



Undergrounding for Visual Amenity

scheme selection and design process



UNDERGROUNDING FOR VISUAL AMENITY

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Cover illustration : Beacon Fell, Forest of Bowland NL

This page : Bela Bridge, Arnside & Silverdale NL

1. Executive summary

Since the inception of the undergrounding for visual amenity programme in 2005, we have been keen to support its implementation and have worked with regional partners to ensure its success.

The programme is fundamentally based on the wishes and priorities of representatives of the Designated Areas within our region. As such, we have always striven to make it easy for our partners to access the information and expertise they need in order to make informed choices regarding priorities for undergrounding. We intend to maintain and build on this commitment in the RIIO-ED2 period (2024-2028) such that stakeholders can interact with us in a constructive manner, consistent with our aspiration to fully spend our programme entitlement in the period.

This document sets out our process for scheme selection and design and updates the previous version of this process published in July 2016.

The following sections detail our current process for reviewing and implementing proposed sites for undergrounding, together with the types of assistance that we will continue to make available to our partners.

2. Background

The Undergrounding for Visual Amenity (UVA) programme was established in 2005 as part of the DPCR4 (2005-2010) price control review and has continued under subsequent price controls including the current RIIO-ED2 (2024-2028) period. Under the scheme, Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) such as Electricity North West are entitled to recover expenditure incurred on undergrounding overhead lines in National Parks and National Landscapes (NLs) (collectively known as 'Designated Areas'). Each DNO has a maximum entitlement based on the relative length of line it has in qualifying areas which is set in advance of the price control period commencing.

Participation in the scheme is voluntary; hence funding is not granted in the form of up-front allowances, but recompensed after the work has taken place.

We have three National Parks and four National Landscapes either wholly or partially within our region. The lengths of overhead line within each area by voltage as at 31 March 2023 were as follows:

	Overhead line length (km)					%
	LV	HV	33kV	132kV	Total	
Arnside & Silverdale	27.7	43.8	10.2	0.0	81.7	2
Forest of Bowland	108.1	494.4	35.9	6.0	645.1	18
North Pennines	38.6	179.0	14.9	0.0	232.6	7
Solway Coast	18.1	67.1	2.1	6.3	93.6	3
Lake District	216.5	1,108.3	112.9	122.6	1,560.3	44
Peak District	56.4	209.1	10.7	2.6	278.8	8
Yorkshire Dales	85.0	484.7	59.6	0.0	629.3	18
	550.4	2,586.4	246.2	138.3	3,521.3	100

Initial allocations of funding by area are based on a simple pro rata of the total entitlement by the relative proportions above.

Priorities for undergrounding sites are suggested by our regional stakeholder parties, assessed using the process outlined in this document and, where viable, converted into construction schemes and implemented.

3. Programme co-ordination

We host regular regional steering group meetings at our local offices where we discuss new proposed schemes, review the progress of individual projects and the programme as a whole, addressing any issues arising.

An annual stakeholder meeting is hosted at Preston to review the overall programme and enables the group to share their successes and future priorities and policy developments and emerging national news within the undergrounding programme. The group is able to monitor the criteria used for prioritising lines for undergrounding and promote consistency across the programme. In addition, the group reviews national developments, monitors approaches used in other areas and discusses appropriate regulatory support.

3.1 Assistance offered to regional partners

We are aware that many of the partner organisations are under extreme financial and resource pressure and aim to facilitate the programme as best we can.

In terms of the identification of sites, where requested we provide detailed, marked up maps in either electronic or hard copy form for survey purposes. This eases the survey process for the partners and enables us to assimilate the results more easily.

We have a number of skilled project managers who maintain day-to-day liaison with partners as appropriate.

Our project managers and Land Rights and Consents officers are on hand to advise on any likely issues relating to specific sites and often meet area representatives on site as part of the survey process.

These project managers also provide 'hands-on' assistance for the partners in the form of training for assessment volunteers and representation to local communities e.g. at Parish Council meetings, to explain details of the work proposed.

When projects progress to construction, we assist with facilities such as press & public relations, photographic recording etc., as well as liaising with and co-ordinating any other relevant experts and stakeholders (e.g. archaeologists, the Environment Agency and local councils).

