

**VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Minutes of the fifth meeting held on 13th/14th April 2015**

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

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| • Chairman | Chris Baines |
| • Cadw | Ashley Batten, Senior Planning Archaeologist |
| • Campaign for National Parks | Fiona Howie, Chief Executive |
| • CPRE | Neil Sinden, Policy and Campaigns Director |
| • CPRW | Peter Ogden, Director |
| • Historic England | Shane Gould, Senior Local Government & National Infrastructure Advisor |
| • Landscape Institute | Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director |
| • National Association of AONBs | Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB |
| • National Grid | George Mayhew, Director of Corporate Affairs |
| • National Parks England | Lesley Marsden, Landscape Officer, Broads Authority |
| • National Parks Wales | Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning & Cultural Heritage, Snowdonia National Park |
| • National Trust | Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director |
| • Natural England | Liz Newton, Director Landscape and Geodiversity |
| • Natural Resources Wales | Keith Davies, Head of Strategic Planning Group (13 th April only) |
| • Ofgem | Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist |
| • The Ramblers | Nicky Philpott, Director of Advocacy and Engagement |

Apologies:

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| • Visit England | Lyndsey Swift, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Engagement |
| • Visit Wales | Lawrence Manley, Head of Investment and Funding |

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Hector Pearson, Planning Policy Manager; VIP Project Manager; Ian McKenna, Senior Policy Planner; Gagan Gata-Aura, Policy Planner
- Professor Carys Swanwick, Independent Advisor to National Grid
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Matt Sutton; Jane Dalton

The purpose of the meeting on 13th and 14th April was for the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Receive an update on the progress of all of the shortlisted schemes.
- Approve the annex to the VIP policy on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative.
- Agree the process and the information needed for decision making at the Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in September.

Session 1 – VIP project update

Updates on progress for the 12 shortlisted sections of line were given by National Grid's VIP team and members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group who attended the local stakeholder engagement events. It was noted that there is tremendous support for the VIP Project from all of the shortlisted AONB Partnerships/National Park Authorities and none of the schemes had fallen out of consideration as a result of early engagement activity.

1.1 – Local stakeholder engagement events

Stakeholder engagement events have now taken place in each of the shortlisted areas with the exception of the shortlisted section of line to the east of the Woodhead Tunnel in the Peak District National Park (scheduled for 30th April 2015). Apart from the Peak District National Park (see section 1.4 below), these have all taken the form of a technical 'information-gathering' meeting with stakeholder organisations in the morning to help National Grid find out what they need to know about the local area and local issues, followed by an afternoon session that was open to wider stakeholder groups and members of the public.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group shared brief updates on their own experiences of attending these events and discussed the following benefits, challenges and lessons learned.

- Overall the events have been very beneficial – there has been a huge amount of enthusiasm for the project, and in most areas people were very forthcoming with information.
- Whereas people often come to this type of event or formal consultation in a negative frame of mind (because of proposals for new development), it was found at these events that people were generally much more positive due to the potential for power lines to be removed from their area. Some of this enthusiasm was, however, tempered as they began to realise what might be involved and the extent of the construction works.
- It was apparent that stakeholders and members of the public are used to a scheme being presented to them and then being asked to comment on it, as opposed to just being asked for their knowledge/input.
- There was some wariness of the project, as well as some tensions between the aspirations of technical stakeholders, landowners and the public and it was acknowledged that part of the challenge will be in bringing these groups together to work with each other.
- In at least one location the stakeholders had met in advance. While this was useful and augurs well for a constructive partnership approach in future, it created a tendency in the workshop to jump towards solutions as opposed to providing the technical information that was needed at this very early stage.
- Local democratic involvement in the technical stakeholder workshops was very beneficial, and highlighted that consideration will need to be given to how the local democratic process will work in later stages of the project.
- Strong views in some workshops tended to steer discussions in certain directions, highlighting the need for careful management of key or dominant stakeholders.
- Levels of public attendance varied due to a number of factors including the location of the venue and the extent to which the events were promoted locally and/or targeted at members of the public.
- Having a venue at or near the sites under consideration was considered beneficial (recognising that this is not always possible).

