

National Grid Visual Impact Project – New Forest Hale Purlieu
Hale Parish Council notes of a meeting held Tues 19th June at 2pm

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1. Introduction and Project overview (Chris Baines, Chairman VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group)

- 1.1. The essence of the Visual Impact Scheme is a decision by OFGEM to sanction the National Grid to apply a levy to electricity consumers (approx. 30p per household per year) to 'compensate' for the use of some of the most beautiful countryside in the country as a resource for the distribution of electricity.
- 1.2. The stakeholder advisory group was formed. Chairman is Prof. Chris Baines, an independent landscape architect, environmentalist and, amongst other things, Vice President of The Wildlife Trusts. The group has been meeting over a three year period. Stakeholder engagement over that period has been active and consistent with representation at the most senior level of the stakeholder bodies.
- 1.3. This is an ongoing iterative process.
- 1.4. The first step was an initial independent assessment of 130 sites to identify the highest priority sites (essentially defined as those most precious landscapes which are most damaged by the presence of pylons). The decision-making group was made up of 12 representatives, all senior members of the stakeholder groups. This initial review generated a shortlist of 12 sites which was then further refined. The final list of 4 sites was a unanimous decision.
- 1.5. The very nature of the project means that none of the work proposed is straightforward and each site presents a unique set of challenges. The project brings NG infrastructure technical expertise and experience alongside those stakeholders who have expert knowledge of the particular issues of each site.

2. Initial stakeholder views; HPC asked the other stakeholder groups present to set out their views of the project at this stage – whether they thought it was a good idea in principle and what caveats they had identified at this stage

National Trust ("NT")

- 2.1. The NT looks at all infrastructure projects on their individual merit. This project is NOT yet approved by NT as owners of the majority of the land covered by this proposed project, although in principle the idea of losing pylons from the landscape is one they would support. NT has their own panel to review any evidence presented. On this proposal, the current NT view is that there is a lot of detail still to be presented; in particular details of aftercare of the site.

New Forest National Park Authority ("NFNPA")

- 2.2. The New Forest is one of the country's most protected landscapes and the NFNPA has a duty to 'protect and enhance' the land under their care. There are also legal obligations on National Grid and all utility providers to protect areas of natural beauty and sensitivity through their operations. In considering this project, National Grid is fulfilling its duty to the regulator; they are duty bound to lessen the impact of any work undertaken. The key question is how this is achieved and whether the process of improving the visual impact may adversely affect the sensitive balance of the area.

- 2.3. The NFNPA welcomes the use of the planning process as a tool to bring the final proposal to the 'court of public opinion'. It is important that any final decision is made in a public environment with an opportunity for all to contribute rather than being made by a group of individuals behind closed doors.
- 2.4. At any point through the process before the planning application, the stakeholders may identify something that makes submission of a planning request pointless. The NFNPA has forensically examined all the evidence available and so far nothing has come to light that means the NFNPA would want to prevent this process going ahead.

Natural England appointed Verderer ("DW")

- 2.5. DW has worked in the New Forest for various conservation bodies since 1988. She is appointed by Natural England but does not have to follow their decisions. DW understands that many look at the pylons and think it would be nice not to have them and agree that it is a great idea, but she will sit back and wait to hear the detail of what is being put forward and see how National Grid will deal with the unique challenges of the Forest.
- 2.6. Nothing has been a showstopper so far, but her personal point of view is that her primary concern is the potential impact on wetland habitats and will be particularly interested in the hydrology and geology surveys to be sure that there is no long-lasting damage to the watercourse. She is still waiting to see the details.

Lord Willie Manners (Verderer); "LWM"

- 2.7. Other primary caveats that the Verderers have at this stage is to understand the short and long-term impacts on grazing and how effective the restoration will be.

CB noted that one of the reasons that the proposed route was changed was in response to results of hydrology surveys carried out. He asked the verderers directly if they were happy with how the process had been run so far.

- 2.8. (DW) verderers agree that the process has allowed them to ask all the questions that they have wanted to. To date they have not received all the answers, but that is largely as a result of it being an ongoing process, because the information is largely not yet available.

