

Say No To Sunnica Action Group Ltd

Badlingham Farm, Chippenham, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB7 5QQ



16 August 2023

Dear Sirs,

Planning Act 2008 (as amended)

Application by Sunnica Ltd for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Sunnica Energy Farm (the DCO Application)

Secretary of State Request for Comments on Responses to Letter of 27 July 2023

Interested Party ID 20031080

The Secretary of State has requested comments on the responses to their letter of 27 July 2023.

We are preparing a complete response to be submitted by the deadline, but I am attaching a note from our Agricultural Expert concerning the points raised by the Applicant on Agricultural Land Classification.

We reserve the right to make further comments in our complete response.

Yours Faithfully

Dr C Judkins (Director)

Sent electronically.



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14th August 2023

Dear Mr Wheadon,

Sunnica Energy Farm – Responses to the Secretary of State

I have reviewed Pinsent Masons' response on behalf of Sunnica Ltd to the Secretary of State's letter of 27th July 2023 requesting further information of the Applicant. My comments relate solely to Section 7 of the letter, headed 'Other Matters' and the issue of Agricultural Land Classification (**ALC**) and the taking of 981 hectares of highly productive agricultural land for the project, of which more than 490ha should be classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land.

Throughout the course of the dealings with this matter, the issue of ALC has been generalised and obfuscated by the Applicant, to the extent that it is hard to assess effectively the evidence presented.

The Say No to Sunnica Action Group (**SNTS**) is criticised for failing to provide a methodology for its calculation of the area of Best and Most Versatile (**BMV**) agricultural land taken by Sunnica. SNTS's calculation was made using GIS (digital) techniques applied to digital mapping produced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (**MAFF**) and the Soil Survey of England and Wales [**SSEW**] and accurately scanned soil survey maps, [**REP4-121 pp137-141, Rep10-057 pp8-13**] which are described below.

It is accepted that Sunnica commissioned a soil survey to be carried out in accordance with Natural England guidance set out in Natural England's TIN049 [**REP2-240o**]. The findings of the Sunnica survey have been assessed by RAC and three other, independent soil scientists against field observations and highly detailed soil mapping of the area carried out by SSEW and MAFF. The findings of the Sunnica survey are at odds with the mapped soils of the area. Because of this anomaly SNTS requested three times that the land be surveyed independently to verify those findings and were refused access on each occasion.

The Reading Agricultural Consultants (**RAC**) survey of a proposed mineral site described by Pinsent Mason is consistent with the mapped soils of the area as described by the Soil Survey and MAFF and is consistent with the findings of the Sunnica Survey. The area of overlap between the RAC and Sunnica survey areas is less than five hectares, 0.5% of the whole site.

The Natural England predictive map referred to by SNTS is based on the findings of SSEW and MAFF from detailed mapping and identifies, in detail (1:10,560), BMV soils. It is accepted that the 1:250,000 mapping should not be enlarged for definitive classification and it has not been relied upon in such a way.



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The predictive map is used as a base to show at strategic scale the detail of the mapped land quality it reflects. The resulting calculations rely on detailed mapping at 1:10,560 and 1:63,360 scales based on observations at better than one per hectare, compared to 1:20,000 used by Sunnica.

Sunnica only identifies in its Soils and Agriculture Baseline report three soil associations, mapped at 1:250,000 scale. It does not refer to freely available detailed authoritative mapping that goes against the findings of its own soil survey, and the soil profile descriptions produced as part of its own extensive archaeological survey [REP10-058].

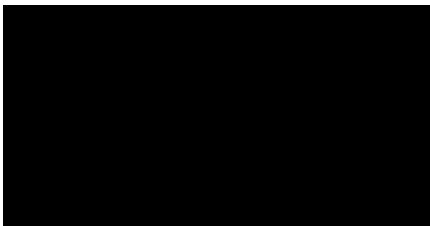
Regarding Natural England's statement that "*SNTS have used the strategic guide whereas DBSC have done a detailed survey which is in line with best practice, as using more detailed surveys gives more accurate results.*" This is wrong. SNTS may refer to strategic scale mapping, but its opinion regarding ALC in the area is based on highly detailed mapping carried out by SSEW and MAFF. The detailed physical characteristics of the soils of the area, to a depth of 1.2m seldom achieved by the Sunnica survey, will not have changed since those original surveys; the mapping relied upon by SNTS is not out-of-date as implied in Pinsent Masons' letter.

Second, the assessment of the economic benefits of irrigation to agricultural production generally and the local economy in particular should be part of an overall assessment of the proposal. This assessment is missing from both the Soils and Agriculture Baseline Report to the Environmental Assessment, which deals with impacts on farm businesses in a superficial way, and from the Socio-Economic Assessment, which fails to identify any impacts, adverse, neutral or beneficial, on agriculture and food production due to the loss of nearly 1,000ha of highly productive land for 40 years.

Third, it is a matter of evidence that the independent survey carried out for Sunnica failed to meet the standard set by the British Society of Soil Science (**BSSS**). The checklist provided by the BSSS guidance has been completed by independent soil scientists without consultation and each finds matters of concern that justify referral to independent third parties.

Whilst Natural England claims to be "*satisfied with the approach and methodology employed*" in report, it has not addressed the inconsistencies between the survey findings and those of its predecessor bodies. Historically, in cases such as this, Defra or a second independent soil surveyor has been instructed to carry out a second, in this case a third, detailed survey to examine the soils of the area. Sunnica has repeatedly obstructed SNTS attempts to commission an independent survey and landowners associated with the scheme have refused access. This refusal clearly demonstrates the low level of confidence Sunnica and the landowners have in their own soil survey and confirms SNTS' assertion that independent surveys carried out on neighbouring land with similar soils, which reflect the findings of SSEW and MAFF, are most likely to provide an accurate picture of land quality in the area.

It is clear from the evidence before the Secretary of State that the conclusions regarding soils and agriculture reached by Sunnica's Environmental Assessment contradict authoritative information produced by SSEW and MAFF, and thus that those conclusions should not be relied upon in the decision making process without independent confirmation.



Peter W Danks