

Visual Impact Provision Seventh Annual Report

June 2020 – May 2021



nationalgrid

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Cover images from the top:
 1. Cyclists using the Trans Pennine Trail in the Peak District National Park
 2. Beneficiaries of Landscape Enhancement Initiative funding in Snowdonia National Park
 3. Left to right: Allen Pestell, Chair of Dunford Parish Council; Andy Neilly, Project Supervisor, National Grid Peak East VIP project; Claire Briggs, Senior Environmental Advisor, Morgan Sindall
 4. National Grid pylons in Snowdonia National Park

Foreword by Chris Baines



Chris Baines,
 Independent
 Chair, Stakeholder
 Advisory Group,
 Visual Impact
 Provision project

VIP means imposing major short-term disruption on some of the most sensitive and much-loved landscapes in the country.

As a consequence, this programme has needed to set new standards for engaging early with a whole range of interested parties, from local neighbours to government agencies and from amateurs with specialist knowledge to national experts. The merit of this approach has really paid dividends this year, and two things stand out for me that both reinforce the value of genuine consultation.

Firstly, despite the scale of the projects and the sensitivity of the locations, unanimous approval was granted by the planning committees in Barnsley and Gwynedd councils, and in the Peak District and Snowdonia National Parks. Taking the time to build metaphorical bridges is proving to be as important as digging trenches for the VIP programme!

That deep-rooted commitment to consultation has yielded particularly exciting rewards in the Dorset Downs AONB. Digging an 8 km trench through such a historical treasure trove of a landscape was bound to be challenging. However, by combining the very best levels of modern technology and professional expertise from civil engineers, with painstaking studies by both amateur and professional archaeologists, the Dorset VIP project has increased our knowledge and understanding of this ancient landscape immeasurably. That exceptional collaboration resulted in subtle refinements to the rerouted transmission lines and was celebrated by the archaeologists themselves hosting virtual seminars around the prehistoric, Roman and medieval discoveries.

As work continues on our existing and upcoming VIP projects, and as more immediate landscape improvement is increasingly delivered through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative, the future for VIP looks more exciting than ever.

Foreword by Michelle Clark



Michelle Clark,
 Visual Impact
 Provision project
 manager,
 National Grid

It's hard to believe that VIP is another year older – and what a year it's been.

People throughout the UK have experienced a tumultuous time due to Covid-19 but, despite all the lockdowns and upheaval, we've made excellent progress on our VIP projects.

In Dorset, our site team are making great progress with construction as well as integrating themselves in the local community, showing ingenuity and the highest standards of engineering excellence to adapt to the surrounding environment.

Construction began in the Peak District in May 2021 and our Snowdonia project now has the planning consents it needs in place. It is fitting that these projects should have reached this stage as the RIIO-T1 price control period came to an end in March 2021.

We are delighted that Ofgem has confirmed an expenditure cap of £465m in 2018/19 prices over five years for RIIO-T2, enabling us to pursue projects in North Wessex Downs and begin work evaluating other potential options identified by the Stakeholder Advisory Group. Work is well underway to develop the planning application and Ofgem submission for North Wessex Downs, and we are working with local experts to identify the best opportunities for biodiversity net gain.

I would like to thank the Stakeholder Advisory Group for their ongoing commitment to and passion for all the VIP projects. Their role as a critical friend means we continue to develop and refine these projects for the benefit of local communities. The pandemic has re-emphasised the importance of these beautiful landscapes for our mental health and wellbeing, underlining the enduring effect of VIP.

1. Visual Impact Provision project

National Grid's Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project is now in the delivery phase of placing existing overhead transmission lines underground in nationally important landscapes in England and Wales. Its aim is to help to reduce the visual impact of electricity transmission infrastructure in these landscapes.

From April 2013 to March 2021, Ofgem made a £500m provision available¹ to carry out this work in National Parks, English and Welsh AONBs and Scottish National Scenic Areas. National Grid is making use of this provision as the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales to deliver projects in the Dorset AONB, Peak District National Park and Snowdonia National Park.

The provision also provided for our Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI), a grant scheme for smaller local improvement projects open to all 30 AONBs and National Parks which contain or are impacted by National Grid overhead transmission lines.

Following the success of the project, consumer research and extensive feedback from stakeholders, Ofgem has made a further provision of £465m available² for the period April 2021 until March 2026. National Grid is making use of this to develop a project in the North Wessex Downs AONB, to continue with LEI projects and is investigating other projects identified by the national Stakeholder Advisory Group.

While we need to build infrastructure to connect homes and businesses to the energy they need, we are

passionate about playing our part in conserving and enhancing 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. We are working closely with stakeholders to achieve this aim.

This seventh annual report records our progress and key activities between June 2020 and May 2021. It builds on the progress described in our six previous annual reports. To read them, or to find out more about how the projects were selected, please visit our website: www.nationalgrid.com/uk/electricity-transmission/planning-together-riio/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
- **Four sections** of overhead line prioritised for undergrounding
- Landscape Enhancement Initiative provides funding of **up to £200,000** for smaller projects

£465M

provision to benefit National Parks, AONBs and National Scenic Areas



- ◆ Dorset AONB
- ◆ Peak District National Park
- ◆ North Wessex Downs AONB
- ◆ Snowdonia National Park

¹ Ofgem is the government regulator for gas and electricity markets in Great Britain. As part of the RIIO-T1 price control period (covering 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2021), Ofgem set aside a £500m (2009/10 prices) provision for the three transmission owners in Great Britain to address the visual impact of existing transmission infrastructure. The size of the provision was based on a 2012 Willingness to Pay study.

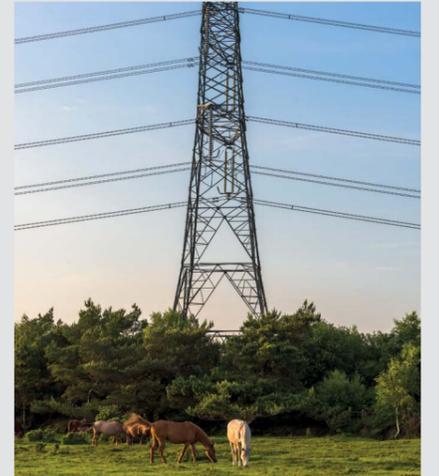
² Ofgem set aside a £465m (2018/19 prices) provision for the three transmission owners in Great Britain to continue to address the visual impact of existing transmission infrastructure. The size of the provision was based on activity in the 2013-2021 price control period, feedback from stakeholders and a 2019 Willingness to Pay study.

2. Working with stakeholders

The VIP project is driven by stakeholders; they help us to make decisions on how we should use the provision to maximise its potential benefits. On each individual project, we tap into the expertise and seek the views of a wide variety of local stakeholders including experts from organisations like Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Historic England and Cadw, local interest groups, communities and landowners. Crucially our national Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) established in

2014 at the start of the project continues to guide our work, with many of its original members still involved.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group advises National Grid on key decisions and the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders. The group is chaired by leading environmentalist Chris Baines and its members are senior representatives from organisations committed to enhancing the landscape. National Grid and Ofgem are also members of the group.



Stakeholder Advisory Group members:

The group has met twice over the past year and below is an overview of the key activities and issues considered. If you would like more details, the minutes of these meetings are on our website www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision.

17th Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting 24 June 2020, held virtually via Teams

Main items of discussion

- National Grid gave an update on the impact of Covid-19 on the project.
- National Grid gave an update on the progress of construction on the Dorset AONB project.
- National Grid gave an update on the unanimous approval of the main planning application on the Peak District National Park project.
- National Grid gave an update on progress on the Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park and North Wessex Downs AONB projects.
- Notification that Ofgem would publish its draft determination in July 2020 with more detail about the proposed level of funding for VIP in the next price control period.
- Discussion around potential RIIO-T2 projects including the Cotswolds AONB and Tamar Valley AONB.
- Updates on the development of a forward communications plan for VIP as the removal of the first pylons moves closer.

