

VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Minutes of the fifteenth meeting held on 2nd July 2019

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Cadw** Kate Roberts, Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments
- **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 [remotely]
- **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 [remotely]
- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director
- **Natural England** Liz Newton, Director of Strategy Development [remotely]
- **Ofgem** Anna Kulhavy, Senior Economist [remotely]
- **The Ramblers** Alison Hallas, Policy and Advocacy Officer (Countryside and Access)

Apologies:

- **Campaign for National Parks**
- **CPRW**
- **Natural Resources Wales**
- **Visit Wales**

Secretariat in attendance:

- **National Grid** – Michelle Clark, VIP Project Manager; Ben Smith, VIP Project Manager (South); Liz Jones, Consents Officer; Andrea Key, Consents Officer; Steve Knight-Gregson, Regional External Affairs Manager
- **Camargue** – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

The purpose of the meeting on 2nd July was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

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

1 – Planning application for the Peak District National Park (Eastern section – ZO.2)

Andrea Key and Liz Jones from National Grid and Stuart Fox from Camargue gave an update on the Peak District scheme and provided an overview of the planning application that is due to be submitted shortly.

The project involves undergrounding approximately 2km of overhead line and replacing the existing sealing end compound at Dunford Bridge with a new one in a local wildlife site at Wogden Foot.

The project is currently out to tender for the main construction contractor. The planning application has been prepared on the basis of using cable for the scheme, but the tender is being progressed for the options of both cable and Gas Insulated Line (GIL) in parallel in order to ensure that the most efficient option is used. The route is not affected by either option, but as advised at the previous Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings, GIL would require minor changes to the route into the sealing end compound at Wogden Foot, and slight changes to the environmental assessment work (both of which would in turn require minor changes to the planning application).

National Grid is in the process of finalising proposals for ecological mitigation and enhancement, and is also finalising the Statement of Community Engagement following the public consultation events that took place in December 2018.

The route for the temporary diversion of the Trans Pennine Trail has been agreed, and it was noted that some local people are very positive about the opportunity that this will give them to walk a different part of the valley. Although some people are keen for the diversion to become permanent, the landowners do not support this proposal, and the planning application is therefore only being submitted on the basis of a temporary diversion.

The Peak District VIP project team met with the local Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) on 17th June to go through the details of the planning application. The meeting was generally positive and the majority of SRG members are supportive of the scheme, including the Peak District National Park Authority, the Trans Pennine Trail office and Dunford Parish Council. There are, however, a few remaining challenges which are outlined below.

As reported at the last meeting, feedback from the public consultation in December indicated that most people support the Peak East VIP proposals. There is opposition to the scheme from supporters of proposals to reinstate the Woodhead railway. Questions surrounding prospects for rail reinstatement have prompted meetings with a number of key stakeholders including Transport for the North (TfN), Grand Northern Railway (GNR), the leadership team of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC), Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce and Sheffield Chamber of Commerce. Further meetings are due to take place shortly with councillors and ward members of BMBC, the Greater Manchester Mayor's Office, CPRE, Friends of the Peak District and Barnsley Local Access Forum to discuss the implications on the VIP project on any future rail aspirations.

There is no proposal to reinstate a rail line on the Woodhead route in either Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan or in the Northern Powerhouse Rail programme, both of which set the priorities for transport infrastructure investment for the next 30 years. TfN's aim is to improve journey times between major cities, and its current focus is on existing lines which present the best opportunities for that and a new fast route between Manchester and Leeds via Bradford. From discussions thus far with transport interests, we do not anticipate objections to the Peak East VIP proposals on this basis other than from GNR, supporters of that proposal and those who believe the route should form part of TfN's Strategic Plan and/or the Northern Powerhouse Rail programme.

Objections to the planning application are also likely from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust who continue to have concerns about the ecological impacts of the project on the Wogden Foot local wildlife site. The issues that they have raised include concerns about the threat to its status as a local wildlife site, and perceived threats to the willow tit population. Extensive attempts have been made by the National Grid project team to address these concerns through plans for enhancement and mitigation, and they are also now looking at offsite options such as tree planting in order to get to a position of net gain in terms of biodiversity. An onsite meeting with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the

local parish council is due to take place during the week of 8th July to look at alternative options. It was also noted that only three percent of the area of the site is being lost to the new sealing end compound. Despite these attempts, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is currently maintaining its opposition to the scheme, and they could garner support for objections from other local ecology groups.

