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To the applicant

Case ref: EN010169

By email

Date: 15 April 2026

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Dear [REDACTED],

## Planning Act 2008 – section 51

### Application by Meridian Solar Farm Limited for an order granting development consent for the Meridian Solar Farm

#### Advice following issue of decision to accept the application for examination

On 15 April 2026 the Secretary of State decided that the application for the above project satisfied the acceptance tests under section 55 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA2008). The Planning Inspectorate's acceptance checklist and the application documents have been published and made available on the project page of our website.

In undertaking checks at the acceptance stage, the Inspectorate has made some initial observations in relation to the application. This letter comprises advice to the applicant provided under section 51 of the PA2008 in respect of these initial observations. The applicant should pay attention to its content and consider how appropriate action might be taken in response.

#### Minor errors and omissions

There are minor errors and omissions, as reflected in box 30 of the acceptance checklist.

#### Draft Development Consent Order (dDCO) (Doc 3.1)

##### Part 1 – Preliminary

Article 2(1) – Interpretation: the activities defined under the interpretation of 'permitted preliminary works' indicate that these are (i) lawful preparatory activities and (ii) may be undertaken prior to the granting of any Development Consent Order, such as environmental surveys. These activities do not appear to be referenced in the description of the authorised development set out in schedule 1 of the dDCO (Doc 3.1). The applicant should confirm whether the activities defined under the interpretation of 'permitted preliminary works' constitute works or operations undertaken for the purposes of, or in

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connection with, the construction, operation, or maintenance of the authorised development, and whether they fall within the scope of the environmental impact assessment presented in the Environmental Statement.

Article 2(1) – Interpretation: the applicant is advised to adjust the definitions of ‘commence’ and ‘permitted preliminary works’ if that is necessary to remove any site preparation works that are likely to have significant environmental effects, for example, in terms of noise or impacts on protected species or archaeological remains (see Advice Note 15 – paragraph 21.2). The applicant is further advised to adjust the definition of ‘maintain’ if that is necessary for it not to authorise development which may result in significant environmental effects not already assessed (see Advice Note 15 – paragraph 18.2).

### **Schedule 1 – Authorised Development**

Above ground inter-array overhead electric line: Work no. 8(a) seeks the installation of overhead electric lines connecting works no. 3A and 3B to one another as shown on sheets 5, 6, 7 and 9 of the Works Plans – Section A Solar Development Area (Doc 2.3). However, sheets 5 and 9 appear to show work no. 8 connecting work no. 3B in array B to work no. 3B in array D.

The applicant is advised to review the wording in work no. 8(a) to provide consistency with the Works Plans – Section A Solar Development Area (Doc 2.3).

Overhead electric line: work no. 13 is said to be shown on sheets 2, 3 and 5 of the Works Plans – Section B Grid Connection (Doc 2.3) within the dDCO. The applicant is advised to review this given work no. 13 is shown on sheet 4 and not sheet 5 of the Works Plans – Section B Grid Connection (Doc 2.3).

### **Schedule 13 – Protective Provisions**

The Land Rights Tracker (Doc 4.4) indicates that engagement has taken place with several statutory undertakers, each of whom has supplied the applicant with bespoke draft Protective Provisions (PP). However, the dDCO (Doc 3.1) currently includes only generic PP intended to cover all parties. The current status of negotiations between the applicant and the statutory undertakers is therefore unclear. The applicant is advised to update the dDCO to incorporate the relevant bespoke PP and to provide regular updates on engagement with statutory undertakers in accordance with the subsequent examination timetable.

### **Explanatory Memorandum (Doc 3.2)**

The applicant is asked to ensure references to precedents are updated to reflect any recently made and currently unmade Development Consent Orders which may have since proceeded to decision (e.g. Fenwick Solar Farm, Beacon Fen Energy Park, One Earth Solar Farm).

### **Environmental Statement Volume 6 (ES) (Doc 6.1) and its figures (Doc 6.2)**

The Inspectorate draws the attention of the applicant to the APFP Regulation 5 (3) in relation to figures within the ES which have not been drawn to an identified scale. Examples include: Figure 8-1: Designated Heritage Assets – Solar Development Areas &

Inter-array Connections (scale of 1:42,000); Figure 8-2: Non-designated Heritage Assets – Solar Development Areas & Inter-array Connections (scale of 1:19,000); Figure 11-5: WFD River Water Body Catchments (scale of 1:65,000). The applicant may wish to amend these plans to ensure that the scale used follows this regulation.

