



Preliminary Meeting Note

Application:	Sunnica Energy Farm
Reference:	EN010106
Time and date:	10:00 am on Tuesday 26 July 2022
Resumption of the Preliminary Meeting	
Time and Date:	2:00 pm on Wednesday 28 September 2022
Venue:	Bedford Lodge Hotel, 11 Bury Road, Newmarket CB8 7BX & Microsoft Teams

This meeting note is not a full transcript of the Preliminary Meeting. It is a summary of the key points discussed.

1. Welcome and Introduction

Grahame Kean welcomed those present and introduced himself as the lead member of the Panel of Examining Inspectors, the Examining Authority (ExA), and Guy Rigby and Karin Taylor as panel members to examine the Sunnica Energy Farm application.

The ExA explained that their appointment was made by delegation from the Secretary of State (SoS) for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 8 March 2022.

The ExA explained that they would be examining the application made by Sunnica Ltd ('the Applicant') before making a recommendation to the SoS who will decide whether an Order granting Development Consent for the proposed project, which is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), should be made.

The ExA explained the purpose of the Preliminary Meeting (PM) and noted that the Examination will commence after the PM closes.

The ExA confirmed that all documents and submissions received and accepted during the Examination will be published on the project webpage of the National Infrastructure Planning website.

2. Event recording

The full recording of the PM is available on the National Infrastructure Planning website and can be accessed [here](#).

3. General Data Protection Regulation

The ExA explained the Planning Inspectorate's duties under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further information relating to the GDPR can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's [Privacy Note](#).

4. Examination Process

The ExA briefly explained the examination process under the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008): further info can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's [Advice Note 8.4](#)

5. Initial Assessment of Principal Issues

The ExA explained the purpose of the Initial Assessment of Principal Issues (section 88 of the PA2008), which can be found in Annex C of the [Rule 6](#) letter of 28 June 2022 and asked for any observations on them.

Isleham Parish Council stated that the council had been excluded from Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) despite surrounding Parish Councils being included. Isleham Parish Council requested to be included.

East Cambridgeshire District Council highlighted the importance of "Best and Most Versatile Land (BMV)" and "Battery Safety" to the local community and councils.

Say No to Sunnica Action Group highlighted points raised in their letter dated 13 July (paragraph 17 onwards). The ExA advised that it was aware and has made note of these points already.

Suffolk County Council requested that "Good Design" is raised as a discrete topic. The Applicant clarified that many discrete subtopics such as landscaping, Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), regard to cultural heritage, all fall under "Design".

The ExA referred to comments made regarding Food Security, which had been raised during Relevant Representations. No further comments were made during the PM, however the ExA highlighted the ability to submit further representation following the PM.

6. Examination Timetable

The ExA noted requests already received in writing to amend the draft Examination Timetable contained in Annex B of the [Rule 6](#) letter and also welcomed further suggestions from the parties in attendance.

All comments received were duly noted by the ExA and considerations will be reflected in the Rule 8 Letter.

The ExA, in view of the representations received during and prior to the PM, considered it inappropriate to start the Examination over the summer due to a number of issues regarding stakeholders' abilities to meet deadlines and local authorities being able to secure appropriate sign-off for submissions.

The ExA also decided that the Examination should not commence until after the date that the Applicant stated it would formally submit the request to make changes to the application. The dates given in Annex D of the [Rule 6](#) letter therefore would not apply.

The ExA would issue a procedural decision inviting Interested Parties to comment on the Applicant's intention to change the application during the PM and express a view on the letters of 21 July 2022. This will inform the ExA's view of what the revised timetable should be.

The ExA clarified that any Cost Applications need to be made within 28 days of the close of the Examination.

The Examination Timetable can be found in the [Rule 8](#) letter published on 04 October 2022.

7. Hearings and Site Inspections

The ExA clarified the purpose of:

- Issue Specific Hearings (ISH)
- Compulsory Acquisition Hearings (CAH)
- Open Floor Hearings (OFH)
- Accompanied Site Inspections (ASI)
- Unaccompanied Site Inspections (USI)

The ExA sought and noted comments on the arrangements for the above events. ~~These~~. Further information relating to hearings and site inspections can be found in the Planning Inspectorate [Advice Note 8.5](#)

The ExA stated that it has already conducted a number of Unaccompanied Site Inspections, on 10-11 April 2022, 24-25 April 2022 and 10-11 May 2022, from publicly accessible land. The notes of the Site Inspections are available to view on the project webpage on the National Infrastructure Planning website.

The ExA confirmed that an ASI would be helpful due to much of the site not being viewable from publicly accessible land. The ExA stated that any further notes from USIs would be made available on the National Infrastructure Planning website.

The ExA reiterated that the hearings scheduled for later in the week (w/c 25 July 2022) were now postponed but not cancelled. Future events are expected to be conducted in a blended style and agendas will be made available closer to the time.

The Horseman's Group, Say No to Sunnica Action Group and Worlington Parish Council all highlighted the importance of the events being blended and the advantage of having a physical aspect to the hearings.

8. Procedural decisions

The ExA clarified the procedural decisions made under section 89(3) of the PA2008 and asked for any observations. Procedural decisions can be found in Annex F of the [Rule 6](#) Letter.

A relevant representation was received from National Grid regarding the Applicant's Option 1 grid connection. The Applicant noted that Option 2 requires Compulsory Acquisition (CA), which the Applicant would like to avoid, so the Applicant is proposing a change to the application to include a new "Option 3" which involves transforming the 33kV electricity received from the solar stations directly to a 400kV at the site and then

exporting the electricity at 400kV to the Burwell National Grid substation. This would remove Option 1 from the application and may also remove Option 2.

