

Scopwick and Kirkby Green Parish Council

<http://parishes.lincolnshire.gov.uk/ScopwickandKirkbyGreen/>

The minutes of the Parish Meeting for Scopwick and Kirkby Green residents held on **Wednesday 22nd February** 2023 at 7pm. The meeting was held in Scopwick Village Hall. These are notes of the meeting until approved by the Council as a true record.

Chairman of Scopwick and Kirkby Green Parish Council Cllr Baumber presided over the meeting, with the Clerk taking the minutes and over 100 members of the public in attendance, mostly residents of Scopwick and Kirkby Green.

Cllr Baumber opened the meeting giving a short speech, introducing the Clerk, and outlining that the proposals for the Springwell Solar Farm project are in the very early stages of the planning process - the pre-application stage.

The Parish Council were made aware of literature delivered to residents at the same time as notices for this meeting, Cllr Baumber stressed that the information on the leaflet opposing the proposals did not represent the views of the Parish Council. Cllr Baumber confirmed the Parish Council have not discussed the proposals and will consider all views.

A representative from Springwell was invited to attend the meeting but declined.

Cllr Baumber acknowledged that the proposed development had raised considerable interest and reminded those in attendance to be polite and respectful. The meeting was to allow all those who wished to speak to be able to do so.

Cllr Baumber asked the Clerk to explain the difference between a Development Consent Order (DCO) and a planning application that would go through the District Council.

The Clerk introduced himself and began to explain how the Springwell Solar Farm project met the criteria for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) which meant the application would be put to the Planning Inspectorate rather than the District Council.

The Clerk went on to detail the stages of the DCO, confirming that the current stage of the process was the pre-application phase - a non-statutory consultation, where the developers are looking for feedback on influencing the design at this stage. The pre-application phase will include a statutory consultation before submitting the application to the Planning Inspectorate. During the statutory consultation, the developer must summarise all responses in a Consultation Report, to be submitted with an application.

Information provided by the Clerk, taken from the National Infrastructure Planning website - [The process | National Infrastructure Planning \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](#) - was disputed by a resident (1).

During the examination stage, Interested Parties who have registered by making a Relevant Representation are invited to provide more details of their views in writing. Careful consideration is given by the Examining Authority to all the important and relevant matters including the representations of all Interested Parties, any supporting evidence submitted, and answers provided to the Examining Authority's questions set out in writing or posed at hearings.

A resident (2) questioned what type of feedback the developers would be looking for: the scale or location of the project. The Clerk advised providing feedback to the developers on both those issues. These comments would be considered by the Council.

A resident (3) spoke against the Solar Farm proposals, suggesting that not enough time had been provided to understand the project and formulate an opinion.

CLLr Baumber advised that this was the type of comment that could be put to the Parish Council to consider when responding to the developers.

A resident (4) sought clarification on the purpose of the meeting which was for the Parish Council to hear the views of the residents of the Parish, to inform the Parish Council's thinking and represent those views in a response to the developers.

CLLr Baumber confirmed that all views will be considered by the Parish Council.

A resident (5) questioned whether all residents were aware of the meeting, suggesting that information so far had been sparse regarding both the proposals and the Parish Meeting.

CLLr Baumber advised that the developer held a meeting in Scopwick Village Hall on 1st February which outlined the details of the proposals and that a leaflet advertising the Parish Meeting had been delivered to every residence in the Scopwick and Kirkby Green as well as the appropriate notices posted.

A resident (6) requested a vote be taken to provide an indication to the Council as to whether residents are in favour or opposed to the proposals.

A resident (7) expressed disappointment at the idea of the countryside being covered in solar panels, suggesting that it would be an insult to nature, flora and fauna alike, as well as to the human disposition. The resident spoke about the need for a reduction in carbon and how the proposals, if implemented, would go towards meeting Government quotas. Further comments were made regarding the significant costs involved for the developers - showing their intent and strongly advocated protesting against this development.

A resident (8) expressed concerns of UK food security, citing the large the volume of food produced on the land in the proposals. The resident advised the land in the proposals was grade 2 and 3 farmland, detailing possible crops that can be grown on this grade land.

The resident discussed the carbon footprint of the proposals, suggesting land covered in solar panels will not take carbon out of the atmosphere, furthermore it would take over 7 years for the solar panels to become carbon neutral. The resident referenced existing solar farms that have no vegetation, leading to soil erosion and flooding, as well as having a detrimental impact on wildlife. The resident suggested that others in the community would be open to farming this land. The resident concluded by advocating for solar panels to be on brownfield sites and buildings, rather than farmland.

A resident (9) spoke about how this would be a factory not a farm, expressing concerns over the environmental damage caused by extracting minerals needed for solar panels, the negative impact on humans in the mining industry, the chemicals required in the manufacture of solar panels, and

the environmental impact of transporting resources for the development. The resident expressed further concerns of waste in solar panels at the end of their lifecycle.

The resident suggested that the proposals fundamentally impact the countryside, which could have a devastating effect on wildlife, people's lives, the views that will be blighted and potentially devaluing properties. The resident suggested the proposals do not enhance the countryside at all.

The resident also suggested the developers had approached businesses to gain support for the proposals and asked tenants not to comment on the project. The resident also voiced concerns over members that sit on the Parish Council who have an interest in the project.

