

Working with UK Power Networks to underground electricity infrastructure in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the South East and East of England.

Since 2005 Ofgem, the gas and electricity regulator has granted electricity network operators a special allowance to replace overhead lines with underground cables in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks. The allowance encourages electricity distribution companies to underground power lines to enhance the appearance of protected landscapes.

Given the potentially huge demand for such improvements, UK Power Networks established a steering group of environmental experts, with members from each of the AONBs and National Parks within their distribution area. The environmental experts on the steering group champion and prioritise how the funding should be invested, while UK Power Networks engineers provide technical advice to the group and carry out the work.



UK Power Networks, which owns and operates the electricity network in the South East, London and East of England, has been an industry leader in establishing an effective method of working with the officers of the relevant protected landscapes to deliver the projects.

Prioritising projects in the East and South East of England

Since 2005 officers from The Broads; Chilterns; Dedham Vale; Norfolk Coast; Suffolk Coast and Heaths (in the East of England) and High Weald; Kent Downs; Surrey Hills and the South Downs (in the South East) have worked closely with Natural England and UK Power Networks to deliver 37 projects.

This steering group has an established constitution and has developed an assessment methodology to prioritise undergrounding projects.



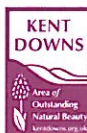
St Benets Levels, Norfolk and Suffolk Broads - before...

This methodology is based on:

- The impact of the overhead line on landscape character
- The impact of the overhead line on visual amenity
- The impact of potential undergrounding on other features within the landscape
- Whether undergrounding will improve the setting of a heritage asset or other historic feature
- Whether undergrounding will benefit biodiversity

The feasibility of each scheme is assessed from a technical perspective by UK Power Networks.

Following local assessment, each scheme is presented to the undergrounding steering group, which meets quarterly, for consideration. If the steering group considers that a scheme should go ahead, a budget is ring-fenced and the proposal is developed further by the National Park or AONB staff. Consultations are carried out and negotiations with landowners take place before the scheme is submitted to UK Power Networks to secure formal consents and wayleaves. The consultation process can take up to a year or longer, depending on the complexity of the scheme.



Budget allocated to network undergrounding since 2005

Nationally, there are 42,354km of overhead lines in National Parks and AONBs. In the East of England there are 1,910km of overhead lines in National Parks and AONBs (4.51% of the national total). In the South East there are 4,922km of overhead lines in National Parks and AONBs (11.62% of the national total).

The size of the allowance is determined by the length of overhead lines in National Parks and AONBs within the individual network operator's areas and the number of customers served by the network operator.

East of England: £5.6m to invest for the period 2010-15

South East: £6.6m to invest for the period 2010-15



...after

Working closely with environmental organisations, UK Power Networks has transformed some of Britain's best loved countryside. The company has dismantled around 77km of overhead electricity lines throughout the South East and the East of England under this project.

Since April 2005 an investment of approximately £11.3 million has been made to replace overhead lines with underground cables in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks. This is thanks to the special allowance from Ofgem.

Find out more:

You can contact the East of England and South East undergrounding steering group via the Chair of the group:

Catherine Tonge, Adviser, Landscape Scale Delivery – South, Mail Hub Block B, Whittington Road, Worcester, WR5 2LQ.

Tel: 07768 038881

Email: catherine.tonge@naturalengland.org.uk

For technical advice relating to any of the schemes implemented in the **East of England and South East contact:**

Shaun Barrell, Protected Landscapes and Major Wayleave Surveyor, UK Power Networks, Barton Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP32 7BG.

Tel: 08701 963701

Email: shaun.barrell@ukpowernetworks.co.uk