

## **Deadline 4 submission to PINS: Cllr Tricia Austin, Ramsgate Town Team**

Further to my comments at the ExA's Issue Specific Hearings, I would like to add:

**Impact on local economy:** We are extremely concerned about the likely impact of the SeaLink project in its present form on the local economy.

Thanet rates as the most deprived district in Kent, with low incomes, poor education & health outcomes and limited affordable housing. Thanet has consistently featured in studies as one of the poorest areas in the country, and currently sits 26<sup>th</sup> from bottom amongst nearly 300 Council areas in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, placing it in the most disadvantaged 10% nationally.

It is therefore clearly vital for our citizens that we do all we can to build prosperity in Thanet. A large company like National Grid coming into the area might appear helpful, but in practice it is difficult to see any benefits from the SeaLink project to Thanet.

From an economic perspective, Thanet's one growth industry is tourism & the visitor economy, which accounts for some 8,000 jobs. Visitors report visiting the coastline (80%), outdoor activities (12%) and food & drink (20%) as key influences in their choice of location – so preserving and enhancing these is key to bringing in more visitors.

SeaLink will do the reverse.

- National Grid plans, inexplicably to local people, to site a massive, weighty converter station on marshland. Somewhat late in the day it appears to have dawned on NG that vast quantities of aggregate will be required to create any sort of stable base for such construction.
- Thus, during the construction phase, Thanet's narrow historic streets and country lanes will thus see constant heavy traffic, noise and disruption. The carbon footprint of such construction alone should give us pause – ironic given the project's aim is presented as ensuring future sustainable energy systems.
- Ramsgate, Cliffsend and the Minster Marshes themselves will be particularly adversely affected by the construction. Heavy plant movements and the constant stream of aggregate lorries will slow the flow of traffic in the area, which already suffers from a poor road system, disrupting other industries.
- We heard during the Issue Specific Hearings that National Grid expects to bring in the majority of its workers from outside Thanet. When asked about the impact of overnight stays on longer-term rental costs in Thanet, they were quick to point out that many workers will travel into the area daily. The further impact of this additional traffic on our inadequate road system, the impact of extra pollution on our air quality and the higher carbon footprint incurred cannot be welcomed.
- Visitors to the area are highly likely to be adversely affected by the traffic, noise and pollution, which will discourage them from exploring.

- Once the project is complete, the once-beautiful Minster Marshes, a focus for birdwatchers, walkers & holidaymakers, will feature a massive converter station, visible for miles around where previously there were unspoilt open views.
- Local businesses appear likely be adversely affected – for example:
  - Our cafes and bars, particularly those close to the site, but also those on the route from the aggregate works on Ramsgate Port, are likely to suffer extensively from dust, noise and vibration, as well as from traffic holdups. Many are struggling already and this may be the last straw.
  - Our tour guides, wildlife photographers, film-makers, birdwatch leaders and seal watching boats will no longer have peaceful, natural locations to capture on film or to introduce to visitors. The enterprising individuals who have carved out these niches for themselves in the local visitor economy are likely to experience serious damage to their enterprises.

### **Impact on jobs & skills**

- We have seen no information on National Grid's jobs & skills plans, but we noted above that they appear not to plan to employ local workers.
- This is a massive missed opportunity. Clearly specialist roles may need to be brought in from elsewhere, but employing local workers in routine roles could go some way to help counterbalance some of the negative impacts on the local economy highlighted above.
- This approach shows disrespect for the potential of local people. By taking on and training local staff, National Grid would be able to do several things at once:
  - Create additional jobs that can be taken by local people
  - Contribute to raising skills levels to improve workers' job prospects in future
  - Introduce a modest positive impact on the local economy to help balance some of the negative impacts mentioned above
  - Reduce traffic flows, car miles and pollution in the area
  - Reduce negative impacts on availability of overnight rentals
  - Improve relationships with the local community
- This last point is an important one, as the fact that NG have made no effort to improve local relationships highlights their approach throughout this project: to regard the location as immaterial, the landscape as disposable, the wildlife as insignificant and the local community as not worth working with. This is deeply disappointing.

We urge ExA to take all these points into account. Thank you.