Topic specific methodologies for the assessment of the variable grid connection date and optionality of underground or overhead cabling for work 14: the Grid Connection Statement (Doc 7.5), Statement of Reasons (Doc 4.1) and ES chapters 2 and 4 (Docs 6.1) all indicate that whilst the ES has assessed the years of 2029 (construction), 2033 (operation) and 2073 (decommissioning), flexibility of up to 7 years is sought from the point of any grant of consent. These documents also note that the current connection date is post 2035 but that the applicant is hoping to achieve an agreement of 2031-2035. An outline assessment of how the flexible commencement and connection date has been considered in the ES (and other relevant assessment) is provided in ES chapter 4 paragraph 4.4.21, however there is no specific reference to this within relevant technical chapters. The applicant is requested to update the relevant ES chapters to confirm how the optionality of the commencement and connection dates has been assessed. Where a variable worst case scenario has been used dependent on the topic, a justification for this should be provided.

Work no. 14 (connection between work nos. 13 and 15) within the dDCO (Doc 3.1) is written as containing the optionality of use of either an underground cable or overhead cable. The ES provides limited detail on this as it predominately assesses the overhead option within each technical chapter. The ES appears instead to rely on tables 3-2 and 3-3 of ES chapter 3 (Doc 6.1) which gives an outline comparison of the 2 options. The applicant is requested to update the relevant ES chapters to confirm how the optionality of work no.14 has been assessed. Where a variable worst case scenario has been used dependent on the topic, a justification for this should be provided.

Use of third party (National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET)) data in the area of the substation tie in works: throughout the ES, it is stated that due to the recent northwards extension of the order limits to include the most recent indicative location of the Weston Marsh B substation, the baseline information collected by the applicant has been supplemented by site specific data from NGET. However, it is noted that the ES does not typically state where the NGET data has been used. The applicant is requested to update the relevant ES chapters to provide clarity on this matter.

Outstanding archaeological trial trenching and mitigation information: throughout ES chapter 8 (Doc 6.1), it is stated that final results of trial trenching and the provision of an outline archaeological mitigation and management strategy are proposed to be provided during the examination. The applicant is requested to provide confirmation of when these are to be submitted, and the geographic areas of coverage, as at present it is not clear whether these are to include trial trenching of the grid connection route (GCR).

Chapter 16: table 16-11 identifies the presence, or potential presence, of unexploded ordnance (UXO) within and around the order limits. It directs readers to the Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (OCEMP) (Doc 7.10) as the relevant document for the Emergency Response Plan. The OCEMP states that further UXO surveys and/or the presence of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Engineer as part of a watching brief may be required, subject to the findings of a detailed UXO risk assessment. However, the timing of this risk assessment and any associated UXO surveys is not

specified. The applicant is requested to confirm whether these surveys will be undertaken prior to, or during, the examination.

### **Environmental Statement Appendix 11-3 Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) (Doc 6.3)**

Representation of waterbodies: the applicant is advised to update the document to include a single figure showing the relevant waterbodies and catchments assessed within the FRA. These are currently only available as individual figures in annex B which impacts on the clarity of the document.

Presentation of flood risk modelling: section 5.3 and 5.4 present the results of modelling of multiple scenarios of flood risk annual exceedance probability (AEP) events, climate change, defence breaches and pumps being operational and non-operational across multiple catchments, for pre and post development scenarios. The applicant is advised to update the FRA to provide a summary table which details the modelled scenarios and the results of these in terms of modelled baseline flood extents and increase or decrease in flood extents as a result of the proposed development. Currently this information is presented for each catchment in multiple locations and, while engagement with Environment Agency is noted, it is difficult to follow. It also introduces potential for discrepancies between the different sections presenting this data (for example between paragraphs 5.3.19 and 5.4.65 for which AEP event would impact the Fleet Fen catchment).

Construction phase flood risk: paragraphs 1.1.9 and 2.1.5 state that a detailed assessment of flood risk during construction is not proposed within the FRA as this is to be managed via the Construction Environmental Management Plan. However, paragraphs 5.5.8 – 5.5.10 refer to design related mitigation measures and consideration of flood risk as a result of the presence of temporary construction compounds. The applicant is requested to provide clarity on the scope of the FRA in relation to the construction phase.

Additionally, paragraphs 5.5.8 – 5.5.10 appear under the subheading of the assessment of the GCR. It is therefore not clear whether the FRA has considered construction compounds located within the solar array or inter array areas (work no. 5(k)).

Consideration of terminology: throughout the FRA, the term extent/extents is used to describe flood risk. However, it is not clear throughout whether this is relating to lateral flood risk extents, or flood height which is used to determine the relevant mitigation of panel/infrastructure raising and bunding. The applicant is requested to update the FRA to ensure clarity on this matter.

Extent of protection from existing flood defences: there appears to be a discrepancy in the FRA in the levels of protection offered to the proposed development near the River Welland flood defences. Examples include paragraphs 4.3.4, 5.3.8 and 6.2.8 stating the defences protect against the 0.1% AEP event plus climate change, whereas paragraphs 4.3.6, 5.4.18 and 5.4.20 state the 1% event with no reference to climate change allowances. The applicant is requested to undertake a review of the FRA for consistency.

