

# Sunnica Energy Farm Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project – Local Impact Report

<b>Report number:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/22/047</b>	
<b>Report to and date:</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder Decision</b>	13 October 2022
<b>Cabinet member:</b>	Councillor David Roach Portfolio Holder for Planning Tel: 01440 768966 Email: <a href="mailto:david.roach@westsuffolk.gov.uk">david.roach@westsuffolk.gov.uk</a>	
<b>Lead officer:</b>	Julie Baird Director (Planning and Growth) Tel: 01284 757613 Email: <a href="mailto:julie.baird@westsuffolk.gov.uk">julie.baird@westsuffolk.gov.uk</a>	

**Decisions Plan:** Due to ensuring the representation is submitted by the required deadline of 19 October 2022, with the agreement of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, the call-in procedure for this item has been suspended. The Chair of the O&S Committee is satisfied that the decision proposed is reasonable in all the circumstances and to it being treated as a matter of urgency.

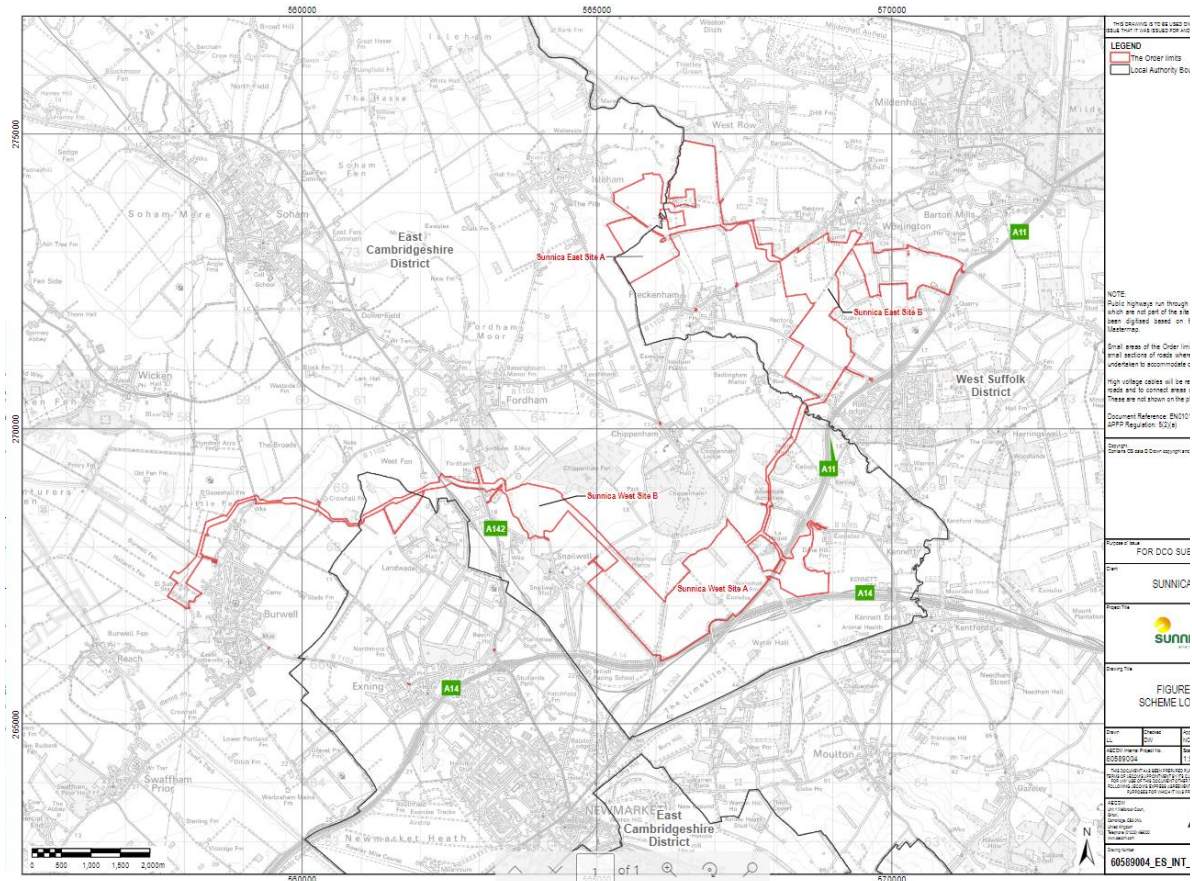
**Wards impacted:** The Sunnica Energy Farm scheme is primarily located in Manor Ward but the scale of the scheme is such that surrounding wards may be impacted – including Icen, Mildenhall Kingsway & Market, Mildenhall Great Heath and Mildenhall Queensway. The cable route also passes through Exning Ward. In addition, parts of the site in Cambridgeshire are close to areas associated with the Horse-Racing Industry in Newmarket.

