Springwell Solar Action Group Response

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Our community is under threat. We are surrounded by high grade irrigated land. Under no circumstances should the Government, EDF or Blankney Estates be allowed to trash this in the name of Net Zero.

What has become abundantly clear, Net Zero targets are unachievable and are causing significant damage.

As a community we embrace sensible logical change to help the environment. This is neither. It is a scheme that
A) ticks a climate change box
B) Makes Blankney Estates & EDF a heap of money

Neither of these help with electric bills. In fact, all we see are prices increasing.

EDF have guaranteed that the land would return to farming and the quality of the land would not be altered. So, we would expect approximately 3500 acres to be return as best most versatile farmland with no contamination!

Whilst many of us may be naive we are not stupid. This land grab will turn 3500 acres of great farmland into a Brownfield industrial complex with a significant amount of contamination from PFAs and heavy metals which leach from the solar panels, let alone the risk of significant pollution caused by any BESS fires.

This Estate with rumoured historic links to the Slave trade, in 2025 should not allow 3500 acres of the same estate to be covered in solar panels that emanate from China with direct links to the forced labour camps.

The planning inspector should be pushing for an absolute transparent supply chain from EDF. What is their policy on Modern Day Slavery?

Key concerns: -

Cumulative Effects

The number of proposed projects will decimate thousands of acres of prime farmland, transforming our beautiful landscape into an industrial complex. This site alone will have 1.5million solar panels, over 1500 shipping containers, multiple substations and a huge amount of steel and concrete

Lincolnshire relies on agriculture and tourism; these projects will have devastating consequences for both sectors. The loss of farmland will not only impact local farmers but also allied trades. This development is likely to have a detrimental impact on local jobs. Additionally, the industrialization of our landscape will deter tourists, leading to a

decline in revenue. We also have a college of further education that provides young people with a pathway into agriculture. Agriculture is being destroyed by this ridiculous rush to net zero.

Land, Soils and Groundwater
Flooding is already an issue and is documented. There are old clay drains under the ground, the piling process is very likely to damage many of these. This would have a material impact on the flow of water. The impact of millions of glass panels will prevent rainwater being absorbed across a wide dispersed area, it will be funnelled, causing more rapid runoff. In fact, when representatives visited a member of our group, he was compelled to educate them on the sheer volume of water that flows into culverts and drains in Scopwick. This is a major concern, and we see no genuine mitigation plans. Will EDF take responsibility for properties being flooded?

There is strong and credible evidence that due to the weather conditions in the UK the 1.5million solar panels will degrade rapidly. As they degrade forever toxins and heavy metals will leach into the soil. This contamination will render this land unfit for agricultural purposes.

Potential Effects of XLPE Cables on Water Aquifers

It is very clear from the application that there is going to be a significant amount of cabling buried across the site. The applicant has only proposed to remove surface-based material at the point of decommissioning. This will leave a huge amount of contamination underground. XLPE cabling has many potential contaminants, and this should not remain in the ground above a primary aquifer. We understand the applicants desire to only remove surfaced based material, this is cost calculation. It is the planning inspectorate's responsibility to ensure the applicant is not permitted to leave contamination below ground. No matter what the costs, it is the responsibility of the applicant to return this land to its previous state by removing all contamination even materials that were buried. What are the risks?

Leaching of Additives or Degradation
XLPE contains not only polyethylene but also additives like antioxidants, cross-linking agents (e.g., peroxides), and sometimes flame retardants. If XLPE cables degrade due to aging, heat, or environmental conditions, small amounts of by-products or additives leach into the soil.

Physical Intrusion and Disturbance
Cable laying will disturb soil layers, changing natural water flow paths and increasing turbidity or altering recharge rates to aquifers. In large-scale installations, cables may act as physical barriers to water flow, modifying hydrology.

What standards are being implemented to ensure there is zero impact on the aquifer? Are any of the following actions being taken? Protective measures such as bentonite layers, encasement, or double sheathing to prevent leaching or intrusion.

There has been a concerted effort to remove microplastics from rivers and oceans. Why do EDF feel it is acceptable to pollute the land with microplastics from XLPE?

How Microplastics Form

- Underground cables degrade slowly due to oxidation, hydrolysis, and mechanical stress.
- As the outer sheath degrades, it can flake or fragment.
- Particles leach into soil or aquatic systems if exposed.
- In high-voltage conditions, water treeing weakens the polymer matrix, leading to internal cracking.
- Cutting, stripping, or mishandling cables during installation or recycling can release particles.
- Improper disposal or abandonment of cables increases the risk of long-term environmental fragmentation.

A 2021 review on plastic infrastructure noted that polyethylene-based cables and pipes are long-term contributors to soil microplastic pollution, especially if not properly disposed of.

Mitigation Measures
1. Use of ducts or concrete encasement to prevent direct soil contact.
2. Laying impermeable barriers (like clay liners) to stop contaminant transport.
3. Installation of groundwater monitoring points to detect any changes post-installation.
4. Ensuring old or damaged XLPE cables are not left in-situ where degradation could occur.

