

## Friends of Isleham Nature Reserves

We are a group of local people who endeavour to look after the local Nature Reserve, and to help maintain green spaces in and around Isleham.

The area affected by the Sunnica proposal is rich in wildlife, including many species which are rare and sensitive to disturbance.

The Site covers geographic areas of East Anglian Chalk, The Brecks and the Fens. This gives an unusual array of species due to the very varied habitats, ranging from the Fen at Chippenham to the more sandy soils of the Brecks.

Whilst we appreciate the need for reducing our reliance on imported energy, and the necessity to reduce our carbon footprint, this must not be at the expense of our natural environment.

The Stone Curlew in particular are extremely rare birds which are sensitive to disturbance. Whilst they do nest in arable fields the farmers are exceedingly careful to protect the nests during the breeding season. Some of the area set aside as mitigation appears to have been shoehorned into areas which cannot be used for panels due to the archaeological remains found on the fields. The main area has a footpath and a road along two sides. However other plots will seemingly be in fields which will form part of the solar field. How these plots can be managed readily is not explained but it seems the likely they will be placed in areas where access is easiest rather than where is best for the birds. The amount of noise created by the piling on adjoining fields, day after day is bound to have an adverse effect on the birds – it is very different to a tractor going through a field at intervals of several days or weeks.

We are also concerned about the effects the piling might have on the hydrology of the area. The chalk aquifers give rise to springs across the area, hammering in the supports for the panels could affect the chalk, particularly where the soil over the chalk is shallow.

There is also limited information on the effects of run-off from the panels. Farmers do not plant crops with the rows running downhill, but this is how the panels will be oriented. With more frequent very heavy rain the amount of water falling on small areas at the base of the panels will potentially lead to soil erosion and pollution of the Lea Brook – a chalk stream which needs preserving. Pollution by soil can lead to weed and algal growth, suffocating water life. We are unclear as to whether there is provision to access the Lea Brook to maintain the water flow and remove silt and weed.

The effects on our food security as an island is under increasing pressure from infrastructure of all types removing BMV farmland. This in turn puts more pressure on the land which is left to grow ever more intensively. Whilst houses and roads will inevitably require the loss of agricultural land that need not be the case with solar farms which can be placed on brownfield sites, rooves etc. Solar is the least effective renewable energy generator for the amount of space it requires. We must maintain our farmland for the production of food the increasing population requires.

The detrimental impacts of the scheme on food production and biodiversity cannot be offset by a scheme which, according to Cranfield calculations, will never repay the carbon required for the construction, maintenance and decommissioning of the plant.

We therefore ask the Planning Inspector to refuse permission for this scheme.