

Chestnut Farm  
Long Drove  
Cottenham,  
Cambs  
CB24 8RR

07.09.2023

The Right Honourable Therese Coffey M.P.  
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
C/o The Planning Inspectorate

Dear Madam,

**Re the Sunnica Proposal to cover 2700 acres of Fen soil with solar panels**

**Ref: 20030481**

There has been much debate between the opposing parties in the Sunnica investigation, about the quality and grading of the 2700 acres of Fen soil which the developers wish to cover with solar panels. The pro-Sunnica team claim that the soil is not particularly high quality- "Grade 3"- while the anti-Sunnica group "SNTS" state that this is a gross misrepresentation . "Really" they say "the soil is of good quality and has been incorrectly graded".

Whatever the case "The proof of the pudding is in the eating" and a local farmer has documented the crops that this area of land actually produces. "High quality milling wheat, malting barley, rye, potatoes, onions and sugar beet." The farmer estimated that if the Sunnica 'plot' were one farm it would probably produce about 32000 tonnes of foodstuffs per year.

The Sunnica team say that this is as nothing beside the energy which their huge solar farm will produce ; lamb or mutton will also be produced by sheep grazing around the panels. However, the public demand for meat has declined and there is one bitter truth: once lost, you cannot 'magic up' food-producing soil. Once you have lost 2700 acres of uncontaminated arable soil you will not get it back. It is also hard to replace the farming communities, the people with skills and the infrastructure of those who grew the crops.

The NFU pledged to provide "affordable high-quality food for the British people" but how can they if the ground is literally being swept away from under farmer's feet? And the more the UK has to forage for cereal and vegetable imports, the more vulnerable it will be to the whims and vicissitudes of the World's markets.

Sunnica say that the Ukrainian crisis and the Climate Emergency has put Green energy production at the "Top of the Bill" but what about food production? Solar panels can actually be placed on many other sites which cannot be cropped. "Brownfield sites" old industrial areas, waste tips, and even the tops of buildings can all be adapted to house

panels. Near my farm in the Chittering -Cottenham area, there are plans to place a solar farm on an old Waste dump. The core soils have been taken out and garbage put in. No crops can be grown, only a sparse layer of grass, so producing energy might be a great idea. But the soil around the villages of Fordham, Isleham, Newmarket, Snailwell and Burwell is not despoiled with waste and every year produces a great deal of food.

Green Energy is a superb way to combat climate change but if it destroys other 'green areas' isn't that causing another problem?

You could almost describe Sunnica as a 'Lazy man's design' because its just there on flat level soil – no ingenuity in finding an old industrial site and working out how to adapt it to hold solar panels.

The Sunnica proposal was no doubt planned before Russian invaded the Ukraine, "The Breadbasket of the World". The Ukrainian government have put the destruction of their agriculture as at \$4 billion. A huge proportion of their once fertile soil is now un-farmable - polluted by mines and other armaments – their farmers and livestock have been killed, and farm buildings and machines destroyed. If the Ukrainians win, their land will need a massive costly clean-up lasting decades. If Vladimir Putin wins it is unlikely he will share his food with us. And as for the rest of Europe – this year has been an appalling year with fires. Is it therefore a good idea to destroy 2700 acres of fertile English soil?

Sunnica is not the only challenge to The Fens (Britain's own breadbasket). Soon hundreds maybe thousands of acres of fen soil in the area around Chatteris will be submerged by a huge reservoir. There are also pressures on Fen agriculture from Cambridge University releasing large amounts of farmland for housing. Britain is only a small country. With all these erosions of our food-bearing soil do we really want to lose any more under solar panels which could perhaps be placed elsewhere?

Please could you therefore think very carefully before you sign away 2700 acres of food-bearing land to the Sunnica development.

Yours sincerely,

***Clare Cambridge***

RH & M Cambridge

Chestnut Farm