It was noted that a key issue going forward will be how to re-engage with the same groups of people and other members of the community before and after the decision-making process.

1.2 – Summary information for the shortlisted schemes

At its last meeting on 4th February 2015 the Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed the format and level of information that they will need to be able to make decisions on the way forward, and were shown a potential format for a summary of the options and issues for each of the shortlisted areas. This format has been revised following feedback and suggestions from the Stakeholder Advisory Group, and at today's meeting draft summary tables of the information to date for each of the shortlisted schemes were presented with the following headings:

- Preferred options (from the following alternative approaches):
 - Alternative tower designs (i.e. maintaining the existing route but replacing the pylons with T-pylons or lower height lattice pylons)
 - Alternative overhead route
 - Underground cable – direct burial
 - Underground cable – bored tunnel
 - No intervention – 'do nothing'
- Stakeholder feedback
- Strengths
- Issues

- Opportunities
- Potential showstoppers

These summary tables will be accompanied by a detailed Options Appraisal (OA) report and a summary (2-3 page) contextual report (see also section 3.2 below).

1.3 – Updates on the shortlisted areas

The initial/draft summary information tables for Snowdonia National Park, Dorset AONB, High Weald AONB, North Wessex Downs AONB and the New Forest National Park were discussed, including current information on the viability of/support for the different options, technical considerations, feedback from the stakeholder engagement events and issues/opportunities that have been highlighted to date.

Whilst it was noted that there is significant stakeholder support for the project from all of the National Parks/AONBs and the majority of stakeholders, some of the potential issues identified to date include:

- The need to assess whether there is significant enough net benefit in removing a National Grid overhead power line in areas where a residual 132kV distribution network operator (DNO) line would remain.
- Multiple landowners and/or lack of buy-in from landowners.
- Technical and archaeological constraints.
- Challenges in identifying suitable sites for sealing end compounds, particularly in open landscapes.
- The difficulties in restoring some of the more sensitive landscapes.

Some of the opportunities that have been identified to date include:

- The potential for cost-savings may mean that some schemes are more appropriate to address in the next price control period e.g. where there are plans for refurbishment and/or new lines.
- The potential for collaboration with other organisations including Scottish Power, DNOs, transport agencies, telecommunications companies etc.
- Areas potentially being opened up to increased tourism (this was seen as a negative issue by some members of the public living locally).
- New ways of thinking about landscape restoration e.g. creating walkways above cable troughs.
- Educational spin-offs e.g. signage/interpretation boards about landscape restoration.

It was suggested that there could be a role for officers from the AONB Partnerships/National Park Authorities or local authorities to make the initial contact/introductions with local landowners and tenant farmers and talk them through the scheme. National Grid stated that it has relationships through its Lands Officers with all landowners who have transmission infrastructure on their land but this could be useful when dealing with 'new' landowners not yet known to National Grid.

1.4 – Peak District National Park

A facilitated workshop was held on 24th March 2015 in the Peak District National Park to consider the three shortlisted subsections of line in the area. The objective of the workshop was to engage with the relevant stakeholders in this region and ask them to make recommendations to National Grid and the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group on the potential way forward for the Peak District. The workshop was very useful and highlighted the importance of engaging with stakeholders at an early stage, although there was some disappointment that transport organisations (e.g. Department for Transport, the Highways Agency and Network Rail) did not attend.

A number of key issues and alternative approaches were highlighted at the workshop including:

- United Utilities are a major landowner in the area and are also responsible for five reservoirs. Potential contamination and/or disruption to the water supply of the Greater Manchester area was identified as a significant issue.
- There is considerable support for a combined direct bury and cable trough approach for the Western section of the line and it is felt that it would have a huge/positive impact on the valley which is heavily used. Stakeholders want the whole line on the Western side to be looked at as a unit with the section in the Longdendale Valley replaced with a combination of direct buried cable and cable troughs and a solution developed for crossing Bottoms Reservoir.