Throughout the development of this project, there has been a huge amount of engagement with key stakeholders, local groups and residents, and it was noted that the vast majority of people and stakeholders are supportive of the scheme going ahead.

National Grid gave an overview of the planning application and consenting requirements and provided a list of the documents that have been prepared as part of the submission. The four key elements of the planning application are:

1. Construction of a new sealing end compound including permanent access to it
2. Construction of a temporary haul road from Brook Hill Lane (northern access road)
3. Construction of two new bridges (one temporary, one permanent)
4. The temporary diversion of the Trans Pennine Trail

Other elements that are included in the overall application include a landscape masterplan which includes plans for visual screening, and (as requested by the SRG) a redesign of the car park. The Stakeholder Advisory Group was shown a number of photo montages of what the area looks like now and how it will look after completion of the project.

It was noted that the planning application process for this project is complex as different parts of the scheme fall under different consenting regimes. Discussions have been taking place with the Planning Officer at BMBC about the best way to present the various elements in order to streamline the process and also so that people are better able to understand which parts of the application they are able to comment on. Although a small part of the project falls under the remit of the Peak District National Park Authority, it is likely that BMBC will take the lead in the overall planning process.

Subject to final amendments and confirmation of whether cable or GIL will be used, the planning application is due to be submitted in summer 2019.

2 – Update on the other schemes shortlisted for underground projects

Michelle Clark, Ben Smith, Andrea Key and Liz Jones from National Grid gave an update on the progress of the other schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward. A summary of progress and specific issues for each of the schemes is outlined below.

2.1 – Dorset AONB – 4YA.7

Following successful approval of the planning application for the Dorset project in June 2018 and the subsequent funding approval from Ofgem in November 2018, the preliminary works for this scheme are now underway. Enabling works are due to commence upon successful discharge of the planning conditions *[at the time of the meeting two of the four planning conditions had been discharged and the two outstanding conditions were due to be discharged within the following week]*.

Following a request by the Community Liaison Group, a community drop-in event is due to be held on 6th July. The scheme is well supported by local stakeholders, and there has also been a lot of interest from the school and local archaeological groups.

West Dorset District Council was formerly acting as the consenting authority for this scheme, but following the local government consolidation in this area on 1st April 2019, National Grid is now working with the new unitary authority, Dorset Council.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group will be visiting the site in Dorset to see the live project as part of their next meeting later in the year.

Ben Smith advised that Dorset AONB and the VIP project team have been approached by an academic at Winchester University regarding the potential to collaborate on a research project that will carry out baseline studies and then map people's perceptions before and after VIP intervention. The project is intended to feed into a much larger piece of work that is being undertaken about tranquillity.

Members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group expressed their support for this kind of research, and it was noted that these kinds of studies can be very useful in demonstrating levels of acceptance for landscape interventions and identifying reasons for objections and support. It was also suggested that conversations need to take place early on to ensure that the project generates outputs and data that will be of use more widely in the future. Chris Baines offered to meet the researcher in the following week, and it was also suggested that it would be useful to put her in contact with Professor Carys Swanwick.

Action:

- **Ben Smith** – Disseminate information about the research project to relevant members of the SAG and confirm with the Dorset AONB Partnership and Winchester University that there is support for the research.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was then shown a video about the Dorset VIP scheme that has been put together for National Grid's annual Chairman's Award. National Grid thanked Chris Baines for his help in putting the video together.

2.2 – Snowdonia National Park – 4CZ.1

The Stakeholder Advisory Group was given details of the current position and plans for the Snowdonia project.

A thorough review has been carried out by National Grid since the termination of the connection contract by Horizon Nuclear Power for the Wylfa Newydd project and the resulting reduction in high-voltage system requirements. Work is ongoing with SPEN (the distribution network operator which operates the conductors on one side of the existing towers), and the project is proposing one 132kV circuit and one 400kV circuit in the tunnel. A spot tender for the tunnel works will be issued this month.

The last SRG meeting was held on 21st June 2019, and the SRG has decided against using helicopters to remove the pylons from the estuary as it was felt that the net benefit was not enough to outweigh the increase in cost, in addition to the potential need to close the railway line. The towers in the estuary will now be removed using the traditional method with cranes and a derrick.

