

National Grid's Visual Impact Provision Project (VIP) - Dunford Bridge East Getting the best result

National Grid has £500million to spend on mitigating the visual impact of existing overhead high voltage electricity lines within National Parks and AONBs in England and Wales. Assessment of the landscape and visual impacts of all such lines in these designated landscapes was undertaken by Professor Carys Swanick and sections of each line were given a score indicating the severity of the impacts¹.

Using this assessment schemes were selected for further investigation and at the most recent VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group meeting in September 2015 there was consensus that the following schemes should be prioritised:

- Dorset AONB - 4YA.7
- New Forest National Park - 4YB.2
- Peak District National Park (PDNP) - 4ZO.2 (the Eastern section)
- Snowdonia National Park - 4ZC.1

We support 4ZO.2 as a candidate. In our view undergrounding should be the chosen option for mitigating the landscape and visual impacts but we believe that undergrounding this section or part of it would be a missed opportunity to remove the full impact of the power line on the PDNP and its setting. Following investigation of options and in order to minimise the impact of the new sealing end compound (SEC), we would like to suggest that the technical feasibility of undergrounding both 4ZO.2 and 4ZO.1 with a SEC at Bullhouse Colliery should be considered.

Background

The existing overhead line east of Dunford that impacts on the PDNP and its setting consists of the SEC above the Woodhead tunnel and 14 towers². The SEC above the Woodhead tunnel and towers 1 to 8 (from west to east) constitute 4ZO.2 (2.37km)³. Tower 8 to tower 14, east of the A616 at Hazlehead, constitute 4ZO.1 (2.63km). For the PDNP Eastern Section Options Appraisal the A616 in the east was considered the limit of the study area.

¹ Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Existing Electricity Transmission Infrastructure in Nationally Protected Landscapes in England and Wales Technical Report for National Grid undertaken by Professor Carys Swanick with Gillespies and Land Use Consultants October 2014

² Grid references for relevant towers counting east from Dunford Bridge and excluding the SEC

5th tower 1690 0260 - below Townhead

8th tower 1780 0275 - Castle Hill

9th tower 1815 0280 - Castle Hill

11th tower 1875 0265 - Cote Bank Bridge

14th tower 1968 0275 - Hazlehead east of A616

15th tower 2000 0273 - Ranah Stones

17th tower 2060 0245 - opencast workings

³ Fig 1.1 PDNP Eastern Section Options Appraisal August 2015 National Grid

4ZO.2 *'is judged to have landscape impacts of a high level of importance on the Dark Peak moorland slopes & cloughs and Dark Peak Yorkshire Fringe slopes & valleys with woodland, landscape character areas'* (see Annex below for full details of para 4.28). It scored 27 and was ranked with two other sections of overhead line as the third most intrusive of all the overhead lines in designated areas in England and Wales. Mitigation options for 4ZO.2 are considered limited (see Annex below for full details of para 4.30). By contrast 4ZO.1 had combined impacts of moderate importance, albeit with some individual impacts which are of high importance, scored only 11 and was not selected for further investigation.

The route to underground 4ZO.2 and where to place the new SEC are undergoing a technical feasibility assessment. The August 2015 Options Appraisal concluded that removing the entire length of 4ZO.2 (Option 3B) would not *'provide proportionately more mitigation benefits than undergrounding only the shorter subsection between the Dunford SEC and towers 4/5 (Option 3A). The greatest landscape and visual impacts occur in the west around Dunford Bridge and these impacts could be mitigated by Option 3A. As Option 3A is much shorter it is anticipated to be preferable on economic and efficiency grounds; in particular due to the fact that Option 3B provides only marginally more landscape and visual benefits'*⁴. Apparently at the first technical workshop for the Options Appraisal stakeholders accepted this conclusion⁵. However stakeholders at the PDNP Stakeholder Workshop in March 2015 recommended exploring *'further the potential for removing section 4ZO.2 and underground beyond Hazlehead or finding a stopping point where appropriate'* (see Annex below for details from the workshop).

Two SEC search areas were identified in the Options Appraisal, around towers 4 to 5 (search area A) and between towers 8 and 10 at Castle Hill (search area B)⁶. The PDNPA appear to support a shorter section of undergrounding and have suggested a location in the despoiled area below tower no 5, which is lower than the current tower 5 location⁷. It is thought that here a combination of the existing landform, some extra/remodelled banking and tree planting could screen the lower sections of a new SEC.

We disagree with these proposals and suggest that undergrounding should be undertaken along the whole of the PDNP boundary with consideration of locating the SEC at Bullhouse Colliery, at or near tower 17, thereby removing the impact of the transmission line on the PDNP and its setting.

Our proposal

We are proposing that all of sections 4ZO.2 and 4ZO.1 and a further 1km of cable, a total length of 5km, should be undergrounded with the SEC located at Bullhouse Colliery. In view of its high score 4ZO.2 must be undergrounded along its entire length. A SEC at the

⁴ Para 6.22 PDNP Eastern Section Options Appraisal August 2015 National Grid

⁵ Options Appraisal para 4.12 'Stakeholders would like to see the line removed as far as Hazlehead but it was recognised that the section of line that runs to Hazlehead was not on the shortlist and its consideration could not be justified. A more likely end location for any mitigation work would be at Castle Hill. Stakeholders would be happy with this.