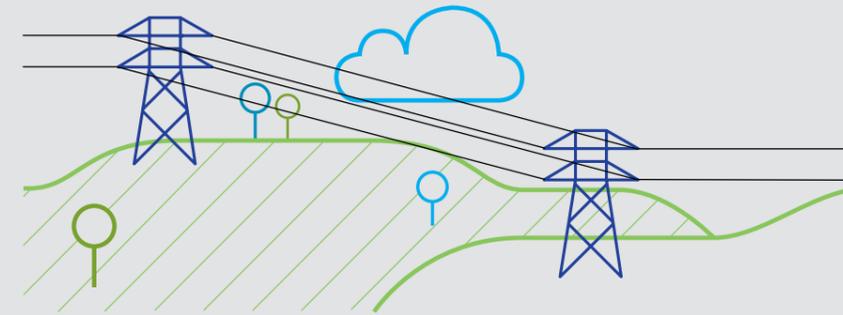
18th Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting 03 November 2020, held virtually via Teams

Main items of discussion

- National Grid provided a further update on the construction of the Dorset project and how local people had been engaged during the pandemic.
- National Grid reported on the unanimous approval of the Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park project in July and on preparations for the start of construction work on the Peak District National Park project in 2021.
- National Grid gave an update on a forthcoming programme of virtual stakeholder and community engagement on the North Wessex Downs AONB project, and in particular on the development of a 360° virtual tour of the project area.
- Updates were given on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).
- National Grid confirmed that, for the RIIO-T2 price control period, Ofgem is proposing an expenditure cap of £465m over five years in 2018/2019 prices with 2.5 percent of that earmarked for the LEI.
- National Grid presented the results of some early landscape work undertaken in the Cotswolds and the potential for an undergrounding scheme in the AONB. National Grid also presented early ideas on some non-undergrounding initiatives with potential for implementation in RIIO-T2 including reducing pylon heights ‘in situ’.
- National Grid presented a forward communications plan with a focus on collaboration with stakeholders to achieve optimum results.

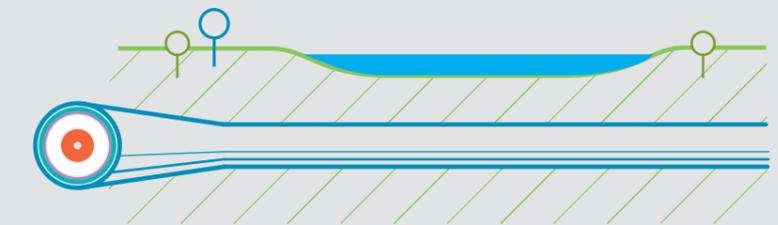


Over **40** stakeholder presentations and many more meetings



Almost **£3.5m** of LEI funding granted to date

51 pylons to be replaced by **underground cable**



We have carried on working with our Stakeholder Reference Groups, which were set up to inform project development in each of the areas and keeping local people up to date on progress.

We describe in more detail how we have done this in each of the project updates that follow.



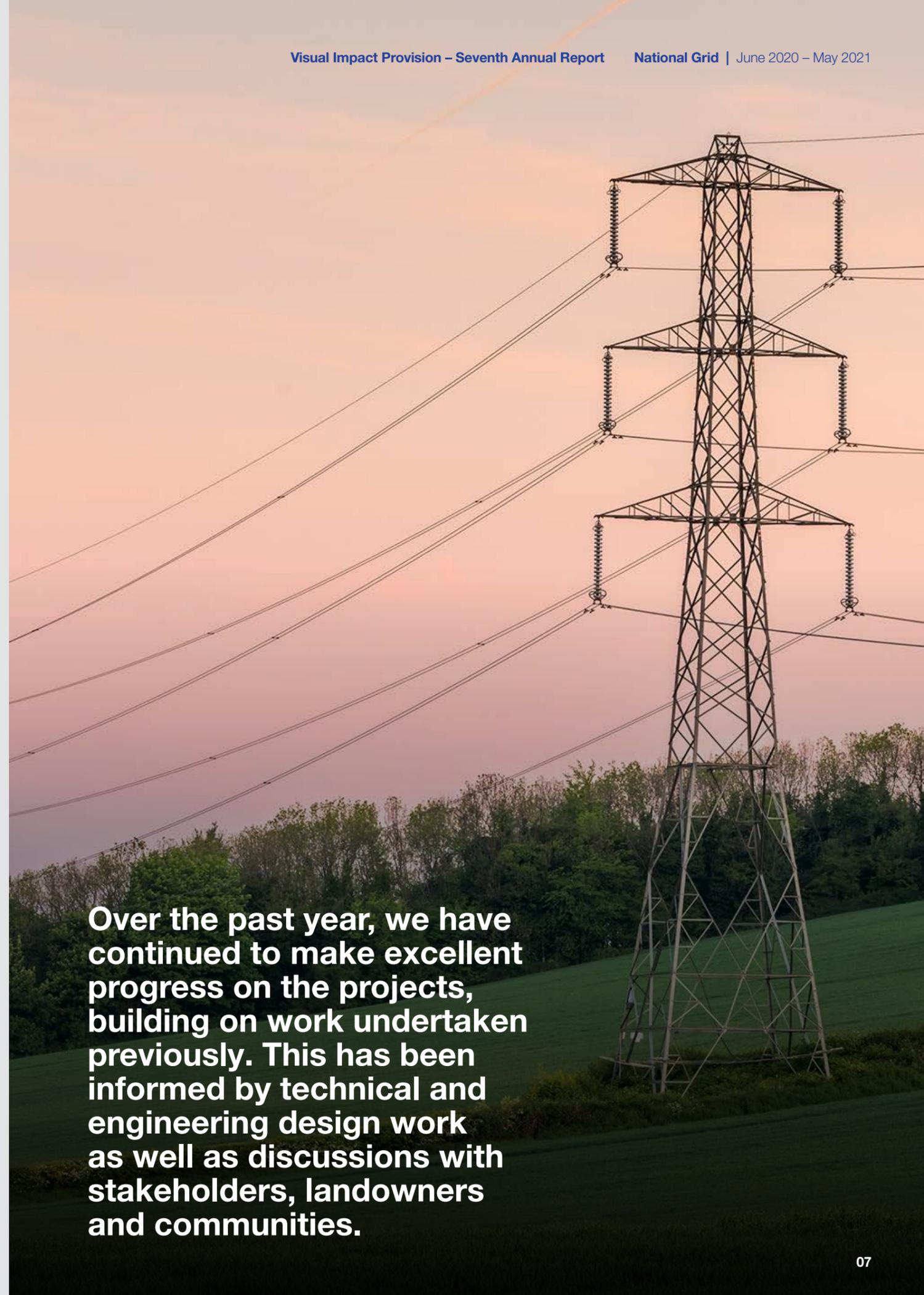
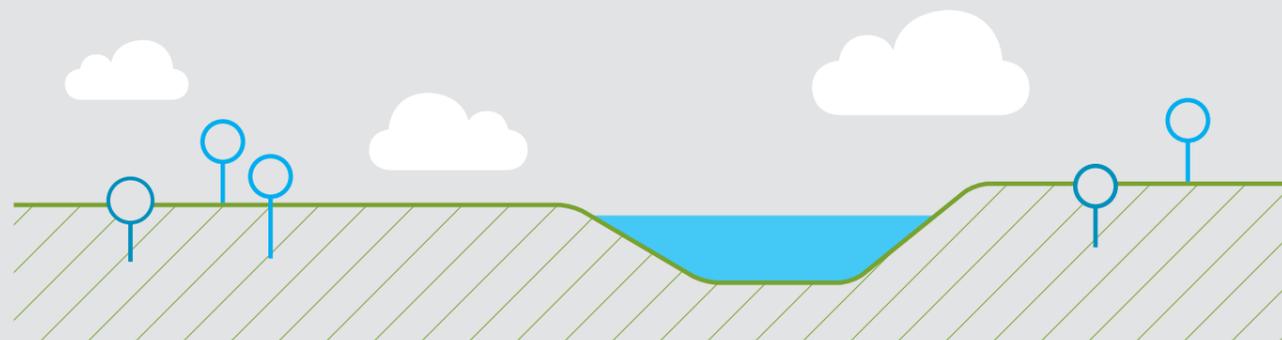
3. VIP project updates

By replacing our overhead transmission lines with underground cables, National Grid's Visual Impact Provision projects aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales, 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 make excellent progress on the projects, building on work undertaken previously. This has been informed by technical and engineering design work as well as discussions with stakeholders, landowners and communities.

The following pages provide an update on each of the projects as well as a look ahead to activities planned for 2021/22.



