

National Grid VIP project New Forest National Park

Meeting with Hale Purlieu commoners

22nd January 2019

10am – 12 noon

Meeting note

The following organisations were represented:

- National Grid VIP project team (+Camargue)
- Seven commoners from Hale
- Hale Parish Council
- National Trust
- Verderers of the New Forest
- Commoners Defence Association

National Grid presentation

1. Following the responses to letters from Hale Parish Council relating to the impacts of National Grid's VIP project on livestock on Hale Purlieu during construction, sent to National Grid on behalf of Hale commoners, National Grid organised a meeting to run through the responses and answer any further questions. Representatives from the Verderers of the New Forest, the National Trust and the Commoners Defence Association (CDA) were also invited and in attendance.
2. National Grid ran through its proposed activity and the mitigation it would undertake in relation to:
 - Access - livestock and pedestrian crossing points - features and locations
 - Fencing and operations within the works site
 - Cable installation
 - Link pillars and jointing bays

The meeting also covered compensation claims and National Grid shared an indicative programme. There was some discussion on the potential for a tunnelled solution.

Access and crossing points

3. National Grid showed an indicative layout of the crossing points. In response to feedback from the local commoners, CDA, Verderers and Agisters, National Grid had re-configured the crossings to segregate people from livestock. The people only section would be gated at both ends to prevent livestock access. In addition, in response to feedback, National Grid had introduced a funnelled entrance into the design with easement fencing. Other features of the crossing points include:
 - Minimum of four access points with precise siting to be agreed (see below an additional pedestrian crossing request which is under consideration)

- Access points - 7m wide with funnelled entrances
 - Crossing points will be open in favour of animals / pedestrians.
 - Segregated 1.2m pedestrian walkway at each crossing - gated at each end to prevent stock entering
 - Signage to inform Purlieu users what to do in an emergency
 - Drivers will turn off engines while waiting for animals to cross
 - Single top strand equestrian fencing across the site
 - 15mph maximum speed limit – in common with practice across the New Forest
4. Commoners asked what the access track surface would be made of? National Grid confirmed that the haul road would be like a typical track that runs through the New Forest and the surface would be agreed with the Park Authority and the National Trust (as landowner). Commoners were concerned that if the track was made of a material that generated noise when stock used it, then they would be too frightened to do so. National Grid confirmed that the surface would not generate noise likely to frighten stock.
5. Commoners pointed out that if the access routes were widely used, they could become very muddy and potentially unusable during wet weather. National Grid confirmed that as part of its construction activity, there would be an ongoing programme of maintenance and repair work to ensure that the crossing points remained useable at all times.
6. Commoners asked for confirmation that the crossing points would be staffed at all times. National Grid responded that there would be a member of staff posted at the crossing points during periods of greatest vehicle movement. When vehicle movements were low then it would be up to the driver to stop their vehicle, turn off the engine and operate the crossing.
7. It was pointed out that one crossing shown on National Grid's indicative plan was not suitable as an animal crossing – this was a crossing point indicated at the end of Mays Firs. National Grid commented that it had been positioned there following a meeting with residents in Mays Firs who had asked for the crossing point, as there is already pedestrian and vehicular right of access to the Purlieu through a gate at the western end of Mays Firs. National Grid agreed to make this a pedestrian and vehicle only crossing point.
- ACTION: National Grid to prepare and circulate new plan showing crossing points**
8. National Grid also confirmed that the access on Mays Firs would only be used by those who currently use it (Agisters, Forestry Commission, National Trust and local residents with rights of access). No vehicles associated with the VIP project would access Hale Purlieu from Mays Firs. All access to the work site on the Purlieu during the main construction works would be from a single site access point on Forest Road.

9. Some commoners expressed concern that plans to fence off access to the area between the houses on Forest Road and the working area from the rest of the Purlieu would deprive animals of shelter. National Grid responded that the proposed fencing of this area had been included for the protection and safety of stock on the advice of the CDA and Agisters. However, it said that it would consider leaving this area open. Commoners are to consider this further and respond to National Grid who will also raise the issue again with the CDA and agisters.

ACTION: Commoners to consider further and feed back to National Grid

10. One commoner stated that the animals had been following set routes all their lives as their predecessors had done and that they would not use the routes proposed by National Grid. Other commoners were sceptical as to whether or not the animals would use the routes provided. One of the Verderers pointed out that this sort of approach had been adopted elsewhere within the New Forest and that stock had adapted well. One example was where underpasses had been introduced.

National Grid stated that it had tried to follow existing routes and match desire lines and that it was still open to further suggestions from commoners on the precise location of the crossing points.

