

VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Minutes of the ninth meeting held on 24th to 25th April 2017

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Cadw** Ashley Batten, Senior Planning Archaeologist,
Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service
- **Campaign for National Parks** Fiona Howie, Chief Executive
- **CPRE** Tom Fyans, Director of Campaigns and Policy
- **CPRW** Peter Ogden, Director
- **Historic England** Sarah Tunnicliffe, National Rural and Environmental
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** Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National
Park Authority
- **National Parks Wales** Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning & Cultural
Heritage, Snowdonia National Park Authority
- **National Trust** Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **Natural England** Liz Newton, Director Strategy Development
- **Natural Resources Wales** John Briggs, Landscape Architect
- **The Ramblers** Nicky Philpott, Director of Policy and Campaigns
- **Visit Wales** Lawrence Manley, Head of Investment and Funding

Attending remotely:

- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist (part of day 2 only)

Guest:

- **Snowdonia National Park Authority** Emyr Williams, Chief Executive (day 1 only)

Apologies:

- **Visit England** Sam Oakley, Policy and Affairs Manager

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Hector Pearson, VIP Project Manager; Jeremy Lee, Lead Project Manager;
Tony Dyas, Lead Project Manager; Ben Smith, Senior VIP Project Officer; Liz Jones,
Consents Officer; Adrian Chanter, Consents Officer; Louise Lewin, Consents Officer
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

The VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group carried out a site visit to the Snowdonia National Park (line section 4CZ.1) on the afternoon of 24th April 2017, followed by a full day meeting on 25th April.

The purpose of the meeting on 25th April was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Hear updates on the four schemes that have been prioritised for replacing existing overhead lines with underground cables in national parks and AONBs
 - Consider the options and decide on the location of the southern sealing end compound for the Dorset scheme
 - Receive an update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative
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1 – Update on the four schemes shortlisted for underground projects

Hector Pearson from National Grid gave an update on the work that has been carried out since the additional Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting held on 12th December 2016.

A significant amount of engineering design work is now underway alongside the ongoing environmental and consents-related activity. An organogram of the enlarged VIP team was shown to the Stakeholder Advisory Group and a number of new key team members were introduced. These included two new team members present at the meeting:

Jeremy Lee – Lead Project Manager responsible for the programme across all four projects. Jeremy will work closely with Tony Dyas (Lead Project Manager) focusing on engineering, design and construction and Ben Smith (Senior VIP Project Officer) focusing on environmental, consents, planning and lands issues.

Louise Lewin – Consents Officer for the Snowdonia project.

The National Grid VIP team is supported by a number of professional advisory consultancies including some noted specialists in areas such as heathland restoration and marine investigation work.

Professor Carys Swanwick, the independent advisor who developed the initial Landscape and Visual Assessment for the VIP project and who has continued throughout as an adviser to the VIP team, will shortly be carrying out further work to demonstrate how the four prioritised projects will deliver on landscape improvements.

Hector Pearson then reported on some other developments not related to the four underground projects, including an update on the shortlisted (but not prioritised in this price control period) Peak District West scheme, and the activities of the Scottish Transmission Operators and their VIEW and VISTA schemes.

Peak District West – At the suggestion of Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority, an initial exploratory technical meeting had been held with United Utilities regarding Peak District West to see if there is potential for a project to be pursued during the next price control period. United Utilities is the major landowner in the Longdendale Valley, through which the shortlisted line sections run, and operates the five drinking water reservoirs that dominate the valley.

These initial discussions are technical and purely exploratory at this stage. It has been agreed that a day-long workshop will be held between National Grid and United Utilities to determine whether there are technical solutions that could be explored further. The outcome of this can then be shared with wider stakeholders.

Schemes in Scotland – National Grid has spoken with the Scottish Transmission Operators about progress on their VIEW (SP Energy Networks) and VISTA (SHE Transmission) schemes. They have reported that they intend to carry out some limited capital engineering works in relation to their transmission lines, as well as some large-scale landscaping projects and more modest measures similar in scope and scale to the Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

It is proposed that they should be invited to the next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting to provide an update on their plans.