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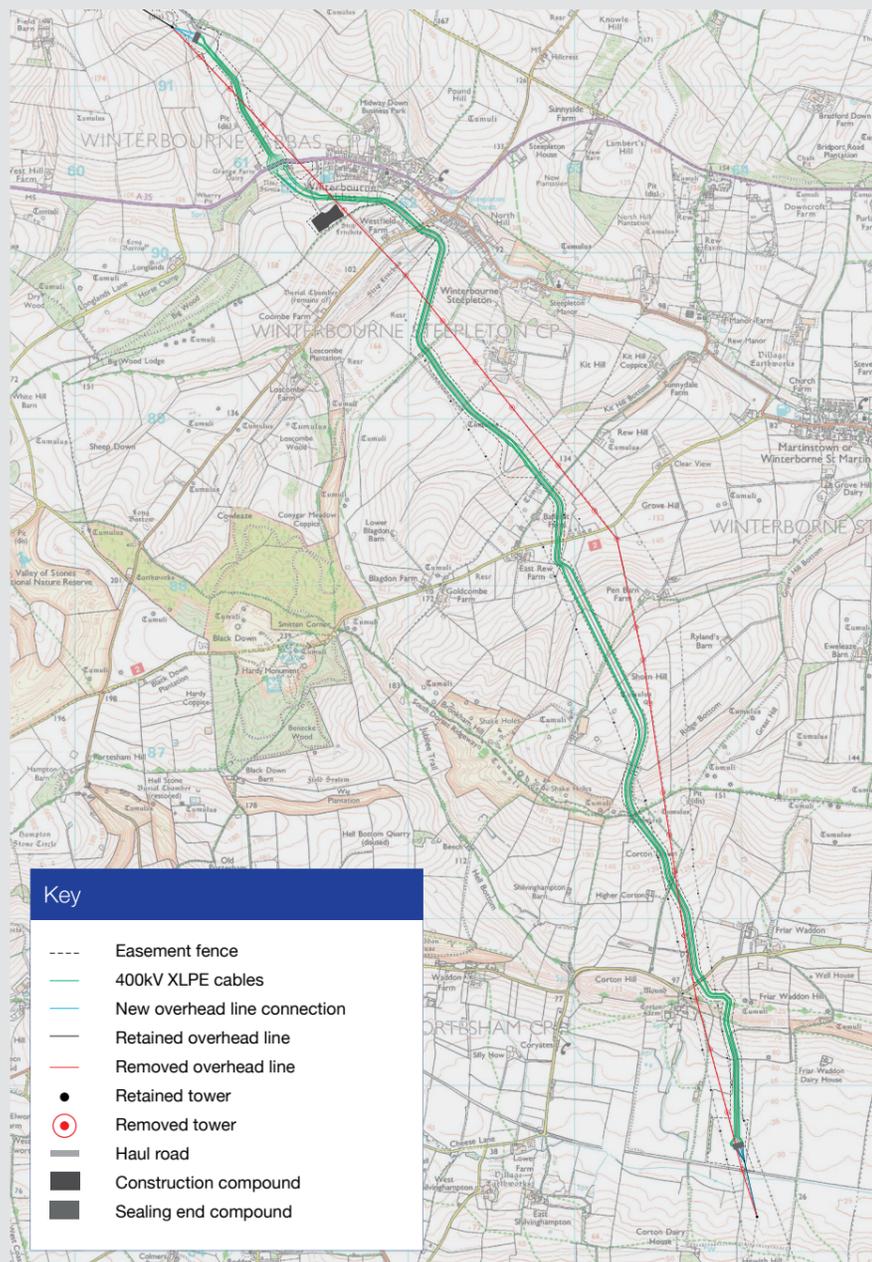
Dorset AONB



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 north of Winterbourne Abbas and below Corton Ridge in Friar Waddon.

Project route



Preparation work for ducting:



Dorset AONB



Progress to date

Construction is now well underway with the on-site archaeological work now complete and the civil engineering work at an advanced stage. The topography and the weather have provided some significant challenges but the ingenuity and innovation of the team working with main contractor, Morgan Sindall, and local civil engineering specialist, MJ Church, have been a match for them. Over the 12-month period, we have:

- Installed the 9km of haul road which runs the length of the work site and keeps construction vehicles off local roads. The steep gradients within the landscape added to the challenge and led to the creation of what is known on site as the 'Alpine Pass'.

This feat of civil engineering reduced the gradient in the centre of the site to 16% - still a significant incline.

- Invested in an ex-military OshKosh machine to transport the 40 tonne cable drums along the length of the haul road.
- Made excellent progress in installing the ducts which will carry the cables along the length of the route with some early cabling work also under way. The first cable drums arrived on site in February 2020.
- Battled against torrential rain in August 2020 and into the autumn, which led to a considerable amount of water run-off from site in an area known for flooding. We have worked extremely hard with our contractors to significantly

enhance flood defences and minimise water run-off and will carry the lessons learned here forward onto future VIP and other National Grid projects.

- Made archaeological finds of national significance dating as far back as 4000BC and including artefacts from the Neolithic, Iron Age, Roman and Saxon periods – see page 10 for more facts and figures.
- Maintained ongoing environmental mitigation measures, including working around birds that had made nests in our on-site equipment during the two-week shutdown and on one of the pylons. We also created a hibernarium for adders and grass snakes identified during vegetation clearance by one of the project ecologists.

Covid-19

Work stopped on the project site when the Covid-19 lockdown was announced by the UK Government in March 2020.

To enable essential work to safely resume, National Grid has worked with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the main contractor, Morgan Sindall, to implement strict safety measures. The safety measures are designed to protect the workforce and the local community. Work on site resumed in April 2020 in accordance with these measures and there were no instances of Covid-19 among the project workforce reported during the period to May 2021.



Dorset AONB



Dorset VIP project – archaeological finds

Extensive archaeological work has continued, and a watching brief remains throughout the construction works with National Grid, Morgan Sindall and specialists, Oxford Archaeology, continuing to work closely with the Dorset County Archaeologist and Historic England. The main excavations finished in May 2020.

Here are some of the highlights:

- 12 Bronze Age barrows (burial chambers)
- 312 Neolithic & Bronze Age pits
- 6,000-year-old Neolithic artefact (4000 BC)
- Inhumations and cremations including a Saxon cemetery with over 180 burials
- Roman buildings
- Roman and Iron Age Pottery
- Up to 25 archaeologists on site at any one time over 20 months of work
- Around 6,000 archaeologist days worked.



After the work, the artefacts will be studied and catalogued and a book about the finds called a 'monograph' will be produced. Information and images of the finds will be available for the public to view, and we are in preliminary discussions with landowners and the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester about finding a permanent home for these fascinating finds.



Dorset AONB



Stakeholder and public engagement

We have continued to work closely with the local community and relationships remain positive. Despite Covid-19, our Community Liaison Group met virtually in September 2020 and March 2021 at events which were very well attended. The members of the group are:



CHESIL BANK PARISH COUNCIL



Our on-site project information centre was fully kitted out in April 2020, and we are hopeful as restrictions ease, we will be able to welcome more people to it to hear about our work.

More practically, we have supported the annual clearance of the South Winterborne stream and provided Christmas trees and hampers as raffle prizes. We are also planning a number of STEM activities in local primary and secondary schools where pupils will be able to hear more about the VIP project and take part in a fun, learning activity.

Looking forward

Project construction will continue throughout 2021 and into 2022. By the end of 2022, the new underground cable will be in service and the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed.

National Grid will continue to work with the community and our local and national stakeholder partners throughout the construction phase to ensure that the scheme delivered achieves the maximum possible enhancement for the landscape.

