

# Stakeholder engagement from the Dorset options appraisal report

Having identified a shortlist of 12 subsections of line in eight designated areas using the landscape assessment, the Stakeholder Advisory Group asked National Grid to carry out early stage engagement with stakeholders and the public at a local level.

The aim of this early engagement was to gather information and intelligence on the areas to inform the options assessments and to gauge local attitudes and opinions on the work. It was also felt that involving local groups and individuals at the outset would not only help to identify any potential problems and challenges but also to give the local community a sense of ownership. It should be a requirement of any scheme taken forward to major engineering work that it has the support and involvement of local people.

It was also agreed at the Stakeholder Advisory Group that National Grid should work closely with the Dorset AONB Partnership to present a collaborative, inclusive partnership approach to the local community.

## 1. Stakeholder meeting

1.1. A meeting was held on 27 November 2014, attended by National Grid, Camargue and representatives from High Weald AONB (Sally Marsh) and Dorset AONB (Richard Brown).

1.2. The following points were discussed and agreed during the meeting:

- Stakeholder engagement would take place as soon as practical in the New Year.
- Ideally engagement events would take place on the same day with a workshop for selected, relevant individuals / organisations followed by a drop in event for the public (afternoon and evening).
- This initial stakeholder engagement will inform the landscape and technical work.
- The workshop would be a closed session, focused on a smaller group and technical in nature. Attendees would comprise primarily key representatives from the AONB Partnerships and other key statutory bodies identified by the AONB Partnerships and agreed with National Grid.
- Personal invites would be issued to the workshop. Personal invites would also be issued to the drop in sessions to selected groups / individuals (as advised by the AONB officers).
- General invites would be sent to other relevant groups / local affected communities primarily using the AONBs' networks / databases. National Grid would work with the AONBs' communications officers to ensure that the message was delivered to relevant audiences.
- Drop in events would need to take place at a convenient location for members of the community as advised by the AONB Partnerships.
- National Grid would take responsibility for organising and delivering the events but they would be collaborative activities between National Grid and the AONB teams.
- Invites and materials for each event would be co-branded.

## **2. Engagement events**

- 2.1. On the advice of the Dorset AONB team, the events were held as follows. Both workshop and drop in events took place on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2015. The workshop was held at County Hall, Dorset County Council's head office and the drop-in was held at The Colliton Club, opposite County Hall.
- 2.2. The workshop ran from 9.30am until 1.00pm and was attended by 14 representatives from local stakeholders including Dorset AONB officers and representatives from Dorset County Council, West Dorset District Council, Natural England, the South Dorset Ridgeway Partnership, SSE and Bournemouth University. Representatives from National Grid and Camargue were in attendance and Shane Gould, Senior Local Government & National Infrastructure Adviser at English Heritage, attended on behalf of the Stakeholder Advisory Group as an observer.
- 2.3. The drop in event ran from 2.00pm until 8.00pm and was staffed by representatives from National Grid (VIP project team) and Camargue. It was attended by a broad cross section of the local community with a number of local landowners represented, as well as local residents. In total, 41 people attended the event.
- 2.4. The event was publicised as agreed with the AONB Partnership with direct invitations sent to the AONB's mailing list of key stakeholders. The event was also promoted via the AONB's e-newsletter, a news article on its website and regular Tweets through its Twitter profile. AONB Landscape Planning Officer Richard Brown was also active in encouraging people to attend via word of mouth. National Grid worked closely with AONB Manager Tom Munro and provided material for use in publicity proactively and on demand.

A press release was produced and issued to local media resulting in coverage in the Dorset Echo, The Argus and on BBC Sussex where the event was mentioned by VIP Project Manager Hector Pearson during an interview about the High Weald.

Tom Munro, Dorset AONB Manager, was interviewed about the project on BBC Radio Solent on the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> February. He discussed the project as a whole as well as what it could mean for the Dorset AONB.

