

# Visual Impact Provision Fifth Annual Report

June 2018 – May 2019



nationalgrid

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## Foreword by Chris Baines



**Chris Baines,**  
Chairman of  
the Stakeholder  
Advisory Group,  
Visual Impact  
Provision project

**After several years of objective landscape analysis, intense consultation and skilled technical design, the first of the VIP undergrounding schemes is underway in Dorset.**

It is testament to the project's commitment to public and stakeholder engagement that the planning application drew a great deal of support from a variety of quarters, united in recognition of its unique potential.

Indeed, a greatly improved understanding of the ancient Dorset landscape is proving a valuable 'VIP bonus'. The project has been welcomed by archaeologists and engineers alike and demonstrates the benefits of investing in creative partnerships. The same shared learning process is thriving in Snowdonia and the Peak District, where schemes for pylon removal are also progressing well.

In the New Forest, thorough consultation with the National Park Authority and many other key stakeholders resulted in substantial ongoing refinements to the VIP proposals. Unfortunately, it became clear that the timetable for achieving planning consent within the current funding window had become too tight, leading to the project being paused.

An alternative, high-potential scheme in the North Wessex Downs is now being energetically pursued. Initial indications are that this will be a more straightforward project to implement in the time available.

Meanwhile, the Landscape Enhancement Initiative is being widely embraced by a whole range of environmental partners. Although the sums involved are relatively modest, these grants for practical improvements are highly valued, helping to spread the impact of VIP much more widely and deliver results rapidly.

## Foreword by Michelle Clark



**Michelle Clark,**  
Visual Impact  
Provision project  
manager,  
National Grid

**In this fifth annual report, I am excited to say that VIP is finally maturing from a tantalising prospect to a ground-breaking endeavour, with our first project moving into delivery in Dorset.**

The process to get this far has been long, but working within these special environments is a great responsibility and technically challenging. Weighing the potential visual and landscape benefits of VIP against any environmental impacts remains a key priority to unlock projects that will enhance cherished English and Welsh landscapes for generations to come.

The VIP project has people at its heart. Protected landscapes are cultural beacons, drawing in millions of visitors from a diverse range of backgrounds, towns and cities.

The social significance of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks, as reinforced in the emerging Glover Review, will ensure the project's success can resonate well beyond the sightline of the pylons it will remove.

This initiative only exists because consumers told Ofgem they wanted to see visual improvements to our natural heritage. It has thrived over the past five years on the enthusiasm of local communities and is underpinned by the advice of expert groups across England and Wales. Once again, our latest acceptability research has demonstrated that the majority of billpayers remain supportive.

We received further encouragement in May 2019 when Ofgem confirmed that a provision for visual mitigation projects will continue up until at least 2026. This will allow us to explore further VIP projects to enhance more protected landscapes. Here's to the next five years, and beyond.

# 1. Visual Impact Provision project

## National Grid Electricity Transmission's (National Grid)<sup>1</sup> Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project is developing plans to place existing overhead transmission lines underground in nationally important landscapes in England and Wales.

Its aim is to help reduce the visual impact of electricity infrastructure in these landscapes. We have developed projects in the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), North Wessex Downs AONB, New Forest National Park, Peak District National Park and Snowdonia National Park.

There is a £500m Ofgem<sup>2</sup> provision to carry out this work in National Parks, English and Welsh AONBs and Scottish National Scenic Areas. National Grid is making use of this provision

as the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales.

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

While we need to build infrastructure to connect homes and businesses to the energy they need, we are passionate about playing our part in conserving and enhancing natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage.

The most important task for us is to use this provision to achieve the maximum enhancement to landscapes affected by our network while ensuring that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result. To ensure that this

aim is achieved, we are working closely with our Stakeholder Advisory Group, which we set up at the start of the project in 2014 to advise us on the evaluation and selection of potential projects.

This fifth annual report records our progress and key activities in delivering the major undergrounding projects and LEI between June 2018 and May 2019.

It builds on progress detailed in our four previous annual reports. To read them, or to find out more about how the projects were selected, please visit our website [www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision](http://www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision).

## Project statistics

- 571km of electricity transmission line in AONBs and National Parks assessed for visual impact
- 30 AONBs and National Parks in England and Wales eligible to benefit
- 53.7km of line within eight protected landscapes judged to have the highest impact
- Five sections of overhead line prioritised for undergrounding
- Landscape Enhancement Initiative provides funding of up to £200,000 for smaller projects

# £500M

## provision to benefit National Parks, AONBs and National Scenic Areas



<sup>1</sup> National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) is now a separate business, operating within the National Grid group. NGET is referred to throughout this report as 'National Grid'.  
<sup>2</sup> Ofgem is the government regulator for gas and electricity markets in Great Britain. As part of the RIIO-T1 framework (covering 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2021), Ofgem set aside a £500m (2009/10 prices) provision for the three GB Transmission Owners to address the visual impact of existing transmission infrastructure. The size of the provision was set based on a 2012 Willingness to Pay study.

# 2. Working with stakeholders

## Stakeholders are central to the success of the VIP project. The views of stakeholders are vital in helping make decisions on how the provision should be used to maximise its potential benefits.

As well as seeking the views of a wide variety of local stakeholders including local groups, communities and landowners, we established a national Stakeholder Advisory Group in April 2014 to guide our work on the project.

## 2.1 Stakeholder Advisory Group

The Stakeholder Advisory Group advises National Grid on the evaluation and ultimate selection of potential projects. Chaired by leading environmentalist Chris Baines, the Stakeholder Advisory Group comprises senior representatives from organisations dedicated to enhancing the landscape

and countryside throughout England and Wales as well as Ofgem (the electricity and gas markets regulator) and National Grid itself. They advise the project team on key decisions and on the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders outside the Group.

### Stakeholder Advisory Group members:



## 2.2 Stakeholder Advisory Group activities

The Stakeholder Advisory Group met three times over the past year. The minutes of these meetings are available on our website [www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision](http://www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision). Below is an overview of the key activities and issues considered by the Group.

Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting	Main items of discussion
<p><b>12th meeting</b>  <b>5-6 September 2018</b>  <b>Held in the Peak District</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site visit to the Peak District National Park project area and presentation from Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority, outlining the specific features of the National Park, the challenges it faces and how the VIP project aligns with the Authority's vision for the future.</li> <li>• Generation and discussion of ideas for the future of VIP in the next Ofgem price control period (RIIO-T2).</li> <li>• Consideration of potential VIP projects in RIIO-T2, with a shortlist of projects identified for further investigation by National Grid.</li> <li>• Landscape Enhancement Initiative update, including progress of latest applications and discussion of ideas for the promotion of the scheme to encourage uptake.</li> </ul>
<p><b>13th meeting</b>  <b>4 December 2018</b>  <b>Held in Birmingham</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on potential VIP projects in RIIO-T2, including early technical investigations into the feasibility of underground solutions in engineering terms.</li> <li>• The Group agreed that RIIO-T2 VIP projects should be pursued in collaboration with District Network Operators wherever possible to enhance their impact.</li> <li>• Discussion of the New Forest National Park VIP project in relation to protected habitats for bird species and the potential for the project to pursue an Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest case.</li> <li>• Sourcing of partner funding to assist applicants with the development of Landscape Enhancement Initiative was identified as a key action to increase uptake.</li> </ul>
<p><b>14th meeting</b>  <b>26 March 2019</b>  <b>Held in Birmingham</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress updates on the prioritised projects, including the appointment of Morgan Sindall as main contractor on the Dorset AONB VIP project ahead of work starting.</li> <li>• Extended discussion of the New Forest National Park VIP project, following which the Group advised National Grid to pause development until the legal position concerning temporary disruption of European habitats can be clarified.</li> <li>• Update on early conversations with a potential funding partner to support AONBs developing Landscape Enhancement Initiative applications during RIIO-T2.</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Wider stakeholder engagement and empowerment

We have continued to work with our Stakeholder Reference Groups in each of the project areas.