At project completion we co-ordinate press releases and media opportunities and provide support as appropriate to our partner organisations to publicise the benefits of the work carried out.

Where a partner identifies a requirement for funded external support, this can be facilitated subject to appropriate governance arrangements being proposed, with the resulting funding being deducted from the allocation to the area requesting the support.

4. Process

4.1 Identifying regional partners

There are a number of organisations with interest in and responsibility for issues within Designated Areas. To enable a clear process of identification, prioritisation and implementation, we formed a steering group with representatives of the National Park Authorities (NPA) and NL partnerships as the organisations with the clearest accountability for issues within the Designated Areas. Two of these partners (Lake District and Peak District National Park Authorities) agreed that the Friends volunteer organisations associated with their areas would be included and hence a regional steering group of nine organisations and ourselves was formed.

The members of the Steering Group and their contact details are as follows;

Partner body	Area	Contact
The Arnside and Silverdale NL Partnership	Arnside and Silverdale NL	info@arnsidesilverdale.org.uk
Forest of Bowland NL Partnership	Forest of Bowland NL	bowland@lancashire.gov.uk
Lake District NPA	Lake District NP	hq@lakedistrict.gov.uk
Friends of the Lake District		info@fld.org.uk
North Pennines NL Partnership	North Pennines NL	info@northpennines.org.uk
Peak District NPA	Peak District NP	customer.service@peakdistrict.gov.uk
Friends of the Peak District		mail@friendsofthepeak.org.uk
Solway Coast NL Partnership	Solway Coast NL	info@solwaycoast.org.uk .
Yorkshire Dales NPA	Yorkshire Dales NP	info@yorkshiredales.org.uk

We arrange and host regular meetings of this group to discuss progress on specific projects, programme priorities and any other issues arising, including policy developments and publicity.

If other individuals or organisations wish to make representations to us regarding specific localities, they are encouraged to liaise with the relevant NPA or NL partnership organisation in the first instance.

4.2 Identifying potential sites

As an initial planning assumption, we pro-rate the entitlement in line with the relative length of line in each area. The partner organisations use this as their planning assumption and work out priorities within an overall funding constraint. Where appropriate, the Steering Group can agree the re-allocation of funds between areas on a consensual basis.

In terms of identifying specific potential sites, we rely on the priorities identified by the programme partners. To ensure the most effective use of their time and resources, we provide maps relating to any identified areas of interest showing our existing network. These can then

be used in conjunction with standard assessment forms which have been developed in conjunction with our partners to 'score' potential sites.

Where there are areas which are likely to be automatically rejected (eg recently installed lines, areas of granite bedrock or of special engineering difficulty), these are highlighted in order to prevent abortive survey work.

Following assessment, either by their own staff or volunteers, the partners send proposed sites to us for review.

4.3 Assessing potential sites

Where possible, we look to progress the proposals submitted by the programme partners. We do not form a view on the relative visual amenity benefit of schemes, only look to see if there are any issues which may cause excessive cost, delay or disruption to scheme implementation.

When we receive requests from the partners, we assess lines for suitability for undergrounding based on the following criteria.

- Date of installation or major refurbishment of the line
- Any particular engineering difficulties to be overcome
- Land accessibility
- Areas of environmental or wildlife significance
- Archaeological sites
- Known wayleave issues
- Suitable routes for underground cable

Lines built or refurbished within the last 15 years are normally rejected for undergrounding due to the cost of writing off relatively new assets. However, where the majority of the line is greater than 15 years old or the line in question is particularly visually intrusive, we may agree to underground some or all of the line.

Where significant examples of the following issues are identified when a line is assessed for undergrounding, it is likely that the line will be deemed unsuitable to progress for undergrounding:

- Engineering difficulties e.g. large amounts of rock in the area, major river crossings along the proposed underground cable route, road or rail closures to lay cable
- Land access problems
- Areas of particular environmental or wildlife significance
- Archaeological sites
- Known wayleaves issues
- No suitable routes for replacement underground cable

