

Deadline 4 submission

Personal submission of Dr Catherine Judkins (URN: 20031441)

Please find below the content of my presentation at OFH2 on 9th Dec 2022. In addition, I have added some comments following some of the views that I heard presented at the hearings last week.

Many thanks for your consideration.

1) OFH2 Presentation

I am part of the Say No to Sunnica community group but I am here to speak as a private individual and as a resident of Isleham. I wanted to pick up on a few points from my Written Representation.

Turning first to landscape. There have been technical discussions about the assessments of the landscape but I wanted to talk today about what this landscape means to us as people and as communities living in it. How do you quantify and assess the emotional attachment we have to our landscape and what this area means to all of us who choose to live and work here.

Our landscape supports us, and nurtures us. It gives us our sense of place and sense of identity. It is not just something we pass through en route to other places.

I'd like to use some of my daughter's schoolwork as an example. We're so lucky in Isleham to have a fabulous community primary school with around 200 children. They learn a lot about the many historic buildings that we are fortunate enough to have here but also they learn about our local landscape, our agricultural heritage, and our varied wildlife.

We are proud in Isleham to be a Fen Edge village – that is a village that sits on the border of the Fens, like a final outpost before the landscape changes to Chalkland, Brecks and beyond.

In my daughter's work she talks about 'The Amazing Fens' (Fig 1) and what a great place it is. She, and her classmates, are clearly very proud to live here.

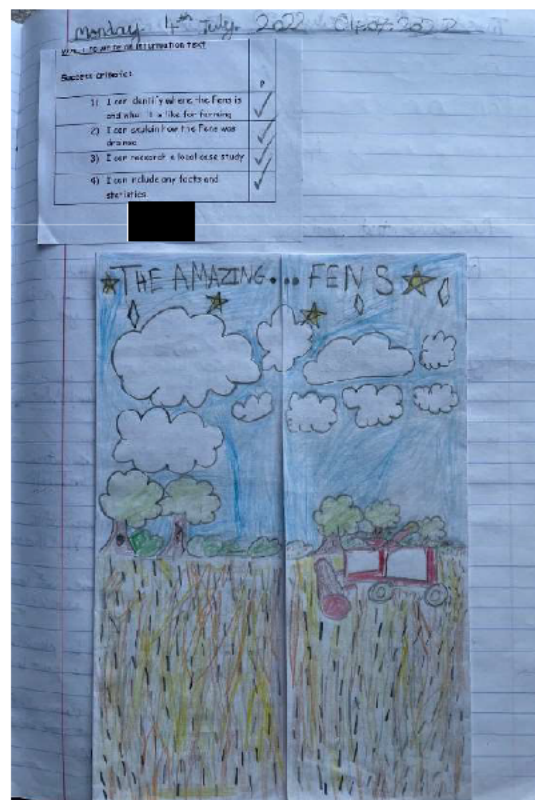


Fig 1. Part of my daughter's topic work on Fenland Landscapes. Note the things she identifies from her surroundings – fields of crops, farming activity (in this case a combine harvester at work), big skies and trees in the distance

She talks about the produce we grow – naming potatoes, sugar beet, wheat as examples. She talks about the high quality soil here – lots of Grade 1 and 2 - and how this region produces over a third of England's fresh vegetables, as well as bulbs and flowers.

Her class did a wonderful presentation of their learning to parents and the rest of the school. They all held up paintings they had done of their local environment (Fig 2). They all had these same features – big skies, big open views, fields of crops.