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



Peak District National Park



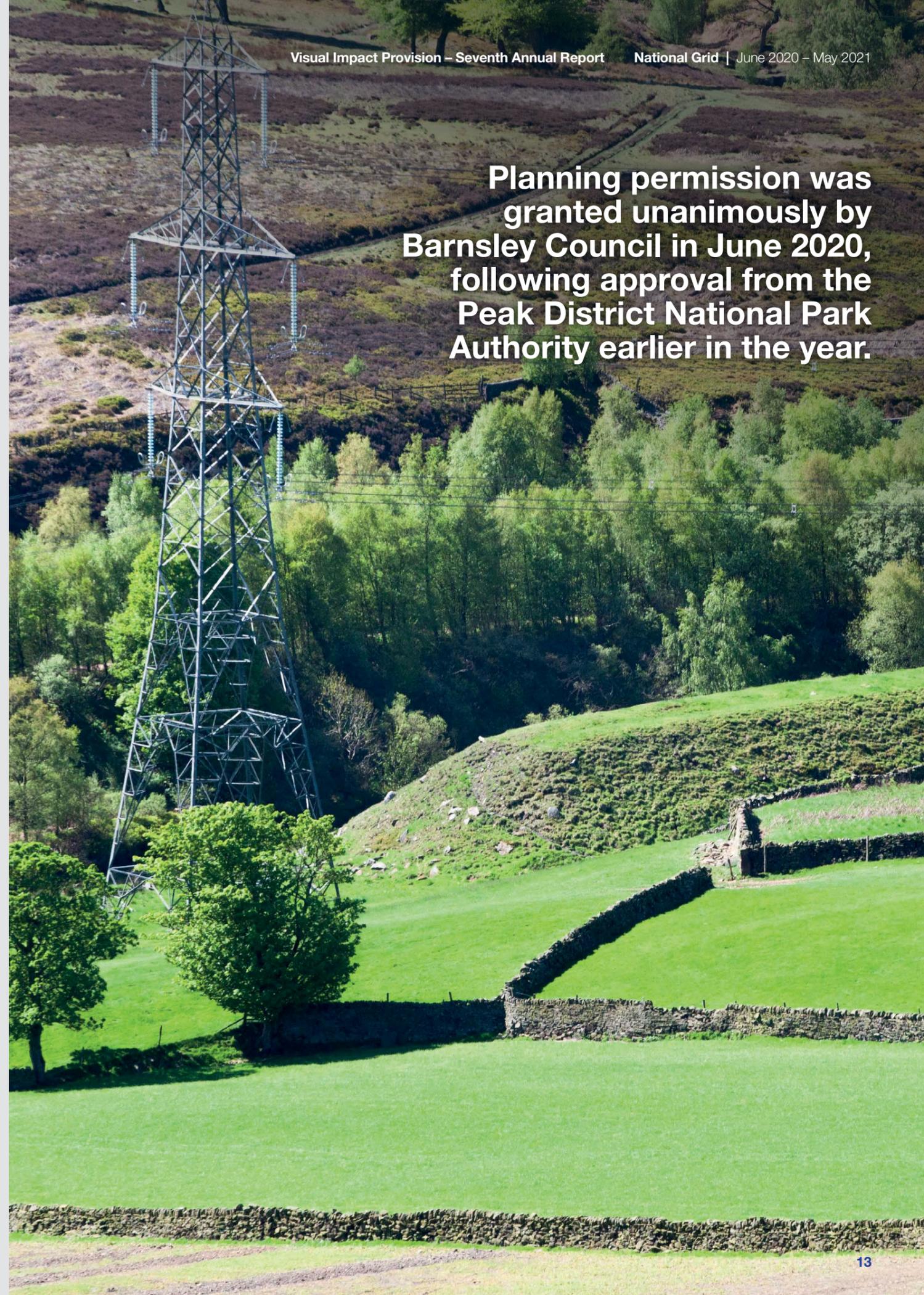
The Peak District National Park (East) project will replace a 1.5km section of overhead line east of the Woodhead Tunnel near Dunford Bridge with underground cables, permanently removing seven pylons and a sealing end compound from the classic Dark Peak landscape.

The route for the connection runs along 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 will need to be constructed at Wogden Foot.

Project route



Planning permission was granted unanimously by Barnsley Council in June 2020, following approval from the Peak District National Park Authority earlier in the year.



Peak District National Park



Progress to date

There has been significant progress on the Peak East VIP project over the last 12 months. In February 2021, Ofgem approved the £43m budget for the project and construction started on site in May 2021.

Planning permission was granted unanimously by Barnsley Council in June 2020 for a new sealing end compound in Wogden Foot, the temporary Trans Pennine Trail diversion, two new bridges (one temporary and one permanent) and a northern access road from Brook Hill Lane. This followed approval from the Peak District National Park Authority earlier in the year.

National Grid is grateful to both Chris Baines and Andy Tickle of CPRE South Yorkshire, both of whom addressed the planning committee during the meeting, speaking in favour of the proposals in the context of some ongoing objections in relation to the local wildlife site and the potential to reopen the disused rail route which now forms the Trans Pennine Trail (TPT).

Subsequently both authorities approved a separate application for plans to improve the car park. This now includes charging points for electric vehicles as well as significant landscaping enhancements, improved signage and furniture, dedicated horsebox and disabled parking and measures to reduce antisocial behaviour.

Our proposals to achieve the required net gain – through a combination of works on the site itself and a management plan for a quarry at Crow Edge approximately 1.5km away – were completed in September 2020, and the final planning decision with the legal agreement in place came through later that month.

Following the granting of the permissions, we have been successfully working to resolve some outstanding highways issues and finalising the management plan for the temporary Trans Pennine Trail diversion with stakeholders.

Prior to construction starting, further design work was undertaken by Morgan Sindall, a number of key environmental surveys were updated, and seeds harvested from along the TPT and within Wogden Foot itself. A further round of ground investigation work was also needed along the proposed cable route.

During this period, we also successfully concluded our negotiations with landowners and discharged the planning conditions identified by Barnsley Council as part of the planning permission.

During the early part of 2021, we worked with Morgan Sindall to establish a site presence at Dunford Bridge. This included clearing some vegetation and invasive species (Japanese Knotweed and Rhododendron) under the supervision of the project ecologist. Barnsley Council undertook some highways work on our behalf to prepare the local roads for the project especially around the northern access point at Townhead.



Peak District National Park



Stakeholder Reference Group members



Trans Pennine Trail™



Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Dunford Parish Council



Stakeholder and public engagement

A Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held in September 2020 and members were invited to join the Community Liaison Group which would provide a forum for discussion during the construction phase.

The first meeting of the Community Liaison Group was held virtually in March 2021. The following organisations were represented:

- Dunford Parish Council
- Langsett Parish Council
- Elected members and officers from Barnsley Council
- Trans Pennine Trail national office
- Trans Pennine Trail Conservation Volunteers
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- CPRE / Friends of the Peak District
- Barnsley Biodiversity Trust
- Hade Edge Junior & Infants School
- Millhouse Primary School
- Barnsley Local Access Forum
- British Horse Society
- Ride Barnsley
- The Ramblers
- East Pennine Innovation Partnership

A project information centre is being fitted out and it is hoped that a meeting of the Group will be able to take place there. We have also briefed a number of other stakeholders on progress including cabinet members and the communications team at Barnsley Council, the communications team at the Peak District National Park Authority and local MP, Miriam Cates.

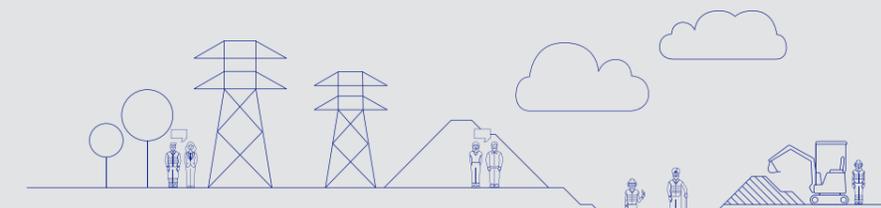
As the site is located within the village of Dunford Bridge and regularly visited by members of the public to use the TPT, it is proposed to install information hoardings at various points along the route with a QR code linking to the project website for more information. A programme of visits and schools' engagement is also being planned. The strong working relationship built up during the project's development with the TPT national office and Barnsley Council's rights of way team is also proving beneficial in ensuring that relevant information gets to trail users at the right time.

Looking forward

In June 2021, we will begin by installing the haul road from Townhead down to the north of the River Don which will enable us to construct the two bridges (one permanent and one temporary) and the temporary diversion of the Trans Pennine Trail. This work should be completed by January 2022 so that work can begin to lay the cables along the existing TPT early in 2022.

We expect that by summer 2022 the new underground section will be in service and that by autumn 2022 the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed. Work on the car park will begin towards the end of the year and be completed in early 2023.

Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared on our Peak District East project website: <http://peakdistricteast.nationalgrid.co.uk>.



