

The Ark – Sunnica Statement

History. The Ark church is an independent church located in the village of Isleham. Although our presence in the village goes back to 1812 we have spent the last 11 years undertaking the most ambitious, self-build construction of an incredible, green oak framed building on the south eastern edge of the village.



For a short view clip providing an aerial view of the church please see:



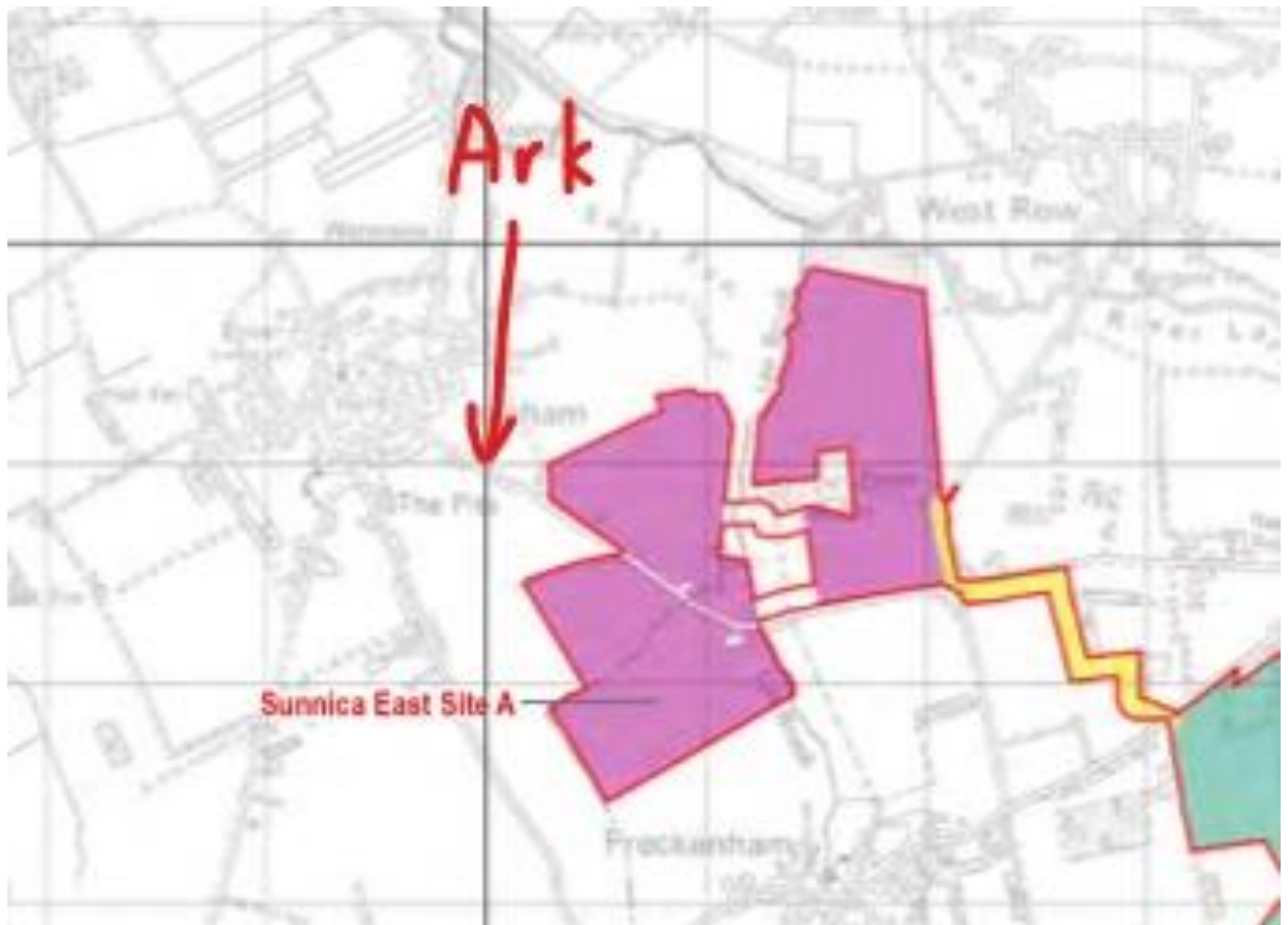
We formally opened the building on the 24th October 2021 and it is now home to upwards of 350 regular worshippers together with numerous visitors, keen to visit the building and worship with us

