

**From:** [LEILA HINDMARSH](#)  
**To:** [Sunnica Energy Farm](#)  
**Subject:** Sunnica objection  
**Date:** 11 September 2023 12:43:03

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Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you about my concerns regarding the proposal of Sunnica Ltd. to build Europe's largest scale solar and battery power plant in Cambridgeshire/Suffolk. The Sunnica scheme is way beyond the scale of any 'normal' solar farm proposal (these typically range from 25-200 acres in size); the huge spread of over 2 million solar panels (each 2.5m high) and 78 acres of 6m high battery units would cover over 2792 acres of highly productive arable farmland. This is not a 'regular' planning application, but rather an application to entirely rewrite, and industrialise, our open, tranquil farming landscape, which has been home to many settlers over the centuries. It will impact many villages and communities. Within a 15 mile radius of the above affected villages, we already have 11 solar farms in operation, and a further 9 pending construction (output over 450 MW). Combined, these cover over 2000 acres of productive arable farmland. We also have a wind farm, 5 biodigester plants and 2 landfill gas sites within this small area. So we have already very much embraced renewables locally. The Sunnica scheme would remove a further 2792 acres of farming land, over and above the acres already taken, and would completely overwhelm this area. My main objections to the Sunnica project are detailed below, but I am also appalled at the way in which this application is proceeding under the cloak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposed area for the 'Sunnica East A site' that surrounds Isleham village was only added very recently to the site plan. So the first time the Isleham residents were notified of this huge impact on their village was during the statutory consultation (which is currently underway, from 22nd September to 2nd December 2020). This consultation has been inadequate and discriminatory. Sunnica is only doing a 'virtual' consultation, and has refused to hold any face to face meetings or have any physical presence in any of the affected villages. A significant portion of each of these village populations either has no internet access or they are not as computer literate and are unable to use Zoom,

etc., which is how Sunnica is currently providing details about the scheme. This means that a large number of residents are not being provided with the information they need to make an informed decision about the plan. The consultation brochure and questionnaire that Sunnica sent out to introduce the scheme to Isleham residents (for the first time), only provides an overview. The detail behind the project is hidden away on the internet, and is not accessible to all. Some of the webinars have poor sound quality and the host (Sunnica) is able to select which questions it answers; these sessions are not a true 'two-way' discussion. Aside from the logistical and technical problems of an online-consultation, I also feel that it is unethical to be holding such an important consultation at a time when people are sick, or have other concerns such as job losses, etc. to deal with. The scheme cannot be fully scrutinised during this difficult time and is having a significant detrimental impact on the mental health of those residents involved. My main objections to the scheme itself are as follows:

- Known fire risk of Lithium ion Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). Sunnica is experimenting with the creation of a huge, 78 acre BESS system that has never previously been built on this scale. Fires from Lithium-ion BESS are well known and well documented. There have been many recent examples at solar plants and other sites. Such fires are explosive, cannot easily be extinguished and they release toxic gases. Yet Sunnica plans to put these experimental units close to residential areas, including 2 local primary schools. This is an unacceptable risk.

- Lack of consideration of alternative sites. According to Government guidelines, ground-mounted solar farms should be sited on brownfield sites. Sunnica has not detailed any brownfield sites that have been considered for this scheme. The Solar Trade Association states that there are 617,000 acres of south-facing commercial rooftops that are not yet being utilised in the UK for solar power. This could provide 50% of the UK's electricity need. In Germany, over 70% of solar PV installations are on rooftops (commercial and domestic), currently generating 50 GW electricity. These, along with suitable brownfield sites, should be utilised for solar panels BEFORE we further industrialise our countryside on a mass scale. Rooftop solar provides a more long term, sustainable solution to the climate crisis. Instead, Sunnica has only considered flat, highly productive arable farmland as an option (land that is predominantly ALC grade 2 or 3 per Natural England's ALC008 map. This is also

against Government guidance).

