Visual Impact Provision
Fifth Annual Report
June 2018 – May 2019
After several years of objective landscape analysis, intense consultation and skilled technical design, the first of the VIP undergrounding schemes is underway in Dorset. It is testament to the project’s commitment to public and stakeholder engagement that the planning application drew a great deal of support from a variety of quarters, united in recognition of its unique potential. Indeed, a greatly improved understanding of the ancient Dorset landscape is proving a valuable ‘VIP bonus’. The project has been welcomed by archaeologists and engineers alike and demonstrates the benefits of investing in creative partnerships. The same shared learning process is thriving in Snowdonia and the Peak District, where schemes for pylon removal are also progressing well.

In the New Forest, thorough consultation with the National Park Authority and many other key stakeholders resulted in substantial ongoing refinements to the VIP proposals. Unfortunately, it became clear that the timetable for achieving planning consent within the current funding window had become too tight, leading to the project being paused. An alternative, high-potential scheme in the North Wessex Downs is now being energetically pursued. Initial indications are that this will be a more straightforward project to implement in the time available.

Meanwhile, the Landscape Enhancement Initiative is being widely embraced by a whole range of environmental partners. Although the sums involved are relatively modest, these grants for practical improvements are highly valued, helping to spread the impact of VIP much more widely and deliver results rapidly.

In this fifth annual report, I am excited to say that VIP is finally maturing from a tantalising prospect to a ground-breaking endeavour, with our first project moving into delivery in Dorset. The process to get this far has been long, but working within these special environments is a great responsibility and technically challenging. Weighing the potential visual and landscape benefits of VIP against any environmental impacts remains a key priority to unlock projects that will enhance cherished English and Welsh landscapes for generations to come. The VIP project has people at its heart. Protected landscapes are cultural beacons, drawing in millions of visitors from a diverse range of backgrounds, towns and cities. The social significance of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks, as reinforced in the emerging Glover Review, will ensure the project’s success can resonate well beyond the sightline of the pylons it will remove.

This initiative only exists because consumers told Ofgem they wanted to see visual improvements to our natural heritage. It has thrived over the past five years on the enthusiasm of local communities and is underpinned by the advice of expert groups across England and Wales. Once again, our latest acceptability research has demonstrated that the majority of billpayers remain supportive.

We received further encouragement in May 2019 when Ofgem confirmed that a provision for visual mitigation projects will continue up until at least 2026. This will allow us to explore further VIP projects to enhance more protected landscapes. Here’s to the next five years, and beyond.

Foreword by Michelle Clark
1. Visual Impact Provision project

National Grid Electricity Transmission's (National Grid)1 Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project is developing plans to place existing overhead transmission lines underground in nationally important landscapes in England and Wales. Its aim is to help reduce the visual impact of electricity infrastructure in these landscapes. We have developed projects in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), North Wessex Downs AONB, New Forest National Park, Peak District National Park and Snowdonia National Park.

There is a £500m Ofgem2 provision to carry out this work in these landscapes. We are passionate about playing our part in conserving, enhancing and preserving Britain’s natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage. The most important task for us is to use this provision to achieve the maximum enhancement to landscapes affected by our network while ensuring that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result. To ensure that this aim is achieved, we are working closely with our Stakeholder Advisory Group, which we set up at the start of the project in 2014 to advise us on the evaluation and selection of potential projects. This project uses the best available technology and innovation to deliver the reduction of visual impact to landscapes affected by our network while ensuring that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result. To ensure that this aim is achieved, we are working closely with our Stakeholder Advisory Group, which we set up at the start of the project in 2014 to advise us on the evaluation and selection of potential projects.

This fifth annual report records our progress and key activities in delivering the major undergrounding projects and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) between June 2018 and May 2019. It builds on progress detailed in our four previous annual reports. To read them, or to find out more about how the projects were selected, please visit our website www.nationalgrid.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision.

