

National Grid – 23rd VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group
Notes from the meeting held on 22nd and 23rd November 2023

Stakeholder Advisory Group members present:

- **Chairman** Chris Baines
- **Cadw** Ashley Batten, Regional Inspector of Ancient Monuments & Archaeology North Wales
- **Campaign for National Parks** Ruth Bradshaw, Policy & Research Officer
- **CPRE** Roger Mortlock, CEO [day 1 only]
- **CPRE** Paul Miner, Head of Policy and Planning [day 2 only]
- **Historic England** Ian Morrison, Director of Policy and Evidence
- **Landscape Institute** Sue Sljivic, Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute
- **National Association of AONBs** Howard Sutcliffe, AONB Manager, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB [dialled in for parts of day 1 and 2]
- **National Parks England** Sarah Kelly, Landscape Officer, New Forest National Park Authority
- **National Trust** Dr Ingrid Samuel, Placemaking & Heritage Director
- **Natural Resources Wales** Mary Lewis, Sustainable Places Land & Sea Manager
- **Ramblers** Stephen Russell, Policy & Advocacy Officer [day 2 only]

Secretariat in attendance:

National Grid – Zac Richardson, Director, Offshore Delivery; Michelle Clark, VIP Project Manager; Tim Hewish, Strategic External Affairs Manager; Steve Ellison, Senior Project Manager, Eryri VIP; Paul Hamnett, Senior Project Manager, Dorset VIP; Phil Rose, Lead Project Manager, Peak East VIP; Robbie Griggs, Lead Project Manager Cotswolds VIP; Amardeep Malhi, Lead Project Manager North Wessex Downs VIP and LEI Project Manager

Professor Carys Swanwick – Independent Landscape Advisor to National Grid

Camargue – Stuart Fox; Jane Dalton

Apologies:

- RSPB Cymru, National Parks Wales

The VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting took place in London on 22nd-23rd November 2023, and included a site visit to New Cross to see National Grid's London Power Tunnels 2 project.

The purpose of the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to:

- Hear updates on the five schemes prioritised for replacing existing overhead lines with underground cables in National Landscapes [formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)] and National Parks in England and Wales.
- Receive an update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI), and input into the mid-period review of the LEI policy.
- Consider the future of VIP in RIIO-T3, and discuss what further information is required to enable the Group to identify potential VIP projects with outline costs that could be taken forwards into the next price control period.

Session 1 – Updates on the schemes shortlisted for underground projects

Paul Hamnett, Phil Rose, Steve Ellison, Amardeep Malhi and Robbie Griggs from National Grid gave updates on the progress of the schemes that have been prioritised to be taken forward for undergrounding. A summary of the progress for each of the five schemes is outlined below.

1.1 – Dorset National Landscape – 4YA.7

The Dorset scheme was the first of the VIP projects to be completed. The project lasted four years and involved the removal and undergrounding of 8.8km of overhead line. The last tower came down in October 2022, and 22 pylons have now been permanently removed from the Dorset landscape. Following a programme of reinstatement, the project was completed on schedule in May 2023 (although management and maintenance is still ongoing), and a community event to mark the occasion was held at Martinstown Village Hall in June 2023.

A professional landscape photoshoot was carried out in September 2023, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group were shown a series of photographs of the project site from key viewpoints. These photographs are now being used on the Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs projects to demonstrate to stakeholders what can be achieved with reinstatement, and how quickly it can be achieved.

A 4-page project summary document and a legacy web page have now been produced, and there have been a number of enquiries about the project from within National Grid in the UK as well as from other stakeholders from overseas.

The Dorset project was a finalist in the 2023 Association of Project Managers Awards, and earlier that week it was announced as the winner in the Engineering, Construction and Infrastructure Project of the Year category.

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

The Peak District scheme has also now reached completion. The project involved the undergrounding of 1.5km of overhead line under the Trans Pennine Trail (TPT), the removal of the existing sealing end compound in Dunford Bridge, and the construction of a new sealing end compound in Wogden Foot local wildlife site (a former railyard). The last tower came down in October 2022, and seven pylons have now been permanently removed from the Peak District landscape.

The project reached final completion in May 2023, and the reinstated TPT has been open throughout the summer. The National Grid project team still regularly visit the site to carry out ongoing maintenance works. The offsite Biodiversity Net Gain works have also been completed, and these works are now in the maintenance phase.

