

Submission ID: 14500

Please see below a copy of what I said at the recent compulsory acquisition hearing at the Bedford Lodge on 14th February 2023.

Good afternoon, I am Joanna Reeks and I live at [REDACTED] which is affected by the proposed Sunnica cable route.

I also jointly own [REDACTED] where Sunnica wish to acquire approximately 100 acres to the east of the A11 to include in their solar area.

During 2019 we looked at the merits of the newly proposed Sunnica scheme. However having reviewed the information provided over a number of months I felt the scheme as a whole was too large and the negative impact on the local community too great. In 2020 we informed Sunnica that we did not wish to participate and this remains our position.

Sunnica were very disappointed by our decision and said that we had two choices "either to sign a 35 year lease against our wishes and thus taking it away from our family for at least a generation or to have the land compulsorily acquired.

So we have ended up in a position where we are negotiating a lease with Sunnica as we felt that compulsory acquisition was a very real threat. The negotiations have been very difficult at times with Sunnica adopting what we felt to be an unreasonable stance over many clauses within the lease. There are two outstanding points left to negotiate on the lease and so we have still not signed it.

I understand from Sunnica that of the 2,500 acres included in their project (and putting aside the landowners along the cable route who will not lose land) that we are the only unwilling landowners. If this is correct, our land forms only a tiny percentage of their scheme and I do not understand why they need our particular 100 acres of land. It is not even contiguous with the rest of the land and is separated by a major highway, the A11.

[REDACTED] has been owned by my family for over 50 years and is used as part of our arable farming business. We do not want to lose it to solar panels. I understand that for you to grant Sunnica compulsory acquisition powers over the tiny percentage of their scheme area that we own, there must be compelling evidence that the public benefits of the project outweigh the private loss suffered by those whose interests are being acquired.

I firmly do not believe that this test is met for our land at [REDACTED] and I urge the Planning Inspectorate to refuse the compulsory purchase of land to the east of the A11 on [REDACTED]. Sunnica is a private company established to make a profit and it is not fair that they could potentially do this having acquired our land on the cheap. They should also not be using the threat of compulsory acquisition powers as a lever over us during lease negotiations. This is unethical.

If you disagree and are minded to include our land for solar generation in the Development Consent Order then I would ask you to bear in mind the extreme imbalance of power between the Applicant and us and to exercise very careful oversight of their behaviour towards us which up until now has been aggressive, high handed and unreasonable.

Just to put on record we would strongly prefer the cable not to pass through [REDACTED] and if we are forced to accept it, we would ask that we are treated fairly by Sunnica, particularly with the reinstatement of any trees and hedges.