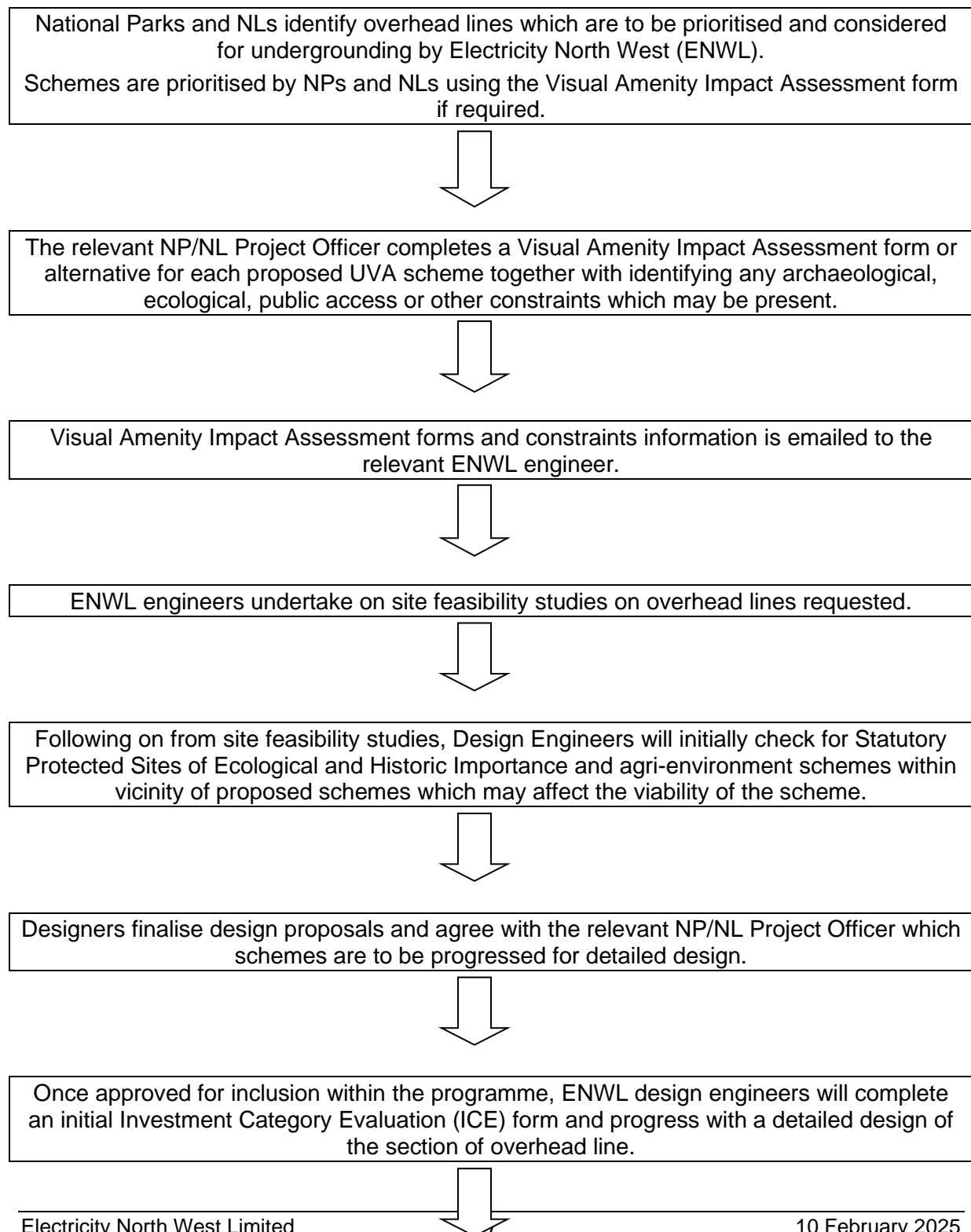
We leave the trade-off of cost versus length undergrounded to the partners. For example, if an area wished to spend all its entitlement on one specific, expensive scheme due to its perception of the environmental benefit, we would progress it subject to there being no insuperable construction, consent or engineering difficulties.