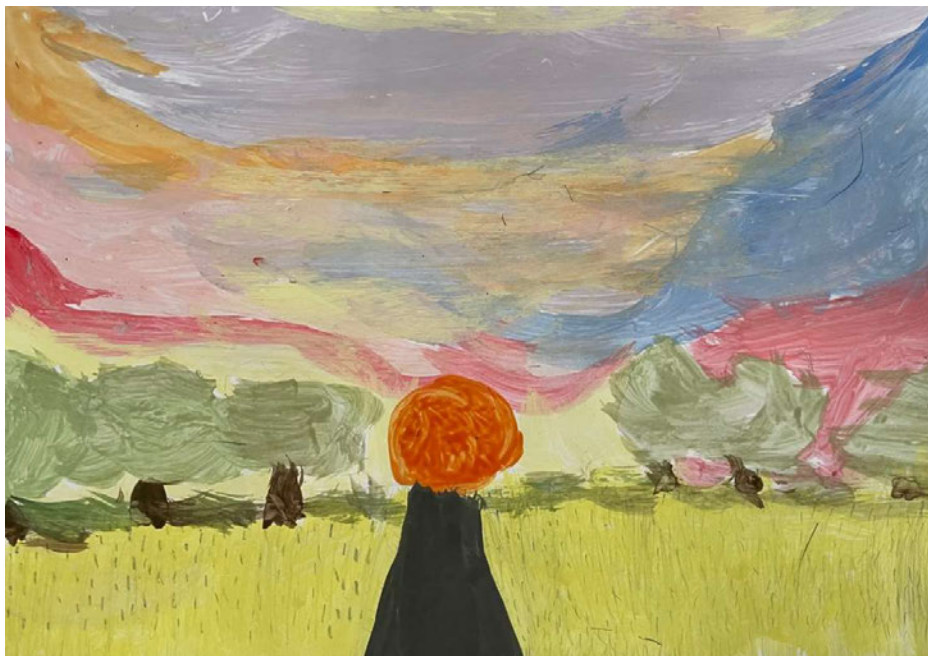


Fig 2. *My daughter's Fenland landscape*

All of this learning was inspired by their surroundings. All of this is what gives our children, and us, our sense of identity and it is why we choose to live here.

If this is changed, and I'm thinking about the drastic change caused by Sunnica East A, which is closest to our village and one of the most exposed areas (because of its openness), but also about the significant changes caused by other parts of the scheme that impact a huge part of the area we move around in on a daily basis to go to the shops, visit friends etc.

The idea of so dramatically changing our rural outlook *in one hit* to an industrial outlook fills me with dread. And to do this on such a huge a scale so that we see and feel this along so many of the routes that we take on a daily basis makes this even worse.

It will damage our enjoyment of our surroundings and who we are as communities. And this doesn't just affect our children and what they connect with here, but also for all new people who move into the villages – having that connection with the local heritage and the rural landscape is what helps them settle. I moved to this area 12 years ago and the open, rural landscape and the close knit communities within it have made us feel like this is home.

And the same goes for the plane crash site and other locally important sites such as the Spurgeon Stone and the River Lark. How do you quantify the sentimental value and significance that these and other local heritage points have in the community?

We've been trying to explain this to the applicant but it has largely fallen on deaf ears.

The recent 'sudden awareness' that the crash site exists was quite surprising. This site has been known about and commemorated in the village for decades. It is not 'new' to those of us who live here.

My 3 neighbours were at the primary school on that tragic day and they still talk about how they are indebted to the sacrifices of the crew who stayed on board the plane to steer it away from the village as it may otherwise have landed on or near the school. Their lives could have been very different, or they may not be here at all.

It has been, and continues to be, honoured as the coroner who carried out the inquest said it should be: *"When we think of this tragedy in the future we should remember the gallant act of the pilot and crew of this craft."*

The field in which the plane crashed has been subtly preserved for over 70 years, largely out of the respect afforded to it. It has not been developed or threatened by development and it looks more or less today as it did back then – an open agricultural field, the same shed that the plane crashed near to still stands.

It is important that it stays that way.

Another lady in the village who was a child when the crash happened remembers it vividly. She said that whenever she drives past this site she looks out, sees the area of the dip where the plane came down, and thinks about these men. My own children occasionally do the same, when we've been for a walk or bike ride or drive out along Sheldrick's Rd or Beck Rd they sometimes ask me about the crash.

I don't know what triggers their thoughts – perhaps they've seen the planes taking off or landing at Mildenhall or Lakenheath in the distance. But what is important is that they *have* these thoughts, and that the site is preserved as it is to ensure that the sentimental attachment is retained.

[I gather that the crash site is currently under review so I will comment further when the change request is submitted].