Project statistics

- 571km of electricity transmission line in AONBs and National Parks assessed for visual impact
- 30 AONBs and National Parks in England and Wales eligible to benefit
- 53.7km of line within eight protected landscapes judged to have the highest impact
- Five sections of overhead line prioritised for undergrounding
- Landscape Enhancement Initiative provides funding of up to £200,000 for smaller projects

2. Working with stakeholders

Stakeholders are central to the success of the VIP project. The views of stakeholders are vital in helping make decisions on how the provision should be used to maximise its potential benefits.

As well as seeking the views of a wide variety of local stakeholders including local groups, communities and landowners, we established a national Stakeholder Advisory Group in April 2014 to guide our work on the project.

2.1 Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Stakeholder Advisory Group advises National Grid on the evaluation and ultimate selection of potential projects. Chaired by leading environmentalist Chris Baines, the Stakeholder Advisory Group comprises senior representatives from organisations dedicated to enhancing the landscape and countryside throughout England and Wales as well as Ofgem (the electricity and gas markets regulator) and National Grid itself. They advise the project team on key decisions and on the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders outside the Group.

Stakeholder Advisory Group members:
2.2 Stakeholder Advisory Group activities

The Stakeholder Advisory Group met three times over the past year. The minutes of these meetings are available on our website www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision. Below is an overview of the key activities and issues considered by the Group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting</th>
<th>Main items of discussion</th>
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| 12th meeting 5-6 September 2018 Held in the Peak District | • Site visit to the Peak District National Park project area and presentation from Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority, outlining the specific features of the National Park, the challenges it faces and how the VIP project aligns with the Authority’s vision for the future.  
• Generation and discussion of ideas for the future of VIP in the next Ofgem price control period (RIIO-T2).  
• Consideration of potential VIP projects in RIIO-T2, with a shortlist of projects identified for further investigation by National Grid.  
• Landscape Enhancement Initiative update, including progress of latest applications and discussion of ideas for the promotion of the scheme to encourage uptake. |
| 13th meeting 4 December 2018 Held in Birmingham | • Update on potential VIP projects in RIIO-T2, including early technical investigations into the feasibility of underground solutions in engineering terms.  
• The Group agreed that RIIO-T2 VIP projects should be pursued in collaboration with District Network Operators wherever possible to enhance their impact.  
• Discussion of the New Forest National Park VIP project in relation to protected habitats for bird species and the potential for the project to pursue an Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest case.  
• Sourcing of partner funding to assist applicants with the development of Landscape Enhancement Initiative was identified as a key action to increase uptake. |
| 14th meeting 26 March 2019 Held in Birmingham | • Progress updates on the prioritised projects, including the appointment of Morgan Sindall as main contractor on the Dorset AONB VIP project ahead of work starting.  
• Extended discussion of the New Forest National Park VIP project, following which the Group advised National Grid to pause development until the legal position concerning temporary disruption of European habitats can be clarified.  
• Update on early conversations with a potential funding partner to support AONBs developing Landscape Enhancement Initiative applications during RIIO-T2. |

2.3 Wider stakeholder engagement and empowerment

We have continued to work with our Stakeholder Reference Groups in each of the project areas. These groups, established at the beginning of the Visual Impact Provision project, are attended by representatives of the relevant AONB Partnership or National Park Authority and other local technical stakeholders. They provide vital information and advice to inform project development.

We held drop-in events for members of the public in the New Forest, Peak District and Snowdonia National Parks to involve local people in project development. The shows people how plans for the projects are developing and provided an opportunity to share their views. Members of National Grid’s team were on hand at the events to answer questions and discuss the technical aspects of the projects in more detail.

Project websites were also kept regularly updated to keep local stakeholders and interested parties abreast of the latest developments. More details of the drop-in events and a summary of the Stakeholder Reference Group members for each area are available in the project summaries. We have also shared project information, updates and documentation on our project website www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision to keep stakeholders and the public up-to-date as the project progresses.

The two companies that own the Scottish transmission network are developing their own projects to use the Ofgem provision. We have continued to liaise with these companies to share knowledge and experiences to maximise the potential benefits across England, Scotland and Wales.
3. Our VIP projects explored

Our major Visual Impact Provision projects aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales by replacing National Grid overhead transmission lines with underground solutions, while avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts and balancing technical deliverability and cost.

