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## **Executive Summary**

Lincolnshire Against Needless Destruction (L.A.N.D) submits this **formal objection** to the proposed **Springwell Solar Farm** on the grounds that it is disproportionate in scale, procedurally flawed, and strategically misaligned with national planning policy. The development spans over 2,000 acres of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land and seeks powers of compulsory acquisition under the Planning Act 2008. It is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), yet fails to demonstrate strategic necessity, grid readiness, or a compelling public interest case.

As a campaign, we are not opposed to net zero. We support the transition to cleaner energy when it is pursued with integrity, strategic foresight, and respect for communities and landscapes. We believe in a balanced approach—one that protects food security, rural livelihoods, and the character of Lincolnshire while enabling innovation in energy generation. Our preference is for small-scale, locally serving renewable energy schemes that empower communities rather than displace them.

This objection outlines five core areas of concern:

- **Legal and legislative flaws**, including misuse of compulsory purchase powers and NSIP designation.
- **Cumulative impact** of multiple energy infrastructure projects across Lincolnshire.
- **Loss of BMV land**, undermining food security and agricultural resilience.
- **Damage to communities**, procedural unfairness, and exclusion of digitally disconnected residents.
- **Misuse of political ambition**, with 2030 targets invoked to justify accelerated planning and construction.

We urge the Planning Inspectorate to reject the Springwell Solar Farm proposal in its current form and initiate a broader enquiry into the use of compulsory acquisition powers and strategic coordination of energy infrastructure in Lincolnshire.

## **Section 1: Legal and Legislative Grounds**

### **1.1 Misuse of Section 122 Powers (Planning Act 2008)**

The developer seeks powers of compulsory acquisition under Section 122 of the Planning Act 2008, which requires:

- That the land is needed for the development.
- That there is a compelling case in the public interest.

However, the transcript from **Compulsory Acquisition Hearing 1 (CAH1)** reveals serious concerns:

“We are not satisfied that all plots identified for compulsory acquisition are essential to the operation of the solar farm. Several parcels appear to be reserved for future flexibility or speculative grid infrastructure.” — *Planning Inspector, CAH1 Transcript, 17 July 2025*

“Landowners have been approached with option agreements before full project details were made available. In some cases, NDAs were requested, which undermines transparency.” — *Local Representative, CAH1 Transcript*

This undermines the requirement for a “compelling case in the public interest.” The scheme is a commercial venture, not a public utility. Profit-driven solar schemes do not meet the threshold for compulsory acquisition.

#### **Key Legal Precedents:**

- *London Borough of Hillingdon v Secretary of State for Transport [2010]*: Reinforced that compulsory acquisition must be proportionate and necessary.
- *Planning Act 2008 Guidance (DCLG)*: States that voluntary agreements should be pursued wherever possible.

#### **Objection Points:**

- The developer has not exhausted voluntary acquisition routes.
- The public interest case is weak, given the commercial nature of the scheme.
- The Planning Inspectorate must scrutinize whether Section 122 powers are being misapplied.

### **1.2 Questionable NSIP Designation**

Springwell Solar Farm is designated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) solely due to its proposed capacity exceeding 50MW. However:

- The transcript from **Issue Specific Hearing 2 (ISH2)** confirms that grid connection is not yet secured:

“The applicant has not provided a confirmed grid connection agreement. The proposed Walpole substation link remains indicative.” — *Planning Inspector, ISH2 Transcript, 15 July 2025*

- There is no evidence of integration with a Strategic Network Plan or alignment with National Grid’s Future Energy Scenarios.
- The developer has not demonstrated that the project addresses a national energy shortfall or strategic gap.

#### **Relevant Policy:**

- *EN-1 (Overarching National Policy Statement for Energy)*: Requires that NSIPs demonstrate national need and strategic fit.
- *EN-3 (Renewable Energy Infrastructure)*: Emphasises grid readiness and land suitability.

#### **Objection Points:**

- NSIP status should not be granted based on scale alone.
- The Planning Inspectorate must require evidence of strategic necessity and grid integration.
- Without this, the NSIP designation risks undermining the integrity of the national infrastructure consenting regime.

## **Section 2: Cumulative Impact Across Lincolnshire**

Lincolnshire is facing an unprecedented concentration of energy infrastructure proposals, including solar farms, battery energy storage systems (BESS), and transmission corridors. The Springwell Solar Farm proposal fails to account for the cumulative impact of these developments, in breach of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations and National Policy Statements EN-1 and EN-3.

