

# Joint meeting of parish councils and Kingsway Solar Community Action group

This document gives details of the meeting that was held at Balsham Institute on 5th December 2024. It includes notes from a presentation by Catherine Judkins about her experiences campaigning against the Sunnica energy farm, followed by questions, then a presentation from Richard Pargeter about the Kingsway Solar Community Action (KSCA) group. The meeting ended with more discussion and questions.

Links to related material

- [Agenda for the meeting](#) and [minutes from the meeting](#)
- [Slides from KSCA](#)

Slides from Catherine Judkins talk are not available.

Present were members of the public, Geoff Harvey (Cambridge District Council) and councilors from

- West Wickham Parish Council
- Little Willbraham and Six Mile Bottom Parish Council
- Brinkley Parish Council
- Balsham Parish Council
- Reach Parish Council
- Weston Colville Parish Council
- Great Wilbraham Parish Council
- West Wrattling Parish Council
- Carlton cum Willingham Parish Council

Apologies were received from Ray Vidler (Weston Colville PC), Henry Batchelor (CCC), Jeremy Newton (Weston Colville), Jim Palridge (Westley Waterless PC), David Gill (The Wilbrahams PC).

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# Talk by Catherine Judkins

## Introduction

Catherine is chair of the Say No to Sunnica Community Action Group, and is happy to share her experiences of Sunnica solar farm with us, with questions at the end or by contact afterwards.

Sunnica is similarly sized solar farm to Kingsway, at 2,500 acres, and also has solar panels and battery storage. It's on the East Cambridgeshire / West Suffolk border, and connects to the grid at Burwell. It has a sprawling design - 15 miles from end to end, with over a million solar panels. It affects 16 parishes and towns along its route, so has a high impact on multiple communities.

We're towards the end of a 5 year process / battle, that you're just starting out.

Catherine is not a planning expert. She can only talk about her specific experiences with the Sunnica scheme,

## The planning process for a large solar farm

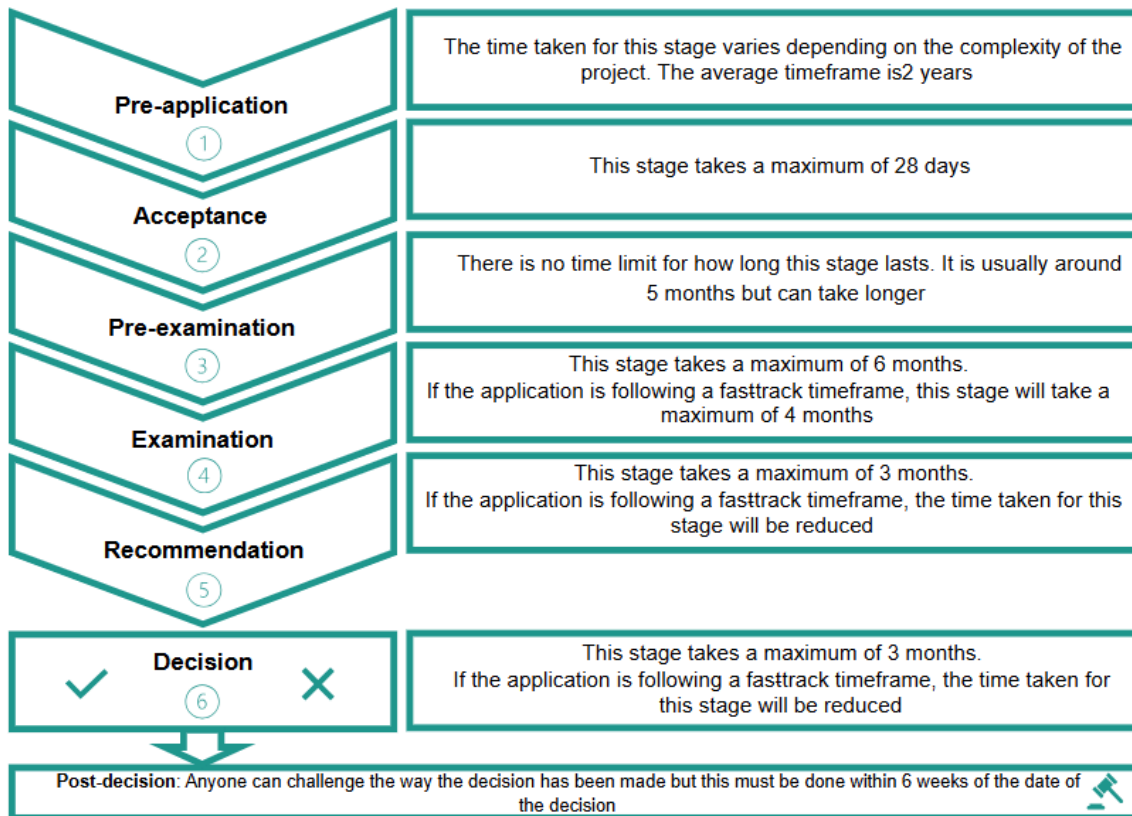
The process itself is quite complex, but you should all get involved if you want your voices to be heard.

