Inside

Wombling free… the charity keeping London’s countryside alive

An open mind to open water swimmers

The grantor making a living out of hiding from wildlife

WIN A two-night getaway for two

Mind the Squash

The former City banker who quit the daily Tube crush to pursue a passion for pumpkins
How to contact National Grid if you are a grantor

Land officers provide a day-to-day point of contact for National Grid grantors. You can also contact them if you have any questions about compensation, reinvestment, maintenance or refurbishment plans in your area – the team will be happy to help.

If you have any queries, please telephone 0800 389 5113 and select from the four options below.

- Electricity wayleave payments and change of name/address ownership of land
- EAST AND SCOTLAND
- SOUTH
- WEST AND WALES

LUMP SUM PAYMENT FOR CONVERTING WAYLEAVES TO EASEMENTS

Many of National Grid’s grantors currently receive annual payments in line with their wayleave agreements and the rates set by the NPSF and CLA. But did you know you can convert the wayleave into an easement and receive a one-off capital payment instead?

National Grid encourage you to seek professional advice from a qualified chartered surveyor or agricultural valuer. National Grid will pay reasonable agent’s fees in accordance with its wayleave agreement and the rates set by the NFU and CLA. But did you know you can convert the wayleave into an easement and receive a one-off capital payment instead?

First of all, a big thank you to everyone who completed the feedback survey in the last edition of Gridline.

We gained invaluable information about what you think of the magazine and were delighted that around 90% of you felt it made you more aware of National Grid’s role and aims, and 88% felt part of a wider grantor community because of the stories we’ve featured.

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Energy revolution
Britain is set to achieve an historic milestone this year, with more electricity being generated from zero carbon sources than fossil fuels for the first time since the Industrial Revolution.

According to National Grid Electricity System Operator, annual power generation data from the past decade shows our reliance on cleaner energy sources such as wind, solar, nuclear, hydro power and storage will overtake coal and gas-fired power generation this year.

It makes a ‘tipping point’ milestone in Britain’s journey towards the Government’s target of net zero emissions by 2050, and has been achieved by increased partnerships with our neighbours and a transformation in clean energy led by National Grid.

Outstanding again
The National Grid training centre apprenticeship programme has been hailed as “outstanding” for the third time in a row by Ofsted inspectors.

The National Learning and Development Centre in Eakring, Nottinghamshire, is the only one of its kind in the UK and offers a range of technical, professional and leadership development courses and residential work experience programmes. With a 50% female attendance on many courses, it’s also helping to develop the next generation of women to consider STEM careers.

The Regional Land Manager South, whose patch covers a quarter of southern England from Cornwall to Norfolk, is keen to stress the partnership that exists between grantors and National Grid’s teams.

He said: “One grantor are our eyes and ears and if they have our assets on their land – and 70% of our equipment is in rural areas – we need to make sure they know who is on their land and what to do if they’re not sure if someone should be there or not.

“It’s important for landowners to know that our Land Officers and Land Agents are there to work with them prior to working on their land, but also sometimes in an emergency.”

The majority of work National Grid carries out is planned, when teams will contact grantors in advance to inform them about the need for maintenance or replacing pylons, fittings and cables. Surveyor Rob Gosler says: “That means a letter or personal visit in advance, but whenever our teams arrive to discuss work needed on your land, always ask for ID. They’ll be expecting you to check and will thank you for doing so.”

The personal approach whenever more complex work is needed is in place to help National Grid’s engineers overcome any issues they may face on grantors’ land and to reassure grantors.

Team member Becky Saddling up for the scouts
The team at the forefront of National Grid’s relationship with grantors has joined forces to make a difference in the community.

More than 50 Land Officers and support team members from Land and Acquisitions jumped at the chance to give two much-loved and well-used organisations a facelift.

One group headed for the Riding for the Disabled Association’s (RDA) new headquarters near Warwick, where they cleared overgrown areas and painted the stables for the charity.