- The Eastern side has not really been looked at in any depth and there is a need to hold a public drop-in session in that area (this had not really been considered before as most of the support to date had been for the Western side).
- A potential alternative solution to removing the pylons and burying/cable troughs along their existing route that has not yet been considered would be to look for a potential corridor for undergrounding north of the reservoirs (with a switch to the northern side at Crowden where no reservoir crossing is required). This would mean that the reservoirs/dams would not have to be crossed.
- There is a legal requirement to maintain access along the long distance footpath which could be an issue during construction works.
- A workshop attendee who is also a local parish councillor believes that the undergrounding of section of line to the east of the Woodhead Tunnel has the potential to generate longer-term economic benefits for the immediate local community that are currently blighted by the overhead power lines.

Public engagement events are now planned on 29th and 30th April for both the Western and Eastern sections of line for members of the public to come along and give their views/provide information. National Grid is contacting stakeholders that did not attend the workshop to gain their input. Further technical information is needed for the Eastern section of line but this will be gathered by meeting stakeholders in smaller groups.

1.5 – Brecon Beacons National Park

As outlined at the last meeting, undergrounding of the shortlisted section of line in the Brecon Beacons below or adjacent to planned upgrades to the existing road through the valley is likely to be the most viable option (given the highly constrained nature of the Clydach Gorge through which the line runs), and there is a very small window of opportunity for this to be carried out. It is a highly constrained location and the Welsh Government has already appointed contractors (Costain) to upgrade the existing road (the A465) to a dual carriageway. National Grid has been in discussions with Costain and a consultant representing Welsh Government to see if they can work together to deliver a joint solution, and will know by July whether this is potentially viable.

It was noted that there are potential cost savings for National Grid if it can jointly work with the contractors to carry out the project, although requirements for additional mitigation works (e.g. widening laybys) would offset some of these savings. Opportunities to leverage influence through the Welsh Government were also discussed in relation to their policy to deliver projects with multiple benefits.

A decision may be needed in advance of the next meeting in September, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed whether it is acceptable to make that kind of decision outside of the planned process. Whilst there was no clear answer on this, it was noted that a landscape assessment of the road itself would be useful to help understand whether there would be sufficient net benefits from removing the overhead power line.

1.6 – Tamar Valley AONB

As agreed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group at previous meetings, the shortlisted section of line in the Tamar Valley AONB has been fast-tracked as a pilot project for more detailed consideration, and at their meeting on 4th February the Stakeholder Advisory Group were given an update on the initial high-level feasibility study for the alternative approaches in this area. Since this meeting a local Stakeholder Reference Group has been set up, and National Grid is in the process of appointing consulting engineers to carry out more detailed investigations into local geology and ecology, in order to understand more about the feasibility and costs for a potential solution.

The activities/timeline for the next stages of work are:

- Completion of the Options Appraisal (OA) report – June 2015
- Review with the Stakeholder Reference Group – June/July/August
- Further public engagement – July/August
- Update the OA report – August/September
- Report back to the Stakeholder Advisory Group at its September meeting

If by this stage it is looking like some of the options are potentially viable, environment surveys would then commence (subject to approval from the Stakeholder Advisory Group).

1.7 – Process for the remaining shortlisted areas

It is envisaged that a similar process to that outlined for Tamar Valley AONB will be followed for the other shortlisted areas between now and September, and (other than the preliminary engagement for the Peak District National Park) further public engagement will not take place before the next meeting.

1.8 – Site visits by Stakeholder Advisory Group members

Stakeholder Advisory Group members were asked to sign up to visit one or more of the shortlisted sites before September. Guides to the sites including maps, photographs and the locations of viewpoints were distributed, and members were encouraged to take their own photographs from these viewpoints during their visits. Camargue offered to put people in touch with local stakeholders/experts to accompany them on these visits if required. However there was some caution about hearing one-sided stakeholder viewpoints and self-guided visits were also encouraged.