Infrastructure raising/flood protection: the mitigation methods referred to throughout the FRA are predominately in the form of raising of infrastructure or provision of flood defence walls/bunds.

- Whilst the heights of these measures are given in the FRA, it is not clearly stated how these levels have been determined. The applicant is requested to update the FRA with this information or clearly cross referencing to where the heights have been determined.
- The bund locations, and height (either above current ground levels or in mAOD) of solar panel raising across the proposed development, do not appear to be represented on figures (though some information is given in annex D of ES Appendix 11-4, Outline Drainage Strategy (Doc 6.3)). The FRA would benefit from representing this information more clearly in the body of the document.
- Table 5-4 gives the bund heights for substations and battery energy storage systems (BESS) in parcels A and B, however the bund height required for the cable sealing end compounds (CSEC) is not given in the FRA (with reference to the bund being discussed in paragraph 5.1.6). The applicant is requested to update the FRA to include the heights of all relevant mitigation components.

Volume loss and floodplain loss: table 5-2 of the FRA gives the volume loss calculations for parcels A – D, however table 5-3 gives floodplain loss only for parcel A. The FRA previously states that other land parcels are within the modelled flood zone 3b extents. The applicant is requested to update the FRA to explain why floodplain loss is not given for parcels B – D or provide these volumes.

### **Design Parameters (Doc 7.4)**

ES chapter 2 (Doc 6.1) paragraph 2.6.11 says solar stations that are located within the flood extent alongside plinths that do not raise the solar stations above worst-case flood depths, they are to have a flood defence wall or bund for protection. The bund would be a maximum height of 2.3m above ground level and a maximum width of 21m. The applicant is asked to clarify why such parameters are not included within the Design Parameters document. Furthermore, the applicant is requested to clarify why the width of bunds for the on-site substation and BESS compound and the CSEC have not been provided within the Design Parameters document.

Paragraph 5.10.4 of the Planning Statement (Doc 7.1) states that all infrastructure will, where reasonably practicable, be set back 10m from any watercourse, with this parameter said to be secured in the Design Parameters document (Doc 7.4). However, this offset requirement does not appear to be defined within the Design Parameters document. Furthermore, Design Principle DP7 within ES Chapter 3 (Doc 6.1) states infrastructure would be offset 20m from main rivers and 10m from drains and agricultural ditches. These parameters are not detailed within the Design Parameters document. The applicant is therefore asked to clarify these discrepancies and update the Design Parameters document as necessary.

### **Plans**

Works Plans – Section B Grid Connection (Doc 2.3): there are a number of locations along the grid connection corridor where the limits of deviation are narrower than the order limits. The applicant is asked to provide clarification on the purposes of the land identified beyond the limits of deviation as shown on sheets 1 – 5 of these plans.

## Outline management plans and other documents

Across 7 of the 10 outline management plans (Docs 7.10, 7.11, 7.12, 7.13, 7.14, 7.15, 7.16, 7.17 and 7.18) qualifying phrases are used, including the terms such as “where reasonably practicable”, “as far as possible”, “as quickly as practicable” and other similar unbounded expressions. While the use of qualifiers may in some cases be appropriate to recognise the need for flexibility during the detailed design, their repeated and wide-ranging application throughout the submitted outline plans may reduce the clarity and precision of the measures relied upon within the ES and proposed to be secured through the dDCO. The applicant is advised to consider whether the extent of such qualifiers could affect the examinability and testability of the commitments set out in the outline management plans, and whether further specificity or clearer decision-making parameters should be provided to ensure that the measures can be adequately assessed during the examination.

## Consultees identified on a precautionary basis

Given the individual circumstances of this case, the Planning Inspectorate advises taking a precautionary approach to consultation under s42(1)(a) of PA2008 to ensure that all persons potentially affected by, or potentially likely to have an interest in the application are given the opportunity to participate fully in the examination of the application. On this basis, the applicant may wish to serve notice on the bodies listed in box 6 of the section 55 checklist when it serves notice of the accepted application under s56(2)(a) of the PA2008; unless there is a specific justification why this is not necessary.

The Planning Inspectorate have included the Ministry of Defence (and subsequently NATS). Our experience is that while it is not a statutory obligation, the MoD often requested to be consulted on applications where infrastructure will exceed 50m in height. The parameters provided as part of the ES and accompanying documents indicates a pylon height exceeding 50m.

Please pay close attention to the advice set out in this letter and act on it accordingly. It is requested that you action these points before the end of the relevant representation period. This will contribute towards a more efficient examination and give any future Examining Authority comfort that the documentation is complete and accurate.

We trust you find this advice helpful, however if you have any queries on these matters please do not hesitate to contact our office using the contact details at the head of this letter.

Yours sincerely

*Naoual Margoum*

Naoual Margoum  
**Case Manager**

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