The proposed changes application would not remove Option 2 at this point, but Option 2 would be expected to be removed at a later date in the Examination.

Resumed Preliminary Meeting Note

Application: Sunnica Energy Farm
Reference: EN010106
Time and date: 2:00 pm on Wednesday 28 September 2022
Venue: Bedford Lodge Hotel, 11 Bury Road, Newmarket CB8 7BX & Microsoft Teams

1. Welcome and Introduction

Grahame Kean welcomed those present and introduced himself as the lead member of the Panel of Examining Inspectors, the Examining Authority (ExA), and Guy Rigby and Karin Taylor as panel members to examine the Sunnica Energy Farm application.

The ExA explained the appointment was made by delegation from the Secretary of State (SoS) for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 8 March 2022.

The ExA explained that the ExA would be examining the application made by Sunnica Ltd ('the Applicant') before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State who will decide whether an Order granting Development Consent for the proposed project, which is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), should be made.

The ExA explained the purpose of the Preliminary Meeting (PM) and noted that the Examination will commence after the PM closes.

The ExA confirmed that all documents and submissions received and accepted during the Examination will be published on the project webpage of the National Infrastructure Planning website.

2. Event recording

The full recording of the resumed Preliminary Meeting is available on the National Infrastructure Planning website and can be accessed [here](#).

3. General Data Protection Regulation

The ExA explained the Planning Inspectorate's duties under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Further information relating to the GDPR can be found in the Planning Inspectorate's [Privacy Note](#).

4. Update from the Applicant on the status of the proposed Change Request and responses to consultation undertaken by the Applicant

The ExA invited the Applicant to describe the proposed changes, the consultation responses and issues of clarification sought in the [ExA's letter of 8 September 2022](#), following the formal submission of the [change request of 30 August 2022](#).

The Applicant explained that, following the submission from National Grid Electricity Transmission, Option 1 proposed for connecting to the Burwell National Grid Sub-station was no longer available to the Applicant. As a result, an alternative option, Option 3, was considered to connect the scheme to the Sub-station along with the current Option 2. Through the Change request, the Applicant proposed 3 changes, changes 1-3, which had been explained in the Applicant's change request letter of 30 August 2022.

As a result of the consultation and engagement, the Applicant and National Grid's preference is that only Option 3 should be pursued i.e the 400kV connection. This will avoid the extent of permanent land-take at the Burwell Substation site. National Grid has not formally confirmed to the Examination that this is its preferred option, so as a result two options are still subject to Examination. The Applicant mentioned that it is expecting that, following discussions with National Grid it will also confirm that Option 2 will not be pursued, and that Option 3 will be the only option in the application.

The change application is submitted with the updated environmental information which explains the likely environmental effects with supporting documents. The further information sought by the ExA was submitted by the Applicant on 14 September 2022 which included additional plans to address the questions.

The Applicant also confirmed that its understanding is that National Grid is content with the 400kV connection and it hopes to formally submit either a joint statement or SoCG with National Grid.

The ExA requested the Applicant to explain the figures submitted with the change request and compare that with the one submitted at the time of original application.

Suffolk County Council requested an indication of timing for when the formal decision will be made by the ExA on whether to accept the change request into the Examination as the local authorities are to prepare their Local Impact Reports, to which the ExA confirmed that the decision will be made shortly after the Preliminary Meeting closes and would not wait for National Grid to formally submit any agreement.

Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council and West Suffolk Council endorsed the remarks made by Suffolk County Council.

Say No to Sunnica Action Group and the Horseman's Group questioned the materiality of the change request and asked whether the ExA will take any input from anyone else on this, to which the ExA answered that the decision will be made by the ExA on this after the close of the PM and people can further elaborate on any issues that arise during the Examination.

5. Further remarks about the Examination process

The ExA added further remarks including in relation to SoCG, LIRs, and Additional Submissions. The ExA referred to the second [Rule 6 letter of 31 August 2022](#) which explained all these matters.

6. Draft Examination Timetable

The ExA referred to the draft timetable in [Annex C of its letter of 31 August 2022](#) and pointed out the changes that have been made since the first Rule 6 letter.

The ExA explained that the ISHs on the DCO and other environmental issues are postponed until after Deadline 2 and the ExA will conduct early ASIs starting the day following the close of the PM, followed by further ASIs in the week of 1 November 2022, and reminded people that IPs may only attend if they have registered in advance.

The ExA further explained the methodology behind the ASIs which takes into account issues including geography, time of the year and accessibility. The ExA explained that further USIs may take place during the Examination if required.

Say No To Sunnica Action Group and the Horsemans Group stated that the Site Inspections should cover certain areas around the site at different times of the year to which ExA confirmed that this will be taken into account.

Reach Parish Council asked if the ExA has any plans to do a Site Inspection at Weirs Drove, to which the ExA confirmed that it will be considered while planning for further ASIs.

The Examination Timetable can be found in the [Rule 8](#) letter published on 04 October 2022.

7. Hearings and Site Inspections

The ExA explained that currently it is anticipated that hearings will take place as blended events or be fully virtual via Microsoft Teams, and that the agendas will be published nearer the time.

The ExA sought comments on the arrangements for the above events. These were duly noted and considered by the ExA. Further information relating to hearings and site inspections can be found in our [Advice Note 8.5](#)

Say No To Sunnica Action Group and the Horsemans Group queried whether input would be sought from Interested Parties on the ISHs in terms of how these will be held and issues to be covered on particular days. The ExA replied that notice would be given to the Parties in advance and that particular consideration would be given to the order in which the issues are covered at the hearings. It will be made clear that representations are to be made by specific deadlines in the Examination timetable in order for particular issues to be considered.

The ExA closed the Preliminary Meeting.