

National Grid's Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project: New Forest

This document answers some of the most frequently asked questions about National Grid's VIP project in the New Forest:

- Why are you proposing to do this work?
- What will the impact be on the environment / ecology of Hale Purlieu?
- What will be the extent of the disruption to livestock and the people who use Hale Purlieu?
- What will the impact be on the village of Hale and the surrounding villages?
- How will you ensure the safety of livestock?
- How long will the cables last?
- How many trees will you cut down? Will they be replaced?
- Who will pay for this?

Why are you proposing to do this work?

The work is part of National Grid's Visual Impact Provision project which is making use of a £500 million provision from Ofgem to place existing overhead transmission lines underground in four nationally important landscapes in England and Wales.

The overall aim is to help reduce the visual impact of existing electricity transmission infrastructure in English and Welsh Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks. It represents a major opportunity to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and environmental heritage within our most protected landscapes.

The project is being driven by national and local stakeholders and communities in the four prioritised locations: the Dorset AONB and the New Forest, Peak District and Snowdonia National Parks.

Before Ofgem made the provision available, a national survey was commissioned by National Grid and Ofgem and undertaken by independent market researchers. It identified a willingness by electricity consumers across Great Britain to pay for the enhancement of the landscape by reducing the impact of the existing transmission infrastructure within AONBs and National Parks.

The work is therefore being undertaken in response to consumer demand and is supported by a significant number of individuals and stakeholders both locally and nationally.

What will the impact be on the environment / ecology of Hale Purlieu?

National Grid is very aware of the sensitive nature of Hale Purlieu and its ecology. As well as reducing the impact of our existing transmission lines in AONBs and National Parks, one of the VIP project's five guiding principles is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and environmental heritage within these most protected landscapes.

To achieve this, we are working closely with the National Park Authority, the National Trust and Natural England, and will also work with other relevant local organisations to ensure that the impact of our temporary construction work on the natural environment is kept to a minimum. We are working together with them and landscape restoration specialists on a plan to restore – and potentially enhance – the habitat in the area once the construction of the project is complete.

What will be the extent of the disruption to livestock and the people who use Hale Purlieu?

Construction is scheduled to take two years. If we are successful in obtaining the appropriate consents and necessary funding, we aim to start work in spring 2020 and be finished with the pylons removed by spring 2022.

We will not, however, be working across the whole site for the two-year duration of the project. Construction would take place in stages which would allow for the free and safe movement of livestock and people up and down the Purlieu throughout construction, keeping restrictions on livestock grazing and recreation to a minimum. We would actively inform local people of the various phases of the work, where it will be located and any likely impact, if any, it might have on them.

We will continue to seek advice from the Verderers, commoners and local people during public consultation and throughout the construction programme. This will enable us to take local considerations – including activities such as the drift – and specific feedback into account, and where appropriate incorporate them into our plans.

What will the impact be on the village of Hale and the surrounding villages?

This is a major engineering project but we will aim to keep our impact on the villages to a minimum in areas such as traffic, disruption, noise and visual intrusion.

Traffic – We will work with the highways departments at Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council, as well as the National Park Authority to ensure that we produce a solution that is workable for everyone and causes as little disruption as possible.

The majority of our vehicles will access the site from the B3080 Forest Road and will then operate on the haul road within the site. In the first few months of the scheme some HGV access will be needed to carry out the ducted crossing of Hale Purlieu road where the cables will carry through to the sealing end. The timing and duration of these works will be confirmed as the more detailed design takes shape. (We will need some short-term, temporary road closures but these will be promoted in advance to minimise disruption). Access will also be required for small vehicles for clearance and sealing end works prior to construction near Stricklands Plantation. During the main construction phase, we can confirm that Lady's Mile will not be used by HGVs.

Noise – As part of our planning application, we will demonstrate to the local authority that we will do everything possible to minimise noise generated as a result of our activity. There is industry best practice to which National Grid is fully signed up. National Grid's appointed main contractor will also be a part of the Considerate Constructor Scheme which sets out a series of measures that contractors must abide by to safeguard the public.

Visual impact – The Purlieu is an open landscape and our work will be visible during the temporary construction period. The construction swathe we need will vary in width across the Purlieu from 75m in some locations up to 140m in others. The wider sections will not all be excavated. Only around 70m of the 140m swathes will be excavated – the remaining 70m will be used for storing the heathland sections which we will carefully lift to install the cables.

Each section will take up to six months to complete at which point the reinstatement of the heathland and replacement of excavated sections will begin.

Construction work closest to Hale village should take 4-6 months at which point reinstatement will begin and machinery move on to a part of the project further east on the Purlieu, although the haul road will remain in situ until the pylons have been removed from the landscape.

Further details and refinement will become available over the next 6 months.

How will you ensure the safety of livestock?

Safety is paramount in everything that National Grid does, whether it relates to people or animals. We will ensure that the site is totally secure and safe. For example, we will erect a secure fence along the length and either side of the working corridor. There will also be 24-hour security on site.

The fence, however, will only enclose the area needed for that particular phase of activity and not the whole width of the Purlieu. This would allow for the free and safe movement of livestock and people up and down the Purlieu throughout construction. In this way restrictions on livestock grazing and recreation will be kept to a minimum. We would keep local people informed of the various phases of the work, where it will be taking place and the likely impact, if any, it might have on them.

How long will the cables last?

The cables being used on the VIP project comprise the most advanced cable technology that National Grid has used. It is estimated based on the manufacturer's guarantee that they will last 40 to 50 years although in reality, this could be longer. If it was necessary to replace them after 50 years, it is not possible today to state how this would be done as the technology will almost certainly advance in the intervening period.

Underground cables are very reliable and it is highly unlikely that we will need to dig up even a small part of the Purlieu on a regular or frequent basis. As an example, cables of a similar, though less advanced type, installed 25 years ago have performed very well and required little or no intrusive maintenance.

How many trees will you cut down? Will they be replaced?

The number of trees which require removal is being determined as our detailed plans are produced. We will be able to share more information on this at our public consultation events in July.

In terms of replanting, we will be advised by the National Trust which manages the land on Hale Purlieu and the planning authority as to the way in which the area is restored, including the nature of any planting.

Who will pay for this?

VIP makes use of a provision of £500m which has been made available to the Transmission Operators in England, Scotland and Wales by Ofgem specifically for this purpose. The money is not available to be spent on anything else.

This provision, on a larger scale, replicates funding that has been available to the District Network Operators for a number of years to underground the wooden pole network in AONBs and National Parks. The size of the allowance was determined following extensive consumer 'Willingness to Pay' research. Ultimately, the costs of these projects are borne by the electricity bill payers.