


Interested Party Reference number: 20029971

Sunnica Energy Farm Case Team
The Rt Hon Claire Coutinho MP
Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero

By email to: sunnica@planninginspectorate.go.uk
@parliament.uk

24 January 2024

Sunnica Energy Development

Further to my letter to Claire Coutinho of 23 October 2023, I was surprised to learn on 7 December 2023 – the day that the decision announcement was due - that the Sunnica Development decision had yet again been further delayed until 7 March 2024. I learned this by watching the local evening news on the day and subsequently by checking the NSIPs website.

You will therefore appreciate my further surprise to receive in the post this evening a letter (dated 22 January 2024) inviting me to 'comment on the information provided in response to the (Secretary of State's) letter dated 14 December 2023' and advising the 'Deadline for comments is 23.59 on 26 January 2024'. Thus I am being given 48 hours to comment on responses to a letter I have not been previously been made aware of.

Until the date of 7 December 2023 Interested Parties were receiving updates by email; has this system changed? If so, why? You will be fully aware that failing to notify IP's by email places those opposed to the development at a huge disadvantage.

Luckily, I have the time to respond, if only briefly, but I am quite sure many, many others won't have this opportunity and therefore it cannot be considered you have notified and received comment from all Interested Parties fully.

As previously commented, it is my understanding that all previous solar NSIPs have been decided either within the timescale permitted or before the required deadline. As no reason for either the first delay or this further delay has been given, is one to presume the outstanding issues in the letter of 14 December are the only matters still to be considered?

If the Secretary of State is still in any way undecided about the appropriateness of this scheme in such a strategic agriculturally important and productive area, I would invite her to visit the vast development sites to see the winter wheat and barley coming through, the fields drilled ready for potatoes and sugar beet, and other areas being prepared for carrots, onions, salad and other varieties of crops.

In specific response to the SOS's letter dated 14 December and responses to same, I would comment as follows:

Breckland Special Protection Area ("SPA")

As a statutory body Natural England must surely be required to support their position by evidence; any waver of this requirement would be an abuse of position.

The Secretary of State would set a dangerous precedent by basing a decision on unsupported assertions only.

NE's admission that 'There is further work required but we do not have any timescales for this or the date of publication' is contrary and their assertion that 'the report as published is unlikely to change our advice provided to date for this proposed development', is therefore assumptive.

As Natural England has been, and is still, unable to provide supporting evidence or confirm when it will be able to, their position on the issue cannot be relied upon.

It should be noted that the independent ecology groups/experts consulted commented during the Examination that the Applicant's farmland bird surveys (including stone curlew surveys) are inadequate and incomplete.

Landscape/visual impacts

The Applicant describes the scheme design and development as being 'landscape-led'. This is not apparent from the plans.

Discussed at length throughout the Examination, the c2500 acre development site covering over 15 miles from one end to another would destroy the existing rural landscape, replacing it with a new glassed-over industrial one, covered in an estimated 1.1 million solar panels along with hundreds of battery energy storage containers.

In its' response the applicant refers to some of the sections of the scheme that were discussed for removal during the Examination:

West Site A - As an elevated site, the view over West Site A from the Limekilns cannot be hidden through planting, which the Applicant themselves have agreed.

E05 - An open expanse with far reaching views and an exceptionally productive growing area (not as stated in the Applicant's assessment), the proposed planting of woodland and hedgerows is not appropriate to the existing landscape.

E05 – This site is also home to the historically significant WW2 plane crash site and a habitat for rare species including stone curlew. Any alteration to the landscape would be inappropriate.

E12 and E13, both important wildlife habitats, which lie either side of the historic Badlingham Lane (Icknield Way). Known for its ecological importance (protected trees, species, etc). The proposed cable crossing and tree removal would destroy the landscape.

As previously noted, 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 – with the exception it would appear, of Natural England - 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.

Yours sincerely

Nicole Langstaff
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