Natural England

- 2.9. NE locally have two cable burying ongoing projects in this area – Dorset and the New Forest. His management responsibility is for specifically the local aspects of these projects. The particular concerns for this area are the environmental protections – as a result he has commissioned numerous surveys, studies and investigations.
- 2.10. The decision that this is the best scheme for a landscape project is one that has been taken nationally. NE opinion is that locally this could deliver clear landscape benefits; it's a fabulous opportunity if it can be delivered.

2.11. The protection of wildlife is a separate side to the equation. If it doesn't stack up for ecology, then NE considers that it should not go forward. NE are happy that restoration of all but the water course is straightforward with a proven track record of success in other similar projects. The water course issue is harder to resolve and needs further investigation.

2.12. NE has advised on the sorts of studies that will be needed to fully assess the impacts. It is also important to distinguish between temporary and fully restored impacts.

2.13. NE has had a number of experiences where pipelines have been buried through heathlands and the restoration has been really good. In principle, it is possible. Whether it is possible on this site is not yet proven but at this stage there has been nothing to say that it definitely cannot happen. The site here is the big unknown and NE's focus is on the restoration to facilitate this potential once in a lifetime prize.

Forestry Commission ("FC").

2.14. The FC has been involved in this type of heathland regeneration for a long time. The FC commission has attended all the stakeholder meetings to date and can see the high benefits in landscape value for the area. The FC is looking to the planning authority process to fully review the proposal with the necessary detail.

3. Work performed to date/ technical overview of current scheme proposal using diagrams 0301 and 0302 as reference guides (NG)

3.1. Some surveys have been completed, some are ongoing and some still have to be done. Survey scopes and detailed results are not yet available for public review but will be attached to planning application.

3.2. The basic summary of the proposal is the undergrounding of cables and removing of 8 pylons. The total route is c. 3km. At each end of the undergrounding are two 'Sealing End Compounds' – these are the transition points between overhead and underground lines. Current proposed sites for sealing-end compounds are on low ground and are outside all SPA, SSSI SPC designations. NG believe that the sites identified, being on lower ground, will allow for good screening for the compounds

3.3. Cables will be sited in four trenches, with a haul road in the centre to facilitate access.

3.4. Where possible, existing access tracks will be used to access and remove pylons once the buried cables are fully working. The nature of the project is such that at some point, both systems (overhead and underground) will be running simultaneously.

3.5. Option A was immediately North adjacent to the existing overhead line. Relative advantages of this route were that it was the shortest distance and that the haul road would also be also be available for removal of the pylons.

3.6. Ecologists produced a habitat sensitivity map showing the areas of greatest and lesser sensitivity.

3.6.1. Most sensitive – mire and open heathland

3.6.2. Less sensitive – woodland and cleared woodland

3.6.3. Least sensitive – grassland and plantation

Alongside these assessments are the longer term aims of the NT and NE of restoring the heathland to its original state (largely treeless) and removing conifers and non-indigenous woodland.

- 3.7. The greatest constraints relate to those areas which are hydrologically sensitive. Of lesser sensitivity are those areas of plantation and cleared plantation and the least sensitive habitats include those areas of bracken and grassland with dense scrub. These latter areas offer an opportunity to replace grassland and non-indigenous woodland with more valuable habitats.
- 3.8. Routes B and C came about as a combination of stakeholder walkovers with the ecologists reports. Both routes were targeted towards lesser habitats. None of these routes can avoid areas of highest sensitivity completely, all three routes involved a section of stream and mire at the Western End of the Purlieu.
- 3.9. The original proposal was to use a horizontal direct drill under the mire at the Western end site, rather than the open cut trenching method – but geology surveys revealed that this would be impossible for engineering reasons (detail 3.12)
- 3.10. Stakeholders and ecologists then raised further concerns for the Southern options which still passed through mire and where restoration may not be fully possible for the mire feeder streams. The topography was also quite steep and raised some civil engineering issues. Both ‘Southern’ routes would also need a haul road and so focus switched back to potential routes to the North of the existing overhead lines.
- 3.11. Schematic Drawing 0302 shows routes diverting around the mire and the mire feeder systems. The routes to the North were also flatter than the Option A straight route and so were preferred from an engineering point of view. At this point, the plan was still to go under the Western section of mire using the horizontal directional drill.
- 3.12. Consents were gained to do test drills in Jan/ Feb 2017. The test drilling showed that the gravel went down to 30m where the pre-existing maps showed clay. The problem with gravel is that it acts as a drain and can divert water course. It is not possible to bury the cables below the gravel as this would be so deep that the cables would not reach the required ratings and would not function properly (Underground cables have less ability to carry current and the deeper that the cables are buried, the less current can be carried. The operational distribution requirement of the NG are such that cables have to be capable of carrying a certain level of current).
- 3.13. Horizontal Directional Drilling also requires the use of launch and receptor sites and pits. These can be up to 200m x 50m.
- 3.14. At this point it was decided that Horizontal Directional Drilling was a non-starter for both engineering and ecological reasons. Options A, B & C were therefore considering for open cut methodology. Of these, option C is the option with the least impact on areas of mire and therefore is the one proposed for further and more in-depth investigations

