

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
4th July 2016

NATIONAL GRID VISUAL IMPACT PROVISION

Purpose

To inform members of the opportunities to develop projects in Walford, Goodrich and Marstow Parishes through the National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP) and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- National Grid surveyed all AONBs and National Parks which have National Grid overhead electricity lines or substations within their area.
- National Grid set up the Visual Impact Provision (VIP) to mitigate the visual impact of National Grid's infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected landscapes in 30 National Parks and AONBs
- The Wye Valley AONB has 4.1km of National Grid overhead high voltage powerlines, in the Parishes of Walford and Marstow and 2.5km of lines already undergrounded (see attached maps).
- The Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) allows the AONB Partnership to apply for 75% funding to deliver significant benefits that enhance the landscape and reduce the visual impact on the ground of the National Grid infrastructure (see appended fact sheets).
- The scheme does not relate to the smaller pylons that go through Walford and Marstow and over the river as these are Wester Power Distribution cables.
- National Grid are working in 4 other National Parks & AONBs to underground dominant powerlines currently on pylons.

Reasons

The Visual Impact Provision (VIP) was established by National Grid to use a £500 million allowance set up by Ofgem for electricity transmission owners to mitigate the landscape and visual impacts of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes in Great Britain. For National Grid, which is the electricity transmission owner in England and Wales, this means considering the landscape and visual impacts of existing electricity infrastructure in or adjacent to 21 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and 9 National Parks. In addition to the small number of major capital engineering projects which will come forward for funding from the provision, part of the allowance is also made available for funding smaller localised visual improvements and landscape enhancements, through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

Overall the objective of the initiative is to reduce the visual impact of National Grid's existing infrastructure and enhance the quality of the affected landscapes. Where the visual impacts of the electricity transmission line cannot be directly screened or otherwise mitigated it may be possible to shift emphasis away from the transmission line by enhancing the landscape in other ways.

Called the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI), National Grid state that, “Where visual impacts cannot be directly screened or otherwise mitigated it may be possible to shift emphasis away from the powerline by enhancing the landscape in other ways.” Grants of up to £200,000 may be available over 5 years for suitable schemes that can raise 25% match funding and are co-ordinated through the AONB Partnership.

Implications

National Grid pylons extend through the Wye Valley AONB in parishes of Walford and Marstow in with 4.1km being overhead on pylons and 2.5km already underground. These pylons are also visible from parts of the parishes of Ross Town Council and Goodrich. The attached Map 1 below shows the estimated visibility of the National Grid infrastructure within a 3km zone in the Wye Valley AONB. The scheme does not relate to the smaller pylons that go over the river as these are Wester Power Distribution cables.

The Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) provides interesting opportunities for the management of landscape features in parts of the parishes of Walford, Goodrich, Marstow and Ross. However it is recognised that adequately mitigating the scale of the National Grid infrastructure is a significant challenge. The attached ‘What could be funded’ sheet provides some ideas. The Wye Valley AONB Unit have commenced discussions with local partners, including Walford Parish Council, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, English Heritage, Natural England and Forestry Commission. Other potential partners will be the farmers and landowners, Goodrich & Marstow Parish Councils, Coppett Hill Common Trust and Ross Town Council. Close liaison will also be maintained with other AONB Partnerships and National Park Authorities to share good practice over their proposals and schemes.

The Wye Valley AONB Unit will co-ordinate proposals over the coming months with the intention of negotiating the match funding and submitting applications for the agreed projects. Examples of the type of projects that may be eligible include (see attached sheet):-

- Localised tree planting and/or woodland creation
- Management, re-planting and/or planting of new hedgerows
- Changes to trails, footpaths, cycleways and riding routes
- Projects that enhance the special qualities of landscape and may also benefit biodiversity
- Projects that enhance the special qualities of landscape and may also benefit cultural heritage

Nick Critchley, Wye Valley AONB Development Officer, will lead on drawing the project proposals together and preparing the applications to National Grid. Details of the VIP and LEI are available on National Grid’s website <http://www2.nationalgrid.com/UK/In-your-area/Visual-Impact-Provision/> .

Background

The Visual Impact Provision (VIP) is a clear example of the CRoW Act Section 85 ‘Duty of Regard for AONBs’ being implemented. The ‘Duty’ rests with Ofgem as a Public Body and they have enacted the Duty through their control of the electricity distribution suppliers. The £500m allocation by Ofgem to help reduce the impact of existing transmission lines in English and Welsh AONBs and National Parks represents a major opportunity to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and environmental heritage within these protected landscapes.

Map 1: Visibility of National Grid infrastructure within 3km in the Wye Valley AONB

