

**VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group**  
**Meeting notes of the seventeenth meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

**Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:**

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Campaign for National Parks** Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager
- **CPRE** Tom Fyans, Director of Campaigns and Policy
- **Historic England** Amanda Chadburn, Senior National Infrastructure Adviser
  
- **Landscape Institute** Mary O'Connor, WYG Associate Director
- **National Association of AONBs** Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB
  
- **National Grid** Barney Wyld, Director of Corporate Affairs
- **National Parks England** Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National Park Authority
  
- **National Parks Wales** Jonathan Cawley, Director of Planning and Land Management, Snowdonia National Park
  
- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **Natural England** Caroline Cotterell
- **Natural Resources Wales** John Briggs, Specialist Advisor: Landscape
- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist

**Apologies:**

- **Ramblers** Alison Hallas
- **Visit Wales** Lawrence Manley

**Secretariat in attendance:**

- **National Grid** – Michelle Clark, VIP Project Manager; Ben Smith, VIP Project Manager (South); Eloise Frank, VIP Project Manager (North); Andrea Key, Consents Officer; Stephen Fedzin, Project Engineer; Steve Lam, Regulatory Submissions Manager; Christopher Hawkins, Senior Investment Engineer; Aled Rowlands, External Affairs Manager
- Professor Carys Swanwick, Independent Advisor to National Grid
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

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The purpose of the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Hear updates on the schemes prioritised for replacing existing overhead lines with underground cables in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks in England and Wales.
- Review progress on the VIP project in the North Wessex Downs AONB.
- Receive an update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative.
- Receive an update on the future of VIP in RIIO-T2.

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Due to Covid-19 restrictions, this meeting was held remotely via Microsoft Teams.

**1 – Covid-19 update from National Grid**

Michelle Clark gave an update on how National Grid has been coping under Covid-19 restrictions. When lockdown was initially announced, National Grid immediately put safety measures in place and the majority of staff started to work from home where this was possible to do so. Following extensive discussions with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), it was recognised that National Grid's work was classed as essential and that it could therefore carry on with work on site so long as it could be done safely and within government guidelines.

At the Dorset AONB project site, following an initial shutdown of operations, a full operational and safety review was carried out with the contractors Morgan Sindall. As a result of this, essential work was able to carry on with stringent safety measures in place to protect the workforce and the local community, and the site is now back up and running. The net pause for the project was approximately two – three weeks, but progress for this scheme is now back on track.

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## **Session 2 – Update on the schemes shortlisted for underground projects**

Members of the National Grid VIP project teams gave an update on the progress of the schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward for undergrounding. A summary of progress and specific issues for each of the schemes is outlined below.

### **2.1 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7**

Work on this scheme is now well under way. Current operations include laying underground cable ducts in the northern section of the route and fitting out the planned visitor information centre. Stakeholder Advisory Group members were shown a number of photographs of the ongoing works including cable trenches/cable ducting, road crossings, archaeological digs and construction of the haul roads and site compounds.

There have been numerous archaeological finds in and around the area, and although the extent of the finds has had some impact on the progress of construction, the project team is working closely with consultant archaeologists, Oxford Archaeology, on site and it is not envisaged that the finds will cause any significant issues with ongoing project development. Historic England offered to collaborate in further discussions on how to promote the archaeological finds and the benefits to the historic environment.

The public information centre is due to be completed within the next couple of months, but there is now some additional work to be done regarding visitor safety due to social distancing requirements before visitors can be welcomed to the site. There has been strong local support for the scheme throughout, and a large number of local groups have expressed interest in using the centre. Visits will be via appointment. An extended programme of further engagement was about to be rolled out to coincide with the opening of the information centre, and although the plans for site visits and other events are currently on hold due to Covid-19, Camargue and National Grid have been keeping the community informed through various other means and are currently working towards being able to accept visitors onto site in the autumn.

