



**The Examining Authority's Second Written Questions (ExQ2)
Issued on 25 February 2026**

**Answers from the
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds**

**Submitted for Deadline 5
10 March 2026**

Planning Act 2008 (as amended)

In the matter of:

**Application by National Grid Electricity Transmission for the
Sea Link Project**

**Planning Inspectorate Ref: EN20026
RSPB Registration Identification Ref: [REDACTED]**

ExQ2	Question to:	Question:
1. Ecology and biodiversity		
2ECOL5	NE RSPB Local authorities	<p data-bbox="546 304 954 336">Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)</p> <p data-bbox="546 347 2011 411">Explain whether the proposed approach to UXO outlined in the applicant's response to ISH2 AP16 [REP4-086] is sufficient to ensure that potential effects on the designated sites could be appropriately mitigated.</p> <p data-bbox="546 432 779 464">RSPB response:</p> <p data-bbox="546 475 2123 671">We do not agree that this answer is sufficient at this stage, however, we have recently been in constructive discussions with the Applicant around the potential mitigation needed to minimise impacts on designated sites and the potential for a related commitment in the REAC. We will update our position via our SoCG once further information has been provided, but note that we consider that this should include commitments that surveys within the Leiston-Aldeburgh SSSI should be non-intrusive, the avoidance of excavation within the SSSI and to consult RSPB and NE with regard potential locations for any ex situ detonations in the vicinity of the SSSI or Sandlings SPA.</p>
2ECOL10	RSPB Applicant	<p data-bbox="546 694 965 726">Works affecting North Warren</p> <p data-bbox="546 737 2119 833">Provide an update on the discussions regarding access, grazing and vegetation management proposals at North Warren. Also comment on the known distribution of water voles at North Warren in areas of wet grassland and whether any preconstruction survey is necessary in respect of this species close to the HDD compound.</p> <p data-bbox="546 853 779 885">RSPB response:</p> <p data-bbox="546 896 2107 1129">We are currently in discussion with the applicant around the use of access routes on site, particularly to clarify that no vehicular access would be required for monitoring during the drilling process, except in the event of frac-out, in which case agreed access points and vehicles would be used. We have also discussed the need for early consultation should any temporary and limited scale restrictions on grazing be required during drilling, to allow us to liaise with graziers. With regard vegetation management, we are discussing tree group 82S and clarifying that any management required to maintain the access route here would not lead to loss of habitat. Again, we will update on the progress of these discussions via updates to our SoCG with the applicant.</p> <p data-bbox="546 1182 2123 1348">Water vole presence has been recorded at various locations across the ditch network within the wetland areas of RSPB North Warren. As such, they are likely to be present within the HDD swathe and could be affected by incidents such as frac-out. However, given that the HDD compound is located on dry habitat outside the reserve and that the closest habitat within the reserve to the compound is also dry, we do not consider that there is a need for surveys around the HDD compound itself.</p>

ExQ2	Question to:	Question:
2ECOL12	RSPB Local authorities NE	<p>Updated wintering bird survey</p> <p>Comment on the applicant’s statement in [REP4-241] that “since the North Warren RSPB Reserve is being treated as a sensitive receptor, the Applicant does not consider that updated information regarding the number and distribution of wintering birds within the Reserve is required, particularly since RSPB have good data for their Reserve.”</p> <p>RSPB response:</p> <p>We raised concerns in our Written Representations that only one full season of wintering bird surveys was carried out for this project (in 2023/24), with no surveys in 2022/23 and only part of the season covered in 2021/22. We would normally expect to see two full seasons of data collection to support an application of this nature. The RSPB carry out monthly Wetland Bird Surveys (WeBS) during winter and these data would be available to the applicant to supplement their own data and can be obtained via a formal data request to us. However, it is important to note that whilst these surveys give a robust and standardised count of birds present at the site, the surveys were not designed to gather the fine level of distributional data that are may be required to inform development proposals. For WeBS, the wetland areas of North Warren (including reedbed and waterbodies as well as wet grassland) are reported as one recording unit, and therefore additional surveys by the applicant may be required to inform assessment of impacts where knowledge of bird presence at particular locations within the site is needed.</p>
2ECOL13	NE RSPB Local authorities	<p>Suffolk Wintering Bird Survey Report</p> <p>Provide any further comments on the assessment of effects on wintering birds, based on the updated Suffolk Wintering Bird Survey Report appendix 2.2.b [REP4-037].</p> <p>RSPB response:</p> <p>We welcome the update to Annex 2.B.2 of the Suffolk Wintering Bird Survey Report to provide WeBS data for key Suffolk sites rather than Kent, although these data appear different to the WeBS data reported in Table 1.8 for key species. There are also some confusing references to WeBS data within the report – Table 1.8 reports 8 <u>pairs</u> of Bittern from the 5 year mean peak count for the Minsmere-Walberswick SPA and states this figure includes North Warren (although North Warren also features in another column): it seems likely therefore that this may be breeding data rather than WeBS count data. Paragraph 1.5.19 also notes that the WeBS data includes heathland and woodland birds – this is unlikely as WeBS is a wetland survey. Again, we query whether general reserve data (including breeding birds) has been referred to in some cases instead of winter WeBS data. We also raised a number of queries around the reporting of the bird surveys and data in the Suffolk Wintering Bird Report in sections 2.1.5 and 2.1.6 of our Written Representations. Whilst these issues may not make a significant difference to the overall conclusions of this report, noting that key sites have been ascribed appropriate levels of importance, we consider it important that care is taken to ensure the accuracy of data used and to use appropriate data (including obtaining additional data if required) to inform assessment of specific impacts and requirements for mitigation.</p>

