

Offshore windfarm cables 'will cause sci-fi horror of towers and wires'

March of the super-pylons

By Valerie Elliott

VAST swathes of the British countryside are set to be blighted by hundreds of 'super-pylons' needed to carry electricity from offshore windfarms to the National Grid.

Celebrities including Bill Bryson, Carol Vorderman and Griff Rhys Jones have united against the plans – which fellow campaigners say would leave many famous beauty spots 'looking like a sci-fi horror of metal towers and wires'.

Cherished views in areas of outstanding natural beauty from the Lake District to Snowdonia to the Mendip Hills will be scarred by the National Grid's intention to build nearly 1,000 of the 160ft pylons.

Rural campaigners are now demanding the Government orders that the 300 miles of new cabling, some of which is also required to link new nuclear power stations to the National Grid, is buried under-

ground. Bill Bryson, president of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), said the plan was 'crazy'.

He added: 'Tens of thousands of pylons already march across our countryside. We don't need to add still more – we can and should start to put a number of existing lines underground or under the sea.'

Details of the pylons – which would be built before 2020 – were slipped out in a little-noticed National Grid document before Christmas.

The Coalition had already floated the idea of watering down the planning rules that say pylons should not be built in conservation and tourism areas – suggesting that in future, regulators should be required only to 'bear [the rules] in mind'.

Critics say this gives power com-

panies no incentive to avoid damaging scars on the countryside.

Paul Miner, the CPRE's senior planning campaigner, said: 'Now is the best opportunity we've had for a generation to get National Grid to change its ways and stop plastering our finest countryside with 160ft-high pylons.'

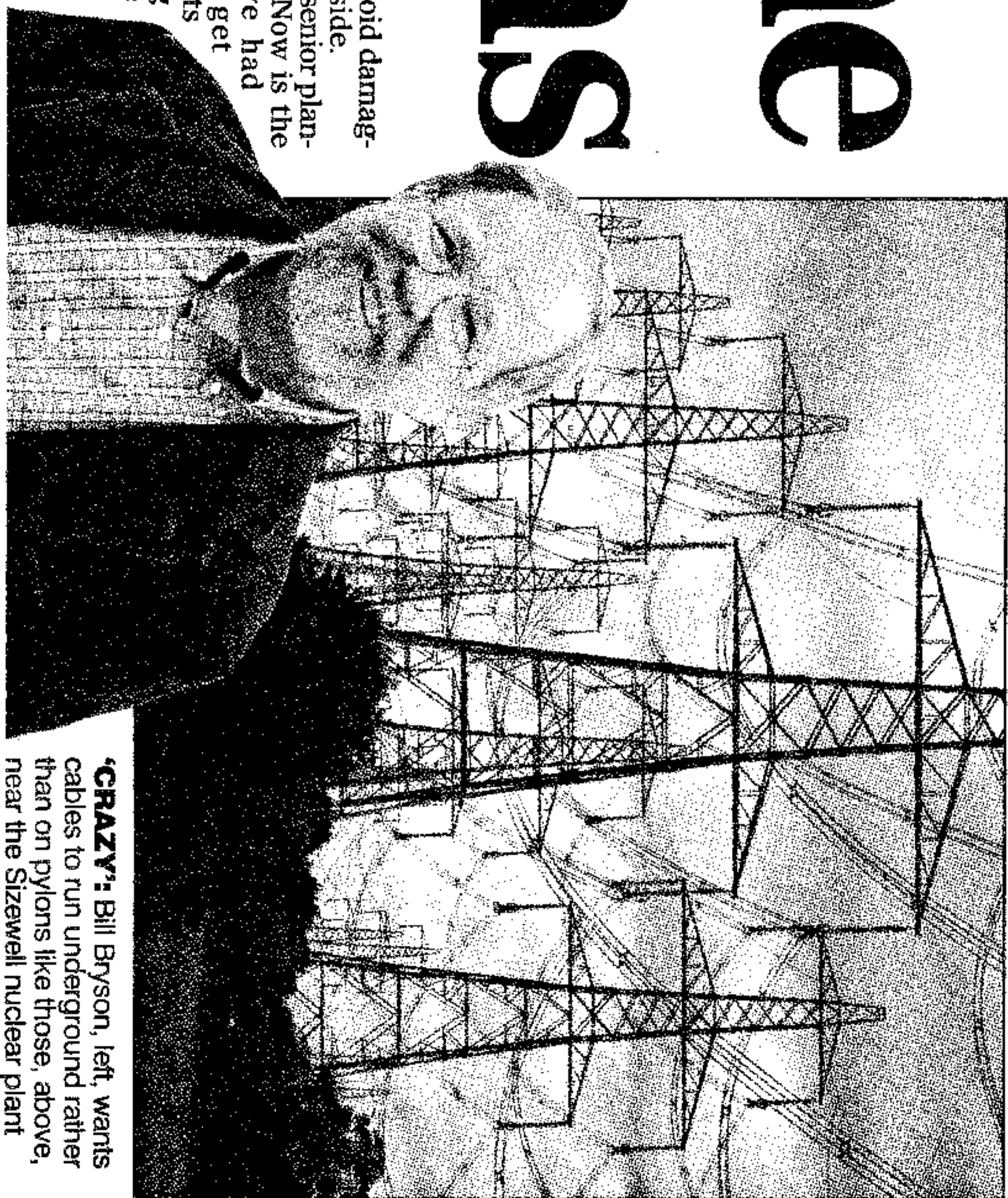
The Government is preparing to make some key decisions about how we develop our electricity network. If it gets them wrong, England's landscape could end up looking like a sci-fi horror of metal towers and wires.'

The offensive is also timed to ensure a new policy is in force before National Grid submits formal planning applications for new nuclear power stations at Sizewell in Suffolk and Hinkley Point in Somerset.

National Grid claims underground lines cost an average £22million per kilometre while an overhead line is less than £2million per kilometre.

Critics disagree, saying that underground cables cost as little as £4million per kilometre on the Continent.

A spokesman for National Grid said: 'Underground cabling costs 12 to 17 times more than overhead



'CRAZY': Bill Bryson, left, wants cables to run underground rather than on pylons like those, above, near the Sizewell nuclear plant

power lines. It is an obligation of our licence to provide an economic, efficient and co-ordinated network. But we are reviewing our policy on underground cabling.

A Department of Energy and Climate Change spokesman said: 'Each project should be assessed on a case-by-case basis depending on the specific circumstances of the project.'