

VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Minutes of the fourth meeting held on 4th February 2015

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

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| • Chairman | Chris Baines |
| • Cadw | Ashley Batten, Senior Planning Archaeologist |
| • Campaign for National Parks | Julian Woolford, Chief Executive |
| • CPRE | Neil Sinden, Policy and Campaigns Director |
| • CPRW | Peter Ogden, Director |
| • English Heritage | Shane Gould, Senior Local Government & National Infrastructure Advisor |
| • Landscape Institute | Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director |
| • National Association for AONBs | Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB |
| • National Grid | George Mayhew, Director of Corporate Affairs |
| • National Parks England | Peter Currell, Landscapes 4 People |
| • National Trust | Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director |
| • Natural England | Liz Newton, Director Landscape and Geodiversity |
| • Ofgem | Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist |
| • The Ramblers | Nicky Philpott, Director of Policy and Campaigns |
| • Visit Wales | Lawrence Manley, Head of Investment and Funding |

Apologies:

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| • National Parks England | Lesley Marsden, Landscape Officer |
| • National Parks Wales | Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning & Cultural Heritage, Snowdonia National Park |
| • Natural Resources Wales | Keith Davies, Head of Strategic Planning Group |
| • Visit England | Phil Evans, Head of Policy & Analysis |
| • Visit Wales | Jane Richardson, Head of Partnerships & Policy |

Secretariat in attendance:

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

The Stakeholder Advisory Group had met on the previous day (3rd February) to carry out a site tour of the Gas Control Centre and Transmission Network Centre at the National Grid offices in Warwick. They also received an update on VIP communications activity since the third advisory group meeting and, in particular, media response to the announcement of the shortlist of line subsections for potential major intervention.

The Advisory Group was pleased with the level and nature of coverage achieved and thanked the National Grid team for its efforts. Communications teams from CPRE and the National Trust as well as shortlisted AONBs / NPAs were also thanked for their contributions to the positive coverage.

The Advisory Group was keen to build on the positive coverage achieved to date as the project moves ahead and specifically in relation to the launch of the Landscape Enhancement Initiative. Continued close co-operation with Advisory Group members' communications teams and those within all the AONBs and NPAs was strongly endorsed by the Group.

The purpose of the meeting on 4th February was to:

- Discuss and agree the level of information that will be required by the Stakeholder Advisory Group to help it decide which schemes will be taken forward for further investigation.
 - Review and discuss the proposed policy for the Landscape Enhancement Initiative so that it can be provided to Ofgem.
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Session 1 – Presentation on the Tamar Valley AONB feasibility study

At the meeting on 30th October 2014 the Advisory Group agreed that the subsection of line in the Tamar Valley AONB (the highest scoring section in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) should be fast-tracked for more detailed consideration by National Grid. Hector Pearson (HP) from National Grid gave a presentation on the local drop-in sessions that have since been held in Tamar Valley and outlined the findings from the initial high-level feasibility study for the following alternative approaches:

1. Alternative tower designs (i.e. maintaining the existing route but replacing the pylons with T-pylons, lower height pylons or lattice pylons)
2. Alternative overhead route
3. Underground cable – direct burial
4. Underground cable – bored tunnel
5. No intervention – ‘do nothing’. (National Grid is required to consider this option alongside others to form a complete appraisal)

1.1 – Consideration of the alternatives

HP led the Advisory Group in a broad ranging discussion of all the various options. As well as technical solutions listed above, the following were also considered in relation to the stakeholder workshop and drop in session held on both Cornwall and Devon sides of the Tamar Valley on 22 January 2015:

- **Local stakeholder views** – including input from local technical experts and landowners – these covered a variety of issues from the area’s rich industrial / mining archaeology and local users of the river to migratory birds and fish as well as local bat and mollusc populations.
- **The 132 power line** – that crosses the estuary south of the National Grid line.
- **Other potential projects in the location** – including rail and road upgrades and housing projects in Saltash and Tavistock.
- **Access** – the roads down to the estuary are narrow and there was discussion on possible alternative transport routes using possible rail and the river itself.

1.2 – Proposed way forward resulting from feasibility study

Following in depth discussion, the Advisory Group agreed to take forward some specific options for more detailed assessment.

