

Eyesore pylons ruining UK's countryside to be taken down at cost of £7m EACH to reverse poor planning decisions

Power lines will be buried underground in £500 million National Grid scheme

But huge cost of engineering work means only 65 pylons will be dismantled

Eight year scheme expected to cost the average household 22p a year

It has not yet been decided which pylons will be the ones removed

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Eyesore electricity pylons which blight some of the UK's most spectacular countryside are to be removed at a cost of £7 million each.

Power lines will be buried underground as part of the £500 million National Grid scheme which aims to reverse some of the damage done by the poor planning decisions of the past.

But such is the enormous cost of the engineering work required that the fund – which will ultimately be paid for by electricity customers – only has enough money to dismantle 65 pylons.

That figure is fewer than 1 in 20 of the 1,500 structures that currently stand in national parks and areas of outstanding national beauty.

The eight year scheme is expected to cost the average household 22p a year.

It has not yet been decided which pylons will be the ones to be removed.

But yesterday a shortlist was published identifying 12 sections of overhead lines where the pylons are deemed to have the worst impact on the environment.

They are in four national parks - the Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia, the New Forest and the Peak District — and four areas of outstanding natural beauty — Dorset, High Weald, Tamar Valley and the North Wessex Downs.

But the huge costs expected to be taken up in the process of negotiating with landowners and digging the wide trenches required to bury the cables mean that only a fraction of the pylons in these scenic landscapes can be dealt with.

And, controversially, there is no money left in the pot for other beauty spots including the Lake District and South Downs National Parks, and the Cotswolds, Chilterns and Blackdown Hills.

Feasibility tests undertaken in early 2015 will decide exactly which pylons should be removed, with the first dismantling work set to begin in 2019.

Two pylons which straddle the Tamar Valley, blighting a large section of the area between Devon and Cornwall, have been viewed to be among the worst offenders and may be the first to be removed.

At the centre of the decision making process is an advisory group including representatives from the National Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Ramblers walking charity.

Crucially the public, although they will in effect be footing the bill, will not be consulted on which pylons to remove.

Chris Baines, an environmentalist, author and broadcaster who chairs the group, said the biggest problem faced by the panel was the realisation that there simply wasn't enough money in the scheme.

National Grid had originally recommended spending £1.1 billion on removing pylons but Ofgem, the energy watchdog, cut the budget to £500 million.

Speaking to the Times, Mr Baines said: 'Having thought, 'Gosh, £500 million is a huge amount of money for national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty', the big surprise for the panel was waking up to the cost of the extreme engineering solutions and realising it is not going to stretch very far.

'Sixty years ago, when these lines were put through, attitudes and values were different. This is a chance to go back and remedy the situation.

'We would like this to be the first of a series of similar commitments.'