

INTRODUCTION

I reside in East Sussex some 100 miles away from the proposed Sunnica Energy farm but have a personal interest as my parents, now in their eighties, live in Worlington and my sister and her family live in [REDACTED]

I frequently visit my family and we often enjoy outings together in the adjacent countryside and villages. Indeed, I have always planned to move back to Suffolk ultimately and close to where my parents live.

The scale of the development is so spread out (10 miles) as to affect many villages and of course the whole landscape will change from the unique Brecklands landscape to an industrialised zone with circa 1.1m solar panels, each 13 feet high and standing way above the hedgerows. There will also be the three battery sites, each including a substation, and these are all 30 feet high and unscreened.

It has recently come to my attention that a 30 foot high wall will be built between the transformers and substation on each of the three sites which will have a further adverse affect on the existing rural landscape.

The Sunnica proposal, which has been ongoing now for three and half years, is having a major detrimental effect on my parent's [REDACTED]. The stress of not knowing what will happen to the value of their home and to the local environment is intolerable for them. Their home and village would be surrounded by solar panels and the danger of fire, explosion and toxic plumes from any of the three BESS sites adds significantly to their concerns.

My parents are also finding it incredibly difficult to keep up with the discriminatory formal planning process, given their limited computer knowledge. This has been exacerbated by the Applicant having caused extreme confusion throughout an already complex planning process. There has been a distinct lack of public consultation, coupled with insufficient information and a wholly inadequate level of transparency.

I visit my family every month and I enjoy travelling around the delightful countryside close by. If the landscape becomes surrounded by solar panels and resembles an industrial zone, then I shall have no wish to relocate.

I love to visit the local country pubs and farmers' markets and I very much enjoy visiting Ely, in particular, with its beautiful cathedral, country markets and marina. Ely is only approached via Isleham which is very badly affected by the Sunnica proposal. Therefore, such visits will no longer be part of my life.

In light of all the above issues raised, I therefore object to the Sunnica proposal.

I will now comment on various sections of the DCO.

ALTERNATIVE SITES

Sunnica have not listed any alternative sites explored. Neither have they made reference to any brownfield, contaminated land or redundant MOD sites. Brownfield sites must take preference over food-producing farmland.

In the DCO there is only a generalisation of choice of site by extending a 10 mile radius from the existing Burwell grid connection.

DECOMMISSIONING

Sunnica have not addressed this important subject in the DCO by looking 40 years into the future and providing a detailed decommissioning policy together with associated costs. I may not be around at that time to witness how, and if, the land is returned to agricultural use. However, my nephew and niece will be the generation that has to witness the result of soil not worked for 40 years, that has never seen sunlight or rain and could be purely dust, and an industrial wasteland of twisted metal, glass, redundant electricity apparatus and cabling.

There seems little sense in negotiating 40 year leases when the life of a solar panel, as advised by academics, is 25 years.

A detailed plan is required from Sunnica and their comment in a webinar “the owners today will not be the owners throughout” gives great cause for concern.

BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS (BESS)

We know there are 75 acres of BESS and substations but Sunnica refuse to tell us for each site the number of containers and the electricity output. Therefore academics are unable to assess the risk of fire and explosion.

It is well recorded in the press and reports by academics that BESS are unsafe. There is no better evidence than the 30 fires globally in the last 4 years, and in 2020 a BESS fire at a site in Liverpool, to make a decision that these units cannot be placed close to residential properties.

They must NOT be used by Sunnica.

COMPULSORY PURCHASE (CP)

It is noted in the DCO the large reliance on CP to enable the site to operate successfully. This is quite wrong when it is known that in 2019, at the time Sunnica was looking to connect to the Burwell grid, there were hundreds of acres of land available which would not necessitate CP and be much closer for a grid connection than the Sunnica 16km cable route.

Furthermore it is noted Sunnica are prepared to disturb persons’ Human Rights. This is unacceptable in a democracy.

FARMLAND

The entire area of the proposed 2,800 acre development uses farmland which produces food for this country. We are heavily reliant on imported food to survive in this country and farmland nationally is diminishing at an alarming rate. The Ukraine war has taught this country to be more self-sufficient in the food chain. This is another important reason to decline this proposal.

There is no justification for the Sunnica Solar proposal on food-producing farmland when alternative brownfield sites are available.

CONCLUSION

As I live 100 miles from the proposed site I have had to rely on good communication. Since the inception of Sunnica’s proposal in 2019, this has not been forthcoming. There has been a distinct lack of information, inaccurate and misleading data, lack of clarity, omissions, confusion and virtually no opportunity given to the community to have public meetings. Covid for two years was used as an excuse.

I have the utmost respect for the campaign group saynotosunnica Limited. It is they who have done Sunnica's job in keeping the community updated with specific and meaningful comments and given the residents the opportunity to understand the meaning of technical terms, the risks from BESS and the changes to our landscape.

The proposed project is for the largest solar development in the whole of Europe. The way in which Sunnica has approached the planning application process for this NSIP acutely demonstrates a grave lack of experience, understanding and respect for due process, as highlighted by the above points raised in this Written Representation.

Sunnica clearly does not have the requisite experience in putting forward a NSIP for a solar development of this scale with battery storage and a capital cost of around an estimated £1bn.

The Secretary of State should decline the Application.

END OF REPORT