We are doing this through a transparent process which is led by the Stakeholder Advisory Group, drawing on input from technical experts, local stakeholders and communities. The VIP project is supported by National Grid’s project team and external specialist advisors.

Over the past year, we have continued to progress the four projects initially chosen for potential undergrounding, building on work undertaken previously. This has been informed by technical and engineering design work as well as discussions with stakeholders, landowners and communities.

In March 2019, National Grid decided to pause work on the New Forest National Park project following advice from legal experts, the regulator and the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

Due to the New Forest project being paused, work has begun to determine the technical feasibility of delivering an undergrounding project in the North Wessex Downs AONB using the current Ofgem provision.

The following pages provide a progress update on each of the projects as well as a look ahead to activities planned for 2019/20.

Visual Impact Provision project areas

North Wessex Downs AONB

We aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales by replacing National Grid overhead transmission lines with underground solutions.
The Dorset project will replace 8.8km of overhead line near Dorchester with an underground cable, permanently removing 22 pylons from the landscape.

The route for the underground cable runs from Winterbourne Abbas to the edge of the South Dorset Escarpment at Friar Waddon. To connect the cable to the remaining existing overhead line, sealing end compounds and associated terminal pylons will need to be constructed at Winterbourne Abbas and Friar Waddon Hill.

**Project route**

![Indicative underground cable route corridor](image)

- **Indicative underground cable route corridor**
- **Existing National Grid overhead line (indented)**
- **Existing National Grid line to be removed**
- **New National Grid underground cable**
- **New National Grid overhead line**
- **Existing National Grid pylon**
- **Proposed Sealing End Compound**

**Progress to date**

Planning permission for the project was granted by West Dorset District Council in June 2018 subject to the meeting of planning conditions and a unilateral undertaking being agreed. Since June 2018, we have been working to meet the planning conditions. This has included:

- Liaising with Historic England and Dorset Council over the potential for archaeological discoveries, including an agreement that National Grid would undertake to excavate a large number of archaeological trial trenches. More details of what has been discovered can be found over the page.
- Agreeing terms with landowners to obtain the rights to build, operate, access and maintain the new cable and remove the existing infrastructure. This work has been led by National Grid’s lands team and appointed land agents, Bruton Knowles.
- Delivering environmental mitigation measures such as the relocation of some badger setts and dormice before construction work can begin.
- Developing a community relations plan to keep the public and local residents informed during the project’s construction. This includes the establishment of a Community Liaison Group and plans for a Project Information Centre near Winterbourne Abbas where visitors – including schools and local interest groups – can make an appointment to learn more about the project.

The project also received consent from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to replace a short section of line to connect to the new sealing end compound north of the A35.

The application for project funding that was submitted to Ofgem in April 2018 was approved in October 2018. A budget of £116million was approved for the Dorset project from the overall provision made available by Ofgem.

In January 2019, Morgan Sindall was appointed as the main contractor for the project.

**Stakeholder Reference Group members**

- Dorset AONB
- Historic England
- Dorset Council
- Environment Agency
Dorset AONB

Dorset VIP project - archaeological trial trench finds

Between July and October 2018, 147 trial trenches were excavated along the route proposed for cable burial. Several key areas along the route can be considered of moderate to high regional archaeological significance based on what was found and warrant further investigation:

- Bronze Age barrows, west of Winterbourne Abbas
- Early Bronze Age enclosure system with potentially an earlier Neolithic element, west of Winterbourne Steepleton
- Early Bronze Age barrows, urned cremation burial and undated enclosure systems, west of Raw Hill
- Roman agricultural / possible settlement activity at Bronkham Hill and Corton Down

There will be an archaeological watching brief throughout the project’s construction with National Grid and Morgan Sindall continuing to work closely with the Dorset Council Archaeologist and Historic England.

Stakeholder and public engagement

One Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held in Dorset in 2018/19. We have established a Community Liaison Group for the project.

