

**VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group**  
**Minutes of the sixth meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> September 2015**

**Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • <b>Chairman</b>                      | Chris Baines  |
| • <b>Cadw</b>                          | Ashley Batten, Senior Planning Archaeologist  |
| • <b>Campaign for National Parks</b>   | Fiona Howie, Chief Executive  |
| • <b>CPRE</b>                          | Neil Sinden, Policy and Campaigns Director  |
| • <b>CPRW</b>                          | Peter Ogden, Director   |
| • <b>Historic England</b>              | Shane Gould, Senior Local Government & National Infrastructure Advisor                            |
| • <b>Landscape Institute</b>           | Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director   |
| • <b>National Association of AONBs</b> | Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB (9 <sup>th</sup> September only) |
| • <b>National Grid</b>                 | George Mayhew, Director of Corporate Affairs  |
| • <b>National Parks England</b>        | Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National Park Authority                                |
| • <b>National Parks Wales</b>          | Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning & Land Management, Snowdonia National Park                  |
| • <b>National Trust</b>                | Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director   |
| • <b>Natural England</b>               | Liz Newton, Director Landscape and Geodiversity   |
| • <b>Ofgem</b>                         | Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist  |
| • <b>Visit England</b>                 | John Cope, Policy and External Affairs Manager  |
| • <b>Visit Wales</b>                   | Lawrence Manley, Head of Investment and Funding   |

**Apologies:**

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| • <b>Natural Resources Wales</b> | Keith Davies, Head of Strategic Planning Group   |
| • <b>The Ramblers</b>            | Nicky Philpott, Director of Policy and Campaigns |

**Secretariat in attendance:**

- **National Grid** – Hector Pearson, Planning Policy Manager and VIP Project Manager; Ian McKenna, Senior Policy Planner; Gareth Williams, Lead Project Manager
- Suzannah Lansdell, Independent Facilitator
- Professor Carys Swanwick, Independent Advisor to National Grid
- Landscape consultants: Kate Ahern, Director, LUC; Rebecca Greatrix, Principal Landscape Architect, Gillespies; Adrian Chanter (8<sup>th</sup> September only)
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Matt Sutton; Parv Gandham; Jane Dalton

---

The purpose of the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September was for the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Agree a list of projects to take forwards from the shortlisted areas and a list of those where no further work will be undertaken at this stage.
  - Provide an update to participants on the options appraisal process and scheme recommendations.
  - Review information, resources and input relating to the shortlisted schemes and discuss the relative merits of the shortlisted schemes in terms of the agreed guiding principles.
  - Agree communications and next steps for the VIP project.
-

## **1 – Process for shortlisting the projects to take forwards**

### **1.1 – Work carried out since the last meeting**

Discussions at the last Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2015 focused on the information that would need to be available and the decision-making process that should be adopted by the Stakeholder Advisory Group to enable them to determine which of the shortlisted schemes should be prioritised to be taken forward.

Since that meeting further work has been carried out by National Grid, Camargue and the landscape consultants to: investigate the feasibility of the alternative approaches for each scheme; determine and test the preferred options with local stakeholder reference groups; and work in liaison with local officers/experts to further evaluate the potential landscape, wildlife, cultural, environmental and socio-economic impacts both during and after construction. Most members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group had also visited one or more of the shortlisted schemes in person.

### **1.2 – Process for shortlisting the projects**

Ian McKenna from National Grid gave a presentation summarising the preferred option(s) for each shortlisted scheme as a result of the options appraisals work that had been carried out i.e. direct burial, tunnel (or a combination of the two) and/or re-routing. This also included a summary of local stakeholder views, and an overview of key challenges/issues for each scheme including technical complexities, landscape recovery/reinstatement, finding locations for sealing end compounds and obtaining the necessary consents.

There was also a reminder of the five VIP policy Guiding Principles by which potential projects should be prioritised:

- **Principle 1:** Result in greatest landscape enhancement benefits.
- **Principle 2:** Result in greatest opportunities to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts.
- **Principle 3:** Result in greatest opportunities to encourage public understanding and enjoyment of the protected landscapes including positive socio-economic impacts.
- **Principle 4:** Are technically feasible in the context of the wider transmission system.
- **Principle 5:** Are economical and efficient.

Additional information that was presented or made available for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to support and inform their deliberations included:

- The draft Options Appraisal Report for each scheme.
- An exhibition of information boards providing an overview of each scheme and a summary of the information in the Options Appraisal Reports.
- Further photographs/images of the sub-sections of line and the impacted views.