## **3. Stakeholder feedback**

### *3.1. Technical workshop*

The following key issues were discussed at the Technical Workshop:

#### *3.1.1. Landscape and visual*

- Two sections of National Grid's transmission line pass through the Dorset AONB.
- Section 4VN.2 runs from Weymouth north-west to Broadway, crossing diagonally over the South Dorset Escarpment.
- Section 4YA runs west to east from Axminster to Weymouth, running broadly parallel to the coast.
- Subsection 4YA.5 runs from Spyway in the west to the head of Stancombe in the east. It runs along the edge of the chalk escarpment following the northern side of a deep coombe which shows distinctive chalkland topography.
- Subsection 4YA.7 runs south-east from Winterbourne Abbas to the edge of the South Dorset Escarpment at Bronkham Hill. It crosses the open downs, dropping into a valley

as it passes close to Winterbourne Abbas and approaches the South Dorset Escarpment from the north.

- 4YA.7 crosses areas of open large scale downland and smaller-scale valleys, with the open downs more able to accommodate the pylons than the valleys. The transmission line crosses areas of open large scale downland and smaller-scale valleys.
- From the village of Askerswell, 4YA.5 interrupts views of the downland escarpment.
- There is a significant visual impact where 4VN.2 passes the South Downs Ridgeway. The line crosses the ridge at a shallow angle, affecting more of the sensitive escarpment landscape.
- Attendees felt that locating sealing end compounds in the AONB's open landscape could be a challenge.
- It was acknowledged that the transmission line's crossing points across the South Downs Ridgeway take the most appropriate route and therefore re-routing this line is not a viable option.

### 3.1.2. *Ecology / environment*

- It was noted that 4YA.5 crosses a SSSI and SAC
- Refurbishment works are taking place this summer (2015) on the two SSE lines that run parallel to 4YA.7.
- Attendees felt that there are no known constraints to undergrounding 4YA.5

### 3.1.3. *Archaeology*

- The South Downs Ridgeway has important Iron and Bronze Age settlements and stretches between 4VN.2 and 4YA.7. The transportation of materials across the Ridgeway is of particular interest to many archaeologists.
- There is a dense concentration of Bronze Age burial mounds and the only other examples can be found at Stonehenge and Orkney.
- Attendees felt that 4YA.7 crosses the landscape at one of the most important archaeological sites.
- It was noted that sensitive undergrounding works could support archaeological work. Attendees stated that the construction of the Weymouth relief road had help to uncover a roman road and 50 beheaded Vikings.

### 3.1.4. *Land ownership*

- The Duchy of Cornwall is a major landowner but the rest of the AONB has a broad number of landowners.

### 3.1.5. *Tourism*

- Tourism in West Dorset is significant and 14 per cent of local people are employed in the sector

- The South Downs Ridgeway project is aiming to demonstrate to visitors the importance of the landscape.
- Some attendees felt that the South Downs Ridgeway project provides a good opportunity to combine with the Visual Impact Provision project.

### 3.1.6 Summary

- The consensus from workshop attendees was that 47A.7 provides the best option for undergrounding works, however finding locations for sealing end compounds would be challenging.

## 4. Feedback from drop-in event

10 feedback forms were completed at the Dorset event. Comments are summarised below.

- The majority of those providing feedback were in favour of the project.
- Burying the cables underground was the preferred option with respondents stating that screening and camouflaging pylons would not be beneficial to the area.
- One respondent stated that they felt that the eastern shortlisted section (4VN.1) was of equal importance to the shortlisted section of line (4VN.2) within the AONB.
- While most respondents were in favour of undergrounding all three sections of line, one respondent felt that the section marked 4YA.5 was more detrimental to the landscape within the AONB than either of the other two shortlisted sections (4VN.2 and 4YA.7).
- Three respondents highlighted concerns about access to public rights of way during any proposed work as well as the need for extensive restoration.
- The restoration aspect of the project featured prominently in four comment forms with respondents highlighting the impact that undergrounding would have on the landscape.
- One respondent felt that the length of the sections of line being considered were too short.
- The impact that the pylons currently have on local wildlife was highlighted – in particular birds' use of the pylons as nesting points.
- The historical and environmental importance of the landscape was mentioned by the majority of respondents with members of the public requesting that extensive archaeological and environmental surveys be carried out.
- One respondent mentioned that there have been calls for a by-pass around Winterbourne Abbas. Should this by-pass be built, they felt that it would greatly alter the visual impact assessment the area around the section 4YA.7.
- One respondent added that they were in favour of a number of smaller mitigation measures in the place of a single, larger scheme.
- Overall, the majority of the feedback received at the event was positive with most people supportive of a scheme that would bury cables underground.