

## Written Representation UR: 20031108 Sunnica Energy Farm Deadline 11 November 2022

Coming from a Suffolk farming family my heart and soul has always been in the country. We lived about 14 miles east of the sugar beet factory in Bury St Edmunds and on cold winter evenings we could smell the 'toasty' aroma of the beet being processed wondering if it was our beet. Circumstances moved me briefly into a local town and gosh was it different - the noise, the lights the constant human and vehicular activity gave me an almost permanent headache. Town life really wasn't for me!

I was fortunate to move to Isleham with my family nearly twenty years ago. We haven't looked back and thought of this as our 'forever' home. We have had the privilege of meeting people whose families have lived here for generations. People that have farmed the fields and nurtured land and village for the benefit of generations to come.

We have discovered and keep discovering so much about this village and its historical importance - the Priory Church built just after the invasion of William the Conqueror, St Andrew's church and its association with the Peyton family. The Spurgeon Stone along the banks of the River Lark - as part of their ministry training, new pastors make a pilgrimage to visit Spurgeon's Stone - coming from as far as Australia! A unique place!

I have included a photograph of our new village map.



My greatest simple daily pleasure is walking my dog through and around the village, enjoying the ever changing landscapes. The patchwork of crops in the fields – the comforting familiar routine of sowing, growing, harvesting and ploughing. Searching for unusual wild flowers and grasses and watching the insects, birds and animals that share the countryside with us. Taking deep breaths and filling my lungs with clean air, clearing my head and enjoying the wonderful views and big skies of where I live. We are so lucky and felt especially so during the pandemic and lockdowns.

Or should I say we were so lucky ..... in September 2020 we were told the news about Sunnica's proposed development – we were very late to the party and disadvantaged by that. Throw in the Covid-19 pandemic and we couldn't meet with any Sunnica representatives. We still haven't had that opportunity and there are many people that even at this late stage don't realise the magnitude of what is planned.

Whilst we will not be able to see the development from our house, the village will be surrounded and every journey we take means we will pass through or by one of the 'solar farms' or battery storage facilities. The roads that surround the proposed development sites are narrow and pot holed already and totally unsuitable for large heavy construction vehicles. Our landscape and views from the village will be irrevocably changed and we will be living within an industrial site. We didn't sign up for that.

At a time when our food security is paramount I am greatly saddened and worried that acres of precious food producing fields will be lost – sugar beet, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, onions, wheat, barley, maize and pigs. Sunnica report that this is low grade land. I understood it to be 'best and most versatile' (BMV), it's use being flexible, efficient and most capable as demonstrated by the superb variety of crops seen in the fields. In Wales BMV land is protected from solar farming.

This was issued to Chief Planning Officers from Julie James, the Welsh Minister for Climate Change on 1 March 2022:

*Planning Policy Wales (PPW) paragraphs 3.58 and 3.59 outlines national policy towards safeguarding Wales' Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land.*

*Future Wales, the National Plan 2040, identifies BMV agricultural land as a national natural resource under Policy 9.*

*Further guidance is provided in Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6, including the consultation arrangements with the Welsh Government included at Annex B\*; and, Practice Guidance: Planning Implications of Renewable and Low Carbon Energy).*

*Specifically PPW states that:-*

*'.....in development plan policies and development management decisions **considerable weight** should be given to protecting such [BMV] land from development, because of its special importance. Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a should **only** be developed if there is an overriding need for the development, and either previously developed land or land in lower agricultural grades is unavailable, or available lower grade land has an environmental value recognised by a landscape, wildlife, historic or archaeological designation which outweighs the agricultural considerations.*

*The purpose of this letter is to clarify that in accordance with Welsh Government policy outlined above, where BMV land is identified within a proposed solar PV array development, considerable weight should be given to protecting such land from development, because of its special importance, and unless other significant material considerations indicate otherwise it will be necessary to refuse permission. I have instructed officials to monitor closely proposals that would involve the loss of BMV land.*

Listening to Sunnica representatives explaining the 'safety spacing' of the battery energy storage systems (BESS) my concerns with the safety of the lithium-ion batteries used in the BESS have not been allayed. The fact that they need to be 'spaced' throws up serious questions about their safety in the first place. I fear that should one of these beasts catch fire we will be in serious trouble. They have been banned in Arizona – they cannot be put out using conventional means and fumes emitted during these fires are extremely hazardous to human life. There were 23 BESS fires in South Korea between 2017 and 2019. Seemingly the BESS insurance market believe these systems to represent a 'significant' emerging risk. They are planned for siting very close to homes and schools in the Sunnica scheme. Will this scheme be insured?

Fast forward to the end of the scheme and I am guessing that as there is no real commitment to a decommissioning plan, it will be left to whoever owns the sites at the time. I don't feel this is acceptable.

I am conscious that many interested parties must be watching the progress of this huge scheme and if it goes ahead it will set a real precedent. Having been fortunate to see the area from above during a flight in a light aircraft it is not surprising to see that the solar farm 'jigsaw' is gaining shape.

I am totally in favour of solar, we have it, but in the right place, our roof and it works brilliantly whilst the sun is shining.

