

VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Minutes of the eighth meeting held on 27th to 28th September 2016

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Cadw** Ashley Batten, Senior Planning Archaeologist,
Gwynedd Archaeological Planning Service
- **Campaign for National Parks** Fiona Howie, Chief Executive
- **CPRE** Neil Sinden, Landscape Consultant
- **CPRW** Peter Ogden, Director
- **Historic England** Shane Gould, Senior Local Government & National
Infrastructure Advisor
- **Landscape Institute** Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director
- **National Association for AONBs** Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range
& Dee Valley AONB (*absent for day two*)
- **National Grid** George Mayhew, Director of Corporate Affairs
- **National Parks England** Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National
Park Authority
- **National Parks Wales** Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning & Cultural
Heritage, Snowdonia National Park
- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **The Ramblers** Nicky Philpott, Director of Policy and Campaigns
- **Visit England** Sam Oakley, Policy and Affairs Manager

Apologies:

- **Natural England** Liz Newton, Director Landscape and Geodiversity
- **Natural Resources Wales** Keith Davies, Head of Planning, Landscape, Energy
and Climate Change Group
- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist
- **Visit Wales** Lawrence Manley, Head of Investment and Funding

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Hector Pearson, VIP Project Manager; Ian McKenna, Senior Policy Planner;
Tony Dyas, Lead Project Manager (*day two only*); Adrian Chanter, Consents Officer (*day one
only*)
- **AECOM** – James Riley (*day one only*)
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Matt Sutton; Jane Dalton

The VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group carried out a site visit to the New Forest National Park (line section 4YB.2) on the afternoon of 27th September 2016, followed by a full day meeting on 28th September.

The purpose of the meeting on 28th September was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Hear updates on the four schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forwards for capital engineering projects
 - Discuss forward plans and contingency should one of the schemes fall away
 - Consider future communication and engagement plans
 - Receive an update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative
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1 – Update on the four schemes shortlisted for capital engineering projects

Hector Pearson, Ian McKenna and Tony Dyas from National Grid gave an update on the work that has been carried out since the last Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting on 19th April 2016 on the four schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward.

1.1 – Project development and local stakeholder engagement

The consultant team working on the project has expanded to include consultants in engineering, consents, land management, environmental, heritage, geology and transport. On specific schemes, specialists have been engaged to look at heathland restoration (New Forest) and marine consents (Snowdonia).

Detailed site investigations have begun and meetings of the local stakeholder reference groups (SRGs) have taken place in all four areas. There has also been a series of public drop-in events and conversations / negotiations with key stakeholders and members of the community including landowners, local access and special interest groups and elected members.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) programme of work in Dorset and the Peak District is ongoing and will continue until July 2017. EIA Screening Opinions have been sought from each of the relevant local planning authorities (apart from Snowdonia where an opinion will be sought before the end of 2016), and phase one habitat surveys and preliminary environmental assessment reports have been completed. Wintering bird surveys have also been completed and breeding bird surveys are ongoing alongside a raft of other environmental surveys.

The aim for Dorset AONB and Peak District National Park is to submit planning applications in July/August 2017 with a view to construction commencing early in 2018. Submission of a planning application for the Snowdonia National Park scheme is proposed for May 2018 where construction will align with the North Wales Connection Project, and for the New Forest National Park the planned submission date is spring / summer 2018 with construction starting later the same year.

There has been good local support for all four projects with many members of the community as well as stakeholders praising the initiative. Negative feedback has centred mainly on cost (some members of the public believe that the money would be better spent on other services such as the NHS or international aid) and on local concerns about the potential disruptions and traffic congestion during construction.

A summary of progress and specific issues for each of the four schemes is outlined below.

1.2 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7

A preferred routeing option for replacing the overhead line (OHL) with underground cable has now been identified in consultation with the local stakeholder reference group (SRG) and the wider community. There are, however, challenges with securing support from one of the major landowners along the route and as a result, access has not been granted for the required ground intrusive (GI) surveys on his land. Unfortunately it is not possible to by-pass this landholding as it covers a wide area around the existing OHL.

