

My name is Kerry Sabin-Dawson and I am here today to represent the **Thanet RSPB local group**, with its almost 200 members, as the volunteer administrator. RSPB Local Groups are run by volunteers.

Our members are very concerned about the long term impact of these proposals on both the breeding and migrant bird population which are beloved by the community in this area, an area which is crucial for the East Atlantic flyway route of bird migration.

We are supportive of a move towards a low carbon energy, aiming for Net Zero by 2050, but our members feel that this should not be at the expense of nature. This is not marginal land. This is an active, important wetland ecosystem that supports biodiversity of national (and international) significance. We believe there are less damaging options that National Grid should consider and we would urge National Grid to re-examine those options.

Pegwell Bay Nature Reserve and Minster Marshes are regular spots for local bird watching, they are valuable sites for people to connect to nature and our members will be devastated to lose access to them, not just during the long proposed building phase at Pegwell but the permanent loss of an amazing site at Minster.

A number of our members have limited accessibility and Pegwell Bay is one of the few local areas where they are able to drive in and use a wheelchair or mobility scooter in a bird watching site. Restricting access for four years will have a huge impact on the mental wellbeing of some of our members- many of whom are elderly.

Having already lost important habitat for birds and wildlife in this area due to the cumulative impact of solar panels, battery storage units and industrial sites, this proposal is yet another onslaught on nature. We are concerned the SSSI site is already being affected by surrounding activities. This year we lost a long term heronry and egretty from the SSSI. National Grid's proposals would completely decimate the bird population in this area- an area with 35 red listed birds, where a total of 230 species have been recorded in over 50,000 observations.

Our members feel that National Grid have not carried out sufficient surveying of this area, to reach well-informed conclusions. For example, only one year's worth of vantage point survey and only four months' of bird corpse surveys to inform the collision risk and displacement predictions in the environmental assessment. Also for Golden Plover use over the long term of functionally link land there were only 2 years' surveys which may not be enough to understand that use. This means that they, and consequently the Examining Authority, do not have a true picture of the scale of wildlife- particularly birds- using this natural marshland throughout the year and how they may move around the local landscape. Our local survey records (which includes ringing data from a site that is destined to be wiped



out by this proposal) show that 35 red-listed bird species, 46 amber listed birds, and 74 other species, including species in danger of extinction in the UK such as nightingale, cuckoo, grey partridge, skylark, grasshopper warbler, garden warbler, curlew, golden plover, lapwing, hen harrier, marsh harrier, yellow hammer, tree sparrow, greenfinch, turtle dove would be severely impacted by this proposal.

Our members are very concerned, particularly after National Grid's last project in this area (Nemo Link) that any trenching, construction access or infrastructure through this area would fragment bird habitats, disturb breeding and foraging patterns, and risk long-term impacts to species that the UK is legally committed to protecting in this area. We note that National Grid mention underground cabling, *where feasible*, we are concerned that this gives a carte blanche for open trenching the area if it's seen as *not* feasible. Open trenching in this delicate, biodiverse area would have an enormous impact and would cause long lasting damage to the ecosystem.

We consider that the mitigation and compensation being proposed by National Grid is wholly inadequate. For example the proposal of a small area, sandwiched between industrial units, as compensation for golden plovers losing the rich marshland of Minster Marshes is fundamentally flawed and would not be a like-for-like replacement. We urge the Examining Authority to consider the diverse habitat of wetlands like Minster Marshes- these cannot simply be recreated elsewhere. Once lost, their function and biodiversity are gone for good.

We are seriously concerned about the number of new pylons that NG are proposing and, even worse, they propose to add these at varied heights. There are well recorded incidents of bird mortality due to collision with pylons locally when pylons were last added in this area.

We would like to urge the Examining Authority to consider the impact of operational **noise pollution** from the proposed converter station. We believe that 50hz is likely to be the level of noise omitted. It is likely that this level of noise will have a detrimental impact on the birds in the area, as will the enormous drills going to incredible depths attempting to locate hard surfaces for the frame of the platform for the converter station.

We are also concerned about the planned **2m deep platform of hardcore** that National Grid now intends to put under the converter station. This could risk polluting our local water system, marshland and the Stour river- causing further damage to the wildlife. Our members would like to seek reassurance that this will not lead to pollutants in the food chain for our local bird population.

For all of these reasons, the RSPB Thanet Local Group members respectfully ask you to reject Sea Link's onshore development and we implore National Grid to look for alternative options/routes, given the threat proposed by this infrastructure on these amazing, diverse habitats and the bird populations and wildlife of south east Kent: Please do not risk and damage these precious natural spaces, we support renewable energy and associated grid infrastructure but this must not (and need not) be built at the expense of nature.