As with Kingsway it's an Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP). Instead of applying to a local authority for planning permission, NSIP developers apply to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for a Development Consent Order (DCO), and the planning decision is ultimately made at government level, by the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, currently held by Ed Miliband.

Local authorities are not decision makers in the process, but they do play a key role and their views do carry substantial weight.

If approved the local authorities will be forced to work through any planning conditions that are set, and must work in delivering, so they play a vital role throughout the whole process.

It is worthwhile looking at the government documents about the multi-stage NSIP process.



From <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-the-stages-of-the-nsip-process-and-how-you-can-have-your-say>

So, all of that process, to get to the decision stage with ours, has taken **five years**.

Even once the decision has been made, there would be a whole bunch of planning conditions to work through.

These schemes realistically don't deliver power for a very, very long time. Catherine stresses that it is a long process. She said "You're at the start, and you feel like you need to do everything right now. And yes, you do need to take steps to form your arguments. But in it for the long haul".

You need to stick with it because it is a process that you do need to engage with.

You're in the **pre-application phase**, which on slide shown as average timeframe of two years.

The pre-application stage includes two consultations. Sunnica's **non-statutory consultation** (an optional stage), which was a very small-scale consultation, was carried out by Sunnica Limited back in July 2019. For you it's a fact-finding stage. The applicant will then go away, look at all of the responses that they have received, and will then work on the design that they propose to submit for formal application.

[Gap of over a year??? - check]

The **formal statutory legal consultation** ran from September to December 2020.

You've then got an **acceptance phase**, which is the phase where the developer puts their formal application into the planning inspectorate ("PINS"). And Sunnica case was submitted to PINS in November 2021.

Then in phase two, **the acceptance stage**. PINS has 28 days to decide if they will accept the application or not.

We were told by local authorities and others that they typically do go through at this stage.

"Adequacy of consultation" - how well/sufficiently the developer consulted with the community in pre-application - does play a role here. PINS will contact the local authorities and ask them if they felt that the applicant had adequately consulted with the local communities.

In the consultations the developers need to make sure that their consultation is accessible to as many people as possible, with sufficient information for people to take a view on the scheme. At the acceptance stage LAs make an adequacy of consultation representation, which they submit to PINS 14 days afterwards, and then the planning inspectorate have another 14 days or so to decide - hence the 28 days.

Not much time, once that application goes in, for LA to give views on whether they've been properly consulted. They don't ask parish councils or community group their view, but if you've got a good enough relationship with the councils you can talk to them about how well your communities feel consulted, and hopefully they would feed that into their adequacy of consultation report.

Important to know the consultation period, how well you think it's been done, and whether they've answered the questions you asked.

Our application went in November 2021. It was accepted then for examination in December 2021, so about a month later.

Sunnica Limited didn't start the next **Pre-examination phase 3** of the process until January 2022. There was an announcement out to the public to say that it's been accepted.

That is where you need to engage your communities and get them to register as interested parties. Being an interested party is the only way that communities can get their views heard directly by the examining authority, which feeds into the decision maker.

*The earlier consultation phase was about feeding your feedback back to the developer.*

The interested party phase is about putting your objections into the decision-making body, via PINS.

In our case, the pre-examination phase took until March 2022. The **examination phase 4** then will follow within a couple of months. In our case it was scheduled to start in July 2022.

But paused because applicant not properly consulted with National Grid. Went back and had to redo a partial consultation.

**Examination phase 4** started again in September 2022. The process is then in a very defined period of time - examination has to be done within 6 months. It is done by an “examining authority”, which is group of one or more planning experts who are appointed by the planning inspectorate. They will organise a series of public hearings, visit the site, and read all of the evidence that interested parties submit into the examination.

Following that six-month period they have three months **Recommendation phase** to draw their conclusions and write a report recommending to the Secretary of State what they feel the decision should be, but it's then ultimately for the Secretary of State to decide.

The Secretary of State has 3 more months to read through the examiner's recommendations, ask any additional questions, then publish their decision.

From the examination starting to the decision being made, you're looking at 12 months. In our case, expecting a decision in September 2023.

Delayed several times & ultimately announced in July 2024. So, 5 years since the process started. *“If looking for speed and getting to net zero rollout of rooftop solar is a lot quicker and can be done more smoothly, than huge scale schemes on green belt land.”*

## Community groups and parish councils

### Community group

We felt role of the **community group** was to help spread the word - make sure everyone knows about the scheme. It's awareness raising. The more people know about it, the more can comment & form their own opinion and get involved.

Role of community group (and parish councils) was to provide factual information to help people decide how they feel. Help dispel misinformation on FB etc.

Give objective balanced information in an easy to understand format that people could use as a reference source.

Encourage people to go along to the consultations and find out as much as possible.

*It is worth recording what you get told at the consultations.* Also record if you ask a question and they don't answer it, because they are obliged to during the statutory consultation.