### **2.1 Current and Recent NSIPs in Lincolnshire**

The following are some of the NSIPs either proposed, under examination, or granted within the last 12 months:

Project Name	Status	Type	Location	Capacity
Springwell Solar Farm	Under Examination	Solar + BESS	Central Lincolnshire	500 MW
East Pye Solar Farm	Pre-Examination	Solar + BESS	South Lincolnshire	600 MW
Heckington Fen Wind Farm	Consent Granted	Wind	Near Sleaford	20 turbines
Grimsby to Walpole Transmission	Stage 2 Consultation	Grid Corridor	North–South Lincolnshire	400kV line
Weston Marsh to East Leics	Consultation	Grid Corridor	East Lincolnshire	400kV line
Kingsway Solar (Burwell)	Pre-Application	Solar + BESS	Bordering South Lincolnshire	350 MW
Meridian Solar	Pre-application	Solar + Bess	South Lincolnshire	750MW
Ossian	Pre- application	Grid Corridor		underground
EGL 3. 4, 5	Pre-application	Grid Corridor		underground
Outer Dowsing	Pre-application	Grid corridor		underground
Fosse Green	Pre - application	Solar/BESS		240MW
Leoda	Pre-application	Solar/BESS		600MW
Tweenbridge	Pre-application	Solar/Bess		800MW

### Quote from ISH3 (Springwell):

“The applicant has not provided a cumulative impact assessment that includes East Pye, Grimsby–Walpole, or Weston Marsh. This omission is significant given the scale of overlapping infrastructure.” — *Planning Inspector, ISH3 Transcript, 16 July 2025*

## 2.2 Landscape and Infrastructure Saturation

- The combined footprint of solar NSIPs exceeds 5,000 acres across Lincolnshire.
- Grid corridors such as Grimsby–Walpole and Weston Marsh intersect with multiple solar and BESS sites.
- No strategic coordination exists between developers, risking grid congestion and stranded assets.

### Quote from Open Floor Hearing 2 (OFH2):

“We are seeing a patchwork of industrialisation across Lincolnshire’s countryside. Each developer claims their project is isolated, but the reality is cumulative devastation.” — *Local Resident, OFH2 Transcript, 15 July 2025*

## 2.3 Breach of Policy and Guidance

- EN-1 requires cumulative impacts to be assessed across landscape, biodiversity, and infrastructure.
- EN-3 states that solar developments must be considered in the context of other energy infrastructure.
- The EIA Regulations mandate that cumulative effects be addressed in the Environmental Statement.

### Objection Points:

- The developer has failed to assess cumulative impacts, violating EN-1, EN-3, and EIA Regulations.
- The Planning Inspectorate must require a revised Environmental Statement that includes all relevant NSIPs.
- Lincolnshire's rural character and grid capacity are being overwhelmed without strategic oversight.

## Section 3: Agricultural Land and Food Security

The proposed Springwell Solar Farm spans over 2,000 acres of predominantly Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. This directly contradicts national policy guidance and undermines long-term food resilience, rural livelihoods, and the integrity of Lincolnshire's farming heritage.

### 3.1 Classification of Land

- The developer's own Environmental Statement (Chapter 10: Land Use and Agriculture) confirms that **over 70% of the site is classified as Grade 2 or 3a**, which qualifies as BMV land under Natural England's Agricultural Land Classification.
- No alternative sites or brownfield options were assessed in detail.

"The site comprises a mix of Grade 2 and Grade 3a land. While mitigation measures are proposed, the permanent loss of productive land is acknowledged." — *Environmental Statement, Springwell Solar Farm, Document Ref: ES10.3, December 2024*

### 3.2 Policy Conflict

- **EN-3 (Renewable Energy Infrastructure)** states:
- **DEFRA's Food Security Strategy (2023)** warns against large-scale solar development on productive farmland, citing risks to domestic food supply and rural economies.

- The **Climate Change Committee’s Land Use Report (2022)** recommends protecting BMV land for food production and nature recovery.

### **3.3 Lack of Agricultural Impact Assessment**

- The Environmental Statement lacks a standalone Agricultural Impact Assessment.
- No modelling was provided on the long-term effects of land loss on local food systems or tenant farming viability.

“We have not seen a detailed assessment of how this project affects agricultural productivity or food supply chains. This is a significant omission.” — *Planning Inspector, ISH4 Transcript, 17 July 2025*

### **3.4 Local Economic Impact**

- Lincolnshire’s agricultural sector contributes around £2 billion annually to the UK economy. (Greater Lincolnshire LEP)
- The permanent loss of BMV land threatens jobs, supply chains, and food processing industries in the region.

“This is not just about fields—it’s about families, jobs, and food. Once this land is gone, it’s gone for good.” — *Local Farmer, Open Floor Hearing 2, 15 July 2025*

### **Objection Points**

- The proposal violates EN-3 by failing to justify the use of BMV land.
- The Planning Inspectorate must require a full Agricultural Impact Assessment.
- Lincolnshire’s food-producing capacity must be protected as a matter of national interest.

## **Section 4: Community Impact and Procedural Fairness**

The Springwell Solar Farm proposal has failed to uphold principles of inclusive engagement, procedural fairness, and community respect. The consultation process was heavily reliant on digital platforms, excluded vulnerable groups, and lacked transparency in land negotiations.

### **4.1 Exclusion of Digitally Disconnected Residents**

- The Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) confirms that the majority of consultation materials were distributed online, via email newsletters, virtual exhibitions, and digital feedback forms.