Actions:

- **Hector Pearson** – Circulate the draft summary templates for each area.
- **All** – Request the more detailed survey sheets for the areas that you are due to visit if required.

Session 2 – The Landscape Enhancement Initiative

At its last meeting on 4th February the Stakeholder Advisory Group considered the draft policy paper for the VIP Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI). The LEI has been established by the Stakeholder Advisory Group to allocate a proportion of the total fund to smaller localised landscape solutions that will enhance or mitigate the visual impact of existing overhead lines. A revised version of the document that will form an annex to the existing VIP policy was circulated to the AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities for comment, and at today's meeting the comments and resulting recommendations from National Grid were discussed with a view to signing off the final version of the policy annex for submission to Ofgem.

2.1 – Support for the LEI

It was reiterated that there is a great deal of support for the LEI within the AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities, and it was also noted at the stakeholder events that people were very willing and in many cases more easily able to engage with this scheme than the major capital engineering projects.

2.2 – Comments and recommendations

A summary of the discussions and agreements arising from the comments and resulting recommendations is outlined below:

Levels of funding available:

- Comments included that limiting funding to 75% of total project costs may make it difficult to secure 25% of funds via match funding, and that funding should be increased to 90% of total project costs. The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed with National Grid's recommendation that funding should be set at 75% of total project costs as originally envisaged, but this would be included in any future review of the LEI.
- Comments included that consideration should be given to equally dividing £24 million across the 30 eligible landscapes and providing each AONB Partnership and National Park Authority with an annual spend of £133,000 per annum. The Stakeholder Advisory Group rejected this and agreed with the recommendation that the proposed level of funding and application methodology already agreed by the Group should be adopted and the methodology set out in the paper should be retained. Because the visual impact and length of transmission lines across the 30 protected landscapes is varied, it does not seem appropriate to allocate funding in this way.
- Comments included that 15% of project funding should be available to help AONBs and National Parks prepare applications, administer and resource a project. The option for LEI delivery officers to provide support was discussed, and it was also suggested that National Grid and its appointed administrators could talk to other grant-awarding bodies such as the

Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the Esme Fairburn Foundation to seek advice on how they deal with these challenges.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed with National Grid's recommendation that, as agreed at the last meeting, funding should not cover application preparation but could include administration of the implementation of the project. The administrators will, however, be asked to consider arising issues carefully and will need to talk to the National Association of AONBs, National Parks England and National Parks Wales to ensure that appropriate guidance and support is put in place.

What types of project are eligible?:

- Comments included that tree planting and woodland creation are not always appropriate in landscapes where the focus is on enabling woodland management, the new Stewardship Scheme provides funds for tree planting and therefore LEI tree planting projects should not be funded, and the LEI could add value to Stewardship Schemes but dual funding should not be provided. The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed with National Grid's recommendation that the LEI should continue to include tree planting as a measure to enhance the landscape in designated areas. Detailed guidance will be prepared for potential applicants, and learning will develop as the initiative gets under way.

Who can apply?:

- Comments included that it may be challenging to secure active involvement of wider stakeholders or the local community in remote areas, and securing the written consent of landowners will not always be straightforward in common land sites or those with fragmented ownership. The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed with National Grid's recommendation that these challenges are noted and guidance will be developed by the LEI administrators to accommodate this and help applicants.

Application process:

- Comments included that two application windows instead of four each year should be considered. The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed with National Grid's recommendation that this proposal would reduce administration costs and should be adopted. Additional application windows could be created if demand requires them.

Following these discussions, approval was given by the Stakeholder Advisory Group for National Grid to make the agreed changes and submit the LEI paper to Ofgem for approval.