There are also ongoing discussions with another landowner and the Dorset AONB regarding the location of the southern sealing end compound (SEC).

The Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed options for the way forward should landowner agreement not be obtained. There were three main options discussed. First, National Grid was asked to look at the potential for removing a shorter section of line (thereby avoiding the

landholding). This would however require an SEC in open farmland (which in turn would require landowner consent albeit from a landowner who has been co-operative to date) and screening options for the SECs and the pylons that would remain. The second option was potentially to switch to one of the other shortlisted Dorset schemes. A third option was to seek compulsory rights from the landowner. *[See also Section 2 for further discussions on this issue for this and other schemes.]*

The Stakeholder Advisory Group also discussed the potential impact of the cable route on known and unknown archaeology. Local archaeologists remain supportive of the project, however the inability to carry out GI and geophysical surveys along the whole length of the proposed route means that there are still gaps in the team's knowledge on the potential existence of any archaeological sites. It was pointed out that even when GI work is done, there is no guarantee that it will reveal any sites. National Grid is continuing to work closely with Historic England, Dorset County Council and local archaeological experts, and there is a watching brief over all of the intrusive investigations and resulting works.

The potential for horizontal directional drilling (HDD) was discussed (both to avoid archaeological sites and minimise disturbance to the land), but National Grid advised that HDD is highly intrusive – it is only possible to drill in 800m – 1,000m lengths and each drill requires a sizeable launch area. In fact, it is possible that using HDD could cause greater short-term disturbance than simply burying the cables and it could potentially have an impact on adjoining landowners.

1.3 – New Forest National Park – 4YB.2

There is strong local support for this project and following the SRG meeting in August 2016 endorsement has been received from the local SRG to progress with the northern alignment option (the route visited by the Stakeholder Advisory Group on the previous day).

The key issues for this scheme are: gaining consents for the necessary works to be carried out in the numerous environmental designations in the area; minimising the long-term environmental impact of construction works on the heathland habitat; and mitigating the impacts on the territorial grazing areas of the New Forest livestock. National Grid has appointed reinstatement specialist, Alaska, to advise on this aspect of the work and it has presented initial ideas to the SRG. Alaska will work closely with Natural England, the National Trust, Forestry Commission and the Park Authority as the project progresses.

Given the complexity of the stakeholder landscape in the New Forest, it has been agreed that a community liaison group will be established to ensure that members of the community and local interest groups beyond the more technical members of the SRG are fully engaged and informed. Letters have already been sent to a range of organisations including parish councils, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, CPRE Hampshire and the New Forest Commoners Defence Association (CDA) inviting them to nominate a representative for the group. It is proposed to host the first meeting in December 2016.

Stakeholder Advisory Group discussions also focused on the ongoing negotiations with the owners of the land that will need to be purchased for the new sealing end compound locations. National Grid reported that these discussions had progressed positively to date.

1.4 – Peak District National Park (Eastern section – 4ZO.2)

A number of potential complications have arisen with the Peak District East scheme and agreement on the preferred undergrounding route has therefore not yet been reached with the SRG and local stakeholders. At the SRG meeting in March 2016, discussions with those present had narrowed the preferred routeing option down to a route south of the River Don along the Trans Pennine Trail

(TPT), which would also involve moving the sealing end compound down the trail into a new location within the Wogden Foot local wildlife site.

However, following the March SRG, stakeholders had visited the site and as a result asked for an alternative northerly routeing option to be reconsidered – this would require an HDD to allow the cables to cross under the River Don. This had previously been discounted due to the significant amount of spoil that would be generated in re-profiling the banks of the Don and hillside to the north in order to achieve cable ratings. National Grid's contractors, Parsons Brinckerhoff are currently producing an engineering design for this northern alignment which should enable a decision to be made on the route alignment as soon as possible.