<u>Blankney Estates – Irrigation Application</u>

2012 Blankney Estates planning application to upgrade the irrigation of the estate's land. The intention of the irrigation scheme was to facilitate the growing and production of high-quality crops on the high-grade land.

In particular, the irrigation project comprised the following key elements:

a. a water abstraction points on River Witham.
b. a water abstraction pumping station.
c. the use of former golf course land for agricultural purposes.
d. two new storage reservoirs
e. upgrading of secondary water transfer pumping stations.
f. water transfer pipelines.
g. irrigation feeder pipelines.
h. watercourse crossings.
i. hydrants for irrigation.

The estate claimed then, there would be no significant change to the landscape because of the scheme. Furthermore, in the most part, the overall project would not be visible, being below or at ground level. This claim of course is in total contrast to the Springwell solar project currently proposed.

The application was successful, and the estate was awarded with a taxpayers' DEFRA grant that we are led to believe was in excess £1.2 million. If the Springwell project is approved this would lead to the irrigation system being set aside for the duration of the existence of the solar farm and would be unserviceable in 35 years of inactivity.

Not only is this a total waste of taxpayers' money, but a waste of high-quality land that has a first-class irrigation system used to produce high-quality crops.

Landscape & Visual Impact
The Steeples & Stepping Out walks are extensively used. If this industrialisation is permitted, then the Planning Inspector is in effect saying people and the wildlife don't matter and widespread destruction of the environment is the way to achieve Net Zero. There is no reasonable person who can say this development won't have a devastating impact on the landscape.

We seriously can't allow the pursuit of money to ruin this area.

We are blessed with migrating birds who rely on our countryside for food and breeding. There is clear evidence that birds mistake panels for water and significant numbers are killed as they fly into them. Is this just another casualty of Net Zero?

If planning is granted, we will be forced to walk through fenced off solar alleys, with unsightly panels and substations, forced to listen to the constant humming from the inverters and substation compounds, be watched over by CCTV Cameras, light pollution and the decimation of the wildlife. It will be an industrial complex. The impact on the community's wellbeing will be significant and is already being felt.

BESS & Risk to Aquifer
The BESS is located above a primary aquifer and near 2 vital MOD locations. We don't need to look far to see the impacts of BESS fires, Moss Landing in the US, Statera Energy in Essex, and BESS in Liverpool. EDF ***independent*** expert looks to minimise the risk by highlighting classroom tests. This cannot be a reasonable route through planning. We need 100% guarantees that no harm will be done to the environment, the aquifer, and the communities if a fire were to occur.

A BESS fire is likely and those in the industry acknowledge this. The question is how big the incident will be and could it be managed. A fire would contaminate the aquifer, leading to groundwater contamination from hazardous materials, including heavy metals like lithium, cobalt, nickel, and manganese. Contamination of the aquifer would affect drinking water, agriculture and ecosystems. Who will be responsible to fix this.

Our community are expected to sit back and trust EDF with our safety. Tell that to the people impact by Grenfell, Bopal in India or those poisoned by PFAs from Teflon in the USA. Large corporations can't be trusted and there needs to be scrutiny throughout the process.

Grid Connection
Springwell has no connection to the grid. The planning inspector can't grant permission to EDF to build this industrial complex with no legitimate means to connect to the grid. It is relying on the Navenby National Grid substation application being approved. This may not be consented to.

Our group has worked tirelessly for the last 2 years to try and stop this Solar Industrial Factory. We are the little people that big corporations hate and feel they can trample on. Once these greedy corporations and landowners have run off with their millions it will be the people living through this nightmare who must live with the consequences.

Submission ID: 36588

Has the applicant provided sufficient detail around the security provisions. It is now recognized that grid scale infrastructure poses a significant risk both from a physical attack but more likely from a cybersecurity perspective. As already highlighted most of the kit is imported from China and the majority of companies in China are state sponsored. How can the applicant guarantee the safety of these facilities as more of the controls will be managed remotely which gives any potential bad actors the opportunity to access the facility. In addition the inspector has raised the question around the nature of security fencing. We object to any fencing as this will limit the ability of deer to roam freely, we would certainly object to any additional fencing. Again how can the applicant prevent theft and encouraging increase in criminality in the area but also more concerning is physical attack from hostile forces - terrorism or nation attack?

Submission ID: 36508

On behalf of the many hundreds of people who are fighting to stop Springwell Solar, we welcome the opportunity to submit our detailed response to this application. The open floor hearings and issue specific hearings were an opportunity to see how the applicant with unlimited resources have funded significant number of lawyers and external consultants to help them position Springwell. As an action group we feel there was no independent oversight, The external resources are all collaborating on this project and therefore can not be classed as independent. There are many questions that remain unanswered and we are please to see the questions raised by the inspector.