HPC: What are the other stakeholders' views of the different classification of the areas according to ecological sensitivity?

- 3.15. NE: The Southerly options were originally suggested because of the occurrence of plantation – which may have offered an opportunity to replace it with better heathland – but there are considerable areas of mire between the plantations and hence the decision has been taken that the route is too challenging to ensure restoration of the mire and feeder streams.
- 3.16. NE: The drier the heathland the easier it is to restore. Associated ecological surveys will not be in the public domain until the submission of a planning request.

HPC: What is Natural England trying to achieve on Hale Purlieu? We have some evidence of National Trust intentions by their planned felling activity but have no real visibility of NE ambitions for the site.

- 3.17. NE: Hale Purlieu is a large undeveloped piece of land. It could be a superb piece of natural habitat but without doubt, the NG currently across it is unnatural.
- 3.18. NE's ambition is the restoration of open heath and mire where conifer plantations are or have been. The existing situation is not an undisturbed environment – the existence of the pylons disturbs the balance of the habitat on the mire. Whilst there has not been comprehensive studies done to ascertain the ecological impact of having the pylons, the environment is undoubtedly disturbed. The fact that large birds perch on the lines in itself upsets the environment for smaller birds which are threatened.

CB noted that habitat restoration is quite new; previously it was just conservation and preservation but now we are actively trying to rebuild what had been lost.

- 3.19. NE: There will be some adverse effects as a result of this proposed process, but if we can be confident in the restoration then that harm will be temporary rather than permanent. There is much evidence of successful restoration in dry heathland and evidence is already showing that parts of the mire that were damaged or disrupted by conifers (now removed) are already restoring quickly.

HPC: How do you quantify an adverse effect on the ecology of birds and wildlife and how much adversity are you prepared to accept?

- 3.20. NE: There is no hard and fast rule but the benefits this site has is that many of those adverse effects will be recoverable. The question they are grappling with is how long it will take to recover and whether this is acceptable for the planning balance for the landscape.
- 3.21. If this were a greenfield plan on a SSSI site, NE would be pushing hard to get the cables undergrounded if it were possible to be confident on the restoration effort. Undergrounding does cause damage but its effects are temporary whereas the pylons are a permanent disruption.
- 3.22. There is some evidence of effective restoration when conifer plantation was removed from Millersford. Underneath the conifers was dry mire and the vegetation had gone. On removal of the conifers, the area regenerated itself. There are sphagnum

communities there now that are fantastic; the simple act of taking the trees off has been enough for the mire to recover and restore without further help.

3.23. NE agree that the Southern routes considered would damage a lot more mire.

3.24. FC: the FC shares NE's commitment to restore habitats. The design plan for the New Forest is currently being updated but will reflect the importance of mire habitat in the New Forest

HPC: Does this project have anything to do with the Silver Birches? We notice that a number have been removed and others marked for felling.

3.25. NT: A lot of trees had previously been left to grow in order to hide the pylons. Part of the planned restoration to open heathland includes the removal of some of the trees at the top of Lady's Mile. These are non-indigenous and self-seeded.

4. Ladies Mile.

HPC: is there an intention to leave the screening trees along Ladies Mile? Presumably the management plan would leave native trees along Ladies Mile?

4.1. NT: The planning process will address this issue of whether or not trees will be replanted along Ladies Mile and include views from all parties but at this stage it is too early to decide.