There are also potential land ownership issues north of the Don for the location of either the diverted TPT (if the southern route is chosen) or SEC / permanent access road (if the northern route is chosen). National Grid will continue to liaise with landowners and stakeholders locally.

All stakeholders and most of the local community (support was very high from visitors to the Penistone Show where National Grid had a stand) would like to find a practical solution to enable the scheme to go ahead. All agreed that there is enormous potential in the location for VIP to make a significant positive impact on the valley and its community.

Possible wider benefits for the area include: raising awareness of the valley's archaeological and industrial heritage (as well as its unique ecology) through the provision of education and interpretation; further promotion for users of the TPT and the creation of an eastern gateway to the National Park; enhancing Wogden Foot (including the potential to use the new sealing end compound as a protected area for ground-nesting birds) to make it an exemplar project for habitat improvement / enhancement; and secondary benefits such as the introduction of flood control measures through tree planting etc. National Grid reported that the pub in Dunford Bridge village which had recently closed is in the process of being refurbished with a view to it re-opening as a B&B / tea room.

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council will be the determining authority for the bulk of this scheme. Ongoing relationships with Council members of the SRG remain good but continued delayed responses from the Council remain a concern to the project team. Following letters to the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council, National Grid has been invited to present to senior officers – including those for tourism and cultural heritage – on Monday 24th October 2016.

1.5 – Snowdonia National Park – 4CZ.1

The preferred option for this scheme is to construct a cable tunnel from Cilfor to Garth under the Dwyrdd Estuary and extend the underground section to join up with the existing cables that run across the Glaslyn Estuary to the north-west. This would avoid leaving a short section of OHL (and three pylons) between the two estuaries. Feedback from stakeholders, members of the public and landowners was strongly against leaving the three spans up due to its adverse visual impact on the setting of the National Park

GI works are now needed to determine how deep the tunnel would need to go, and the consenting process for these works is expected to take six months due to the environmental designations in the area. Further work is also required to finalise the locations for the tunnel head shafts and eastern SEC (there may not be a requirement for an SEC at the western end). Further considerations for National Grid and stakeholders include determining how to deal with the spoil arising from the tunnel construction works, and to decide whether the pylon bases (particularly those that are

located in the sensitive estuary environment) should be retained or removed once the steel lattice work is taken down.

There is very strong support from local stakeholders to proceed with the scheme. However, as agreed at the last Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting, to reduce construction disruption locally, the VIP project in Snowdonia should be aligned with the North Wales Connection project to connect the proposed new nuclear power station, Wylfa Newydd. A definitive decision has not yet been made on whether or not the power station on Anglesey will proceed, but if it does go ahead the capacity of the line being considered for undergrounding under the VIP project would need to be increased. This would in turn require a greater diameter tunnel than is needed for the current project (c. 5m diameter as opposed to c. 4m).

The difference in cost for constructing a bigger diameter tunnel (the tunnel fit out would also be different if two 400kV cables were required) is being investigated by National Grid.

National Grid confirmed that the cost and scale of the GI works would be the same whatever the diameter of the tunnel. For the VIP project to proceed within the current price control period the investigatory works in the estuary would need to be carried out early in 2017.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group also voiced concerns about holding on for a decision about the future of a new nuclear power station that might never happen, and it was further noted that proceeding with projects like this is important for the future of the VIP scheme.

It was noted that if the nuclear project does not go ahead, construction of the VIP section could be brought forward to the earliest opportunity, however given the current timescales for the decision to be made, there is the potential that it could take this project beyond the current price control period, unless the GI work is done early in 2017.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that it strongly supports proceeding with preparatory works on this project. In Ofgem's absence it requested that the funding for the GI works in the estuary was made available to National Grid so that it can proceed with the project within the current price control period.

1.6 – Coordination and collaboration between agencies

Stakeholder Advisory Group members have previously expressed their frustration with the lack of collaboration between different agencies in relation to strategic planning for infrastructure developments.

