

Continuation of Submission 11919(cut off in process of submitting document)

Objections to Sunnica Energy Farm: Environmental concerns

The proposed area has been traditionally used for agriculture, raising crops and livestock. There are several long-established villages and one larger settlement, Red Lodge on the perimeter of the proposed site. If the scheme is approved the area will be changed beyond recognition into an industrial site, containing 1,000, 000 solar panels, BESS storage systems 3 m in height, security lighting and deer fencing. Sunnica states it will create screening by planting trees and hedging, but this would probably occur after construction. The hedging would consist of "whips" about 60 cm high, so it would probably take half the lifespan of the project for any screening to be effective. The amount of materials required for such a large scheme would make it unlikely for it to be carbon neutral.

Surrounding the scheme with fencing would impact on wildlife corridors, destroy nesting and feeding habitats, and cause disturbance to rare species, such as stone curlews, which nest in one area of the site.

The proposed site borders Chippenham Fen, a National Nature Reserve, which could be damaged by toxic chemicals leaching into the soil.

Sunnica states that after 40 years the site would be cleared and revert to farmland, but there are concerns about the condition of the soil, also that the company might be insolvent and unable to fund the reinstatement.

A small but locally important wildlife site, Red Lodge Heath SSSI, situated about 2km from the Sunnica East BESS storage site, would be adversely affected by fumes from fires. The SSSI was considered particularly important for invertebrate conservation, including 16 Red Data Book and 54 nationally scarce species.

Impact on Local Residents: Many residents chose to move to this area to enjoy the rural aspect. Sunnica states it will retain rights of way and create new footpaths, but views of acres of solar panels will not create a pleasant experience for walkers or cyclists.

Construction of the site would take about two years, during which 1,250 staff would be working from 7 am to 7pm six days a week. 841 staff vehicles and heavy goods vehicles would be on site, creating additional traffic along narrow country roads. Residents would encounter road closures and diversions as they travelled to work or made local journeys.

The change in land use would cause property prices to fall, possibly as much as by 40%.

Residents in Red Lodge would be particularly affected as house prices there are the lowest in the area, so home-owners might find it difficult to purchase a property elsewhere, or even find themselves in a negative equity situation.

If a major fire or explosion occurred on the site home insurance premiums for local homes could rise.

Although renewable energy is the means to reducing global warming, the Inspectorate should be aware that about 20 solar farms are already in operation or under construction within the West Suffolk/East Cambridgeshire area. Alternative locations, eg brownfield sites or domestic installations should be considered.

The Sunnica Energy Farm proposal has been rejected by parish, district and county councils and by the MPs for West Suffolk and East Cambridgeshire. It is inappropriate in size, scale and location for a densely-populated country such the UK.