

Written Representation of Roy Clarke

Our family has farmed land adjacent to the Sunnica proposal for close to 70 years. We have seen the amount of food the land in this area can produce and the variety of crops grown. It distresses us to think that this might soon be covered in solar panels.

We feel passionately about the loss of this good, agricultural land to a solar energy scheme which will take it out of production for over 40 years. The land in this area grows a much wider variety of crops than many other areas in the country. It is well suited to the vegetable crops currently grown – potatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips as well as cereals, sugar beet, lucerne and maize. Managed well the land will continue to supply food for decades to come.

We understand there is an energy crisis at the moment but the UK is not fully sustainable with food production either, and the growing population needs good food at fair prices. The more land we take out of production the greater the possibility of imported food being necessary- increasing the carbon footprint of that food. Taking poor, unproductive land out makes sense, the Sunnica proposal simply does not.

Although there is irrigation on much of the Sunnica land, our land has never been irrigated and gives high yields every year. Crops which are irrigated are high value crops such as packing potatoes where irrigation helps give the skin finish supermarkets demand. If we have to import food from Europe or further afield there is a strong chance that it will have been irrigated too. The land near to Isleham is good land which can grow excellent crops without the need for irrigation.

We are extremely concerned that the promises that the land can be returned to agriculture only have substance if a robust decommissioning plan, with appropriate funds set aside, is legally enforceable.

Similar provision must be made for access to sites in case of accident and the clearing up of any spills of water and toxic chemicals should an accident happen. The siting of the batteries uphill from the Lee Brook, which is a rare chalk stream, requires great attention to the possibility of pollution should any accident occur.

Sunnica may well sell the site on should they get permission. There seems no restriction on who could buy the site and we are selling off our assets to foreign buyers who have no knowledge of the area, its history and importance. We know too many foreign companies have means of paying little or no tax in this country- how can this be right?

Although there are not as many people working in farming now there are many in the ancillary industries who may be affected – local machinery dealers, agronomists, mechanics etc. Who will support these people? During construction, traffic and parking issues may affect many people going about their daily lives, commuting between nearby towns and villages along roads which are essentially country lanes.

This area has always had many small farms where families made a living growing a variety of crops which were supplied to local outlets and markets in London. They feel they are being marginalised by large companies who come along and say they want the land for their scheme and will take it by compulsory purchase if required. Having farmed here, near Isleham for 70 years that also saddens me and makes us feel insignificant. Local groups are immediately disadvantaged by this.