

Meridian Solar Farm – EN010169

Meridian Solar Farm Ltd

Section 51 Advice Log

Version: 01 December 2025

There is a statutory duty under [section 51 \(s51\) of the Planning Act 2008](#) for the Planning Inspectorate to record the advice that it gives in relation to an application or potential application, and to make this publicly available.

This document comprises a record of the advice that has been provided by the Inspectorate to the applicant (Meridian Solar Farm Ltd) and their consultants during the pre-application stage. It will be updated by the Inspectorate after every interaction with the applicant during which s51 has been provided. The applicant will always be given the opportunity to comment on the Inspectorate's draft record of advice before it is published.

The applicant will use this Advice Log as the basis for demonstrating regard to section 51 advice within the application.

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Date of meeting	Meeting overview
19 November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grid connection • Non-statutory consultation summary • Stakeholder engagement update • Statutory consultation programme • PEIR update • Invoicing and finance • Dates of forthcoming meetings • Programme document feedback (post meeting note)
23 June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • statutory consultation update • Stakeholder engagement update • Approach to design • Programme • Adequacy of Consultation Milestone
15 October 2025	Programme document feedback
23 October 2025	Updated Pre-Application Prospectus
01 December 2025	Adequacy of Consultation Milestone Feedback

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Topic	Meeting date: 19 November 2024
Grid Connection	The Inspectorate stressed the importance of providing detailed evidence to justify the final design of the overall project, particularly around the grid connection to the Weston Marsh substation. The applicant explained that there is a current presumption for an overhead line (assuming a 400kV steel lattice), partly driven by considerations relating to planning policy, soil conditions and the potential for the presence of buried archaeology in the area. The considerations around design and a single grid connection corridor will form part of the statutory consultation. The final proposed order limits and grid connection design options will be applied for within the Development Consent Order.
Stakeholder Engagement	The Inspectorate advised on the benefits of carrying out a wide scope of engagement with the community around the proposed application. It was recommended that the applicant expand on its level of engagement with the local schools and communities. The applicant agreed to consider this approach. The applicant did advise that an update newsletter following the non-statutory consultation held earlier this year was sent to Parish Councils and other stakeholders. Parish Council meetings have been attended on request to discuss the update.
Statutory Consultation Programme	The Applicant was advised to regularly update the Inspectorate at key milestones on how the design aspects of the project are evolving and to provide as much detail on what the applicant will be consulting on during the statutory consultation period, as well as any agreements the applicant has with relevant statutory consultees. In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the Applicant said that there had been discussions with nearby private airfields in relation to the project which were being considered further. The applicant also said that they were aware of other projects in the area that are due to undertake consultation in a similar timeframe and if there is any overlap, they will seek to differentiate their consultation accordingly. Additionally, the applicant reported that it is due to progress Statements of Common Ground with relevant consultees soon.
PEIR Update	The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to include all information gathered from its assessments within the PEIR including how the project evolves over the coming months. The Inspectorate confirmed that it will not look at any draft PEIR documents. In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the Applicant said highway surveys were ongoing together with discussions with Lincolnshire Council

