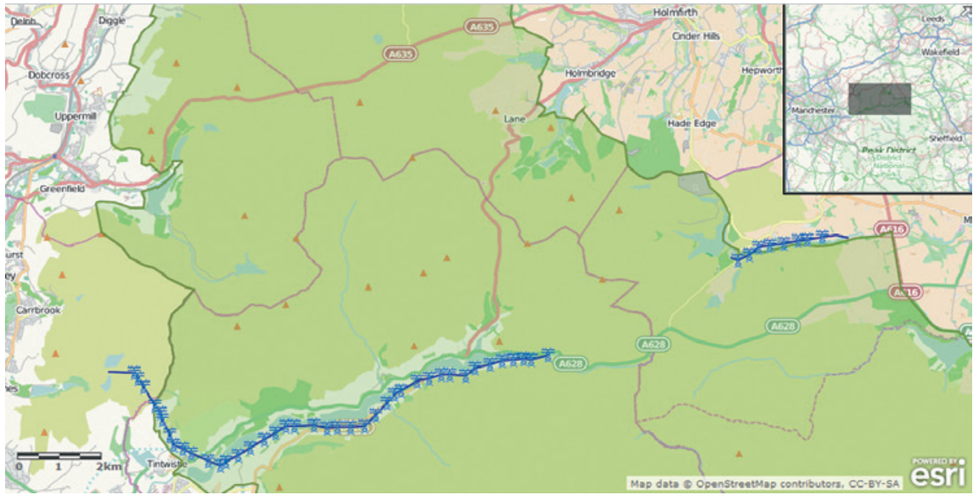
Progress to date

We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in the AONB in March 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the AONB, local authorities and the Pewsey Community Area Partnership.

Stakeholders generally felt that, despite potential disruption, undergrounding would offer the best solution for reducing the visual impact of the section of line. Alternative pylon designs were not deemed to be sufficient to lessen the impact. For example, it was felt that T-Pylons would be in contrast to an existing distribution line and the cumulative visual impact would therefore be greater. Areas either side of the A339 and A345 were seen as potential locations for sealing end compounds.

The majority of the residents in Pewsey attending the public drop-in preferred undergrounding as a solution to reduce the visual impact of the line. This was seen as an opportunity to enhance the tourism experience and to bring socio-economic benefits to the area. Most residents felt that other options such as painting or screening the pylons would not help in minimising the visual impact.

Peak District National Park



The Peak District was the first National Park in England and Wales, being designated in 1951. One of National Grid's overhead lines runs through the northern part of the Park. The independent landscape assessment concluded that three sections of the transmission line have landscape and visual impacts of very high importance.

One of the sections runs from a sealing end compound near the eastern entrance of the Woodhead Tunnel eastwards along the River Don Valley. The other two sections start at the head of the upper Longdendale Valley where the line emerges west of the Woodhead Tunnel and run down the valley along a number of reservoirs up to Tintwistle.

The section of line between west of Woodhead tunnel and Stalybridge is in a physical condition which requires significant replacement/ refurbishment work. National Grid therefore undertook a study looking at options to secure the long term future of this important transmission route. The study has provided an input into the consideration of options under the Visual Impact Provision project.

Progress to date

We held an independently facilitated technical workshop for stakeholders for the section west of Woodhead tunnel in March 2015. A subsequent public 'drop–in' event took place in April 2015. The stakeholders considered the long term study, explored a number of options to reduce the visual impact of the overhead line and agreed recommendations to the Stakeholder Advisory Group. They recommended prioritising the removal of the overhead line in the Longdendale Valley, taking into account where/how the transition between overhead line and cable sections could be made without impacting the environment further. Stakeholders also recommended considering alternative methods other than trenching and undergrounding along the existing route. It was recognised that further discussions with United Utilities who own the reservoirs were required.

