

The Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6PN

13 July 2022

Dear Examination Authority,

Please find set out below our Written Submission on the Examination Procedure regarding the Sunnica solar energy park proposal.

This submission reflects a high level summary of the concerns expressed to us by residents in the communities which would be directly impacted by the Sunnica solar energy park.

We understand that the purpose of the Preliminary Meeting, scheduled for 26th July 2022, is to consider how Sunnica's DCO application will be examined, including the examination timetable. Further to this, we are conscious that the date of the Preliminary Meeting has been delayed for several weeks at the request of Sunnica. We would like to emphasise again that this delay was contrary to normal practice, in particular, the Secretary of State sets an expectation of the Planning Inspectorate Committee that the Preliminary Meeting will be held no later than between 6 weeks and 2 months following receipt of the Relevant Representations from Interested Parties. On this basis, we believe that Sunnica's request for a delay to the date of the Preliminary Meeting should have been refused (as set out in our letter to the Examination Authority, dated 18th May).

Notwithstanding our comment above regarding the delay to the date of the Preliminary Meeting, the new proposed examination timetable is a cause for concern. There are two main reasons for this:

1. **It puts significant pressure on local residents who wish to engage with the examination process** – On 28th June 2022 Interested Parties were sent a link by the Examination Authority to a 48-page document. On reading this very dense document, recipients found themselves confronted by a number of important and fast-approaching deadlines and key dates, including a deadline of 13th July for Written Submissions, 26th July for the Preliminary Meeting and 30th August for Written Representations.

On top of this, recipients would have been required to digest this critical information at the same time as many of them were preparing their responses to Sunnica's public consultation on the changes it would like to make to its DCO application. (On this point, it is worth highlighting that the full detail of the changes Sunnica proposes to make to its application is unlikely to be known for several weeks and once these

documents are finally made available, time will be needed to carefully consider these changes.)

Multiple deadlines, often closely spaced together and sometimes overlapping, places significant pressure on many local residents who wish to engage with the examination process. These individuals and groups are often volunteers who want to protect the best interests of their communities. They often work full/part time and may care for children or other relatives. They do not have vast resources to scrutinise complex planning applications. Therefore, the fast bombardment of deadlines is both unfair and not conducive to community engagement (which is extremely important to ensure the best outcomes for communities).

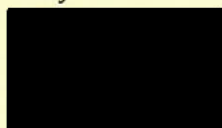
2. **Clash between key dates/deadlines and the summer period** – Key dates and deadlines in connection with the Sunnica proposal, notably the date of the Preliminary Meeting on 26th July and the deadline for Written Representations on 30th August, fall during the summer period when we understand many residents with an interest in this application are away on holiday and/or have other pressing commitments, for example, childcare given that it will be outside term time. This must also be seen in the context of the decision taken by the Examination Authority – at Sunnica's request – to the delay the date of the Preliminary Meeting. If residents had been given more notice of the change to the date of the Preliminary Meeting, they would have had more time to make alternative arrangements so that they could engage with the examination process to a greater extent but as it is, the revised date was only announced recently.

Anything that has the potential to prevent local residents from inputting into the examination process for this project gives Sunnica an unfair advantage given that local surveys demonstrate strong local opposition to Sunnica's solar energy park. Further, the recent changes Sunnica has been forced to make to its application (relating to how Sunnica would connect any solar energy park to the National Grid) only underlines how crucial it is that the appropriate time and care is given to scrutinising Sunnica's proposals.

The Examination Authority will appreciate that many people living in the communities that would be directly impacted by the Sunnica solar energy park have considerable reservations about the proposed examination process (as well as the project more widely) and so we ask that you carefully consider the concerns laid out above, and take these into account as you move forward.

Yours sincerely,

Lucy Frazer MP



Matt Hancock MP

