

SeaLink meeting notes

Let me start by saying thank you for giving me and others time to speak.

Also let me say that I fully understand the need to reinforce our energy and specifically our electric grid as more and more of our daily lives are dependent upon it, one way or another. However and this is a key point, the landing of the SeaLink cable at Pegwell Bay is completely the wrong location in Kent.

It's not because it's near to where I live, or it's a place I love, but because it's the wrong location and been driven purely by money and by people not understanding this location and the catastrophic impact it will have on all the areas which are involved - Pegwell Bay, Hoverport, Minster Marshes, villages, road networks

I visit Pegwell Bay, the Hoverport and the surrounding area multiple times each week, probably 4 or 5 times. Plus I enjoy visiting the 2 cafes in Sevenscore by the Viking ship and opposite the Jet fuel garage.

Pegwell bay, the Hoverport and Minster Marshes are wonderful natural environments which give me such pleasure by allowing me to enjoy their nature and because they are open wild spaces - yes even the Hoverport is wild as nature has been reclaiming that concrete area ever since the Hovercraft left. In fact Nature has done such a good job, we now have rare moths, butterflies, plants and birds living there.

The river Stour is a unique major wildlife corridor in Kent, connecting the sea all the way up to Ashford. It is a critical corridor for all living things. If the nature that is present or uses this unique corridor was fully understood then I'm certain that this project would not be allowed to be sited here.

There is a real lack of complete and proper environmental surveys. For example the bird surveys conducted are woefully inadequate - why wasn't Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory contacted for intertidal surveys as it's part of their recording area and have extensive records? Another example was is only 2 Jack Snipe being recorded on their few visits, whereas I have send 15 in one night when involved with ringing and census work!

It's proposed that more pylons and power lines (at different heights to the existing lines) are to be added to the river valley making it even more hazardous for flying birds. Any area of wetland is subject to mist and we often get sea fog roll in off the sea in autumn which then makes it very hazardous for birds to safely navigate. So putting more pylons and power cables at different heights to the existing ones, will cause mass casualties (for example Swans cannot adjust their flight direction/height quickly). There is no real concern for nature with this project.

I sincerely hope that this particular public event, with the planning inspectorate present, will prove that everyone's words including mine are not in vain and don't fall on deaf ears as they have done so with all previous SeaLink sponsored events.

This to me is the last hope I have to get this project changed and located to the correct site. Although it's been called a consultation process, it hasn't been so. All it has been, is SeaLink telling us of their latest plans which then change again and again as they start to realise how much the land required keeps needing to be adapted to allow them to build their project- for example, even after being informed and invited to these meetings, I then receive another change to their planning, this time about the Hoverport and increasing the size of the area needed and extending it now onto salt marsh

I started by saying that this is the wrong location and that it will have catastrophic consequences on the environment but also let me tell you why I have no faith in SeaLinks intentions and integrity or planning ability.

- Untruths - for Eva ample, at the Sevenscore village hall initial consultation meeting, SeaLinks technical representative, when challenged about why not bring the bale onshore at Dungeness, he told me that the electrical network there was not robust enough for this project. I was shocked and replied that that simply cannot be true as that network supported two nuclear power stations! The real answer came from a latter online meeting when asked the same question - cost
- Disregarding the Dept of Energy Security & Net Zero National policy statement for Electricity networks infrastructure. This statement gives clear guidelines about climate change adaptation and resilience for such projects. The published maps, show the

areas of the UK which will be under seawater due to the expected 35cm rise in sea levels by 2050. They specifically show that the site of the proposed converter station on Minster Marshes will be underwater and so will the surrounding area.