A number of concrete examples of the failure to adopt a more coordinated approach have been highlighted during the VIP project - Brecon Beacons (highways work), Dorset (DNO infrastructure), Peak District West (utilities) – the Stakeholder Advisory Group feels strongly that in the light of the situation in both Dorset and the North Wessex Downs (and potentially elsewhere within AONBs and National Parks), Ofgem should look at providing funds to reduce the impact of both TO and DNO lines where they occupy the same section of landscape.

The potential role that the Stakeholder Advisory Group alongside National Grid could play in putting the case for a more strategic and joined-up approach to planning to government and infrastructure developers was also reiterated. The possibility of a meeting or workshop bringing together utilities, stakeholders and government was raised and should form the subject of further discussion among members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group and National Grid.

2 – VIP forward planning and contingency

The Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed the status of the four prioritised schemes and the key risks that could lead to them falling away. The Dorset and Peak District projects have reached a critical juncture where potential landowner issues could prevent the schemes progressing further. In Snowdonia, alignment with the North Wales Connection project could mean that completion of the VIP project would go beyond the current price control period, and in the New Forest, environmental designations and confidence in the ability to restore the heathland habitat are currently the main issues.

Hector Pearson from National Grid led the discussions surrounding the available alternatives and the implications for each course of action should a scheme fall away. These are summarised below.

2.1 – Alternative projects

At its previous meeting in April 2016, the Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed the need for a pipeline of alternative projects should any of the prioritised schemes fall away. The possible scenarios at this stage include: choosing another project from the top 12 very high impact (purple) schemes (including switching to another Dorset scheme if the current Dorset project cannot proceed), choosing another scheme from the next level of high impact (red) projects, or accepting that the full VIP allowance will not be spent in this price control period.

With regard to the existing top 12 shortlisted schemes, it has already been determined that a single price control period does not allow enough time for the more complex schemes such as Tamar Valley and Peak District West to be pursued during the current round of VIP funding. The opportunity to pursue the Brecon Beacons project has already been lost as the road scheme has progressed too far to enable it to go ahead, and issues with the other projects (including e.g. lack of stakeholder support and issues with remaining parallel distribution lines) mean that there is no immediately obvious replacement scheme. Due to the different costs associated with the current four prioritised schemes, there is also no single scheme that could act as a direct substitute.

Opportunities for bringing forward another scheme are also hampered by limitations on using the VIP fund to invest up-front in carrying out more detailed technical investigations on a project that is not being actively pursued. Any new scheme would have to undergo the same detailed scoping and site investigations that are already under way for the current four schemes, which is again likely to take the timescale for an alternative project beyond the current price control period.

2.2 – Compulsory purchase

National Grid has the powers to compulsorily purchase land or rights through land, if absolutely necessary, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group was asked to consider whether invoking these powers would be something they would be willing to support if landowner issues cannot be resolved.

Hector Pearson outlined how the process would work, including the evidence and justifications that would be required as part of a public inquiry. It was noted that, whilst National Grid would be able to give evidence on technical requirements, the justification for compulsory purchase would have to come from the VIP project itself. This would require the Stakeholder Advisory Group to fully back the invoking of a compulsory purchase order (CPO), and for members to be willing to come forward to argue the case for it at inquiry.

The CPO process could take up to a year however, as outlined above, choosing an alternative project could take even longer.

The issues were discussed by the Stakeholder Advisory Group, and it was acknowledged that the need for compulsory purchase could be a difficult argument to make, especially when there is a fully operating power line already in existence. Concerns about how compulsory purchase might be viewed and the potential for negative public / community perceptions were also considered. There were, however, concerns that an individual landowner could potentially prevent a whole scheme going forwards, even if there is strong support from wider local and national stakeholders as well as local communities. The precedent that it could set for other projects was a concern. Accordingly, the Stakeholder Advisory Group backed the use of compulsory powers in principle, and decided to meet again, if necessary, to discuss any specific cases and decide if powers should be invoked for them.