Hector Pearson, Adrian Chanter, Liz Jones and Louise Lewin from National Grid then gave an update on the progress of the four schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward. A summary of progress and specific issues for each of the four schemes is outlined below.

1.1 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7

A preferred routeing option has been agreed with local stakeholders, and good progress has been made with the scheme design and ongoing survey work. Issues around gaining access at this stage of the project from a key local landowner appear to have been resolved and access has been granted for the necessary ground intrusive (GI) works to be carried out. It is hoped that this improved relationship will continue through to the next stages of the project.

The location for the northern sealing end compound has been agreed with local stakeholders, but a decision on the location of the southern sealing end compound is required. Extensive discussions with local stakeholders have explored a range of alternative locations and narrowed down the options to two alternatives.

Option i) – This option (Option 3A) would locate the sealing end compound at the bottom of a steep escarpment. Officers at the AONB Partnership do not favour this location as it would impact on the views from the top of the escarpment and on views of the ridgeline from the local footpath network to the south – particularly views of the barrows on the tops of the ridge. The location is also very close to historic farm buildings – including a listed farmhouse and chapel – and the owner of the land and buildings is opposed to the sealing end compound being located in this area. The engineering works for this site would be more complex due to its location at the bottom of a slope, however no temporary diversion of the existing 400kV overhead line or District Network Operator (DNO) line would be required with this option.

Option ii) – This alternative (Option 8) would locate the sealing end compound further south along the existing line near a former railway line and would include the removal of two additional pylons. Although this location would mean that the sealing end compound would be more visible from parts of the Jubilee Trail and the escarpment, there would be an improvement of the views to and from the escarpment, and the impact on the historical buildings would be reduced. This option has been endorsed by the AONB Partnership, the Dorset project’s Stakeholder Reference Group, local stakeholders (including Historic England and the County Archaeologist) and the landowner. The engineering requirements are less complex. Temporary diversions of the existing 400kV overhead line and DNO line would, however, be required. Precise costs for this option will be determined after the geophysical works have been completed, but it is likely to be more expensive by some £7m to £10m.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was presented with the proposed plans for planting and landscaping for each option, both of which have been approved in principle by the AONB Partnership. Members were also shown existing and prospective photographs of viewpoints for the two locations at year one and at year 15. The Group posed a number of questions about the opportunities for additional enhancement in the area including adding to the public footpath/access network, creation of wildlife areas and improved hedgerow management.

Sarah Tunnicliffe suggested referring to historic maps and archives with a view to restoring ancient field boundaries as part of the work. She also offered the group the opportunity to receive a brief presentation from Shane Gould on historic landscape characterisation (HLC) at the next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting.

Following a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of both options, Stakeholder Advisory Group members unanimously agreed that they supported proceeding with the second option (Option 8). This decision will now be communicated to local stakeholders.

The next steps for the Dorset scheme are to begin land discussions and prepare the EIA for public consultation in July 2017. It is currently envisaged that the planning application will be ready to submit in November 2017 at the same time as the Ofgem application. The planning application will be shared with the Stakeholder Advisory Group and the approval of the Group will be sought by National Grid prior to its submission.

Subject to receiving planning permission and approval from Ofgem, construction would begin in March 2019, with the new line available for service in November 2021.

1.2 – New Forest National Park – 4YB.2

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was reminded of the preferred route option for the scheme and the challenges of crossing this highly-designated location. Agreement has been reached with both landowners regarding purchase of the land required for the locations of the two new sealing end compounds.

As reported at the December Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting, breeding bird surveys have identified the presence of several protected bird species including the nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler. Further surveys are currently being undertaken to establish 'carrying capacity' within the wider area to determine whether there is sufficient space for displaced birds to move to for nesting.

