

3 Environmental Impact Assessment

Screening and Scoping

- 3.1 A screening opinion was originally requested from Gwynedd Council 15th December 2015 (Gwynedd Council are taking the role of Lead Authority and are also representing Snowdonia National Park Authority for the purposes of the Proposed Project). The screening opinion received (8th February 2016) concluded *‘that insufficient information was provided in order for the Local Planning Authority to adopt a formal opinion’*.
- 3.2 Further discussions between Gwynedd Council, Snowdonia National Park and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) identified the desire to have a joint Screening and Scoping Report which provides further information on the Proposed Project, any mitigation measures proposed at the outset and the method of environmental assessment that would take place.
- 3.3 Under the terms of The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Wales) Regulations 2017 (hereon referred to as the EIA Regulations) and The Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 (as amended) (hereon referred to as the Marine EIA Regulations), the Proposed Project does not fall under Schedule 1; and therefore a mandatory EIA is not required.
- 3.4 Similarly, the Proposed Project does not obviously fall within any of the categories of development outlined in Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations/Marine EIA Regulations. However, planning guidance¹ states that it should not be presumed that developments falling below the Schedule 2 thresholds could never give rise to significant effects, especially where the development is in an environmentally sensitive location. The fundamental test to be applied in each case is whether that particular type of development and its specific impacts are likely, in that particular location, to result in significant effects on the environment.
- 3.5 Given the above, consideration has been given as to whether the Proposed Project may give rise to significant environmental effects, such that an EIA may be required.
- 3.6 Although the removal of Pylons 4ZC030R (replacement), the foundations of the previous 4ZC030 and 4ZC031 fall within a statutory designated site, based on studies and consultation undertaken to date, National Grid is of the opinion that the Project does not constitute formal EIA development.
- 3.7 National Grid proposes to prepare an Environmental Assessment Report to accompany the planning application for the Project. The Environmental Assessment Report would cover all elements of the Project commensurate with that of a formal Environmental Statement demonstrating how it intends to meet its environmental responsibilities.
- 3.8 This Screening and Scoping Report has been prepared in order to identify the potential impacts and issues relating to the Proposed Project and aims to:
- Outline the Proposed Project;
 - Summarise the assessment work already undertaken and that which is ongoing;
 - Describe the baseline conditions where they are known;
 - Set out the proposed assessment methodology, identification of potential impacts and proposed mitigation; and
 - Identify issues to be scoped out.

¹ Welsh Office Circular, Circular 11/99, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), 1999

- 3.9 This report provides information to support a formal Screening Opinion request to Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park Authority under Regulation 5 of the EIA Regulations, and to NRW under Regulation 11 of the Marine EIA Regulations, in relation to the Proposed Project.
- 3.10 The report also provides Gwynedd Council, Snowdonia National Park Authority, and NRW with the opportunity to comment on the proposed scope of the environmental assessment for the Project which will subsequently be reported in a single Environmental Assessment Report. The Environmental Assessment Report would be submitted to accompany a planning application and marine licence application for the Proposed Project.

Planning Permission and Permitted Development

- 3.11 Subject to the screening opinion, a planning application will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for the compounds enclosing the extended SEC and tunnel head house works at Garth and the new SEC and tunnel head house at Cilfor (including any permanent access to these sites) under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 3.12 National Grid has permitted development rights under Schedule 2, Part 17, Class G(a) and (f) of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (the GPDO), subject to restrictions and conditions. Dependent on the Screening Opinion the following elements are covered by the GPDO and can be constructed under permitted development rights - Garth SEC extension, connecting cable to the tunnel head house and the tunnel construction. The detail of the consenting regime is provided in Appendix 1 of the accompanying Screening letter.
- 3.13 National Grid is of the opinion that the tunnelling works described are permitted.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 3.14 The UK is bound by the terms of the EC Habitats Directive, the EC Birds Directive and the Ramsar Convention. The aim of the Habitats Directive is to conserve natural habitats and wild species across Europe by establishing a network of sites known as Natura 2000 sites. Under Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive, an appropriate assessment is required if the 'plan or project' is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, either alone or in combination with other projects.
- 3.15 The Dwyrdd Estuary is designated at an international level as part of the Lleyn Peninsula and the Sarnau (Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau) European Marine Site encompassing Lleyn Peninsula and the Sarnau (Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau) Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).
- 3.16 The requirements for Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) screening across the Proposed Project will be discussed with NRW.