The rest went to Birkelow near Coventry, where the area’s scouts have used the Rough Close campsite facilities for decades, to paint cabins, renovate walkways and hammer in new fence posts.

Joe Martin, Compliance Manager in National Grid’s Land and Property team, said: “Our Land Officers, and Central and Regional teams spend a lot of time every day meeting and talking to grantors on the phone about issues on their land and in the wider community. Our teams are spread all over the country and enjoy volunteering, not only to help stakeholders but also to meet each other so they can work together to resolve any grantor issues.”

Almost every region of the UK has experienced a rise in rural crime.

It’s a blight that cost the nation almost £30 million last year and one that affects not only landowners through loss of livestock and equipment, but also National Grid substations, cables and pylons.

“Then we work together with our grantors to ensure security and safety is a major priority that forms one of the most potent factors in the way we operate,” says Tim Sisk.

The team spent the day clearing and painting the scout centre (right) and renovating the campsite facilities for decades, to paint cabins, renovate walkways and hammer in new fence posts.

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Team member Becky

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BIG GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR COUNTRYSIDE ENHANCEMENT SCHEMES

Grants are being urged to play a greater role in a nationwide initiative that is enhancing the landscape by reducing the impact of National Grid’s transmission lines.

The Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project, launched five years ago, is already making positive changes to the landscape in four key Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks in Devon, North Wessex Downs, the Peak District and Snowdonia. National Grid is now urging landowners to partner applicants (opposite) to seek grants for local visual improvement and landscape enhancement schemes as part of the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

Grants of up to £300,000 are available for projects in each of the 30 National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales impacted by National Grid transmission lines, some of which built in the 1960s when planning priorities were different.

Tree planting, hedgerow management, footpath work and dry stone wall rebuilding are covered by the scheme, which is also helping to conserve and revitalise the landscape’s ancient species-rich habitats, with more than eight hectares of native woodland maintained by landowners to partner applicants (opposite). A project to control invasive plant species such as rhododendron is also helping to conserve and revitalise the landscape’s ancient woodland at several sites including Llan Ffestiniog.

The third project, Snowdonia Traditional Boundaries, recognises the importance of historic features including hedgerows and dry-stone walls as hallmarks of the unique local culture and landscape.

Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust and both Welsh farming unions, along with nearly 100 individual landowners, have joined in the delivery of the project.

The wildflower species-rich trees planted at nearby Scotney Castle to promote long-term sustainability. Gerry Sheerin, Business Manager at the High Weald AONB Partnership, said: “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 are already appreciating the new hedges when they’ve been in bloom and in the run up to Autumn.”

HIGH WEALD AONB, KENT

A project to screen overhead lines from walkers and create a sense of timelessness is transforming an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Kent.

Tree planting is shielding the lines and pylons from key viewpoints along the promoted 1066 Walk and the Sussex Border Path trails and footpaths in the countryside just south of Tonbridge.

Lost and overgrown hedges are also being restored to strengthen the landscape’s distinctive boundary features and enhance wildlife habitats thanks to an LEI grant funding the three-year project. The AONB is working to enhance the historically rich area, a beautiful mosaic of patchwork fields, small copses, shaws and hedges, through its Beautiful Boundaries project.

The grant is also funding education sessions for landowners at nearby Snettisham Castle to promote long-term sustainability. Gerry Sheerin, Business Manager at the High Weald AONB Partnership, said: “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 are already appreciating the new hedges when they’ve been in bloom and in the run up to Autumn.”

DID YOU KNOW?
All electricity transmission network owners in Great Britain are funded by a service charge mechanism set by Ofgem: the electricity and gas networks regulators.

NATIONAL PARKS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR LEI FUNDING

AONB ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR LEI FUNDING

DID YOU KNOW?

The energy regulator, Ofgem, will spend £500 million to mitigate the visual impact of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes.