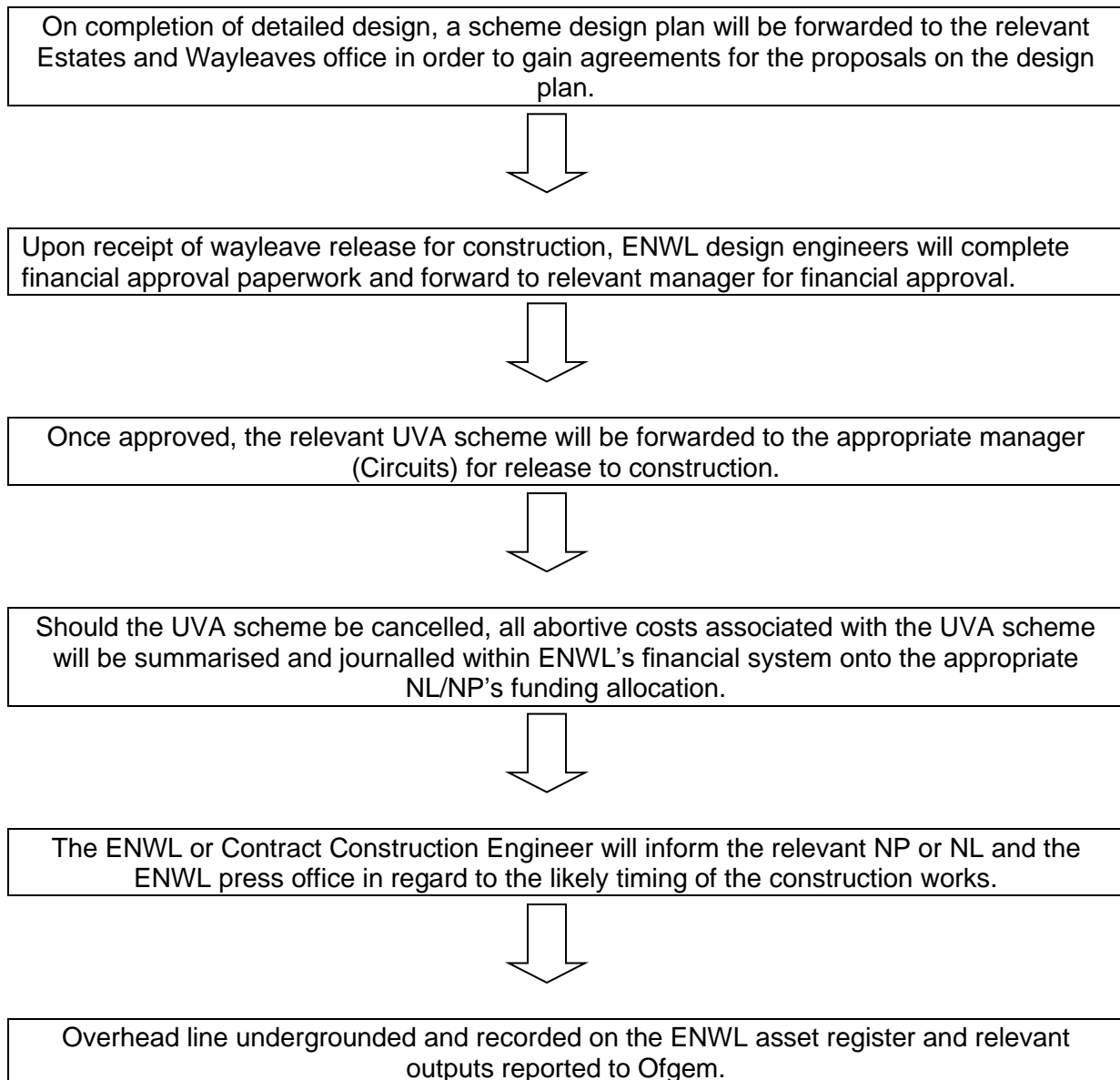
On occasion, we may propose locations to the partner bodies based on potential synergies with other planned works in the vicinity or where we are intervening on overhead lines for other purposes which could potentially be undergrounded through the deployment of undergrounding funding.

Following assessment and consideration of the various factors identified, we will identify to the partner organisation whether there are any reasons why the project is unsuitable for undergrounding. We will also supply an indicative cost to allow the partner to prioritise the project within their overall programme, taking into account the length of line to be undergrounded and the length of cable to be laid to replace the overhead lines

If the partner wishes to progress an individual project, they give us formal agreement for us to proceed with the project.

This process is summarised below;





5. Contacts

For further information on the Undergrounding for Visual Amenity process, please contact;

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