Marine Licence

- 3.17 It is anticipated that two marine licence applications will be submitted to NRW post planning for the works within the Dwyrdd Estuary (within the marine environment) under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (MCAA) 2009. The first licence will be for the laying of the cable within the tunnel. The second licence will be for the pylon foundation removal including the dismantling of pylons (4ZC030R and 4ZC031), the removal of the foundations of the previously dismantled pylon 4ZC030, and the temporary access to enable the dismantling of pylon 4ZC032 (the pylon itself is within the terrestrial environment).

General Assessment Methodology

Establishing Baseline Conditions

- 3.18 The environmental assessment has commenced with the identification and review of information relating to known, or the likely presence of, environmental receptors and resources within a defined Study Area in order to determine their relative value, importance and/or sensitivity towards change.
- 3.19 Site surveys are currently being undertaken to verify and consolidate information gathered during the desk-based review, and to evaluate the relationships between specific environmental interests and their wider environmental value.
- 3.20 Study area extents vary in accordance with the environmental aspect/ topic being considered. For some topics, a study area has been defined as being relatively localised to the Proposed Project, while for others it has extended outward. The definition of each study area has been informed by a review of the relationship between the Proposed Project and the receiving environment, and reference to thresholds stipulated in topic-specific environmental assessment or best practice guidance.
- 3.21 Study Areas have been defined using an initial 'Area of Search for Permanent and Temporary Works' (see Figure 2.1) which was established in early project conception for data collection purposes to encompass the maximum extent of all temporary and permanent works associated with the Proposed Project. This, by its very nature is much larger than the area which will be affected by the Proposed Project.

Determination of Scope

- 3.22 Potential significant effects will be assessed for the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Project.
- 3.23 The current indicative programme is that, assuming planning consent, on site works would commence in 2020 and take approximately 4-5 years to complete.
- 3.24 Construction and decommissioning effects will often be temporary, short term effects.
- 3.25 With regard to landscape, the assessment of impacts extends to fifteen years after operation starts to take account of growth in planting where this is provided by the Proposed Project.
- 3.26 Operation is anticipated to last at least 40 years, in line with the design life of the electricity infrastructure.
- 3.27 The spatial scope of the assessment is the physical area over which changes to the environment are likely to occur as a result of the Proposed Project (the Study Area).

Predicting and Assessing Significance of Effects

- 3.28 There is no statutory definition of what constitutes a 'significant' effect within the EIA Regulations. The determination of the significance of the effects is crucial to informing the decision-making process. The process typically involves consideration of two aspects of a potential effect, namely the sensitivity or value of the receptor or resource, and the magnitude of the impact that is occurring. The following are examples of the criteria that will be used (where appropriate to the issue being addressed) to inform the assessment of the significance of an effect:
- Aspects relating to the receptor or resource:

- The value of the resource, based upon both empirical and intrinsic factors, and taking into account any legal or policy protection afforded, which is indicative of its value nationally or locally; and
- The sensitivity of the receptor or resource to change, for example is the receptor likely to acclimatise to the change, or return once the project is decommissioned, or will it be irretrievably affected or lost.
- Aspects relating to the magnitude of impact include the physical/ geographical scale of the impact, duration, frequency, and reversibility of the impact, the likely effectiveness of mitigation and whether the impact is direct or indirect.

