

VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Minutes of the third meeting held on 29th/30th October 2014

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Cadw** Ashley Batten, Senior Planning Archaeologist
- **Campaign for National Parks** Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager
- **CPRE** Neil Sinden, Policy and Campaigns Director
- **CPRW** Peter Ogden, Director
- **English Heritage** Shane Gould, Senior Local Government & National Infrastructure Advisor

- **Landscape Institute** Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director
- **National Association of AONBs** Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB

- **National Grid** George Mayhew, Director of Corporate Affairs
- **National Parks England** Peter Currell, Partnerships Delivery Manager, South Downs National Park Authority

- **National Parks Wales** Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning & Cultural Heritage, Snowdonia National Park

- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **Natural England** Liz Newton, Director Access and Engagement
- **Natural Resources Wales** Keith Davies, Head of Strategic Planning Group
- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist (30th October only)
- **Visit England** Phil Evans, Head of Policy & Analysis
- **Visit Wales** Lawrence Manley, Head of Investment and Funding

Apologies:

- **The Ramblers** Tom Fewins, Policy Consultant
- **Visit Wales** Jane Richardson, Head of Partnerships & Policy

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Hector Pearson, Planning Policy Manager and VIP Project Manager; Ian McKenna, Senior Policy Planner
- Professor Carys Swanwick, Independent Advisor to National Grid
- **LUC** – Samantha Oxley, Principal (29th October only)
- **Gillespies** – Rebecca Greatrix, Principal Landscape Architect (29th October only)
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Matt Sutton; Jane Dalton

The purpose of the Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting on 29th/30th October was to:

- Consider and discuss the findings of the landscape assessment report and agree the major schemes that will be taken forward for further investigation.
- Agree the way forward for smaller landscape enhancement projects.
- Agree the communications and stakeholder engagement plans relating to major project announcement.

Session 1 – Presentation on the outcomes of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

Carys Swanwick gave a presentation on the outcomes of the landscape and visual assessment, including an explanation of the scoring and ranking process and how the suggested top twelve shortlist of subsections for further investigation was arrived at. The process of benchmarking and calibration between the consultants to ensure objectivity was also explained. Full details of the process and the suggested shortlist are available in the full report entitled *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Existing Electricity Transmission Infrastructure in Nationally Protected Landscapes in England and Wales*. The report is available as a download (Visual Impact Provision Technical Report) from our website at www.nationalgrid.com/vip.

1.1 – Exclusion of tourist accommodation and scenic routes in the final ranking

A discussion was held regarding the exclusion of visual impact scores for tourist accommodation and scenic routes in the preferred ranking, and there were some concerns that their exclusion could imply that visitors/tourists are not relevant in the rankings. The consultants explained that they are confident that tourists are catered for due to the inclusion of walks, trails and cycling routes etc. It was reiterated that these two categories were excluded because comparative levels of information were not available for these visual receptors in all of the areas being assessed, and their inclusion therefore had the potential to skew the results. The data for the areas where information existed is available, and assurance was given that more detailed assessments of specific areas will be able to take these kinds of issues into account.

1.2 – Potential viability of the shortlisted schemes

National Grid was asked how confident it is that enough of the schemes in the top 12 are deliverable, and there were some concerns that many if not all of the shortlisted schemes could be eliminated when technical and engineering filters are applied. Whilst it was acknowledged that this could happen, it is not feasible to take too many projects forward for more detailed investigation at this stage. If it were to happen, lower-ranked schemes would be brought forward for consideration.

1.3 – Consideration of longer stretches of lines including lower-ranked sections

A discussion was held about the potential merits of considering longer stretches of line, especially where high-ranking areas are adjacent to or between the top twelve schemes. National Grid confirmed that this kind of issue will be considered during the next stage of assessment which will include e.g. more detailed assessment of technical feasibility, how long each length of line will be in reality (including potential end points), geological findings and the engineering options available.

1.4 – Implications of future boundary changes

The issue of future boundary changes and extensions to the designated areas was raised and there were questions about how this might affect the rankings. Specific reference was made to the impending decision regarding the Lakes and Dales extensions. Whilst it was acknowledged that changing circumstances could have an impact on the assessment, this would not bring these sections into the top 12 shortlist and no date has yet been set for an announcement regarding the extensions.

