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WEYMOUTH: Goodbye power pylons?

OVERHEAD power cables could disappear from parts of West Dorset as the National Grid start to reduce their impact on the landscape.

The Dorset Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), have welcomed the move and have suggested local people lobby the National Grid to keep Dorset on the short-list for putting the lines underground.

"The pylons really are ugly. Many people will be aware of the line close to the coast just inland of the coast near Weymouth, but there are others as well," said Linda Williams of the CPRE.

The National Grid has put aside £500m, made available by energy industry regulator Ofgem until 2021, to bury, screen, or re-route high voltage cables away from beauty spots.

Among other contenders for early investment are sites in the New Forest, Brecon Beacons, the Peak District and Snowdonia and four areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) including Dorset, the High Weald, the North Wessex Downs, and the Tamar Valley.

Sarah Harris from National Grid said: "Initially we assessed 571 km of transmission lines of our overhead lines in AONBs and national parks.

"We then had independent consultants physically walk the power lines in question to look from all viewpoints and see where was the biggest impact.

"We will now do further studies on all the sites that have been identified to see what's best to do in each individual site."

An advisory group is helping to make the final decision. The group includes the Campaign for National Parks, the CPRE, English Heritage, Natural England and the National Trust.

Nick Clack, senior energy campaigner at CPRE, said: "This is a really positive step in reducing the impact of existing overhead electricity lines in our most valued countryside.

"Given these welcome efforts to mitigate the impact of existing lines, National Grid needs to make sure it is doing all it can to reduce the impact of new ones.

"Close consultation and co-operation should be applied across all regulated industries so that landscape impacts arising from big infrastructure projects are properly considered and funding is provided at the outset."