Snowdonia National Park



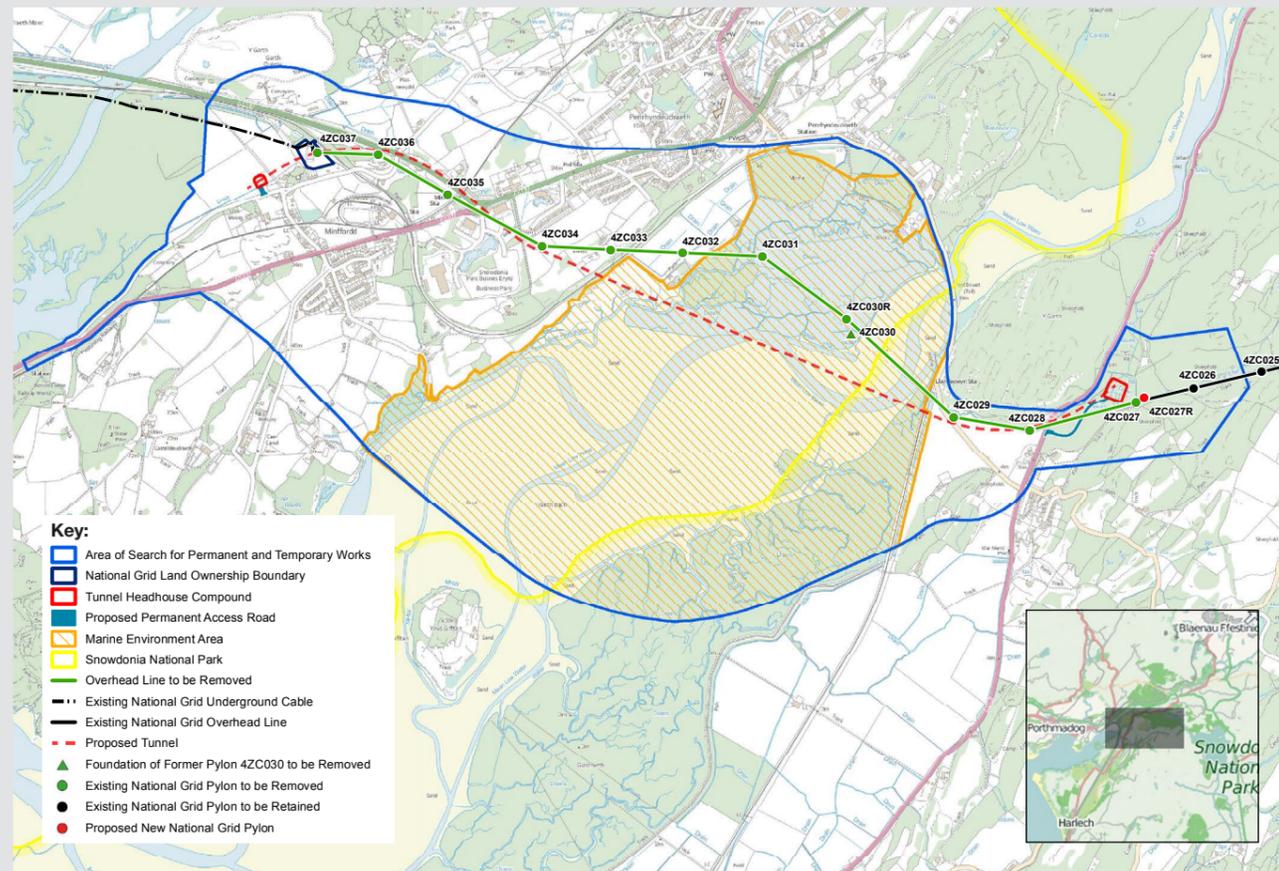
The Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park project will replace a 3km section of overhead line crossing the Dwyryd Estuary near Porthmadog with an underground cable, permanently removing 10 pylons from the landscape.

The new cable will 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.

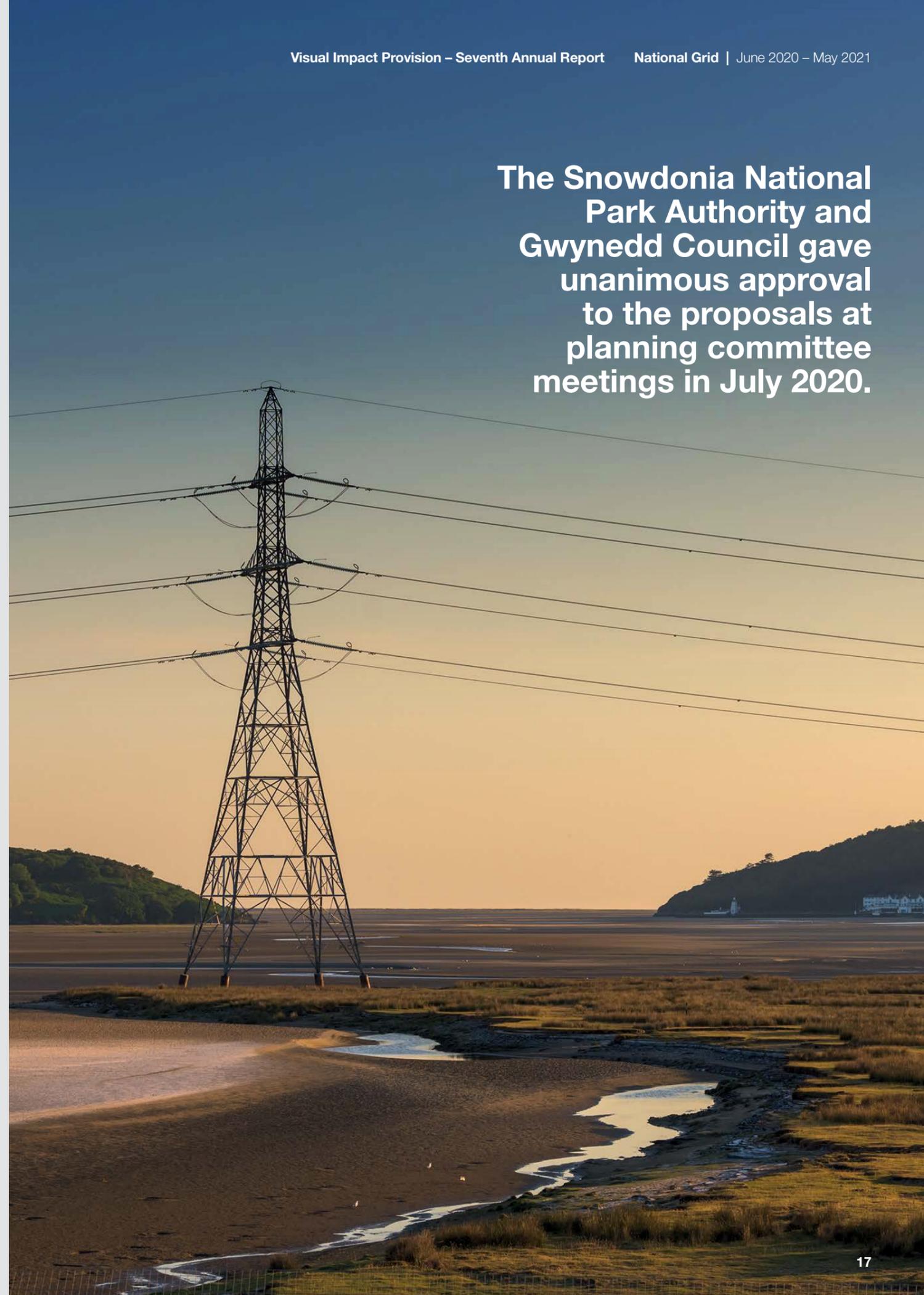
To connect the remaining existing overhead line in the east, a sealing end compound and associated terminal pylon would be needed near Cilfor.



Current route option



The Snowdonia National Park Authority and Gwynedd Council gave unanimous approval to the proposals at planning committee meetings in July 2020.



Snowdonia National Park



Progress to date

The planning application for the Snowdonia VIP project was submitted to both the Snowdonia National Park Authority and Gwynedd Council with a view to Snowdonia National Park Authority taking the lead role through delegated authority. However, this had not been put in place before the Covid-19 lockdown and it was not possible to implement it before the next full meeting of Gwynedd Council in September.

To avoid delay, the two authorities agreed therefore to take the application in front of both planning committees separately. Both committees gave unanimous approval to the proposals at planning committee meetings in July 2020. The two marine licences required for work on the Dwyryd Estuary have also been granted by Natural Resources Wales.