These groups, established at the beginning of the Visual Impact Provision project, are attended by representatives of the relevant AONB Partnership or National Park Authority and other local technical stakeholders. They provide vital information and advice to inform project development.

We held drop-in events for members of the public in the

New Forest, Peak District and Snowdonia National Parks to involve local people in project development.

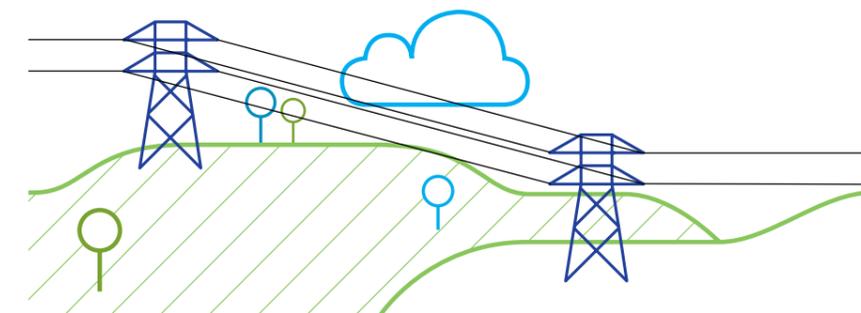
The events showed people how plans for the projects are developing and provided an opportunity to share their views. Members of National Grid's team were on hand at the events to answer questions and discuss the technical aspects of the projects in more detail.

Project websites were also kept regularly updated to keep local stakeholders and interested parties abreast of the latest developments. More details of the drop-in events and a summary of the Stakeholder Reference

Group members for each area are available in the project summaries. We have also shared project information, updates and documentation on our project website [www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision](http://www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision) to keep stakeholders and the public up-to-date as the project progresses.

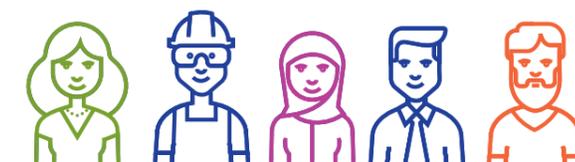
The two companies that own the Scottish transmission network are developing their own projects to use the Ofgem provision. We have continued to liaise with these companies to share knowledge and experiences to maximise the potential benefits across England, Scotland and Wales.

**Over £2.3m** of LEI funding granted to date



**147** Trial trenches dug for archaeological surveys in Dorset

**49** Stakeholder meetings held in the year



### 3. Our VIP projects explored

**Our major Visual Impact Provision projects aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales by replacing National Grid overhead transmission lines with underground solutions, while avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts and balancing technical deliverability and cost.**

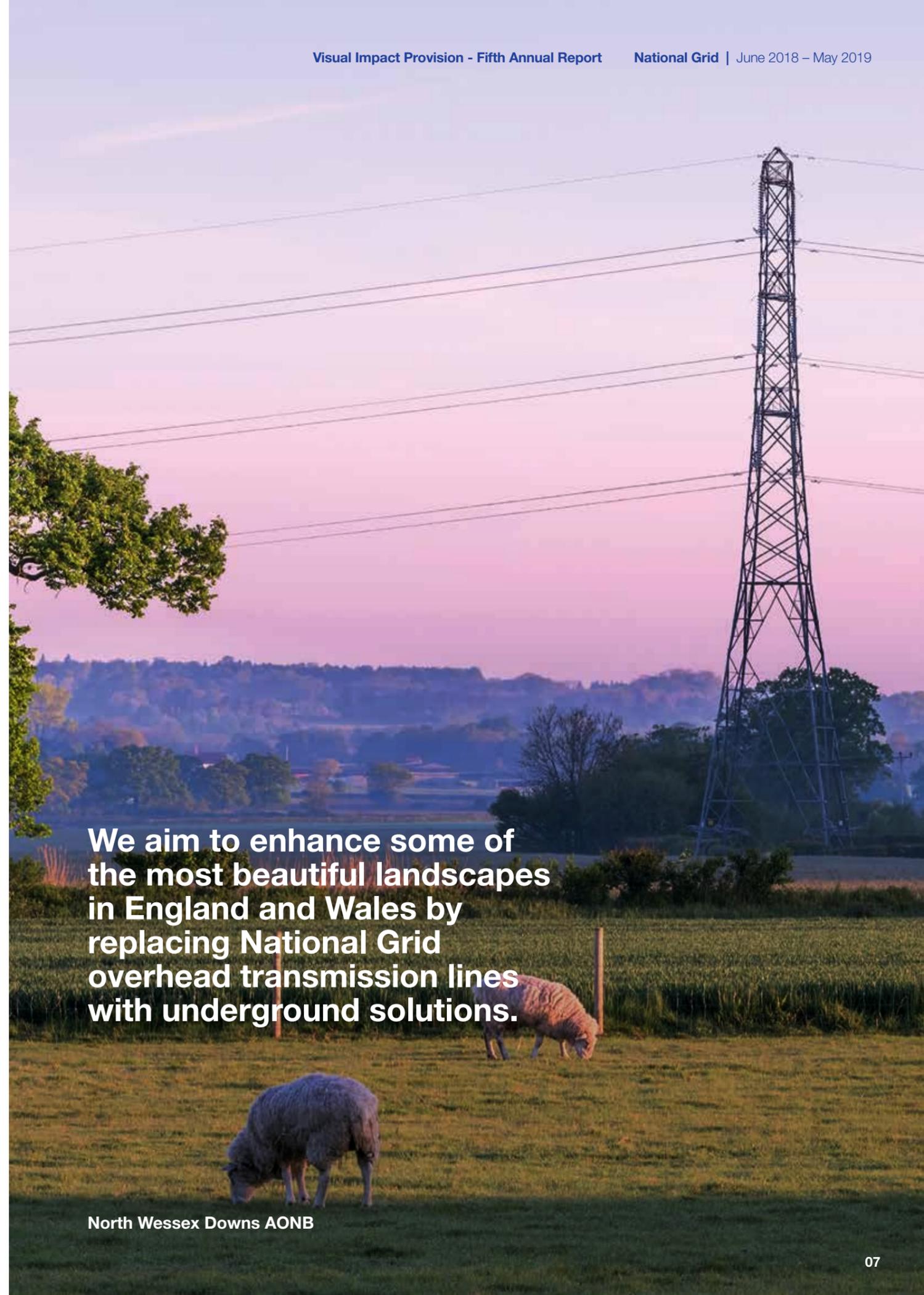
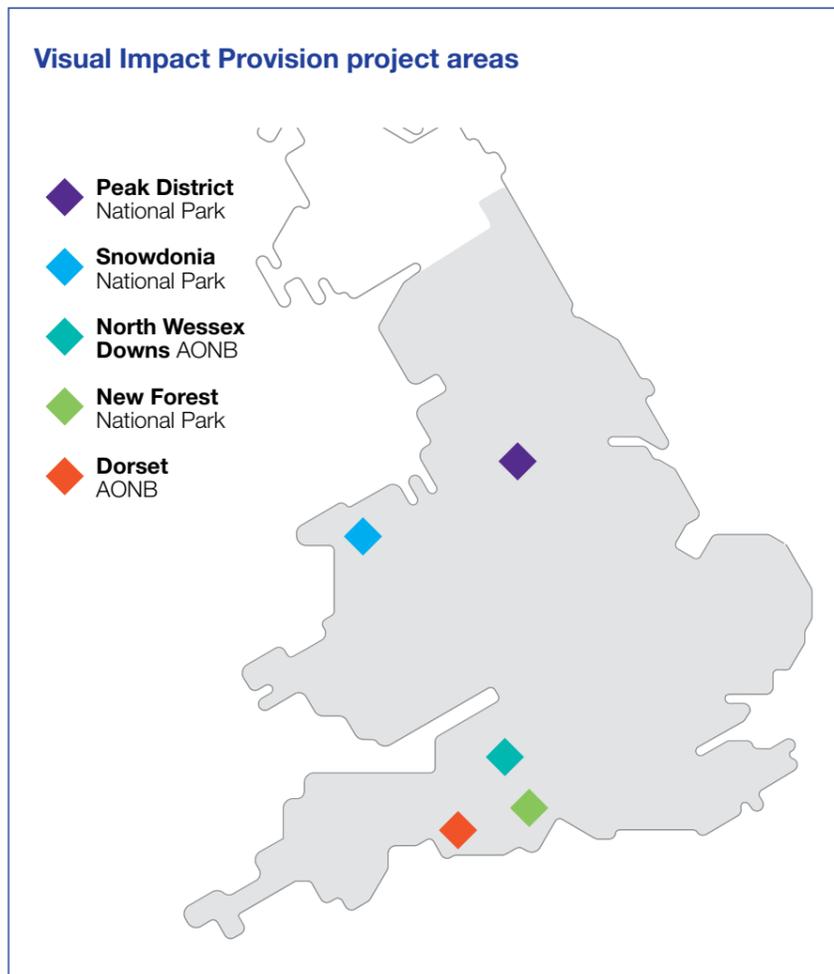
We are doing this through a transparent process which is led by the Stakeholder Advisory Group, drawing on input from technical experts, local stakeholders and communities. The VIP project is supported by National Grid's project team and external specialist advisors.