Session 2 – Consideration of the shortlisted schemes

Advisory Group members viewed an exhibition on the top twelve shortlisted schemes. The display board for each transmission section/subsection included maps, photographs and more detailed information about each of the schemes including the landscape and visual context, environmental designations, the relevant local authorities and other factors such as headline technical requirements, planned maintenance/refurbishment and potential infrastructure developments in each area. The landscape consultants, Professor Swanwick and National Grid were available to answer any technical and process questions.

2.1 – Prioritisation of schemes for further investigation

Following an initial discussion and Q&A about each of the schemes it was agreed that all of the top twelve shortlisted schemes should be put forward for further consideration. The next stage of work will include: a more detailed analysis by National Grid on factors such as technical feasibility, environment, geology, cultural heritage, land ownership issues etc.; dialogue with the relevant AONB/NP and their stakeholders to explore initial views on the feasibility and acceptability of the scheme from a local perspective; and consideration of other factors such as environmental designations, sensitive ecosystems, cultural heritage and archaeological interests that could affect the final weightings.

2.2 – Agreements re specific schemes

There was broad agreement that it would not be appropriate to use the whole budget in just one designated area, and in relation to specific schemes the following was also agreed:

- **Peak District National Park – subsections 4ZO.3, 4ZO.4:** These two sections of line have already been looked at quite closely by National Grid so a body of evidence already exists, and there is also a strong local campaign for undergrounding. A number of technical challenges exist including e.g. a reservoir crossing and a very narrow corridor for undergrounding, as well as potential new rail/road infrastructure developments in the valley. Given the complex set of circumstances and the amount of technical information already available, National Grid is to work with the Park authority to determine next steps, potentially leading to a facilitated workshop.
- **Dorset AONB – subsections 4VN.2, 4YA.5, 4YA.7:** It was felt that these sections (including the sections of line adjacent/in-between) should also be looked at as a whole scheme as there might be a better solution than looking at subsection each in isolation.
- **Tamar Valley AONB – subsection YF.1:** This was the highest scoring scheme, and it also benefits from being a relatively 'self-contained' project. It was therefore agreed that, subject to first talking to the relevant authority, it should be fast-tracked for more detailed consideration. It was also felt that focusing on one project in this way would also serve as a useful demonstration/test of the process, and would enable National Grid to develop a robust methodology.

In the meantime the focus of communication about the shortlisted schemes will be on the eight AONBs/NPs that the subsections are located in as opposed to the specific transmission sections/subsections.

2.3 – Other issues

Other issues that were discussed included:

- **Landowner issues** – National Grid advised that it is difficult to assess the risk or complexity of dealing with landowners until the landowners themselves have been spoken to, and it was suggested that having willing landowners might be a relevant criterion. Other issues such as common land, the existence of vergers and temporary provision of alternative land will also need to be considered.
- **Consideration of neighbouring lower-ranked subsections** – For a number of schemes the relative merits of dealing with adjacent or 'in-between' sections of lower-ranked lines were discussed, especially where dealing with a higher-ranked subsection could result in a line looking worse than it did previously.
- **Planned maintenance/refurbishment** – Where there are existing plans for maintenance/refurbishment, the potential to make savings by offsetting those costs was discussed. Concerns about being seen to remove a line that has only just been refurbished were also noted.
- **Other planned development/infrastructure** – It was agreed that careful consideration is needed in locations where new infrastructure or upgrades to existing infrastructure are being considered or are planned. There may be little point in investing in undergrounding or re-routing lines only for something else to have a significant visual impact in the future, and concerns about cumulative disruptions to the community were also noted. The potential benefits of 'joined-up' thinking/collaboration with other agencies was discussed e.g. minimising disruption by carrying out work at the same time, cost savings, making use of the same routes etc.
- **Existing infrastructure** – The relative merits of making improvements in an area that already has other significant infrastructure were discussed, for example the existence of main roads or distribution lines, as opposed an area that is relatively unspoilt. A similar discussion was also held re investing in areas with dense communities and lots of visitors as opposed to more remote/undeveloped areas. It was reiterated that the level of Ofgem funding for DNOs does not allow them to tackle 132kV lines and it was suggested that this might provide another strong case to put to Ofgem that the inability to deal with 132kV lines means that there is no point in putting some of the high-ranking National Grid projects forward.
- **Options other than undergrounding** – It was noted that some of the short-listed schemes may be good candidates for options other than undergrounding including e.g. re-routeing, mitigation of visual impacts by modifying woodland edges/changing the relationship of the pylons within the landscape, and re-routeing footpaths.