A celebratory community event was held at the Dog & Partridge pub in June 2023, with more than 60 local residents attending. A professional landscape photoshoot was commissioned, a 4-page project summary document has been produced and a legacy website will follow.

The project was a finalist in the 2023 BIG Biodiversity Challenge Awards sponsored by CIRIA (the Construction Industry Research & Information Association), and was awarded Highly Commended at the November 2023 awards ceremony.

1.3 – Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park – 4ZC.1

The Eryri scheme involves the removal and relocation of approximately 3km of overhead line into a 3.5m segmentally lined tunnel under the Dwyryd Estuary, and the installation of 12 400kV high

voltage cables with a circuit length of approximately 4.2km. The tunnel will carry the connection from a new sealing end compound at Llandecwyn to the expanded and reconfigured existing cable sealing end at Garth near Minffordd, to join up with the existing cables that run under the Glaslyn Estuary to the northwest. Construction requirements also include two new tunnel headhouses, and a shunt reactor installation at Trawsfynydd 400kV substation.

2023 has been very busy with preparatory on-site works, and the main construction phase of the project is now just beginning.

Works at Garth have been focused on completing the laydown area and preparing to bring the equipment in for tunnel boring to commence on site. Progress at Llandecwyn has included completion of the site offices and temporary bridge structures, and the floating road construction which provides permanent access to the sealing end compound and headhouse is continuing. Construction of the nearby temporary workers accommodation that is necessary for 24/7 operation of the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) is being progressed by the appointed main contractor for the work, Hochtief UK.

The re-manufacture/re-purposing of the TBM is on target and the machine will be ready for shipping from Germany in February 2024. A TBM naming competition has been held, with seven local schools taking part. There were 104 entries, and a shortlist of 10 has been drawn up by the judging panel. The winning name is due to be announced at the Community Liaison Group on 29th November 2023, and certificates will also be awarded for the 10 shortlisted entries and the schools who took part.

The comprehensive programme of community engagement activity is ongoing. Recent events have included: presentations to North West Wales Construction Training Group and Probus North Wales, Community Grant Programme awards to Talsarnau Community Hall and North Wales Wildlife Trust, a 'Meet the Buyer' event, and project team members taking part in the Llandecwyn 10k, the National Eisteddfod of Wales, and a Trussell Trust bike ride which saw donations of food to local and national foodbanks.

Ongoing and planned upcoming activities include: continuing to work with the Community Liaison Groups, schools activities including workshops and work experience opportunities, further funding opportunities through the Community Grant Programme, a Project Information Centre, activity around the journey and arrival of the TBM, and participation in the Christmas lights switch on in Penrhyndeudraeth.

The current indicative programme for the key stages of the project timeline are as follows:

- Shaft sinking – early 2024
- Project information centre complete – March 2024
- TBM to arrive at site – April 2024
- Tunnelling starts – July 2024
- Tunnelling complete – late 2025
- Cable insertion & termination – late 2025 to summer 2026
- Headhouse installation complete – summer 2026
- Reinstatement commences – late 2026
- Sealing end compound and termination – late 2028
- Pylon removal commences – mid 2029
- Project completion – end 2029

1.4 – North Wessex Downs National Landscape – YYM.1

The North Wessex Downs scheme focuses on a section of line near Devizes at Roundway Hill near the Millennium White Horse, and on the edge of a Civil War battlefield site. The project has widespread stakeholder and local support, and involves the undergrounding of approximately 4.6km of overhead line, with the removal of 13 pylons. The proposed cable route runs mainly across agricultural land, so from a construction and engineering route it is relatively straightforward. The project is expected to take two years to complete.

The planning application to Wiltshire Council was approved in July 2023, and Ofgem has indicated that it is minded to approve the funding submission [see also Section 3 below].

Community engagement activity has included taking part in the North Wessex Downs Walking Festival in June 2023, and proposed archaeology days with Wiltshire Young Archaeologists / Wiltshire Museum. The first Community Liaison Group meeting will take place in January 2024.

Archaeological works are due take place during the coming winter months. The construction contract was awarded in November 2023, and the main construction works are due to commence in January 2024. The current indicative programme is for construction, installation and commissioning of the cable route to be completed in 2026, followed by removal of the pylons and reinstatement.