2.4 – Membership of the approvals panel

After some debate it was agreed that the approvals panel should only consist of organisations that are *not* eligible to apply for funding from the LEI scheme. The following organisations will be included:

- National Grid
- Natural Resources Wales
- Natural England
- Historic England
- Cadw
- A landscape architect

It was also suggested that people and access need to be represented, and that a representative from the Heritage Lottery Fund could be included to benefit from their familiarity with grant award schemes and their knowledge of other funding streams that may be available.

Actions:

- **Organisations on the proposed panel membership list** – Consider who from each organisation might sit on the panel.
- **Nicky Philpott/All** – Think about potential organisations to represent people/access.

2.5 – Next stages

The LEI policy paper will now be submitted to Ofgem. It will then be subject to a period of formal consultation (likely to be around one month) via the Ofgem website. Once Ofgem is satisfied, it can then be added as an Annex to the existing published VIP policy.

National Grid are about to appoint an organisation to administer the scheme on their behalf. This company will create the online application forms, develop the website, produce the supporting guidance documentation and provide ongoing administrative support. Technical assessors (not from the same organisation) will also be appointed.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group will have the opportunity to comment on the more detailed paperwork, but it was agreed that this should be done by a smaller sub-group as before comprising representatives from the National Association of AONBs, National Parks England, National Parks Wales, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales.

2.6 – Launch activity

Two launch events are being planned for July at the Senedd and Westminster, and the scheme will be showcased at the National Association of AONBs Landscapes for Life 2015 conference. Social media activity and local launches will also be carried out, and Camargue will work with the AONB/National Park organisations to support them in promoting the scheme. Other promotional opportunities include the National Parks conference in October and a meeting of landscape officers in November.

Action:

- **All** – Think about who should be invited to the launch events and consider other opportunities for promoting the scheme.

2.7 – Timescale for review

A brief discussion was held about the appropriate timescale for a review of the scheme and it was agreed that there needs to be a mechanism for quickly addressing any fundamental issues/problems, as well as a formal planned in review after the first two application windows. It was also noted that the review is more likely to lead to changes in the guidance documentation as opposed to the policy itself.

Session 3 – Decision making at the Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in September 2015

There was a reminder from National Grid that to be able to deliver the major capital projects during the current price control period, decisions on which schemes to take forward need to be made at the next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in September 2015, and reassurance was given that the process is on track to meet this deadline. Ofgem also gave their assurance that although it is expected that significant progress on the major capital engineering projects should be made during this price control period, the construction works would not have to be *fully* completed within that timescale.

Discussions during this session focused on the decisions that need to be made at the September meeting, the information that National Grid will need to provide, 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.

3.1 – Recap of the VIP Policy Guiding Principles

Hector Pearson gave a recap 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.

The VIP policy also recognises that these principles may sometimes conflict with one another and each scheme is likely to perform differently against them, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group/National Grid will therefore need to carefully balance the choices they make against the Guiding Principles.

It was also raised that the VIP policy states that the VIP project relates to existing electricity transmission infrastructure in English and Welsh AONBs and National Parks and that there were no special cases, such as using VIP in the HS2 project in the Chilterns AONB. This was re-affirmed and agreed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

3.2 – Proposed information for the September meeting

It is proposed that the following information will be provided in advance of the September meeting for each of the shortlisted areas:

- A detailed Options Appraisal (OA) report on each of the shortlisted areas. This will include National Grid's judgement on what they believe is the most appropriate/preferred solution(s) for that area based on technical information and discussions with local stakeholders. [An example of a draft OA report was circulated for the work carried out to date on Tamar Valley AONB.]
- Indicative costs for the preferred option(s).
- A summary of the OA report (2-3 page contextual report).
- A re-run of the landscape and visual impact assessment scoring process to demonstrate whether the proposed solution(s) would produce net benefit, to understand the impact of any new infrastructure (e.g. sealing end compounds) and assess the impact on adjacent sections of line.
- Photo montages to show before and after views.
- Personal experiences from site visits.