- Further to the above objection, we would lose a considerable expanse of productive, and highly versatile, arable farmland, if this scheme goes ahead. This area already has a large amount of farmland used for solar PV. The additional 2792 acres that Sunnica wishes to develop can provide 41,300t food each year (8,700t potatoes, 7,300t onions, 15,400t carrots, 7,900t parsnips, 12,000t sugar beet (= 1,920t sugar)). The local sugar industry relies on our local crops of sugar beet for its sugar production and, in terms of carrot production, this amount is enough to feed 3 million people each year (based on average consumption). In addition, this land also produces 900t wheat and 550t spring barley each year. In a world where food shortages are a concern, and people are encouraged to reduce their carbon footprint and buy local produce, etc. we cannot afford to keep removing thousands of acres of highly versatile farmland for industrial solar purposes, when rooftops and brownfield sites can be used instead. This Fenland region, often referred to as the "bread basket of Britain," supplies over 37% of vegetables in the UK, so removal of large amounts of farmland in this particular area will have multiple consequences not only with increased food imports and carbon footprint, but also in terms of long term job losses in the farming sector and related industries, loss of farming know-how and further land clearance/ intensive farming elsewhere to 'plug the gap' left by the agriculture we have lost.

- Loss of wildlife. Sunnica has conceded that there will be a loss of wildlife species as a result of their huge proposal. There are many well-established natural habitats within the existing agricultural fields. Removing, or attempting to relocate, these established habitats will have disastrous consequences for the species within them. The mitigation measures that have been proposed so far by Sunnica are completely inadequate. The disruption to, and destruction of, the local ecology caused by the solar sites, battery sites and the extensive 15 mile cabling route to the substation (which requires 2m deep trenches to be cut through fields, roads, rivers, etc. along the way) will have significant repercussions for the wildlife in the immediate and wider vicinity, not to mention the damage from HGVs, construction materials, dust, noise, etc. during the 3 year construction period.

- Decommissioning concerns. The Sunnica proposal does not provide any specific details about how the 2 million or so solar panels will be decommissioned from the site when the scheme comes to an end in 30-40 years' time. They have not provided a 100% guarantee that

all recyclable parts will be recycled (no matter what the cost), and not just end up in landfill sites. There is a possibility that the decommissioning of this huge scale proposal could lead to many tonnes of toxic waste being left for our future generations - either in this country or elsewhere - to deal with.

- Loss of open, accessible countryside and amenity to residents. This Fenland area is defined by open swathes of land with wide, expansive skies. This openness provides a wonderful sense of freedom, tranquility and wellbeing, and a sense of place. The sheer size of the Sunnica scheme would dramatically rewrite this landscape, replacing the greenery and openness with fenced-in fields of over 2 million industrial solar panels. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of green spaces and accessible countryside for positive mental health and well-being. The Sunnica scheme would remove this forever.

- Loss of archaeological and heritage assets. In its scoping report on the Sunnica project Historic England notes that, "This extremely large proposal affects an area of known archaeology recorded in the County Historic Environment Record (HER)." The Sunnica development risks damaging or destroying remains and, according to Historic England, "Has the potential to cause wholesale destruction of an archaeological landscape." There are many designated assets within 1km of the Sunnica site plan, including multiple Scheduled Monuments, churches, listed buildings, conservation areas, etc. Not only would the Sunnica scheme have devastating effects on these historic assets, it would also impact the cultural heritage of this area too.

- Contamination of protected water supplies and local rivers. The proposed development site runs over a groundwater Source Protection Zone, used for public water supply. These are susceptible to contamination, particularly during construction and decommissioning, but also during operation from possible leaching of the toxic elements within the panels should they get damaged (which can happen easily through storms, stones, flying debris, etc.)

- The proposed development site is close to several airports including the military bases at Mildenhall and Lakenheath. I understand these bases are examining the risks of glint and glare from the panel impacting flight safety. Many residents are very concerned about this as air activity over our villages is high =

There are many other valid reasons why I, like the overwhelming majority of my fellow residents, do not want this Sunnica scheme to go ahead. Please listen to our voices and please stop this ill-conceived project from going ahead.

Yours faithfully,  
Leila Hindmarsh