A separate technical workshop for stakeholders and a public drop-in event for the section east of Woodhead tunnel were held in April 2015. Stakeholders felt that the existing sealing end compound should be moved to a different location and that the possibility of placing the line in cable troughs under the Trans Pennine Trail or burying the cables in agricultural land to the north of the Trail should be considered.

Snowdonia National Park

Snowdonia National Park was designated in 1951 and is the largest National Park in Wales. Snowdonia comprises of a varied landscape which includes mountain scenery, glacial valleys, extensive moorlands, and two coastal estuaries.

The National Park is crossed by four of National Grid's overhead lines. The independent landscape assessment concluded that one section of transmission line has landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. This subsection runs from the west coast at the Dwyryd Estuary near Porthmadog past Cilfor before climbing up towards the summit of Moel Tecwyn and beyond, finishing at the western side of Ceunant Llennyrch Valley.

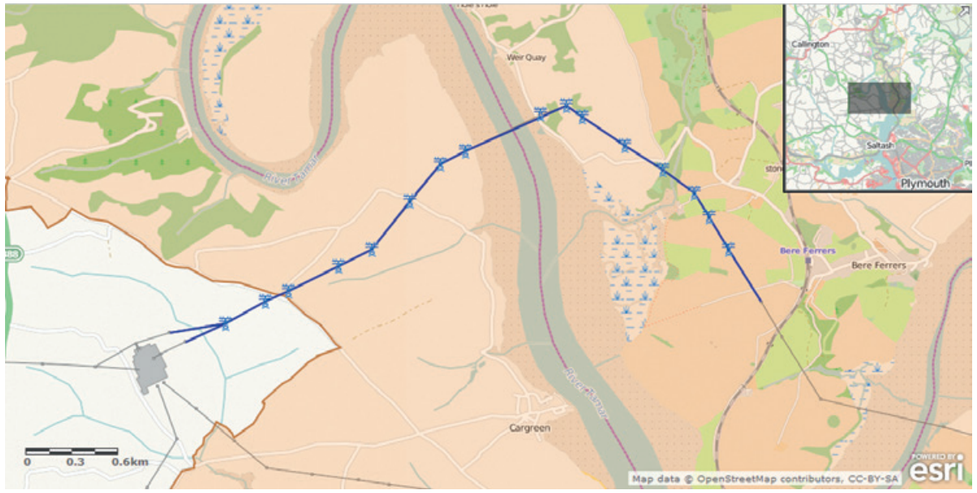
Progress to date

We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in the National Park in January 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the National Park, Natural Resources Wales, Cadw and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust.

Stakeholders explored issues to be taken into account, such as particular views and heritage assets, and potential options for reducing the impact of the overhead line. It was noted that the habitat east of Llyn Tecwyn was very sensitive which would be difficult to restore if cables were to be buried underground. Shifting sands in the estuary would probably mean that any solution to reduce the visual impact would require directionally drilling underneath the estuary.

The majority of those attending the public drop-in was strongly in favour of burying the section of line underground due to the visually intrusive nature of the pylons. However, some expressed concern about the impact that burying cables underground could have on the local environment, especially the habitats of native wildlife. On the other hand, some believed that placing the line underground would be beneficial for tourism and the local economy.

Tamar Valley AONB



Straddling the border between the counties of Devon and Cornwall, the Tamar Valley AONB landscape, which was designated in 1995, is defined and shaped by the rivers Tamar, Tavy and Lynher.

One of National Grid's transmission lines runs through the area, crossing the Tamar and Tavy rivers. The independent landscape assessment concluded that one section of the line has landscape and visual impacts of very high importance. This section enters the AONB east of Ellbridge and carries on across the River Tamar on a pair of very tall pylons to Weir Quay, where it turns southwards along the Bere Peninsula.

Progress to date

Based on the independent landscape assessment, where it had the highest score, and the information obtained through stakeholder events, the Stakeholder Advisory Group recommended that this section of line should be 'fast tracked' under the Visual Impact Provision project. The work on options for the Tamar AONB was therefore more advanced and this has acted as a pilot for the other areas. We held a technical workshop for stakeholders and a public 'drop-in' in January 2015. The stakeholder workshop included representatives from the AONB, local authorities, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Cornwall Wildlife Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust. A second stakeholder workshop was held in April 2015 which considered emerging mitigation options.