- **Creation of other landscape impacts due to undergrounding or re-routeing** – It was noted that re-routeing may create its own landscape impacts that the authorities might find difficult to accept e.g. impacts on other parts of the landscape, or heat from the cables meaning that frost/snow would not settle along the route of buried cables.

2.4 – Next stage of work

National Grid agreed to undertake preliminary landscape work and local stakeholder engagement by April 2015, and that this should enable the Advisory Group to prioritise the projects further.

It was also suggested that the Advisory Group could play an important role in questioning/challenging the existing technical options and driving the innovation agenda. National Grid agreed with this and suggested that it put a panel together for the Advisory Group to ask questions of during a subsequent meeting (probably April 2015). Ofgem also explained that funding might be available via their innovation scheme if there are sensible opportunities to explore that could have wider benefits and/or are relevant for other infrastructure. The potential cross-benefits from partnering, leveraging and developments from existing/ongoing research and development (e.g. work already happening on photo-reactive paint) were also discussed.

Session 3 – Agreement on the way forward for smaller landscaping projects

The Advisory Group has previously recommended that a proportion of the £500m fund should be allocated to smaller, localised visual landscaping/improvement projects, and National Grid have found that this concept has been well received in meetings with AONBs/NPs.

Hector Pearson from National Grid gave an update on the proposals and draft paper arising from the outcomes of the smaller landscaping projects sub-group meeting that was held in September 2014. The aim of the initiative is to enable smaller projects to be developed that enhance the local environment in other ways and ‘shifting the balance’ of the lines. Projects must support the objectives of the AONB/NP as well as enhance the visual impact of National Grid’s existing infrastructure. The proposed amount of funding to be made available is £4m per year from April 2015 until March 2021. This represents up to five percent of the possible total provision and the amount allocated each year can be varied year on year if needed. All 30 designated areas that contain a National Grid transmission line are eligible to apply, and applications should be submitted by the AONB/NP, even where applications are developed by others.

3.1 – Feedback from Ofgem

Ofgem confirmed their support for allocating some of the VIP funding to smaller landscaping solutions (as above). They endorsed the proposed criteria for applications and reiterated the need for a robust process/procedure for applying for and approving funding.

The Advisory Group asked about the extent to which Ofgem would need to approve individual applications. In response Ofgem explained that they would hope to take a pragmatic view and that applications could be reviewed in blocks, with the first set of applications being used to set benchmarks. The need for very clear criteria for eligibility to make this process work well was reiterated.

3.2 – Submission of applications through AONBs/NPAs

A discussion was held about whether it makes sense for applications to only be submitted by AONBs/NPAs or whether other organisations should be allowed to submit directly. After some debate it was agreed that this approach is appropriate, as it will act as a form of quality control and prevent other organisations from putting in applications that are not appropriate for this fund. It was noted that the relevant authorities are used to bringing relevant stakeholders together and this will help to ensure that applications are appropriate and fit within the AONBs/NPA’s own management plans. It was also noted that the authorities will be able to help groups submit joint applications that bring together smaller projects.

3.3 – Match funding and use of the fund for monitoring

It was agreed that applicants must be able to use part of the funding to carry out monitoring activities. It was also reiterated that match funding can include volunteer hours and monitoring costs. Ofgem noted that there does, however, need to be a clear breakdown of where contributions made up by 'costs in kind' are coming from.

3.4 – Scale of the fund and size of individual projects

The proposed amount of funding per allocation was discussed. Some felt that there should be a minimum level/size of project to avoid lots of small projects being submitted, however not everybody agreed with this and there was support for being able to fund very small projects. It was suggested that the authorities could 'marry' smaller/individual projects together and/or that there could be a process by which the authorities could apply for their own fund which they would then allocate to projects at a local level. Whilst these approaches would avoid National Grid having to manage lots of small schemes, Ofgem reiterated that they have to sign off any consumer money that is spent so the onus will be on the authorities to group small projects together and provide evidence of outputs that meet the criteria. There was broad agreement that there should be a way of managing the fund so that small schemes are not excluded and a number of suggestions were made as to how this could work. The National Association for AONBs and National Parks England agreed to put a proposal together for consideration by National Grid/Ofgem.