Over the past year, we have continued to progress the four projects initially chosen for potential undergrounding, building on work undertaken previously. This has been informed by technical and engineering design work as well as discussions with stakeholders, landowners and communities.

In March 2019, National Grid decided to pause work on the New Forest National Park project following advice from legal experts, the regulator and the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

Due to the New Forest project being paused, work has begun to determine the technical feasibility of delivering an undergrounding project in the North Wessex Downs AONB using the current Ofgem provision.

The following pages provide a progress update on each of the projects as well as a look ahead to activities planned for 2019/20.



**We aim to enhance some of the most beautiful landscapes in England and Wales by replacing National Grid overhead transmission lines with underground solutions.**

North Wessex Downs AONB

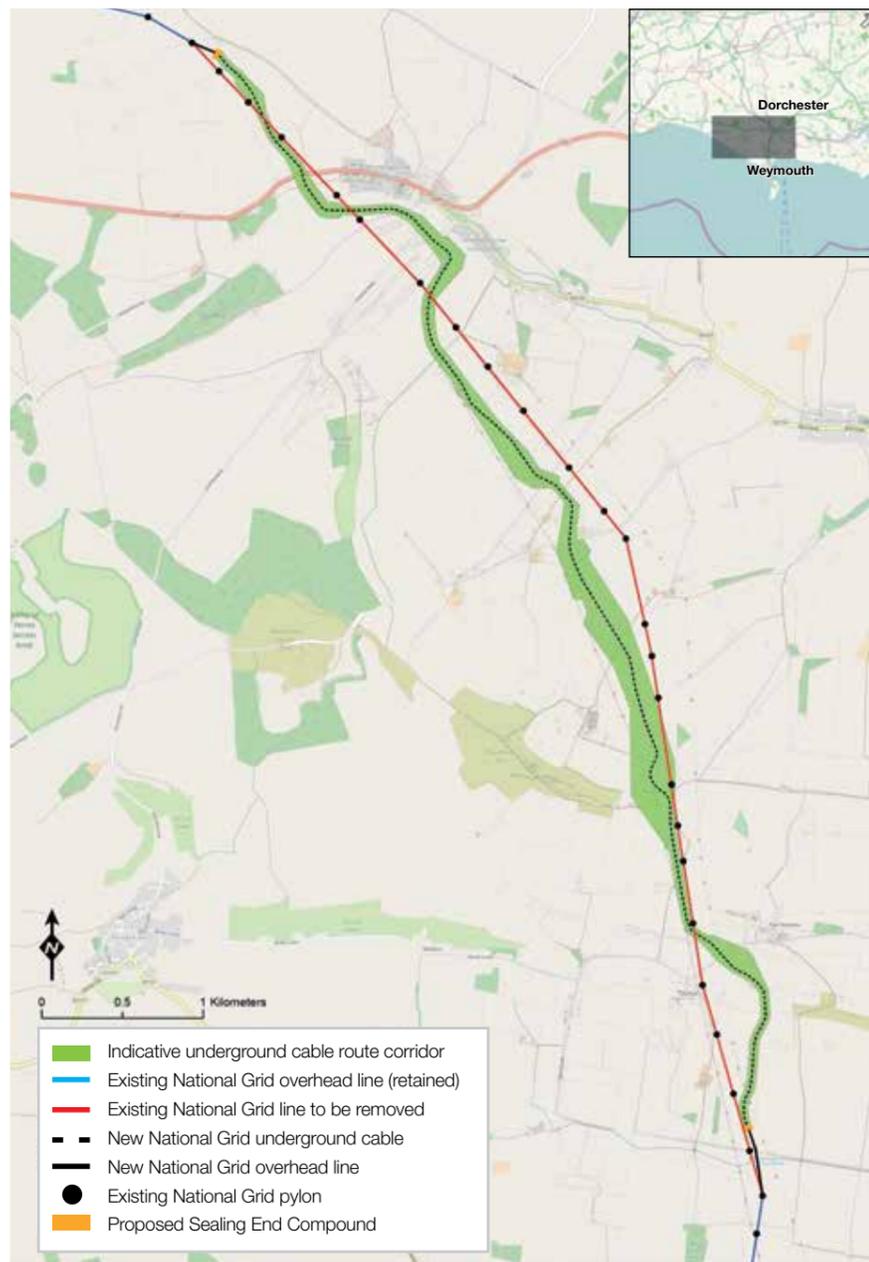
# Dorset AONB



## The Dorset project will replace 8.8km of overhead line near Dorchester with an underground cable, permanently removing 22 pylons from the landscape.

The route for the underground cable runs from Winterbourne Abbas to the edge of the South Dorset Escarpment at Friar Waddon. To connect the cable to the remaining existing overhead line, sealing end compounds and associated terminal pylons will need to be constructed at Winterbourne Abbas and Friar Waddon Hill.

### Project route



# Dorset AONB



## Progress to date

Planning permission for the project was granted by West Dorset District Council in June 2018 subject to the meeting of planning conditions and a unilateral undertaking being agreed. Since June 2018, we have been working to meet the planning conditions. This has included:

- Liaising with Historic England and Dorset Council over the potential for archaeological discoveries, including an agreement that National Grid would undertake to excavate a large number of archaeological trial trenches. More details of what has been discovered can be found over the page.

- Agreeing terms with landowners to obtain the rights to build, operate, access and maintain the new cable and remove the existing infrastructure. This work has been led by National Grid's lands team and appointed land agents, Bruton Knowles.
- Delivering environmental mitigation measures such as the relocation of some badger setts and dormice before construction work can begin.
- Developing a community relations plan to keep the public and local residents informed during the project's construction. This includes the establishment of a Community Liaison Group and plans for a Project Information Centre near Winterbourne Abbas where visitors – including schools and local interest groups – can make an appointment to learn more about the project.