It was agreed that constructive negotiations with landowners should continue, and that reassurance should be given through positive examples of restoration of land following other major cable construction projects, and discussions as to how the impacts during construction could be mitigated. It was also suggested that supportive landowners and members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group could be asked to support National Grid in their negotiations. There may also be useful lessons to learn from Natural England's approach to gaining landowner consent for the coastal path project, especially with regard to the specific nature of the VIP project and its value in enhancing nationally protected landscapes.

2.3 – Future of the VIP allowance

The future of the VIP allowance was discussed. Ofgem has not officially committed to continuing the fund in the next price control period, and it is also reluctant to commit to reserving funds from the current period for expenditure in the next (unless it is already committed to in a contract for an existing project). Ring-fencing of funds for substantial expenditure in the next price control period is also not currently supported as it could fetter the other transmission network operators. There are also concerns that if the UK Transmission Operators are not able to complete enough schemes during this price control period, it may affect Ofgem's and the consumers' appetite to repeat the allowance.

Following on from discussions at previous meetings, the Stakeholder Advisory Group reiterated its support for continuing with the VIP allowance in the next price control period, and the need to put forward a convincing case and strong justification to Ofgem for its continuation was noted.

2.4 – Way forward

It was agreed that an additional Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting should be scheduled for December 2016 in case a decision is needed about the way forward if landowner negotiations are not successful.

3 – Communications support and advocacy for the schemes

Stuart Fox from Camargue gave an update on the communications and engagement strategy as the projects move into a new phase. Plans for each of the four proposed schemes are now in place and are constantly under review as the situation in each location progresses. The need for continued support and advocacy from the Stakeholder Advisory Group and its member organisations was emphasised.

The VIP team plans to work very closely with each organisation's communications team to support them in presenting a shared message locally, nationally and with their membership, and to look for opportunities to raise the profile of the project.

Communications and consultation plans for each of the areas will be produced and National Grid has commissioned graphics that will show what the areas will look like when the pylons have been taken out. At a local level the plans for each project will go out to pre-planning application consultation. Representatives from the VIP team will attend all local public and stakeholder events/meetings, and the need for local Stakeholder Advisory Group representatives to attend these events was also reiterated.

Locally, there is also a need for support in countering any misconceptions (e.g. people thinking that the projects have already been agreed). It was requested that if stakeholders have any concerns locally then they should be raised with the VIP team so that a joint decision on how to best address them can be made.

At a national level, the need to raise the VIP project's profile, promote individual projects, and send out a positive message to wider stakeholder groups was highlighted.

It was emphasised that it would benefit the VIP project as a whole if Stakeholder Advisory Group members and their organisations took greater ownership of the projects and referred to them as their projects – and not always National Grid projects. A shared sense of pride in what is being achieved needs to be communicated more broadly by all involved.

It was noted that the National Park planning authorities (and the other determining bodies) will need to be mindful of what they say in support of the project but factual updates are entirely possible. Jonathan Cawley of National Parks Wales informed the meeting that he had already declared an interest to the Snowdonia NPA and was therefore able to speak positively on the scheme.

4 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

Mary O'Connor (Chair of the LEI Approvals Panel) and Ian McKenna gave an update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative following its launch in May 2016.

4.1 – First round of submissions/applications

The first window for expressions of interest (EOI) opened in May 2016 and twelve submissions were received. These submissions were assessed by Trust CSR (the scheme administrators) and the scheme's landscape advisors (Gillespies for the north and LUC for the south). Following feedback and discussion, eight of the twelve applicants were invited to submit full applications.

Six applications were subsequently submitted to the LEI Approvals Panel which met for the first time on 30th August 2016. Five of these schemes have been put forward to Ofgem for approval, and it is anticipated that Ofgem will announce their decisions on funding in early 2017.

The next window for expressions of interest has now opened and will close on 31st October 2016.

4.2 – Ongoing learning and provision of monitoring information

The Approvals Panel will collate advice that can be passed on to future applicants, including lessons learned during each round of submissions and applications. The LEI has its own website

(<http://lei.nationalgrid.com/>) which includes an FAQ section that will be added to on an ongoing basis.

