

7 Socio-Economic and Land Use (Chapter 12 of the Environmental Statement)

7.1 We note in Appendix 12B: Soils and Agriculture Baseline Report soil survey data has been provided by Sunnica². The methodology adopted uses the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) guidelines³. The consultant's findings are broadly in line with Natural England's Agricultural Land Classification Map Eastern Region⁴. Nonetheless, noting that the applicant has excluded the assessment of the soils and agricultural land quality of the cable route, and it is clear in the Draft National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3) that soil surveys should be extended to the underground cabling and access routes (2.48.14), we consider that further evidence on this should be provided to allow a comprehensive assessment to take place ahead of any decision being made. Whilst we acknowledge the applicant's position that the installation of the cable route will not affect the quality or future use of the agricultural land it travels through, consideration should be given to the methods employed to carry out this element of the development. The disturbance of the topsoil and subsoil can have a lasting impact on the quality of the soil and the retention of water, and this should be taken into account. Furthermore, members of the Environment and Green Investment Committee are aware of local concerns over the Agricultural Land Classification results. Access to the land by the campaign group to seek to verify these results has not been forthcoming. This is therefore also drawn to the Planning Inspectorate's attention ahead of reaching any final conclusions on this matter.

7.2 Notwithstanding the above, the capability of the soils to produce high yield crops with the support from irrigation seems to be understated. Grade 3 soils in Cambridgeshire can produce a greater range and yield of crops than Grade 3 soils in other areas of the country albeit using irrigation. Evidence of the yield from this area is needed to inform the assessment of the scheme's impact on agricultural production in the area. The assessment needs to reflect this.

7.3 The loss of land capable of food production is less well documented by Sunnica and should be assessed as a percentage of each type of soil in the county.

² Link to Sunnica's Appendix 12B: Soils and Agriculture Baseline Report
https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/ipc/uploads/projects/EN010106/EN010106-001863-SEF_ES_6.2_Appendix_12B_Soils%20and%20Agriculture%20Baseline%20Report.pdf

³ MAFF guidelines – MAFF revised guidelines and criteria for ALC (Ref 1) published October 1988

⁴ ALC Map Eastern Region