3.29 A combination of the magnitude of the impact under consideration and the sensitivity or value of the receiving environment / receptor can be used in considering the overall significance of an effect. The general approach adopted for classifying effects is outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Classification of effects

Sensitivity / value of receptor	Magnitude of impact			
	High	Medium	Low	Very low
High	Major	Major	Moderate	Minor
Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
Low	Moderate	Minor	Negligible	Negligible
Very low	Minor	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

3.30 Further explanation of these significance levels is provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Significance Category Descriptions

Significance Category	Typical description
Major	<p>A large and detrimental change to a valuable/sensitive receptor; likely or apparent exceeding of accepted (often legal) threshold.</p> <p>A large and beneficial change, whereby the improvements to the baseline were previously poor conditions is replaced by new legal compliance or a major contribution is made to national targets.</p> <p>These effects may represent key factors in the decision-making process. Potentially associated with sites and features of national importance or likely to be important considerations at a regional or district scale. Major effects may relate to resources or features which are unique and which, if lost, cannot be replaced or relocated.</p>
Moderate	<p>A medium scale change which, although not beyond an accepted threshold, is still considered to be generally unacceptable, unless</p>

Significance Category	Typical description
	<p>balanced out by other significant positive benefits of a project. Likely to be in breach of planning policy, rather than legal statute.</p> <p>These effects, if adverse, are likely to be important at a local scale and on their own could have a material influence on decision making. A positive moderate effect is a medium scale change that is significant in that the baseline conditions are improved to the extent that guideline targets are contributed to.</p>
Minor	<p>A small change that, whilst adverse, does not exceed legal or guideline standards. Unlikely to breach of planning policy.</p> <p>A small positive change, but not one that is likely to be a key factor in the overall balance of issues.</p> <p>These effects may be raised as local issues and may be of relevance in the detailed design of the project, but are unlikely to be critical in the decision making process.</p>
Negligible	<p>A very small change that is so small and unimportant that it is considered acceptable to disregard. Effects which are beneath levels of perception, within normal bounds of variation or within the margin of forecasting error, these effects are unlikely to influence decision making, irrespective of other effects.</p>

- 3.31 For the purposes of the environmental assessment, moderate and major effects will be considered to be significant, unless otherwise stated in the technical assessment methodology. Each discipline has further refined the above typical criteria for assessing significance based on relevant standards / guidelines for the particular discipline. An explanation of the specific criteria used for the assessment of individual discipline are set out in the technical assessment methodologies (where appropriate).

Mitigation

- 3.32 Mitigation typically fall into one of two categories as follows:

- Primary or 'embedded' mitigation measures developed through the iterative design process that have become integrated mainstream components of the design of the Proposed Project. The following measures have already been embedded into the design of the Project:
 - Standard/ best practice construction practices for avoiding and minimising environmental effects
 - Pylon removal will take place outside of the winter bird season
- Secondary mitigation measures which are designed to address any significant adverse effects remaining after primary measures and standard construction practices.

- 3.33 Appropriate mitigation measures for the Proposed Project will be identified as part of the environmental assessment.

Residual Effects

- 3.34 Residual effects are the effects of the Proposed Project on the environment which remain having taken account of mitigation measures. The environmental assessment will identify all residual effects.

Cumulative Effects

- 3.35 Cumulative effects can be defined under the two categories identified in the IEMA 2011 Special Report on 'The State of Environmental Impact Assessment in the UK' (IEMA, 2011). These are inter-project effects and intra-project effects. These two types of cumulative effects are explained below.
- **Inter-Project Effects:** The combined effects of the Proposed Project with other relevant projects which may, on an individual basis be insignificant but, together (i.e. cumulatively), have a significant effect.
 - **Intra-Project Effects:** The combined effects arising as a result of the Proposed Project, for example upon a single receptor or resource e.g. a local resident is affected by dust, noise and a loss of visual amenity during the construction of a project, with the result being a greater nuisance than each individual effect alone.
- 3.36 Cumulative effects will be considered as part of the environmental assessment.

Assessment of Alternatives

- 3.37 Reasonable alternatives to the design, technology, location, size and scale of the Proposed Project will be described within the Environmental Assessment Report.
- 3.38 It is not proposed to assess the "do-nothing" option. The purpose of the VIP project is to counter the existing negative effects of existing infrastructure on the visual amenity and landscapes of Snowdonia National Park.