Action group created a website.

You could do a Facebook group

Leafleting. Some PCs did donate a little bit of money towards leafleting to make sure communities were informed.

Join UKSA

## Parish councils

In early stages the **parish councils** calling village meetings. Sunnica was during covid so quite a few Zoom meetings. Action group tended to take the lead on village meetings once could meet in person again.

Parish councils carried out surveys to gauge the level of opposition & find out people's key concerns. Gather info about what is important to the community to help inform objections documents

A number of the parish councils joined forces to form a **town and parish council alliance**, - 2 towns within the affected area. Good to help share the workload, "bounce ideas off each other", and help each other out. Good to have that network to talk through thoughts about the scheme. Obvs individual parish councils should have own views, and during the examination phase you should be raising points that are very specific to your own parishes. But having an umbrella alliance is useful to help share knowledge and advice.

## Both

Notify communities of key deadlines to meet. It is a complex planning process with lots of deadlines, particularly when the examination starts.

Lots of planning jargon and lengthy instruction letters. Sometimes 48-page letters sent to each interested party with lots and lots of technical jargon and instructions how to participate. No way individuals can digest such lengthy letters.

The community group of the parish councils and action group helped digest some of those letters - put in easy to understand format on FB, village newsletters, etc.

It's that sort of interaction that's useful.

Put shout out to local community to see who there that can help. Might have people with planning experience who can help steer through the jargon and process. Also advise format of representations & tell you about deadlines.

Also seek experts in local heritage and wildlife. Local bird groups, bat groups, walking groups, riding groups, contact your wildlife trusts.

## Pace yourself!

There will be key points throughout the process where you really need to call people to action. If you bombard them at the beginning, or get them wound up too early - bearing in mind that application may not go in for a year - it won't help.

The intensity goes in waves.

Try to peak at the right times. Try to rally people to support and to get involved at the right time. Again, that's something community groups and parish councils can work together on so you know when exactly to call people to action.

## What to do now

Encourage people to go along to the consultation seminars, webinars, etc.

Find out facts, ask questions and keep a record of questions not answered.

Any feedback you provide now during the (non-statutory) and statutory consultation phase is going back to the developer to see if they need to adapt the scheme in any way.

But, key part is when people want to have their views heard by the decision maker. That's why they need to get involved in the examination when it starts. Tell them when they need to register as interested parties - only way they can get involved and have their voices heard.

## UK solar alliance

[UKSolarAlliance.org](http://UKSolarAlliance.org)

Kind of umbrella group. Say No to Sunnica is one of the founding members. When Sunnica came along only 3-4 NSIP scale solar farms (Cleve Hill in Kent, Crow Solar in Scunthorpe, Sunnica, then Longfield in Essex).

Then we were contacted by other groups who were also being faced with large scale solar on farmland or green belt. Decided to pull a sort of an alliance together again as a support network, to share ideas. Particularly for new groups.

UK solar alliance is mainly for campaign groups as opposed to parish councils. Gives them a head start.

Rather than 130 different campaign groups going off and doing masses of research, there's a huge sort of database of information to give you a good start. To help you form your objections.

From notes by Simon Chandler & Gillian Bennett.

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## Q&A Catherine Judkins

[Simon Chandler] Can I start off with one question, Catherine? We're in the non-statutory consultation phase at the moment. And there's been a fair bit of internal debate over whether we should, as a community group and parish councils, be engaging with the developer at this stage to try and influence their design or whether we should just object, object, object! What's your recommendation?

"Yes, engage".

They're going to do this whatever you decide. At this stage [non-statutory consultation], they'll only have skeleton outline of what they're planning to do.

Use it as fact finding. Go along. Talk to them about major concerns, listen to what they've got to say. Use that information to spread the word to the communities.

It's hard to object to something when you don't know enough about it. You can't object for objection's sake. In the examination phase you have to be able to evidence your objections. You can't just say I don't like the look of it. YOU have to show evidence that it will be harmful to the landscape, the landscape character, etc. It's a planning argument, which is why it's worth finding people with planning expertise in your area.

Question from a parish councillor and county councillor for the area.

The name of your action group was "Say No to Sunnica". So obviously you objected. Did you object from the beginning, and on what grounds did you object? And then related to that, what was the nature of your relationship with the parish councils?

We didn't object from the outset. At the non-statutory consultation we were just individual members of the community. For the most part, people were pro-solar, welcoming it on rooftops and the right places. The marketing materials are deceptive. They don't say giant new solar farm coming your way. Usually glossy brochure with a few panels and some grazing sheep. Most people sort of look at those brochures and toss into recycling. Think it's just another solar farm.

Went along to the talks, found out about it. Only when you start to dig into it and word starts to spread do you think, oh, wow, this is more than what we normally see as a normal solar farm. This is huge!

As we found out a bit more about it started to formulate our objections. Which you can see at the SayNoToSunnica.com website. Bit out of date - looking to shift most of our activity over to Facebook.