4.2. The NT would consider it to be very unusual to plant trees on a heathland habitat with a SSSI classification. We would not necessarily interfere with what came up through the ground. Open heathland is basically no trees but some self-seed.

5. Future maintenance of cables (NG)

5.1. For this sort of installation, NG expects cable life to be 40-60 years.

5.2. NG monitors condition of cables regularly and would be disappointed if life was anywhere near the bottom of this range. They like to think that the lifetime will be at least that if all is well-maintained.

5.3. In addition, cable design has improved, whereas once cables were pressurised and oil filled (and therefore prone to leaks), modern cables use plastic insulation and no fluid.

5.4. This 'new' design has been around for 25+ years and has good reliability stats.

5.5. Cables may well need replacing in 60 years but with technical advances who will know what the national electricity system will need to look like at that time?

PHPM: Your assessment of cable life has increased from your previous public presentation. Will cables be future proofed to minimise need for further intervention?

5.6. The cables themselves do not restrict the rating of the whole circuit and cables to be used match anticipated future needs.

5.7. Current conductors on pylons are due to be upgraded to modern equivalent which will increase rating of circuit

PHPM: What about heat loss from cables?

5.8. The heat loss from the cables reaching the surface will be less than half a degree and will not be measurable. It will therefore be insignificant.

6. Proposed next technical steps – further ground investigation works (NG)

6.1. Ground investigation works informed the decision that the HDD horizontal directional drilling is not possible. The next step is more General Investigation to help form the detailed design plan and application will be made for more GI trial pits.

6.2. One trial pit every 100m – approx. 3m long, 2m deep and width of a bucket. Test boreholes will be dug to facilitate the bridge over the water course for the haul road. Majority of previous boreholes have been restored, some have been left to pick up ongoing groundwater information. The ongoing investigation is estimated to include 2 boreholes, 31 trial pits and 16 plate bearing tests and trial pits.

HPC: some of the metal plates on top of the boreholes have been knocked off or pushed to one side, exposing the tube. This presents a danger to livestock.

6.3. NG: These are inspected regularly and replaced if any are found to have moved. NG will investigate how these can be made resistant to animals and accidental moving.

6.4. Cllr Heron: request that instead of inspections and replacements amendments are made to borehole design such that plates cannot be knocked off, so any left in place do not present such potential danger to livestock. I feel that the apparent lack of attention to this kind of details is indicative of whether NG is listening to us.

7. Potential proposed construction scheme details –haul road and traffic movements (NG)

7.1. Haul road would be stone, rather than permanently surfaced. Fabric membrane will be laid to prevent contamination of the existing surface.

7.2. The haul road will remain in place and it is not expected that this will need to be fenced off.

7.3. Stone would be removed at the end of the project.

7.4. Road will be 4m wide with passing places every 150m.

7.5. Traffic on haul road will be busiest when laying the haul road. Anticipated average number of movements per day on haul road is 50 (25 lorries in and then out) and the peak day for the whole site will be 98 movements (49 lorries).

7.6. The bid terms for all contractors making a submission must include traffic plans that will minimise damage, disruption to local traffic and ensure livestock safety.

7.7. Cable comes on large drums – 48 drum deliveries will be required. It may be possible to combine two drums on one load; this will be well telegraphed as will require a police escort

HPC: Can NG/ contractors consider active traffic management rather than passing places

7.8. NG will ensure this is part of Contractor bids

PHPM: How will NG meet its Health & Safety obligations by not fencing the Haul Road/ PHPM believe that Health & Safety obligations cannot be met if the Haul Road is not fenced.

7.9. Verderer: this is not a major concern for the verderers as long as the construction company keeps tight control of drivers and vehicles travel at less than 15mph. Many forest tracks are already used by heavy machinery for the working of wood without significant incident.

7.10. NG: Sections where trenches are open will be fenced off to prevent people and livestock on site. There will be gates at the end of each section. The construction contractor will be required to ensure these gates are shut properly and always attended or locked.

7.11. NG is an experienced main contractor and believes that Health & Safety obligations will be met. As with any site, construction contractor will have a duty of care to ensure security of site.

HPC: What will be anticipated traffic through Hale village?

7.12. NG: Only two activities (duct crossing on Ladies Mile and duct crossing of Western Mire) require access through village. No current plans to close roads through the village, ongoing discussion with Highways Authority suggest single lane closure and traffic lights will be sufficient.