Discussions are ongoing with Gwynedd Council regarding the options for waste disposal.

Other key changes for this project include adaptations to the size and locations of a tunnel head house, including:

- A smaller building for the tunnel head house at Garth as the reduced power that needs to be carried through the tunnel means that fewer fans are required. The location of the tunnel head house has been moved to an adjacent field that is slightly further away from residential properties and other utilities that are already in situ.
- The Cilfor shaft has been moved to the other end of the and the location of the building has also moved slightly. The movement of the shaft also means that temporary diversion of the overhead line is no longer required as construction can take place with the existing line in place.

National Grid is still working towards submission of the planning application before the end of 2019, and another SRG meeting will be held in the autumn in advance of its submission. The indicative programme is for completion of construction in 2025/26, with the final tower removal taking place in the summer of 2026 due to the presence of overwintering birds on the estuary.

2.3 – New Forest National Park – 4YB.2

As discussed at the previous meeting, the project in the New Forest National Park has now been paused. A statement was issued on 29th March 2019 and local stakeholders were notified. All borehole equipment has been removed and National Grid is now off site.

A meeting was held in May with the New Forest National Park Authority to advise them of the reasons for the pause, and a meeting is due to take place with the National Trust to provide them with some of the draft ecological data.

2.4 – North Wessex Downs AONB – YYM.1

Following the pause of the New Forest scheme, National Grid has been working to explore the feasibility of a project in the North Wessex Downs AONB. The section of line is north of Devizes at the edge of the Roundway Down battlefield site, and the project involves undergrounding 4.4km of overhead line and the removal of 11 pylons.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership is enthusiastic about the project and National Grid is working closely with Historic England and the County Archaeologist. The pylons are largely located in agricultural land and the landowners have all been contacted and are happy to work with National Grid on the project. Ecological survey work is underway including eDNA analysis for great crested newt and National Vegetation Classification for the single tower that is located on the edge of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Some landscape assessment work has been carried out to identify potential locations of the new sealing end compounds, and a provisional route has been determined. Ground investigations will commence in the autumn once the harvest has been completed.

A local Stakeholder Reference Group has been established and the first meeting with them will take place on 23rd July 2019. Stakeholder Advisory Group members including the Ramblers, Natural England and Historic England made a number of suggestions regarding SRG membership, and also made offers of help with regard to securing representation and input from local ecologists and battlefield archaeologists/specialists.

It was acknowledged that the timescales for the project are very challenging. In order to gain funding approval from Ofgem within the current price control period, National Grid has a year from now to submit the planning application. They are, however, committed to doing everything that they can to achieve this and are working towards being able to submit both the planning application and the Ofgem funding application within the deadline. The indicative programme would be for construction to start on site in June 2021.

3 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

Ben Smith from National Grid gave an update on progress with the LEI.

3.1 – Project application updates

Window 4 – The five proposals submitted to Ofgem in October 2018 were all approved on 1st July 2019. The Ofgem licence consultation is now live on the website and will run until 26th July.

Window 5 – The applications for the two projects that were submitted during Window 5 have both been approved by the LEI Approvals Panel and are now being finalised for submission to Ofgem.

Window 6 – The Approvals Panel were due to meet on 3rd July 2019 to consider the eight full applications that were submitted during this window. The projects that are approved will be reviewed by Ofgem between 20th August and 16th November, and the licence consultation will take place in November/December. Final approval and the release of funds is expected to occur around December 2019/January 2020.

Window 7 – Expressions of interest closed on 28th June 2019 and seven were received.

Window 8 – Expressions of interest will open in January 2020.

An online workshop took place on 9th May 2019 with the purpose of encouraging further applications during the current price control period. The materials from this workshop are available online on the LEI website.

3.2 – Progress with securing seed funding

Chris Baines reported back on the discussions that have been taking place with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Heritage Lottery Fund regarding the provision of additional seed funding to help the identification and initial development of projects. As reported previously, discussions with the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation were initially positive, but it was ultimately determined that it was not possible for them to proceed due to restrictions on their ability to provide funding to a government agency. Subsequent discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund have however been very positive, and they are now considering internally whether there is a way for them to provide additional resource to support LEI during RIIO-T2.