The objections that we formally put into the examination authority were largely on:

- agricultural land classification - because they downgraded the land to poor when we knew it was high quality farmland.
- Impacts on wildlife species, heritage sites, landscape impact,
- Battery storage and the safety of those and lack of safety regulation.
- Impact on the [horse] racing industry - swathe of panels next to the historic lime kilns gallops in Newmarket.
- Socioeconomic impact

[Simon Chandler] Nick White, your colleague, told me that he thought it was important that you campaigned under the banner of "Good Solar, Not Bad". He felt that that was significant in persuading the examining authority that your arguments were valid.

We did. Our job as a community group was to represent the community and their views on it. SNTs and the PCs did lots of surveys at your sort of stage. Are you pro solar? Are you in favour of solar on agricultural land or rooftops?

Early surveys were showing ~85% of our communities were in favour of solar. But consistently over 90% against Sunnica. We have a lot of solar and wind farms already in the area.



Not only did it reflect the local communities, but made people feel more comfortable about speaking out against Sunnica, because at that time there were very few large scale schemes. If you said a bad word against a solar farm, accused of being a climate change denier.

Difficult to get people on board without being accused of being a NIMBY. That's always going to be said. You're accused of not caring about the environment. The "good solar, bad solar" helped us find where we were coming from as a group. Helped people feel comfortable opposing Sunnica.

Taking away vast areas of top quality farmland or sensitive greenfield sites is not the way to get to net zero. There are better alternatives. About making sure your communities can engage comfortably and that you're reflecting their views.

[Nick Acklam, Reach Parish Council]. As Catherine will know, I am Reach Parish Council's an interested party in the Sunnica inquiry.

This feels like Groundhog Day to me. As background [Reach] have a very different perspective from some of you here, and from most of the people involved in Sunnica, because we're at the receiving end of this. Catherine mentioned Burwell, Wears Drove, the substation there and the connection to the National Grid, which is a critical part of the scheme. What we're seeing there is a massive transformation of the landscape. A lot of it isn't even in the documentation that Kingsway has put out, because the National Grid can do a lot on the permitted development rights, which go completely under the radar.

My question for you, Catherine, you mentioned we're in it for the long haul and it's a tough route. I'm very conscious of the need for finance to keep this on track. Could you give people here some sense of the sums of money needed to take this through to conclusion?

At your stage, funding will be largely going on awareness raising, leafleting, and our parish councils were very kind - gave us some money towards that sort of thing.

When it comes to the examination phase, you can't object for objection's sake. It's like going into a courtroom. People in community can say whatever they like, but when a parish council or action group is putting together an objection, they need to be able to evidence why they are objecting to it. You'll have thousands of pages of application documents to read through in the formal application. They look at everything - impact on wildlife, landscape, etc. Unless you challenge their assessments of each of these things, it will get accepted that whatever they say is correct.

As an example with agriculture, they downgraded our land. They said it was all 96% poor quality soil. We knew just from the produce that we see here that was untrue. But you can't just say we don't believe you.

We had to employ soil experts to come out, test the soils and put proper formal reports together as to how they assess the soil. When you're starting to get external experts in, that's where the costs creep up.

Also had a planning barrister represent us during the examination. He knew the format, how it all worked. We could provide him with facts and evidence, and he would put it together in the right structure.

We ended up getting a landscape expert, which the parish alliance paid for, because they have such a large landscape area impacted. Useful to multiple parish councils.

Uniting together, not just sharing knowledge, but also pooling funding and collaborating to get expert input is also a good thing.

We had a landscape expert, heritage expert, a soil expert, ecology expert and we had a barrister.

If you're lucky enough to have people in your communities who will do that for free, then you need to tap into them now and see who you've got out there.

We had a lot of fundraising. You will need to do serious fundraising as it gets towards the examination if you feel you need to top up the expert input to make sure evidence in examination is as robust as possible.

[Simon Chandler] I think when I spoke to Nick White, he said that the town & parish council alliance were able to arrange contributions from the different parish councils amounting to about £25,000-£30,000. And he said that it was vital to be able to do that.

Yes. Absolutely. Vital.

[Name of attendee redacted] I hear everything that you did. I'm interested in knowing what impacts you had in the development. What success did you have doing all this? It ended up going to be built anyway and you don't like the development as it ended up. So what impact did you have doing all this?

That's a good question. There were areas that were reduced in size. An area that had a heritage site on it - a Roman villa near Snailwell - was taken out. But we were calling for much more.

Sunnica is the only example of the other NSIP solar applications where the examining authority recommended the project shouldn't go ahead. When you're doing your examination, the people you have to win over are the examining authority who are examining the case. Bit like a courtroom. You have to win the "judge" over. Our evidence was so strong in areas of landscape, heritage, socio economic impact, that the examiners recommended a rejection.

Sadly it was in the process of being rejected when the general election was called & we had obviously a change of government. We thought that the process, because it was already underway, to be rejected would be honoured.