7.13. NG: Construction of ducts over Hale Purlieu will require road closure, anticipated maximum 4 weeks

8. Potential proposed construction scheme details – trenches/ cable laying (NG)

8.1. Max working width 140m. This is in one location only where there is both an existing utility provision to avoid and need for storage and deep crossing.

8.2. Standard width 75m; of this, half of which is cleared for haul road and trenches. i.e removed heathland width 38m.

8.3. Cables will be set in cement bound sand with an impervious membrane inside the trench to stop leeching to prevent trench acting as giant French drain that would affect the water table.

8.4. Ref earlier point about future proofing, the cables are laid in sets of two. System rating is a particularly important part of the design. The system will have the capacity to pick up if there are issues elsewhere in the distribution network or future need for increased capacity.

HPC: What is longevity of impervious membrane?

8.5. NG: There are no concerns re longevity of impervious membrane. Indeed the longevity of such material (plastic) is currently a hot topic of environmental debate elsewhere.

PHPM: what about heat generated by cables?

8.6. NG: Studies show that the potential heat rise at the surface as a result of the cables is less than 0.5 degrees. This is a conservative assessment. No damage is anticipated as a result of this temperature rise.

9. Potential proposed construction scheme details – link boxes (NG)

9.1. Sealing End Compounds are substantial structures that link buried cables with existing/ remaining pylons.

9.2. The locations proposed for SEC are both on lower ground so it will be easier to screen and ensure safety. See map for locations.

9.3. The fencing surrounding these SECs is similar to that around electricity sub-stations; strong steel fencing with heavy locked gates and warning signage. All sufficient to protect from animals and human entry.

9.4. The link boxes are approx. 1m x 1m x 0.5m and there will be three in total along the route (at 1km points). They are a little larger than the Openreach/ BT boxes that you see on the streets.

9.5. These pillar boxes are required for ongoing monitoring purposes; the purpose of these boxes is to allow NG to test the electrical integrity of the earthing system. Testing is carried out every two years. The electrical testing equipment required for the maintenance would fit in a car or 4x4 and this is the anticipated method of access to the boxes. No separate track would be required to access the box for testing purposes but if there was an existing track in the vicinity, this would be used

9.6. Within these boxes, sections of cable are spliced together. The boxes are inert; the testing equipment when used is attached to the earthed sheath of the cable and the boxes have no standalone power requirements.

HPC: These boxes will be readily accessible to livestock and it is well known that cows etc use such objects as scratching posts; are these boxes safe and robust enough?

9.7. NG: In other schemes, these boxes are currently in situ on livestock grazing land and there have been no significant reported issues – but NG will do some research to ensure the most appropriate and robust design possible.

10. Potential proposed construction scheme details – restoration (NG)

10.1. Alaska Ecological <http://www.alaska.ltd.uk/> have been identified as the restoration specialist for this project. Alaska are restoration experts with a proven track record in heathland restoration.

10.2. Construction partners will be required to work with Alaska. It will be a strict contractual stipulation that the final contractor use Alaska for the restoration aspects of the project.

10.3. Alaska have provided a working schematic of how their work is performed and are working on an animation to give public more idea of what the process involves.

- 10.4. The depth removed of material removed and stored will be the variable and is governed by the depth of the active rooting systems, which are kept as near to untouched as possible.
- 10.5. NE: NE may not require all turf to be stored; most necessary in wetter areas, in sandy, dry heath areas, there is sufficient evidence that restoration is better from bare sand.
- 10.6. Verderer: In areas where the topsoil is gravel rather than sandy, this may not be sufficient to ensure sufficient restoration for grazing, hence verderers may require storage of top surface even if NE do not.
- 10.7. NE: NE have a lot of good experience of working with Alaska. They are a known and trusted partner

PHPM: Isn't it telling that Alaska state on their own website that restoration of heathland is difficult?

- 10.8. NE: That is a question only Alaska can answer definitively but I think this may be referring to where heathland is very sandy. In these circumstances, it can be physically difficult to pick up as a turf. As I have previously said, NE view is that in these circumstances, you can get better restoration results in other ways and storing turf is not necessarily required. The wetter the heathland gets, the more difficult it is to restore.

