

FRECKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Writeup from Sunnica to Parish Council Alliance briefing 15th July 2020

Two representatives from each Parish Council in the area affected by the Sunnica proposal were invited to a briefing given by representatives from Sunnica and AECOM on the 15th July 2020, using a Zoom online meeting. The briefing was arranged by Cllr Brian Harvey from West Suffolk Council: Cllrs Andrew Douch and Paul Brooks attended for Freckenham.

Readers may remember the Parish Council opposed the scheme as presented during the non-statutory consultation because of its sheer size, effect on views around the village and proximity to villagers' homes. This was backed up by the results of a villager survey accompanying the Neighbourhood Plan survey.

Sunnica explained that the Statutory Consultation, expected to start in June / July 2020, had been delayed because of Covid-19 restrictions, and was now planned to begin in September / October 2020. Also, that the details of the way the Statutory Consultation will happen are still being discussed by Sunnica with the working group made up of officers from West Suffolk Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Suffolk County Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. The Parish Council has already stated that it believes the consultation should continue to function locally, with events in village halls and other local facilities where possible.

The area covered by the proposed scheme has increased since the non-Statutory Consultation last year, from around 2600 to 2800 acres. The map released as the “West Suffolk Briefing Note September 2019” available on the Parish Council website seems to remain a reasonable guide for the area around Freckenham, subject to the changes below. We were advised that precise maps will be made available at the Statutory Consultation, but so far we believe the changes affecting the area (and the September 2019 map) around Freckenham are:

- An additional field has been added, towards Isleham on the south side of Isleham Road, stated to be for archaeological and environmental mitigation.
- A battery storage compound is proposed for a narrow isosceles triangle-shaped area “Bay Farm” at the eastern end of Elms Road, Freckenham, adjacent to the quarry, with the point of the triangle meeting Elms Road near the junction with Bridge End Road. This area to be surrounded by additional screening.

Overall the proposed scheme is still divided across 4 sites (Sunnica West, sites A and B around Chippenham; Sunnica East, site A and B around Freckenham), with the 2800 acres divided up as follows:

- 1900 acres of developable land containing solar panels, and infrastructure such as transformers and inverters
- 850 acres of non-developable land, containing
 - 635 acres of offset/mitigation
 - 215 acres of archaeological mitigation zones
- 50 acres of battery storage compounds: one in Sunnica East site A near the quarry on Elms Road, the other in the centre of Sunnica West site B.

The proposal is to arrange the panels facing south, in lines across fields running from east to west.

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The maximum panel height would be 2.5 metres (about 8 foot 3 inches), with the panels on galvanised metal frames with metal legs into the ground. The normal spacing between roads or rights of way and the edge of panels would be 20 metres (about 65 feet). Areas including panels would be separated from roads or other rights of way using deer fencing.

The battery storage compounds would use 40 foot shipping containers containing Lithium-ion batteries. These containers are normally 3 metres tall, but planning will be done on the basis of 6 metres tall to allow air conditioning or other equipment to be added to the roofs of the containers. Compounds such as those for batteries would be surrounded by metal fencing.

There is a planning expectation of increased access to new developments, and as part of this two changes adding permissive rights of way are proposed for the Freckenham area:

- A new foot/cycle path on the north side of Isleham Road connecting Mortimer's Lane with Isleham.
- A new foot/cycle path leading from the byway between Elms Road and Worlington, connecting the byway to the western end of Worlington (Freckenham Road).

Estimates relating to the possible business rates contribution to the scheme were made available: it is estimated that around £4M total could be due to West Suffolk and East Cambs district councils in roughly equal portions, of which around £2M would be for the solar part, and around £2M for the battery storage part.

Many questions were asked about screening and mitigation. We understand the Statutory Consultation will include photographs from viewpoints as now and with mock-up treatments of the appearance of affected areas one year after the construction is completed. There are several viewpoints around Freckenham:

- looking north from Fordham Road at the western end of the village
- looking north-east at the top of the roadway section of Mortimer's Lane
- looking east from the bridleway connecting Elms Road and Mildenhall Road

Freckenham and other parish councils submitted further written questions to Sunnica in advance of the briefing, and though some questions were answered during the briefing we expect written responses. We will update the Parish Council website with further information as it becomes available. If you have further questions please speak to Cllr Andrew Douch on 07869 296648 or Cllr Paul Brooks on 07880 791087.

Freckenham Parish Council encourages villagers to learn about the proposed scheme, and the impact on the village and surrounding areas. We want everyone to take part in the Statutory Consultation and make their views known to the Planning Inspectorate. The parish council has a sub-group made up of residents and councillors which has continued to meet monthly using Zoom, and this sub-group has been planning events to help inform villagers about the scheme and help to ensure villagers respond to the consultation. If you would like to help the sub-group, please contact Andrew Douch on 07869 296648. Look out for updates from the Parish Council over the next few months.

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