And a final comment is just to say how much me, my family and my friends enjoy this area. There was some debate yesterday about footpath closures and whether they are permanent or temporary or if they join up. But the biggest issue that we would struggle to deal with is the long-term damage to the footpaths and other routes as a result of their industrialisation, and for the next 40 years.

Three of my school parent friends do the Couch to 5 K programme and they enthuse about how they can literally get off their couch and run out of their front door and through open countryside, enjoying the wildlife, the farming activities in the fields and the nature wherever they go.

For the 2 year construction period they will be limited to where they can go with the air and routes full of construction vehicles, dust and dirt, and the noise of drill piling to accompany them. Post construction they will certainly not have a lovely countryside setting to exercise through.

I have friends who are part of the Isleham Joggers group, who enjoy running in this area. Two of these sent me comments (which I unfortunately didn't have time to read out at the OFH, so I have attached here as Appendix 1).

We, like many of my friends, would avoid using routes where the fields that we once enjoyed looking at were replaced by industrial infrastructure. In all likelihood we would have to travel elsewhere if we wanted to actually *enjoy* a rural walk or bike ride or do exercise, which is a bitter irony when we have rural countryside right here on our doorstep.

2) Comments on other points raised at the hearings

2.1 Having listened to the representations made at both Open Floor Hearings I fully support the objections about this particular scheme that our local MPs, our local district, county, parish and town councils raised. I also support the many and varied representations made by local residents who clearly value this area and the villages they live in and do not wish to see it industrialised.

2.2 In terms of the issue specific hearings, there were many points raised across the two days by SNTS and council experts that I agree with but shall not go into detail in this submission. Examples of some of the points that stuck me are as follows:

2.3 It was clear from the evidence presented by the SNTS ecology expert, the councils and the Suffolk Wildlife Trust that insufficient ecological surveys have been carried out by the Applicant, and that this poses a threat to a number of species, including farmland birds and the rare stone curlew. This needs to be rectified before consent so that negative impacts can be properly assessed and avoided.

2.4 It was made clear that the land allocated for stone curlew would not be sufficient to support the breeding pairs that we have, and that there is a high risk that this would lead to a decline in this species. I was saddened to hear the Applicant respond to the effect that they are fully aware that losses to species will occur as a result of this scheme, but maintained that the scheme on the whole delivered Biodiversity Net Gain, implying that this would somehow compensate. I do not consider this an acceptable approach to conserving and protecting wildlife and, in particular, retaining and enhancing sites for rare and protected species. This approach should not be allowed.

[Mr Turney, speaking for the Applicant at ISH2 following the discussion about inadequate mitigation for farmland birds said, *"to merely observe change in particular species is probably not this, well, it risks Madam distracting from the real thrust of the ecology case here, which is net gain not net loss."*]

2.5 I was also in agreement with Dr Burns' comments about the enjoyment we have here as locals seeing rare bird species (stone curlew as well other farmland birds) in close proximity to the villages (especially around Isleham) and it would be sad indeed to displace these species such that we can no longer appreciate their presence. This adds further damage to our enjoyment of living here and will also deter other wildlife enthusiasts from visiting this area. Living in the rural countryside, alongside bats, birds, deer and the many other species we are fortunate to see on a routine basis is a significant part of why we enjoy living here.

2.6 Regarding landscape and heritage matters, I look forward to commenting further once the cumulative impacts on these have been discussed and on the plane crash site once the change request has been submitted.

2.7 It was clear from the limited discussion that took place regarding agriculture and soil assessments that there is disparity between the findings of Sunnica's soil expert and the findings of the 3 soil experts retained by the Say No to Sunnica group. This, in combination with the evidence presented at the OFHs from farmers who work/ have worked the land that is within and adjacent to the scheme boundary and who know the range of crops and high yields it can deliver, must (in my view) lead to the conclusion that additional assessment of this is required to enable the ExA to base decisions on accurate and representative information. This was also reiterated by Lucy Frazer MP, as well as some of the county councillors.

2.8 Regarding the impact on the Limekilns, I agree with the points raised by the Newmarket Horseman's Group. Some of my friends who have worked for years in the racing industry (not just in Newmarket, but elsewhere in the world), have commented to me how much they enjoy riding here in this landscape and how they rate Newmarket as currently being the best place because of its excellent facilities and rural setting. I therefore agree with points made by SNTS about the benefits that the rural and historic surroundings here have for the racing industry in maintaining its current renowned position.

2.9 I also fully support the comments made by Dr Fordham, Cllr Stanbury and others who urged the input of the Health and Safety Executive at this planning stage since the area of battery storage and safety considerations are highly specialised and require careful scrutiny. Parties agree that current regulations for e.g. building control and building firefighting measures are not applicable to BESS. Hazardous Substances Consent should be sought for these installations, which clearly do contain hazardous substances.

3.0 I also agreed with points raised by Prof Christensen in lieu of his attendance at ISH3 and Dr Fordham that safety proposals for both technologies being tabled should be presented at this planning stage. It is not acceptable to focus only on one set of considerations for one technology type, when the

other technology type may end up being used. This makes it difficult for any party to assess the impacts that these huge BESS compounds would have on them. Listening to the commentary at the OFHs , battery safety remains a key concern to local residents.

Appendix 1 – comments from friends that I was unable to read out at OFH2 due to limited time

Catherine Monument

Living in the countryside means ‘freedom’ on your doorstep. Instead of hopping in the car and heading to the gym (which is difficult as there aren’t any close by) we have the luxury here of freedom to run and enjoy the countryside while we exercise.

From Isleham village centre we usually head out past the Ark Church and onto Freckenham via Mortimer Lane and then back into the village via Station Road. I either run as an individual or as a group, mostly as a running club.

On other occasions we run up to Chippenham, passing through Freckenham and round through Badlingham, finally heading back to the village along Station rd.

On the weekends we head out along Beck Rd towards Mildenhall, via Worlington and return to the village through West Row, past Lee farm and back to the village, again passing The Ark. I love the variety of the different routes we take and the fact that the scenery changes in the different seasons and depending on what is growing in the fields that surround us.

There is no public transport in the village but because I can get out and run I never feel trapped. My children enjoy long dog walks with me, on the perimeter of the village, this is their enjoyment, their fresh air and healthy lifestyle. Being able to enjoy the views and teach the children about nature is the whole reason we live in this village. It has charm and encourages the children to grow into individuals who appreciate nature and enjoy cities on the occasions it is necessary to visit. The healthiest way of life is to get a balance. I have a very busy lifestyle and I rely on my rural surroundings to give me my balance. The sun rises as you look towards Mildenhall, above the open fields. A view only nature can provide and this would be a huge loss to the rural surroundings should that be covered with panels and batteries.

If these views and the natural area were to be taken from us, via the implementation of Sunnica, it would be truly devastating. There’d be no enjoyment from running, no views and the feeling of enclosure, rather than the open fields and fresh air. I couldn’t be more opposed to the idea and feel that the loss would far outweigh any proposed gain.

Paul Addison

I am a keen runner and I regularly participate in marathons and other running events. Running in this area is particularly enjoyable due to the far reaching vistas we have. It’s relatively safe to run on the roads around these areas as you can see and hear any traffic approaching from far away, due to the openness of the area and the peaceful environment. I enjoy seeing nature around me when I run. This would all change if Sunnica went ahead.

Other potentially serious problems for runners in the area could also arise if Sunnica were to go ahead. The proposed application would obscure views of known problem portions of road, leading to basically running blind into oncoming traffic. This and the masking of any traffic sounds by the noise from inverters, substations and batteries could prove to halt all running in these areas as it would become less safe. The replacement of tranquillity with industrial noise would also mean that I wouldn’t be able to hear the sounds of birds and other wildlife as I run, which would spoil my enjoyment.

Running would become risky along my regular routes, especially during construction, leading to runners being forced into safer stretches of road but in larger numbers (although safer stretches are likely to be hard to find given the huge spread of this proposal). This would create its own problems such as stopping oncoming traffic, increased risk of accidents due to larger numbers of runners on fewer roads, etc.

All in all, I object to this scheme as it will seriously damage my enjoyment of the surrounding countryside, which is what I value about living here. It would make tis area a far less pleasant and safe place to run.