

Putting overhead lines underground

Ofgem have allowed electricity distribution network operators (DNOs) to place existing overhead lines underground within designated areas for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). This programme was introduced in 2005 as part of the current Price Control Review.

The funds are aimed to address areas which have high impact on the visual amenity of the area. The current scheme allows around 1.5 per cent of the networks in National Parks and AONBs to be changed to underground cables, at an average cost of £100,000 per km. Allowances were set based on customer research on willingness to pay. In selecting locations, DNOs must demonstrate they have taken account of advice from local environmental groups and/or planning bodies

The scheme has been widely adopted and well received by stakeholders, who feel there is a need to continue. They see important benefits in terms of visual amenity in protected areas and for stakeholder relations.

SSEPD has received a good response from the National Parks and other bodies and would favour continuing the current scheme. There has been some delay in getting these projects jointly identified and initiated. Longer term certainty of this area of work needs to be provided to ensure continuity of works.

A number of existing high priority schemes have not been viable within the maximum unit prices proposed by Ofgem. We believe that there should be more flexibility of unit rates to ensure that the best schemes can proceed.