In response to a question about backfill from the cable trenches, it was confirmed that as much as possible will be re-used on site (and the subsoil in particular). Some material that cannot be re-used is going offsite. Further information will be made available at the next meeting once there is a better understanding of the volumes that can and cannot be re-used.

It was noted that there has been some interest in and coverage of the project from local press and television. With regards to national coverage, Camargue have been working with the National Grid External Affairs team to discuss future plans for communication regarding this and other VIP projects [see also Section 6.1].

The underground cable works are still on track for completion towards the end of 2021, with full reinstatement and removal of the pylons planned for the early part of 2022.

## 2.2 – Peak District National Park (eastern section – ZO.2)

Significant progress has been made on both the consenting and delivery aspects of this scheme in the last six months, and the National Grid project team was pleased to confirm that planning permission for the scheme was unanimously approved at the Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) Planning Committee meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The Peak District National Park Authority also approved a separate application for the car park on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020, subject to the addition of two electric car charging points to be included within the design. Determination of the car park application by BMBC is likely to take place in July.

The approval came on the back of intensive activity from the National Grid team to try to address some of the key concerns that had been raised about the project, and to overcome a number of key challenges on a range of issues (particularly rail and biodiversity net gain). There has been an extensive programme of negotiation with different stakeholder groups, both face-to-face and online, and it was noted that this process has been particularly challenging whilst working remotely.

As has been reported during previous Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings, one of the key issues in securing planning permission was the requirement to secure a minimum of 10 percent biodiversity net gain. The National Grid project team was initially restricted to an area within 1km of the project site and it had proved to be difficult to achieve the target within this constraint. In January 2020 BMBC permitted a widening of the search area for net gain up to 5km, and 11.99 percent net gain has now been secured by identifying a number of sites and a range of measures within this larger area. The three-tier approach to additional enhancement and compensation that has been secured includes:

- Two additional areas of willow tit enhancement within and adjacent to Wogden Foot Local Wildlife Site.
- Replacement/additional tree planting (2:1 basis) secured with two landowners.
- Off-site biodiversity enhancement at Crow Edge quarry (1.5km from the project site).

The planning approval from BMBC is subject to a Section 106 agreement to secure delivery of this biodiversity net gain, and the plans now need to be agreed/signed.

With regards to the other key areas of concern surrounding the proposals the following was noted:

- **Climate change/carbon impact** – As part of the planning application National Grid was required to submit a detailed carbon management plan showing the difference between the carbon impacts of the existing line remaining in place, and the impacts of the proposed project resulting from the construction process and traffic movements etc. The outcome of this report was that the proposals were seen to be in accordance with planning policy.
- **Highways** – A few concerns had been raised by the local authority regarding highways issues, and the National Grid team had therefore been working with the highways team, BMBC and consultants, WSP, to provide information to satisfy these concerns.
- **Rail reopening** – As part of the planning submission, National Grid was required to submit costs for reinstating the overhead line if the railway was to be reopened in the future. As previously noted, there are no current proposals in the Transport for the North plan to reopen the railway, and it is unlikely to happen within the next 30-40 years. Although it was anticipated that the lobby groups who are campaigning for the reopening of the railway would make a presentation at the planning meeting, on the day itself they did not attend.

The Chair and members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group expressed their thanks and congratulations to the National Grid project team for the extensive work that has been carried out in developing this scheme and in working towards overcoming the concerns and objections to the project. Thanks were also expressed to all of the stakeholders who had given their support to the

scheme, and in particular to Chris Baines and Andy Tickle from CPRE who both spoke at the virtual planning committee meeting. In order to assist with efforts to overcome concerns from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust about the impact on the habitat of the willow tit, Chris Baines had also written a short paper for the planning committee on the potential for biodiversity net gain, including a section on the willow tit and the opportunity to enhance its habitat in the wider valley.

National Grid and its appointed contractor, Morgan Sindall, are now working on a revised delivery programme to accommodate the delays in planning process, and the subsequent change to the timing for the planned outage (now agreed as April 2022). Following on from this, the Ofgem submission will be updated to align with the new timescales and final costs.

