



Planning Inspectorate  
Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

## Hearing Transcript

|                 |                                            |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project:</b> | Meridian Solar Farm                        |
| <b>Hearing:</b> | Transcript of Open Floor Hearing 1 (OFH 1) |
| <b>Date:</b>    | 8 September 2026                           |

**Please note:** This document is intended to assist Interested Parties.

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The video recording published on the Planning Inspectorate project page is the primary record of the hearing.

1

00:00:01,700 --> 00:00:05,380

Good afternoon, everybody. It's now 2:30 and time for this hearing to

2

00:00:05,480 --> 00:00:08,830

start. I'd like to welcome you all to this open floor hearing for the Meridian

3

00:00:08,940 --> 00:00:11,900

Solar Farm project. Can I just confirm that I can be heard

4

00:00:12,020 --> 00:00:16,000

clearly? Thank you. And can I confirm that the live streaming and recording

5

00:00:16,040 --> 00:00:18,020

of this event has commenced? Thank you.

6

00:00:18,820 --> 00:00:22,810

My name is Ms. Casini. I'm a chartered town planner and examining inspector.

7

00:00:23,240 --> 00:00:26,540

I've been appointed by the Secretary of State to be the lead member of this panel

8

00:00:26,580 --> 00:00:30,430

to examine this application, and I'm now going to ask my colleagues

9

00:00:30,480 --> 00:00:31,700

to introduce themselves.

10

00:00:33,160 --> 00:00:35,560

Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Beth Davis.

11

00:00:36,080 --> 00:00:39,580

I'm a chartered geologist, and I've also been appointed by the Secretary of State

12

00:00:39,589 --> 00:00:40,710

to be a member of this panel.

13

00:00:42,580 --> 00:00:44,200

Good afternoon. I'm Samantha Murphy.

14

00:00:44,240 --> 00:00:48,170

I'm also a town planner and a chartered environmentalist, and I've been appointed

15

00:00:48,200 --> 00:00:51,560

by the Secretary of State to be a member of the panel of inspectors to examine this

16

00:00:51,620 --> 00:00:52,220

application.

17

00:00:54,060 --> 00:00:58,020

Thank you. Together, we constitute the examining authority, or ExA, for this

18

00:00:58,080 --> 00:01:01,910

application. And I'll now briefly deal with some housekeeping

19

00:01:01,980 --> 00:01:03,720

matters for those attending in person.

20

00:01:04,200 --> 00:01:07,520

Please could I ask that you turn all devices and phones to silent.

21

00:01:07,940 --> 00:01:11,840

There are no fire alarm drills planned for today, but if the

22

00:01:11,880 --> 00:01:14,070

alarm does sound, please exit the building,

23

00:01:14,880 --> 00:01:18,790

and the assembly point is the Chris Turner statue outside

24

00:01:18,790 --> 00:01:22,420

the football club, located on the approach to the venue, and the toilets are

25

00:01:22,460 --> 00:01:26,450

located outside. Just to mention that we do have a colleague from the

26

00:01:26,520 --> 00:01:30,260

planning inspectorate attending today. He's located at the back of the room.

27

00:01:30,660 --> 00:01:33,120

It is just for training and observation purposes.

28

00:01:34,360 --> 00:01:36,760

With that in mind, I'll now hand over to Mrs.

29

00:01:36,920 --> 00:01:39,820

Murphy to comment on the purpose of the open floor hearing.

30

00:01:40,900 --> 00:01:44,420

Thank you. So the purpose of this open floor hearing is to hear

31

00:01:44,460 --> 00:01:48,240

representations of interested parties, or IPs, who have

32

00:01:48,260 --> 00:01:51,740

registered to make an oral representation, elaborating on their

33

00:01:51,800 --> 00:01:55,330

representation made in writing to date in respect of the

34

00:01:55,380 --> 00:01:56,980

proposed Meridian Solar Farm.

35

00:01:57,800 --> 00:02:01,480

The order in which you'll be invited to speak will follow the agenda issued on the

36

00:02:01,620 --> 00:02:03,780

27th of August, 2026.

37

00:02:04,720 --> 00:02:08,660

This open floor hearing is your opportunity to raise anything directly to the

38

00:02:08,670 --> 00:02:12,560

examining authority that is important and relevant, and that you

39

00:02:12,640 --> 00:02:14,660

think we should know about and consider.

