

PROFESSOR CHRIS BAINES: STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY GROUP

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

1 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 1.1 My name is Chris Baines, and I am a Landscape Architect. I hold an Honours Degree in Horticulture from the University of London (Wye College) and a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from City of Birmingham Polytechnic (now Birmingham City University).
- 1.2 In the public sector I have served as a trustee of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, with a particular focus on landscape and natural heritage. I have also served as a member of the water industry regulator Ofwat's environmental advisory board and as an occasional adviser to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). As a self-employed professional of more than fifty years standing, I have worked as an independent adviser to senior executives in a wide range of national companies across the energy, water, minerals, built-development, environmental investment, forestry and farming industries. In the not-for-profit sector I have served pro-bono as a trustee or an honorary non-executive (president, patron or vice president) for several national conservation charities including the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, The Countryside Management Association and the National Trust. I have been awarded lifetime achievement medals by both the RSPB and the British Association of Nature Conservationists
- 1.3 I have served continuously as the independent chair of the National Grid Stakeholders' Advisory Group ("SAG") which was established in 2013 at the direction of Ofgem. This unique panel of director-level professionals from leading landscape Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) was originally established to guide the delivery of National Grid's Visual Impact Provision ("VIP") programme across England and Wales.
- 1.4 Members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group believe that the natural beauty of designated landscapes in England and Wales must be conserved and improved for everyone to enjoy both now and in the future. We, therefore, want to see as much as possible done to enhance biodiversity and reduce the negative impacts of transmission infrastructure in National Landscapes (like the Cotswolds) and National Parks.
- 1.5 The SAG provides a collaborative forum to evaluate projects based on principles established in the VIP Policy (CD D6). The SAG typically convenes on a six-monthly basis. Minutes of these meetings are taken and made publicly available on NGET's website.
- 1.6 The selection process for all of the VIP projects which have been taken forward was a rigorous one. Initially, an independent assessment of all 571km of National Grid's high voltage overhead transmission line (within National Parks and National Landscapes) was undertaken by a small team comprising experienced landscape architects. The methodology involved dividing up all 571km into subsections by landscape character producing some 120 subsections for analysis.
- 1.7 The SAG's input has guided the prioritisation of the Project as a candidate project during Ofgem's current price control period (known officially as 'RIIO-T2' which runs from April 2021 to March 2026). In consideration of the VIP Guiding Principles, the SAG confirmed at a meeting in June 2020 that the Project should be progressed during this period.
- 1.8 During this meeting, the decision to divide the line in the Cotswolds was also discussed due to its 22km length being considered too big for a single project. Landscape architects, Gillespies were

instructed to do the work and concluded that the selected Cotswold line could be divided into three clear subsections.

- 1.9 The central section of the three was identified as having the most adverse impact and the SAG asked National Grid to proceed with development work on this section after first consulting with the senior leadership team, including the CEO, at the Cotswolds AONB Partnership (known as the Cotswolds National Landscape). He agreed with the selection of the central section. The Cotswolds National Landscape is an independent statutory body that works with two leading purposes, defined by law, to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds and to increase the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities.
- 1.10 There has been objection made to the order which directly challenges why this particular section of overhead line in the Cotswolds National Landscape was selected for the Project. Mr Jonathan Morton Stanley and Corinium Construction Limited (**CD C7**) assert that the selection process has been opaque, which I do not accept. I believe that the Project's selection process is among the most comprehensive and highly consultative that I have ever encountered. This is a view shared by other SAG members and local and regional stakeholders. It has also been documented in extensive detail in technical reports and the minutes of meetings. All the extensive work that the SAG has undertaken has been well documented since 2015, and has been publicly available on the National Grid website.
- 1.11 Further, the objection also suggests that the Project will in fact have a harmful impact on part of the Cotswold National Landscape. I recognise that the short-term impacts will be significant – and National Grid has always made it clear to stakeholders and communities that this would be the case. However, the impact of this short-term disruption and the construction of two new cable sealing end compounds – the presence of which can be effectively mitigated through careful screening – is dwarfed by the positive impact of the net removal of 16 highly-intrusive pylons across open, common land. I believe – and I think as do many local and national stakeholders – that the landscape needs to be viewed holistically and that this Project will deliver enormous landscape enhancement. Furthermore, in terms of the short-term impacts, I have seen at first hand the completed project in the Peak District National Park and imagery from the completed project in the Dorset National Landscape and after only a short period of time the landscape and nature recovery evident in these areas is impressive.
- 1.12 It is my professional view that the project being promoted by National Grid will be a significant improvement principally in landscape and visual terms. There will also be positive benefits in terms of the opportunities for nature recovery and biodiversity net gain, as well as deepening our understanding of the historic environment in the area. A combination of all these factors will enhance the experience for everyone, from locals to the international visitors that come to this exceptional landscape.

2 WITNESS DECLARATION

- 2.1 I confirm that the evidence prepared for this Inquiry and contained within this statement of evidence are my true and professional opinions. I confirm that I have understood and complied with my duty to the Inquiry as an Expert Witness and have provided my evidence impartially and objectively. I confirm that I have no conflicts of interest.
- 2.2 I confirm that artificial intelligence has not been used to produce this statement of evidence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Baines', written in a cursive style.

CHRIS BAINES

10 October 2025