The project also received consent from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to replace a short section of line to connect to the new sealing end compound north of the A35.

The application for project funding that was submitted to Ofgem in April 2018 was approved in October 2018. A budget of £116million was approved for the Dorset project from the overall provision made available by Ofgem.

In January 2019, Morgan Sindall was appointed as the main contractor for the project.



### Stakeholder Reference Group members



# Dorset AONB



## Dorset VIP project - archaeological trial trench finds

Between July and October 2018, 147 trial trenches were excavated along the route proposed for cable burial. Several key areas along the route can be considered of moderate to high regional archaeological significance based on what was found and warrant further investigation:

- Bronze Age barrows, west of Winterbourne Abbas
- Early Bronze Age enclosure system with potentially an earlier Neolithic element, west of Winterbourne Steepleton
- Early Bronze Age barrows, urned cremation burial and undated enclosure systems, west of Rew Hill
- Roman agricultural / possible settlement activity at Bronkham Hill and Corton Down

- Early mediaeval cemetery, dyke and potential Iron Age enclosure or lynchets on Friar Waddon Hill. Cist burials – human skeletons radiocarbon dated to mid-6th century

There will be an archaeological watching brief throughout the project's construction with National Grid and Morgan Sindall continuing to work closely with the Dorset Council Archaeologist and Historic England.

Information and images of the finds will be available for the public to view at the Project Information Centre and, where possible, the finds will be put on display in local museums.



A mid-6th century burial cist



Bronze Age arrowhead

## Stakeholder and public engagement

One Stakeholder Reference Group meeting was held in Dorset in 2018/19.

We have established a Community Liaison Group for the project.

The first meeting of the group was held in March 2019 and was attended by representatives from the Dorset AONB Partnership, Winterbourne Abbas and Winterbourne Steepleton Parish Council, Winterbourne St Martin Parish Council, Chesil Bank Parish Council, The Ramblers, Dorset Wildlife Trust, RSPB South Dorset, Dorchester West Rural Policing, CPRE West Dorset, Dorchester Rotary Club, Country Land and Business Association, Dorset Local Access Forum, South Dorset Ridgeway Landscape Partnership, Winterbourne

Valley First School and St Martin's Church, Martinstown.

A public drop-in event will be held in summer 2019 at the request of the Community Liaison Group.

The event will allow us to share more information on the construction timetable, the traffic management needed to create the site entrance from the A35 and how National Grid is managing working within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

## Looking forward

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents, the current indicative programme is that on-site works will begin in July 2019 and take approximately three years to complete. It is anticipated that by 2022 the new underground cable will be

in service and that the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed.

We will continue to work with the local community and our stakeholders throughout the construction phase to ensure that the project achieves the greatest possible enhancement of the landscape.

A Project Information Centre will open by winter 2019/20 and we have developed a plan to keep the public informed of progress.

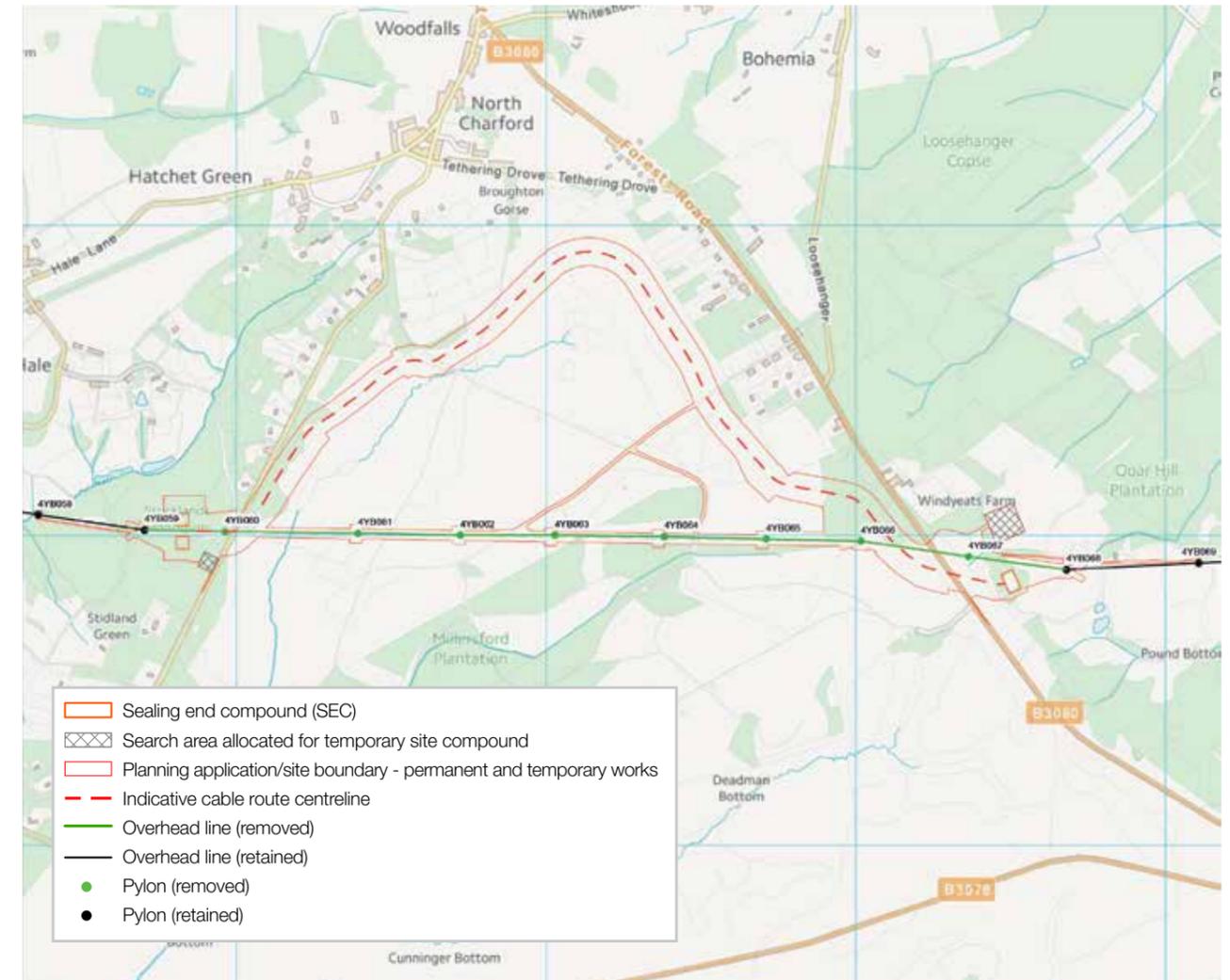
Project information, updates and documentation will continue to be shared through our Dorset project website: <http://dorset.nationalgrid.co.uk>.

# New Forest National Park



In March 2019, National Grid decided to pause work on its landscape enhancement project to remove eight pylons from Hale Purlieu in the New Forest National Park following advice from legal experts, the regulator and the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

## Current route option



## Stakeholder Reference Group members



Hale Parish Council



# New Forest National Park



**The decision was made due to emerging complexities surrounding the European regulations designed to protect the natural habitats of protected species.**

While these regulations are designed to prevent the permanent loss of habitats, and not to stop short-term work that we believe could have provided a net gain to the environment in which we were working, it is evident that the legal position is complex and, importantly, untested for a project of this nature. It is therefore unlikely that a planning application for this project would receive approval before the funding deadline.

