

Submission to PINS against the Sea Link proposals to come ashore across Minster Marshes by Phil Shotton

Having raised my concerns about the use of an ecologically important (SSRI, Ramsar area) to site a high-power cable landfall, converter station and associated construction, I find I now have to raise concerns about more potential destruction to another extremely important nature area, that of the Hoverport site on the edge of Pegwell Bay.

Some personal background: I am a scientist by training, and hold a degree in Zoology. I am a passionate believer in the importance of our natural world in our lives on numerous levels; physical health, mental wellbeing, connectedness to our natural environment and many others. In short, the quality of our natural environment, and our access to it, is a very precious resource that unfortunately does not figure in the accounting of companies and individuals who seek profit from natural resources.

The Hoverport at Pegwell is very special. Until 1982 it supported a cross-channel hovercraft service, before falling out of use due to cost, noise and environmental concerns. The buildings on the site were finally demolished in 1995.

From that point on the site was left to allow nature to take over, providing an amazing opportunity to study the recolonisation of industrial land by natural forces without any assistance. Currently the Hoverport is used daily by large numbers of people for recreation while at the same time supporting a large number of plants, animals and other eucaryotes and prokaryotes.

On a personal note, as a step-father of a dyspraxic daughter, it is one of the few places with easy access and a level walking surface at which such a medley of wildlife can be discovered.

Now we learn that the Sea Link project aims to trash this as well as the Pegwell Bay bird reserves and the incomparable Minster Marshes. The only justification for using this site over one of many brownfield sites with comparable access to the National Grid infrastructure is ‘cheaper’; but at what cost to our natural environment?

The Hoverport is important both as a novel biodiverse site and a buffer protection for the Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve. Primary plant species like birch and buddleia, sea buckthorn, prostrate sedums etc have self-established, enabling microclimates for other species to develop and gradually leading to the existing concrete surfaces deteriorating thus opening up further soil pockets for plants.

The site also contains many fruit trees and blackberries providing not only food for the wildlife but also foraging human visitors. It provides a superb educational resource for all ages to learn about the return to nature of an industrial site. There is no excuse for even considering this site, and Pegwell Bay or Minster Marshes, for an extremely destructive development. I urge the inspectors to refuse this application. On a factual point, National Energy states in its submission ‘Various searches regarding the Hoverport have identified some ‘anecdotal’ evidence that the Hoverport was constructed on Colliery Spoil – but at the current time National Grid has not seen any data or information that confirms this.’

However, a cursory search of the Internet reveals, in Wikipedia's entry about the Hoverport, "The build required the tipping of 300,000 long tons (670,000,000 lb) of colliery spoil to form the base" quoted from "Hover trip for technical press". East Kent Times. 25 April 1969.

If National Grid cannot be trusted on points like this, why should they be given any credence for their promises to minimise the damage to our important ecosystem."

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