

SUNNICA UPDATE

Sunnica's application for a Development Consent Order, will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in June, not May as originally intended.

- Now delayed until 1st September 2021

West Suffolk & East Cambs Councils are working together to produce a Statement of Understanding. This will identify areas that the councils agree and disagree on, with Sunnica's proposal - Volume of issues suspected cause of delay reported above

For clarity, the challenge to Sunnica is happening on three fronts:

1. The County Councils as documented above - they are attempting to ensure the project does not proceed unless Sunnica provide solutions to issues that have arisen through the consultation process - involved with the councils are specialist groups such as English Heritage, etc..
2. The 'Say No to Sunnica' action group - who are actively campaigning and fund raising to 'fight' Sunnica
3. The Parish Council Alliance - representatives from District and Parish for each of the 8 affected councils (includes 3 or 4 others who have a concern but not directly affected), focusing on the key concerns of their residents (as highlighted through village surveys) and trying ensure that those with concerns are made aware of how they can provide feedback at each step of the process

The Parish Council Alliance have been advise to focus on the areas of disagreement, readying any relevant information for the Planning Inspectorate's examination which invites submissions from interested parties over the 6 months following submission (this is now noted as 28 days for the registration of interested parties - see below).

The three points below remain the focus for the Parish Alliance, although No.2 Highways is progressing via the County Councils (see notes in green under item 2).

1. Battery Storage - specifically the lack of any detail to conduct a thorough independent review. The concerns highlighted are: a) the potential impact on the local residents and specifically two schools in Red Lodge, especially as they are in the line of the prevailing wind (including the need for evacuation plans in the event of an incident) and b) the impact of the low frequency noise emitted by the battery farms and c) the through life management and decommissioning of the battery farms - **no further detail on battery type, but a real emphasis being placed on this issue, along with point 3 below** - Sunnica are not prepared to provide further information about the battery storage farms until after the decision stage
2. Highways & HGVs - specifically construction traffic. The majority of the planned access roads are 'C - class', for example Golf Links Road is earmarked for HGV traffic. There will also be 800 workers on site for 2/3 years, although Sunnica state that many will be staying in a caravan park they will create (Freckenham Road?) so the work traffic through the week will not be that significant. - Sunnica have now provided detailed access routes for their traffic and Highways have identified 'pinch points' where roads are too narrow or islands too sharp to manage the size of the vehicles required. Sunnica have now issued a more detail map of these pinch points and have started work on identifying the changes required to widen roads or adjust turning points at junctions or islands - this could cause significant disruption with road closures in the run up to the start of panel installation.
3. Quality of Farm Land - solar projects are not allowed on farming land graded as A, B, or C1. The farm land being used has been listed as C3 by Sunnica, but this grading was last done in the 1990s. The belief is that this might have altered in recent years and Sunnica changed the boundary to include a different farm after the grading was released in their project

documentation - possibility of more updated information on land grading from a local farmer, attempting to provide more information at the next meeting - The racing industry in Newmarket has contributed to the cause by employing a QC to put forward and defend the arguments against Sunnica. He will need the input of professional consultants, specifically landscape planning and land classification. The Parish alliance have found a suitable consultant but now need to raise £25,000 to fund this key element of the challenge.

THE IMPORTANT BIT:

- When Sunnica present their proposal, the Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State) has 28 days to decide whether the application meets the required standards to proceed to examination, including whether the developer's consultation has been adequate.
- Anyone can register as an interested party, but only has 28 days in which to do so. An interested party is someone who feels they have an issue with Sunnica's proposal.
- So from the 1st September (assuming this date is achieved), residents have 28 days to register their interest - the more that register a specific interest 'such as the lack of information about Battery Storage', the more focus will be placed on the topic during the 6 month examination by the Planning Inspectorate.
- The Parish Alliance have prepared boards for display in all Parish buildings that explains the process. They are preparing leaflets for a leaflet drop as soon as the date has been confirmed. They are writing to all Parish clerks to ask if they can place a link to their crowd funding site on the Parish website.
- The Alliance are asking all Parish Councils to contribute to the costs of the consultant, each funding up to £3,000 (this may be taken under section 137 powers).

We need to now decide which of these we wish to participate in.

These are the three key areas, but they are also challenging the following, although they are aware that Sunnica may well have alternatives that wouldn't stop the project or could simply ignore (in other words that are not likely to stop or reduce the size of the farm):

Bio-Diversity - the impact on the wildlife, specifically protected species (the existence of Milk Parsley, Great Crested Newt, etc..) - Sunnica's alternative would be to isolate and build around or move the protected item - **looking for expertise in this area**

Deer Containment fences and Landscaping - the fact that it will take 10 to 15 years for the tree saplings to grow to a height that would hide the deer containment fencing (8 to 10 feet tall and miles of it) - also considering the closure of Bridleways

Density of Solar Farms in the area - there are 3 more solar farms planned in the area (area not clearly defined, but within 8 miles) and a hydroponics plant at Bay Farm that will utilise solar and battery storage (stacked 18m tall). I believe this is on the Newmarket Road by the 'House of Muddy Paws'. - **further confirmation that the Hydroponics plant will have significant battery storage**

Aviation - although the bases at Mildenhall and Lakenheath have been consulted and considered safe, the light aircraft traffic using Newmarket Racecourse hasn't been considered and would be subject to thermal currents that make the air unstable over solar farms. - **Civil Aviation have stated they do not want to stop Carbon Neutral initiatives, so do not see this being a problem and therefore support the project**

Archaeology and Listed Buildings

Finally, in the summer of 2022, if passed by the Planning Inspectorate, they offer up a period where a legal challenge could be mounted. The PCA is currently exploring the implications of a

legal challenge and are looking to raise funds. Their primary focus is to crowd fund and this is about to start, but they are looking to councils to raise funds as well. I have already flagged that Red Lodge declined to be involved previously, but at some point I will bring it back to the council to vote on, to confirm the councils most current thinking.