Although we have not surveyed individual church members, we believe the following to be an accurate representation of the views of our church and in particular Church leaders towards Sunnica's proposals:

- As custodians of God's creation, we fully recognise the terrible historical and ongoing damage being caused to our planet
- We accept our individual and collective responsibility to change our behaviours and universally support the principal of renewable energy as part of this change
- We do however believe that there are numerous flaws with Sunnica's proposal including:
 - the detrimental impact of losing such vast amounts of agricultural land and the resulting increase in transportation of food supplies
 - the inefficient generation, transportation and storage of electricity achieved by this proposal
 - the compulsory purchase of several sections of land will unnecessarily and detrimentally affect people's economic livelihood
 - changes should be made at a political and legislative level to ensure renewable energy is efficient and a compulsory element of all new domestic and commercial construction
 - the lack of clarity and accountability for the ultimate decommissioning of the enormous site

Location & Views

As you can see below, the Ark Church is located less than 400m from the start of the proposed Sunnica East Site A, at the highest point of elevation within the village. It has been specifically positioned so that it takes advantage of the far-reaching views, particularly to the south and east of the building and these views would be dramatically and irrevocably destroyed should Sunnica East Site A be approved



Un-interrupted views looking towards the South East of The Ark

From the car park / grounds



From inside the building - Ground floor



Panoramic view from the first floor of the building



Distant view of St Mary's Parish Church Mildenhall – reflecting the current visual connectivity between Churches

A key requirement of any place of worship is that it provides a carefully protected space to reflect on the wonder of God's creation. There is little doubt that The Ark currently provides this and that those who worship here benefit both spiritually and emotionally from our rural setting and that this would be significantly / detrimentally affected should these views be lost.

Similarly, we simply do not believe that any mitigation but particularly the trees and hedges proposed by Sunnica, which will be barren from leaves for almost 50% of the year, would shield or detract from the industrial views that would be created should this application be approved.

Design & Construction: also see appendix 1

As you can see from the photographs below and from the site visit, the building which has a current rebuild value of approximately £9m, is of major architectural significance and is unquestionably among the biggest green oak framed buildings in the UK. As a result of its unique design and construction it has attracted significant local, national and international media attention

The entire architecture of our building (both externally and internally) is based on a traditional agriculture design and absolutely every effort has been put into ensuring that the church fits naturally into our rural environment and built to the highest of standards to prevent it being a burden on future generations.

There is no question that these stances have added to both the time taken and the financial cost of constructing such an amazing building. We believe however that it was a significant factor in us obtaining planning permission for this site and has resulted in a most fantastic building, of which we are extremely proud.

One of the biggest compliments that we regularly get from visitors to the church is their appreciation of "what a fantastic job we've done converting such an old barn", not realising that it is a completely new build!

With the exception of a few specialist services, the entire design and construction of our church building has been undertaken by members of our church. Of

Photos of agricultural / traditional features - External



Photos of agricultural / traditional features - Internal



The past eleven years has been an incredible journey:


- A vision was established and embraced by our church community, who have faithfully funded the entire project, to the point that we are now completely mortgage free
- High Oak Construction was established in 2008 to complete all aspects of the project, including a team of just 4 church members to undertake the build
- A large sawmill was constructed in the grounds of the pastor's farm and c 2000 Oak trees were purchased from the Forestry Commission. These were subsequently felled and shaped to form the frame of the building, using traditional building methods
- The frame was installed, efficient services installed and the ground floor became fully operational in October 2021. The first floor is now almost complete
- We have benefited from the practical support of a number of local businesses who have bought into our vision for this amazing building

As you would expect, this project has required enormous levels of ; personal, emotional, financial and spiritual commitment from our Church family and been an incredible labour of love.!

Our Church Community

The Arch Church is made up of members of all ages, social classes and a wonderfully increasing diverse range of cultural backgrounds. In contrast to Churches nationally, The Ark has seen significant growth in both attendance and membership since opening in its current building, with many members travelling 20+ miles to join us. We are concerned that people would not be dissuaded from visiting us and ultimately become an integral part of our church should our building be bordered by a significant Solar farm!?

