



The Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP  
Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero

By email to: [REDACTED]@parliament.uk

Dear Claire Coutinho

13 October 2023

### **Sunnica Energy Development**

I was surprised to receive notification that the Sunnica Development decision has been delayed and would be grateful if you would be able to explain why.

It is my understanding that all previous solar NSIPs have been decided either within the timescale permitted or before the required deadline.

I am unsure whether the delay is connected with the PM's Net Zero announcements, or whether Sunnica is again being given further time to complete their application. I note with concern that Sunnica have publicly stated 'We will continue to work with the Secretary of State to provide them with any information they require to determine our DCO application' which could be interpreted as the latter.

As stated in my latest submission to the Inspectorate and Secretary of State, I repeat, the poor quality of the Sunnica application, much of which was based on inaccurate and misleading information – not least Sunnica's claim using outdated and incorrect land classifications that the land within the order limits is only 3% BMV and which is pure fabrication and completely at odds with both Natural England and independent soil analyses that agree a figure of at least 50% - led to an unacceptable level of unresolved issues and critical detail at the end of the Examination period, which confirms yet again, that the application was not completed at the close of the Examination and therefore should not be proceeded with.

The Applicant has already been given multiple extensions to deadlines both pre- and now post- close of Examination, with numerous and sufficient opportunities to provide the statutory information required for their application.

All other interested parties have been able complete requests to the require deadlines. This position would appear blatantly biased and unfair and unreasonable to other parties and those who oppose the scheme.

The Inspectorate and Secretary of State have now received detailed evidence of the many flaws of a scheme, which will almost certainly never be carbon neutral and will not help reach our net zero goals; the Sunnica scheme is first and foremost an arbitrage scheme, designed to buy and store electricity at low rate and sell it back to the grid at a higher rate.

Timescale aside, as Matt Hancock was quoted on BBC News on 22 September 2023 as saying 'it should have been rejected. The development is too big, the scale is too vast and it's in completely the wrong location. It will turn our beautiful Suffolk villages into industrial zones' adding 'Sunnica's current proposal is not only dangerous but it's undermining support for renewables.'

Your speech on 2 October made a welcome reference to 'Sensible Solar' and your view that conserving our green and pleasant land is a personal priority was reassuring. As you are clearly aware, tackling climate change means taking people with you and maintaining public support, and that a greener future also means protecting the environment. Not only the natural environment, but agricultural land that is finite.

The PM's stated plan to restrict the installation of solar panels on British farmland, as an amendment to the NPPF due later this year, allowing local authorities to block solar projects that could put food security at risk, thereby putting food security on a par with energy security is very welcome. However, as an NSIP, our local authorities have no power to block the Sunnica scheme.

There is virtually total opposition to the Sunnica scheme from all County, District and Parish Councils across all political parties, including Suffolk County Council who have considerable experience of NSIPs and whose deputy leader Richard Rout called the Sunnica scheme 'the poorest application' he had seen.

The PM's view that 'It's important that local communities have a say and that their needs are taken into account and we come to a balanced decision' and his intention for local communities affected by (sic) solar farms to be compensated for the disruption is laudable, but no compensation could cover the loss to our local community if the Sunnica development were permitted.

The ever present and unknown dangers of BESS, the permanent loss of agricultural land, the natural environment, historical and cultural features and the rural views associated with them all, would scar this rural part of the East of England permanently.

As has been widely commented, local engagement throughout has been extremely poor and no local community benefit whatsoever has been demonstrated; there will be no local benefit through power to local homes, bill discounts or other financial compensation.

With the current climate emergency and an opportunity to 'save our environment, grow our economy and secure our children's future' a decision to approve the Sunnica scheme based on factually incorrect information will set a very dangerous precedent for the increasingly large number of applications for large solar schemes in the UK.

Yours sincerely

Nicole Langstaff

Cc Rishi Sunak Prime Minister  
Lucy Frazer MP  
Matt Hancock MP