To inform the decision, detailed environmental and ecological surveys were undertaken and we engaged with stakeholders and the public. While the project was supported in principle by many individuals and organisations with an interest in the management of the National Park, the response from residents was mixed.

Three Stakeholder Reference Group meetings were held in the New Forest in 2018/19. In July 2018, a representative of Hale Parish Council was invited to join the Group.

Throughout the year, National Grid held meetings with a wide range of stakeholder groups including the New Forest Verderers, the Commoners Defence Association, representatives of local commoners and users of Hale Purlieu including members of the Protect Hale Purlieu movement, senior representatives from the National Trust and Go New Forest, a community interest company promoting tourism in the New Forest. National Grid also contacted local residents with properties immediately

adjacent to Hale Purlieu with an offer to meet with them to discuss the proposed project. Over 30 residents took up this offer.

National Grid also had a stand at the New Forest Show and the Ellingham & Ringwood Show.

### Looking forward

Following work being paused on the New Forest project, the

Stakeholder Advisory Group has asked National Grid to investigate whether it will be possible to develop and achieve approval from Ofgem for a similar-scale VIP project at a different shortlisted location within the RIIO-T1 period which runs to the end of March 2021. National Grid is currently investigating the possibility of developing a project in the North Wessex Downs AONB.

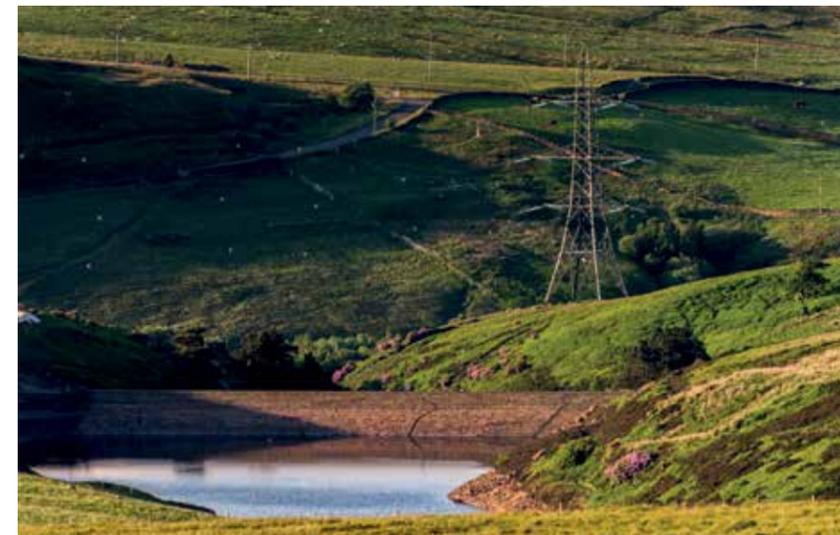


# Peak District National Park

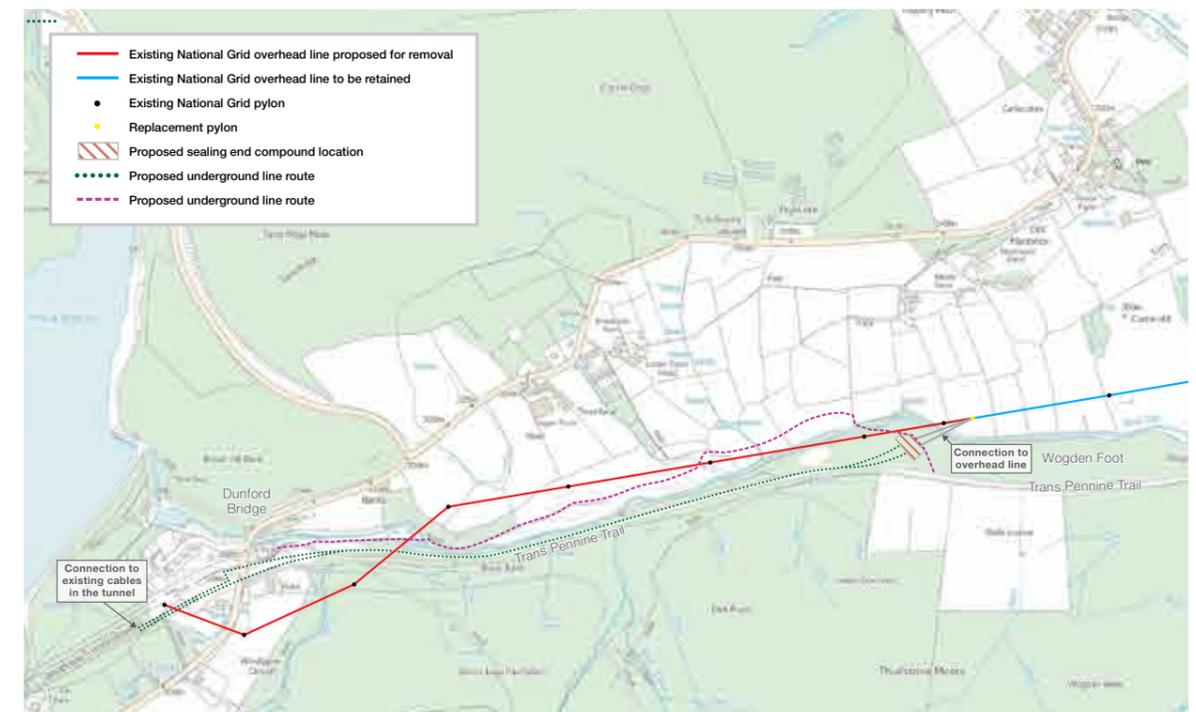


**The Peak District National Park (East) project would replace a 2km section of overhead line east of the Woodhead Tunnel near Dunford Bridge with an underground connection, permanently removing seven pylons and a sealing end compound from the landscape.**

The preferred route for the connection runs alongside the Trans Pennine Trail to the south of the River Don to join the existing cables in the Woodhead Tunnel. To connect the remaining existing overhead line, a sealing end compound and associated terminal pylon would need to be constructed at Wogden Foot.



### Current route option



# Peak District National Park



## Stakeholder Reference Group members



## Progress to date

Ongoing archaeological, environmental and hydrological studies have continued throughout 2018/19 to support the creation of detailed engineering designs for the project. Ground investigation surveys took place in summer 2018 to support this process.

For the project to be delivered, the Trans Pennine Trail would need to be temporarily diverted to allow for construction work. National Grid is fully committed to ensuring that the Trans Pennine Trail remains open and accessible throughout this period for the many local residents, long distance walkers, cyclists and horse riders who enjoy its special qualities.

Detailed work with the Trans Pennine Trail Office and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has led to the development of a suitable diversion. Our proposed temporary diversion runs across agricultural land to the north of the River Don and discussions with relevant landowners are progressing well. The temporary diversion would be fully accessible for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

Three Stakeholder Reference Group meetings were held in the Peak District in 2018/19. Several other stakeholder briefings have taken place including with elected members for Barnsley MBC's Penistone West and Penistone East wards.

Discussions on planting, screening and environmental mitigation have been ongoing between National Grid and a stakeholder group including ecology and biodiversity specialists from Barnsley MBC, the Peak District National Park Authority and Yorkshire Wildlife

Trust – as well as landscape architects. The collaborative approach to developing an appropriate solution is working well and the agreed designs will form a part of the planning application for the project.