**Recommendation:**      **It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Planning approves the submission of the Local Impact Report, by the required deadline of 19 October 2022 (A summary of which is set out in Appendix 1):**

## 1. Context to this report

- 1.1 Sunnica Energy Farm is a scheme for the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) generating panels and on-site battery energy storage systems (BESS) across two sites within Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. The proposal will include the infrastructure associated with the required connection to the national grid, which will either involve an extension to the Burwell National Grid Substation or the installation of the necessary equipment within the solar panel sites to enable the generated power to be transported to the grid.
- 1.2 The scheme is situated across four sites:
- a. Sunnica East Site A, which is situated partly in West Suffolk and partly in East Cambridgeshire, is located approximately 3.5 kilometres(km) east of Mildenhall, 0.5km south-east of Isleham and 0.6km south-west of West Row;
  - b. Sunnica East Site B, located in West Suffolk, is approximately 1.5km south-east of Mildenhall, 1km east of Freckenham and immediately south of Worlington;
  - c. Sunnica West Site A, located in East Cambridgeshire, is approximately 7km to the east of Burwell, immediately north of the A14 at Newmarket; and
  - d. Sunnica West Site B, located in East Cambridgeshire, is approximately 5.5km to the east of Burwell and 0.5km north of Snailwell.

All locations will comprise ground mounted solar PV panel arrays, supporting electrical infrastructure and, with the exception of Sunnica West Site B, a BESS. A cable route (including interconnection between the Sites) and an either an extension to the Burwell National Grid Substation or the installation of additional equipment on site are also proposed.



[https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/EN010106/EN010106-001879-SEF\\_ES\\_6.3\\_Figure\\_1-1\\_Scheme\\_Location.pdf](https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/EN010106/EN010106-001879-SEF_ES_6.3_Figure_1-1_Scheme_Location.pdf)

- 1.3 The scheme is defined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008 as it is an onshore generating station in England exceeding 50 megawatts (MW). Consent for an NSIP takes the form of a Development Consent Order (DCO). The application will be determined by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The Council is a statutory Consultee in the consenting process.
- 1.4 Sennica submitted its application for a Development Consent Order for its proposals to the Planning Inspectorate on 18 November 2021. The Planning Inspectorate accepted the application for examination on 16 December 2021.
- 1.5 On 28 June 2022 the Examining Authority issued the Rule 6 letter, confirming the appointment of the Examining Authority and the invitation to the Preliminary Hearing on 26 July 2022. Following the Preliminary Hearing the Examining Authority made a procedural decision to delay the start of the examination. On 31 August 2022 the Examining Authority issued a further Rule 6 letter that included the draft timetable for the examination. The timetable states that the Local Impact Report is to be submitted by 19 October 2022.

- 1.6 At its meeting on 11 February 2020 Cabinet agreed the decision-making process in respect of the formal stages of the application process. Cabinet has agreed that the decision to submit the Local Impact Report will be taken by the Cabinet Member for Planning, in consultation with the Director (Planning & Growth) and Local Ward Members.