- Not fully understanding the water table and the make up of the land. SeaLink's plans for Europe's biggest converter station to be built on Minster Marshes clearly shows this - they have already changed their initial plan and now propose multiple concrete pilings plus building a 2 metre platform on which to build the converter station on (this platform will need c400,000 tonnes of materials to be transported in). Minster Marshes is made of alluvial materials from the Ice Age and then when it was part of the sea and known as the Wantsum Channel. It only has about a metre or so of soil on the top above what is effectively is a sponge. This means that the weight of the converter station will immediately upset the surrounding water table by squeezing water out side ways and worse, even with the platform etc, it is still likely to sink and/or crack as the land is so soft (just look at the nearby Thanet bypass which is sinking again near St Nicholas at Wade and has had to have a reduced speed limit imposed).
- National Grid's record or history. Their previous project (called the Nemo Link) brought a cable around the coast and in through Pegwell bay. It caused real and lasting environmental damage to the salt marsh by trenching a channel through the tidal flats and salt marsh after they promised to drill (has any of the planning inspectorate actually been to see the damaged salt marsh just to the west of the Jet fuel station?). I completely disregard SeaLink's answer who say that was a different company, as the previous company was also conducting work for National Grid - so National Grid are ultimately responsible this time too. SeaLink plans to drill under the bay and not damage the salt marsh cannot be believed, primarily as they have not given any proof of why it's different this time and because they have caveated their promise with "if it's possible".
- What has clearly been forgotten or purposely played down is that Pegwell bay is protected under multiple designations (Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area and Ramsar Wetland of International Importance) what more legislative protection can be given to site to stop it being damaged? To me it seems the DCO joker card trumps everything.
As SeaLink will need to ensure their new cable is laid a safe

distance away from the existing cables to ensure that they do not create “alien crosstalk”, this risks greater damage to the salt marsh.

- Keep changing their plans and expanding areas. For example the very recent widened plans for the Hoverport and for more of Pegwell Bay.

I hope that gives you a sample of my personal reasons as to why this is the wrong location in Kent.

However, I am very mindful that large infrastructure projects such as these often have some element of national governmental pre-planning before they are even brought to the public's attention for consultation, which means that ministerial approval is regrettably highly likely.

Therefore if this occurs, for my final minute, I would like to focus on the mitigation and offset that is needed as the current proposals are wholly inadequate

Mitigation

- The offset land or field being suggested is both pitiful and useless. The field is currently being used to grow maize for the bio-digester, is near the very busy sandwich bypass, and has power lines crossing it. Maize is completely useless for nature and the land is certainly not in anyway making up for the loss of the converter station habitat and other damage. To give birds like Golden Plover, Snipe, Jack Snipe and others, suitable land to rest and feed on then a large area of wet farmland nearby should be purchased as an offset.

An example of good practice for this is the enormous Graveney marshes solar farm near Faversham, where several large fields were purchased and are being developed for wildlife. They have almost immediately given positive results with wildlife moving back and especially as they have appointed an on-site friendly to wildlife manager who has some knowledge and is willing to listen to the right parties. The second phase of their development for these fields includes the building of a large scrape and more hedging is due to commence shortly.

- It's proposed more pylons and power lines are built along the river Stour valley making it very more hazardous for birds flying during the times of darkness or fog (which is a common feature of a wet area) please can you ensure that

- power cables are the same height as the existing ones
- deflectors are placed on all new and existing lines to stop collisions, which are regularly happening. An example of good practice are the pylons and lines near Welney in the Ouse washes as they have been constructed in a way that gives due consideration for the 000's of wild swans that reside in that area especially during the winter period
- Pegwell bay as I've already mentioned is a very special site, unique in east Kent and a vital area for migrating birds and also wintering birds. The Hoverport must be returned (and not used to give reason for any future projects) to nature and for people to enjoy - this needs to be carefully managed.
Also, the provision of a new bird hide possibly on the west side of the Stour to help with the ongoing survey work that Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory conducts of the bird life (which has never been asked for!) and for Kent Wildlife Trust to monitor the seal colony.
- Financial support for local wildlife organisations such as Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory and Kent Wildlife Trust who both do so much good work protecting our local wildlife and providing educational services to local communities for all ages.