1.5 – Cotswolds National Landscape – ZF.2(B)

This scheme was selected to be taken forwards as a RIIO-T2 project. The focus of the scheme is on the central section of a longer section of overhead line, which runs across the Cotswold Plateau from the west of Winchcombe in the north, to the east of Cheltenham in the south. The scheme would involve undergrounding approximately 7km of line and the removal of approximately 18 pylons. The scheme has widespread community and stakeholder support to date. The biggest challenges are around access, archaeology and topography.

Work during 2023 has focused on carrying out extensive surveys to determine the optimum underground corridor route, front-end engineering design, preparation for the planning application and other consents, and community engagement/consultation.

Ecology surveys that have been completed include otter, water vole and white-clawed crayfish habitat assessments, bat and barn owl presence absence surveys, and bat activity surveys. All trees and woodlands have also been surveyed. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report has been started, and the final report is due to be completed by the end of November 2023.

With regard to archaeology, non-intrusive geophysical surveys are under way, and the survey results will inform a programme of intrusive field investigations to be undertaken after agreeing the methodology with Historic England and the Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Team.

Other survey work has included agriculture and soil, mining, air quality, water, transport and landscape.

Current ongoing activity includes finishing off the surveys, EIA screening, and preparing the planning applications for the proposed sealing end compounds (SECs) ready for submission in the first half of 2024.

The two sealing end compounds fall under the remit of two different local authorities – the northern SEC planning application will be submitted to Tewkesbury Borough Council, and the southern SEC to Cotswolds District Council. The application for works on Cleeve Common falls under Section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 and will be submitted in November/December 2023. An application under

the Section 37 Electricity Act 1989 may also be required for the temporary line diversions as they will be in place for longer than six months – this will also be submitted in November/December 2023.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group were shown an overview of the preferred cable route and access points. The design and engineering has been quite challenging because of the topography and ecology, and other key considerations have been finding suitable locations for the SECs, as well as the temporary construction access and the site compound.

There have also been lots of changes/adaptations following discussions with stakeholder and landowners, as well as workshops with trails and access groups. Engagement events have also revealed challenges, including e.g. a private water supply. These conversations have resulted in a number of suggestions/requests that have informed key decisions, and have enabled the project team to build a comprehensive picture in order to create the best possible solution.

The primary focus has been on trying to find a route that does not impact on people, and adaptations that have been made to the route include e.g. avoiding mature trees and instead going into an area where there is lots of ash dieback, avoiding a new barn that had just been built, avoiding hedges, minimising disruption to ecology, and looking to considerably reduce works in the area of common land.

Stakeholder and community engagement activity has included taking part in the Winchcombe Walking Festival, pop-up events, public drop-in events, presentations to specific groups including the Cleeve Common Trust and Winchcombe Town Council, and attendance at the Winchcombe Country Show. In August the project received a visit from the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate who were impressed by the project and the levels of engagement with stakeholders and communities.

The current indicative programme is for the planning submission and determination and the Ofgem submission and determination to be completed in 2024, construction to commence in 2025, and pylon removal and reinstatement to be completed in 2028-2029.

Session 2 – Update on the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI)

Amardeep Malhi has now taken over from Ben Smith as the new National Grid LEI lead and representative.

2.1 – Project application updates

Window 11 opened in early 2023, and five of the applicants that submitted Expressions of Interest were invited to submit full applications. Following receipt of these applications, the recommendation from the LEI Approvals Panel is to award funding to all five applicants.

The projects are all at the upper end of the funding limit and there is a good regional spread, with schemes in the Clwydian Range AONB, Eryri National Park, North Yorkshire National Park, South Downs National Landscape and Blackdown Hills National Landscape.

There are no new applicants, but it is hoped that proposed changes to the programme funding parameters will increase the reach (see 2.2 below).

2.2 – Mid-period review of VIP Policy, and proposed changes to the LEI policy

As part of the Ofgem licence there is a requirement to revisit the VIP and LEI policy at the mid-period of RIIO-T2. Nothing has arisen with regards to changing the main body of the VIP policy, but there

are proposals for revisions to be made to the LEI policy which is an annexe to the main VIP policy document.

Trudi Webber from National Grid gave an overview of the work that has been carried out by the LEI Approvals Panel with regards to the LEI Policy for this mid-period review. Some of the proposed changes have previously been discussed (see in particular the Minutes from the 12th May 2023 VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting which considered a number of recommendations for changes to the LEI terms and policy, prompted by feedback from organisations delivering LEI projects, and reflected in the economic situation and the impact of Brexit, Covid and the war in Ukraine – see also 2.2.iii below.)