## Stakeholder and public engagement

Five public consultation events were held at the end of 2018 to give the public the opportunity to comment on plans for the project, including detail on proposals for environmental and landscape mitigation, traffic and construction management and the Trans Pennine Trail diversion. The events were held at the Pennine Sailing Club, Millhouse Green Institute, St John's Community Centre in Penistone and Dunford Parish Community Centre.

Attendees included representatives from Barnsley MBC, Sustrans, Dunford Parish Council, PLACE and Grand Northern Railways as well as local residents and business owners, affected landowners and representatives of community groups.

A total of 60 feedback statements were submitted to the project team during the consultation window; 40 respondents made comments indicating they were fully supportive of the project, while a further six gave neutral or balanced feedback.

Several groups promoting the potential for a new freight / high-speed railway between Sheffield and Manchester alongside the route of the Trans Pennine Trail attended the public consultation events. The groups' main concern is that the VIP project would make it less likely that a railway could be built along the Trans Pennine Trail in the future. As a result of

# Peak District National Park



the feedback, National Grid has met with a number of stakeholders to discuss and clarify this issue including Sheffield City Region transport team, Barnsley MBC, the Peak District National Park Authority and the Rt Hon Angela Smith, MP for Penistone and Stocksbridge. It also met with Transport for the North, which confirmed that this route does not feature in its 30-year Strategic Transport Plan.

The VIP project team also took a trade stand at the Penistone Show in September 2018. Around 40 people visited the stand and engaged with the team to learn more about the project.

## Looking forward

Environmental assessment work will continue to enable the environmental mitigation and enhancement proposals, such as improving Dunford Bridge car park, to be finalised.

We hope to submit a planning application for the project to Barnsley MBC in summer 2019. The tender process for the main construction contractor will be progressed alongside this.

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents, the current indicative programme is that on-site works

will begin in 2020, a year later than initially anticipated to avoid clashing with another National Grid project that requires an electricity outage on the circuit earlier than the VIP project.

It is anticipated that in 2021 the new underground section will be in service and that by mid-2022 the existing pylons and section of overhead line will have been removed and all remediation work will be completed.

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



# Snowdonia National Park



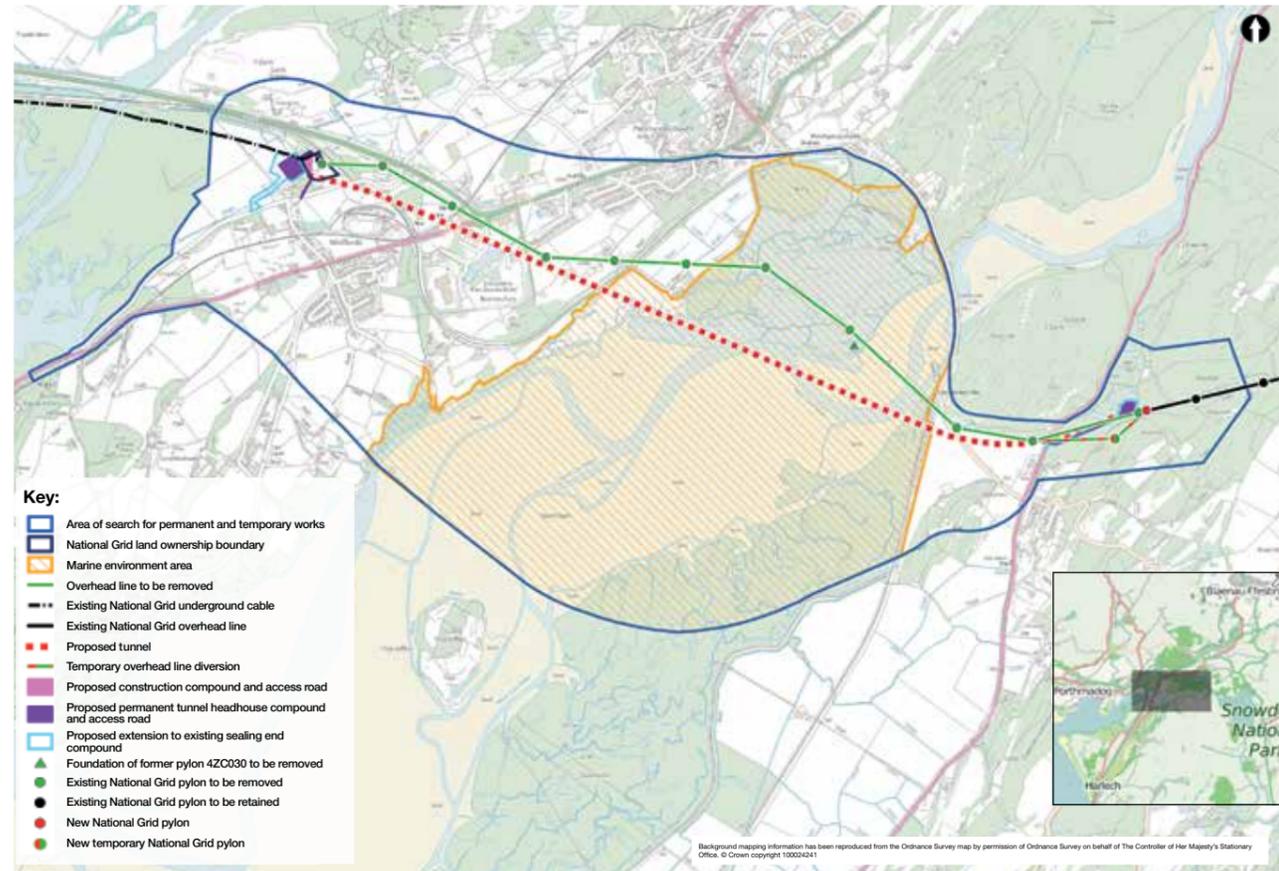
**The Snowdonia National Park project would replace a 3km section of overhead line crossing the Dwyryd Estuary near Porthmadog with an underground solution, permanently removing 10 pylons from the landscape.**

The new connection would run through an underground tunnel from Cilfor to Garth under the Dwyryd Estuary. A head house would be required at each end of the tunnel in Cilfor and Garth.

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



## Current route option



# Snowdonia National Park



## Progress to date

Survey work has continued in the Dwyryd Estuary, including a second round of ground investigations in August 2018, to inform the development of engineering designs for the underground tunnel which would house the new connection. The work was agreed with landowners, Gwynedd Council, the Harbour Master and Natural Resources Wales.

Following Horizon Nuclear Power's decision to suspend works on the proposed

nuclear power station at Wylfa on Anglesey, the National Grid team has reviewed and assessed the impact this will have on the Snowdonia VIP project and its impact on the ratings (power requirements) needed for the VIP section.

The conclusion of this work is a reduction in the power requirements of the electrical circuits that would be inside the tunnel.

The removal of the concrete bases which the pylons running across the estuary stand upon

remains an engineering challenge. Typically, the bases are dug out to about 1 to 1.4 metres in depth and covered in an environmentally appropriate material.

We are continuing to work with Natural Resources Wales and marine ecological specialists to determine the best approach in the case of the Dwyryd Estuary. National Grid has explored several options to remove them and discussions with stakeholders are ongoing.



## Snowdonia National Park



### Stakeholder Reference Group members



National Trust

### Stakeholder and public engagement

Two Stakeholder Reference Group meetings were held in Snowdonia in 2018/19. Other stakeholder briefings have also taken place including with Penrhyndeudraeth Town Council, the Harlech and Talsarnau Community Councils and the Snowdonia Society.

Three public consultation events were held at the end of 2018 to give the public the opportunity to comment on plans for the project, including detail on proposals for environmental mitigation, traffic management and tunnel head house design.