Other ongoing background work on the project has included: continued work on finalising landowner option agreements with solicitors, finalising the Trans Pennine Trail management plan, re-engaging with wider stakeholders now that the delivery timescales for the project have shifted, updating the environmental surveys, and further design and GI works by the contractors Morgan Sindall.

The indicative programme for the scheme will be better informed once the revised delivery programme has been agreed, but current estimates are for construction to commence on site in spring 2021, with the new cables energised in summer 2022, and the overhead line and pylons removed in the autumn of the same year.

**Actions:**

- **Camargue / Chris Baines** – Share paper on biodiversity net gain.
- **Camargue** – Circulate the link to the planning meeting for anybody who would like to watch the proceedings.

**2.3 – Snowdonia National Park – 4ZC1**

At the previous Stakeholder Advisor Group meeting in November 2019, the details of the complex planning application for this scheme were shared and discussed. At that time the National Grid project team was in the process of putting together the final planning application ready for submission in early 2020 and preparing for the statutory pre-application consultation.

The pre-application consultation took place during December 2019 and January 2020. Stakeholder engagement activity during this time also included:

- A meeting with the local Stakeholder Reference Group to talk through the application.
- A public information event at the Snowdonia National Park Authority offices – there were 45 attendees including local residents and a number of groups including CRPW, Gwynedd Council, SNPA, NW Wildlife Trust and the Ffestiniog Railway.
- A presentation to Penrhyndeudreaeth Town Council.

The feedback overall was very good, including positive feedback about the changes that were made to the design of the tunnel head house following input from local residents during the 2018 consultation. A few minor changes were made to the planning application following this consultation, and the pre-application consultation report was submitted alongside all of the planning consent applications and the marine license applications in early March 2020.

The council's consultation on the planning application received no objections, and the project team feel that this is indicative of the value of the consultation and engagement that was undertaken prior to this stage. Snowdonia National Park Authority and local councils/councillors have also expressed their support for the way in which genuine engagement and consultation has been carried

out by National Grid from the outset, and the fact that the project has evolved as a result of feedback that has been received is testament to this.

The planning application 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. The Snowdonia National Park Authority planning committee meeting will take place on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, and the Gwynedd Council committee date is currently scheduled for 16<sup>th</sup> July.

The two separate Marine Licences for the tunnel construction/cable laying and the tower removal will be considered by Natural Resources Wales, and a decision is expected in July 2020.

Other updates on the project included:

- **Lands rights:** There have been no in principle objections – approximately 60% of the heads of terms have either been agreed or the contracts completed, and positive negotiations are continuing with the remaining landowners. A CPO application was submitted in June 2020, as a precaution. The VIP project in Snowdonia covers an area of very complex land ownership, with some unregistered land and previous CPOs. The decision was therefore taken to submit a CPO application to ensure that nothing can happen at a later stage that might delay construction.
- **Engineering:** The National Grid team is now nearing the end of a complex and lengthy tendering process, and the final rounds of negotiations were very productive. National Grid feels that it has tested the market thoroughly, and that the best contractor has been identified to deliver this very complex project at the best price. This extended process has also enabled more detailed work to be carried out on the engineering and construction aspects of the project, including identification of the need for a shunt reactor at Trawsfynydd. A more detailed understanding of the complexities of the project and final negotiations with the contractor, coupled with a number of other external factors has meant that the projected costs for the Snowdonia scheme are now higher than originally estimated; work is continuing on putting together the final cost profile.

Given the increased cost of the project, and with the scheme now in a position where planning consent could be approved within the next month, National Grid and Ofgem both asked the Stakeholder Advisory Group to consider whether they are still happy to give their support for the Snowdonia scheme. Ofgem further suggested that proper reflection and consideration of this point is particularly important to include in National Grid's funding submission, especially in the current context where people are concerned about the economic outlook and security of employment due to the impact of Covid-19.