ExQ2	Question to:	Question:
2ECOL14	Applicant Local authorities RSPB	<p>Seasonal restrictions - Suffolk</p> <p>Applicant: Section 6.7 of the Suffolk oLEMP [REP4-065] explains that topping/flailing works would be restricted during the bird ground-nesting season (i.e. avoiding March to August). In light of previous amendments relating to the bird breeding season, should this read February to August?</p> <p>Other parties: To comment.</p> <hr/> <p>RSPB response:</p> <p>Due to the possibility of Woodlark presence (and their early breeding period), we agree that topping/flailing should avoid February to August.</p>
2ECOL30	Applicant RSPB	<p>RSPB further management measures</p> <p>Applicant: At DL3, the applicant stated in its response to first written questions (1ECOL47, [REP3-069]) that it would consider further management measures suggested by the RSPB for the 10ha arable mitigation land for golden plover associated with Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay SPA. No updates have been made to the oLEMP (section 5.4 [REP4-067]). Does the applicant intend to make such updates?</p> <p>RSPB: To comment.</p> <hr/> <p>RSPB response:</p> <p>Further reassurance as to how this location would function appropriately and consistently as mitigation for Golden Plover is required, given concerns around how this land will be managed that could undermine the effectiveness of this site to act as appropriate mitigation. This is especially the case given wider constraints from industry including solar farms in the surrounding landscape. There needs to be greater clarity around what qualifies as success, and no AEoI for the qualifying features of the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA/Ramsar due to loss of associated functionally linked land for Golden Plover, and details of what the contingency plan would be should these criteria not be met by the mitigation site. The RSPB would be open to discussing bespoke management.</p>
2ECOL51	Applicant NE, KWT, RSPB	<p>REAC provision B59</p> <p>Applicant: The applicant's Comments on Other Submissions Received at DL3 and DL3A [REP4-241] suggests that contractor(s) would prepare a HDD landfall Method Statement and Drilling Fluid Management Plan in consultation with NE, KWT and the RSPB "as appropriate". Can the applicant explain what is meant by "as appropriate" in this context.</p> <p>Other parties: Comment on this caveat.</p>

ExQ2	Question to:	Question:
		<p>RSPB response: Given that the applicant's answer refers to both Suffolk and Kent, we assume that "as appropriate" is used to imply reference to the relevant land managers (RSPB in Suffolk and KWT in Kent). We welcome the intention to consult us; however, it would be helpful if the wording could be clarified to avoid the interpretation that such consultation may not be required.</p>
2ECOL53	NE, KWT, RSPB	<p>Frac out effects - Kent</p> <p>All parties: Are the applicant's measures in the REAC [REP4-235] sufficient to manage frac out and exclude AEoI for the Sandwich Bay SAC, Thanet Coast SAC and Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA & Ramsar site from changes in marine water quality or pollution by drilling fluid. If not, confirm what further commitments you consider are needed.</p> <p>NE: With regards to the impacts of frac out, the applicant (table 3.6 [REP4-241]) considers that the HDD location for East Anglia One was a constrained environment with little coastal wave action, which is not comparable with Pegwell Bay. It noted that the saltmarsh in Pegwell Bay is dry 50% of the time and frac-out could be easily removed. Does this alleviate NE's concerns regarding the impacts of frac out on the supporting habitats of the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA?</p> <p>RSPB response: The RSPB is content regarding the applicant's ability to contain any possible frac out incident at this location, provided NE's concerns are alleviated.</p>