The requirement for this meeting was for the Stakeholder Advisory Group to consider two policy change recommendations that have been put forwards by the LEI Approvals Panel. If it is agreed that these and any other policy changes should be taken forwards by National Grid, they will need to be drafted and submitted to Ofgem for them to agree and consult on.

The two proposals are to:

- Reduce the matched funding element from 25% to 10%.
- Agree to fund the development costs of the application up to £10,000 [NB funding development costs cannot currently be included].

These proposed changes have arisen due to the following problems:

- Other funding bodies (e.g. Farming in Protected Landscapes and National Lottery Heritage Fund) make awards with 10% matched giving.
- Applicants are choosing other funding paths that support the payment of development costs.
- Applications to the LEI have reduced from previous volumes at each window, with potential applicants citing the above factors as reasons for not engaging with the application process. They are instead choosing to apply to other funding bodies who are considered to make the process more attractive.

The benefits of both proposed changes were presented and discussed, and there was broad agreement that aligning the LEI with other similar funding bodies and grant-making schemes would increase accessibility and hopefully therefore uptake. It was however also noted, that in the case of the proposal to fund development costs, Ofgem has in the past rejected the idea, and this was therefore discussed in more detail.

2.2.i – Funding development costs

There was a reminder that the issues around the funding of development costs have already been discussed extensively during previous meetings, and a number of potential alternative avenues for funding have also been explored (including but not limited to the Esmée Fairburn Foundation and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)).

Trudi Webber advised that she has spoken to many of the existing and potential applicants, and has got quotes to say why it would be really beneficial for them to have access to some form of project development funding. This particularly applies to those who have never made an application, and it was noted that this issue is already resulting in an imbalanced distribution of the LEI funds. It is therefore already a concern that some of the National Landscapes and National Parks are not benefiting from the LEI fund, as they do not have the resources to develop projects, whereas others have been able to submit several successful applications.

A discussion was also held about the reasons behind Ofgem's opposition to development costs and it was also noted that HLF went through the process of considering this issue several years ago. There was a reminder that HLF have previously indicated that they might be willing to fund feasibility studies that could then lead to an LEI application.

Some Stakeholder Advisory Group members felt that the £10k figure that had been proposed might be too high, and it was noted that HLF do not work on a fixed amount or a percentage amount, and are very varied in the amount that they pay. Other related issues that were discussed included: the limitations on funding of core costs (including whether or not the LEI fund will cover officer/staff costs for people who are in an existing post to undertake project development work); capacity within the organisations to do the work that is required in putting an application together both with regards to staff time and expertise; and problems relating to cashflow including the delay in receipt of payments for projects that do get over the line for costs that have already been incurred.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a further conversation with HLF about how they have approached this in the past, and for National Grid to raise the issue of funding development costs again with Ofgem to see if its stance has changed before making a decision as to the way forwards. There were also suggestions of other organisations that could be considered for providing further support and/or avenues for access to funding, including e.g. the Countryside Management Association, Defra and the National Heritage organisations.

Other considerations that were raised as having the potential for further exploration included: having access to a central pot of funding to help with development costs; revisiting the idea of one of the Stakeholder Advisory Group member organisations hosting an individual to help with development, and potentially holding that central pot of funding; having access to other sources of expertise for the projects that do not obviously fit within the remit of the LEI (e.g. those that may include heritage and archaeology as part of the project remit); and encouraging potential applicants to make more use of the LEI consultants that are already in place to support them.

Overall it was felt that the success of the LEI scheme to date should be capitalised on as a driver to push forward with optimising similar funding opportunities, and that the issues around fairness, equity and cashflow need to be resolved if the LEI funding is to be used to its full potential.

2.2.ii – Matched funding

The Group agreed with the proposal to reduce matched funding to 10% in line with other organisations funding projects in this area.

2.2.iii – Other proposed changes from previous meeting

There was a reminder that at the last meeting, the Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that the individual project funding limit should be increased from £250k to £300k, and that requests for 'top-ups' to adjust for inflation and other increases in costs should be allowed.

2.3 – Promotion of the LEI and the broader opportunities for other National Grid projects

With regards to promotion and marketing of the LEI scheme, there was a reminder of the website and materials that already exist. It was agreed that further material, in particular more examples of what has been achieved to date, would be useful both within National Grid and when talking to new communities. It was also suggested that it would be useful to increase the focus on recording the broader and longer-term outcomes/successes from the LEI projects, in addition to the visual impacts, including e.g. climate change benefits, habitat reinstatement, wildlife/nature recovery etc. This could be achieved through building baseline studies and longer-term monitoring/reporting plans into the projects.