National Grid advisors, Camargue and the consultants who were involved in carrying out the landscape and visual assessments for each of the prioritised schemes were also available to answer queries and explain any of the information in more detail.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group worked through an iterative process in four sub-groups to consider and discuss the information, and assess each of the schemes against the five Guiding Principles. In three separate sessions the groups made an initial prioritisation of the schemes and categorised them into:

- Those which should be prioritised to be taken forward.
- Those that needed further debate/discussion.
- Those that should not be taken forward at this stage.

### **Session 1 – Principles 1 to 3**

Focusing on Principles 1 to 3 only, the sub-groups reviewed the exhibition boards and additional information provided to identify the pros and cons of each potential scheme and make their initial categorisations.

## **Session 2 – Further work carried out on the evaluation framework**

Professor Carys Swanwick presented an overview of the detailed work carried out on the evaluation framework. This was a framework originally presented to the Stakeholder Advisory Group at the last meeting at which their feedback was incorporated. The detailed evaluation work was undertaken by the landscape consultants, technical advisors at National Grid and with input from the officers at the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) Partnerships and National Park Authorities.

Professor Swanwick explained how the landscape consultants used the summary/comparison tables for Principles 1-3 to evaluate each scheme. This involved making an assessment for each Principle against a range of pre-agreed criteria and considering the original assessment that was carried out in Summer 2014. Each sub-group then considered the implications for their initial categorisations.

## **Session 3 – Principles 4 & 5**

Hector Pearson and Gareth Williams presented an overview of the information available for Principles 4 and 5. It was noted that a great deal of further investigative work (including e.g. ground intrusive surveys) would need to be carried out to give greater certainty on technical feasibility and accurate costs. The information available at this stage was therefore very high-level but sought to provide an overview of some of the issues that would need to be investigated further for the schemes that are taken forward, including e.g. landowner permissions, consenting regimes, transport/access, geology and ground conditions etc. A high-level overview of the *typical* costs for the preferred option(s) for the shortlisted schemes was provided, however it was again reiterated that these estimates were based on comparisons to other similar projects, and that the actual costs would be highly influenced by factors such as ground conditions which can only be determined by carrying out intrusive investigations.

During the plenary discussions that followed each session, each sub-group shared their categorisations and the rationale behind them. The debate then focused on synergies between the sub-groups' initial categorisations, emerging preferences and the reasons behind any differences. Each sub-group then reflected on whether the different layers of information resulted in any changes to their categorisations.

---

## **2 – Final list of scheme categorisations**

### **2.1 – Shortlist of prioritised schemes**

Following the above deliberations there was unanimous agreement amongst the four sub-groups that the following schemes should be prioritised to be taken forwards:

- Dorset AONB – 4YA.7
- New Forest National Park – 4YB.2
- Peak District National Park – 4ZO.2 (the Eastern section)
- Snowdonia National Park – 4ZC.1

The remaining schemes all remain on the shortlist in case any of the prioritised schemes drop away from consideration following further detailed investigations.

### **2.2 – Declarations of interest**

Stakeholder Advisory Group members were asked to declare any conflicts of interest at the outset of the meeting and those with an interest in the above shortlist of prioritised schemes absented themselves from the room when the final decision on each scheme was made. The people with declared conflicts of interest for the top four schemes were:

- Dorset AONB – none
- New Forest National Park – Dr Ingrid Samuel, Sarah Kelly, Professor Carys Swanwick
- Peak District National Park – none
- Snowdonia National Park – Jonathan Cawley, Lawrence Manley, Peter Ogden

It was also agreed that extended biographies for each member of the Stakeholder Advisory Group, including any current/historical interests, should be published on the website.

### **2.3 – Tamar Valley AONB and Peak District National Park (Western sections 4ZO.3/4ZO.4)**

It was noted that although the Tamar Valley and the western section of the Peak District schemes both had strong landscape/visual merit for being taken forward, the technical challenges and other complexities involved in the projects mean that it may not be possible to deliver them within the current price control period.

For the Peak District, the Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that high level discussions should continue with key stakeholders, with a view to identifying a solution that could potentially be taken forward in the future if VIP provisions are made by Ofgem in the next price control period.

For Tamar Valley, it was noted that many local stakeholders are likely to be disappointed that the project has not been shortlisted, particularly as it was the highest scoring project in the Landscape and Visual Assessment, and was fast-tracked as a pilot project for more detailed consideration. It was suggested that more detailed investigations could be carried out to determine the technical feasibility of the different options for going under the Rivers Tamar and Tavy (directional drilling, tunnelling or a combination of both), however Ofgem advised that it is unlikely that investigatory work for a project that is not being taken forward during *this* price control period could be funded through the current VIP allowance. It was, however, noted that this kind of issue will inform the need/rationale for any future scheme, and having specific projects that the Stakeholder Advisory Group wants to take forward in the future will help to engage stakeholders when putting forward the case for extending a similar VIP allowance in the next price control period.

