

George Cooper – Oral Representation to the Examining Authority
National Grid Sea Link Examination – Kent Onshore Scheme (Minster Converter Station & Marshes)
23 March 2026 (or as scheduled)

Good morning, Inspector, and members of the Examining Authority.

My name is George Cooper. For the past three years, since 2021, I and a licensed British Trust for Ornithology bird ringer have been conducting systematic ringing surveys on the exact land proposed for the Minster Converter Station and across a large part of the draft Order Limits for the Kent side of the Sea Link project.

National Grid's ecological surveys do not show the true scale of the wildlife that uses this site and the wider Minster Marshes.

We ring more than 1,000 birds every single year in the hedge and scrub area right in the centre of the proposed converter station footprint. Over 40 species, including many red-listed birds such as Nightingale, Linnets and Song Thrush.

At night, using a thermal imager, we carry out night ringing and witness something the applicant's surveys completely missed: the proposed converter site becomes a wildlife spectacle. Thousands of birds descend to feed, drink from the ditches, and roost. We ring Skylark, Woodcock, Jack Snipe and other species that simply do not appear in National Grid's documents.

For the past three years we have ringed between 90 and 100 percent of all the Skylark, Jack Snipe and Woodcock recorded anywhere in Kent – the vast majority of them on the exact land National Grid wants to build on.

Yet look at the applicant's own documents in the Examination Library:

Their Kent Ecology and Biodiversity Chapter (6.2.3.2, latest version REP5-017) and the Wintering Bird Survey Reports (REP1A-017 for 2023-2024 and earlier versions) record just two Skylarks across the entire Minster Marshes in places.

Their Breeding Bird Surveys (REP1A-021) and Vantage Point Surveys (REP1A-023) contain no nocturnal data whatsoever – only daytime and bat-focused night walks (Appendix 3.2.L).

This is materially incorrect and incomplete information. The baseline in the Environmental Statement is wrong. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (latest REP5-036) and the Outline Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (REP4-067) are built on that false baseline. That breaches the Infrastructure Planning (EIA) Regulations 2017 – which demand a full and accurate description of the existing environment – and NPS EN-1 paragraphs 5.25–5.32, which require proper assessment of functionally linked land for the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA/Ramsar.

National Grid's plans show they intend to acquire land right up to the boundary of the Sandwich Bay and Hacklinge Marshes SSSI. There is no buffer zone between their industrial infrastructure and the SSSI. The converter station and substation would literally encircle this internationally important wetland, turning it into an isolated island in the middle of an industrial desert.

An area already battered by other electrical infrastructure projects would be further degraded and rendered worthless to the abundant wildlife that depends on it. Kent Wildlife Trust, the RSPB and Natural England have all raised similar concerns in their Written Representations about the failure to apply the mitigation hierarchy and the cumulative loss of functionally linked land.

This loss cannot be mitigated or replicated.

The Minster Marshes are unique: close to Pegwell Bay, sheltered by high ground from the sea, part of a vast open landscape that gives overwintering birds room to forage. The mitigation land National Grid has proposed is surrounded by industry, main roads, constant noise and light pollution – the exact opposite of what these birds need.

Combined with the unassessed sulphate mobilisation from their proposed Controlled Modulus Columns, the unmodelled thousands of extra HGV movements, and the direct habitat destruction, the Kent side of this project will cause irreversible damage to wildlife and the agricultural marshland that supports it.

I implore you, on behalf of the thousands of birds that rely on this unique site every day and night, and on behalf of the people of Kent who value our internationally protected sites and minster marshes: turn down this ill-conceived and hugely environmentally damaging project.

Thank you.