FOR LEI FUNDING

TO APPLY FOR LEI FUNDING

jonathan.cawley@nationalgrid.com
Swimming free

Laughter, giggling and chit-chat echo over the otherwise whispering reed beds of a meandering river, its banks bristling with abundant wildlife. Nearby, behind a bush, the photographer is temporarily stark naked as he struggles into his wetsuit, more than ready to suffer for his art. He doesn’t mull. The field is in the depths of a grantor’s land and his subjects, mercifully out of view, are a group of five women enjoying an equally liberating experience. They’re in cossies and it’s almost September, but they insist it’s always fine after the first 10 or 20 seconds.

Open water, or wild swimming, has almost doubled in popularity in the past few years, with first-timers pulled back time and again as if by a current by the hobby’s physical and mental benefits.

“There’s nothing quite like it,” says the Outdoor Swimming Society’s Ella Foote (left) as she leads the group with more than a hint of subterfuge through cow-filled fields to the water’s edge at Thundry Meadows near Farnham in Surrey.

Within minutes these seasoned swimmers, around half a century’s experience of open water exploration between them, are in and rolling back the years. All but Ella are in their 50s and 60s but say the weekly watery commune with nature – no winter break for these hardy souls – makes them feel younger.

More than four million people a year take to our countryside’s lakes, lochs, rivers and seas and the numbers of official open water swimmers are doubling every year as the hobby’s health benefits gain credence.

“Nothing like a swimming pool,” added Ella.

Grantors urged to make a splash and back the wonder of wild swimming

IN NUMBERS

94%

The percentage of open water swimmers aged between 25 and 65.

4.1M

The number of people who swim in lakes, lochs, rivers and seas in the UK in the year since November 2017.
Swimming free

OUTDOOR SWIMMING SOCIETY’S SAFETY TIPS

SPOT THE DANGERS – Ask locals for advice, read local warning and guidance signs, and find your exit point before entering the water. Beware of underwater hazards and water currents.

SWIM SOBER – Alcohol and drugs impair judgement, swimming ability and body temperature.

SWIM WITH OTHERS – Take someone with you when you go into water. If something goes wrong they will be able to get help for you.

INCREASE YOUR EXPOSURE GRADUALLY – Get used to the temperature. Cold water shock ‘gasp reflex’ can be triggered in water below 15°C.

DON’T JUMP – Before jumping in, check for depth and hazards and get used to the water temperature. Try within your limits, and swim near the shore, not away from it.

THINK SAFE – Spot the dangers, follow safety advice and the signs, and recognize the signs of someone in trouble in an emergency.

For more information on how to get started, visit www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com

Enlightened Grantors

Since its launch in 2006, the Outdoor Swimming Society has grown into a 70,000-strong collective of wild swimmers all sharing a vision of opening up areas to swimming and offering advice and information to help people dip their toes in the water.

“In this country, private land ownership, public risk aversion and lack of knowledge about what’s permissible have combined to limit opportunities for swimming, but that is slowly changing,” said Ella, who has been wild swimming for 12 years.

Elsewhere in Europe, where a more liberal culture of personal responsibility and public access has allowed the pleasures of outdoor swimming to persist, the tradition of splashing in beautiful inland waterways flanked by riverbank changing huts lives on.

Campaigners dream of the day when ‘swimming forbidden’ signs are replaced with helpful information boards, entry ladders and perhaps a changing hut or two, but that will depend on the nation’s landowners.

Ella, who runs the dipadvisor.co.uk website offering advice and guided swims, said: “Enlightened grantors such as the National Rivers Authority and wildlife trusts know we’re hugely protective of the places where we swim and always leave them as we found them.

“Fears about owners’ liabilities are legitimate and the risks to inexperienced or ill-prepared swimmers are real if overblown, but as long as people use common sense, read the water and look out for each other it’s the most rewarding thing they’ll ever do.”

SIMPLE PLEASURES

The sink or swim question for the uninitiated is usually ‘where can I do it?’. The answer, surprisingly, is anywhere with public access and navigable rivers a foot from the bank and hence beyond private ownership. But Ella wants more and more grantors and landowners to embrace this most exhilarating of simple pleasures, either by allowing swimmers to use their water, or by giving it a go themselves.