It was noted that support for the scheme remains strong amongst local authorities, councillors, MPs, 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 massive economic benefit to the local area, including the increased demand for local accommodation and services that will continue beyond the normal summer peak. It was further noted that members of the Snowdonia National Park Authority have commented on the economic

benefits for the local area during project development. The potential for the project to lead to enhanced economic activity in an area where opportunities are limited and the economy is heavily reliant on hospitality industries was endorsed by several members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

In addition to the local economic benefits outlined above, further points raised by Stakeholder Advisory Group members included:

- There is a need to make sure that this initiative registers in the international arena of National Parks. It is the first time in the world that major infrastructure will have been removed, and this is significant.
- The project is a good news story for tourism, and on completion there will be magnificent view of Snowdonia from across the estuary.
- The positive benefits to be gained from this particular project are very relevant at a time when people have been making more use of National Parks.
- Government focus on green infrastructure and to develop a process that builds a better world.

A brief discussion was held about the specific aspects of the project that have led to the increase in costs (in addition to inflation), and it was agreed that it would be useful for an advice note to be made available explaining the different elements that make up the cost increase so that further comments can be made before the submission is finalised.

National Grid confirmed that it would capture the outcome of this part of the meeting's discussions in their funding submission to Ofgem to explain the support that they have from the Stakeholder Advisory Group for this particular project. Additionally, when Ofgem reach the stage of its own consultation, Stakeholder Advisory Group members will be able to respond expressing their endorsement for a second time.

**Actions:**

- **National Grid** – Produce an advice note outlining the different elements that make up the cost increases for the Snowdonia project. Circulate to VIP SAG members to allow an opportunity for members to raise concerns or express support for continuing with this project.

**2.4 – North Wessex Downs AONB – YYM.1**

National Grid advised that good progress has been made on this scheme which is now being developed as a RIIO-T2 project. As a result of learning from the Dorset scheme, National Grid is approaching this scheme in a slightly different way and are working on an early engagement approach with contractors. The plan is to award a contract for the entire project but break it down into two stages. At stage one, the successful contractor undertakes the early development of the project including engineering, design and whole project costings. This contract will then be paused whilst the planning application and Ofgem funding submission are both made before, and if all approvals are secured, stage two of the contract is awarded and they continue with the main works subject to Ofgem approval of their costs.

It is hoped that this approach of using a single contractor who is involved with both the design and the construction stages of a scheme will achieve greater continuity, reduce risks and help achieve efficiencies. The contract for the North Wessex Downs scheme should be awarded in the next couple of weeks, after which there will be more work out on site (including ground investigation works) to enable the detailed design work to fully commence.



The Chair reiterated that one of the hidden values of the VIP project is the learning that can be achieved through it, and if this includes the spread of a different culture and new ways of working. There are potentially wider benefits to be gained than purely improvements in the landscape and visual impacts of the overhead lines. It is hoped that having the contractor involved in the early stages of the process will build on everything that has been done to date with regards to trust, collaboration and early engagement, and that it will also avoid some of the difficulties that have been experienced with the 'step-change' on other projects when a contractor has been appointed part-way through the process.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was shown a number of images of the scheme, including the proposed route and the locations of archaeological finds to date. A lot of archaeological work has been carried out, including ground penetrating radar (GPR) scanning of key locations around the historic battlefield site. To date, finds have been identified in areas that are outside of the proposed cable trench route, and the team are currently working with consultant archaeologists, Historic England, the Wiltshire County Archaeologist and other local experts to agree a programme of planning and excavation work to look at what exactly is there. At this stage the team are fairly confident that the project will not be unduly impacted by the location of any finds.

A discussion was held about the opportunities that are available to exhibit what is found, and it was confirmed that a group is currently exploring the options, including the local museum, local archaeologists and Wessex Archaeology. Historic England also offered to support this process further.