The first meeting of the group was held in March 2019 and was attended by representatives from the Dorset AONB Partnership, Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton Parish Council, Winterbourne St Martin Parish Council, Cherhill Bank Parish Council, The Ramblers, Dorset Wildlife Trust, RSPB South Dorset, Dorchester West Rural Policing, CPRE West Dorset, Dorchester Rotary Club, Country Land and Business Association, Dorset Local Access Forum, South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership, Winterbourne Valley First School and St Martin’s Church, Martinstown.

A public drop-in event will be held in summer 2019 at the request of the Community Liaison Group.

The event will allow us to share more information on the construction timetable, the traffic management needed to create the site entrance from the A35 and how National Grid is managing working within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Looking forward

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents, the current indicative programme is that on-site works will begin in July 2019 and take approximately three years to complete. It is anticipated that by 2022 the new underground cable will be in service and that the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed.

We will continue to work with the local community and our stakeholders throughout the construction phase to ensure that the project achieves the greatest possible enhancement of the landscape.

A Project Information Centre will open by winter 2019/20 and we have developed a plan to keep the public informed of progress.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared through our Dorset project website: http://dorset.nationalgrid.co.uk.

New Forest National Park

In March 2019, National Grid decided to pause work on its landscape enhancement project to remove eight pylons from Hale Purlelu in the New Forest National Park following advice from legal experts, the regulator and the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

Current route option
New Forest National Park

The decision was made due to emerging complexities surrounding the European regulations designed to protect the natural habitats of protected species.

While these regulations are designed to prevent the permanent loss of habitats, and not to stop short-term work that we believe could have provided a net gain to the environment in which we were working, it is evident that the legal position is complex and, importantly, untested for a project of this nature. It is therefore unlikely that a planning application for this project would receive approval before the funding deadline.

To inform the decision, detailed environmental and ecological surveys were undertaken and we engaged with stakeholders and the public. While the project was supported in principle by many individuals and organisations with an interest in the management of the National Park, the response from residents was mixed.

Three Stakeholder Reference Group meetings were held in the New Forest in 2018/19. In July 2018, a representative of Hale Parish Council was invited to join the Group.

Throughout the year, National Grid held meetings with a wide range of stakeholder groups including the New Forest Verderers, the Commoners Defence Association, representatives of local commoners and users of Hale Purleau including members of the Protect Hale Purleau movement, senior representatives from the National Trust and Go New Forest, a community interest company promoting tourism in the New Forest. National Grid also contacted local residents with properties immediately adjacent to Hale Purleau with an offer to meet with them to discuss the proposed project. Over 30 residents took up this offer.

National Grid also had a stand at the New Forest Show and the Ellingham & Ringwood Show.

Looking forward
Following work being paused on the New Forest project, the Stakeholder Advisory Group has asked National Grid to investigate whether it will be possible to develop and achieve approval from Ofgem for a similar-scale VIP project at a different shortlisted location within the RIIO-T1 period which runs to the end of March 2021. National Grid is currently investigating the possibility of developing a project in the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Peak District National Park

The Peak District National Park (East) project would replace a 2km section of overhead line east of the Woodhead Tunnel near Dunford Bridge with an underground connection, permanently removing seven pylons and a sealing end compound from the landscape.

The preferred route for the connection runs alongside the Trans Pennine Trail to the south of the River Don to join the existing cables in the Woodhead Tunnel. To connect the remaining existing overhead line, a sealing end compound and associated terminal pylon would need to be constructed at Wogden Foot.

Current route option

- Existing National Grid overhead line proposed for removal
- Existing National Grid overhead line to be retained
- Existing National Grid pylon
- Replacement pylon
- Proposed sealing end compound location
- Proposed underground line route
- Proposed underground line route
Progress to date

Ongoing archaeological, environmental and hydrological studies have continued throughout 2018/19 to support the creation of detailed engineering designs for the project. Ground investigation surveys took place in summer 2018 to support this process.

For the project to be delivered, the Trans Pennine Trail would need to be temporarily diverted to allow for construction work. National Grid is fully committed to ensuring that the Trans Pennine Trail remains open and accessible throughout this period for the many local residents, long distance walkers, cyclists and horse riders who enjoy its special qualities.