She said: “The initial reaction is ‘that’s not for me’, but once you’ve done it there’s no going back. I always say to cynics ‘don’t knock it until you’ve tried it’.”

For safety tips visit www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/is-it-safe/
Charles Eckley grew up in Kent, surrounded by pumpkin fields, and he always loved them. His late father, an investment banker, would take him on visits to pumpkin fields during his childhood. The idea of growing pumpkins was always in Charles’ mind, but he pursued a career in the City instead. He moved to London to work as an investment banker and then took redundancy, which gave him the opportunity to pursue his passion for pumpkin farming.

His father was a farmer who grew pumpkins, and Charles decided to follow in his footsteps. He bought his own farm in Kent and started growing pumpkins. The farm is now called Pumpkin Moon, and it is the largest pumpkin farm in England. Charles is passionate about pumpkins and wants to share his love for them with others. He believes that pumpkins are not just for Halloween but can be enjoyed all year round.

Charles Eckley uses his farming expertise to grow pumpkins in a sustainable way. He is dedicated to the environment and uses eco-friendly farming practices. He also grows a variety of squashes and gourds, and he has become an advocate for their use in food. He is a strong believer in the nutritional benefits of pumpkins, which are rich in vitamins and minerals. He encourages people to eat pumpkins as part of a healthy and balanced diet.

Charles Eckley is also passionate about giving back to the community. He has worked with local schools to promote pumpkin farming and has helped to create a pumpkin festival in Kent. He has also donated pumpkin seeds to schools and community groups to help them grow their own pumpkins.

For more information about Pumpkin Moon and their products, visit their website: www.pumpkinmoon.uk
Rent from sports clubs such as the Magpies Australian Rules Football team help boost the charity's funds, along with log sales and filming rights.

FACT

set on a plateau overlooking the skyscrapers of central London in the near distance, Wimbledon Common is a wonderful anachronism in modern society.

People run, walk their dogs, wander nature trails, chat with friends and even try Mongolian wrestling and Aussie Rules Football. The shrill ring of mobile phones is a rarity here.

Even the keepers, the liveried guardians of this 1,140-acre spread of London’s countryside, roam the heathland and more mature wooded areas on horseback, using small two-seater vehicles only rarely. It’s a little like stepping out of the car race and going back in time to a place where wildlife is abundant, air quality is pure and even car parking is charged on a £1 an hour voluntary basis.

The green space, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation, is protected as “an open, unenclosed and natural” place for exercise and recreation by its own 1871 private Act of Parliament – a pledge living on in Wimbledon and its sisters, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Commons.

The charity depends on a £1m levy collected from homeowners within three-quarters of a mile of the Common’s perimeter, but with running costs of more than £1.6 million, it’s a frugal existence that relies

“The real trick is to maintain it well and ensure it is well cared for, but to keep it looking completely natural at the same time,” says Conservation and Engagement Officer Pete Haldane: “If we left it, nature would reclaim it as woodland within a few decades, but it’s been like this for almost 150 years and we are simply today’s custodians.”

Most of the thousands of weekly visitors the Common welcomes see little of the work that goes on behind the scenes, and Peter adds: “There are always things to be done and places where intervention is needed, because it’s such a large area.

“The woodland needs careful management to attract a wide range of species. Protecting the heathland is an ongoing battle against the encroachment of invasive scrub. Turn your back and it would all be overgrown.”

The Grade II listed windmill (above) is now preserved as England’s only museum of windmills.

Bill Rowland (left) says the Commons team believe they are to be a focal point for London and the world.

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Today’s Custodians

Unfenced and constantly evolving, the spreading areas of heather and gorse heathland and mature woodland are owned and maintained by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, a registered charity with a dedicated team of 25, including keepers, maintenance operatives, playing field staff and admin.

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increasingly on partnerships with organisations such as the Forestry Commission and Natural England, and support from the public, many of whom are blissfully unaware that the three Commons are charity-run.

