

I am writing as a Ramsgate Town and Thanet District Councillor, Secretary of Ramsgate Town Team and a local resident, to provide a summary of some of my concerns in respect of Change Request 1 (CR1), National Grid's proposal to alter access for construction vehicles at the old hoverport in Pegwell Bay, owned by Thanet District Council.

1) CR1 endangers a wildlife haven: The hoverport site was abandoned many years ago and has completely rewilded. Plants such as pampas grass and buddleia have grown up through the old tarmac. Long tailed tits, oystercatchers, redshanks and red-listed lapwings and turtle-doves thrive there. Any traffic, let alone heavy machinery, passing through the site will at best seriously damage and potentially completely destroy this unique waterside habitat.

2) CR1 risks polluting Pegwell Bay: As well as sending heavy plant through the site and along the intertidal margin, however, National Grid also plan to undertake 'works associated with HDD and cable installation'. This risks irreparable damage to the surface of this unique site, which was created from spoils from a nearby colliery site. (National Grid speak of 'hearsay' but there is clear evidence for this.) Base metals and other pollutants are present and will be in danger of leaching into the Bay & saltmarsh.

Inspectors will not, I am sure, need reminding that plans for cable installation under Project Nemo did not work out as planned, resulting in damage in Pegwell Bay from which, seven years later, the site has not recovered. A decision to permit this on the hoverport site would, I believe, be extremely risky.

3) CR1 removes significant amenity value for residents: This site is hugely popular with local residents, who come on foot either to visit the hoverport site itself or to use it as a way through to the cliffside footpath. Many speak in person and on local social media sites of the beauty and peacefulness of the site, of the benefits they gain for their physical and mental health by visiting, and share photos and video for others to enjoy.

One resident states on a local website: 'Pegwell Bay and the old Hoverport are my favourite places to walk and watch nature through the seasons.... I urge you to do, tread softly and discover for yourself. You might find orchids, samphire, purslane, golden birch, honeysuckle, dog rose and old man's beard...'

If CR1 is approved, all this will be gone. Residents will have little or no access during the lengthy construction phase, and when construction is complete the site will offer little or none of the amenity value residents currently enjoy.

4) CR1 further limits the area's tourism potential: Thanet's economy depends heavily on tourism. The Minster Marshes and Pegwell Bay are amongst our most popular destinations for visitors who enjoy and respect the countryside, particularly walkers and cyclists, birdwatchers and seal-spotters.

National Grid's existing plans, if approved, will have a severe limiting effect on the local visitor economy, and if CR1 is approved it will exacerbate this, as few tourists will wish to visit a previously unspoilt wildlife area turned massive, noisy construction site. This will have an adverse effect on local businesses - the cafes and bars that cater for these visitors, the campsites and short-term rentals they stay in, the seal-spotting and fishing trips and the much-loved and carefully researched birdwatching tours will all find little or no audience for their offers.

5) CR1 proposes virtually unlimited access: The Minster Marshes and Pegwell Bay SSSI currently incorporate areas of land where access is restricted, both seasonally to protect overwintering birds and year-round to provide a safe space for sensitive species, including Kent's largest colony of seals.

CR1 appears to propose that National Grid should be permitted to access the whole site, including these protected areas, although there is little explanation as to why such extensive access might be necessary. The damage likely to be caused by giving such permissions is considerable.

Access to these areas is restricted for a reason. National Grid have shown no respect for this and no justification for riding roughshod over the existing restrictions.

6) CR1 provides little backup evidence: National Grid have conducted no ecological surveys. Rather than provide surveys, assessments and other evidence to support their proposals, NG in fact appear to propose that additional permissions should be given to them now, and to promise that they will provide the evidence later.

This would be laughable if the implications of approval were not so serious. No other body is permitted to request permission for something and promise to provide evidence as to why this should be given later, and it is difficult to understand why National Grid believe this is acceptable in their case.

7) CR1 comes as a surprise to its neighbours: The closest residents live under 200 metres from the hoverport site, yet they have received no communications from National Grid about their plans. This would be mandatory for a local District planning hearing, yet it appears National Grid can plan massively greater disruption without consulting or even informing local residents or businesses. I find this unacceptable, and so do the residents I represent.

I urge the Examining Authority to refuse this application.

(Cllr) Tricia Austin