Detailed work with the Trans Pennine Trail Office and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has led to the development of a suitable diversion. Our proposed temporary diversion runs across agricultural land to the north of the River Don and discussions with relevant landowners are progressing well. The temporary diversion would be fully accessible for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Three Stakeholder Reference Group meetings were held in the Peak District in 2018/19. Several other stakeholder briefings have taken place including with elected members for Barnsley MBC’s Penistone West and Penistone East wards.

Discussions on planting, screening and environmental mitigation have been ongoing between National Grid and a stakeholder group including ecology and biodiversity specialists from Barnsley MBC, the Peak District National Park Authority and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust – as well as landscape architects. The collaborative approach to developing an appropriate solution is working well and the agreed designs will form a part of the planning application for the project.

Stakeholder and public engagement

Five public consultation events were held at the end of 2018 to give the public the opportunity to comment on plans for the project, including detail on proposals for environmental and landscape mitigation, traffic and construction management and the Trans Pennine Trail diversion. The events were held at the Pennine Sailing Club, Millhouse Green Institute, St John’s Community Centre in Penistone and Dunford Parish Community Centre.

Attendees included representatives from Barnsley MBC, Sustrans, Dunford Parish Council, PLACE and Grand Northern Railways as well as local residents and business owners, affected landowners and representatives of community groups.

A total of 60 feedback statements were submitted to the project team during the consultation window; 40 respondents made comments indicating they were fully supportive of the project, while a further six gave neutral or balanced feedback.

Several groups promoting the potential for a new freight / high-speed railway between Sheffield and Manchester alongside the route of the Trans Pennine Trail attended the public consultation events. The groups’ main concern is that the VIP project would make it less likely that a railway could be built along the Trans Pennine Trail in the future. As a result of the feedback, National Grid has met with a number of stakeholders to discuss and clarify this issue including Sheffield City Region transport team, Barnsley MBC, the Peak District National Park Authority and the Rt Hon Angela Smith, MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge. It also met with Transport for the North, which confirmed that this route does not feature in its 30-year Strategic Transport Plan.

The VIP project team also took a trade stand at the Penistone Show in September 2018. Around 40 people visited the stand and engaged with the team to learn more about the project.

Looking forward

Environmental assessment work will continue to enable the environmental mitigation and enhancement proposals, such as improving Dunford Bridge car park, to be finalised.

We hope to submit a planning application for the project to Barnsley MBC in summer 2019. The tender process for the main construction contractor will be progressed alongside this.

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents, the current indicative programme is that on-site works will begin in 2020, a year later than initially anticipated to avoid clashing with another National Grid project that requires an electricity outage on the circuit earlier than the VIP project.

It is anticipated that in 2021 the new underground section will be in service and that by mid-2022 the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed and all remediation work will be completed.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared through our Peak District East project website: http://peakdistricteast.nationalgrid.co.uk.
Snowdonia National Park

The Snowdonia National Park project would replace a 3km section of overhead line crossing the Dwyryd Estuary near Porthmadog with an underground solution, permanently removing 10 pylons from the landscape.

The new connection would run through an underground tunnel from Cilfor to Garth under the Dwyryd Estuary. A head house would be required at each end of the tunnel in Cilfor and Garth.

To connect the remaining existing overhead line in the east, a sealing end compound and associated terminal pylon would be needed near Cilfor.

Current route option

Snowdonia National Park

Progress to date

Survey work has continued in the Dwyryd Estuary, including a second round of ground investigations in August 2018, to inform the development of engineering designs for the underground tunnel which would house the new connection.

The work was agreed with landowners, Gwynedd Council, the Harbour Master and Natural Resources Wales.

Following Horizon Nuclear Power’s decision to suspend works on the proposed nuclear power station at Wylfa on Anglesey, the National Grid team has reviewed and assessed the impact this will have on the Snowdonia VIP project and its impact on the ratings (power requirements) needed for the VIP section.

The conclusion of this work is a reduction in the power requirements of the electrical circuits that would be inside the tunnel.

