

“Members - Do you not think that the first priority of any government or governing body should be to ensure the ability to protect food sources and not become reliant on imports which adds to their carbon footprint?”

Using farmland for housing and solar farms means an ever-downward shift to an unacceptable inability to be self-sufficient in food production and recent events on the world stage shows how short-sighted that could be in an emergency.

Food and water is the first basic need for life surely we should be protecting these. We need to ensure that no more productive farmland is taken and if farmers are unable to be sustainable then we need to lobby the government for a fairer package or new cooperatives to make farming work and feed our nation.

I would like Council to support this motion by requiring our representatives on the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee (CLJSPC) to ensure West Lindsey views on this matter be reported to future meetings of the (CLJSPC) and that this Council lobby relevant Government Ministers in a similar manner.”

Response to the Motion – Cllr. Welburn 04.07.22

The following is in response to Cllr. Welburn’s motion to Council on 04th July 2022 in respect to the Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee’s (CLJSPC) position on the protection of farmland within the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan.

The Central Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Partnership Committee (CLJSPC) is a joint planning committee formed by Statutory Instrument for the purpose of producing a shared Local Plan across City of Lincoln, North Kesteven and West Lindsey District Council. The CLJSPC includes members from all four partner authorities, including 3 members and a substitute from West Lindsey District Council. As such the CLJSPC takes into account the views of all members and respective councils and are aware and understand the current challenges faced around land use planning in relation to promoting improved self-sufficiency across the UK; specifically balancing the needs of food production with the need for the generation of sustainable energy.

The CLJSPC recognise that within the last 9 months there has been a number of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects proposed across Central Lincolnshire, specifically relating to large scale solar farms.

The Planning Act 2008 introduced the Development Consent Order process to streamline decision making process for NSIPs with the aim of making the process fair and faster for communities and applicants alike.

Instead of making an application for planning permission to the Local Planning Authority, the applicant instead applies for a Development Consent Order (DCO) directly to the Government. The application will be considered by the Government’s Planning Inspectorate, who will make a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State who then makes the final decision. For a renewable energy scheme of over 50MW, this would be determined by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

All NSIP schemes are considered against National Policy Statements as opposed to Local Plans. The government are in the process of updating these policy statements and recently published a consultation to which West Lindsey District Council responded, highlighting amongst other things the lack of national land use strategy for the provision of NSIP solar projects, understanding the

assessment of best and most versatile land and the cumulative impact on an area of multiple schemes on an area, in terms of both visual impact but also economic, ecological and social. The full consultation response is appended to this statement.

The role of West Lindsey District Council in the DCO process is one of host Authority. The scope of this role is set out by the Planning Act 2008, but it is similar to that of a consultee on Town and Country Planning Act applications, therefore participation is not obligatory but recommended.

At its meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee in November 2021 the Council agreed the decision and delegation protocols, in line with national guidance that would be utilised at each stage of the process. It was agreed that West Lindsey District Council will actively participate in the process and provide an important local perspective at the preapplication stage, in addition to the views expressed directly to the developer by local residents, groups and businesses. West Lindsey will also take part in, and make representations at the Inquiry. Where appropriate the CLJSPC and the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan Team will provide support in this process.

In terms of development proposals which are subject to and determined under the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, the CLJSPC would like to reassure Council that appropriate Local Plan policies are in place to protect farmland, specifically best and most versatile land which is defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.

In the adopted 2017 Local Plan, Policy LP19, Renewable Energy Proposals has a specific presumption against solar farm proposals on best and most versatile land and part G of Policy LP55 dealing with Development in the Countryside requires that proposals should protect the best and most versatile agricultural land so as to protect opportunities for food production and the continuance of the agricultural economy.

In 2019, in response to a changing national picture for planning, the CLJSPC embarked on a review of the Local Plan. After three years of work, including 3 formal stages of consultation, this plan, which is positively prepared and in accordance with national policy, was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in July 2022.

Being a predominately rural area, the submitted Central Lincolnshire Local Plan seeks to balance the issues of land use in the open countryside and provides a positive and evidence-based policy framework in which all Planning Applications submitted across Central Lincolnshire will be considered and determined against.

Policy S67 deals with Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land in the Submission Draft Local Plan and provides clear guidance on how development should be assessed, explicitly requiring that proposals should protect best and most versatile agricultural land to ensure opportunities for food production and the continuance of the agricultural economy. Strict criteria is given on where there may be exceptions.

In relation to the allocation of land for housing the Local Plan uses an established settlement hierarchy when considering suitable locations for housing. All land that is put forward for allocation is comprehensively assessed for suitability, which includes an assessment of the agricultural land classification and use of land, seeking to avoid the use of best and most versatile land. This is all weighed up in the planning balance between the requirement for homes to be built and the importance of protecting the important assets of Central Lincolnshire, including but not limited to, agricultural land.

In relation to any solar energy proposals that will be below the threshold for an NSIP and therefore will be considered against the policies in the Local Plan, Policy S14 sets out criteria that must be considered in any proposals for solar farms. This includes not being supported where it is located on best and most versatile agricultural land.

To summarise, CLJSPC supports West Lindsey District Council's position to protect best and most versatile land and this is reflected in the current Central Lincolnshire Local Plan and in the recently submitted Local Plan which recognises the important role agriculture plays in Central Lincolnshire providing robust policy which supports the promotion of food security and self-sufficiency.

However, it is important to note CLJSPC and associated Local Plan Policy does not have influence over the determination of NSIP proposals and as such a broader strategy for lobbying Government, which considers policy beyond Local Plan policy, led by West Lindsey District Council members would be more appropriate.