**BREAKNECK PACE**

But it’s Pete’s army of volunteers, aged seven to 70, who ease the pressure on the maintenance team, with schools and companies joining scrub-bashing sessions and cutting back acres of holly to ensure daylight cuts through the canopy onto the labyrinth of walkways to offer a clear view and enhance safety and security.

Pete, whose father was once head keeper, has also launched a popular ‘Adopt an Area’ litter-picking team to invoke the spirit of the Wombles, the pioneering environmentally-friendly creatures who enjoyed their own series in the early 70s.

He says: “We sometimes have children and adults ask us where to find them, so we give them a clue but couldn’t possibly reveal the precise location. They are part of the folklore of the Common but also sum up the spirit of community we have here.”

The Common is a magnet for people seeking an escape from the capital’s breakneck pace. Around 600 people descend every Saturday for the Parkrun, members at two golf clubs, including the London Scottish, the second oldest in England, use its 18-hole course, and riders trot out from a brace of stables along its 16 miles of paths.

**OLD FASHIONED IS BEST**

The main focal point is the car park and café, from where bird and bat walks get interesting within minutes as swans touch down spectacularly on one of the Common’s nine ponds, which are also frequented by kingfishers and herons.

Most of the team live in cottages on-site and are on 24-hour call in case of any emergencies, but the worst crimes for the mounted keepers who have patrolled since the 1950s are minor by-law infringements. Senior Keeper Richard Thompson, a former mounted officer with the Met, says: “It’s old-fashioned but it works. The six of us, all former military or police, are a visible presence and our role is to be seen and to reassure. In terms of crime, using the horses has an extremely preventative effect.

“You’ll rarely see police on the Commons unless they’re called, because we take care of things. We’re proactive, but if there’s an emergency we can reach most parts in a few minutes at a gallop.”

Wimbledon Common is almost seven or eight different environments rolled into one, with massive electricity cables connecting London beneath – each one maintained to safeguard the wildlife that call them home, including badgers, Daubenton’s bats, muntjac deer, and butterflies attracted by sapling oaks.

Former Household Cavalry man Bill Rowland, who has been at the Common for 40 years and is now Putney Lower’s Head Ranger, sums it up: “This is a unique place, a focal point for the local area, wider London and the world. We asked for support to bring old tracks up to scratch and the public raised £50,000.

“We don’t have that kind of money, but the generosity of people from all over the world showed what a special place Wimbledon Common has in people’s hearts.”

For more information about the Commons and how to donate, visit www.wpc.org.uk
Jonathan Nothard doesn’t have time for small talk. He lives life at breakneck speed and it only truly content when he’s “getting things done.”

He averages four hours sleep each night, works through the waking hours on his self-taught computer-aided designs and doesn’t suffer fools gladly, which could make the interview tricky.

“I’ve got a wheat harvest to bring in,” he states matter-of-factly, before softening: “I love really; I sit on my tractor alone, going up and down the fields. No radio or chat for me. Just the sound of the engine.”

Hustle and drive, it’s little surprise that he has taken on an established family business just south of the Humber estuary near Scunthorpe and turned it into one of the world’s largest, and arguably best, in its field.

The arable farmer grantor heads up Gilleards, a seven-man business that has designed, built, delivered and installed 1,000 bird hides since the first at Blacktoft Sands nature reserve in York orshire in 1975.

Other products include badger hides, boardwalks, classrooms, viewing platforms, fishing huts, Sand Martin nesting banks and tern rafts.

SINGLE-MINDED

Customers include the BBC, which used one of Gilleards’ purpose-built studios to film Springwatch and host shows from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds’ Minsmere nature reserve in Suffolk.

“Attention to detail is all and if I see something a few millimetres out we’ll start again because we don’t want our customers to rely on hand-built quality from start to finish because that’s something no other bird hide or platform has,” he says.

“Whatever we do, the priority is always on hand-built quality from start to finish because that’s the way I like it. Quality craftsmanship builds our reputation and in the rare moments I do slow down to think, I’m certain we’re doing it the right way.”