In addition to our physical congregation, we now also get up to 400 people watching our services on line each week



It is important to stress that The Ark is more than just a Church. We offer a wide range of activities beyond our normal Sunday services, many of which are community-based activities. These include:

- Serving as the local Community Food Bank,
- Acorns (parents and toddlers group),
- Evergreens (elderly residents) and
- Current Bereavement Programme.

Of particular note is the fact that we now hold an annual summer camp for young people from around the district which utilises the Church grounds for our tents, external toilets and shower facilities.

We are also planning the installation of a play area for younger people on land immediately to the north of the building and intend developing our current catering facilities to enable us to serve members of the local community

The grounds, particularly those facing the rural views to the south of the church also serve as a backdrop for wedding photographs.

In summary, our most specific concerns regarding this application relate to:

- Sunnica's complete disregard for the detrimental impact any approval would have on our church community, particularly on the wellbeing of church attendees, the long-term future of our church and the contradictory nature of such a huge industrial site on the unique, architectural construction of our building.
- the resulting loss of rural views, green spaces and footpaths which won't just detract from the views of our wonderful building but will negatively affect the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of all residents

- the non-typical, green Oak construction of The Ark, means that our buildings insurance premium is already extremely high. (approx. 30% of our total income). Our immediate proximity to the edge of the proposed site and the evidential dangers of fire associated with such sites will unquestionably increase the risk to our building and therefore further increase our building insurance premium



The Ark Church Council - on behalf of Church Leaders

November 2022

THE Ark BUILD

The Ark Church has been designed and built over the past ten years using traditional techniques. In the small village of Isleham near Ely, the large oak beams now house the very congregation that built it. Many have said the building is stunning, splendid and awe inspiring.



The journey has included felling the oak trees in Thetford Forest, building a sawmill and then, years of work on site. The new church replaces a much smaller building in the village used for the last two centuries.

Paul Hedger is the church leader and works on the build. "We have gone from clearing the land, milling the timber to finally fitting doors and skirting boards. We have faced numerous challenges with finances, materials and more

recently COVID, but God has been faithful and guided us step by step. We are delighted to see where God will take us on the next step of the journey."

The project received help from many who have given to the build, including specialist equipment and materials. The building formally opened at the end of October 2021 (although work is still going on a day-to-day basis). The building is very traditional, but it incorporates state of the art underfloor heating, multi-mode lighting and modern kitchen and toilets.

Throughout the project people have asked "when will it be finished, what will it cost, what will it be used for?" The answer to many of those was "we don't know" as the building is very much a journey of faith, trusting God to reveal the plan and provide the finance each step of the way. This is a difficult journey with some anxious moments, but God has guided the team and provided everything the project needs.



The journey started in building a sawmill and buying the right tools and equipment. Nearly all was second hand. Slowly beams were cut and sections erected on the site. Other timber was cut and seasoned on site for joinery work in the later years. Most of the work was done by four of the congregation. The team didn't just cut the beams but went on to build the staircases, doors and windows, even laying the thousands of blocks that make up the carpark.

Very few of the team had building, carpentry or joinery skills, but rapidly learnt everything from building huge oak frames to fitting toilets and installing underfloor heating.

Due to changes in insurance company definitions, the church needed to move into the Ark before it was ready. In November 2020 the congregation walked from our old chapel in Isleham village to the Ark. For a few weeks the new building had no fixed toilets, carpet or even heating.



Challenges continue—the building is unique in many ways but the history of cheap timber framing in modern buildings has made the building difficult to insure. The church needed insurance to cover a mortgage. In a remarkable weekend the church gave or lent enough money to cover the mortgage and the chance to re-evaluate our insurance.

Interesting Facts

- The building took nearly 10 years to build
- There are well over 1,500 trees involved in its construction
- No nails or screws can be seen in the main structure
- One of the biggest green oak buildings in the UK
- The church managed to build the Ark for 30% of the commercial build cost
- There are 65,000 tiles on the roof
- There is 11km of underfloor heating pipes!



The Ark build is likely to continue for some years, if you would like to support the work, we would love to hear from you.

Connect with us



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Find us on google maps!



We have another newsletter on Church Life if you're interested...