There were some concerns about the proposed narrowing of potential options by National Grid before the Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in September as it may e.g. rule out pragmatic lower-cost solutions. Reassurance was given by National Grid that all of the practically viable solutions will be presented and there will also be information about which options have been dismissed and why. The evidence will primarily be based on desk-based investigations and information/feedback from local stakeholders and will not include formal site investigations, but it should be enough to identify potential options and showstoppers etc.

3.3 – Proposed evaluation framework

Professor Carys Swanwick had carried out more detailed work on the Guiding Principles and presented a potential evaluation framework consisting of a summary/comparison table with a series of proposed criteria for each principle that could be used by the Stakeholder Advisory Group to evaluate/select the preferred schemes for implementation, and justify the decisions that are made.

The content for the tables will be completed by the National Grid consultancy team based on further landscape/environment assessment work due to be carried out by the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment consultants, together with input from the local stakeholder reference groups. The landscape consultants carrying out the assessments will be the same individuals who carried out the original assessment in 2014 and will again be under the guidance of Professor Carys Swanwick. The sort of evidence and indicators that will be available to allow the Stakeholder Advisory Group to consider each scheme against the criteria were outlined.

Following a brief overview of the framework, the Stakeholder Advisory Group were asked to consider the proposed criteria and evidence for each Guiding Principle in turn. A number of amendments, clarifications and additional criteria were suggested/agreed, and these will be incorporated into a revised framework.

3.4 – Further information

The need for further information/evidence in the following areas was suggested [some of these were also suggested as either additional criteria in the evaluation framework and/or other factors that may be taken into account during the decision-making process – see also 3.5 below]:

- The extent of buy-in/support from the local community, key stakeholders and the local democracy (recognising that a coherent viewpoint may be unlikely).

- The attitude of landowners and the scope for resolution where problems are anticipated.
- An understanding of actual or potential cumulative impacts of other existing/planned infrastructure (e.g. the existence of roads, DNO and/or BT lines, planning applications for wind turbines etc.) so that the residual benefits of removing power lines can be assessed [NB it was also agreed that this should be included as an additional criteria under Guiding Principle 1].
- Opportunities for economic efficiencies through collaboration with other agencies.
- An understanding of how other existing infrastructure (e.g. reservoirs) and other constraints effect 'build-ability' and costs.
- A better understanding of the scale of disruption involved in delivering these projects and the likely adverse impacts e.g. construction traffic, earth movements etc.
- Potential socio-economic benefits during and after construction e.g. local employment, increased use of hotel/B&B accommodation, potential new visitor opportunities, spin-off schemes etc.
- Local land management plans.
- The visual impact from roads, rivers and other waterways.
- Opportunities for innovation, particularly where this is driven by environmental or geographical challenges.
- The potential for future-proofing, e.g. building in capacity for the future.
- A better understanding of the risks involved including how easily they might fall away over time, and the impact on costs/timescales.
- The extent of the path network and open access land for each of the proposed sites.

The difficulties of getting some of this information within the timescales was acknowledged, and it was acknowledged that much of it will be based on anecdotal evidence and local knowledge/judgement. It was agreed that a template should be given to each of the AONB Partnerships / National Park Authorities for them to provide information on visitor numbers and the potential opportunities created by the project for enhanced visitor experience/greater visitor numbers, etc.

3.5 – Other factors

A discussion was held about other factors that could be taken into account when prioritising schemes to be taken forward. It was agreed that the integrity of the process to date must be maintained, and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and the Guiding Principles should therefore be the primary factors in decision making. However, if there are a number of closely ranked projects, other factors could be applied to prioritise or differentiate between them. Whilst these would be secondary factors it was felt that it would be beneficial if one or more of them could be delivered through the chosen projects.