### **2.4 – Brecon Beacons National Park**

Although the scheme in the Brecon Beacons was not prioritised, disappointment was expressed that the opportunity to underground the overhead line at the same time as the planned upgrade of the A465 through the Clydach Gorge had now effectively been lost. It was noted that attempts to discuss the opportunity for collaboration with the Welsh Government and Costain (the road contractor) had not resulted in a scheme to make use of the VIP policy. The potential role of the Stakeholder Advisory Group in putting pressure to bear on agencies in the future regarding opportunities for collaboration and joined-up thinking on infrastructure development was noted.

---

## **3 – Future communications and media announcements**

### **3.1 – Communications and media announcements**

Stuart Fox from Camargue presented an overview of the plans for communicating the Stakeholder Advisory Group's decision on the prioritised schemes. This includes:

- Contacting all of the AONBs/NPs on 10<sup>th</sup> September to let them know the outcome, and working closely with their press officers to provide help and support where needed.
- Issuing an 'Update' news release on 15<sup>th</sup> September under embargo for release on 16<sup>th</sup> September. National, local, regional and trade media will all be targeted, and people from Camargue, National Grid and the Stakeholder Advisory Group will be available for briefings.
- Engaging with Stakeholder Advisory Group members' communications teams.
- Sending stakeholder letters and emails to MPs, AMs, local stakeholder reference groups, local councillors and so on.
- Updating the VIP website to coordinate with the above.

The draft press release was circulated and discussed, and a number of additions/amendments were agreed.

### **3.2 – Dealing with questions**

It was noted that the next stage of the project will involve detailed feasibility studies and costings for each of the prioritised schemes, and therefore any communication at this stage needs to be relatively high-level. Although it was acknowledged that more detailed questions will inevitably be asked by local stakeholders, the Options Appraisal Reports and notes from the local stakeholder reference group meetings will be made publically available and should serve to answer some of the questions that may arise. It was also noted that the project team will be in touch with key local stakeholders very soon to start scoping the more detailed work that will need to happen for each of the four shortlisted schemes.

Members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group were encouraged to contact Camargue if they need any support dealing with questions or if their organisations' communications teams need any further information.

### **3.3 – Potential for projects to come forward from Scotland**

A discussion was held about what would happen if Scottish transmission companies decided to participate in the project, and Ofgem reiterated that the opportunity is still available for the Scottish companies to come forward with their proposals.

---

## **4 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative**

Hector Pearson gave an update on progress with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

- An organisation called Trust CSR has been appointed to administer the scheme and the landscape assessor role will be appointed shortly.
- The annex to the VIP Policy was being submitted to Ofgem on 9<sup>th</sup> September, and may be published on their website for public consultation for a period before it can be signed off.
- The first window for applications to the fund is likely to be January-February 2016.
- The approvals panel is in the process of being finalised and membership will be announced when the scheme is ready to launch.

It was agreed that a paragraph about the LEI should be added to the main press release. It is also now felt that an official launch for the LEI is not needed, as the key people who need to know about the scheme are already aware of it and are keen for it to be rolled out as quickly as possible.

#### **Actions:**

- **Stuart/Hector** – Let Stakeholder Advisory Group members and the AONBs/NPs know when the annex has been published on Ofgem's website for consultation.
- 

## **5 – Next steps and future process**

### **5.1 – Next stages of the project**

Hector Pearson outlined the stages of the process over the next 12 months:

- The Options Appraisal Reports will be finalised and published on the VIP website.
- Engagement with all of the shortlisted areas will take place ahead of the media announcement, and a detailed project plan will then be drawn up for each site in collaboration with local stakeholders/experts.
- Phase one habitat and archaeological walk-over surveys will commence during the winter.
- Ground intrusive and ecology surveys will be conducted during the spring/summer of 2016.
- Further stakeholder engagement will take place in each area as the schemes develop.

### **5.2 – Dates of the next Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings**

Dates are yet to be confirmed but it is envisaged that the next meetings will take place in:

- April/May 2016 – For an update on progress and to address any issues arising from the detailed feasibility studies and site investigations.
- September/October 2016 – To review the information and costs on the schemes to be taken forward.

### **5.3 – Recognition of work done to date and capturing the learning**

The Stakeholder Advisory Group and project team members from Camargue, National Grid and Ofgem were all thanked for the work that had been done to date. It was also noted that it will be important for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to consider how to report on lessons learned during this process at its future meetings.