But it seems an incoming person can overrule the examining authority. So that's been quite a difficult time for us. It's sad because we went through the process and we won the process. It was just overturned at the last minute.

In terms of the impact we are very aware of the harms that the scheme will do. Even the examiners agreed with most of the harms we pointed out.

A legal challenge is happening at the moment, so it's on pause. If it does go ahead, then we know exactly where we need to focus our energies with the local authorities to make sure that the impacts are minimised as far as possible.

Thanks very much, Catherine. Really appreciate your help here. [Applause].

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## Presentation by Richard Pargeter, Kingsway Solar Community Action

The [slides for this presentation can be found here](#). Comments added by SJC shown in []

Richard gave a brief history of how the Kingsway Solar Community Action (KSCA) group was formed. Started with a [presentation from Kingsway to Balsham Parish Council](#) back in March 2024 [see [this link for contemporaneous notes](#)]. Attended by many people from Balsham. Subsequently there lots of activity on the Balsham Village Facebook page. One resident thought “we've got to do something about this” and brought together a number of the people who they thought could make useful contributions. [There was some discussion about the group's name. “Say No to Kingsway” was explicitly rejected. Chose Kingsway Solar Community Action]

The group collected info about solar farms, NSIPs, etc. Created a Facebook page, waited and hoped that Kingsway would fail to get the required land agreements and it would go away. But at the end of October the plans got bigger! Kingsway had added lots of land around Western Colville and West Wratting - Area C. KSCA attempted to expand to include more people from area C, and moved up a gear in level of activity. A WhatsApp group [with sub-groups for particular areas] was set up for daily discussion.

### Who are we?

Slide was shown with names of key KSCA people - those active on the WhatsApp group - termed “committee” [although no constitution yet written]. The Facebook group has 400 members - people who care enough to be joining a closed Facebook page to find information. KSCA are still open to additional support, particularly from Area C. Also looking for expertise, as recommended by Catherine. Need help from experts in anything from planning through to ecology.

### What do we stand for?

We are very clear that we oppose this particular development. We are not anti-solar, and haven't been from the outset. The unprecedented industrial scale of this project is really

worrying. It will have a massive effect on the ecology and landscape. That is our main objection.

Aim to safeguard our community's interests.

Trying to provide clear, objective information ... to support community engagement initially with Kingsway, then later with the Planning Inspectorate.

KSCA has collected a lot of information and are continuing to do so.

## What have we done?

- Alerted people up to what's happening.
- Provided factual information and support.
- Setup [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts and a [website](#).
- Written a [comprehensive report](#), which details concerns with the solar farm development that people should be thinking about. With references. Available on the website.
- Generated posters and flyers and published them in village magazines and handed out at events.
- Tried to get people to go to the events and get involved.

## What can we now offer to the parish councils, the community as a whole?

- We can provide an additional resource to what's otherwise available to the individual parish councils.
- A body of people - with enthusiasm and determination - that can contribute time and effort.
- We have a body of information. Links to referenceable published information on our website.
- Have joined the UK Solar Alliance and trying to develop links with other action groups.
- We offer advice to the community, including the parish councils and local government.
- Have been immersed in this topic for 8 months, so can give you a bit of a head start.
- Have raised enough funding through a [GoFundMe page](#) to cover the cost of the website and printing flyers.
- We do not have sufficient funds to pay for any sort of paid expertise. That is one reason why we are very keen to work with parish councils - to explore further funding opportunities should it be needed.

## Where next?

- Deadline for submitting [non-statutory] consultation feedback is December the 12th. Awareness raising is pretty much complete for this stage. Then really not much more we can do for a while.

- Intend to move on to advocacy with Kingsway and Downing and then the Planning Inspectorate.
- When it has been accepted for examination, register as an interested party.
- Aiming to link up with other groups fighting NSIPs
- Lobby to influence policy, to local MPs
- Do want to work with and support the Parish Councils.

“Together we are stronger”.

[Applause]

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## Discussion and Question and Answer session

[Simon Chandler] At the moment, I'm the only parish councillor on the committee of the Community Action Group and it was suggested that it would be a good idea perhaps to have a representative from each of the respective parish councils. So, what I would like you to do is to go back to your parish councils, discuss this with them and decide whether you would like to nominate somebody to be on the Community Action Group committee. Does that make sense to people?

[One councillor in audience] Yeah, we've already done it. I mean, we've already agreed with the now parish council to put forward a representative.

Okay, that's great. A question at the back.

[Another councillor in audience] In our PC all but one of us work. Would it be okay if we shared that between more than one of us? Because otherwise it may be quite a load for one person. How do you feel that would work?

[Richard Pargeter] I don't know if anybody else has got any comments, but the only comment I'm going to make is that, at the moment, that list I've put up there is about 20-odd people.

Some people sort of sit very much in the background and don't say very much, but you should see the WhatsApp group sometimes. It can get quite busy. What we've actually done over the last few months is begun to recognise what our individual strengths are and we've also got to know each other and learn to trust each other, which means that I don't feel I need to get involved at all in website design or whatever, because I know there's somebody who really knows that and is doing it really well.