The National Grid project team is finalising a Section 106 agreement with Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) and the planning conditions with both SNPA and Gwynedd Council. We were very grateful to both Chris Baines and Councillor Gareth Thomas, ward member for Penrhyndeudraeth, who spoke in favour of the project at both the SNPA and Gwynedd Council planning committee meetings.

During the tender process, it became apparent that the costs for the project are higher than originally thought due to the nature of the engineering involved. Given this, National Grid and Ofgem both asked the Stakeholder Advisory Group to consider whether they were still happy to give their support for the Snowdonia scheme.

It was noted that support for the scheme remains strong amongst local authorities, councillors, Members of the Senedd,

Members of Parliament, residents and other stakeholder groups, and that no issues about the financial costs have been raised at a local level. Points raised by Stakeholder Advisory Group members included the fact that the area is one of the lowest income areas in Europe, and a project such as this in an area that is dependent on seasonal tourism would be very welcome in terms of economic spin-off.

Approximately 100 jobs will be created on site during construction, and there is therefore the potential for economic benefit, including the increased demand for local accommodation and services that will continue beyond the normal summer peak.

In addition, the Stakeholder Advisory Group noted:

- The project will be a good news story for tourism, and on completion there will be magnificent view of Snowdonia from across the estuary.



Snowdonia National Park



- The positive benefits to be gained from this project are very relevant at a time when people have been making more use of National Parks.
- The Government is focused on green infrastructure and developing a process that builds a better world.

The impact of potential future network requirements on the required tunnel capacity have been kept under review throughout the development of the project. Towards the end of 2020, the Government set a new target for 40GW of electricity generation through offshore wind farms by 2030, and offshore wind leasing, and other potential future requirements have impacted the Snowdonia VIP scheme.

Following discussions between National Grid and Ofgem, it has been agreed that it is sensible to change the specifications of the Snowdonia scheme to construct a larger tunnel to carry more cables, as this will enable the most economic and efficient solution to be taken forwards.

This means that minor changes are required to the above ground designs which, following discussions with planners at both authorities, we have agreed in principle are either permitted development or non-material amendments to our planning consent. It has also meant that we have had to re-run the tender event for the updated scope. This is underway and going well with submissions expected in July 2021. This is to ensure that this significant investment is economic and efficient and does not unduly restrict the UK Government's Net Zero ambitions.

Stakeholder engagement

A Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held virtually in January 2021.

Looking forward

We will continue to work with local authority partners to resolve any issues arising from the changes to the tunnel specification.

A cost update to the funding submission to Ofgem resulting from the change in specification will be made as soon as possible following the conclusion of the tender event at the start of 2022.

We will be setting up a Community Liaison Group for the project to

ensure continued partnership, working with stakeholders and the community throughout its lifetime.

There will be further survey work required in 2022 with main construction expected to start in 2023 and take around a year longer than originally anticipated due to the increase in tunnel size and additional cables to be installed. Pylon removal is now scheduled to be completed by the end of 2029.

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

High praise for Snowdonia VIP

The Snowdonia VIP project was entered in two categories for Planning Magazine's national Planning Awards. The project was chosen as a finalist in both the Award for Stakeholder Engagement and Planning Permission of the Year categories, receiving a 'highly commended' recognition for the latter category.



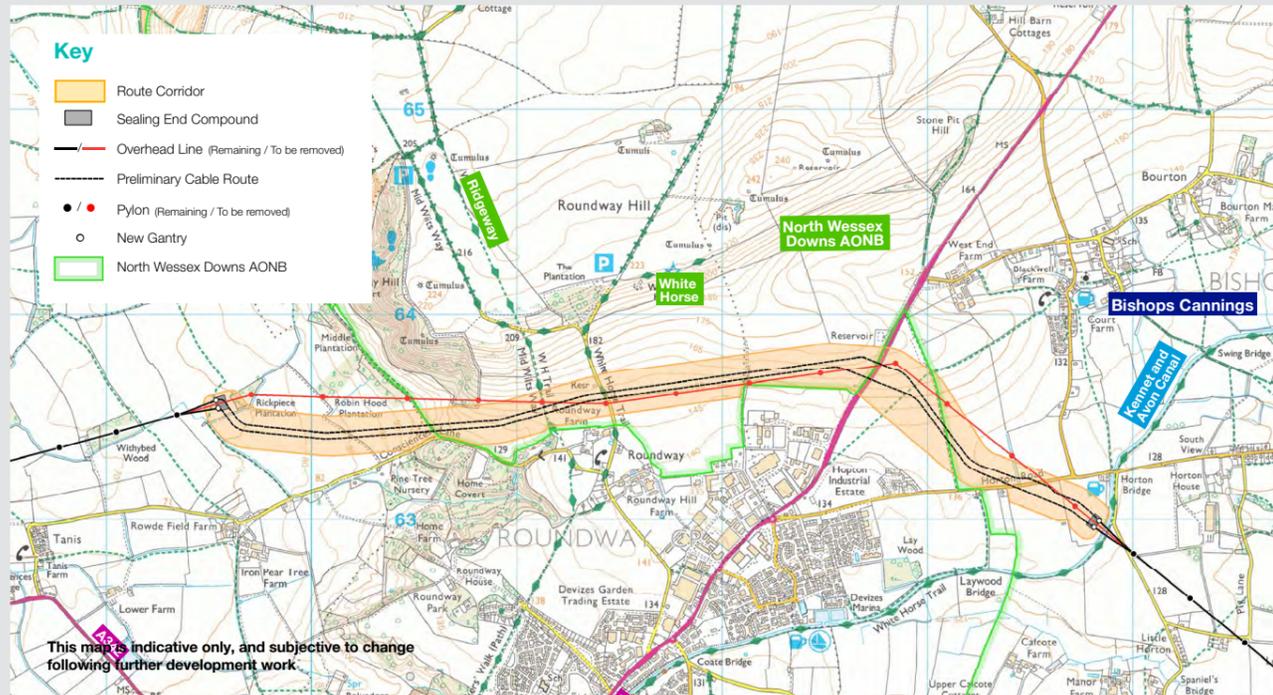
Stakeholder Reference Group members



North Wessex Downs AONB



Project route



The North Wessex Downs project will replace 4.4km of overhead line close to the Millennium White Horse, north of Devizes in Wiltshire, with an underground cable, permanently removing up to 13 pylons from the landscape.

To connect the cable to the remaining existing overhead line, sealing end compounds and associated terminal pylons will need to be constructed close to the Kennet & Avon Canal to the east of Devizes and east of the village of Rowde to the northwest of the market town.

Progress to date

The VIP project in the North Wessex Downs would be the first project to be approved under the RIIO-T2 price control framework. There has been considerable progress made

by the team in developing the project over the last 12 months. The main activities include:

- Following a competitive tender, National Grid appointed Balfour Beatty as main contractor and they will work closely with the project team in developing the scheme for submission to Ofgem for funding and Wiltshire Council for planning consent.
- Further investigative work into the locations for the sealing end compound at the western end of the proposed underground cable route has revealed the presence of a water pipe which will need to be avoided. As a result, the location of the compound has been moved further to the west which will enable the removal of additional pylons (from 11 originally to 13). The location in the east remains to the north of the Kennet & Avon Canal.

- Ground Penetrating Radar and topological surveys have supported ground investigation (bore holes and trial trenches) surveys to inform the development of the cable route. The presence of the water pipe and a Source Protection Zone near Bishops Cannings has added to the challenge, but the team is working closely with Wessex Water and the Environment Agency to identify the optimum route.
- The National Grid team is working with the Wiltshire County Ecologist and the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership to identify the best opportunities for biodiversity net gain as a result of the project.
- Ecological surveys including those for badgers, bats, dormice and Great Crested Newt have continued. The project area has many badger

North Wessex Downs AONB



Stakeholder Reference Group members



setts which will require careful management and is an important bat corridor. The team will continue to work with the Wiltshire County ecologist and Natural England as it develops the project, as well as seeking advice from specialist groups such as Wiltshire Bat Group, Wiltshire Mammal Group, the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the RSPB.

- Working in collaboration with the Assistant County Archaeologist and Historic England, we have undertaken some archaeological trial trenching which was guided by the metal detecting and field walking work undertaken last year. As anticipated, evidence was found of Iron Age and Romano-British settlement activity including ditches, pits and small linear features as well as a Neolithic pit. Early discussions have also taken place with the Wiltshire County Museum in Devizes.