	on the methodology to be used. Discussions with the Environment Agency on the Flood Risk Assessment and Water Framework Directive assessment are being planned. Discussions with Natural England regarding ornithology surveys had been held.
Invoicing and Finance	The Planning Inspectorate clarified the terms of its pre-application service, as its published Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus (see paragraph 14) explains the daily rate for its pre-application fees and how costs are calculated for its different service tiers and invoicing cycle, while the government's guidance on the Planning Act 2008: Infrastructure Planning (Fees) Regulations 2010 - cost recovery by the Planning Inspectorate and public authorities explains how applicants will be charged by the Planning Inspectorate (see paragraph 15)
Dates of forthcoming meetings	The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to provide an updated programme document with more specific timescales for its remaining pre-application activities and milestones and the importance of providing detailed agendas in advance to denote any specific topics requiring advice from the Inspectorate. The Applicant stated that it will provide an updated Programme Plan with more refined meeting dates. The next meeting is expected to take place mid to late January 2025.
Draft Documents	The Inspectorate expressed the importance of having advanced notice of what draft documents the Applicant requires to be reviewed to determine what resources need to be allocated. The Inspectorate advised that this needs to be at least three months before the DCO submission date.
Further Information	The Inspectorate requested further information on limits of deviation, potential flood mitigation and if the applicant is seeking an upper limit on the number of panels. The applicant agreed to provide an update on this at the next meeting along with what will be consulted on in the Statutory Consultation.
Programme Document feedback (post-meeting note)	The Applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document in line with the Expression of Interest process, after the publication of the 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers overall that it covers the expected content as set out in the government's pre-application guidance at paragraph 10 , namely setting out realistic timescales and related information on its pre-application activities. However, in updating its Programme Document, the Applicant should:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out the main issues / topics identified arising from the proposed application, even if this includes initial information at this stage • include whether the local authorities, statutory consultees and others are content with the proposed programme • include dates in its programme timetable for the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone and any Evidence Plan meetings (it is stated that multiparty meetings may be requested and if so, these should also be included as soon as practicable) • Include an Issues Tracker and if this will be shared with local authorities, statutory consultees and others and indicate whether these parties agree with the status of the issues raised and any possible mitigation • identify and include the risks to achievement of the pre-application stage and the process by which these are managed • include any progress with any Planning Performance Agreements with relevant Local Authorities or statutory undertakers. <p>It would also be helpful if the Programme Document explained how the design approach will be managed and communicated during pre-application as well as any relevant information about the development of the draft DCO and Explanatory Memorandum. The applicant will need to publish its Programme Document on its website as soon as practicable.</p>
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Topic	Meeting date: 23 June 2025
Land use and agriculture	<p>The Inspectorate advised the applicant regarding any loss of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land, to state clearly in the application and policy compliance documents how it intends to address the National Policy Statements and the specific guidance on the use of alternatives like brownfield land. This could be a key issue during examination if the project moved forward. The more this issue and the specific paragraphs on this issue in the National Policy Statement can be addressed in the application documents the better. The applicant stated that it was continuing to undertake its Agricultural Land Classification surveys and that discussions had been held with Natural England regarding the scope of</p>

	these surveys across the grid corridor as well as the solar array areas.
Overhead line	The Inspectorate encouraged the applicant to clearly visualise in the application documents what the overhead line infrastructure would look like once built so that all parties have a clearer understanding, and to explain why the technology had been selected over alternatives. The Inspectorate signposted the applicant to the linear projects advice page , as the advice has a section on plans, illustrations and visualisations with examples. The Inspectorate advised further that visualisations of how any infrastructure may interact with other nearby projects and overhead lines would also be useful.
Flood Risk	In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant confirmed it had agreed its flood modelling methodology with the Environment Agency. It confirmed it had based its Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) on the 'worst-case scenario' in respect of maximum heights for infrastructure. Alternative heights, materials and methods were being considered in order to seek to reduce other potential environmental impacts.
Grid Connection	In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant explained that the siting of the new, proposed National Grid substation (to be delivered by NGET as part of the Grimsby to Walpole Project) has not yet been confirmed, but that the applicant showed the search area which had formed part of the consultation. National Grid are progressing the Grimsby to Walpole NSIP at pre-application, having commenced its own statutory consultation stage and sharing consultation material on the proposed, linked substation. The applicant has also been holding regular meetings with National Grid on the issue. Should the location of the substation move outside of the intended Order Limits, consideration will be given to the most appropriate way forward for the project.
Environmental surveys	In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the applicant confirmed it had agreed its methodology with Natural England for ornithology surveys and that the majority of these had been completed for the project.
Approach to design	The Inspectorate advised the applicant to review other Design Approach Documents as good demonstrations of explaining the design journey and evolution.
Adequacy of Consultation Milestone	The Inspectorate explained that the key purpose of the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone is to ensure that a project is not "seriously adrift", taking into account any views from local planning authorities on the adequacy of consultation undertaken by that stage and whether any further statutory consultation is needed to address any changes to the design of the scheme. The Inspectorate added that it will be useful to understand in the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone whether the key statutory bodies are