So, it works fairly well from that point of view, but the bigger we get, the more difficult it is to get to know everybody and the more difficult it is to keep the interactions under control. So, I'm not quite sure how we are going to manage a big increase in anything, but we do have to do this and we do have to find a way of doing that.

[Colin Eade - KSCA] I think, Richard, it's worth saying that we grew into a big group and then eventually we decided that, actually, we need to split ourselves into areas of expertise.

So, we've got Tony and Richard who are really great with some of the detail on the planning and the ecology, others of us who are dealing with Facebook and things. So, we split ourselves into more of a specialised structure, so that we've got people just working on, as Richard said, people working on the website, people working on planning stuff, people working on the various aspects. So, I think that what we probably need to move to at some stage is a central committee, it sounds very communist, but a central committee which keeps an overall view on everything and then you've got the other individual bits which are working on communications or lobbying or technical stuff.

And we need to think about how we manage the inputs from the various parish councils into that.

[Councillor in audience] On our parish council, we sometimes struggle for numbers. We've only a maximum of seven. I think West Wrattling is probably the same. Could the parish council representative be a volunteer who is effectively seconded onto the parish council for this purpose only?

[Simon Chandler] Yes. I think that would be fine, with the non-councillor as a member of a working group of the PC. A lot of activity happens on the WhatsApp groups, etc. But there are also face-to-face meetings at which people come together, bi-weekly at the moment, and I think at that meeting it would be a good idea to have a representative from each parish council that's a communication channel to your parish council.

At the last KSCA committee meeting I attended, I was asked, "Simon, would you be the representative for all the parish councils?" And I said, whoa, hang on, I can't possibly do that. I can't represent all the PCs. And that's one of the reasons I've tried to bring you all together here.

It's my personal opinion that any way we do it, there should be somebody who attends those committee meetings who is a communication channel back to each of the parish councils. I don't mind if it's a member of a working group who's a non-committee member, and I don't mind if it is a committee member that changes each time. As long as they can take the messages back and forth, I think that's the right thing to be doing.

So, we don't have to decide it now, I just want you to go back, talk with your parish councils, decide if you want to engage in this and if we do, we'll start organising, OK? Thank you.

Yes, question here.

[Another parish councillor] Well, it's not really a question, it's really a comment. I think at the moment it's very hard for us to form a view as a parish council as to how we will react, not least because we haven't had a chance to discuss it in the meeting and we also haven't had a chance to discuss, to gather the views from our residents. And I think it's probably fair to say that sort of anecdotally, the views are quite mixed in [our village]. Now, obviously we do recognise we were less affected in a way than these villagers up here.

Obviously there are pylons that may go past, but not the massive effect of the industrialisation of the landscape that you are being threatened with. We realise the sheer scale of that, but I think a lot of people are still very concerned about the need to do something as a country, big and quick, about the climate emergency and [are concerned

about] holding up things like this for ten years. I know that's what you want, it's not going to solve the... And I'm sure there are different arguments about it.

We're concerned about the fact, sort of nationally, and you might be able to comment, that there is no yet published strategic land use plan. And that seems completely wrong to us. If this was in the context of a strategic land use plan, you would have to suck it up and then you'd expect to get massive mitigation and massive community benefits to compensate. But that is not the case, and it seems at the moment to be opportunistic.

I think it's very difficult for us, and I certainly can't say tonight, but even having gone back, having a discussion, I think if you were information gathering, really understanding the process, helping us to understand how to engage with the process, that's one thing. But if you're already saying "we are absolutely 100% against it" [that would be a different matter].

[Simon Chandler] I'm a parish councillor for West Wrattling, and we haven't as a parish council made a formal statement about our position on the Kingsway proposal yet. But I've been engaged with [KSCA] for probably six months now. I've been going along as a communication channel back to my parish council. I've made it very clear to the people on the [KSCA] committee that our PC position is not yet decided, so I'm being involved with KSCA without saying I'm 100% against the Kingsway proposal.

[previous councillor] I accept that, and I think if you could really clarify that, that might help us to know how we could or would engage.

[Nick Acklam, Reach PC] Could I offer a perspective here from the parish council that's been through this process with Sunnica? You have to buy into the fact that this will be an iterative process.

[The plan] is very diffuse at the moment, and even on the point you raised, where is the pylon line going to run? We have two very broad connection corridors going between the solar arrays and Burwell. Precisely where they go is going to be really, really important in terms of the impact on landscape. So I think you have to go into this process with a certain degree of balance and not arriving at a fixed position.

But that adds to the burden, because you've got to constantly go back and check what's evolved, what's come to you, in light of what your community has said to you. It's tricky, but I think you need to brace yourself for the fact that that's how it's going to work.

[Another Councillor] Well yes, I agree with everything that XXXXXX said. We need more time, we need more information. In relation to what's on the slide, you said that the community group is totally opposed. I think those were the words on one of the slides. So I'm just puzzled about how you're going to engage in advocacy with Kingsway Downing if you're totally opposed.