National Grid is currently looking into the feasibility of these options, including replacing the existing overhead line with direct buried cables, moving the overhead line on to a new route alignment where it has less impact, replacing the existing overhead line with a new route using alternative tower design, or smaller scale intervention on the existing line such as by using a different type of insulators. Issues raised by stakeholders are taken in account as part of this feasibility work, e.g. impact on wildlife, historical and archaeological assets and existing soil contamination.

05: Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative has been developed together with our stakeholders to use part of the £500 million Visual Impact Provision allowance by Ofgem for smaller localised improvement projects. The initiative will be available to all of the 26 AONBs and National Parks which have National Grid overhead electricity lines within their area as well as the four designated areas that have National Grid overhead lines adjacent, or relatively near, to their boundaries which were included in the landscape and visual impact assessment.

5.1 A stakeholder-led initiative

The principle of allocating a proportion of the Visual Impact Provision allowance for smaller, more localised landscape mitigation was first proposed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group in July 2014. The concept was also supported by the feedback we gained through our direct engagement with stakeholders in the AONBs and National Parks.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group therefore recommended that this initiative – known as the Visual Impact Provision Landscape Enhancement Initiative – should be established, in addition to the small number of major capital engineering projects which will come forward for funding from the provision in the shortlisted areas.

5.2 How the Landscape Enhancement Initiative will work

Set to be launched in autumn 2015, the Landscape Enhancement Initiative has an ambition to provide up to £24 million over the six years to March 2021.

Each of the 30 AONB Partnerships or National Park Authorities covered by the project will be able to submit bids for funding of schemes that reduce the visual impact of National Grid's existing infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected landscapes. This could include measures to screen lines or to 'shift the balance' of the impacts by enhancing the local environment in other ways. A panel of National Grid and external experts will review the bids and decide which projects should be funded.

Dorset AONB

06: Timeline and next steps

During 2015/16 we will continue to consider options for all of the shortlisted areas. The Stakeholder Advisory Group will consider all evidence, information and stakeholder views in September 2015 with a view to selecting probably three to five projects that will be taken forward for major engineering works.

Once these priority projects are known, we will engage further with stakeholder groups (for example, in the case of new underground cables, establishing acceptable route corridors and alignments) in line with the principles laid out in our published 'Approach to the design and routeing of new electricity transmission lines'.

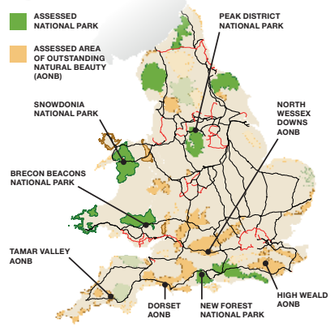
At that point we will carry out project-specific consultation before seeking to secure the necessary planning permissions and consents.

Following confirmation by Ofgem, we plan to formally launch the Landscape Enhancement Initiative in autumn 2015 which will open for the first round of bids for funding. Applications for funding of projects will be invited from all the 30 AONBs and National Parks covered by this project.

We will continue to keep stakeholders informed about the progress of the Visual Impact Provision project, including through our website.

SUMMER 2015

Developing and refining options and further feasibility work for all of the eight shortlisted areas



AUTUMN 2015

- Launch of Landscape Enhancement Initiative
- Stakeholder Advisory Group to consider all evidence, information and stakeholder views and select projects for major engineering works. Three to five projects likely to be selected.

2016 - 2018

Scheme routeing, development and consenting.

2018 - 2021

Scheme construction.

For further information:
Visit our website at: www.nationalgrid.com/VIP
Send an email to: visualimpact@nationalgrid.com
Write to our freepost address and quote: "FREEPOST VISUAL IMPACT PROVISION"

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