If the surveys demonstrate that there is insufficient capacity, local stakeholders have requested that the project is restricted to winter-only working (i.e. between September and the end of February). Calculations indicate that this would lead to an increase in the construction programme from two-three years to approximately eight years (based on a five-day working week) or six years (seven-day working week). Other implications of an extended programme include wider environmental and social impacts, additional disruption caused by repeated set-up and dismantling of construction equipment, risks of not being able to complete an underground section within the compressed time period and a considerable increase in costs.

GI works were carried out across the site in February 2017 to avoid the bird nesting season. Five boreholes of 30m depth and eight trial pits were completed and National Grid reported that, despite the complex requirements to minimise damage and mitigate impacts in this highly designated area, no negative feedback was received from local stakeholders regarding the works.

The full analysis from the GI works, which will confirm the viability for the use of a horizontal direction drill (HDD), will be ready towards the end of May. Clay layers or rock provide the ideal conditions for a HDD, however the preliminary results from the boreholes have – against expectations – shown that the ground is primarily made up of gravel and sand. Whilst it is possible to drill in loose material, a lot of bentonite would need to be pumped in to keep the borehole open and due to the complex hydrology of the area and local stakeholder concerns, National Grid is reluctant to use bentonite. It was further noted that deeper drilling is also unlikely to be an option as cables heat up as depth increases and the required cable ratings would not be met.

These findings mean that there are now significant engineering challenges for the project and there may be a need to look at an alternative route or consider direct burial instead.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that given the potential challenges now facing this scheme, it would be important to hold high-level discussions to determine the way forward. Sarah Kelly suggested that the meeting should involve National Grid and senior, national-level and local representatives from both Natural England and the National Trust. She also suggested that the New Forest National Park Authority would broker the meeting and host it in the New Forest.

A discussion was held regarding how the issues relating to this scheme should be communicated, particularly if it is ultimately not possible to proceed due to the engineering issues. It was agreed that it will be important to emphasise that if this project cannot proceed due to a combination of factors, it does not rule out future projects being undertaken in other highly designated areas, as each location and potential site is unique.

Although it was originally envisaged that the planning application for this scheme would be submitted in January 2018 with construction commencing in August 2019, the current timetable is likely to change as the issues outlined above are discussed and resolved.

1.3 – Peak District National Park – eastern section ZO.2

Discussions with local stakeholders have been continuing regarding the identified routeing option for this project, which would take a southerly route along the Trans Pennine Trail (TPT) and would also involve moving the sealing end compound down the trail into the Wogden Foot local wildlife site.

The route requires a temporary diversion of the TPT to the north for approximately two years and negotiations to gain agreement from the landowners are ongoing. Discussions are also underway with landowners regarding the location of the temporary access road that is required.

Extensive environmental survey and assessment work is ongoing and two stakeholder workshops were held in January and February 2017 regarding potential plans and mitigation options for the Wogden Foot local wildlife site. These were followed by a further meeting with stakeholders with a specific interest in ecology.

The management of the site is changing from Sheffield & Rotherham Wildlife Trust to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and discussions are ongoing regarding their longer-term plans for the site. There are emerging issues in relation to the presence of the willow tit, and there are ongoing discussions on mitigation with the potential to set up a partnership involving Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC), Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and possibly local academic institutions.

Lack of available resource at BMBC is a potential issue for the project and National Grid is looking at ways of working with the council to resolve this. BMBC is also interested in the economic impacts of the TPT diversion and the re-launch of the trail after the works have been completed. National Grid is working collaboratively with the local authority on a number of work packages which it is hoped will ease the progress on the project.

Subject to progress in the above areas, it is envisaged that the planning application for this scheme will be submitted in December 2017 with construction commencing in May 2019, should approval be granted in summer 2018. The next steps are to agree lay-down area locations, develop ecological and landscape mitigation principles with local stakeholders and prepare the EIA for public consultation in September 2017.

As outlined at the last meeting, alternative technology options are also being explored for this project (see Section 1.5 below).

1.4 – Snowdonia National Park – 4CZ.1

The preferred option for this scheme is to construct a cable tunnel from Cilfor to Garth under the Dwyrdd Estuary and extend the underground section to join up with the existing cables that run across the Glaslyn Estuary to the northwest.