The removal of the concrete bases which the pylons running across the estuary stand upon remains an engineering challenge. Typically, the bases are dug out to about 1 to 1.4 metres in depth and covered in an environmentally appropriate material.

We are continuing to work with Natural Resources Wales and marine ecological specialists to determine the best approach in the case of the Dwyryd Estuary. National Grid has explored several options to remove them and discussions with stakeholders are ongoing.
Looking forward

A planning application will be submitted jointly to both Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park Authority towards the end of 2019, and a funding application to Ofgem is anticipated to be submitted in 2020.

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents from the Local Authorities and Natural Resources Wales, the current indicative programme is that on-site works will begin in winter 2021 and take approximately five years to complete. It is anticipated that the new underground connection will be in service in late 2025 and the existing pylons and section of overhead line will be removed in 2026.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared in both English and Welsh through our Snowdonia project website: http://snowdonia.nationalgrid.co.uk.

Stakeholder Reference Group members

The events were held at the Snowdonia National Park Authority offices, Penrhyneddauaeth Memorial Hall and Talsarnau Community Hall. In total, 102 people attended the events, including representatives from the Snowdonia National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales, the Snowdonia Society, Penrhyneddauaeth Town Council, Talsarnau Community Council as well as local residents and business owners, affected landowners and representatives of community groups.

Looking forward


Looking forward

National Grid is continuing with technical and engineering studies to determine the project’s feasibility. Detailed engineering surveys and environmental work will take place alongside ongoing stakeholder engagement and negotiations with landowners for the rights required to construct and operate the cables.

If the project can progress, public consultation on the proposals would take place ahead of the submission of a planning application in 2020. Construction would take approximately two years and would be targeted to commence in 2021.

Project information, updates and documents will be shared through our VIP project website www.nationalgrid.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision.

The project will only be able to progress if investigations indicate that it could achieve full planning consent in the RIIO-T1 regulatory period, which ends in March 2021.

Progress to date

Positive meetings have been held with the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership, which is supportive of the project. Stakeholders have also been contacted about the potential project so that National Grid can hear their feedback at an early stage and create an open dialogue.

Stakeholders contacted include elected officials and officers of Wiltshire Council, Bishops Cannings and Rowde Parish Councils, Devizes Town Council, the Rt Hon Claire Perry, MP for Devizes, Historic England, Natural England and local organisations including access groups and interest societies.

Stakeholder engagement

The inaugural Stakeholder Reference Group meeting will be held in July 2019 in Devizes.
4. Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is an important part of the VIP project. Championed by our stakeholders, the initiative aims to use some of the Ofgem provision for smaller visual improvement projects.

Launched in May 2016, the LEI offers grants of up to £200,000 for local visual improvement projects. Each of the 30 National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships in England and Wales covered by the initiative can submit applications for the funding of projects. The overall objective of the initiative is to reduce the landscape and visual impact of National Grid’s existing electricity transmission infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected designated landscapes.

Examples of projects that may be funded include:
- Localised tree planting
- Management of hedgerows
- Changes to trails, footpaths, cycleways and riding routes
- Rebuilding of dry stone walls
- Enhancing the special qualities of the landscape which may also benefit biodiversity

About the Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The LEI is driven by our stakeholders. Projects are suggested by the relevant AONB Partnership or National Park Authority before being considered by the LEI Approvals Panel. Independently chaired by Mary O’Connor from the Landscape Institute, the panel includes experts from Cadw, Historic England, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales and makes recommendations to Ofgem on which projects to fund. The initiative is supported by National Grid’s project team and external specialists, including landscape advisors to offer guidance to eligible applicants on potential LEI projects.

Progress to date

Since its launch in May 2016, more than £2.3m has been allocated to projects across England and Wales.

Examples of projects that have benefited from LEI include:
- Enhancing the special qualities of the landscape
- Rebuilding of dry stone walls
- Managed hedge and tree planting
- Localised tree planting
- Rebuilding of dry stone walls
- Enhancing the special qualities of the landscape

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Five new projects received confirmation of their grants from Ofgem in January 2019:
- Kent Downs AONB: High Downs
- Kent Downs AONB: North Downs Living Grid project
- Dorset AONB: Reconnecting the Ridgeway

Ofgem has requested further clarification from National Grid on two of the applications. A decision on funding is expected by summer 2019.