40

00:02:15,700 --> 00:02:19,680

They are not about particular location or topic, so it's up to you to

41

00:02:19,720 --> 00:02:22,340

decide which aspect of the proposal you wish to address.

42

00:02:23,380 --> 00:02:27,260

When invited to speak, please introduce yourself by name, and if

43

00:02:27,300 --> 00:02:31,180

relevant, by an organization. This is important for the transcript,

44

00:02:31,380 --> 00:02:35,340

recordings, or live streams for the examining authority and for other

45

00:02:35,380 --> 00:02:38,860

parties. A time limit of three minutes for

46

00:02:39,000 --> 00:02:42,760

individual interested parties, including businesses, and five

47

00:02:42,820 --> 00:02:46,720

minutes for those representing groups, memberships, organizations,

48

00:02:46,780 --> 00:02:48,280

or councils has been set.

49

00:02:49,180 --> 00:02:52,120

When you are speaking, we will indicate to you that you have one minute

50

00:02:52,160 --> 00:02:55,680

left. Once you have spoken, the panel may wish to ask

51

00:02:55,720 --> 00:02:56,350  
questions.

52

00:02:57,420 --> 00:03:01,280

And finally, once everyone has finished speaking, the applicant will then have an

53

00:03:01,340 --> 00:03:03,720

opportunity to respond to any matters raised.

54

00:03:04,600 --> 00:03:08,540

Today's hearing is being undertaken in a hybrid manner, meaning that

55

00:03:08,549 --> 00:03:12,010

some of you are present with us at the hearing venue and some are joining

56

00:03:12,100 --> 00:03:14,660

virtually using Microsoft Teams.

57

00:03:14,700 --> 00:03:18,400

We will make sure that however you've decided to attend today, you'll be given a

58

00:03:18,460 --> 00:03:21,080

fair opportunity to participate.

59

00:03:21,120 --> 00:03:24,780

A recording of today's hearing will be made available on the Meridian Solar Farm

60

00:03:24,820 --> 00:03:28,400

section of the National Infrastructure Planning website as soon as possible

61

00:03:28,760 --> 00:03:29,860

after the hearing is finished,

62

00:03:30,720 --> 00:03:34,120

and a link to the planning inspectorate's privacy notice was provided in the

63

00:03:34,160 --> 00:03:37,820

notification for this hearing. We've assumed that everyone here today has

64

00:03:37,840 --> 00:03:41,700

familiarized themselves with that document, which establishes

65

00:03:41,780 --> 00:03:45,540

how personal data of our customers is handled in accordance with the

66

00:03:45,560 --> 00:03:49,520

principles set out in data protection laws. Please speak to Mrs.

67

00:03:49,620 --> 00:03:51,860

Margum if you have any questions about this.

68

00:03:53,100 --> 00:03:56,900

And the final point to say is that if you do make an oral submission

69

00:03:56,940 --> 00:04:00,080

today, please follow it up with a written summary of your

70

00:04:00,140 --> 00:04:03,860

representation in writing by deadline one, which is Tuesday

71

00:04:04,080 --> 00:04:05,500

the 22nd of September.

72

00:04:06,500 --> 00:04:10,320

So I will now hand over to Ms. Davies to start with the registered speakers.

73

00:04:12,980 --> 00:04:16,459

Thank you. Before we hear from any speakers, can I just ask who'll be speaking for

74

00:04:16,481 --> 00:04:17,370

the applicant today?

75

00:04:20,079 --> 00:04:20,519

Thank you.

76

00:04:22,680 --> 00:04:25,100

So we have eight people registered to speak.

77

00:04:25,540 --> 00:04:29,500

Is there anybody else who hasn't registered who is likely to want to speak today?

78

00:04:31,500 --> 00:04:33,340

I can't see anyone in the room. Is there anyone online?

79

00:04:37,380 --> 00:04:41,300

Okay, in terms of the published order, we've had a request from Sir

80

00:04:41,320 --> 00:04:42,250

John Hayes.