The next steps will be to go back to the AONB and local stakeholders to communicate these recommendations and talk to Western Power Distribution (the DNO) regarding the 132 line.

1.3 – Process for recording decisions

From a regulatory point of view it was agreed that there needs to be a decision log to record the reasons why options are being discounted or not and Hector Pearson confirmed that National Grid is in the process of producing an Options Appraisal document which will fulfil this function.

1.4 – Collateral benefits

There was some discussion about the potential for collateral benefits e.g. using local contractors/haulers, B&B accommodation for construction workers, legacy opportunities, local ecology research projects etc. This would apply across to all of the shortlisted lines taken forward.

It was agreed that the VIP team should work closely with the AONB or NPA to identify and measure extended economic benefit. It was suggested that this might also help to demonstrate that there are additional benefits to come from the VIP project.

Session 2 – Update on other shortlisted AONBs/National Parks

The way forward for the other shortlisted schemes was discussed. There was a reminder from the last meeting that the majority of the other potential projects are not as 'self-contained' as the Tamar Valley, and in many cases it is harder to define the beginning and end points. Consideration of the alternative approaches for these areas is much less developed and local workshops/drop-in events are still to take place in some areas. A broad-based/high level approach is therefore proposed for each of these areas before the next Advisory Group meeting in April with the work to include:

- Establishing the study area.
- Completing the local drop-in events.
- Gathering baseline information.
- Identifying and defining the scope of mitigation options.
- Carrying out an 'Options Appraisal' and assessing technology, cost, environmental and socio-economic impacts.

Examples of the kind of information that would be presented at the April meeting were given in a table format for Tamar Valley, Snowdonia National Park and the Brecon Beacons National Park with the following potential headings:

- Preferred options and outline costs.
- Stakeholder sentiment (including initial feedback, any tensions between local stakeholders etc.).
- Opportunities (including e.g. linking in with other infrastructure improvements).
- Strengths (e.g. avoiding local archaeological interests).
- Issues (e.g. contaminated land, access, ecology, geology).
- Potential showstoppers (e.g. construction access, cable depth).

The Advisory Group were asked to consider whether this format and level of information would be sufficient for them to make decisions on the way forward.

2.1 – Level and nature of information

The Advisory Group supported the concept of the overview tables but agreed that it would be useful if this was supported by maps and a short contextual report giving the more detailed exploration of each of the options (as had been presented for Tamar Valley).

It was also suggested that:

- Potential showstoppers could be renamed to e.g. risks, with colour-coding or a 'traffic light' system to highlight the extent of the risk.
- An overview of the feedback from the local stakeholder meetings would be useful.
- Stakeholder sentiment should be presented carefully, particularly where there are conflicting views amongst stakeholders.
- Preferred options should be changed to 'Considered' or 'Feasible' options.
- Opportunities for innovation and collaboration should be included in Strengths.
- The materials for the local workshops/drop-in sessions could be circulated.

2.2 – Brecon Beacons National Park

It was noted that there is a very small window of opportunity for carrying out undergrounding of the subsection of line in the Brecon Beacons. The location is very constrained and if undergrounding is not linked to existing planned road improvements a solution may not be possible in the future. A discussion was held as to whether it would be appropriate to fast-track detailed investigations of the Brecon Beacons scheme to enable a decision to be made in September. Whilst there was some support for this, concerns were also expressed about compromising the objectivity of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

2.3 – Potential for multi-agency collaboration on infrastructure development

The opportunities for pursuing 'win-win' options were discussed further, and whilst it was acknowledged that the objectivity of the assessment process should not be compromised, it was felt

by many that it would be a lost opportunity if the potential for collaboration with Western Power Distribution (132 line in Tamar Valley) and the Highways Agency (A465 dualling in the Brecon Beacons) were not pursued.

The difficulties of achieving this within the VIP project timescales were noted but it was also felt that being able secure double wins through collaboration would be a fantastic legacy for the project. The opportunities for collaborating with other agencies such as the Canals and Rivers Trust, Environment Agency and HS2 were also discussed.

The Advisory Group felt that consideration should be given to the situation with existing and new lines in the Menai Straits between mainland Wales and Anglesey.