Proposed Structure of the Environmental Assessment Report

- 3.39 The Environmental Assessment Report would comprise the following set of documents:
- Non Technical Summary (NTS)
 - Volume 1: Main Text – with the proposed chapter headings as follows:
 - Introduction: including general background information, description of the site and surroundings;
 - Approach to EIA: detailing the methodologies employed as part of the EIA and any issues agreed to be scoped out;
 - The Proposed Project (including the alternatives considered);
 - Planning Policy;
 - Consultation;
 - Technical Chapters
 - Volume 2: Figures – comprising the figures in A3 format
 - Volume 3: Technical Appendices.

Construction Environmental Management Plan

- 3.40 A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) would be prepared. This would present the general approach and application of environmental management and mitigation for the construction of the Proposed Project. The CEMP will ensure that adverse effects from the construction phase on the environment and local communities, are minimised.

Planning Policy

- 3.41 A planning policy context chapter will be prepared for inclusion in the Environmental Assessment Report. The chapter will include a general overview of the national and local planning policy framework of direct relevance to the Proposed Project and a more detailed examination of policies that relate to it. The area of search for permanent and temporary works lies within the administrative boundaries of both Gwynedd Council and Snowdonia National Park Authority.
- 3.42 Policies, Technical Advice Notes (TANs), other relevant guidance and legislation relating to technical aspects of the environmental assessment will also be listed specifically within each technical chapter, where necessary.

Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation

- 3.43 Consultation and stakeholder input has been integral to the design and development of the Proposed Project, identification of existing environmental constraints and sensitivities and identification of the likely environmental effects.
- 3.44 Under Section 38 and Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989, National Grid has a duty to have regard to the desirability of the preservation of amenity: the natural environment, cultural heritage, landscape and visual quality, as well as the effect of our works on communities.
- 3.45 The five Guiding Principles contained in the VIP Policy² document make specific reference to these aspects of the protected landscapes. In addition, National Grid's Stakeholder, Community and Amenity Policy³ sets out a commitment to meet this duty.
- 3.46 A chapter in the Environmental Assessment Report will be dedicated to stakeholder engagement. Below is a summary of stakeholder engagement activity undertaken to date and that intended.

Early engagement on the VIP project

- 3.47 National Grid's VIP project has been stakeholder-driven from the outset. Both National Grid and Ofgem have always maintained that for the project to succeed, it is vital that stakeholders play an ongoing central role in helping to identify those areas and existing OHLs which would benefit most.
- 3.48 The Stakeholder Advisory Group was established in April 2014 and comprises an independent group of stakeholder organisations.
- 3.49 The members advise the project on key decisions and on the most effective ways to engage with local stakeholders. In the same way at a local level, an independent Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) has been established in each priority area, including Snowdonia. The Snowdonia Stakeholder Reference Group includes Snowdonia National Park Authority,

²<https://www.nationalgrid.com/sites/default/files/documents/37295-Policy%20document.pdf>

³https://www.nationalgrid.com/sites/default/files/documents/National%20Grid_s%20commitments%20when%20undertaking%20work%20in%20the%20UK.pdf

Cadw, Gwynedd Council, Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, Natural Resources Wales and the National Trust. The input of local people from local enthusiasts to residents and technical experts has been sought throughout the project using the majority of techniques recommended in the Snowdonia National Park Authority's Community Involvement Scheme, as detailed in the '*Eryri Local Development Plan Delivery Agreement*'⁴ (July 2016).

- 3.50 In its guidance for consulting on planning applications, the government notes that early involvement of local communities, local authorities and statutory consultees can bring about significant benefits for all parties.⁵