Stakeholder and public engagement

The Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns struck at a time when face-to-face stakeholder and community engagement would have been at its height for the North Wessex Downs VIP project. However, as all the VIP projects are stakeholder-led, we were determined to take the message out to stakeholders and the community and gather their insight and views into the emerging project.

A well-attended Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held virtually in November 2020. In addition to this meeting, we have given briefings and presentations to a wide range of relevant stakeholders in the area including:

- Wiltshire Councillors for the Wards where the project is proposed
- The Leader and members of the Cabinet at Wiltshire Council
- Wessex Water
- Devizes Area Board
- Rowde Parish Council
- Bishops Cannings Parish Council
- Devizes Town Council
- Bromham Parish Council
- The Canal & River Trust
- Wiltshire Mammal Group / Wiltshire Bat Group
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- Wiltshire Ramblers
- CPRE Wiltshire
- The RSPB

North Wessex Downs AONB



We have significantly increased our understanding of the area thanks to the input of local experts. Overall stakeholder reaction to the project has remained positive but, to target the wider community, we needed to find an innovative way of reaching people and explaining the project without being able to stage face-to-face public events.

In autumn 2020, we developed a 360° virtual tour of the project to bring the project and what it could achieve to life. This immersive experience enabled members of the public to view the project on their computers, tablets or smartphones and to feedback comments and thoughts on the project.

Alongside this we ran a series of public webinars which were advertised through our stakeholder network, through the parish councils and local Facebook groups as well as more traditional routes in local press. These virtual events enabled us to talk about

the projects, demonstrate the virtual tour and take questions from members of the public. Central to these was our ability to show images and video footage from our project in Dorset to give people a real sense of what construction would look like.

In all 21 key stakeholders signed up to join the virtual events. Feedback was once again very positive, and it is likely that future engagement activity will include an element of virtual engagement alongside face-to-face activity.

Looking forward

We will continue to work with Balfour Beatty on the technical, engineering and environmental work needed to develop detailed plans for the project. At the same time, we will continue to engage with stakeholders and the community and keep them up to date on aspects of the project as they emerge as well as carrying out negotiations with landowners for the rights required

to construct and operate the cables. Biodiversity net gain and archaeology are likely to be two key areas for stakeholder input.

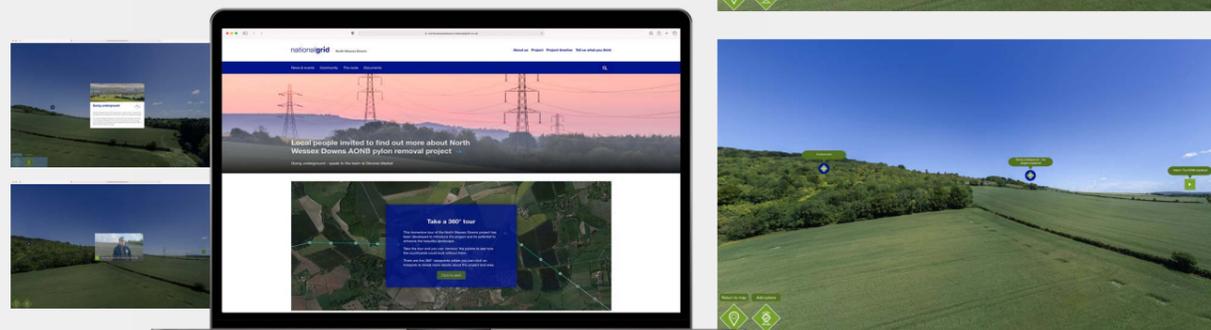
Public engagement events are planned for autumn 2021 and it is intended that these will be a combination of virtual and face-to-face activity. Engagement will also include the opportunity for key stakeholders to visit the Dorset VIP project site to see construction work at first hand. A planning application and Ofgem funding submission are scheduled for early in 2022.

Project construction is expected to take around two years, targeted to commence in 2023 with the cables energised in autumn 2024 and all 13 pylons removed by 2025.

Project information, updates and documents will be shared through our North Wessex Downs project website <http://northwessexdowns.nationalgrid.co.uk/>.

The 360° virtual tour

By combining 360° still photography with drone footage, our digital team was able to create an immersive experience for anyone visiting our website. Short, informative video pieces from members of the team and guest stakeholders combined with explanatory text and images were embedded within the tour to help explain the project fully in an engaging and interactive way.



4. Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is an important part of the VIP project. The initiative aims to use some of the Ofgem provision for smaller visual improvement projects. Its overall objective 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.

Launched in May 2016, the LEI offers grants to each of the 30 National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships in England and Wales covered by the initiative for local visual improvement projects. 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

Since its launch, almost £3.5m has been allocated to projects across England and Wales.

Under the old, T1 regime, Window 8 saw eight projects invited to full application – see the table below.

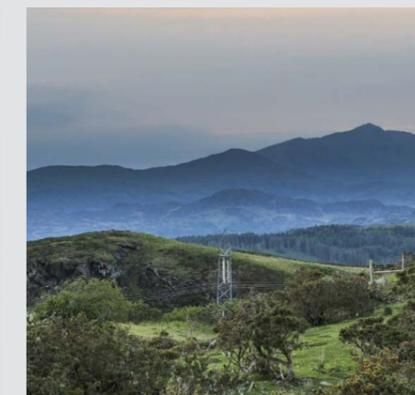
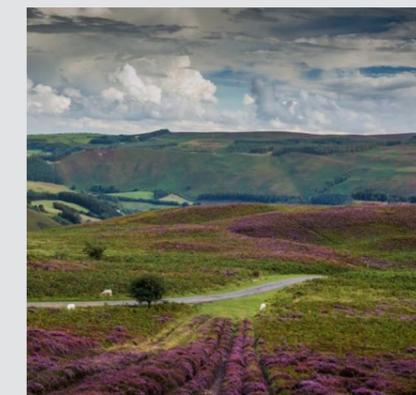
A new streamlined approvals process came into force with RIIO-T2 on 1 April 2021.

Window 9 opened in March 2021 under the RIIO-T2 process with 10 expressions of interest received and invited for full application. The approvals panel will meet in September 2021 to discuss the applications.

How the Landscape Enhancement Initiative works

The LEI is driven by our stakeholders. Projects are suggested by an AONB Partnership or National Park Authority before being considered by the LEI Approvals Panel. Independently chaired by Lee Morris from the Landscape Institute, the panel includes experts from Cadw, Historic England, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales. The panel 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.



Covid-19

For many, project timelines have slipped beyond their control and project completion dates are therefore likely to change. National Grid's project team is working to support AONBs and National Parks to update their timelines.

Mary O'Connor

Mary O'Connor has been the Landscape Institute's representative on the Stakeholder Advisory Group since the VIP project began, attending her first meeting at the inaugural gathering in London in 2014. Since its introduction in 2016, Mary has also chaired the LEI panel and was instrumental in its inception and how it operates.

On behalf of the whole VIP team and the Stakeholder Advisory Group, we would like to thank Mary for her invaluable contribution driven by her passion and enthusiasm for the landscape. We wish her well in her retirement and look forward to meeting up again when the first pylons come down.