Actions:

- **National Grid** – Raise the issue of multi-party dialogue and engagement for infrastructure developments with appropriate Government departments and National Grid's HS2 team.
- **National Grid** – Talk to the National Grid team dealing with Anglesey regarding the Advisory Group's views on the potential for any tunnel to be built with the possibility of the existing line over the Menai Straits to be re-routed at some stage in the future.

2.4 – Advisory Group decision-making process

The need for a process for evaluating and choosing between the alternative options for each scheme, and prioritising the shortlist of schemes to be taken forward for detailed assessment was discussed. As in 1.5 above it was emphasised that the reasoning behind any decisions must be documented. This will require clear criteria and a step by step process to be able to explain why certain options have been ruled out, and the key points/reasons behind any recommendations that are made will need to be captured/documentated.

It was noted that there may be learning from this process that would change how the assessment process is carried out in the future e.g. if there had been a 'further opportunities' or 'value for money' criteria it might have changed the weighting/ranking of some schemes. The need to capture learning to take forward to the next price control period was emphasised.

Actions:

- **National Grid** – Review the level and format of information that will be provided before the next meeting and consider what the high-level decision-making criteria might be.

Session 3 – Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

The Advisory Group had previously agreed that five percent of the VIP funding should be allocated to smaller, localised projects, and Ofgem has also confirmed its support for allocating a proportion of the fund to smaller localised landscape solutions that will enhance or mitigate the visual impact of existing overhead lines. Hector Pearson gave an update on the progress of writing the policy for the LEI and a draft policy paper was presented to the Advisory Group for their final comments before it is passed to Ofgem for approval. The approvals process is likely to take around two months, and it is currently intended that the initiative will be launched in early summer 2015.

National Grid and Ofgem have agreed that the paper will be added as an Annex to the existing VIP policy and it will therefore become a public document. The policy paper itself is written at a high level but a layer of detail will exist below it for applicants. National Grid is in the process of appointing an external agency to manage the fund, and it is intended that this agency will assist with developing the detail including e.g. application forms and more detailed criteria / guidance notes. Advisory Group members will be given the opportunity to comment on the administrative paperwork.

In the discussion that followed a number of minor amendments and clarifications were discussed/agreed and these will be reflected in the revised paper. More substantial areas of discussion are summarised below.

3.1 – Promotion and communication

Branding for the initiative is still under review but the current proposed title is the 'VIP Landscape Enhancement Initiative'. The plans for promoting and communicating the scheme were discussed, and in addition to direct communication with all of the affected AONBs/National Parks there are a number of potential avenues e.g.:

- The AONB conference in July.
- Broader promotion via AONB/National Park contacts.
- A Westminster reception after the general election to brief the new intake of MPs about this and the VIP project as a whole. A similar briefing would take place for the Senedd in Cardiff
- Alerting other fund-giving agencies (e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund, Forestry Commission) and potentially holding a joint workshop to explore how the funds might operate together to maximise benefit.

Ofgem noted that there needs to be some care that the LEI should not be seen as a PR-led initiative, but acknowledged that this is balanced against ensuring that the people who need to know do find out about it.

3.2 – Ongoing review and adaptation of the scheme over time

In relation to a number of issues (e.g. number of application opportunities in a year, level of funding per quarter/year, potential for the funding to be under/over-subscribed at different stages), there was some debate about how 'fixed' the policy will or should be. Some elements of the policy reflect processes that have been adopted in other successful grant schemes, but it was suggested that some flexibility needs to be built in to allow for the scheme to be adapted over time, to see how well it works in practice. It was emphasised that part of the process will be about gathering/providing feedback so that learning can be applied, and that there is already a clause in the policy that reserves the right for the scheme to be refined/adapted. It was suggested that it would be useful to have a regular monitoring report outlining what is being achieved and potentially a review event part way through the four year period.

3.3 – Simplicity and ease of submitting applications

It was reiterated that the scheme is intended to be as easy to understand as possible, and that it needs to be straightforward to apply for funding. Although it will require some effort and resources in the AONBs/National Parks to apply, it is not intended that the process should be overly difficult/time-consuming. It was noted that one of the roles of the administering agency will be to support applicants in making their applications, but there was some debate about the extent that this support should take, with some feeling that there could be central resource to support people in making applications but others expressing concerns that the fund should not pay the authorities to do what is essentially part of their job. It was, however, noted that it is possible for the authorities to include funding for a project officer within an application for funding.

