

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Sunnica Energy Farm](#)
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The Planning Inspectorate

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Proposed Sunnica Energy Farm

Written Representation on behalf of the Ramblers, Newmarket and District Group, Suffolk Area.

I am the Group Footpath Secretary for the Newmarket and District Group of the Ramblers, which has responsibility for monitoring rights of way matters including planning applications, and the like, 'affecting a public right of way' in the locality. In this case, the role includes not only the West Suffolk parishes of Barton Mills, Freckenham and Worlington, but also the East Cambridgeshire parishes of Chippenham, Kennett and Snailwell, and more recently, Isleham, which feature in the Sunnica scheme.

We recognise the need to reduce the use of fossil fuels and to develop alternative ways of meeting the ever-increasing demand for electricity but this, surely, should not be at the expense of the production of food crops, a policy which would lead to increased reliance on imported produce. It has been cited that the land intended for this project is not of a particularly high grade, something that the laymen amongst us are not qualified to challenge. However, a tour of the general area, at the time, revealed that, as far as could be seen from the road, all the fields included in the scheme, with the exception of West Site B, were either in or prepared for crop.

In recent years, the reputation of Newmarket as 'the home of horse racing' has resulted in an ongoing increase in the number of stud farms and private training establishments in the area surrounding the town, one only separated from West Site A by Snailwell bridleway no. 5. It is apparent that this type of development is also extending further afield and is encouraged by the district councils in both counties, reducing the acreage in arable use. The wisdom of permitting the loss of further substantial areas, reported as being in excess of 2,600 acres to accommodate an energy farm for an alleged period of forty years must, therefore, be questioned. At present, the farmed countryside, even with very limited access, is pleasing to the eye but, should the scheme go ahead, this will be exchanged for a fenced industrial landscape, alien to the area, and not a good legacy to leave for those generations who follow us during the next forty years or so.

My role, here, as a Footpath Secretary, is to ensure that the 'walking public' are not disadvantaged, should the scheme go ahead. There are, in fact, very few rights of way within and in the vicinity of the areas under consideration and it is, therefore, even more important that those that exist are either protected or acceptable alternatives, suitable for

adoption by the relevant Highway Authority, are provided. In view of the envisaged lifespan of the scheme, more than half of the lifetime of an average human being, permissive routes will not be acceptable. Clearly, this was not in the minds of Sunnica, when they provided an 'Update Newsletter', apparently midway through 2021, with plans marked with sketchy blue lines, identified as permissive paths, but with no indication of existing routes that may, or may not, be affected. This aspect needs to be revisited by Sunnica, if their proposals are to be taken seriously.

Sunnica do, however, seemed to have redeemed themselves slightly, to the north of Freckenham village, where the adjustment of the area of East Site A, to keep solar development further away from dwellings, and the introduction of an area of native grassland instead of solar panels, should enable Freckenham bridleway no 2, running from Mortimer Lane, in Freckenham village to Beck Bridge, and extending to Beck Road as Freckenham bridleway no 7, to remain open, in its entirety, and not closed towards its northern end, for the duration of the, alleged, two year construction period, as was previously indicated. The short length of permissive path, proposed alongside Beck Road towards Isleham, is noted with interest, but no attempt has been made to provide a pedestrian link with West Row from Beck Bridge, as had been hoped, the existing road link being particularly hazardous for walkers and riders.

Moving now to East Site B, where the main concern is with the 'green lane' running from Rectory Farm, on Elms Road, north-eastwards to Worlington village. This lane is not shown as a public right of way on the Definitive Map for either Freckenham or Worlington, but is given the number 6006 on both maps, and U6006 elsewhere, indicating county unclassified road status. The green lane is thought to be an ancient route, part of Ashwell Street, a variant of the Icknield Way, and is still well used today by walkers and riders and has appeared many times as part of a circular walk in the programmes of local Ramblers Groups and others. This walk is now much improved by the creation of Freckenham footpath no.10 following the Lee Brook from Badlingham towards Freckenham, cutting out a long stretch of fast road, and ultimately, enabling a link with Mortimer Lane, referred to earlier, in the village. It was a great pleasure for me to use the leafy U6006, along with the other routes mentioned above, during the lockdown period, as part of my regular exercise, wishing that my wife, who has now passed away, could have been with me. We both enjoyed the remoteness and peacefulness of routes like this. It is now generally accepted that the Icknield Way was never a fixed route, but one which would have migrated over the centuries to suit ground conditions, and it is not unreasonable to consider 'Ashwell Street' to be such a variation. However, I will go as far as to say that whatever the history of U6006 may be, it is now part of a vital recreational link between several West Suffolk and East Cambridgeshire villages and should be preserved as it is now, gnarled pine trees and all, at all costs, and not bounded on one side and, in part, on both sides, by tall fencing surrounding solar panels. It must not be closed but should remain open to pedestrians and riders, throughout the construction period, but out of bounds to construction traffic. Based on this, East Site B should be reappraised, if not omitted from the scheme altogether.

Returning now to the proposal, as a whole. It is interesting to note that all four of the sites are well to the east of the 'parent' sub-station at Burwell, and both East Sites A and B are as much as ten miles away from the sub-station at their extremities, when measured along the proposed cable routes. Was the inclusion of these two sites an opportunist afterthought on behalf of Sunnica, perhaps after a failure to acquire land closer to the sub-station, as they give the impression of 'standing alone', almost detached from the West Sites. Was there, perhaps, a minimum area in mind to be achieved?

Reference has been made earlier of the low number of rights of way, apart from in Burwell parish on the 'run-in' to the sub-station and, in a letter to Sunnica, in December 2020, suggestions were made for other potential rights of way links that might be explored. There was, though, no response; apparently Sunnica were not interested.

In conclusion, I must return to my earlier remarks and say that the proposal, as it stands, is completely alien to this rural area, to the detriment of crop growing, and too large by far.

Phil Prigg

Group Footpath Secretary

Ramblers, Newmarket & District Group, (Suffolk Area).

8th November 2022