	satisfied with the consultation and their input into this process.
Programme Document	The Inspectorate advised the applicant to set out in the Programme Document what the main issues are in as much detail as possible, including the progress made in any surveys and methodology and any agreements reached with relevant statutory bodies.
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Topic	Programme Document feedback
Programme Document feedback	<p>The applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial programme document and feedback was provided on 19 November 2024. We note that the applicant has now published its Programme Document dated September 2025. The Inspectorate has reviewed the document and notes that it provides a clear programme timetable of the main events, approach to engagement and outcomes to the consultation phases, as well as the progress made in securing Planning Performance Agreements and Discretionary Advice Services.</p> <p>However, the Inspectorate offers the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In accordance with the government's published guidance Planning Act 2008: pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects guidance, the programme document should include the applicant's view on the main issues for resolution and activities it will undertake to address those. <p>The main issues should typically take the form of a table setting out the different topics and environmental issues/constraints arising from the proposed development and high-level summaries indicating whether each issue has been resolved, either through mitigation measures or project redesign, and the activities the applicant is undertaking to consult parties during pre-application, including whether it has agreed the approach to the methodology used or the scope of its assessments with the relevant statutory bodies.</p> <p>The main issues table should be updated by the applicant at relevant points during the pre-application stage and should reach a degree of maturity and detail following the publication of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) and statutory consultation. This section of the programme document is likely to give the Inspectorate and statutory consultees the most insight into the progress</p>

	<p>of the application and the extent of potential issues for examination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is noted that the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM) statement is intended to be submitted in November 2025. However, the applicant anticipates submitting the application in January 2026. The applicant should be aware that the Planning Act 2008: pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects guidance advises that the AoCM statement should be submitted no later than 3 months before application submission. • Though the risks identified by the applicant have been included, in accordance with the government's pre-application guidance, the applicant should set out the process by which these risks will be tracked and managed. <p>It is also helpful if the programme document can explain if any other consents or licences will be needed for the development.</p>
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Topic	Advice (Email) 23 October 2025
Pre-application prospectus	<p>The Inspectorate has advised that, following a 6-month review of our services, our Pre-application Prospectus has been updated: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. The update log at the bottom of the page summarises the changes and clarifications that have been applied.</p> <p>Applicants with a live project at the pre-application stage of the process, please familiarise yourself with the update and consider how it might affect your pre-application programme and interaction with our services.</p> <p>Please note in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the establishment of land and rights negotiations tracking as a primary service feature – this means it is now expected for all applicants to develop and share a land and right negotiations tracker in 1 of 2 available templates, irrespective of the service tier they have subscribed to • clarified expectations of applicants when preparing to interact with the Inspectorate at meetings – including clarified rights for the Inspectorate to delay or refuse service where pre-meeting expectations are not upheld e.g. an updated programme document or

	issues tracker is not provided, on time, to inform a meeting agenda
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November 2025	Adequacy of Consultation Milestone (AoCM)
<p>Adequacy of Consultation Milestones (AoCM) feedback Section 3.6 Section 3.6.1 Section 3.7.3</p>	<p>The applicant's AoCM statement has been prepared and submitted having had regard to the government's statutory pre-application stage guidance as well as the Inspectorate's non-statutory 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. Having reviewed the applicant's AoCM statement, the Inspectorate considers that it broadly sets out the applicant's consultation activities undertaken to date, confirms the approaches set out in the applicant's Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), and summarises the consultation responses and the way in which they are shaping the application.</p> <p>However, the following advice is given:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix E - it is noted that a response to the AoCM is included at appendix E. However, the AoCM does not make clear which local authorities were consulted about the AoCM. This information should have been included in the AoCM, as it is important that the views and any relevant supporting material about the AoCM is included from all relevant local authorities. • Section 3.6 - it is unclear whether the Marine Management Organisation and Greater London Authority have been consulted or whether the applicant is of the view that consultation with these authorities is not applicable. The applicant is advised to ensure that all relevant statutory consultees are consulted, and where the applicant has considered it unnecessary to include a specific statutory consultee, to provide an explanation as to why. • Section 3.6.1 - it is noted that a number of consultation bodies identified in the list of consultation bodies at appendix 1 of the EIA Scoping Opinion dated 10 July 2024 appear to have not been included at appendix C of the AoCM, including Rutland County Council and North Northamptonshire Council. Again, the applicant is advised to ensure that all relevant statutory consultees are consulted, and where the applicant has considered it unnecessary to include a specific statutory consultee, to provide an explanation as to why. • Section 3.7.3 - the applicant confirms the Section 48 notice included all details prescribed by Regulation 4(3) of the Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed

	<p>Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009. However, the AoCM does not include a copy of the section 48 notice. The applicant should ensure that the notice is included in the Consultation Report.</p> <p>The Inspectorate's comments on the applicant's AoCM statement are made without prejudice to any decision on whether to accept the application for examination.</p>
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