



Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

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Our ref: MCB2024/17190

Cllr Richard Rout
Deputy Cabinet Member
Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects
Suffolk County Council

Email: phil.watson@suffolk.gov.uk

3 December 2024

Dear Richard,

Thank you for your letter of 25 October to the Secretary of State regarding Sunnica Solar Farm and potential links to modern slavery. I am responding as this matter falls under my Ministerial portfolio.

I would first like to reassure you that the Government is committed to tackling the issue of forced labour in solar energy supply chains, including the mining of polysilicon used in the manufacture of solar panels, on which we are taking robust action. For example, the Government has introduced guidance on the risks of doing business in Xinjiang, enhanced export controls, and announced the introduction of financial penalties for those who fail to report as required under the Modern Slavery Act. Additionally, we have co-sponsored Action Sustainability's "Addressing Modern Slavery and Labour Exploitation in Solar PV Supply Chains," a procurement guidance pack that provides tools to ensure the responsible sourcing of solar panels. You may find this especially useful in relation to the valuable work you are doing through the Solar Together Suffolk scheme.

As part of the reconvened Solar Taskforce, we are in the process of drafting a Solar Roadmap, which will, amongst other things, outline actions the Government will take to develop resilient, innovative, and forced labour-free supply chains. The Roadmap is expected to be published in early 2025.

As you rightly mention in your letter, Solar Energy UK, together with their European counterparts Solar Power Europe, have launched the Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI), which seeks to develop a responsible, transparent, and sustainable solar value chain. A key element of this will be the Environmental, Sustainability and Governance Standard, launched in 2023, and the Supply Chain Traceability Standard, due to be launched in December 2024. The SSI also expects to begin independently auditing solar manufacturing sites in China by the end of the year. Non-conformance with these standards will be reflected in the manufacturer's 'performance score' and may result in non-certification.

It is worth noting that the approval of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) is a matter that pertains purely to planning rather than procurement. NSIP examinations are focussed on the suitability of the proposed development at the proposed location, whereas the procurement of resources for construction are post-consent commercial decisions by the applicant. Furthermore, due to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in the planning system, it would not be appropriate to comment on individual planning applications.

I would like to thank you again for this letter on what is a very serious and important issue.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Shanks', followed by a period. The signature is fluid and cursive.

MICHAEL SHANKS MP

Minister for Energy