It was agreed that it would be useful to circulate the existing Achievements Report to Stakeholder Advisory Group members, and the LEI team will continue to work up more case studies.

2.4 – LEI in RIIO-T3

National Grid informed the Group that if it is to continue, LEI needs to be included in National Grid's RIIO-T3 submission to Ofgem. The initial T3 plan will be submitted in mid-2024, and it will need to give a high-level view of what the LEI scheme might look like in the next price control period. The subsequent submission (likely to be in late 2024) will contain more detailed proposals, costs and evidence of stakeholder support for continuing with LEI.

Michelle Clark confirmed that National Grid is looking at continuing with LEI in T3. As a starting point, Ofgem is likely to look at the T2 run rate (i.e. the extent to which the current provision is being spent), in setting allowances for the next price control period. The amount of T2 funding that has been allocated currently stands at approximately £5.5-£6m against a total budget of £11.4 million, i.e. around 50% uptake at the point of being half-way through the current price control period and with two years left to go.

For the record, at today's meeting, the Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that they would like to see a similar amount of funding for LEI projects to go forwards into RIIO-T3. National Grid will also be looking to include within the Ofgem submission some endorsements from the National Landscapes/AONBs and National Parks that have already made use of the LEI funding.

Actions:

- **Chris Baines / Trudi Webber** – Have a conversation with HLF about how they have approached the funding of development costs in the past.
- **Michelle Clark** – Ask Ofgem for more information about their reasons.
- **Chris Baines / Stuart Fox** - re-connect with the Esmée Fairburn Foundation and approach the Countryside Management Association to revisit explore funding of development costs.
- **Stuart Fox / Michelle Clark** – Circulate the LEI Achievements Report and LEI website link.

Session 3 – Ofgem consultation in North Wessex Downs and wider implications

Michelle Clark from National Grid gave an update on the status of the funding submission to Ofgem for the North Wessex Downs scheme.

As outlined in Section 1.4 above, the North Wessex Downs project is still being progressed as a T2 project and is currently on programme to meet its outages and complete in 2026. Ofgem has now published their 'minded to' consultation, and overall it says that it is in favour of the project. However, whilst there are no objections to the engineering scope and plan, Ofgem's funding table for the scheme is £21m less than the budget that was submitted by National Grid.

In response to questions from Stakeholder Advisory Group members about the feasibility of the project if the budget issue is not resolved, this is still being looked at by the National Grid project team.

The other major concern is that the consultation document states that NGET does not plan to submit any further VIP projects in RIIO-T2. This is clearly not the case as development work on the Cotswolds project has been underway for two years and the submission of planning applications is imminent. The Cotswolds National Landscape team is aware of the situation, and have been

reassured as to both National Grid's and the Stakeholder Advisory Group's commitment to the scheme.

National Grid asked for support from the Stakeholder Advisory Group in responding to the consultation, focusing on the issue with the budget for North Wessex Downs as well as the broader issue about further VIP projects in RIIO-T2.

It was agreed that in order to demonstrate the strength of support for VIP, in addition to individual organisation responses, it would also be useful to submit a group response on behalf of the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group.

Actions:

- **Michelle Clark/Stuart Fox** – Provide links to the consultation on the Ofgem website to enable Stakeholder Advisory Group members to write their own responses to the consultation.
 - **All** – Respond to the consultation (closing date 15th December 2023).
 - **Chris Baines** – Submit a group response on behalf of the Stakeholder Advisory Group.
-

Session 4 – RIIO-T3 preparation

Michelle Clark gave an update on National Grid's preparations for the submission process for the RIIO-T3 price control period which will begin in April 2026. As part of that process National Grid will have to include its thinking about VIP, including major undergrounding projects as well as smaller projects.

There is no requirement at this stage to commit to specific projects, but there is a need to know what the potential projects might be, so that the National Grid VIP project team can begin to develop and cost them up ready for the consumer Willingness to Pay exercise.

As outlined in Section 3 above, the timeline for the RIIO-T3 price control submissions is for the first submission in July 2024, and the final submission in December 2024. National Grid therefore now needs the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group's input in identifying potential undergrounding projects that could be taken forwards during RIIO-T3.