[Richard Pargeter] You can say, I believe you can say to them, I don't like your proposal because I think it is inappropriate for this part of the world and so forth. But recognising that you may end up getting approval for it, I'd want to work with you to make it the least worst it could be for us. And work with you to make sure that you don't miss the fact that this countryside is covered with skylarks, which are a red-listed species, or whatever.

[Previous speaking councillor] Can I just follow that up with a supplementary question? And that is to ask Catherine Judkins, just to understand more clearly the nature of the relationship between the community action group and the parish councils that are elected to represent a broad range of views in their community. So how does the community action group, which as you said is totally opposed, then relate to parish councils in communities which might actually have more nuanced range of views?

[Another attending councillor] You can put your more nuanced range of views and still access the useful information that the community action group have provided. They will be able to help you understand the processes you need to go to. They're not telling you what to write.

[Richard Pargeter] We're very much trying to gather factual information and see where it leads us. We're totally against it because everything that we've gathered since May has pointed us in that direction, broadly. I don't think that we're going into this from an ideological starting point.

[Simon Chandler] One thing we did in West Wrating was we sent out questionnaires to all our parishioners, and we've have received a reasonable number back. And the mandate from our parishioners is pretty clear what they want this parish council to do. So we will be meeting in an extraordinary meeting next week to make a formal statement about how we stand.

[Nick Acklam, Reach PC] Could I suggest you ask Catherine about the relationship between Say No to Sunnica and Parish Council Alliance?

[Catherine Judkins] Yeah, I did, yeah. We work very closely with them. At your stage, I don't think you're being asked to give your opinion. You're fact-finding at this non-statutory consultation phase. You might find out things during the scheme.

It'll help you clarify at this stage which bits you're concerned about, which bits you're not concerned about. The parish councils got together and formed a parish and a town council alliance, which might help, from some of the discussion I heard in terms of people's time, having that sort of go-between and being able to relay it back to the rest of the group. So forming an alliance might help you share the workload a little bit easier between the parish councils.

We came along to parish council meetings. We had some parish councillors who were on our committee anyway, so there was quite a close working relationship. But certainly, we talked about information at the meeting and we shared information, but we didn't dictate what the parish councils had to say.

They came up with their own representations. They put their own objections in. But it was a close working relationship and respecting each other's opinions.

And really, it's mostly important to work together for information sharing, so you're not duplicating effort. Everyone's really stretched resource-wise. This is all completely voluntary.

It takes an awful lot of work to do this process on a voluntary basis. So the less duplication, the better. The more collaboration, the better.



And actually going into the examination, the applicant will sit there in the examination with a barrister, a junior barrister, a bunch of solicitors, experts in any way, shape, or form you can imagine. They have got hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds that they can throw at this thing, and they're up against a bunch of volunteers. And actually, the more united a front, if there are areas of objections that you agree on, and as you get through this process and go along to your non-statutory consultation, go along to the statutory consultation, because the scheme might change, as Nick was saying, it being an iterative process.

Between your non-statutory consultation and the statutory consultation, there can be some big changes to the scheme. We had an entire land parcel taken out of the non-statutory consultation, but then that brought Islam into the fold, because then another landowner came along and chucked in another parcel of land closer to the frontier. It was a whole different ball game by the time it went into the statutory consultation phase and then into examinations.

Things do change along the way. Not everyone has got the time to focus on all of these changes, so it is really useful to have these regular meetings and this collaboration so that you're all kept up to date. If there has been a major change to the scheme, you can quickly ping out an email or a message along your WhatsApp group and everybody then knows about it.

That sort of a thing. We work very closely with them. As I say, on our committee, we did have parish councillors on our committee and we work very closely with the parish councillor lines.

[Richard Pargeter, KSCA] Can I just say, from the outset, we came together as a group of interested people. We were concerned about the scale of this and the utter transformation of the landscape around here. There is no doubt that we are opposed to the utter transformation of the landscape.

It concerns us very greatly and there's a lot of strength of feeling out there. However, within the group, there is a lot of nuance about that strength of feeling and what kind of result might come out of it. Some people might be very relaxed that it goes ahead but that it's mitigated in suitable ways.

How we handle that, how we handle a group of people who are committed to saying we don't want this to wreck our environment on the one hand but we don't want to be in such a way to go into the statutory consultation and not be listened to because all we want to do is lie down in front of bulldozers. It's really important that we then find a way to negotiate. We need a voice.

We need voices who can negotiate on the part of the communities to get the best result. If it does get approved, there will be some kind of compensation that is actually better than anybody could expect. How do we do that? We've got no money.

[Another KSCA attendee] There will be people outright objecting and there will be people with nuanced opinions about this. If we can find the common ground, we will stand a better chance, I believe, of either getting it thrown out but then we've just heard today that the Prime Minister says 150 infrastructure projects will be unblocked. They will be fast-tracked.