## **2. Proposals within this report**

- 2.1 The Local Impact Report is defined in s60(3) of the Planning Act 2008 as 'a report in writing giving the details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the authority's area (or any part of that area)'. Local authorities are encouraged to cover any topics they consider relevant to the impact of the proposed development on their area. The Local Impact Report is the means by which the local authority can use its existing body of local knowledge and evidence on local issues to provide a full and robust report to the Examining Authority.
- 2.2 The Local Impact Report is distinct from the Written Representation, which is the most appropriate document for a local authority (separate from the local planning authority) to set out its view on the application, i.e. whether or not it supports the application and its reasons.
- 2.3 As noted at 1.1 and 1.2 above, the scheme is located across four sites within Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. Given that the impact of the development will be felt across four local authority boundaries, the preparation of a joint Local Impact Report by West Suffolk Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Suffolk County Council and Cambridgeshire County Council was considered to be the most appropriate way to provide the Examining Authority with a full and robust assessment of the impacts.
- 2.4 In accordance with the advice published by the Planning Inspectorate in connection with the preparation of Local Impact Reports, the joint Local Impact Report will address such matters including:
- Site description and surroundings/ location
  - Details of the proposal
  - Relevant planning history and any issues arising
  - Relevant development plan policies, supplementary planning guidance or documents, development briefs or approved master-plans and an appraisal of their relationship and relevance to the proposals
  - Relevant development proposals under consideration or granted permission but not commenced or completed
  - Local area characteristics such as urban and landscape qualities and nature conservation sites
  - Local transport patterns and issues
  - Site and area constraints
  - Designated sites
  - Socio-economic and community matters
  - Consideration of the impact of the proposed articles and requirements within the draft Order (such as the scheme) in respect of all of the above

- DCO obligations and their impact on the local authority's area.

2.5 Attached to this report at Appendix 1 is a summary of the key environmental topics addressed in the joint Local Impact Report. The full Local Impact Report will continue to be developed and refined by all four local authorities prior to its submission on or before 19 October 2022.

### **3. Alternative options that have been considered**

3.1 The Local Impact Report is one of the key documents prepared by the local authorities responsible for the area(s) in which the proposed development is located. The Examining Authority will take the contents of the Local Impact Report into account in its assessment of the application and its recommendation to the Secretary of State on whether Development Consent should be granted. If the Council do not submit a Local Impact Report the Examining Authority will not have the benefit of the local knowledge and expertise of the local authority in assessing the impacts of the development.

3.2 Notwithstanding the above, the examination process is designed to thoroughly test the key issues that have arisen and the Council will have the opportunity to make its views known in its written and oral submissions.

### **4. Consultation and engagement undertaken**

4.1 Regular updates are being provided to local Members and their views will be sought on the content of the Local Impact Report. Regular engagement also takes place with the community action group. This engagement will continue throughout the Examination.

4.2 The Planning Inspectorate's Advice Note on producing a Local Impact Report states that local authorities are not required to carry out their own consultation with the community. The Local Impact Report should consist of a statement of positive, neutral and negative local impacts but it does not need to contain a balancing exercise between positives and negatives.

### **5. Risks associated with the proposals**

5.1 If the Council do not submit a Local Impact Report by the deadline set in the Examination Timetable the Examining Authority will not have the benefit of the local knowledge and expertise of the Council as to the likely impacts of the development.

## **6. Implications arising from the proposals**

- 6.1 An NSIP project of this size has the potential to benefit the economy and labour market of West Suffolk through the direct investment involved in building and operating the scheme that will link to supply chains (indirect impacts) and through increases to incomes, that could translate into additional spending by the workforce in the local economy.
- 6.2 There may be financial risk to the Council and other public sector bodies if mitigation provided by the applicant is insufficient to alleviate impacts caused by the project. In particular, this may relate to the investigation and enforcement of the Requirements in relation to matters such as nuisance and pollution.
- 6.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not undertaken as the Council is responding to the planning proposals of the applicant. As such, it is the applicant that is required to satisfy the EqIA requirements as they promote their application. This assessment must account for people with protected characteristics and, in particular, must consider whether impacts of the scheme such as glint & glare or noise might affect people with physical or mental health conditions. The decision maker, in this case the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), is required to have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## **7. Appendices referenced in this report**

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Summary of Local Impact Report Contents

## **8. Background documents associated with this report**

- 8.1 Sunnica Energy Farm examination library:  
[Sunnica Energy Farm | National Infrastructure Planning \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](https://www.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/sunnica-energy-farm/)
- 8.2 West Suffolk Council Constitution: Article 6 The Cabinet – Procedure for decision-making by individual Portfolio Holders  
([Part 2 - Article 6 - The Cabinet August 2021.pdf \(westsuffolk.gov.uk\)](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/media/10000/Part-2-Article-6-The-Cabinet-August-2021.pdf))