Gilleards and its workshop boss of 25 years, Craig Fellowes, insist Craig’s boss, is something of an anachronism – a business that tops the global internet searches for bird hides but does so by relying on old-fashioned principles.

He says: “That’s the way I like it. Quality craftsmanship builds our reputation and in the rare moments I do slow down to think, I’m certain we’re doing it the right way.”
Start the year in style with these two great prizes

WIN

A TWO-NIGHT GETAWAY FOR TWO

Leave the daily stress behind to indulge you and your partner in a luxury stay at one of the UK’s stunning National Parks. Peace, quiet and the tranquillity of nature. What more could you want?

To enter, answer the question below and we’ll add your name to the draw.

BMG Research may contact you to take part in a five-minute survey seeking feedback and opinions from stakeholders to help National Grid better understand stakeholder requirements.

How many cities was pumpkin grower Charles Eckley’s excess crop distributed to?

Email your answer, name and contact details to gridline@madebysonder.com

Alternatively, send your entry to Sonder Gourmet Break competition, Victoria Court, 8 Dormer Place, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 5AE to arrive no later than 28 February 2020.

Enter our photo competition and you could win a £100 gift voucher

We’ve featured some superb pictures taken by grantors down the years, and there’s usually a theme… but this time we’re opening it up to any picture of you on your land, Just give us your best shot.

Best entry sent to the addresses on the left by 28 February 2020 wins a £100 voucher to spend on a high street shopping spree.

JUST FOR FUN CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1, 5 & 13 One of the pieces from Mussorgsky’s Pictures at an Exhibition depicting an edifice which was never actually built (3,3,4,2,4)
5 See 1 across
9 A long rope with a running noose used for catching wild horses (5)
10 Genus of poisonous plants of which Monkshood is the common European species (7)
11 One who studies insects (12)
13 See 1 across
14 A machine for generating electric currents (6)
17 Botanist who has done much to help children understand the natural world by such things as the “I-Spy” club and a TV programme featuring a computer called Alice (5,7)
20 Adjective meaning watery (7)
21 Stringed instrument, introduced into Britain by minstrels in the 1840s (5)
22 Type of palm tree whose fruits of the same name are extremely rich in sugar (4)
23 Type of warbler native to Britain (8)

DOWN
1 Form of magnesium silicate, used for cosmetics, lubricants and as a filler (4)
2 German born psychologist popularly known for his book, Know Your Own IQ (7)
3 Shrub of north temperate zones with dark, leathery leaves and showy flowers in spring (12)
4 Large river of South America flowing into the Atlantic Ocean on the equator (6)
6 In a criminal charge, the defence of having been elsewhere at the time in question (5)
7 An elementary particle containing an electric charge (8)
8 Containing or uttering words of only one syllable (12)
12 Surname of one of the journalists who, while working for the Washington Post, investigated the Watergate affair (8)
15 Form of calendar including astronomical events, anniversaries etc (7)
16 Plant which grows in waste places and whose heads are used as brushes (6)
18 One of the disciplines in men’s gymnastics (5)
19 A high deck at the stern of a ship (4)

© Brainwarp

COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS: GOURMET BREAK: The winner will be the first entrant selected at random who correctly identifies the answer and is a National Grid grantor at the time of draw. Editor’s decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Gridline reserves the right to change the prize without notice. The prize is not transferable and can’t be exchanged for cash. National Grid always seek feedback and opinions from stakeholders they interact with to better understand stakeholder requirements. By entering this competition you permit BMG Research to contact you on behalf of National Grid Gas/Electricity Transmission. Closing date: 28 February 2020. PHOTO: Winning image will be the most visually appealing, original and relevant to the theme and will feature in the next edition. The winner must be a National Grid grantor. Editor’s decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Gridline reserves the right to change the prize without notice. The prize is not transferable and can’t be exchanged for cash. Closing date: 28 February 2020. The competition winners’ names will be published.