

## VIDEO CONFERENCE MEETING WITH LUCY FRAZER MP – SUNNICA

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A open forum videoconference call was held on 5<sup>th</sup> October with Lucy Frazer MP regarding the Sunnica solar farm planning application. Lucy explained that she was holding a number of these meetings with villages affected by the proposal and was keen to represent the view of the local people.

The meeting was attended by over 20 local residents.

Nick Wright spoke on behalf of the parish council and Julia Huffer in her capacity as District Councillor.

All attendees were given the opportunity to put forward their questions and/or concerns.

The overarching concern was the sheer size of the scheme and the impact such a large scale development would have on the local landscape, farming, biodiversity and quality of life.

Below is a summary of points raised:

### 1. Planning process

- Concerns that due to COVID 19 this scheme may slip through the system 'under the radar' so to speak.
- The statutory consultation should be held by a third party and not conducted by Sunnica themselves
- The biggest issue raised in the non-statutory consultation is the size of the scheme. This has not been addressed for the statutory consultation. Furthermore the scheme is split into two sites; Sunnica East and Sunnica West which makes commenting on the scheme as a whole more difficult.
- The statutory consultation questionnaire has been written in such a way that there isn't a specific opportunity to raise the issue of the size of the scheme other than in 'any other comments'
- There are over 900 pages of documentation in the consultation. Realistically, this is too much for most people to trawl through to understand the detail of the scheme.
- There is concern that this will tick a big box in terms of 'green energy' for the government and that will affect the decision making process.

### 2. Feedback from residents

- 92% of residents who completed the Chippenham questionnaire were against the scheme due to the sheer scale of the scheme. Equally those same people were not against solar power per se but would like to see smaller schemes and land used that does not impact the quality of life of local people such as land alongside the A14.

- There are other smaller solar schemes in the region and they do not adversely impact the landscape or quality of life for local people. These schemes are approved at a local level and each can be judged on its own merits by local planning officers who understand the area and what works best for this region.
- There is no convincing evidence to support this scheme other than to make money for its owners.
- The residents of these villages feel a strong affinity with the land and feel as custodians that this land must be protected for future generations.
- Residents feel bullied and disenfranchised by this whole process. That a company can come and take such a huge land grab without the agreement of the local parishes, district and county councils, who will have to live with the impact of the scheme, is just disgraceful.

### 3. Viability

- What work has been done to show that the green energy that will be generated by this farm will more than offset the environmental impact of this scheme in terms of the manufacturing of the panels and equipment, the loss of agricultural land, the cost to the taxpayer of subsidies paid to the owner of Sunnica and the impact on the quality of life for those people whose local outlook will be forever changed?
- Studies have shown that solar panels lose their ability to generate electricity as they age. So the farms output would gradually decline over the duration of the lifetime of the scheme. Has this been taken into account in Sunnica projections?
- Would this scheme be viable without government subsidies?

### 4. Financial stability of Sunnica

- Investigations into Sunnica's financial standing show that it does not have anything in terms of assets. The scheme is a moneymaking one which relies on the selling of the approved planning to a third party to deliver.
- What financial plans are going to be put in place for decommissioning? What happens if the company should become insolvent? Who will be left to foot the bill to decommission the scheme? Will it be the landowners?
- Residents had concerns about the business model of this scheme.

### 5. Land

- The scheme is a huge land grab.
- The land has been incorrectly assessed as low grade. This is incorrect as it is productive land and used to farm many arable crops.
- Land nearer to the Burwell substation should be used rather than choosing land further away.
- Land adjacent to the A14 roadside would be preferable in terms of impact on local communities.

- Questions were asked as to why this area has been chosen and why not somewhere where the impact on small local villages would not be an issue.
- The decision makers need to consider the impact of this scheme for future generations. This land could be lost forever in terms of its historic landscape.
- Measures must be put in place to ensure that the land is returned to arable farming land at the end of the scheme.

#### 6. Impact on local area including farming land and wildlife

- There doesn't seem to be any positive benefit to the local community for the impact and inconvenience of this scheme being on our doorstep other than business rates to the district councils.
- There are very real concerns about the safety of battery storage especially with regards to fires and toxicity.
- Screening and grazing would take many years to establish. The existing landscape which has established over hundreds of years would be lost forever and replaced with an artificial one.
- Local arable land should be retained for farming crops.

#### 7. Construction

- The 2-3 year plan for construction will put significant strain on the local roads and infrastructure.
- Current COVID rules may further increase the number of vehicles due to rules about sharing and social distancing.

#### 8. Decommissioning

- How will decommissioning be funded? Money should be put upfront to ensure that it is there to fund the decommissioning at whichever point it happens.
- What happens if the company goes into administration? Who will be liable to decommission the sites?
- How will the panels, batteries and other equipment be recycled as to have a minimum impact on landfill?

#### 9. What can we do to fight this scheme

- What tactics can we use to oppose this application?
- Other schemes – what has worked?
- Need to pool resources with other affected villages to maximise impact.

- Be aware that the scheme will be judged on planning considerations and to focus on those issues.
- Local feeling has not been taken into account for other schemes that have been approved. Why would this be any different for us?

### Lucy's Position

Lucy told the meeting that she is there to support to views of her constituents and she would also be speaking to Matt Hancock MP for West Suffolk who also has villages in his constituency impacting by this scheme. She will speak to the MP for Faversham whose opposition to a solar farm was unsuccessful.

It was evident from the meeting that many people had spent time researching various aspect of solar power, battery storage and the Sunnica scheme and she asked that they share their findings with her to help support the fight against this scheme.

She also encouraged everyone to complete and return the Sunnica questionnaire, whatever their views, to ensure that the local community are seen to be engaging in this process. Apathy on our part will help Sunnica.

Lucy also advised residents to email her to sign up for updates from her office.

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