Early stakeholder engagement: 2015

- 3.51 The aim of early engagement was to gather information and intelligence on the area to inform the options assessment and to gauge local attitudes and opinions to the Proposed Project.
- 3.52 National Grid's intention was to work closely with the Snowdonia National Park Authority to present a collaborative, inclusive partnership approach to the local community. An initial scoping meeting for this early engagement work was held between National Grid and the Snowdonia National Park Authority and an overall approach to engagement discussed. As a result, an early engagement programme was developed that involved:
- A technical workshop in January 2015 for key representatives from Snowdonia National Park Authority and other key statutory bodies identified by the authority. These included representatives from the Snowdonia National Park Authority, Cadw and Natural Resources Wales. This group formed a Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) for the project.
 - A bi-lingual public drop-in event on 27th January.
 - Engagement with Llyr Gruffydd AM, Liz Saville-Roberts MP and ward councillors for Trawsfynydd and Penrhyndeudraeth, as well as further officials at Gwynedd Council.
 - Technical feedback from the Snowdonia SRG, along with the opinions of local people and other non-technical groups who attended the drop-in session was then fed into the 'Options Appraisal Study'⁶ prepared for Snowdonia.
 - A second meeting of the SRG (technical stakeholders) took place on 13th August. Following the incorporation of further stakeholder feedback, the 'Options Appraisal Study' for Snowdonia was then presented to the Stakeholder Advisory Group in September 2015 and formed one of the documents that informed the Group's decision on the priority projects to be taken forward on of which was the section of OHL (4ZC) running from Garth SEC near Minffordd across the Dwyryd Estuary.
- 3.53 Following the shortlisting announcement, the VIP team, its appointed environmental consultants and consents team undertook further liaison with the Snowdonia National Park Authority, Gwynedd Council, key members of the SRG and other relevant technical organisations to explore potential options further. Specifically, the following activity took place in 2016:
- Further Stakeholder Advisory Group meetings undertaken in April 2016, September 2016 and December 2016.
 - Third and fourth meetings of the Snowdonia SRG on 26th April and 8th September respectively.

⁴http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/772936/DeliveryAgreementFinal-2016.pdf

⁵See the CLG Guidance note '[Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the Pre Application Process](#)', (para 18)

⁶http://snowdonia.nationalgrid.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/150915_Snowdonia_DOR.pdf

- Bi-lingual public drop-in events on 14th July and 16th July which attracted 100 attendees.
- A meeting with the Snowdonia Society on Thursday 8th September.
- Ongoing meetings with landowners.

3.54 To date, the further engagement programme has involved:

- Meetings of the Stakeholder Advisory Group in April 2017, November 2017 and February 2018.
- Fifth and sixth meetings of the technical SRG on 18th September 2017 and 3rd July 2018. Representatives from the Penrhyndeudraeth town council and the Maentwrog and Trawsfynydd and the Talsarnau and Harlech community councils were invited to join the Group in April 2018 to ensure it captures a comprehensive spectrum of local knowledge and insight.
- Meetings with the sub group of the SRG stakeholders regarding pylon and potential foundation removal methods within the Dwyrdd Estuary.
- The launch of a dedicated, bi-lingual website (Snowdonia.nationalgrid.co.uk) in February 2017.
- Individual briefings with Gwynedd ward councillors for Penrhyndeudraeth and Talsarnau and Harlech in July 2017 to update them on the Proposed Project.
- A presentation to Penrhyndeudraeth Town Council on 4th July 2017 by the VIP project team, with specific reference to plans to use a car park owned by the council as a base for National Grid during ongoing works.
- A presentation to Talsarnau Community Council on 14th July 2017 to inform councillors about the Proposed Project and forthcoming geophysical surveys.
- A presentation to the ward councillor for Trawsfynydd and Maentwrog and Maentwrog Community Council on 31st October 2017, updating them on the Proposed Project.
- Direct engagement with local residents, businesses, community groups and other interested parties with updates pertaining to specific works, including mailouts to over 1,600 addresses in August 2017 and May 2018 to give notification of ground investigation works and further surveys in the Dwyrdd Estuary.

EIA-specific consultation

- 3.55 Consultation with statutory consultees and other organisations has taken place to obtain environmental data.
- 3.56 Ahead of the submission of a planning application to the Snowdonia National Park Authority in early 2019, National Grid will undertake a further round of consultation. This will include more detail than we have been able to present to date and also address issues raised locally including disruption during construction, traffic management and site restoration.
- 3.57 A chapter detailing consultation activity will be included as part of the Environmental Assessment Report. This will identify feedback from stakeholders and demonstrate the steps National Grid has taken to incorporate stakeholder input into its proposals.