

Comments and Objection re Sunnica Energy Farm site East A and West A and B

This objection is based on one key issue and that is the impact on the character of the landscape and its history.

Background

It is necessary to first understand the existing character type and this is contained usefully in the National Character areas and in this case No 87 The East Anglian Chalk. This character area is linear stretching from Letchworth in the south and finishing in Chippenham in the north.

The Natural England publication on the Character area summarises the character as follows:

'The East Anglian Chalk National Character Area (NCA) is characterised by the narrow continuation of the chalk ridge that runs south-west–north-east across southern England. The underlying geology is Upper Cretaceous Chalk, which is covered in a surface deposit of ice and river-deposited material laid down during the last ice age. This creates a visually simple and uninterrupted landscape of smooth, rolling chalkland hills with large regular fields enclosed by low hawthorn hedges, with few trees, straight roads and expansive views to the north'.

Clearly any proposal that impacts on this has to be by definition **harmful**. Furthermore the document outlines the objectives as being to:

'Conserve and promote the landscape character, geodiversity, historic environment and historical assets of the chalklands, including the open views of undulating chalkland, large rectilinear field pattern and linear ditches, strong equine association and the Icknield Way prehistoric route. Improve opportunities to enhance people's enjoyment of the area while protecting levels of tranquillity'.

Two of the 4 statements of Environmental opportunity state the following:

'SEO 1: Maintain sustainable but productive agricultural land use, while expanding and connecting the chalkland assemblage of semi-natural grasslands, for example by sensitive management of road verges and extending buffer strips along field margins to benefit soil and water quality, reduce soil erosion, strengthen landscape character and enhance biodiversity and pollinator networks.

SEO 3: Conserve and promote the landscape character, geodiversity, historic environment and historical assets of the chalklands, including the open views of undulating chalkland, large rectilinear field pattern and linear ditches, strong equine association and the Icknield Way prehistoric route. Improve opportunities to enhance people's enjoyment of the area while protecting levels of tranquillity. '

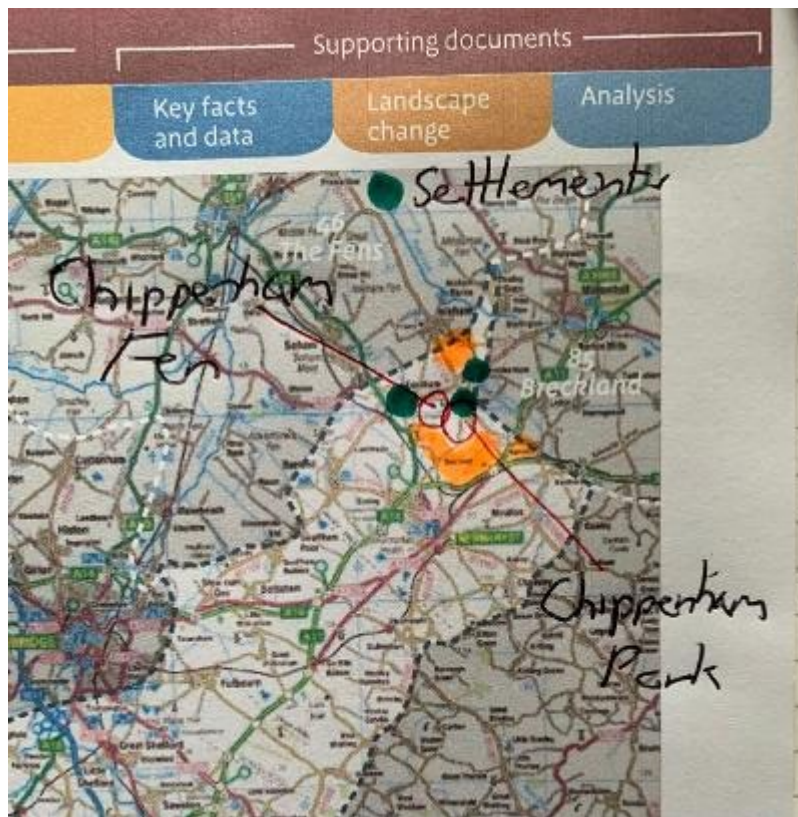
The Landscape opportunities include

'Identify and conserve views to and from key viewpoints and landmarks by careful design and vegetation management, minimising the visual impact and effects of development, woodland planting and scrub encroachment.'

What is the impact.

Anything that impacts the simple uninterrupted landscape with few trees and expansive views must be harmful. The percentage of the landscape taken will dictate that impact, as if it is only a small amount then the overall result could be minimal. However, in the case of the sites north and south of Chippenham the energy farm takes a significant amount. In the immediate vicinity probably in excess of 50% once the settlements are factored in along with Chippenham Park (a historical

parkland) and Chippenham Fen (a Nationally important reserve). This is illustrated below when the location of the 'farm' is superimposed on the character area plan.



As it can be seen, given the narrow nature of the character area in this location the energy farm effectively takes the majority of the important open landscape.

It is also noted that the 'farm' encompasses the historic entrance to Chippenham Park which transverses the open landscape and is an important historical feature. Linear transport features are noted in the landscape character type.

Whilst it is observed that some traditional grassland forms part of the mitigation proposed, which is in line with the landscape assessment, this will not mitigate the impact of the panels. Tree planting can be more effective but this is not to be encouraged in this landscape as outlined in the character type and merely adds to the breaking up of the simple uninterrupted views.

Conclusion

This landscape cannot take the extent of the energy farm proposed with its wide-ranging panels destroying what little of the East Anglia chalk that exists in its northern extremities. The scheme will fill the gaps between the Newmarket gallops, Chippenham Park and Fen so removing the landscape. Mitigation will simply not work as it will break up the character. One or two very small areas of panels could be perhaps incorporated but not at this scale. You cannot destroy the whole of the landscape character with one single type of development.