It was noted that the most recent application window had the highest number of applications during a single window since the LEI was launched, and that the applications were larger both in terms of ambition and the scale of landscape change. It is therefore hoped that if it is possible to secure funding that will enable additional professional guidance, this will happen on an even bigger scale in the future. It was acknowledged that whilst it is frustrating that the LEI provision for RIIO-T1 will be considerably underspent, the ability to demonstrate that there is a strong upward trend in the number and scale of applications provides a strong argument for continuation of the fund as well as for securing additional seed funding via a partner organisation.

It was emphasised that both for the Heritage Lottery Fund and for wider endorsement, there is a need to be able to pull out the broader benefits as well as the landscape benefits of the LEI projects (including e.g. socio-economic benefits, building partnerships and community involvement). It was also suggested that it would be worth reviewing the current projects to draw up guidelines for future applicants.

Actions – Ben Smith, National Grid:

- Circulate a link to the online workshop materials.
 - Update the LEI website to provide an update and clarification on the revised project approval limits.
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4 – Update on RIIO-T2 & Ofgem consultation

The VIP Project Manager, Michelle Clark, gave an update on the outcomes of National Grid’s RIIO-T2 submission process and the news regarding the future of VIP.

- **Funding** – Ofgem has agreed to retain VIP for RIIO-T2. The amount of the funding provision will be based on an updated willingness to pay study which is yet to be completed.
- **Scope** – The scope of the provision will continue to only cover National Parks and AONBs. It will also continue to include projects that are close to designated landscapes but fall just outside the boundary.
- **LEI** – The amount allocated to the LEI will be 2.5% of the total VIP funding, whatever the size of the overall provision.
- **Process** – Ofgem will retain the existing process for the larger funding submissions, but LEI projects will no longer be required to be sent to Ofgem for approval. A process will need to be set up to enable the LEI Approvals Panel to approve projects, and for National Grid to report on these costs to Ofgem.

Stakeholder Advisory Group members expressed their satisfaction that the VIP fund will continue in the next price control period, and the hard work that has been carried out by National Grid and members of the group to get to this stage was noted. National Grid also thanked everybody in the Stakeholder Advisory Group for taking the time to respond to Ofgem’s consultation, and for their input in supporting the RIIO-T2 submission process. Disappointment was expressed by some members that World Heritage Sites had not been included within the scope.

In response to questions relating to the work on willingness to pay and how this will influence the size of the overall funding provision, National Grid confirmed that the early phase high level consumer work has been completed and a draft submission has been made to Ofgem for RIIO-T2. More detailed work on consumer willingness to pay still needs to be carried out and the outcomes of this will be shared in more detail at the next meeting. Further detail on National Grid’s business plan for RIIO-T2 will also be available within the next two weeks.

5 – Any other business and future meetings

5.1– Update on projects in Scotland

Ben Smith and Chris Hawkins of National Grid spent a day with Grant Douglas and Euan Smith of SSE and SP Energy Networks (the Scottish Transmission Network Operators) for an update on the VISTA and VIEW projects that are being undertaken in Scotland:

- **SSE** – Two undergrounding projects in the Cairngorms received funding approval from Ofgem in December 2018, and work has started on the removal of approximately 14km of overhead lines. There are also two further undergrounding projects in the area of Loch Lomond. It was noted that there is a significant difference in the scale and size of works for the removal of the lower voltage lines of the Scottish transmission network (132kV as opposed to 400kV). SSE are also undertaking a number of landscaping schemes in their National Scenic Areas including a painting scheme at Loch Tummel, and providing views from specially designed seating/viewing pods built in traditional stone at Loch Rannoch.

- **SPEN** – Projects in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs are underway, with further projects being investigated. SPEN do not have a great deal of infrastructure that falls under the scope of Ofgem’s funding, and they have therefore probably exhausted the work that they can do during RIIO-T1. There may however be projects of a different nature that they could pursue during RIIO-T2.

The Chair requested that congratulations be sent to SSE and SPEN regarding their progress, and a request was also made for photographs of the projects that are underway.

5.2 – Future meetings

The next Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will take place in early November with the intention of using the meeting to visit the location of the Dorset VIP project.

The agenda will also include:

- Looking at National Grid’s willingness to pay work
- A further update on progress with the project in the North Wessex Downs
- A run through of the content of the Snowdonia planning application