The tunnel feasibility report has been completed, and the preferred underground routeing option runs along the line of the main road – this reduces significantly the number of landowners potentially involved. The final route will be determined following GI works and further discussions with stakeholders and landowners.

GI works to determine the depth of the tunnel will take place towards the end of summer/into September with five boreholes of 50m depth planned. The contract for these works is currently out to tender. The application for consents to carry out the investigatory works is currently being finalised, however the initial HRA screening assessment indicated that the works are unlikely to significantly affect the site or species.

Other progress has included completion of an initial traffic and transport survey, collection of baseline data for the botanical and ecological survey reports and instruction of the options appraisal. The next steps include agreeing the locations for the tunnel head houses with landowners and local stakeholders, defining the programme of collaboration with local stakeholders and National Grid's North Wales Connection project team, and continuing to consider the options for dealing with the spoil arising from construction works (including the potential for it be removed and used for ecological projects elsewhere in the country).

It is now envisaged that the planning application for this scheme will be submitted in October 2018 with construction commencing in 2021. As outlined at previous Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings, one of the key issues is aligning the VIP project in Snowdonia with the North Wales Connection project (a proposed second connection for the Wylfa Newydd nuclear power station on Anglesey), as this affects both the timing of construction (to minimise disruption locally) and the width of the tunnel that would be required. At this stage the VIP team are working on the assumption that both projects are going ahead, but should the North Wales Connection project be delayed, further discussions will be needed with Ofgem regarding the timing of construction.

Regarding the width of the tunnel, National Grid is starting to do work on the options and costs for different tunnel diameters, and this will also need further discussion at a later date. The use of alternative technology (see 1.5 below) could also have an impact on tunnel width.

1.5 – Alternative technology option for underground installation

As raised at the December 2016 meeting, National Grid is exploring the option of using gas insulated line (GIL) for the Peak District East scheme and possibly also for Snowdonia. GIL is a form of technology that has not been used underground in the UK to date. It has been successfully used underground in Europe, most notably on a scheme at Frankfurt Airport. The Peak District project potentially lends itself well to the technology as it is a relatively short and flat route.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was given an overview of the key differences between underground cable and GIL, including the implications for construction, monitoring and maintenance. National Grid is continuing to pursue the underground cable solution for both the Peak District and Snowdonia schemes, but is also working with suppliers to understand the application of GIL technology as an alternative.

It is intended that local stakeholders will be briefed when the suitability of the technology is fully understood and National Grid has evaluated the installation differences and likely costs. It is envisaged that National Grid will be in a position to make a recommendation on the technology to stakeholders in early summer this year.

2 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

Ben Smith and Mary O'Connor (Chair of the LEI Approvals Panel) gave an update on progress with the Landscape Enhancement Initiative.

2.1 – First round of submissions/applications

The first window for expressions of interest opened in May 2016 and this resulted in five applications being put forward to Ofgem for approval in November 2016. Three of these schemes have now been approved (High Weald AONB Partnership, Peak District National Park Authority and North York Moors National Park Authority). National Grid is currently working on two further schemes with the Snowdonia National Park Authority to clarify a few outstanding issues for Ofgem.

The three approved schemes are now subject to a 28-day licence consultation before final approval is given to release the funds. The consultation for the three approved schemes from this first application window opened on 31st March, and it envisaged that, subject to the outcome of this consultation, funds will be available for distribution in May 2017. The two Snowdonia schemes will also be subject to a 28-day consultation once the issues have been satisfactorily resolved.

The VIP team will work with the applicants' communications teams regarding local promotion of the first approved LEI projects.

2.2 – Second round of submissions

The second window of applications closed on 31st October 2016 and, as outlined at the December 2016 meeting, ten expressions of interest were received of which seven were invited to submit full applications. The Approvals Panel is due to meet in May 2017 to consider the applications and agree which will be put forward to Ofgem for approval.

