

Sunnica Energy Farm

Isleham Parish Council Registration ID Number: 20030170.

Isleham Parish Council comment on the information provided in response to The Secretary of State's letter of 14th December 2023.

Isleham Parish Council (IPC) reiterates its opposition to this scheme which, if approved, would have a devastating impact on the local environment and the communities in this area. The ExA was made aware of the almost unanimous opposition to this scheme from Isleham residents and multiple other parishes, groups, councils etc so we will not repeat this in detail here. Our reasons can be viewed in multiple representations presented / submitted by the Council before and during the examination.

Landscape and Visual Impact

Sunnica set out in their response to the Secretary of State's letter regarding landscape and visual matters that the design of the Scheme was landscape-led from the outset, informed by the LVIA and consultation.

It is the view of the Council this is not the case, and we fully support the evidence submitted to date by Michelle Bolger Expert Landscape Consultancy, MBELC (submitted via the Say No to Sunnica community action group and supported by the parish alliance). As well as showing numerous inaccuracies in Sunnica's LVIA, MBELC draws the same conclusion that we all know – that this development is in the wrong place. The site selection was flawed from the beginning, hence there are areas where the significant impacts cannot be reduced. We support the joint council's view that these should be removed, as we have stated previously.

In relation to parcel E05, which is within the parish of Isleham, the development of this parcel would change completely the characteristic landscape, as we have submitted before. The so-called mitigation planting, the panels and the security fencing themselves would block the long ranging and much-loved views from the village to the Lea Brook, the River Lark and beyond to our neighbouring villages and towns to the north and east, as well as the B50 aircraft crash site. This important part of our village history would be blocked off visually and physically. We have made several submissions about the impact on this site.

Sunnica further claim that the site *"...has been selected because it relates to a relatively flat landscape within generally strong patterns of existing vegetation which can be reinforced by the substantial setbacks and planting incorporated into the design."*

It is clear to anyone looking at parcel E05 that, in terms of our local area, it is not entirely flat and this parcel certainly does not have a strong pattern of existing vegetation. It is very open as a result of our fenland geology and is very typical for our Fen Edge location. We are proud of our setting (see photos). The substantial setbacks and tree and hedgerow planting suggested in the design will destroy this landscape and views.



View of E05 east towards Lea Brook (not visible due to fall in the land) and showing the pattern of existing vegetation



View of E05 north from Beck Road highlighting the sparse vegetation

Sunnica specifically refers to Parcel E05 as an opportunity to substantially enhance biodiversity, appreciation of cultural heritage and public amenity. Not only have they failed in this regard, but the selection of parcel E05 for development should never have happened if this were truly “landscape-led.”

This yet again demonstrates their lack of awareness of the landscape here in their assessment. In addition had effective consultation taken place they may have understood the value of this landscape and the views of our residents.

Sunnica's position that the removal of the parcels proposed by the Councils would not result in a very significant landscape or visual benefit defies logic. The removal of parcel E05 would clearly be a benefit over the remodelled, uncharacteristic landscape and views they propose.

Stone Curlew

IPC maintains its concern about the impact of the development on stone curlew and other rare farmland birds that we enjoy seeing in this area. Sunnica's provision is inadequate, and we maintain the concerns raised in our previous representations.

With regard to the position of Natural England and the linkage of stone curlew populations in this area we feel that it is of the utmost importance that any position taken on this matter is fully evidenced. Natural England has already advised that regardless of the formal status of the link between stone curlews within the Sunnica proposed development and the SPA population, they expect that the compensatory habitat areas should still go ahead.

The stone curlews in our local area, alongside the other bird species adversely affected by the development, are greatly valued and appreciated by local people. This autumn a very large gathering of over 50 stone curlews was present on fields adjacent to the Sunnica proposed site at Isleham for several weeks. This reinforces the importance to this species of our local arable landscape and these birds will have probably originated from pairs breeding locally as well as in the Brecks.