81

00:04:43,120 --> 00:04:47,050

Because of time constraints, he's asked whether or not he could speak

82

00:04:48,260 --> 00:04:51,320

early. So I'm going to suggest that we hear from him first.

83

00:04:51,420 --> 00:04:53,380

Does anyone have any objections to that?

84

00:04:59,280 --> 00:04:59,540

Okay.

85

00:05:00,980 --> 00:05:03,620

Mr. Hayes, I don't know if you heard that and you're prepared.

86

00:05:05,500 --> 00:05:06,240

Sir Hayes?

87

00:05:07,460 --> 00:05:08,220

I am. Yes.

88

00:05:08,340 --> 00:05:08,560

Okay.

89

00:05:08,580 --> 00:05:08,980

Thank you.

90

00:05:09,300 --> 00:05:13,180

So if we hear from you first, and then I'll move on to the order that we published.

91

00:05:14,800 --> 00:05:18,320

That's very kind of you. I'm obviously speaking from Parliament, and I explained

92

00:05:18,360 --> 00:05:22,280

before I came onto the call that I could have votes at any time, and the

93

00:05:22,320 --> 00:05:25,820

last thing I wanted was to disrupt your meeting by disappearing in the middle of my

94

00:05:25,840 --> 00:05:28,550

presentation. So thank you very much for your

95

00:05:30,200 --> 00:05:31,330

generosity in that respect.

96

00:05:32,460 --> 00:05:36,430

I have three essential points to make in opposing this

97

00:05:36,480 --> 00:05:38,800

application. The first is that it di-

98

00:05:42,800 --> 00:05:43,550

Mr. Hayes, you-

99

00:05:43,560 --> 00:05:46,380

... existing policy, both in terms of the Southeast...

100

00:05:48,080 --> 00:05:48,230

Sorry?

101

00:05:48,680 --> 00:05:51,600

We've lost that first sentence. Do you mind starting that last bit again?

102

00:05:54,710 --> 00:05:55,160

Hello? Oh, sorry.

103

00:05:58,300 --> 00:06:02,050

I wanted to make three points. The first is that it directly

104

00:06:02,080 --> 00:06:05,916

contradicts policy In particular, the South East

105

00:06:05,996 --> 00:06:09,916

Lincolnshire Local Plan, adopted in 2019, which

106

00:06:09,996 --> 00:06:13,436

says, and I quote, "The lower quality agricultural land should be

107

00:06:13,616 --> 00:06:14,796

used in,

108

00:06:15,676 --> 00:06:19,456

and the natural environment, biodiversity protected and enhanced in

109

00:06:19,496 --> 00:06:23,176

respect of energy development." It also says that high

110

00:06:23,356 --> 00:06:27,236

quality agricultural land will be protected to prioritize the reuse

111

00:06:27,296 --> 00:06:31,156

of previously developed land to minimize the loss of South East Lincolnshire's high

112

00:06:31,196 --> 00:06:33,226

quality agricultural land.

113

00:06:34,296 --> 00:06:37,556

Furthermore, it conflicts with national planning policy.

114

00:06:38,076 --> 00:06:41,606

The current NNPS says, "Where significant development of

115

00:06:41,636 --> 00:06:42,496

agricultural

116

00:06:43,356 --> 00:06:47,116

land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poor quality

117

00:06:47,176 --> 00:06:51,076

land should be preferred to those of higher quality, and that

118

00:06:51,096 --> 00:06:54,676

planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the

119

00:06:54,736 --> 00:06:58,356

natural local environment by recognizing the intrinsic

120

00:06:58,476 --> 00:07:01,796

character and beauty of the countryside."

121

00:07:01,856 --> 00:07:05,776

Furthermore, it conflicts with government policy on

122

00:07:05,816 --> 00:07:08,095

best and most versatile farmland.

123

00:07:08,496 --> 00:07:12,486

The Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero said earlier this year,

124

00:07:12,486 --> 00:07:16,416

"We operate under guidance from the last government about avoiding

125

00:07:16,436 --> 00:07:20,196

the best available land where at all possible." And a written parliamentary

126

00:07:20,316 --> 00:07:23,916

question, again this year, Minister of State for Energy said,

127

00:07:24,356 --> 00:07:28,306

"Solar farms should be built on brownfield sites or previously

128

00:07:28,316 --> 00:07:30,936

developed land wherever possible.

