



THE WAY FORWARD

Outline of NIE Networks' investment plans, 2017-2024



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At NIE Networks, we have spent the last year listening to you - our customers and stakeholders - on what you would like the electricity network to deliver in the future. We believe we have achieved a good balance and geographic spread of views from domestic and business customers which have helped us to understand what you want and importantly what you would be willing to pay for.

Reports detailing all of the engagement work including the costs and details of proposed work programmes in 'Have your say' are available at nienetworks.co.uk/haveyoursay

By the end of June 2016, NIE Networks will submit its plans to the Utility Regulator for approval. The Utility Regulator has already stated that your views should be an important element in deciding what the future plans should deliver.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

We are currently working on the detail of our investment plans, which will provide specific information on all work programmes we intend to carry out between 2017-2024. This detail is important as you, the Utility Regulator and other groups should be able to fully understand the work we intend to carry out, how much it will cost and the benefits it will deliver.

It is too soon to provide you with precise details of the plan. However as your views have helped to shape it, we would like to share a broad overview at this stage.

We will be splitting our delivery plan for 2017-2024 into two sections:

- A core investment plan – the essential work that we believe is required to deliver the key outputs that customers want and meet our legal requirements.
- Optional programmes – work which we believe will bring further benefits to customers and deliver more reliable networks in the longer term.

OUR CORE PLAN & WHAT IT WILL DELIVER FOR YOU

The outputs detailed below represent our core plan.

The decision to include them is based on the following considerations:

- Were domestic customers surveyed widely supportive?
- Were business customers surveyed widely supportive?
- Are they necessary to ensure the network is legally compliant?
- Will they improve the service provided to customers?



Safety: minimising risks to the public, employees and contractors

Although essential, electricity is inherently dangerous and we must take steps to identify and minimise risks the electricity network could pose. We propose to continue investing to keep the network safe and maintained, meeting our legal obligations. We will also ensure the network is secure, visible and out of reach by continuing our public education programme, complying with our legal obligations and enhancing security at a number of substations.



Maintain networks to provide 'reliable & available' electricity daily

We will continue our investment programme to maintain the reliability of the electricity network. As an accredited asset management organisation, we're committed to updating our equipment when it reaches 'end of serviceable life'. Approximately 6.5% of Northern Ireland's electricity network will need to be replaced between 2017-2024. We will also continue our work to clear vegetation from the network. These programmes keep the network safe and delivers a reliable service for customers.



Continue to deliver a 24/7 fault & emergency service for power cuts

We will continue to deliver an all day, every day service to deal with power cuts - making repairs and keeping customers up to date on what's happening. We will also focus on reducing the time people are without electricity due to power cuts and continue to develop our severe weather emergency plans and support agreements with other network companies to manage major escalations where large numbers of customers are without electricity.



Develop networks to provide 'reliable and available' electricity during severe weather

We will protect over 70,000 homes and businesses from the risk of power cuts due to flooding by building defences in over 200 substations.



Reduce our environmental impact

We will focus on increasing the environmental efficiency of our business by reducing our carbon footprint, taking steps to minimise the risk of leaks from equipment failure and by continuing to strive towards environmental excellence through our management and compliance programmes.



Provide excellent customer service

Most customers say that they still want to talk to us over the phone but many younger customers have requested more online and social media information. We will be delivering better services for internet-enabled mobile phones and more proactive information for all customers. We will also deliver our guaranteed and overall customer standards of performance and continue to provide our critical care register for more vulnerable customers.



Connections: provide an excellent service

We will be speeding up the process for all customers wishing to connect to the electricity network – someone building a house, an expanding business or a major wind farm development. To improve customer service we will put in place key account managers for major customers and increase online 'self-service' facilities. Building on experience from outside Northern Ireland we will deliver new ways to connect renewable generators where the grid is currently at capacity.



Sustainability: facilitating a low-carbon economy

The demands on electricity networks are changing to help tackle climate change. The plan will set out options to develop smarter network solutions which facilitate the connection of low carbon technologies.



Ongoing engagement with customers

We want you to help us make decisions on an ongoing basis. Our role is to deliver safe and reliable networks which deliver power to you at a cost that everyone can afford. We need your input to prioritise which elements of our work you believe are most important and most valued.

OPTIONAL PROGRAMMES

The outputs detailed below are additional options beyond the core plan and relate to specific service improvements. They received some support from customers but there were also reservations about paying more for these services.

The decision to include them as additional investments is based on the following considerations:

- Were domestic customers surveyed widely supportive?
- Were business customers surveyed widely supportive?
- Are they necessary to ensure the network is legally compliant?
- Will they improve the service provided to customers?



Reducing the impact of severe weather

If this project is approved, it would protect more customers – particularly those in rural areas – from power cuts caused by severe weather. It includes strengthening the 11kV network in upland areas to manage the risk of ice accretion. It also includes clearing trees within falling distance of the network on a 20 rather than 25 year cycle and increasing our substation defences in addition to what is included in our core plan.



Reducing unplanned power cuts

If this proposal proceeds it would improve the service for those customers most affected by longer or more frequent power cuts. It would increase the number of fault & emergency teams, identify specific parts of the network we need to strengthen and trial 'smart' technology to improve network performance.

AREAS NOT INCLUDED IN OUR PLANS

The programmes detailed below will not be included in our business plan as they received low levels of support and are non-essential.

The decision to exclude them is based on the following considerations:



Were domestic customers surveyed widely supportive?

Were business customers surveyed widely supportive?

Are they necessary to ensure the network is legally compliant?

Will they improve the service provided to customers?

- **Undergrounding overhead lines in areas of outstanding natural beauty**

We proposed undergrounding up to 65 kilometres of overhead electricity lines in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and tourism sites. There are currently 3,500 kilometres of 11kV lines in these areas.

- **Undergrounding overhead lines in urban areas**

We proposed undergrounding up to 39 kilometres of overhead electricity lines within 30mph limits in towns and villages. There are currently 1,500 kilometres of 11kV lines in these areas.

- **Resolution of bird fouling issues on customers' properties by undergrounding overhead lines**

We proposed developing 30 underground cable schemes to resolve customer issues where birds perch on overhead electricity lines running over homes or gardens and cause a fouling problem. NIE Networks receives about 100 complaints per year on this issue.

NEXT STEPS



We will be contacting a sample of people and organisations who have fed into this investment planning process to understand if you feel our approach summarises your views. If you would like to talk to us about it, you can email haveyoursay@nienetworks.co.uk or call the independent market research company, Perceptive Insight, on Freephone 0333 323 9696.



Once we are confident we have captured your feedback, we will be submitting our plans to the Utility Regulator. It will provide full details of our core and optional investment programmes, customer benefits and costs. The Utility Regulator will then carry out its own consultation with stakeholders and customers and you will have a further opportunity to input your views.



It is expected that there will be a final decision on our plans in early 2017 and we will start to deliver it from October 2017.



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