From: [redacted]
To: Sunnica Energy Farm
Subject: Written Response Sunnica
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To Whom it may concern:

I James Thorp have spent 17 years of my 23 year agricultural management career farming land involved in the Sunnica scheme or nearby.

I have formal training in agricultural practices, soil management and agronomy. In my previous employment I worked for A G Wright & Son Farms Ltd farming land near Chippenham and Badlingham.

In my current employment I am working for a large scale vegetable growing business producing 48,000 tonnes of potatoes and 18,000 tonnes of onions, along with significant other agricultural crops throughout Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

The land I farmed was a bodied sandy loam to a minimum depth of 250mm. Sub soils varied from sandy silt loams, loamy sands to sands. I was able to achieve milling wheat and malting barley yields above the national average year on year. We also grew high yielding sugar beet crops and the land had previously grown carrots and seed potatoes. This was productive land which performed well.

I recognised that the soils had further productive potential for growing a wider range of vegetables. We therefore installed a 32 million gallon winter fill reservoir for the purpose of growing high quality pre pack potatoes, onions and other vegetables for the supermarkets. The reservoir project cost £485,000 and was part grant funded as we demonstrated the increased employment opportunities vegetable growing brought to the area. I would not have made this significant capital investment if the soils on the farm were not productive and suitable for further vegetable production.

The reservoir enabled us to produce high yielding crops of quality packing potatoes Maris Piper which commanded a premium price with our customers Tesco and M & S. We achieved average yields in excess of 65 tonnes per ha and on some fields over 70t per ha. We also let land for specialist onion growers who are still growing on the farm today. They like the soils and are able to grow a quality crops.

Our rotation on this farm was: Winter Wheat
Potatoes Maincrop
Winter Wheat
Sugar Beet (or other break crop)
Winter Wheat
Onions

Daniel Bairds Report- I have the following comments to make based on my experience of farming in the area and where applicable I have linked them to comments made within the Baird report:

1/ Tables 5-2 and 5-3 - it is not possible for there to be only 4% BMV land on the 981 site. I believe the majority of the land I was farming would be graded as 3A. It is telling the landowners are not allowing access to their land for a second opinion to be given.

2/ 5.2.2 - None of the arable land I farmed for 13 years ever flooded.

3/ 5.4.3 - Winter fill reservoirs are supported by the Environment Agency as they take out water from the watercourses during periods of high rainfall which assists the Agency in there management of water. The capital investment in reservoirs and the high labour costs of irrigation are sustainable because of the ability of the productive soils that are able to produce high quality high yielding vegetable crops. I can confirm that the reservoir I installed took 12 acres out of production.

4/ I was able to produce high yielding crops of wheat and barley on the soils, and did not find droughtiness to be a restricting factor other than the two fields on the southern boundary of the farm bordering Wildtracks. Even here we were still able to grow milling and malting quality crops.

5/ 5.6.3 - I would dispute that this soil type is particularly susceptible to compaction. If compaction is a factor it is easily manageable on this soil type. High yielding root crops do not grow on compacted land.

6/ 5.6.5- I do not believe that shaded soil under solar panels will improve for the panels being there.

7/ 5.6.6 - The deep excavation of land to lay the cables will upset soil structure and should be taken in to account when assessing the scheme.

8/ 5.7.3 – The Bury St Edmunds factory relies on Sugar Beet to be grown locally and British Sugar want to reduce road haulage miles of the crop. This is ideal for Sugar Beet growers in the Sunnica area.

9/ 5.7.7 / 5.7.16 / 5.7.22 / 5.7.27 / 5.7.37 Sugar beet can be grown successfully on this land without irrigation and the majority of it is.

10/ 5.7.46 – Farm Business - We have seen sugar beet grown on this farm for a number of years. This farm is the lightest of all the farms in the scheme and is situated in East site B. Despite having 570 million gallons of water available it does not irrigate sugar beet.

Conclusion – I am not against renewables and understand the need for them. I also understand agriculture and the need for food production. The areas of the country (indeed world) which have correct soil types and water together to grow high value root crops is so limited that none of this land should be compromised for future production!

I believe the soils within the Sunnica scheme are critical and will certainly be needed for food production now and in the future. Renewables and Solar is also needed but should be sited on land which is less productive elsewhere.

Kind Regards

James Thorp