A discussion was also held about whether there should be a cap on the number of live applications from any one body, to stop any one organisation dominating the scheme, and it was reiterated that this only refers to the capital phase and that having projects in the maintenance phase would not preclude an authority from applying for further projects. It was agreed that there should be some flexibility in the process, and as there will be an ongoing dialogue between the applicants, the grant assessor and the panel, these issues can be monitored and reviewed.

Actions:

- **Peter Currell and Howard Sutcliffe** – Put together a proposal for how smaller projects could be considered.

3.5 – Restrictions on where and how the fund can be spent

It was agreed that:

- The application process should require the applicant to justify and demonstrate the visual impact and therefore no proximity criteria should be applied.
- The visual impact that is addressed should be for a view from within the AONB/NP boundary but the work can be carried out outside (e.g. to mitigate the impact of a line that is outside the boundary, planting trees outside the boundary could have a bigger impact than planting within).
- Applications related to the visual impact on the four designated areas who proposed lines outside of the boundaries for consideration and that were the subject of detailed assessment can be submitted (e.g. in the Howardian Hills AONB, Northumberland National Park, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and The Quantock Hills AONB) but any others are excluded during this Price Control Period.
- The scores/ranking from the landscape and visual assessment are not relevant for applications made under this funding stream, and will not be used to assess or rank any applications for these smaller projects.

3.6 – Structure of the panel

It was agreed that a panel should be set up to support the professional staff in signing off applications and approving funding. After discussion it was agreed that the panel should be chaired by National Grid, and that, as a minimum, membership should include representation from the National Association for AONBs and National Parks England / National Parks Wales and an independent landscape architect. Ofgem confirmed that it would not be appropriate for them to be a member as their role is to approve recommendations put forward by National Grid.

Action:

- **All** – Send further specific comments and suggestions on the draft proposals to Hector.
- **Hector Pearson** – Expand the information in the draft paper on the application/approvals process and the panel structure/membership.
- **Hector Pearson** – Redraft the proposals and circulate for further comments.

3.7 – Communication about the £24m for smaller landscape enhancement projects

Regarding communication about the £24 million initiative, Ofgem advised that there is no provision in the licence condition to say that an amount has been 'set aside' and that it should instead be communicated as a 'level of ambition to use up to £24m for these landscape enhancement projects over six years.'

It was also noted that it would be useful to not have committed to spending £4m specifically per year as applications could rise in later years as people learn about what can be done with the fund.

Session 4 – Update on communications and engagement

Stuart Fox and Matt Sutton from Camargue PR gave an update on the plans for communications, media activity and stakeholder engagement.

4.1 – Communications including media/press releases

Immediately following this meeting, National Grid and Camargue will brief the eight designated areas on the shortlist to let them know that they have a section of line (or lines) within their area, and will work with them to tailor their own regional news releases and prepare for local interviews. A national press release will then be issued on Sunday 9th November, and a feature in the Guardian/Observer is planned for the same date. Media briefings will continue after this date and it is anticipated that there will be a need for a higher level of information in some areas.

4.2 – Stakeholder engagement

The plans for engagement with officers, members, stakeholders and communities in the eight selected locations and all other AONBs/NPs were outlined. In addition to the immediate communication plan outlined above, National Grid and Camargue will work with the AONBs/NPAs to shape local stakeholder engagement over the next few months. Whilst there will be a particular focus on the eight selected areas (including gathering of information to inform the next stage of the decision-making process), for all other authorities communication will focus on opportunities available for local landscape enhancement projects.

Organisations represented on the Advisory Group are encouraged to send information to their members at the same time as the above via their distribution lists, websites, newsletters etc.

4.3 – Specific activity in the eight shortlisted areas

Planned activity with the AONBs/NPs on the shortlist will include agreement at a local level about how they want to proceed and how best to tap into local stakeholder networks. As a minimum it is envisaged that a local stakeholder workshop and a drop-in day for the wider community will be held in each area, possibly on the same day. National Grid will be present at these meetings and it was suggested that it would also be useful for the Advisory Group to be represented. The workshops/meetings will take place before the next Advisory Group meeting to ensure that relevant information and feedback is available.

Action:

- **Camargue** – Circulate dates for local stakeholder workshops/drop-in days when they have been agreed for Advisory Group members to sign up to volunteer for a link with a particular shortlisted scheme.