There was a reminder that for RIIO-T2 there was a practical limit of developing no more than two or three projects at the same time as the existing projects. The constraints for RIIO-T3 are likely to be greater due to the extent and nature of the work required to achieve the UK net zero targets for 2035 (a net zero clean power system) and 2050 (a net zero economy), and it is therefore likely that it will only be feasible for one or two VIP projects to be taken forwards during T3 depending on their scale.

There was some discussion around the net zero targets and the resulting pressure on National Grid to deliver all of the new infrastructure that is required to meet those targets. Questions were raised as to how deliverable and realistic it is for National Grid to deliver VIP projects alongside all of this, and whether there is still likely to be an appetite from the public to support paying for VIP in the current climate.

There was a reminder that in the last Willingness to Pay exercises VIP still had positive support from consumers, and it was further noted that the proportion of consumer bills that is actually being spent on VIP is very small. But it was also agreed that conversations do need to be had about

whether it is appropriate in the current climate to push forward with major engineering projects, or perhaps consider changing to only pursuing smaller, LEI-type projects.

A number of different perspectives were considered, including:

- Some organisations feeling that with the increase in new infrastructure it is even more important that there is compensation elsewhere, i.e. in designated landscapes.
- As LEI is now a proven tool, there could be an opportunity to focus on that more, with the potential for even bigger-scale achievements if a larger budget were to be allocated to it.
- Reluctance about losing momentum for continuing with the major undergrounding projects, and concerns that if the focus were to be switched to LEI, funding and support for the bigger VIP schemes may never be recovered.

Ruth Bradshaw of the Campaign for National Parks pointed out to the Group the strengthened 'duty of regard' which was introduced in the Levelling Up Act 2023 (s245) and which means that bodies such as National Grid now have a duty to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes.

Discussions also focused on the opportunities for implementing landscape and visual impact projects through the wider Community Benefits fund that has just been announced for new infrastructure. The broader opportunities to compensate communities and mitigate the impact of new and existing infrastructure outside of designated areas were also discussed. Whilst it was agreed that there are many opportunities for all of these schemes to be linked and optimised through joined-up approaches and the sharing of best practice, there was also a reminder of the fact that the justification for VIP in the first place was that there are specific requirements that apply in designated landscapes. There was a further reminder that the Terms of Reference for the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group are focused purely on designated landscapes.

Ultimately it was agreed that the argument for linking up the learning from VIP and LEI with the opportunities for new infrastructure development outside of designated landscapes should be taken forwards to Ofgem as a separate/different initiative.

In the meantime, the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group agreed that they would support pursuing at least one undergrounding project in R110-T3, alongside continuing with the LEI scheme. It was also agreed that it would be useful for National Grid and key members of the Stakeholder Advisory Group to have a conversation with Ofgem about its views on VIP and, whilst acknowledging the pressure on public funding, make the point that this is not new funding, but an existing line of funding that needs protecting.

The Stakeholder Advisory Group revisited the project information for the highest-scoring projects from the original Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) i.e. the highest priority 'Purple' routes and the next priority 'Red' routes. The information presented for each scheme included the results from the original LVIA, an overview of the technical/engineering assessments that were carried out, a summary of the environmental constraints, and the reasons for not pursuing these schemes during the previous rounds of shortlisting that took place in 2014 and 2019.

In addition to conversations about the merits, engineering challenges, stakeholder support and overall viability for each of these schemes, the option to apply broader principles was also considered. This included e.g. whether additional sections of line should be considered in areas that have already been taken forwards for undergrounding, whether there should be an attempt to prioritise an equal geographical spread, and/or whether to prioritise projects that would create a more equal spread across National Landscapes/AONBs and National Parks. It was agreed that at this stage, nothing should be ruled in or out on the basis of these additional factors, as these could be

considered at a later stage when the projects have undergone further optioneering and development work.

It was agreed that for the next meeting, National Grid should update information on an agreed list of the potential projects that remain on the high and very high scoring lists from the original landscape assessment and that discussion on T3 options should form a major part of the meeting.

Those potential projects are located in the following designated landscapes:

- Dorset National Landscape
- Eryri National Park
- Lake District National Park
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- Peak District National Park West
- Wye Valley National Landscape

Session 5 – Future meetings

The next VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting will be held in March 2024 in Lincolnshire, combined with a visit to the National Grid project site at Bicker Fen / Viking Link.