Following on from delays in the approvals process during round one, a clear set of dates has now been agreed with Ofgem for rounds two and three. For the second round, the date that has been agreed for approval to be given is 4th September, followed by the 28-day licence consultation. Notification to applicants and the issuing of grant agreements will take place by 2nd October, and funds will be released by 16th October. The third window will open in June/July this year.

2.3 – Lessons learned from the first round of applications

A discussion was held about the delays in funds being released for the first round of applications. The delay took the approvals process beyond the end of the 2016-17 financial year, and the potential knock-on effects to current and future applicants and their projects was raised as a concern, particularly with regard to budgets that are tied to a specific financial year, and the potential loss of match-funding. Delays to seasonal work (e.g. tree planting) could also put planned work at risk. It was reiterated that these concerns have been raised and discussed with Ofgem, and reassurance was given that the dates that have been agreed for future windows fit with Ofgem's timescales, avoiding particularly busy times in the regulator's schedule.

Concerns were also raised about the extensive amount of additional information and documentation that applicants were required to submit. It was noted that High Weald AONB Partnership's application was of particularly high quality and that very little further information regarding this

scheme was requested by Ofgem. It has therefore been agreed that the future application process should adopt a standardised template based on the High Weald model, and that this will need to include a detailed spreadsheet breaking down how and when the money will be spent. It was also noted that applicants were originally required to feed back twice a year regarding the progress of the scheme and how they are spending the money, but this has now been reduced to once a year.

Other specific expectations will include:

- The need to reference comparable cost rates and provide evidence behind prices.
- A requirement to state a minimum level of delivery to ensure that there is a clear deliverable that can be measured.
- A reminder that the LEI funding incorporates additional funding for three years beyond completion, and that this needs to be set out in the project proposal.

As outlined previously, ongoing advice to applicants includes being more ambitious with the scale of the projects, including the need to look for additional benefits and ways to enrich the projects, and consider, for example, the interplay between landscape, culture and heritage. In response to a query about whether restoration of archaeological features could be included in a scheme (e.g. Yorkshire Dales barns), it was noted that stone walls have been accepted in one of the approved schemes as they are considered to be part of the cultural landscape/heritage. Applicants are therefore encouraged to identify what is important about the landscape so that its current 'health' can be reviewed in order to develop a wider scheme.

It was also reiterated that the fundamental requirement of any project must be for it to result in a visual or landscape improvement. Applicants will therefore be encouraged to review the initial landscape and visual assessments carried out for the VIP project to assist them in determining and providing the justification for appropriate schemes.

2.3 – Encouraging future applications

It was noted that due to the requests for additional detailed information and the delay in the approvals process, a lot of the momentum and potential enthusiasm for the scheme amongst the eligible AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities has diminished. There is therefore now a need to rebuild their confidence in the scheme and reassure them that putting together an application is a worthwhile investment of their time.

The third application window for submission of expressions of interest will now open in June/July 2017, and a workshop for AONBs and their partners to promote the scheme and encourage them to put an application together is planned for June 2017. It was also suggested that Camargue could draft an article featuring the schemes that have been approved and the Stakeholder Advisory Group's reflections on them, and that this could be tailored for each stakeholder organisation.

Actions:

- **Chris Baines** – Write to Ofgem to thank them for listening to the Stakeholder Advisory Group's concerns, and reiterate stakeholder support for the LEI.
- **Camargue** – Draft an article on progress with the LEI and the initial schemes that have been approved to provide stakeholders with common messages to use when referring to the VIP/LEI work, allowing scope for them to tailor individually.
- **Camargue** – Work with Mary O'Connor and Howard Sutcliffe to plan and deliver a workshop aimed at AONB Partnerships.

3 – Future meetings

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will take place in Birmingham on 6th November 2017.

The primary aims of the meeting will be to:

- Hear updates on the four prioritised schemes, including final designs for Peak District East and the tunnel options for Snowdonia
- Approve the Dorset scheme both for submission of the planning application and funding submission to Ofgem
- Hear an update on the approved LEI projects
- Invite the Scottish Transmission Operators to provide an update on their proposed schemes
- Look ahead to the second price control period, including consideration of lessons learned during the first round of the VIP project.