The events were held at the Snowdonia National Park Authority offices, Penrhyndeudraeth Memorial Hall and Talsarnau Community Hall. In total, 102 people attended the events, including representatives from the Snowdonia National Park Authority, Natural Resources Wales, the Snowdonia Society, Penrhyndeudraeth Town Council, Talsarnau Community Council as well as local residents and business owners, affected landowners and representatives of community groups.

### Looking forward

A planning application will be submitted jointly to both Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park Authority towards the end of 2019, and a funding application to Ofgem is anticipated to be submitted in 2020.

Subject to all necessary negotiations, approvals and consents from the Local Authorities and Natural Resources Wales, the current indicative programme is that on-site works will begin in winter 2021 and take approximately five years to complete. It is anticipated that the new underground connection will be in service in late 2025 and the existing pylons and section of overhead line will be removed in 2026.

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



## North Wessex Downs AONB



### Following the decision to pause the New Forest VIP project, early stage technical feasibility studies are being carried out to replace around 4.4km of overhead transmission lines and 11 pylons in the North Wessex Downs AONB, close to the Millennium White Horse, north of Devizes.

In the 2014 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, this section (YYM.1) was judged to have landscape and visual impacts of high importance. The line runs through open downland north of Devizes.

The area is historically rich with several Scheduled Ancient Monuments within 2km of the overhead line, including Oliver's Camp, an early Iron Age settlement, bowl barrows at Roundway Hill Covert and the Roundway Hill farm round barrows. An extensive Registered Battlefield associated with the 1643 Civil War battle of Roundway Down lies directly to the north of the line with its southern boundary following the overhead line. The project has the potential to improve the settings of these important sites.

Roundway Down and Covert SSSI lies immediately under the overhead line and is designated for its extensive unimproved chalk downland flora, as well as mixed scrub and the woodland of Roundway Hill Covert.

As well as running close to the community of Devizes, the overhead line impacts views enjoyed by many visitors to the historic landscape. The Wessex Ridgeway long-distance route passes through the area, north of Devizes and across the scarp slope, directly under the overhead line.

The project will only be able to progress if investigations indicate that it could achieve full planning consent in the RIIO-T1 regulatory period, which ends in March 2021.

### Progress to date

Positive meetings have been held with the North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership, which is supportive of the project. Stakeholders have also been contacted about the potential project so that National Grid can hear their feedback at an early stage and create an open dialogue.

Stakeholders contacted include elected officials and officers of Wiltshire Council, Bishops Cannings and Rowde Parish Councils, Devizes Town Council, the Rt Hon Claire Perry, MP for Devizes, Historic England, Natural England and local organisations including access groups and interest societies.

### Stakeholder engagement

The inaugural Stakeholder Reference Group meeting will be held in July 2019 in Devizes.



The new group's initial membership includes North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership, Wiltshire Council, Historic England, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

### Looking forward

National Grid is continuing with technical and engineering studies to determine the project's feasibility. Detailed engineering surveys and environmental work will take place alongside ongoing stakeholder engagement and negotiations with landowners for the rights required to construct and operate the cables.

If the project can progress, public consultation on the proposals would take place ahead of the submission of a planning application in 2020. Construction would take approximately two years and would be targeted to commence in 2021.

Project information, updates and documents will be shared through our VIP project website [www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision](http://www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision).

## 4. Landscape Enhancement Initiative

**The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is an important part of the VIP project. Championed by our stakeholders, the initiative aims to use some of the Ofgem provision for smaller visual improvement projects.**

Launched in May 2016, the LEI offers grants of up to £200,000 for local visual improvement projects. Each of the 30 National Park Authorities and AONB Partnerships in England and Wales covered by the initiative can submit applications for the funding of projects. The overall objective of the initiative is to reduce the landscape and visual impact of National Grid's existing electricity transmission infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected designated landscapes.

Examples of projects that may be funded include:

- Localised tree planting
- Management of hedgerows
- Changes to trails, footpaths, cycleways and riding routes
- Rebuilding of dry stone walls
- Enhancing the special qualities of the landscape which may also benefit biodiversity

### About the Landscape Enhancement Initiative

The LEI is driven by our stakeholders. Projects are suggested by the relevant AONB Partnership or National Park Authority before being considered by the LEI Approvals Panel. Independently chaired by Mary O'Connor from the Landscape Institute, the panel

includes experts from Cadw, Historic England, Natural England and Natural Resources Wales and makes recommendations to Ofgem on which projects to fund. The initiative is supported by National Grid's project team and external specialists, including landscape advisors to offer guidance to eligible applicants on potential LEI projects.

### Progress to date

**Since its launch in May 2016, more than £2.3m has been allocated to projects across England and Wales.**

National Grid held workshops in November 2018 and May 2019 for representatives of AONBs, National Parks and project partners to learn more and discuss their own ideas for funding.

### Window 1 projects

**Three projects secured final approval from Ofgem in 2017 and are now underway:**

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

### Window 2 projects

**Seven further projects approved by Ofgem in February 2018 and are in progress:**

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

### Window 3 projects

**Five new projects received confirmation of their grants from Ofgem in January 2019:**

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

### Window 4 projects

**Five applications were submitted to Ofgem in October 2018 following approval from the LEI panel:**

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

Ofgem has requested further clarification from National Grid on two of the applications. A decision on funding is expected by summer 2019.

### Window 5 projects

**Two applications were received in Window 5. The approvals panel met in December 2018 and has recommended these to Ofgem for funding:**

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

### Window 6 projects

**A record eight applications for LEI funding were received in May 2019.** The LEI approvals panel will meet to consider these in July 2019.

### Future application windows

There are two submission windows coming up in 2019/20 during which eligible AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities can submit project ideas:

- **Window 7 – June 2019**
- **Window 8 – January 2020**

If you are interested in finding out more about the LEI, please visit our website for more information: [www.lei.nationalgrid.com](http://www.lei.nationalgrid.com).

## Timeless appeal in the High Weald

### Case study:

High Weald AONB,  
Beautiful Boundaries

“The LEI has offered our farmers a rare opportunity to work together to improve the scenery and wildlife around the transmission line. Walkers from near and far have appreciated the new hedges in blossom this spring and we are looking forward to seeing their autumn colour.”

**Gerry Sherwin,**  
Business Manager at the High  
Weald AONB Partnership

### The historically rich landscape of the High Weald AONB is defined by its mosaic of patchwork fields, small copses, shaws and hedges.