I would say that maybe the inspectorate are not really going to have a job. Who knows? We don't know.

[Simon Chandler] I've asked you to take back to your parish councils the idea of making a communication channel with the Kingsway Solar Community Action group. That's the first thing I'd like you to do. Some of you may decide that that's not appropriate at this stage and that's fine. However, the other thing I would like you to take back is the idea of forming a parish council alliance, which you may think is more appropriate and, of course, that will be run according to local government's rules.

One of the reasons I made sure that the meeting this evening was a public meeting was so that nobody could accuse us of doing things non-transparently. We did that at the advice of our clerk. We will do everything in a legal way but I think we can do that and still be part of a wider group rather than a collection of individual parish councils. We may be repeating lots of work if we do that and just not acting with the strength that we could if we pulled together. So take that idea back to your parish councils and talk about it and I'll be in touch sometime soon to ask how you feel about it.

[A parish councillor] I think it would be important if we could take back some view of what the alliance's primary purpose was and what were its objectives so that we could just show that it was more nuanced.

[Simon Chandler] I've got all your email addresses. The Sunnica Town and Parish Council Alliance had a document [constitution?] which described what the Town and Parish Council Alliance did. I've been told that they could send it to us and we can look at that and perhaps use it as a model if we did something along those lines.

So I'll write to you all with an outline of what the Town and Parish Council Alliance would be and what its purpose was and what it was trying to achieve.

[PC attendee] I think perhaps for some of us who are less far on this journey the idea of the aim being to get the best possible outcome sounds much closer to where we're at than an initial aim to totally oppose.

[Richard Pargeter?] Well for us the best possible outcome is it doesn't go ahead. But if it does go ahead then we get the best deal that we possibly can for the communities. That's the hierarchy.

*[Unknown member of the audience] Once they get the planning permission it's a problem. I mean can you imagine a public railway enclosed by fences? I wouldn't want to. No, absolutely.*

*There's no way that that is the right way. I mean the inefficiency of solar panels is known. So how can you propose a project like that? You plaster the whole landscape with solar panels and think you are making net zero with solar panels.*

*That's ridiculous. That's a stupid idea. I mean it's obvious.*

[Simon Chandler] That's why we have committees. On the committee people have differences of opinion.

*Nobody can be that stupid to believe that.*

*Solar panels in England, in the UK. I will send you all a document outlining what the Italian Parish Council Alliance would be and to ask if you would like to join effectively.*

*I think we've run over.*

[Catherine Judkins] One other thing into the equation is that the UK Solar Alliance covers people who've got small solar farms and the NSIPs as well. So they're also looking at trying to pull together a grouping which is just the NSIPs.

The UK Solar Alliance covers the ones that are tiny little solar farms in the middle of nowhere which people haven't been really objected to. It's the NSIPs which have got a different planning process and which have got a bigger issue to face. So we might be trying to pull together just something that's focused on NSIPs.

Can I just say a very, very quick comment just in relation to the UK Solar Alliance as well? So the UK Solar Alliance has got about, I think it's about 31 NSIPs as members at the moment. And the rest of it is made up, as you say, of local authority approved applications. Probably rather than... So we are looking within the UK to create a sort of subgroup, if you like, of the NSIP schemes.

So it's sort of best to work with that through that organisation because we can immediately put you in touch with all 31. So that's a useful thing to know. But also just on that, the experience... Although the UK has some of the smaller... Well, they're not small scale.

Some sort of large and gigantic solar schemes in its membership. The issues that impact them, the impacts on wildlife, heritage, those sorts of things, are quite common ground between both kinds of schemes. So the resource database and things is quite applicable to all sorts of schemes, whatever size it is.

But yeah, I'm happy to sort of talk to you a bit more about UK Solar Alliance if you wanted to drop me a line. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[Richard Pargeter] Can I just make one other comment? This is a solar farm with battery storage. And everybody keeps referring to this as a solar farm. We do also have these large number of very large lithium ion batteries which they are planning to have with their own associated noise and safety issues.

So please when you're talking about this make sure that people are aware that they're talking about not just plastering the countryside with solar panels but also installing very large lithium ion batteries as well. People refer to that as BESS. BESS is Battery Energy Storage Systems.

*[Previous speaking unknown member of the audience] Yeah, I got batteries. I got solar panels on my roof. I have it for three years now.*

*And it has been working for one year. So not even in a small scale I can get it to work. We've got much better experience when it's on the roof.*

[Simon Chandler] Okay, so I think we'll close the meeting there.

[Another parish councillor] I'd just like to say that the actual website and information is really useful because I feel that we are actually in a bit of a scramble to meet the deadline next week.

[Simon Chandler] And thanks for joining us Catherine.

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## Actions

- Simon Chandler to contact Nick White to ask for documented details about the Sunnica-related Town and Parish Council Alliance.
- Simon Chandler to contact all attending parish councils with a proposal for a Parish Council Alliance, detailing its aims, scope, etc.