Suggestions included:

- Synergies with other planned/existing infrastructure or planned refurbishment [could also apply under Guiding Principle 5].
- Opportunities for multi-agency working (e.g. water companies, transport agencies etc.) and/or delivery of multiple benefits.
- Balanced coverage of AONBs/National Parks.
- Geographical spread e.g. delivery of schemes in both England and Wales, and in the North and South.
- Delivery of people and/or landscape benefits (e.g. schemes in areas that are highly visited as opposed to remote/tranquil areas with few visitors).
- Delivery risks, particularly where these might impact on the ability to deliver projects within the current timeframe or lead to schemes dropping out [could also apply under Guiding Principle 4].
- Opportunities for quick wins.
- Opportunities for technical innovation that could be applied to other/future projects and prove what can be done in different landscapes.

There was consensus that it would be inappropriate if only one project were to be implemented, and that a minimum of two should be aimed for. There was also a reminder that if the current process is successful, projects that are not prioritised this time round could be implemented during future price control periods.

3.6 – Weighting and scoring

National Grid's proposal is to rank all of the schemes so that if a prioritised scheme drops out at a later stage the next one(s) on the list can be brought forward. It was noted that no weighting or relative importance has been applied to the Guiding Principles, and a discussion was held about the options for weighting and scoring the shortlisted schemes.

There was some support for weighting the first principle i.e. putting a greater weight on projects that would result in the greatest landscape enhancement benefits, however others were not in favour of weighting. Whilst it was acknowledged that Principle 1 outlines the fundamental aim of the scheme, concerns were expressed about weighting visual impact at the expense of other factors. Suggestions included setting a minimum level of landscape and visual improvement that a scheme has to deliver for it to be put forward for further consideration, and making other factors showstoppers.

The advantages and disadvantages of different scoring systems were debated, and it was noted that using verbal weightings (e.g. very high, high, low, very low) that were ultimately converted into numbers was a very useful approach for the Landscape and Visual Assessment process.

It was eventually agreed that it would be useful for National Grid and Professor Carys Swanwick to work together to test different scoring systems using mock examples/test cases to see what the effects of scoring the criteria/evidence in different ways would be.

Session 4 – Other information and next steps

4.1 – Study on the impact of overhead power lines on the historical environment

Shane Gould outlined a study commissioned by Historic England to look at the impact of National Grid overhead power lines on designated historical environment assets in the English National Parks and AONBs, and make recommendations on how the impacts could be reduced. The report is due to be finalised in the next month or so, but the material will be available shortly. It was noted that if consideration is being given to mitigating impacts on the historical environment, this needs to be balanced against the impact on archaeological assets of undergrounding power lines.

Action:

- **Shane Gould** – Circulate the report when it has been finalised.

4.2– Dates of next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting

The next meeting will be held on 8th/9th September in Birmingham and will be a full day meeting on both days. The full set of Options Appraisal reports will be sent to everybody in advance of this meeting, but members are encouraged to focus their more detailed reading on the sites that they have elected to visit before September.

There may also be a need for an interim meeting at the end of January/beginning of February 2016. After that it is envisaged that the Stakeholder Advisory Group will only need to meet twice a year.

4.3 – VIP project progress report and publicising the project

The first annual VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group progress report will be produced by the VIP project team and National Grid and signed off by Chris Baines. All Stakeholder Advisory Group members are encouraged to think about who should receive a copy of the report.

Action:

- **All** – Advise Camargue who should be sent a copy of the annual progress report.

4.4 – Publicising the VIP project

In addition to the LEI launch events, Stakeholder Advisory Group members were encouraged to think about how else the VIP project and the LEI can be publicised. Promotional materials and summary slides can be made available, and interviews can be arranged with National Grid if this would be of use. The need for more photographs of actual visual impact mitigation work within National Parks and AONBs was also highlighted.

Actions:

- **All** – Consider other ways to publicise the project.
- **All** – Send photos of existing landscape mitigation works (e.g. tree planting etc.).
- **Camargue/Hector Pearson** – Circulate the summary process slides and infographic produced for BestGrid.
- **Shane Gould** – Circulate the link to the Conservation Bulletin which included a feature on the VIP project.