Vegetation removal

11. Commoners asked how much of the vegetation on the eastern side would be taken. National Grid confirmed that there would be some clearance from the eastern side, but the bulk of the trees, and in particular those screening properties on Forest Road from the Purlieu, would be left. Some commoners said that they were less worried about the trees but more about the gorse. National Grid confirmed that some gorse would be cleared in this area.

Language

12. One commoner pointed out that National Grid should ensure that it used the conditional 'would be' rather than 'will be' when referring to potential works on Hale Purlieu.

Cables

13. National Grid confirmed that the width of each cable trough is approximately 4m and the depth approximately 1.2m. The variable width of the overall swathe is due to space needed to store the topsoil that is subsequently replaced over the buried cables (rather than transport it away by lorry, store it offsite and bring it back again when it is needed) and at its widest where the translocated heathland turves would be stored prior to reinstatement. The width of the haul road and the excavated area would remain consistent along the length of the construction swathe.

One commoner asked whether 800m was the optimum length for cables and would this potentially mean more link boxes. National Grid responded that the contractors who are tendering for the work are currently looking at this issue and the position will become clearer soon. National Grid would be in a position to give the exact numbers of proposed link bays and link boxes at the public consultation events, following further discussions with the tendering contractors.

The meeting requested that for public engagement and consultation events, National Grid should produce much clearer user-friendly diagrams with clear labelling rather than the technical drawings that it had largely used to date. National Grid agreed to do this.

Water management and drainage

14. Commoners asked what would happen in very wet weather and, in particular, if there would be a need for pumps to be used. National grid responded that there would be a drainage and water management plan drawn up for the entire project which would be submitted as part of the planning application. Running times for the pumps would depend on the conditions. All of this information, including where the excess water would be pumped to, would be contained within the sustainable drainage plan submitted with the planning application.

Commoners pointed out that as landowners they had been informed by the Environment Agency that they cannot allow any spoilt water to enter the Avon Valley catchment of which Hale Purlieu is a part of. National Grid confirmed that it had been in dialogue with the Environment Agency throughout the development of the project and that its water management proposals and wetland management plan would need to be approved by both them and Natural England.

A commoner asked whether the project would stop the water flowing from north of the works to the south effectively acting as a dam and increasing flood risk. National Grid confirmed that its drainage and wetland management plans would address this issue.

15. Concerns were raised over the plastic lining of the concrete deteriorating over time and potentially poisoning the water course. National Grid is aware of these concerns but is confident in this method as plastic has a high degree of resistance to degradation. The management of the plastic over time would be included within the environmental statement.
16. Commoners asked whether more construction space would be needed beyond the red lines shown on the map. National Grid confirmed that all construction activity to bury the cables would be within the red line boundary.

Heathland restoration

17. Given that the turves would be stored at the side of the works, a question was asked as to how long the turves would survive. National Grid said that its specialist ecological restoration consultant, Alaska, was confident that the turves would survive long enough to be successfully translocated. One of the commoners stated that they had been told that turves were only viable for six months but after that they were not. National Grid agreed to confirm the times with Alaska and report back.

ACTION: National Grid to confirm timings and report back

18. Commoners asked for examples of where Alaska had successfully carried out translocation on sites similar to Hale Purlieu in the New Forest. They cited an example in the North York Moors where work was done and took over 25 years before it started to come back. They also mentioned the water pipe that runs across Hale Purlieu which had never regenerated. National Grid responded that when these jobs were undertaken, there were not the same strict environmental safeguards in place and that developers would not have been required to make guarantees regarding the restoration. Any work on Hale Purlieu would need to satisfy Natural England both at the planning stage and during the restoration and National Grid would need to ensure that the work was carried out effectively.

One of the Verderers present stated that the New Forest project's reference group of technical stakeholders had been taken to see a site in St Leonard's that Alaska had restored and the turves had taken very well. It was also pointed out by one of the attendees that at Rockford and Ibsley Common and Fritham Aerodrome where work had been done, the forest had come back remarkably well without a restoration plan in place and it was agreed that with heathland of this nature the more it is stressed, the more it thrives.

Link boxes

19. National Grid informed the meeting that it was investigating the use of buried link boxes instead of the more standard upright link pillars above ground. This was in response to feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. The dimensions of these would be similar to those of their above ground counterparts and if the landowner or stakeholders requested could be fenced, although this was not thought to be necessary.

National Grid stated that it should have more information on the cable lengths and number of link bays and boxes required at the end of February and would make this information public during March.