Key feedback to applicants during this first round included advice to be ambitious with the scale of the project, to look for additional benefits and ways to enrich the projects, and to consider the interplay between e.g. landscape, culture and heritage. It was also noted that the main aim of a project has to be a visual or landscape improvement, and some submissions (or elements of an application) were rejected as they did not meet this fundamental requirement, however other aspects such as education and interpretation may be allowed if they are linked to the visual impact reduction.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group also discussed the level to which monitoring information and provision of evidence of results is required. It was noted that applicants are required to show how they will carry out ongoing monitoring and show evidence of the impact on the landscape (including photographic evidence). The funding is given in staged payments against key phases/deliverables, each of which will require evidence of completion. Whilst the importance of gathering evidence was acknowledged, it was also noted that there are concerns re the administrative burden on applicants, and there is an ongoing debate with Ofgem regarding how value for money can be shown. It was also suggested that the impact on visual receptors should be evidenced.

4.3 – Promotion of the scheme and its results

It was noted that promotion of the scheme was deliberately low key during the first application window. Future promotion of the LEI scheme, the projects that it approves and its results will be led by stakeholders with support from National Grid.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was informed that the VIP team proposed to work with the successful AONBs and National Parks to promote their success locally and that opportunities to promote the scheme more widely should be explored with the communications teams of Stakeholder Advisory Group members.

Following feedback from Howard Sutcliffe of the National Association for AONBs, the VIP team is looking to arrange a workshop for AONB bodies and their partners in order to promote the scheme and show what can be done, and a similar event could also be organised for the National Parks (or the two combined). There would be practical sessions and the opportunity for one-to-one meetings with consultants as well as plenary sessions. More details will follow and the VIP team will work with Howard Sutcliffe to progress.

5 – Any other business: Plans for a new transmission line in the Lake District National Park

At its last meeting, the Stakeholder Advisory Group discussed the plans to construct a new 24km high voltage power line in Cumbria to connect the proposed new nuclear power plant at Moorside with National Grid's existing network. Members of the Group had expressed strong concerns if this is being proposed as an overhead line.

Sarah Kelly of National Parks England advised that she had again been asked by Dan Hunt, consultations manager at the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA), to raise this issue with the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group and specifically to ask whether the National Grid board is aware of the potential impact of the proposed new pylons, and how the impact of an imminent internal meeting within National Grid will be communicated externally.

Stakeholder Advisory Group members reiterated the inconsistencies between the VIP project and the current proposals in the Lake District National Park, and it was noted that this is also relevant to the earlier discussions about the need for the group's members to act as advocates for the VIP scheme [see Section 3]. As highlighted at the previous meeting, the potential conflict/tensions between the two projects means that it is difficult for members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group to communicate positive messages about the VIP process, and it was further noted that there has been pressure from some of their own stakeholders to not say anything about the VIP scheme in the light of the plans in the Lake District.

National Grid confirmed that the concerns of Stakeholder Advisory Group members have been shared with its board and senior leaders. They are therefore very aware of the issues, and the messages have been taken very seriously. Discussions are ongoing and, once a decision is made on a preferred option, it will be taken to formal public consultation.

It was further noted that whatever option is taken forwards, National Grid would need enough evidence to present a strong business case to the regulator and to the Secretary of State. Whilst there will be a strong focus on costs to the consumer, both Ofgem and the Secretary of State will be very sensitive to stakeholder views.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group asked for the minutes to reflect that this issue is an ongoing concern that affects their ability to support VIP publicly, and that it should be included as a standing item on the agenda at future Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings. It was also noted that there is an opportunity to share the learning from the VIP process to improve how potential schemes within protected areas are dealt with in the future.

6 – Future meetings

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings will take place in Birmingham on:

- Monday 12th December 2016 (afternoon meeting only)
- Tuesday 25th April 2017 (full day meeting) – the Scottish Transmission Operators should be invited to this meeting to update on progress on their schemes