Landscape Enhancement Initiative

Progress to date

Window 1 projects

Ofgem funding received June 2017:

- **High Weald AONB Partnership:** Beautiful Boundaries
- **Peak District National Park Authority:** Central Longdendale Trails
- **North York Moors National Park Authority:** Over Silton to Thimbleby Bridleway

Window 2 projects

Ofgem funding received February 2018:

- **Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB Partnership:** Lost Landscapes
- **Peak District National Park Authority:** Longdendale Landscape Restoration
- **Snowdonia National Park Authority:** Dyffryn Maentwrog Woodland Restoration and Landscape Improvement
- **Dorset AONB Partnership:** Magical Marshwood Vale
- **Snowdonia National Park Authority:** Snowdonia Traditional Boundaries
- **Snowdonia National Park Authority:** Dyffryn Ffestiniog (East) Woodland Restoration and Landscape Improvement
- **New Forest National Park Authority:** Woodland Improvements and Wild Play at Holbury Manor / Warren Copse

Window 3 projects

Ofgem funding received January 2019:

- **Kent Downs AONB:** High Downs
- **Cannock Chase AONB:** Gentleshaw Common into the Future
- **North York Moors National Park:** Arncliffe Wood and Scarth Wood Moor Restoration
- **Kent Downs AONB:** North Downs Living Grid project

Window 4 projects

Ofgem funding received June 2019:

- **Blackdown Hills AONB:** Enhancing the Hills
- **New Forest National Park Authority:** Landford Bog Nature Reserve
- **High Weald AONB:** Beautiful Boundaries 2
- **Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB:** Lost Landscapes Continued
- **High Weald AONB:** Wonderful Woodlands

Window 5 projects

Ofgem funding received January 2020:

- **Tamar Valley AONB:** South Hooe Restoring & Enhancing Watery Landscapes
- **North York Moors National Park:** Kepwick Landscape Restoration

Window 6 projects

Ofgem funding received January 2021:

- **New Forest National Park:** Restoration and Enhancement of Franchises Lodge
- **Cotswolds AONB:** West of Winchcombe Landscape Enhancements - Nottingham Hill
- **Lake District National Park:** Healing Valley Mires
- **Blackdown Hills AONB:** Hillforts of the Hills
- **Forest of Bowland AONB:** Quernmore & Conder Valley Landscape Enhancement Initiative
- **Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB:** Views of Minsmere
- **Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB:** Scenic sights and watery wilderness
- **Cotswolds AONB:** Restoring Cheltenham's Escarpment Grasslands

Window 7 projects

Ofgem funding received May 2021:

- **Lake District National Park:** Highlighting History at Lowther
- **Northumberland National Park:** Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail Enhancement
- **Cotswold AONB:** Hampnett to Chedworth Boundary Restorations
- **Snowdonia National Park:** Carneddau Connectivity

Window 8 projects

Eight applications received and approved by the approvals panel. Ofgem approval is expected by autumn 2021.

- **Lake District National Park:** Breast High Road Bretherdale Restoration
- **South Downs National Park:** Revealing Grandfathers Bottom Chalk Grassland Restoration
- **Kent Downs AONB:** Empowering the Natural Network
- **Lake District National Park:** Breast High Road Borrowdale Restoration
- **South Downs National Park:** Historic Boundaries of Woolbeding Estate
- **New Forest National Park:** New Forest access and landscape enhancements
- **Clywdian Range & Dee Valley AONB:** Hidden From View
- **Dorset AONB:** Linking Chalk, River & Vale

New Forest National Park

Case study:

Improving historic woodlands, restoring and enhancing the landscape

The New Forest is a unique landscape which combines open heathlands with ancient woodlands where the ancient tradition of commoning continues to this day.

Supported by grants totalling more than £260,000 from the Landscape Enhancement Initiative, the New Forest National Park Authority has set about three major initiatives to reinvigorate the natural landscape character of areas bordering National Grid's overhead lines.

Making woodland improvements

Volunteers have been working hard to restore active management to Warren Copse, including coppicing hazel woodland.

Public access has been improved through targeted footpath development, laying gravel in place of the muddiest paths for greater stability, while an exciting new wild play site within the wood has been created for local schools and children to enjoy.

These enhancements are inspiring the community to re-engage with the local area by



improving the natural landscape and providing a focus for family activity within the woodland.

Enhancing Landford Bog Nature Reserve

The beauty of Landford Bog Nature Reserve is being enhanced by diverting attention from the nearby pylons through improvements to visitor access and the landscape character of this internationally important habitat.

New fencing has been erected to enable grazing to be managed safely and securely, an important element of effective management of the bog. Further enhancements have included carrying out critical habitat restoration by clearing invasive vegetation such as cotoneaster and managing native birch and gorse scrub.

Reconnecting the landscape – Franchises Lodge

The landscape and habitats of Franchises Lodge are being restored, enhanced and reconnected to benefit all those using the area for recreation.

Work here includes removing over 60 hectares of rhododendron as part of a programme to manage invasive non-native species, renovating three Bronze Age tumuli which are registered Scheduled Ancient Monuments, reinstating a walking track for visitors, opening up a new lime avenue route and removing 120 square metres of abandoned building rubble to improve the landscape quality.

“These extensive works have already started to enhance our beautiful landscape and local habitats, breathing new life into the area. Through often simple enhancements, we are significantly improving the experience for local people and visitors and reminding them what a rare treasure the New Forest is. We’re grateful that LEI funding has helped us unlock these opportunities, which will go such a long way to keeping visitors coming back and re-engaging with this wonderful place.”

Sarah Kelly,
New Forest National Park
Landscape Officer

“These extensive works have already started to enhance our beautiful landscape and local habitats, breathing new life into the area.”



Blackdown Hills AONB

Case study:

Enhancing the Hills

“The funding from National Grid’s Landscape Enhancement Initiative has enabled us to breathe new life into our management and reignite the visual appeal of this beautiful setting. These crucial initiatives will enrich views from across the flat-topped plateau, and re-emphasise the rich mosaic of diverse and interconnected habitats in the AONB. The changes mean we can continue to maintain and grow the Blackdown Hills’ offering as a wonderful destination for visitors to enjoy.”

Lisa Turner
Blackdown Hills AONB Planning Officer

The Blackdown Hills is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the border between Devon and Somerset, consisting of forest, farmland and steep valleys.

Epitomising the English countryside, with hedgerows and copses, small farms with intricate field patterns, deep valleys and narrow, winding lanes, the AONB is popular for cycling, riding and walking.



With a grant from the Landscape Enhancement Initiative of almost £50,000, the Enhancing the Hills project focuses on a 6km corridor where National Grid’s electricity infrastructure cuts across a valley, ridge and plateau landscape.

The project has aimed to reduce the visual impact of the overhead line through targeted conservation initiatives to restore and enhance hedgerows and hedgerow trees, small woodlands and orchards, and meadows close to the power lines.

Expanding hedgerows

To filter views between irregular medieval fields and the more

regular field patterns on higher land, through an investment of over £25,000 the AONB team has so far installed 225m of brand new hedgerow, and restored 410 metres of old hedgerows. The new hedgerow strengthens the natural character of the landscape and crucially means there is now a clear physical boundary for the AONB in this location.

Restoring prominent spaces

Additionally, over one hectare of derelict and previously neglected historic orchard is being restored with new trees of native varieties. Scrub control, tree and ride maintenance are being carried out across 1.6 hectares of semi-natural woodland on the landscape close to Honiton.

Enhancing grassland

To build on the work to date, five hectares of grassland is being enhanced and resown using a combination of seeds and green hay, which will benefit natural regeneration for the long term. An ongoing annual monitoring programme will ensure the success of the programme and measure progress.



5. RIIO-T2 – entering the new price control period



Ofgem’s £500m VIP provision that was made as part of the regulatory period known as RIIO-T1 ended of March 2021.

For RIIO-T2, it was confirmed in early 2021 that an expenditure cap of £465m in 2018/2019 prices over five years has been set by Ofgem. This figure is based on the 2019 joint ‘willingness-to-pay’ study plus consideration of the pipeline of potential future projects, and is balanced against the impact on household bills, the costs associated with Net Zero, and the potential economic shock resulting from Covid-19.

The scope of the provision will remain the same as in RIIO-T1 and is available to all the electricity transmission operators in Great Britain i.e. National Grid in England and Wales and Scottish & Southern Electricity and Scottish Power Energy Networks in Scotland. It was confirmed that this figure would enable National Grid to continue to pursue the North Wessex Downs and Cotswolds projects that are already under consideration.

The provision for the LEI will be up to 2.5% of the expenditure cap which equates to between £11m and £12m over the five-year period. The funding submission process for the larger capital projects will remain the same, whereas LEI projects that have been approved by the Approvals Panel will no longer need to be sent to Ofgem for approval.

National Grid has also continued to monitor, as requested by the Stakeholder Advisory Group, infrastructure developments associated with the following locations to determine their feasibility:

- New Forest National Park
- Peak District National Park (West)
- Anglesey AONB



² To find out more about the RIIO regulatory framework please visit our website: <https://www.nationalgrid.com/about-us/how-we-are-regulated>

For further information:

Visual Impact Provision hotline: **0330 134 0051**

Visit our website at: **www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision**

Send an email to: **visualimpact@nationalgrid.com**

National Grid Electricity Transmission

National Grid House, Warwick Technology Park, Gallows Hill, Warwick, CV34 6DA, United Kingdom
Registered in England and Wales No. 4031152

www.nationalgrid.com