It was agreed that there should be as few restrictions as possible on where the 25 per cent of match funding comes from and that it does not need to be a cash match from the applicant organisation itself e.g. it could be other grant funding (unlike many other grant-awarding bodies which do not allow this), volunteer hours, materials etc.

There was also a suggestion that 'dummy' completed application forms could be provided to give examples of how to complete an effective application.

3.4 – Clarification of technical definitions/wording

A discussion was held regarding some of the language in the policy that might be interpreted differently than its 'technical' definition or intended meaning e.g. 'enhancement of the landscape', 'visual receptors' and 'shifting the balance'. It was agreed that some redrafting is needed to find words that provide a better explanation, but that the key point is that any project that is put forward must relate to the visual impacts of existing National Grid overhead power lines.

3.5 – Clarification re the limit on 'live' applications/projects

A discussion was held regarding the definition of 'live' applications/projects and it was apparent that there were different understandings and interpretations as to whether the cap on three projects was intended to apply to applications that are going through the system and/or projects that have been approved and are now in the implementation phase. There was also some debate as to whether a

project that has gone into maintenance should be included within this cap but it was agreed that this should not be the case.

There was a reminder that the intention behind this limit was to ensure that no organisation could dominate the fund, but it was also suggested that areas with greater extents of line should potentially have more scope for a larger number of projects. It was also noted that if an area has reached a cap of three live projects and is not allowed to start a new project until an existing one has been completed it could create lots of short-term projects. As in 3.2 above there was some debate as to whether flexibility or hard and fast rules are appropriate, and concerns about 'unfairness' were weighed against the need for flexibility to be able to approve projects that would add significant benefit. It was eventually agreed that the policy should be that each organisation can only submit three applications in one year but that the approvals panel should monitor how this is working in practice and exercise some judgement if needed. It was also reiterated that there is a clause allowing the policy to be adapted/refined over time if this is not working in the way that is intended.

3.6 – Payment and monitoring

It was agreed that more clarity on payment schedules/milestones is needed, and that some degree of payment in advance will be needed for many projects to start. Payments will only be made to the relevant AONB/National Park and it will be up to them to disseminate to local groups. The managing agency will also need to look at whether funding coming directly from National Grid is still regarded as public sector finance.

The need for effective monitoring and checks/balances was reiterated, and it was noted that the detail of Ofgem's role in monitoring how the fund is spent is yet to be agreed.

3.7 – Agreements and way forward

Hector Pearson will make the agreed revisions and redraft the relevant sections of the paper. The revised version will be signed off by a sub-group (comprising the representatives from the National Association for AONBs, National Parks England and National Parks Wales), and once it has been agreed it will be shared with the AONBs and National Parks to get their feedback and input on how they think it will work in practice. This will be gathered via the relevant Advisory Group contact for each set of organisations. The target final sign-off date for submission to Ofgem for approval is April 2015. There was also a reminder that the policy will need to undergo legal review before it is implemented.

Actions:

- **Hector Pearson** – Redraft the paper and circulate to subgroup for comment.
- **Howard Sutcliffe, Peter Currell and Jonathan Cawley** – Circulate paper to AONBs/National Parks for comment. Collate comments from AONBs/National Parks and feedback to National Grid.

Session 4 – Next steps

4.1 – Dates of next Advisory Group meetings

The next meetings will be held on:

- 13th/14th April 2015 (provisionally in Birmingham)
- 8th/9th September 2015

4.2 – Workshops and drop-in sessions in the shortlisted AONBs/National Parks

All Advisory Group members were encouraged to attend the remaining workshops and drop-in sessions that are taking place in the shortlisted AONBs/National Parks, including the two-day facilitated workshop in March for invited stakeholders for the Peak District National Park, Advisory Group members were also encouraged to visit at least one of the shortlisted sites before the September meeting.

Actions:

- **All** – Advise Camargue of availability for attending workshops.
- **All** – Feedback any key points that have arisen during the meetings to date to enable a dossier of key learnings from this process to be formulated.