With regards to ecology, the scope of the surveys has been agreed with the local planning authority ecologist, and survey work is currently being carried out for dormice and bats. A number of badger setts have been identified in the western area, and the team are looking to carry out mitigation works for these setts early on in the project.

For planning purposes, all of the underground cable works will fall under permitted development rights, and planning applications will be needed for the sealing end compounds and access roads.

Relationships with local stakeholders are positive and there is strong and widespread support for the scheme, including from elected ward members, council leaders, parish councils and other key local stakeholders. Public information events were due to be held over the summer, but these are now on hold. The team is, however, keen to maintain momentum so plans are now being made for virtual engagement including an interactive 'fly-through' across the project area using a combination of drone footage and CGI, with the opportunity to look at viewpoints from different angles, pop-ups with information on aspects such as archaeology, ecology, etc., and a mechanism for giving feedback. There are also plans to promote this extensively through the local media to build on the support that is already there.

The current situation with Covid-19 is being seen as an interesting opportunity to explore online/virtual engagement alongside traditional face-to-face engagement, and other online engagement opportunities are also being explored including e.g. webinars on specific dates alongside the planned project website and stakeholder partner channels.

All of the dates for this project will be firmed up once the initial tender has been awarded and Ground Investigation works have commenced. It is currently envisaged that, subject to successful planning consent, construction could start on-site in 2022 followed by a 12-18 month construction period culminating with pylon removal in 2024.

### **3 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)**

Ben Smith from National Grid gave an update on progress with the LEI. It was also announced that Mary O'Connor, Chair of the LEI Approvals Panel, has retired from her role at White Young Green. She will stay on the Stakeholder Advisory Group as the representative of the Landscape Institute until the end of RIIO-T1 and will also stay in her role on the LEI Approvals Panel until she has inducted her replacement. Thanks were expressed to Mary for all of her work on the VIP project since its inception, and for her contribution in developing the LEI.

#### **3.1 – Project application updates**

There are now 21 live approved projects in the LEI scheme, and the projects submitted during Windows six and seven are waiting for approval from Ofgem.

The application process for Window eight has been paused due to the impact of Covid-19. At the start of lockdown, some of the applicants who were in the process of taking their Expressions of Interest through to full applications advised that it would be difficult for them to produce all of the information that is needed for the full application, due to e.g. staff being furloughed (affecting AONBs in particular), limitations on carrying out site visits, and/or difficulties in getting quotes from contractors. Although this was not the case for all applicants, in order to be fair to everybody a decision was made to pause the application window. It was agreed that in the interim, the LEI Approvals Panel and LEC/Gillespies would continue to look at the applications and give feedback.

It is likely that the application window can be reopened soon, and applicants will be given the full amount of time that they would originally have had to prepare their full applications. The timescale from receiving full submissions to submitting to Ofgem will now be towards the back end of T1 with full approval in T2.

A meeting will be convened shortly to review the current situation and make a decision for the way forward.

#### **3.2 – Monitoring of live projects**

The outputs of approved projects are written into the National Grid Licence Condition that is updated when projects are approved by Ofgem. The impact of Covid-19 means that some projects may not be able to deliver on all of their outputs within the agreed project timelines. National Grid have therefore flagged the need to discuss this with the Ofgem approvals team regarding what can be done and any mitigation measures that can be put in place. Covid-19 monitoring forms have been sent to the project managers of live projects, and the LEI team are currently working through the feedback. The majority of delivery bodies have said that they can continue with no major implications, but further detail is still coming in regarding potential licence issues. For many of the projects a lot of the matched funding is to do with volunteer time, and with restrictions on volunteers working at the moment this is slowing some projects down.

It was reiterated that it is currently intended that LEI will continue into T2 (subject to final determination from Ofgem – see also Section 4 below). As discussed at previous meetings, a revised process is being set up to streamline the applications and approvals process so that LEI projects no longer have to be sent to Ofgem for approval. Discussions are ongoing with various bodies regarding the provision of third-party support for identifying and developing projects.



#### **4 – Update on RIIO-T2**

National Grid gave a brief reminder and update on the situation regarding the future of VIP in RIIO-T2. As outlined at the previous meeting, Ofgem has agreed to retain VIP in a similar form going into RIIO-T2, and the LEI programme will also remain in place with the funding being set at 2.5% of total VIP funding. The VIP scheme will continue to cover only AONBs and National Parks and will include projects that are close to designated landscapes but just fall outside their boundary.

Ofgem is due to publish a draft determination for RIIO-T2 on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020. At this point there will be more detail about what is proposed and the provisional amount of funding that will be allocated for addressing the visual amenity of existing transmission infrastructure in designated landscapes in England, Scotland & Wales. National Grid will review the draft determinations and summarise the key outcomes for members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

The draft determinations will form part of an eight-week consultation process, and there will therefore be an opportunity for people to provide their feedback to Ofgem during July and August. There was a reminder from the Chair to the Stakeholder Advisory Group to please encourage members of their organisations to respond to the consultation endorsing continuation of VIP.

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#### **5 – Emerging T2 projects and LEI+**

Following on from discussions at previous Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings where a future pipeline of projects was discussed and agreed, National Grid gave an update on the current status of the plans and ambitions for potential projects in RIIO-T2 and beyond.

As outlined earlier in the meeting, the project in North Wessex Downs AONB is progressing well and is currently looking like a solid part of the RIIO-T2 plan. The next major undergrounding projects on the priority list are Cotswolds AONB and Tamar Valley AONB, and projects on the reserve list include sections of line in the Lake District National Park and the New Forest National Park. The ongoing situation with potential projects in Peak District National Park western section of line and Anglesey AONB are also being monitored closely.

##### **5.1 – Cotswolds AONB – ZF2**

This section of line is in the Western Cotswolds and includes 44 pylons over a distance of 17km. The setting of the overhead line includes numerous trails and public rights of way, Sudeley Castle, Grade I and II listed buildings, ancient woodlands and several SSSIs. The area is sparsely settled in many parts but there are a fair number of residences and several large landowners.

Landscape consultants, Gillespies, have been engaged to look at splitting ZF2 into three smaller sub-sections to allow for more detailed route appraisal, alongside assessment of the landscape and visual impact of the separate sections and potential mitigations.

It was agreed that National Grid should continue with further work to scope the project options out in more detail, and by the next Advisory Group meeting more should be known about the potential viability of this section of line as a potential T2 project.

##### **5.2 – LEI+**

The concept of LEI+ came from the Scottish Transmission Operators' successes in carrying out smaller capital schemes that do not involve undergrounding. This concept potentially allows National Grid to widen its work in areas where undergrounding is not going to be an option due to cost, engineering or environmental constraints, and also enables them to revisit options for some of the very high-scoring overhead line sections where undergrounding has been ruled out. This

approach would potentially allow National Grid to broaden the VIP spend geographically and expand the scope of the programme without focusing purely on the large-scale capital engineering projects.

Potential options under LEI+ would involve looking at alternative solutions such as changing the pylons or re-routeing, as well as other innovative techniques that are coming into the fold with National Grid and other transmission operators. One of these is the use of insulated cross-arms which allows the height of the pylons to be reduced; this technology is still in the stage of testing at higher transmission voltages, but these sorts of solutions could potentially be used in situ alongside other types of solutions including diverting or creating new footpaths, larger-scale screening and so on.

The intent is that National Grid would be the driver of the process in terms of identifying projects that involve modifications to transmission assets and then working with AONBs and National Parks (as they have done for the undergrounding projects) to scope those projects out in more detail. This would help to address the issues with LEI applications that do not meet the ambition for landscape-scale thinking as well as mitigating the lack of resource in AONBs to put forward such projects.

Ofgem confirmed that this kind of project is within the spirit of the original project. In principle there are therefore no major issues with pursuing the LEI+ concept and it would be appropriate for National Grid to identify and then work with stakeholders to bring larger-scale projects that stopped short of undergrounding transmission assets forwards. Caution was, however, expressed that the projects need to stay 'on the right side of the line' and not morph into a variant of the scheme. National Grid reiterated that LEI+ projects would be identified and delivered by National Grid with stakeholder support, as opposed to LEI which is the other way round.

In response to questions of clarification, it was reiterated that LEI+ would be in addition to the LEI with its own separate policy and criteria. It was also confirmed that, whilst National Grid would initiate the process of generating the opportunities and ideas for projects, specialist consultants could then be brought in to work with the National Parks and AONBs to expand on those ideas.

**[Post meeting clarification:** Due to the fact that the pylons would not ultimately be removed, it would be important to assess the benefit of targeted engineering works in conjunction with wider, complementary landscaping measures.]

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was asked to consider its reaction to the proposals, how the potential LEI+ scheme should be progressed, and what it would like to see at the next meeting in order to consider the concept further.

Support for this 'middle ground' was expressed by Stakeholder Advisory Group members, alongside endorsements for the support that this would bring to project teams in the National Parks and AONBs through the provision of more help and input from National Grid in designing and developing projects.

It was also suggested that whilst the primary criteria for any scheme would need to remain focused on improvements in landscape character and visual impact, if there were secondary criteria that brought in multiple benefits such as functional landscape benefits and enhancing green infrastructure, this might help to give landowners more of an incentive to come on board with these kinds of projects.

Professor Carys Swanwick suggested that there is an opportunity to redo the original landscape and visual assessment work on the basis of LEI+, and National Grid agreed to start looking at that process

with Professor Swanwick in order to come up with a worked/costed example. It was also agreed that it would be useful to have a refresh on the Scottish projects at the next meeting.

### **5.3 – Tamar Valley AONB**

A brief discussion was held about Tamar Valley AONB which was the highest-scoring project in the original landscape and visual assessment, but which proved to be extremely complex from both an engineering and environmental perspective when it was investigated further. It was agreed that further consideration of the future of this project should be delayed until the size of the RIIO-T2 provision is known.

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## **6 – Any other business and future meetings**

### **6.1 – Communication**

A discussion was held about the opportunity to plan ahead for when and how to spread the word about the positive messages and learning from VIP, especially now that schemes are either under way or in the final stages of being approved. It was noted that although it will still be quite a long time before there will be ‘before and after’ photographs and proof on the ground of what can be achieved, as discussed previously, there is a lot of potential to share the learning about what has been achieved in terms of the process and the lessons learned in terms of stakeholder engagement. There was broad agreement that the opportunity to share case studies showing the effectiveness of good stakeholder management and lessons learned should not be missed, and that this does not need to wait until the pylons come down.

Stuart Fox from Camargue advised that discussions have already been taking place with the External Affairs team within National Grid regarding a communications plan. With the Dorset project underway, and the two National Park schemes reaching key stages of planning consent, it is felt that the end of 2020/beginning of 2021 will be a good timeframe for starting to talk about the projects themselves. Lead times for broadcasters and publications do however mean that there is an argument for starting discussions with them now in order to get more comprehensive plans in place for future communications activity.

It was agreed that Camargue would set out a proposed communications plan for further consideration by the Stakeholder Advisory Group. As the next meeting will not be held until November 2020, it was agreed that a smaller planning group should be put together to work on developing the narrative and identifying potential audiences/publications. Various offers of help/support for this process were made including from Historic England, the National Trust, National Parks England, and Campaign for National Parks.

#### **Actions:**

- **National Grid (Aled Rowland) and Camargue (Stuart Fox)** – Discuss the next steps for communications with input from Stakeholder Advisory Group members.

### **6.2 – Future meetings**

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will provisionally take place in November 2020. The format/location for the meeting will be subject to developments in the Covid-19 situation. If Government guidance at the time allows, the meeting will take place in North Wessex Downs AONB so that a site visit can be carried out.