⁶ Fig 5.7 PDNP Eastern Section Options Appraisal August 2015 National Grid

⁷ Email from PDNPA John Keeley to National Grid Hector Pearson 2-9-2015

location of towers 4/5 would remove the severe adverse impact of the SEC at the Woodhead Tunnel and its two accompanying towers, and avoid disruption to Wogden Foot local wildlife site, but provides no benefit further east. Rather than seeking an appropriate location for the SEC by shortening the length of undergrounding, a location should be sought further east. This raises two issues - where should the SEC be located and what route should be undertaken for undergrounding of the cables.

Location of the SEC

A SEC at the eastern end of 4ZO.2 below Castle Hill (search area B in the Options Appraisal) would impact on the more open valley and amenity. At Castle Hill the Don valley broadens from its narrow moorland character at Dunford to a wider landscape of stone walled fields, scattered farmsteads and small hamlets. The linear TPT (trans-Pennine Trail) and River Don are both screened and demarcated by a band of woodland along their length. This is distinctive South Yorkshire countryside in the Yorkshire South Pennine Fringe Character Area. A SEC located below Castle Hill would be visible from the TPT, local footpaths and open access land to the south on Thurlstone Moors. It would be at least as visible as the existing towers 8 and 9 when viewed from the road between Carlecotes and Townhead but an improvement on the existing SEC at Dunford Bridge. However, there is no access to this location and new infrastructure would be required, increasing the negative impact of the SEC. We believe a SEC below Castle Hill would be unacceptable.



Above: Looking west from the TPT near Cote Bank Bridge - Tower 10 stands on the left of the photo. Tower 8, immediately adjacent to it, is the junction between 4ZO.2 and 4ZO.1. Tower 9 stands centre field with Castle Hill to the right.

A new SEC at towers 9/10 (see photo above) would have similar impacts to a SEC at tower 8. Moving further east towers 11-14 all stand to the south of the TPT on high ground. From the trail and the lower northern slopes of the Don Valley the towers break the skyline although from higher ground to the north they are seen against a background of moor/woods/fields. Tower 14 is particularly intrusive as it stands in an open landscape near the highest point in a field, with some screening trees to the north, and breaks the skyline in many views. Tower 15 on Ranah Stones and tower 16, although standing on high ground, are less obtrusive in the landscape and are partially screened by conifer plantations. They are seen against the sky from the northern slopes above the River Don.

Further east, a SEC located at the disused open cast workings at Bullhouse Colliery, near tower 17, would provide the greatest landscape and visual benefits and be well beyond the National Park setting (see photos page 6 below). If the SEC was located at the lowest point in the conifers it would be lower in the landscape than tower 17 and well screened by trees at its feet. It would also be standing in an industrial, rather than an agricultural, landscape. Land stability might be an issue - the information board at Bullhouse Colliery states '*beneath the ground here lies a maze of pits and tunnels once worked for coal...*' The compromise would be a SEC in the location of tower 17. Access is already established to the disused colliery and would require no new infrastructure.

Route of undergrounding

Undergrounding of the cables along the route of the TPT would provide the easiest option but the trail east of Dunford is a particularly valued and well used asset cared for intensively by volunteers with much new planting. If the trail could be avoided this would be beneficial.

Cable carried by towers 11-15/17 could be undergrounded along the route of the existing wayleave over agricultural land. This is elevated open country with a relatively flat topography. The line passes through open fields or conifer plantations, the latter extending from Bullhouse Colliery to the footpath to Hazlehead Farm (new woodland not shown on 2004 map). Undergrounding the line across country would avoid damage to the TPT, which is particularly beautiful here and would lose character by loss of mature trees. Tower 11 stands in open access land but this could be avoided. The TPT between Cote Bank Bridge and Hazlehead has two bridges and two private dwellings adjacent to the TPT which would complicate use of the trail for undergrounding.

Next Steps

Our proposal requires further investigation and measurement against the five VIP policy Guiding Principles by which potential projects are chosen. The five principles are:

1. Result in greatest landscape enhancement benefits.
2. Result in greatest opportunities to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage whilst avoiding unacceptable environmental impacts.

3. Result in greatest opportunities to encourage public understanding and enjoyment of the protected landscapes including positive socio-economic impacts.
4. Are technically feasible in the context of the wider transmission system.
5. Are economical and efficient.

It is essential that we seek the best outcome for the PDNP. Promoting this proposal now would be timely as the technical feasibility assessment is ongoing. It would appear from the Options Appraisal that we have little chance of influencing the outcome. We could also be seen as critical of the VIP process, although if this is kept out of the public domain this should be manageable. The next step would be to discuss our proposal with the PDNPA and National Grid.