11. Potential proposed construction scheme details – long term maintenance

HPC: Who is going to be responsible for the long term maintenance and how will it be properly managed? The commoners and residents have experienced several poor examples of habitat maintenance from emergency repairs to the water pipe by the water authority.

- 11.1. NG: This will be a contractual matter and NG will deal directly with the landowner and expect to be held to account by the landowner.
- 11.2. Planned maintenance is designed as part of the scheme to be non-intrusive. There will be an annual helicopter survey and a number of walking surveys to assess condition. The scheme is designed to be installed and left; there will be no people on site on a day-to-day basis.
- 11.3. NT: This will be governed by planning conditions. If conditions are not being met then the authorities will act.
- 11.4. NT: The water pipe was put in before the SSSI rating of the site and in those days maintenance terms were not included in planning and construction contracts. NT has noted that the utility company has got better at fulfilling its repair requirements.

12. Potential proposed construction scheme details – livestock concerns

HPC: how will construction scheme allow for free movement of livestock?

12.1. NG: the indicative plan divides the work into four sections. Expected time on each section 4-6 months. Work will be year round and will be on two sections at any one time but not on two adjacent sections to facilitate continued free movement of livestock.

HPC: Livestock will not be used to traffic in this area of the forest and may drift towards Roger Penney way which has a high fatality rate. Commoners are thinking of taking animals off the forest which will be expensive in feed costs.

12.2. NG: Project includes compensation payment allowance which will be available to cover this sort of eventuality. Compensation for affected commoners will be coordinated through verderers – details can be requested through them.

13. Potential proposed construction scheme details – timing, next steps (NG)

PHPM: how is this timetable in any way compatible with the particular New Forest restrictions on work in the spring nesting seasons?

13.1. NE: It is not illegal to do work in the nesting season but it is illegal to do work on bushes with nests in them. However, it is perfectly possible to proactively manage the nesting environment before the season begins to ensure that work does not disturb nesting birds. This means that the area will be cleared in the winter to prevent birds nesting in that area for spring.

13.2. Verderer: this is not a new concept, the FC actively burn large areas of forest every year as part of their ongoing management of the site.

13.3. NG: The stakeholder group has done a considerable amount of work over the past three years such that there is now a proposal for public consultation although there are still various surveys and tests ongoing and the proposals may change to reflect the results of this ongoing work and information gathering.

13.4. NG has planned a number of public consultation opportunities where the public can attend and ask questions of the project (Date schedule to be attached)

13.5. There is a separate community liaison group and also the Stakeholder Advisory Group thinks that now is the right time for the community to be represented on the Group by the inclusion of HPC.

13.6. NG anticipate being in a position to submit a planning application in Dec 18 and that the planning process will take 4-6 months given the complexity of the project and the environmental and ecological concerns that need to be addressed. The Environmental Impact Assessment will be available as part of the planning process.

13.7. Anticipated start date would be Spring 2020 and commissioning of the underground cables expected for Autumn 2021. Pylon towers would be dismantled in Spring 2022. Work will be year-round with the benefit of two summer seasons.

13.8. NE: NE support year-round working as it wants to shorten the period of actual construction as much as possible to improve the restoration outcome.

14. Going Forward

- 14.1. HPC will become a member of the VIP key stakeholder group. HPC will keep residents fully and accurately informed and take every opportunity for ongoing dialogue.
- 14.2. The NG and other Stakeholder surveys and investigations will be ongoing with the aim of producing a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment that will be submitted as part of any planning request.
- 14.3. HPC to accept an invitation from Alaska Ecology – the identified restoration contractors – to visit restored sites and ask any questions. Date to be confirmed.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF ORGANISATIONS IN ATTENDANCE

Organisation	Attendees
VIP Stakeholder Group Chairman	
National Grid	3 attendees
Godshill Parish Council	1 attendee
Hale Parish Council	6 attendees
New Forest District Council/ Hants CC	1 attendee
Redlynch Parish Council	1 attendee
Woodgreen Parish Council	1 attendee
New Forest National Park Authority	4 attendees
Protect Hale Purlieu Movement	1 attendee
Natural England	1 attendee
Forestry Commission	1 attendee
National Trust	2 attendees
Verderers of the New Forest	4 attendees