4.4 – Other planned communication/engagement

In addition to the above:

- The VIP website is due to be refreshed.
- There will be ongoing engagement with Advisory Group members' communication teams and NPAs/AONBs to get news out about the project and explore collaborative opportunities.
- NPAs/AONBs will be encouraged to alert key local stakeholders such as National Park Societies to the planned announcement.
- Contact will be made with wider stakeholders on both a local and national level including e.g. RSPB, Wildlife Trusts etc.

- National Grid will be updating their blog and posting updates on Twitter and all are encouraged to re-tweet/provide content for the blog.
- There will be a section on the project website for each of the shortlisted areas and future functionality will enable people to add comments.
- Opportunities are being explored for wider media (including broadcast) coverage beyond the shortlist announcement are being explored.
- Speaking opportunities through both Advisory Group organisations and other third parties are being investigated.
- Ministers, MPs, AMs, MEPs and civil servants are being kept informed of the project's progress through National Grid's regular engagement channels.
- All MPs whose constituencies have shortlisted subsections of line will be written to as will those representing the wider AONBs and NPs concerned.

Advisory Group members were encouraged to discuss the project with any ministers or parliamentary committees that they deal with. Camargue is able to provide any level of information that is needed for briefings/discussions.

Actions:

- **All** – Continue to let Camargue know of people they need to talk to and submit any ideas for programmes/events that could be used to feature the project.
- **All** – Provide content for the National Grid blog.
- **Lawrence Manley & Phil Evans** – Provide contacts for tourism-related sites.
- **Camargue** – Cross-reference membership lists of parliamentary committees to ensure appropriate members are briefed.

4.5 – Communicating about possible local landscape enhancement projects

It was noted that although there is particular interest from the AONBs/NPs in this element of the VIP, until the criteria have been fully developed only broad information can be communicated at this stage. Camargue and National Grid will therefore liaise with the National Association for AONBs and directly with the NPAs regarding the best way to communicate the opportunities that might be available through this provision. Information will be made available for their own websites/communications and people will be able to register via the VIP project website to receive more detailed information about the fund when it becomes available.

4.6 – Circulation of the report

The Landscape and Visual Assessment Technical Report has been published on the project website alongside a shorter non-technical summary. All of the background/technical information is available on a CD – this will be sent to all of the 30 impacted AONBs/NPs and is available to anybody else who requests it. It was therefore noted that although communication will focus on the eight selected areas, the actual/detailed rankings will be readily available.

A technical workshop that will explain the process and methodology of the landscape and visual assessment will be coordinated if there is a demand for this event. The Advisory Group and National Grid will also demonstrate that this is an ongoing process and a significant amount of engagement with local communities/stakeholders will now take place. It was reiterated that the reason for working closely through the AONBs/NPAs is that they consult widely with their communities and stakeholders, and the local landscape enhancement initiative will also involve wider community engagement. All stakeholders should also be reminded that there will also be a formal opportunity to respond to consultations for undergrounding or major VIP projects as part of the statutory planning process.

The Advisory Group also mentioned that account needs to be taken of National Grid's proposed major projects near to sections of line proposed for VIP investment, specifically in relation to stakeholder engagement and communications.

Action:

- **National Grid** – to feedback the latest position on any proposed major projects, which might have an interaction with VIP, to the next Advisory Group meeting.

Any other business

- **Future meeting dates** – The next meeting will be held on 3rd/4th February 2015. As there is no requirement for site visits at the next meeting, it was proposed that the meeting take place either in Birmingham or Warwick.
- **Future of the Advisory Group** – It was agreed that the Advisory Group should have a continuing role for the life of the project and that its members will play a key part in acting as ambassadors for the scheme. The number of meetings is likely to reduce from four times a year to once annually after the end of 2015. Meeting dates to be circulated for all meetings to end of 2015 as soon as possible.
- **Plans for review** – Ofgem advised that they will be starting their review for the next Price Control Period in 2020, and it was suggested that the Advisory Group needs to plan a review of the process into their own timetable to feed into National Grid/Ofgem. It was also suggested that there should be an annual review of the expenditure on landscape enhancement projects and the progress of the major engineering projects.

Action:

- **Camargue** – Circulate the rest of the meeting dates for 2015.
-