Conclusions

The most severe landscape impacts result from the existing SEC at Dunford Bridge and the two towers standing to its east. A location for the new SEC must be found that does not impact on the National Park or its setting east of 4ZO.2. A new SEC anywhere between Dunford Bridge and Bullhouse Colliery would increase the intrusiveness of whichever tower it replaces. The most beneficial location for a new SEC would be at Bullhouse Colliery. This would fit with National Grid's objective for the VIP project⁸ which *'is to achieve the maximum enhancement to the landscape from the available funds whilst ensuring that no significant adverse impacts arise as a result'*.

We believe that, taking a long term view of the VIP, this option would fulfil all five principles. Any attempt to minimise the impacts of the new SEC that result in shortening the length of line undergrounded is expedient rather than what is best for the PDNP. It is most unlikely that, if the Options Appraisal is followed, what remains standing of section 4ZO.2 would be a strong contestant in future funding rounds. This part of the PDNP and its setting, which is especially in need of enhancement, would continue to be disfigured.

Although the VIP fund is not available for areas outside National Parks or AONBs, lines that impact on the setting of protected landscapes are eligible for consideration - in this area towers 3-10 and 14-17. By reducing the length of overhead line to be removed, National Grid implies that impacts on the National Park setting are less important than those within the Park. This does not fit with the PDNPA's approach towards the Park's setting. *'The flow of landscape character across and beyond the National Park boundary... provides a continuity of landscape and valued setting for the National Park. This is a special value attached to the National Park by surrounding urban communities'*⁹.

Burying cables along the route of the TPT should be avoided wherever possible. East from tower 11 the topography is flatter and the landscape open, so a wayleave would be less obtrusive. By contrast destroying the wooded character and tranquillity of the TPT would do severe harm to a valued amenity purely to reduce costs because undergrounding would be easier.

⁸ Visual Impact Provision policy, 2013, National Grid

⁹ Peak District National Park Local Development Framework Core Strategy, adopted 2011, para 3.31; para 9.15 penultimate bullet; para 11.27



Potential location for a SEC at Bullhouse Colliery - tower 17 on the right above, and below, could be replaced by a SEC



Annex

Extracts from Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment of Existing Electricity Transmission Infrastructure in Nationally Protected Landscapes in England and Wales Technical Report for National Grid undertaken by Professor Carys Swanwick, 2014

Para 4.28 - '4ZO.2 is judged to have landscape impacts of a high level of importance on the Dark Peak moorland slopes & cloughs and Dark Peak Yorkshire Fringe slopes & valleys with woodland, landscape character areas. This landscape is transitional in character with some of the special qualities of the National Park being displayed. Strong localised topographical variety around Dunford Bridge, together with the proximity of nearby areas of high conservation interest, recreational value and relative tranquillity, all serve to increase the value of the landscape. Although the impact of the line is geographically contained, the scale of impact is high with the terminal tower and sealing end compound being locally dominant man-made features. This subsection is also judged to have visual impacts of a high level of importance. Dunford Bridge serves as a local gateway for visitors to the Pennine Moors. The towers are skylined in views from visitors to the promoted Trans Pennine Trail car park, picnic area and walkers and cyclists on the Trans Pennine Trail National Cycle Route 62. The scale of visual impacts on the local community in and around Dunford Bridge is also considered to be high due to the proximity of the line and its elevated situation in relation to this settlement.'

Para 4.30 - 'At Dunford Bridge the high importance impacts of subsection 4ZO.2 could again only realistically be mitigated by undergrounding. The high importance impact on the visual amenity of the community of Dunford Bridge could potentially be reduced by screen planting in particular to filter views of the terminal tower that results in greatest impact. Localised planting may also help reduce the scale of impact on views from users of nearby national and regional trails including the Trans Pennine Trail and visitors to the Dunford Bridge car park. Elsewhere there may be opportunities for larger areas of additional woodland planting to further enhance the landscape.'

Visual Impact Provision Project - Peak District National Park Stakeholder Workshop, 24th March, 2015, Report of Meeting

Para 6.2 Dunford Bridge

- Tourist impact - the area could do with being developed.
- Eyesore in Dunford - Terminal tower and sealing end compounds above the village.
- Old sidings on railway - plans to be developed into wildlife area.
- Corridor wider - so option to avoid the trail.
- Horrendous sealing end compound.
- Do undergrounding in the worst part and then lower height towers.
- Dilemma is where would you site a new sealing end compound?
- Following railway route
 - finish east of Hazlehead - there is a conifer area where sealing end could go.
 - 4ZO.1 - not an area of severest impact and is out of identified areas.
- Socio-economic impact quite large - would make a massive improvement.

- The £24m Landscape Enhancement Initiative fund could also be used to add further value.
- Dunford Bridge community benefit.
- Perception of the edge of the National Park and setting - would create a more natural setting.
- There would be lots of local support - would welcome it.
- Summary
 - Move the terminal tower - some questions of where moved to?
 - Positive community benefit and would be welcomed

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2 Feb 2016