- No printed Environmental Statement was made available in local libraries or parish offices during the statutory consultation period.

“We were told to go online to view 10,000 pages of documents. Many of us don’t have internet access or the ability to navigate these systems.” — *Resident, Open Floor Hearing 2 (OFH2), 15 July 2025*

This approach violates the spirit of inclusive engagement under the **Equality Act 2010**, which requires reasonable adjustments for those with limited digital access.

#### **4.2 Lack of Transparency in Land Negotiations**

- Multiple landowners reported being approached with option agreements before full project details were disclosed.
- Some were asked to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs), limiting their ability to discuss concerns with neighbours or seek independent advice.

“We were pressured to sign before we understood the full scope. It felt like a land grab, not a consultation.” — *Landowner testimony, CAH1 Transcript, 17 July 2025*

This undermines the principle of **procedural fairness**, which is central to the Planning Act 2008 and the Nolan Principles of public life.

#### **4.3 Community Wellbeing and Social Impact**

- The Environmental Statement lacks a standalone Social Impact Assessment.
- No modelling was provided on the effects of construction traffic, visual intrusion, or loss of amenity on mental health, cohesion, or rural identity.

“This project will change the character of our village forever. We feel ignored, not consulted.” — *Local Councillor, OFH2 Transcript*

#### **Objection Points**

- The consultation process excluded digitally disconnected and vulnerable residents.
- Land negotiations lacked transparency and fairness.
- The Planning Inspectorate must require a revised Statement of Community Consultation and a full Social Impact Assessment.

### **Section 5: Misuse of 2030 Political Targets**

The developer repeatedly cites the UK’s 2030 net zero ambitions as justification for accelerated planning and construction of the Springwell Solar Farm. However, these

targets are political ambitions—not statutory mandates—and must not override scrutiny, fairness, or strategic coherence.

## 5.1 Developer’s Framing of Urgency

The **Design Approach Document** and **Environmental Statement (Chapter 2: Need for the Development)** both frame the project as essential to meeting 2030 decarbonisation goals:

“Springwell Solar Farm will contribute significantly to the UK’s 2030 renewable energy targets and help accelerate the transition to net zero.” — *Environmental Statement, Document Ref: ES2.1, December 2024*

“The urgency of delivery is driven by national policy commitments to decarbonise the grid by 2030.” — *Design Approach Document, Page 12*

However, these targets are not legally binding. The **Climate Change Act 2008** sets a statutory target for net zero by 2050. The 2030 goals referenced by the developer stem from political declarations and advisory pathways, not enforceable law.

## 5.2 Planning Must Remain Evidence-Led

- The Planning Inspectorate is a quasi-judicial body and must assess applications based on planning law, environmental impact, and procedural fairness—not political ambition.
- Accelerated timelines must not compromise due process, community engagement, or strategic coordination.

“We are concerned that the applicant is using political ambition as a mandate to bypass scrutiny. The Planning Act requires evidence, not urgency.” — *Planning Inspector, ISH3 Transcript, 16 July 2025*

## 5.3 Risk of Precedent

- If Springwell is approved based on 2030 urgency, it sets a precedent for other developers to invoke political timelines to justify fast-tracking.
- This risks undermining the integrity of the NSIP process and marginalising affected communities.

“We must not allow political targets to become a substitute for planning rigour. The consequences for rural communities are too great.” — *Local Campaigner, OFH2 Transcript, 15 July 2025*

## Objection Points

- The developer’s reliance on 2030 targets is misleading and legally irrelevant.
- The Planning Inspectorate must uphold evidence-led decision-making and resist pressure to fast-track.



- Infrastructure decisions must be based on strategic need, environmental integrity, and procedural fairness—not political ambition.

## **Closing Statement**

Lincolnshire Against Needless Destruction (L.A.N.D) stands for a fair, strategic, and inclusive energy transition—one that protects the landscapes, livelihoods, and communities that define our region. We are not opposed to net zero. We support the move to cleaner energy when it is pursued with integrity, evidence, and respect for those most affected.

The Springwell Solar Farm proposal fails on all these fronts. It is disproportionate in scale, procedurally flawed, and strategically incoherent. It threatens over 2,000 acres of productive farmland, bypasses proper community engagement, and invokes political ambition as a substitute for planning rigour.

We believe the future of energy lies in innovation, not imposition. Locally serving, small-scale renewable schemes—cooperatively owned, strategically sited, and grid-smart—offer a better path forward. They empower communities rather than displace them. They balance climate goals with food security and rural wellbeing.

We therefore urge the Planning Inspectorate to:

- Reject the Springwell Solar Farm proposal in its current form.
- Initiate a public enquiry into the misuse of compulsory acquisition powers under Section 122.
- Reassess the NSIP designation and demand strategic justification.
- Require cumulative impact assessments and agricultural land protections.
- Reform consultation standards to uphold procedural fairness and inclusion.

This objection is submitted not in opposition to progress, but in defence of good planning, democratic process, and the values that make Lincolnshire worth protecting.

Signed on behalf of the Members of LAND by:

