

VISUAL IMPACT PROVISION

nationalgrid

The Project Explained



Foreword

The Visual Impact Provision project represents a major opportunity to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and environmental heritage of our National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group that I chair has an important role to play by helping National Grid to identify and select those projects which use the fund in the most efficient way and deliver maximum benefit for our most treasured landscapes.



Chris Baines

Chairman of the Stakeholder Advisory Group
Visual Impact Provision project

Stakeholder Advisory Group members



What is Visual Impact Provision?

National Grid's Visual Impact Provision project will make use of funds from a £500m allocation by Ofgem to carry out work which will help to reduce the impact of existing transmission lines in English and Welsh National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The most important task for us is to use this allowance to achieve the maximum enhancement to the landscape in England and Wales while ensuring that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result.

To ensure that we get this right and bring the most benefit from the Visual Impact Provision project, National Grid is working closely and collaboratively with stakeholders.

A group, known as the Stakeholder Advisory Group has been set up by National Grid and comprises organisations dedicated to conserving the landscape and countryside throughout England and Wales.

The group will help National Grid to make decisions and these will be made according to the guiding principles set out in the Visual Impact Provision policy document and set out below. By adopting this approach we aim to ensure fairness and balance in our decision making to help select the projects which we undertake.

Our Guiding Principles are to prioritise potential projects which:

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

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



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

National Grid Visual Impact Provision Project

How it came about?

All electricity transmission owners are funded by a price control mechanism which is agreed with and set by Ofgem, the electricity and gas markets regulator.

Ofgem has agreed a set of price controls and incentives for the period from April 2013 to March 2021. The new price controls and incentives include a provision of £500 million to mitigate the visual impact of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes in Great Britain.

For National Grid, which is the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales, this means considering the visual amenity of our existing infrastructure in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

We call this ‘Visual Impact Provision’.

Enhancing our treasured landscapes

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

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



How can the fund be used?

The Visual Impact Provision project applies to existing electricity infrastructure – principally high-voltage overhead electricity lines – in National Parks and AONBs in England and Wales.

It can, in special cases, also be applied to lines running adjacent to these protected landscapes where the lines impact on the visual setting.

The fund could be used for:

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

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

The fund cannot be used for:

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

What do customers want to see?

Research suggests that most stakeholders favour undergrounding and screening as the most desirable options and it is likely that much of the funds will be allocated for these approaches.

Working with the Stakeholder Advisory Group, we will also identify smaller, more localised projects which can be delivered quickly to supplement the major projects. This will ensure that more affected areas around England and Wales stand to benefit from the fund.



Screening of transmission lines with tree planting



Construction work to replace overhead lines with underground cables

Working with stakeholders

Stakeholders hold the key to the success of this project. National Grid has established the Stakeholder Advisory Group chaired by leading environmentalist Chris Baines, to advise National Grid on the evaluation and ultimate selection of the projects proposed for delivery.

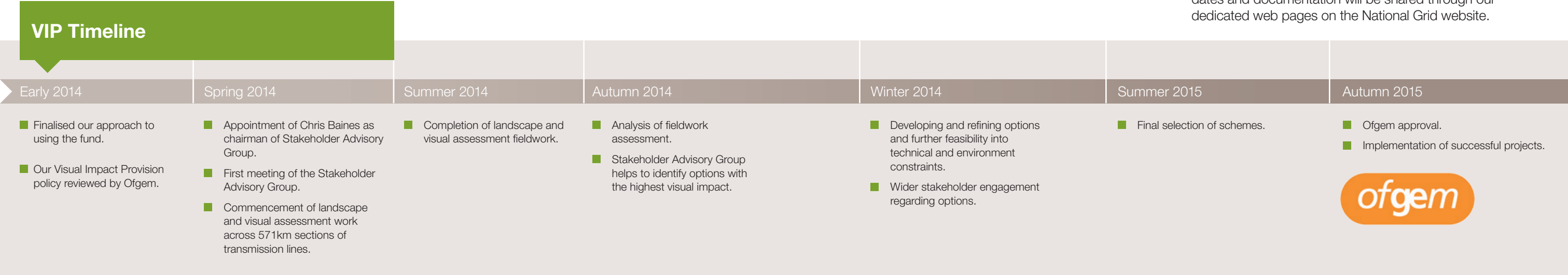
The Stakeholder Advisory Group comprises representatives from organisations dedicated to enhancing the landscape and countryside throughout England and Wales and they advise the project not only on the key decisions but also on the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders outside the main group.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group will

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

- Define the projects which should be taken to development phase by National Grid
- Re-consider or re-assess priorities and use of the fund, as development of projects progresses

National Grid will work in collaboration with the Stakeholder Advisory group to develop its approach to wider consultation. We expect to proactively reach out to and engage with stakeholders, through a broad engagement programme underpinned by open and transparent communications. This will include engagement through our website; one-to-one meetings; drop in days; and through written consultations.



Making choices together

Our objective for the Visual Impact Provision project will be to achieve the maximum enhancement to the landscape in England and Wales from the available funds whilst making sure that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result.

Landscape assessment

As a first step, we have appointed expert landscape consultants under the objective guidance of landscape architect Professor Carys Swanwick to assess each of the overhead lines within the scope of the project.

Broadly speaking the assessment involves:

- Defining the overall study area, to cover all the potential landscape and visual impacts, for each of the lines to be considered
- Identifying those aspects of the existing landscape or visual environment that are affected by the transmission lines
- Identifying, listing and briefly describing the impacts of each specific section of transmission line
- Assessing the importance of each impact for each section, using an agreed, standard assessment framework
- Comparing the level of importance of the impacts of each section.

Ensuring we make the right decisions

Following the landscape assessment, the Stakeholder Advisory Group will narrow down the field of potential projects and highlight the sections of lines with the very highest visual impact. This prioritised list will then be subject to a range of further assessments which will look at technical feasibility, cost, environmental and heritage issues. The opinions of local stakeholders, as well as those on the Stakeholder Advisory Group, will also be fed into the process. This will ensure that stakeholders have a substantial input in determining how the Visual Impact Provision should be used and how National Grid takes forward proposals for both large and smaller-scale projects.

Once clear priority projects emerge, we will engage further with stakeholder groups (for example, in the case of new underground cables, establishing acceptable route corridors and alignments) in line with the principles laid out in our published ‘Approach to the design and routing of new electricity transmission lines’. At this point we will carry out project-specific consultation before seeking to secure the necessary planning permissions and consents.

To keep everyone informed, all project information, updates and documentation will be shared through our dedicated web pages on the National Grid website.

What they say about the VIP

“It is encouraging that National Grid is engaging so openly with groups like CPRE to remove transmission lines and electricity pylons from our precious landscapes. We are realistic and understand that this will require difficult choices. In the long run, more needs to be done to reduce the impact of energy infrastructure on the beauty of the countryside. It’s early days but we have already had some very constructive debates and we are looking forward to seeing how the results of this process make a real difference on the ground.”

Neil Sinden

Director of Policy and Campaigns, CPRE

“By working with a range of stakeholders at a national level on the Visual Impact Provision project, we have a major opportunity to mitigate the visual impact of transmission lines in the most beautiful landscapes throughout England and Wales. Through collaboration we aim to make the most of the fund, making decisions to select projects that are not only achievable but bring as wide a benefit as possible.”

George Mayhew

Corporate Affairs Director, National Grid

“Our remit covers the quality and conservation of the landscape. We think this is a very exciting project for improving the landscape condition and scenic quality in our most precious places. My hope is that we will make a real difference to these landscapes and for the people who live and work in them or use them for leisure and enjoyment.”

Mary O’Connor

Landscape Institute

“Development should work harmoniously with sensitive landscapes and, where the opportunity presents itself we should also seek to enhance those places that are valued by walkers and other countryside users. England and Wales’ beautiful countryside is often best enjoyed on foot, and in seeking to protect and expand people’s ability to access and enjoy it we must also ensure we protect our most scenic areas. We are delighted to participate in a project which offers us the chance to do just that and we look forward to working with National Grid and its partners in order to help protect and enhance some of England and Wales’ most treasured landscapes.”

Tom Fewins

Policy Director, The Ramblers

For further information

Hector Pearson

National Grid, VIP Project Manager
visualimpact@nationalgrid.com

Ian McKenna

National Grid, Senior Policy Planner
visualimpact@nationalgrid.com



Visit our website at:

www.talkingnetworkstx.com/visual-impact-provision.aspx



Send an email to:

visualimpact@nationalgrid.com



Write to our freepost address at:

FREEPOST VISUAL IMPACT PROVISION

National Grid plc

National Grid House,
Warwick Technology Park,
Gallows Hill,
Warwick. CV34 6DA
United Kingdom

www.nationalgrid.com