129

00:07:30,956 --> 00:07:34,556

Where the development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary,  
lower quality

130

00:07:34,636 --> 00:07:37,296

land should be preferred to high quality land."

131

00:07:38,216 --> 00:07:39,176

My second

132

00:07:40,116 --> 00:07:40,336

point

133

00:07:41,596 --> 00:07:44,496

is the environmental and ecological harm that this development will  
bring.

134

00:07:45,156 --> 00:07:45,676

Approximately

135

00:07:45,916 --> 00:07:50,596

2,700

136

00:07:50,656 --> 00:07:53,836

acres of Grade 1 and 2 farmland is being taken out of food  
production.

137

00:07:53,936 --> 00:07:57,636

Evidence from elsewhere is that farmland, in particular soil

138

00:07:57,716 --> 00:08:01,696

drainage, is irreparably damaged as a result of

139

00:08:01,756 --> 00:08:04,636

piles driven into the ground for solar panels.

140

00:08:04,756 --> 00:08:05,736

Sorry to interrupt you.

141

00:08:05,826 --> 00:08:06,056

Uh, the-

142

00:08:06,726 --> 00:08:07,836

You have one minute left.

143

00:08:08,436 --> 00:08:08,756

Okay.

144

00:08:09,736 --> 00:08:13,316

The effect of this on the local

145

00:08:13,856 --> 00:08:15,076

agricultural

146

00:08:15,956 --> 00:08:19,436

economy will be profound and unhelpful.

147

00:08:20,096 --> 00:08:23,586

Furthermore, pylons necessary to make this

148

00:08:23,596 --> 00:08:25,156

possible will

149

00:08:26,016 --> 00:08:30,006

pose a collision risk to birds, including rufous swans, close

150

00:08:30,116 --> 00:08:32,557

to the site of special scientific interest on the marsh.

151

00:08:33,076 --> 00:08:36,456

Finally, traffic and highways. The roads that will be

152

00:08:36,756 --> 00:08:38,696

used to build this are in-

153

00:08:41,476 --> 00:08:41,476

-

154

00:08:43,516 --> 00:08:44,276  
in many cases.

155

00:08:44,916 --> 00:08:44,946  
Sorry, Sir Hayes, you-

156

00:08:44,946 --> 00:08:47,656  
And in one particular case, a road that's already closed.

157

00:08:47,736 --> 00:08:48,486  
You cut out there.

158

00:08:48,486 --> 00:08:48,736  
All of the-

159

00:08:49,476 --> 00:08:50,036  
Sir Hayes?

160

00:08:51,156 --> 00:08:54,776  
This application is undesirable and contradicts policy. Thank you.

161

00:08:56,396 --> 00:09:00,116  
Thank you. We missed the little bit that you said when you

162

00:09:00,176 --> 00:09:03,256  
started talking about transport there, and you cut out for a while.

163

00:09:03,326 --> 00:09:06,655  
So the last couple of sentences, do you mind repeating those for us?

164

00:09:07,676 --> 00:09:09,956  
Oh, yes. Sorry. Forgive me.

165

00:09:11,116 --> 00:09:14,596  
So the roads that will be used to create this

166

00:09:14,656 --> 00:09:18,636  
infrastructure are mostly single track roads already in

167

00:09:18,696 --> 00:09:22,276

poor condition and cannot cope with the increased volume of traffic.

168

00:09:22,905 --> 00:09:26,476

Many of these roads are narrow, and one in particular,

169

00:09:27,496 --> 00:09:30,836

Barrier Bank at Crowland, is actually closed,

170

00:09:32,156 --> 00:09:35,756

inaccessible, and damaged, and so literally could not be

171

00:09:35,876 --> 00:09:36,176

used.

172

00:09:37,136 --> 00:09:37,456

Thank you.

173

00:09:37,936 --> 00:09:39,156

Thank you, Sir Hayes.

174

00:09:43,916 --> 00:09:44,416

Thank you.

175

00:09:45,456 --> 00:09:45,816

Thank you.

