



6th November, 2022

Re: Objection to Sunnica Solar Farm, Suffolk

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in relation to the proposed solar energy farm in West Suffolk by Sunnica. We all recognise the importance of low carbon, renewable energy but I need to object to the application on a number of grounds. If the application is modified to adequately address these significant issues I believe the project could be supported.

Summary of Key Issues & Solutions

1. The scale of the project is excessive and unacceptable. It will devastate this part of West Suffolk, ruin the landscape, and have enormous impact on residents. More importantly, it will use valuable agricultural land reducing the food security of the UK. A scale of approximately 50% might be acceptable.
2. The huge battery installations pose a real and significant risk. Battery storage should be restricted to only that required to support efficient management of the solar panels. It should not include capacity for the purpose of regeneration (buying & selling of cheap rate electricity).
3. Worlington is a small village with narrow road and pavements. The plan to route HGVs through the village for the build of Sunnica East A not only brings huge impact to residents but also creates significant unnecessary danger. There is a simple solution to this issue: build a service road linking Sunnica East A and B onto Elm Road so construction traffic can enter at this point.
4. Buy British: this is an opportunity to drive investment and technology build for renewable energy in the UK
5. The landscaping plan is inadequate and requires major improvement

My concerns and proposed solutions are set out in more detail below.

1. Scale and Location of Solar Farm

- The tragedy of Ukraine is highlighting to the UK the importance of food security. This is more important than energy provision. Much of the land proposed for solar panels is clearly fertile, high yield land supporting multiple types of crops. The UK cannot afford to lose such important agricultural land which at best drives up food importations with all the associated carbon footprint, and at worst threatens the nation's food supply.
- In addition, the proposed site is entirely unsuitable and further damages the suggested 'green' credentials of this project. An anaerobic digestion plant was built at Bay Farm in 2017. The rationale for the location was that the surrounding area would provide the feedstock for the plant. Using the land for a solar farm destroys these green principles since the feedstock will have to be transported from further afield. This not only increases CO² and pollution but also exposes surrounding areas to unnecessary traffic. The green principles on which the Bay Farm was approved cannot be so blatantly and shamefully disregarded, especially for another supposedly 'green' energy project.

2. Size of Battery Storage and Danger to Residents

- There are multiple examples of serious fires associated with lithium batteries. Catastrophes such as Grenfell Tower illustrate how the UK needs to change its risk assessment of known hazardous materials. Reducing the project size down to half will certainly lower the overall risk. I recently attended a public meeting with Sunnica who were repeatedly pressed by residents about the size of battery storage. Sunnica were consistently evasive over this issue and dismissed residents questions with “.....the plans are indicative...”. Given the democratic nature of this county, detailed plans over batteries must be presented and scrutinized by the inspector, residents, and technical experts before planning permission can be granted.
- Another requirement should be for the project to only install sufficient batteries to store electricity generated on-site. Installing large batteries for regeneration is totally incompatible with the green principles of this project. More batteries means more lithium, more manufacture, more transport – all for the sole reason of corporate greed. The negative environmental and carbon impact along with this increased fire risk must be recognised and this part of the project stopped.

3. Dangerous Transportation Plans

- The huge number of traffic movements outlined in the Sunnica Traffic Management Plan is frightening. I live [REDACTED] in Worlington and am very familiar with local road conditions. The roads and pavements are narrow making it dangerous for drivers and pedestrians.
- Indeed the road between Worlington and Feckenham suffered a multi-fatality accident several years ago, and road safety is frequently raised as a concern with Parish and County Councils. The Sunnica plans shows construction traffic for the entire Sunnica East Site A including huge numbers of HGV movements coming up Newmarket Road and turning left onto the B1102 at the Walnut Tree public house. This is a dangerous junction with poor visibility which results in frequent accidents. Large numbers of vans and heavy duty vehicles taking this route will pose a substantial risk to other road users and residents. Since the build is scheduled to last around two years it must be assumed that such traffic patterns would lead to fatalities and so cannot be permitted.
- Fortunately, there is a clear and simple solution to mitigate this serious hazard. Namely, build a service road linking Sunnica East A and B onto Elm Road. Sunnica either has, or could acquire the continuous land to achieve this. All construction traffic can then enter the site very close to the A11 junction at Red Lodge avoiding the need for journeys through Worlington and surrounding roads. Clearly, building a link road connecting East A & B will add slightly to the construction cost but this is the only viable solution to adequate traffic management. Importantly it will also bring benefits to the project itself since traffic can move freely and efficiently on site.

4. Opportunity to Accelerate UK Renewable Energy Capability

- Sunnica have indicated they expect that essentially all the panels and batteries will come from China because there is insufficient technology and manufacturing in the UK. Since the UK wants to be at the forefront of green technology this is a shocking indictment of our solar technology base, particularly in light of the government’s announcements on a ‘Green Industrial Revolution’. As the largest solar park in the UK, it presents an excellent opportunity to build our solar technology. A planning requirement should be placed on this project to source at least 50% of the high-technology components (e.g. batteries and panels, not metal frames or cabling) from UK manufacturers. Sunnica may resist this idea, but

accelerating a technology base for the wider benefit of the country requires imposition of short-term challenges. We all recognise the importance of renewable energy so using this and other projects to position the UK as a future leader of solar energy will grow our technology base, drive investment, and create jobs.

5. Need for Enhanced Landscaping Plan

- The landscaping plan is inadequate. The visual impact of this project, even at half scale, will be appalling. People will walk lanes and paths and see nothing but panels up to 3.9m high (based on dimensions in the Sunnica Consultation Booklet, p12). This is the height of a first-floor window on a house. This can only be mitigated by an extensive landscaping plan that provides camouflage for the acres of panels within a sensible timeframe. I suggest this to be a maximum of 2-3 years. The recent webinar by Sunnica indicated the landscaping would take 15 years to be effective for the panels and storage units. Combined with a two year build, residents and visitors to the district will suffer the consequences for ~17 years before reasonable protection is afforded. A more comprehensive landscape plan with dense, mature tree planting is also an opportunity to extend the environmental benefit of this NSIP. The high CO² impact of the build can be mitigated not just by the green energy generated, but the CO² absorption by the landscaping.

Thank you for reading this rather lengthy correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tim French