ACTION: National Grid to make the information available once it is clear

Compensation

20. National Grid talked through its position on compensation. In its conversations with the Verderers, CDA and Aisters, National Grid had been informed that there is adequate grazing on Hale Purlieu to cope even when the area is fenced off during construction. If owners chose to move their livestock that would be a decision for them, and National Grid would not pay any compensation claim arising.

If a commoner feels that they have a legitimate claim, then each claim will be considered on an individual basis with the onus on the claimant to mitigate the loss. Bruton Knowles administers compensation claims on behalf of National Grid throughout the UK and would do so in the New Forest. If a commoner believes they have suffered a loss due to the works that can be substantiated, they should contact Bruton Knowles. Claimants can appoint a land agent to act for them and National Grid would meet any reasonable costs incurred.

21. One commoner raised the possibility of National Grid delivering a load of hay to the Purlieu during construction, if it was required. National Grid said that it would work with those commoners during the works and that it might be possible to deliver hay to agreed locations if it was considered necessary. One commoner noted that if they were given hay in a specific location, they wouldn't wander off.
22. Another commoner pointed out that the situation was not about money but the fact the communing was a lifestyle that had been practiced for hundreds of years and that local people wanted to keep their animals on Hale Purlieu.

One of the Verderers pointed out that since the removal of Millersford Plantation and other plantations near Turf Hill, there was now a lot more grazing available on the Purlieu.

23. A commoner asked why National Grid was pursuing this project when nobody wanted it. National Grid pointed out that many stakeholders – nationally and locally – support the project as well as UK consumers as verified through acceptability testing carried out last year which reported very favourably on the New Forest project.
24. National Grid was asked precisely how long all aspects of the restoration would take.
ACTION: National Grid to reply to commoners with detail on the timing of the restoration.

Alternatives to direct burial

25. A number of alternatives to the preferred direct burial solution were then discussed. Some commoners asked whether a tunnel option could be considered. National Grid responded that while the potential for a direct burial solution exists, it should be pursued as the preferred option, as its cost would be significantly less than a tunnel and would therefore offer better

value for money for electricity consumers in line with VIP's fifth principle that each project should be economic and efficient.

National Grid stated that initial calculations had been done that showed that tunnelling would be more expensive than direct burial even when long-term maintenance and eventual replacement of cable are taken into account. National Grid agreed to share percentage differences when they had been finalised.

ACTION: National Grid to supply commoners with percentage difference for the initial versus long-term costs for both technical solutions when the detailed work has been completed.

National Grid presented images of the tunnelling machinery used to create the London Power Tunnels. These were to illustrate the scale of the civil engineering involved in building a tunnel for high-voltage cables.

26. A commoner stated that rather than 'destroy' Hale Purlieu, had National Grid and stakeholders considered replacing them with low height pylons or T-pylons. National Grid responded that these had been considered but rejected by stakeholders largely on the grounds that they would be unlikely to deliver sufficient landscape enhancements.
27. Another commoner suggested that the best solution to screening the pylons would be to allow the plantations to grow back again or plant more trees. It was pointed out that the Purlieu is now being carefully managed as part of an ongoing programme and this did not include more tree planting.

Drifts

28. The issue of the drifts was raised and how the crossing points would hold up during the drifts. National Grid commented that it had already spoken with the Agisters and that it would work with them to minimise impacts during drifts.

One of the Verderers pointed out that National Grid had already consulted extensively with the Verderers who were happy with the arrangements suggested for crossing points.

Other business

29. It was pointed out that Hatchett Green is heavily grazed by ponies. If, as a result of the construction work, the ponies did not make their way onto Hatchett Green, would National Grid act to keep the grass short. National Grid stated that during construction it would meet regularly with the Community Liaison Group to address issues such as this as they arose.

30. It was asked whether it would be possible to remove the fencing from areas where the work had been completed. National Grid stated that this might be possible in some locations and that it and its contractors would liaise with local people at the time to see what was possible.
31. A commoner asked how long Lady's Mile would be closed for. National Grid stated that it would only be for a short time and that it may not need to be closed at all – the contractors tendering for the work were looking at ways of keeping it permanently open. More information on this should be available once the tendering process is complete and National Grid agreed to let local people know as soon as there was greater certainty.
- ACTION: National Grid to inform local people during public consultation events**
32. National Grid stated that should the project go ahead, it would work very closely with local people to ensure that the project ran smoothly with a little impact on local people as possible. This was welcomed by the group who thanked National Grid for taking the time to meet and discuss the project with them.
33. The meeting ended shortly after 12 noon.