The resident advocated for green energy solutions to be in the right place, regarding this proposal as the cheapest opportunity for the developers to obtain the highest possible returns. The resident also reasoned that the Government's energy goals should not be used to justify the development. The resident concluded by conveying disappointment at Blankney Estates.

A resident (10) suggested gathering facts and clear reasons for objections rather than submitting anecdotal responses.

A resident (11) spoke about the size of the project needed for the developers to make a profit, implying the scale of the proposal is unlikely to change. The resident went on to share views on the negative impact on house prices, and the potential increase in traffic in the community. The resident also expressed disappointment at the facetious responses from the developers' representatives when discussing traffic issues and road safety. The resident concluded with concerns of the potential impact on wellbeing and the concerns over the loss of farmland.

A resident (3) spoke about the experience Springwell have in these proposals, advising that 90% of their proposals were approved. The resident acknowledged that emotional, anecdotal evidence will not be good enough; opposing the proposals would require facts. The resident, also a District Councillor, advised that this application will be decided by government, not the District Council. The resident noted that no other sites had been considered by the developer, which, to her knowledge, did not fulfil legal obligations for a project of this scale.

A resident (12) suggested that Springwell is a front for EDF and Luminous Energy, with Blankney driving this proposal forward, solely due to the potential profits involved.

A resident (3) spoke with the developers, who confirmed they had approached Blankney Estates, who own the majority of land in the proposal, making the project easier to deliver.

A resident (12) spoke about how the UK are large exporters of energy and projects like this are used to subsidise energy costs in Europe.

A resident (13) asked if there were any members of the public in attendance with professional knowledge who would be able to join forces to formulate a separate response from the community. The resident also requested a vote to influence how the Council should proceed.

A resident (14) spoke about how this project would devalue property prices in the area.

A resident (1) proposed a vote with a motion to **oppose Springwell Solar Farm in any form with the result communicated to the relevant bodies**, which was seconded.

A resident (15) asked for the result to be formally communicated to the relevant bodies including Blankney Estates, and Springwell, County Councillors, District Councillors and the Member of Parliament.

Cllr Baumber advised the Council would record the decision given from a show of hands.

An overwhelming majority voted to for the Council to **oppose Springwell Solar Farm in any form.**

A resident (16) suggested that this vote didn't represent the Parish as a whole and asked for it to be put to a poll, with voting allowed for 16-year-olds and over.

A resident (7) argued that the points raised were valid but needed to be put to the developers as questions, which would reveal the substance of their application.

A resident (9) spoke about the businesses involved in the project and their intentions to support the developers.

A resident (8) raised concerns over who would be doing surveys on the land, suggesting that any surveys conducted would not be independent, and strongly advocated for independent bodies to do the research. The resident suggested the developers are already out surveying the land as if the decision on the project had been made.

A resident (17) commented on how some members of the community might not have known what this meeting was about, nor had he heard a good argument in support of the proposals. The resident suggested a vote, similar to the referendum on the Neighbourhood Plan, would be a fairer representation of the feeling in the community.

A resident (11) questioned whether the developers could specifically list how they are going to do to improve the environment.

A resident (18) queried the access to the site for construction from the A15 and B1191. Cllr Baumber advised that the Parish Council were no more informed on the proposals than the public.

A resident (3) suggested those who want to object, look at the 10% of projects the developers haven't had approved and learn from them.

A resident (19) doubted whether the next generation would want this solar farm, as it would deny them the opportunity to farm the land.

Cllr Baumber confirmed that a majority of those at the meeting were in favour of **opposing Springwell Solar Farm in any form**, however, several residents asked for a clarification of the majority, requesting the numbers of the vote be recorded. A recount was proposed and seconded, with numbers to be recorded.

101 residents voted for the Council to **oppose Springwell Solar Farm in any form**, with 7 residents abstaining and 2 voting against the motion to **oppose Springwell Solar Farm in any form.**

A resident (20) asked for an action group to be formed, separate from the Parish Council.

A resident (12) questioned whether Parish Councillors must declare an interest. The Clerk explained that Councillors who have declared an interest regarding an item on the agenda will be asked to leave to room during the debate.

Cllr Baumber advised the Council will consider the results of this meeting and to write to the developers.

A resident (21) asked if the Council could consider writing to the MP as well.

A resident (11) questioned Councillors interests. Cllr Baumber reiterated the rules relating to conflicts of interest for Councillors.

A resident (22) explained his relationship with Blankney Estate and position on the Parish Council, confirming he would not participate in any debate and vote on the Parish Council pertaining to Blankney Estates.

A resident (23) asked where the response will be posted. The Clerk advised a response would be posted on the website and posted in the noticeboard.

Cllr Baumber advised the minutes from the Parish Meeting would be published in draft form on the website and posted in the noticeboard.

A resident (24) asked for clarification that the NSIP wouldn't go to the planning department on the District Council, which Cllr Baumber confirmed. The resident (24) then asked for an explanation on a DCO. The Clerk suggested referring to the resident (1) who had disputed the explanation at the start of the meeting. The resident (24) thought this attitude was unprofessional. The Clerk issued an apology. No explanation of the DCO was provided.

It was requested to be noted in the minutes that some members of the public who contributed during the meeting and voted were not residents or registered electors of the parish.

Cllr Baumber thanked residents for attending and providing valid comments that the Parish Council can use when they come to discuss a response.

With no further comments Cllr Baumber closed the meeting at 8:25pm.

Minutes submitted by:

Jack Sargent
Parish Clerk