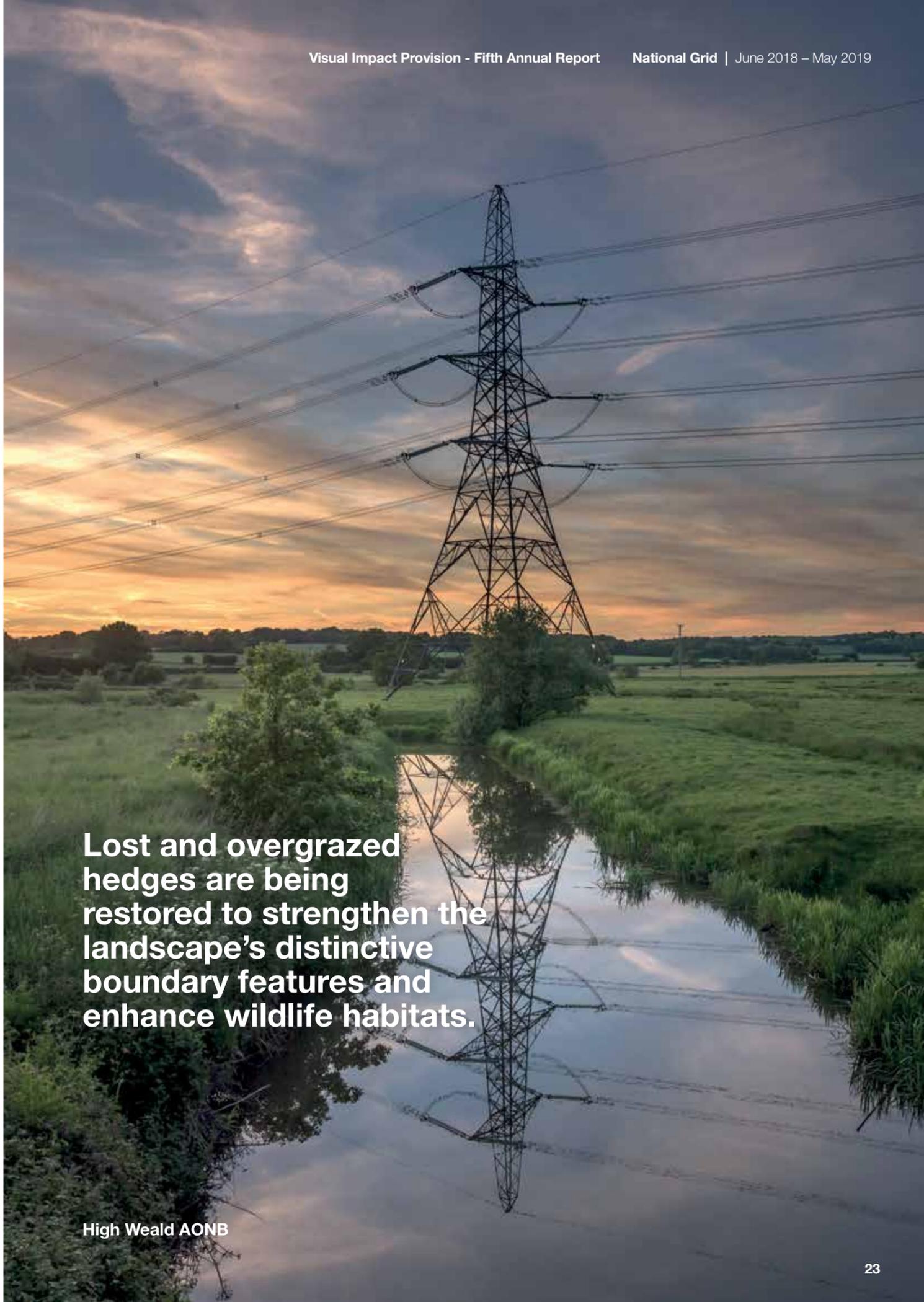
Supported by the Landscape Enhancement Initiative, the AONB Partnership is working to enhance this internationally important setting through its ‘Beautiful Boundaries’ project.

The three-year project focuses on locations where pylons are visible from the area’s popular footpaths and promoted trails including the 1066 Walk and the Sussex Border Path.

A range of measures such as tree planting to screen the overhead line from key viewpoints are being used to create a sense of timelessness.

Lost and overgrazed hedges are being restored to strengthen the landscape’s distinctive boundary features and enhance wildlife habitats.

To promote long-term sustainability, education sessions on good hedge management have also been made available for landowners at nearby Scotney Castle.



Lost and overgrazed hedges are being restored to strengthen the landscape’s distinctive boundary features and enhance wildlife habitats.

High Weald AONB

## Enhancing the majesty of Snowdonia

### Case study:

Snowdonia National Park Authority, Dyffryn Maentwrog Woodland Restoration and Landscape Improvement

“Snowdonia has benefitted greatly from the LEI. The initiative has been successful in bringing together different organisations - including charitable and voluntary organisations - to make landscape and biodiversity enhancements on a meaningful scale. These improvements will be of great benefit to walkers and other users who wish to enjoy the National Park.”

**Jonathan Cawley,**  
Director of Planning and Land Management at the Snowdonia National Park Authority

### The Landscape Enhancement Initiative is supporting three projects in Snowdonia to enhance the National Park's special qualities.

Two woodland restoration and improvement schemes are encouraging biodiversity and protecting natural beauty near to overhead lines. New forestry planting is creating wildlife corridors through species-rich habitats, with more than 8ha of native woodland planted and 871m of hedgerow already restored at Maentwrog.

A programme to control invasive plant species such as rhododendron is helping to conserve and revitalise the landscape's ancient woodland at several sites, including at Llan Ffestiniog.

The third project, ‘Snowdonia Traditional Boundaries’, recognises the importance of historic features including hedgerows and dry-stone walls, not only visually but as hallmarks of local culture and sense of place.

Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust and both Welsh farming unions, as well as nearly 100 individual landowners, are all important partners in the delivery of the three projects.



## 5. Looking forward: RIIO-T2 – the next price control period



### Ofgem's £500m VIP provision is part of the current regulatory period, known as RIIO-T1<sup>3</sup>, which runs to the end of March 2021. National Grid is shaping its plans for the next regulatory period (RIIO-T2) for Ofgem's consideration.

The plans, developed with stakeholders, will include suggestions for what VIP could look like in the future<sup>4</sup>. The Stakeholder Advisory Group unanimously agree that the project should continue in RIIO-T2 and suggested it could expand its scope through consideration of other designations, such as World Heritage Sites.

Ofgem consulted on its RIIO-T2 methodology in 2019, asking for stakeholders' views on engagement and the development of new projects. The consultation received 31 responses in support of VIP, demonstrating widespread motivation to continue maximising the provision's benefits.

National Grid has also carried out its own consultation on stakeholder priorities for RIIO-T2 to help shape its business plan. The consultation was accompanied by new 'Willingness to Pay' research, conducted jointly on behalf of National Grid and the Scottish transmission operators, Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc and Scottish Power Transmission plc.

Ofgem confirmed in May 2019 that a provision for further VIP projects will exist in RIIO-T2. National Grid has undertaken initial feasibility studies into a shortlist of potential undergrounding projects identified by the Stakeholder Advisory Group based on the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment undertaken in 2014<sup>5</sup>. These potential RIIO-T2 projects are:

- **North Wessex Downs AONB (specifically, overhead transmission line sections YYM.1<sup>6</sup>, YYM.4, YYM.5 and YYM.6)**
- **Tamar Valley AONB**
- **Cotswolds AONB**

At the Group's request, National Grid is also keeping a watching brief on infrastructure developments associated with the following locations which will determine their feasibility:

- **Peak District National Park (West)**
- **Anglesey AONB**

It was agreed that a project in the Lake District National Park could potentially be pursued in RIIO-T3 if VIP continued beyond 2026, and that it could be brought forward if other projects could not progress.

The Group and National Grid also agreed to work with the relevant authorities to encourage the submission of Landscape Enhancement Initiative schemes at Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland National Park and within the High Weald AONB.

<sup>3</sup> To find out more about the RIIO regulatory framework please visit our website: <https://www.nationalgridet.com/about-us/how-we-are-regulated>

<sup>4</sup> To find out more about our plans for RIIO-T2 please visit our website: <https://www.nationalgridet.com/working-together/have-your-say-future-business-plans>

<sup>5</sup> Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 2014: <https://www.nationalgridet.com/document/84141/download>

<sup>6</sup> Section YYM.1 is now being investigated as a RIIO-T1 project. Please see page 19 of this report for more details.

**For further information:**

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

Visit our website at: **[www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision](http://www.nationalgridet.com/planning-together/visual-impact-provision)**

Send an email to: **[visualimpact@nationalgrid.com](mailto:visualimpact@nationalgrid.com)**

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