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Future application windows

There are two submission windows coming up in 2019/20 during which eligible AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities can submit project ideas:
- Window 7 – June 2019
- Window 8 – January 2020

If you are interested in finding out more about the LEI, please visit our website for more information: www.lei.nationalgrid.com.
Timeless appeal in the High Weald

The historically rich landscape of the High Weald AONB is defined by its mosaic of patchwork fields, small copses, shaws and hedges.

Supported by the Landscape Enhancement Initiative, the AONB Partnership is working to enhance this internationally important setting through its ‘Beautiful Boundaries’ project.

The three-year project focuses on locations where pylons are visible from the area’s popular footpaths and promoted trails including the 1066 Walk and the Sussex Border Path.

A range of measures such as tree planting to screen the overhead line from key viewpoints are being used to create a sense of timelessness.

Lost and overgrazed hedges are being restored to strengthen the landscape’s distinctive boundary features and enhance wildlife habitats.

To promote long-term sustainability, education sessions on good hedge management have also been made available for landowners at nearby Scotney Castle.

"The LEI has offered our farmers a rare opportunity to work together to improve the scenery and wildlife around the transmission line. Walkers from near and far have appreciated the new hedges in blossom this spring and we are looking forward to seeing their autumn colour."

Gerry Sherwin, Business Manager at the High Weald AONB Partnership

Case study:
High Weald AONB, Beautiful Boundaries

Lost and overgrazed hedges are being restored to strengthen the landscape’s distinctive boundary features and enhance wildlife habitats.
Enhancing the majesty of Snowdonia

Case study:
Snowdonia National Park Authority, Dyfrin Maentwrog Woodland Restoration and Landscape Improvement

"Snowdonia has benefitted greatly from the LEI. The initiative has been successful in bringing together different organisations - including charitable and voluntary organisations - to make landscape and biodiversity enhancements on a meaningful scale. These improvements will be of great benefit to walkers and other users who wish to enjoy the National Park."

Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning and Land Management at the Snowdonia National Park Authority

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is supporting three projects in Snowdonia to enhance the National Park’s special qualities.

Two woodland restoration and improvement schemes are encouraging biodiversity and protecting natural beauty near to overhead lines. New forestry planting is creating wildlife corridors through species-rich habitats, with more than 8ha of native woodland planted and 871m of hedgerow already restored at Maentwrog.

A programme to control invasive plant species such as rhododendron is helping to conserve and revitalise the landscape’s ancient woodland at several sites, including at Llan Ffestiniog.

The third project, ‘Snowdonia Traditional Boundaries’, recognises the importance of historic features including hedgerows and dry-stone walls, not only visually but as hallmarks of local culture and sense of place.

Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust and both Welsh farming unions, as well as nearly 100 individual landowners, are all important partners in the delivery of the three projects.

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- North Wessex Downs AONB (specifically, overhead transmission line sections YYM.1, YYM.4, YYM.5 and YYM.6)
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To find out more about the RIIO regulatory framework please visit our website: https://www.nationalgridet.com/about-us/how-we-are-regulated

To find out more about our plans for RIIO-T2 please visit our website: https://www.nationalgridet.com/working-together/have-your-say-future-business-plans

At the Group’s request, National Grid is also keeping a watching brief on infrastructure developments associated with the following locations which will determine their feasibility:

- Peak District National Park (West)
- Anglesey AONB

It was agreed that a project in the Lake District National Park could potentially be pursued in RIIO-T3 if VIP continued beyond 2026, and that it could be brought forward if other projects could not progress.

The Group and National Grid also agreed to work with the relevant authorities to encourage the submission of Landscape Enhancement Initiative schemes at Hadrian’s Wall in Northumberland National Park and within the High Weald AONB.

Looking forward: RIIO-T2 – the next price control period

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