# Proposed Lincolnshire AI datacentre could emit five times Birmingham Airport’s carbon footprint



A monumental AI datacentre proposed for Lincolnshire has stirred significant environmental concern, with projections indicating it could emit five times the carbon dioxide of Birmingham Airport upon reaching full operation. The planning application for this ambitious £10 billion facility was submitted recently, with a public consultation currently open for feedback over the next three weeks.

According to documents highlighted by The Guardian, the datacentre is estimated to consume around 3.7 billion kWh of energy, resulting in annual carbon dioxide emissions of 857,254 tonnes, based on the current energy mix of the National Grid. The facility is set to be constructed nine miles east of Scunthorpe and would comprise 15 computer warehouses, a staggering investment reflecting the substantial resources required to power such an endeavour.

Research from the Yale School of the Environment underscores the extensive energy demands of AI compared to traditional computing. Their findings suggest that the environmental footprints of AI operations extend beyond direct carbon emissions, linking the technology to vast water consumption and increased pressure on existing resources. This includes significant usage of freshwater necessary for cooling systems in data centres, which can conflict with local water needs. A notable example is in Oregon, where local authorities filed lawsuits against Google to limit its water usage due to concerns from farmers and Indigenous communities about its impact on agriculture and natural ecosystems.

The environmental implications do not end there. Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, has emphasised that while AI holds transformative potential, the responsibility lies with societies and governments to utilise it wisely. The debate surrounding the Lincolnshire datacentre exemplifies this tension, especially as other major tech enterprises face increasing scrutiny for their carbon footprints. Over the past five years, Google’s greenhouse gas emissions have surged by 48%, a trend attributed to the rising energy demands of AI-driven services. The company, while aiming for net-zero emissions by 2030, acknowledges the complexities involved in reconciling growth with sustainability.

In contrast to the Lincolnshire project, other data centre initiatives have emerged that seek to mitigate environmental impact. A £3 billion data centre campus is in the works within the same region, designed to capture waste heat for district heating systems supporting local agriculture. This facility aims not only to reduce emissions but also to create jobs and support local economic growth, with estimates suggesting it could generate up to 3,500 construction jobs.

However, the surge in datacentre developments prompts broader questions about the sustainability of AI and its alignment with climate goals. Current UK government ambitions, promoted by Labour leader Keir Starmer, include a goal to reduce emissions by 81% while simultaneously committing to an unprecedented expansion of AI computing power. This dual commitment raises doubts about the government’s prioritisation of environmental integrity against the backdrop of capitalist ambitions.

Environmental advocacy groups, such as Friends of the Earth, are closely monitoring this multifaceted issue, reminding the government of its legal obligations to meet climate targets. Mike Childs, head of science, policy, and research at the organisation, has underscored that the government cannot ignore its duty to the planet amidst vigorous political manoeuvring. Friends of the Earth has previously held the government accountable, successfully challenging the former Conservative administration regarding energy targets in court.

In this context, the expanding footprint of AI technology confronts us with a stark choice: the pursuit of relentless economic growth driven by business interests or a genuine commitment to planetary health and sustainability. As the conversation around these developments unfolds, the reality becomes increasingly clear—decisions about the future must prioritise the well-being of people and the planet over profit.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2025/06/07/ai-datacentre-lincolnshire/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2025/06/07/ai-datacentre-lincolnshire/), [[2]](https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/humber-tech-park-lincolnshire-uk-district-heating/), [[3]](https://www.cbre.com/insights/articles/data-centers-ai-and-sustainability-navigating-the-carbon-paradox)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c51yvz51k2xo), [[7]](https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2024/07/03/google-data-centre-expansion-leads-to-surge-in-carbon-emissions/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.itpro.com/infrastructure/data-centres/plans-for-north-lincolnshire-data-center-given-green-light), [[6]](https://cross-guard.com/data-centre/the-humber-ai-data-centre-campus-a-3bn-vision-for-data-driven-growth/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2025/06/07/ai-datacentre-lincolnshire/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2025/06/07/ai-datacentre-lincolnshire/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.itpro.com/infrastructure/data-centres/plans-for-north-lincolnshire-data-center-given-green-light), [[6]](https://cross-guard.com/data-centre/the-humber-ai-data-centre-campus-a-3bn-vision-for-data-driven-growth/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2025/06/07/ai-datacentre-lincolnshire/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/humber-tech-park-lincolnshire-uk-district-heating/> - A £3 billion data centre campus in Lincolnshire, UK, is proposed to capture waste heat for a district heating system, potentially supporting local agriculture by heating greenhouses for tomato cultivation. The facility aims to provide 386MW across three buildings, suitable for training AI systems, and includes plans for a district heating unit and a greenhouse to utilise waste heat. The development is expected to create up to 3,500 jobs during construction and cost between £2.2 billion and £3 billion to build.
3. <https://www.cbre.com/insights/articles/data-centers-ai-and-sustainability-navigating-the-carbon-paradox> - Data centres, essential for AI operations, are scrutinised for their environmental impact due to high energy and water consumption. AI is projected to consume between 85 and 134 TWh of electricity annually by 2027, comparable to Singapore's total energy consumption over 1.5 to 3 years. However, AI can also drive efficiencies across sectors, potentially offsetting increased emissions. Optimising facility energy consumption and leveraging AI for energy efficiency can lead to significant reductions in energy use and carbon emissions.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c51yvz51k2xo> - Google's greenhouse gas emissions in 2023 were 48% higher than in 2019, attributed to increased energy demands from AI-powered services. The tech giant acknowledges the challenge of reducing emissions while expanding AI integration and aims for net-zero emissions by 2030, though it admits that further AI integration may complicate this goal.
5. <https://www.itpro.com/infrastructure/data-centres/plans-for-north-lincolnshire-data-center-given-green-light> - Planners have approved a proposed data centre near South Killingholme in Lincolnshire, set to be one of Europe's largest, with a capacity of 384MW across three buildings. The development includes a new electricity substation, emergency generators, a district heating unit, and a horticultural greenhouse heated by waste heat from the data centre. The project is expected to create nearly 400 well-paid jobs and attract over £3 billion in investment.
6. <https://cross-guard.com/data-centre/the-humber-ai-data-centre-campus-a-3bn-vision-for-data-driven-growth/> - Outline plans for a 3 million sq ft hyper-scale data centre campus at South Killingholme near Grimsby in Lincolnshire have been approved by the local council. Developer Humber Tech Park aims to create one of the largest AI data centre campuses in Europe, with a £2.2bn to £3bn investment. The project includes a district heating unit to capture and utilise waste heat, potentially reducing carbon emissions, and a 300,000 sq ft greenhouse to grow tomatoes using waste heat, generating up to £3.5 million in annual sales.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2024/07/03/google-data-centre-expansion-leads-to-surge-in-carbon-emissions/> - Google's greenhouse gas emissions have surged 48% in the past five years due to the expansion of its data centres that underpin artificial intelligence systems, leaving its commitment to get to 'net zero' by 2030 in doubt. The company's pollution amounted to 14.3 million tonnes of carbon equivalent in 2023, a 48% increase from its 2019 baseline and a 13% rise since last year, Google said in its annual environmental report.