



Jadi Coe
Clerk, Freckenham Parish Council
By email: freckenhamparishclerk@hotmail.com

15 October 2020

Dear Jadi,

Sunnica Energy Farm

Thank you for your letter dated 9 October 2020 regarding the current consultation on our proposals for Sunnica Energy Farm. Like you, we want as many people as possible to respond to the consultation and are grateful to Freckenham Parish Council for its suggestions on how we could engage local people.

Approach to consultation

We do not, however, agree that the current consultation is flawed in the manner set out in the Parish Council's letter. This project is considered a nationally significant infrastructure project and there are consultation requirements set out in statute which we are required to comply with - failure to do so would mean that the Secretary of State would not accept our application for development consent when the application is made next year.

We have set out our approach to consulting with the local community in a Statement of Community Consultation. This was developed through extensive engagement with Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council. We considered these councils' Statements of Community Involvement in developing the Statement of Community Consultation.

We believe that the approach set out in the Statement of Community Consultation allows for effective and appropriate consultation while complying with Government guidance about COVID 19. While we are consulting in accordance with the Statement of Community Consultation, we will consider all reasonable suggestions for other consultation activities which would help the local community engage with the consultation process.

The Statement of Community Consultation includes a consultation period significantly longer than the statutory minimum of 28 days and this formed an important part of our discussions with the councils. We are still early in this period and do not believe we need to extend the consultation period to accommodate any additional consultation activity we might carry out on a voluntary basis.

Physical events

We carefully considered whether it would be possible to hold physical public exhibitions in developing our Statement of Community Consultation. We agree that they are a useful consultation tool – that is why we included public exhibitions in our non-statutory consultation last year.

Given the interest in the proposed Sunnica Energy Farm, we concluded that we would not be able to arrange physical public exhibitions in a way that we felt was compatible with current Government guidance regarding COVID 19. The Statement of Community Consultation therefore sets out a consultation programme designed to allow people from across the community to respond while complying with Government requirements in relation to COVID 19.

We recognise that people living in the Parish may not be able or comfortable with online engagement methods. That is why we sent a copy of the consultation booklet along with the consultation questionnaire and a pre-addressed Freepost envelope to all addresses within the Parish, as well as advertising the consultation in print newspapers locally.

We are also offering telephone surgeries for people who would prefer to ask questions about the project this way and have included details of our Freephone telephone number in all consultation materials. If the Parish Council is aware of parishioners who would benefit from additional support in responding to the consultation, we would be happy to work together to provide this.

We do set out that we would consider holding public exhibitions on a voluntary basis if the COVID 19 alert level set by the Government is changed to 1 or 2 by 27 October 2020. We have set this as the date because it would allow us to organise the events before the end of the consultation period. We would consider whether there was any need to extend the consultation period to allow for additional events when scheduling them.

Consultation materials

We do not agree with the Parish Council's comments regarding the consultation booklet. To date, we have had a higher level of response to the consultation than at the same stage of the non-statutory consultation. Distributing the booklet, questionnaire and pre-addressed Freepost envelope to addresses in Consultation Zone 1 has been an effective means of enabling people in the local area to respond to the consultation.

We will send a copy of the consultation booklet, questionnaire, and pre-addressed Freepost envelope, as well as physical copies of the plans in the consultation booklet, to anyone who requests them. We are also happy to provide large print copies of the booklet on request. The £0.35 per page charge you refer to applies specifically to the PEIR and not to other documents such as large print copies of the booklet. We have been in touch with the Parish Council separately, as we have with others, to offer to provide a hard copy of the PEIR for people living within the Parish to access. This



access would need to be subject to measures to ensure that access to the hard copy documentation is carried out in compliance with the Government's COVID-19 measures in place at the time.

On the basis of the above, we do not believe there is a need to extend the consultation period to allow for them to be provided.

Consultation publicity

We publicised the consultation widely in accordance with the Statement of Community Consultation. This included sending a copy of the consultation booklet, questionnaire and a Freepost envelope to all addresses in Consultation Zone 1, writing to elected representatives in Consultation Zone 1 with details of the consultation, and advertising the consultation online and in the local media.

This includes adverts placed in the paper editions of the *Eastern Daily Press* and the *East Anglian Daily Times* on 23 September 2020, the *Cambridge News* on 24 September 2020, *Bury Free Press* on 25 September 2020 and the *Ely Standard* and *Newmarket Journal* on 1 October 2020. I have enclosed proof of publication for each of these publications with this letter.

We are happy to take the Parish Council's advice that a banner would be a helpful addition to the publicity measures set out in the Statement of Community Consultation. We would be happy to provide a banner to the reasonable specifications provided by the Parish Council. This would be a voluntary addition to the activity in the Statement of Community Consultation.

Webinars

The webinars we have organised as part of the consultation include a presentation from relevant members of the project team and a Q&A session. The presentations are not pre-recorded as this allows us to respond to issues and questions raised during the webinar at the time.

We have adopted the Q&A format used in the webinars because it allows for people to seek answers while maintaining their privacy. This is important given that recordings of the webinars are being placed on our website. Over the course of the webinars to date, we have answered more than 250 questions about the proposals. Anyone wanting a more detailed discussion can arrange an appointment to speak with us by telephone.

The scheduling of the webinars allows consultees to consider them in their response. We are repeating each of the webinars live. Recordings of a webinar on each topic being covered will be placed online, which are due to be completed more than 28 days before the close of consultation.

Anyone who wishes to contact us with a question ahead of that point can do so using the Freephone number, email address or Freepost address included in consultation materials.

0808 168 7925

info@sunnica.co.uk

www.sunnica.co.uk

Conclusion

We are consulting in line with the Statement of Community Consultation, as we are obliged to do by the relevant legislation. We believe that the consultation process set out in the Statement of Community Consultation is robust and will enable the local community to communicate their views of our proposals. The consultation period is significantly longer than the statutory minimum of 28 days. While we are happy to consider additional voluntary activities on their own merits, we do not believe there is a need to extend the consultation period to accommodate these.

We are aware there are outstanding matters from the Parish Council's email of 21 September 2020 and will respond on those separately. We responded to questions posed ahead of the briefing with the Parish Solar Alliance of 15 July 2020 at that briefing. We also sought a meeting with the Parish Council, alongside other parish councils, to discuss the issues raised in its response to the non-statutory consultation following that consultation. While this did not occur, we have had subsequent engagement with the Parish Council via the Parish Solar Alliance and do not intend to respond separately in writing at this stage.

We would be very happy to meet with the Parish Council online to discuss any of the above in further detail. Please do get in touch with any questions using 0808 168 7925 or info@sunnica.co.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Luke Murray".

Luke Murray
Sunnica Ltd