176

00:09:47,216 --> 00:09:51,056

Next on my list, I have Mr. Malkin on behalf of the

177

00:09:51,096 --> 00:09:54,876

Meridian Action Group. I'm not sure that he's coming

178

00:09:54,886 --> 00:09:58,845

today. Is there somebody else who's speaking on behalf of the Meridian Action

179

00:09:58,936 --> 00:09:59,256

Group?

180

00:10:05,356 --> 00:10:08,376

Okay, then I'll move on to Ms. Pennington.

181

00:10:10,916 --> 00:10:12,556

Do you want to come forward, Ms. Pennington?

182

00:10:22,485 --> 00:10:22,916

Thank you.

183

00:10:23,086 --> 00:10:23,086

Yes.

184

00:10:23,095 --> 00:10:23,736

You have three minutes.

185

00:10:25,276 --> 00:10:28,896

Jenny Pennington, farmer, resident, Weston Marsh,

186

00:10:29,536 --> 00:10:32,696

impacted by the energy projects. Two

187

00:10:32,756 --> 00:10:36,656

substations coming into us. One is the Meridian

188

00:10:36,716 --> 00:10:40,676

Solar Farm. Our prime concern has got to be for the huge areas

189

00:10:40,716 --> 00:10:44,576

being lost or temporarily put out of use of good Grade 1  
agricultural

190

00:10:44,676 --> 00:10:48,596

land. In the present fragile state of the world, we're also

191

00:10:48,656 --> 00:10:50,736

deeply concerned about food security.

192

00:10:51,416 --> 00:10:54,776

Absolute sacrilege to use such land.

193

00:10:55,696 --> 00:10:59,516

Massive blot on the landscape. Concerns for wildlife.

194

00:11:00,236 --> 00:11:03,896

Recently, three dead swans in the field caused by hitting overhead

195

00:11:03,996 --> 00:11:06,996

power lines. Massive disruption for the

196

00:11:08,276 --> 00:11:08,696

area.

197

00:11:09,646 --> 00:11:13,076

Months of disruption for residents of South Links.

198

00:11:13,216 --> 00:11:16,976

Noise, disruption, pollution, dust to resolve for many months.

199

00:11:17,716 --> 00:11:21,616

Traffic, a huge concern for affected areas with our county

200

00:11:21,676 --> 00:11:25,596

roads being very narrow and in places only capable of one vehicle at a

201

00:11:25,696 --> 00:11:28,946

time. Plans need to be a lot clearer.

202

00:11:29,856 --> 00:11:33,696

A major concern for us has to be focused around the planning access

203

00:11:33,796 --> 00:11:37,696

road on the A151 at Weston. This will be

204

00:11:37,736 --> 00:11:41,656

an absolute nightmare on an already very busy road, and

205

00:11:41,736 --> 00:11:44,476

bearing in mind other projects that are coming.

206

00:11:45,676 --> 00:11:49,316

Main concern for residents in the Weston area must be for the

207

00:11:49,356 --> 00:11:52,996

pylons, which will be coming from the site to the connection point at

208

00:11:53,056 --> 00:11:54,976

Weston Marsh. This is on

209

00:11:55,876 --> 00:11:59,376

top of another two projects. Why not

210

00:11:59,456 --> 00:12:02,376

underground cabling? Why have we got to have pylons?

211

00:12:03,076 --> 00:12:06,666

We've also asked at some stage if the pylons could connect further

212

00:12:06,776 --> 00:12:07,736

south to the grid-

213

00:12:09,668 --> 00:12:13,068

I think this has been discussed with National Grid and Meridian,

214

00:12:13,588 --> 00:12:16,508

so we'd like to know what the outcome of that is, please.

215

00:12:17,288 --> 00:12:20,768

We're also aware of a pinch point at Broadgate, Western Isles,

216

00:12:21,268 --> 00:12:25,167

where both Meridian and National Grid are erecting pylons.

217

00:12:25,828 --> 00:12:28,968

The land owner is getting no answers at all.

218

00:12:29,188 --> 00:12:31,488

Miss Pennington, you have one minute left.

219

00:12:31,648 --> 00:12:32,108

Thank you.

220

00:12:34,248 --> 00:12:37,928

We have been issued with heads of terms from Meridian

221

00:12:38,348 --> 00:12:41,007

relating to an option for overhead cabling.

222

00:12:41,528 --> 00:12:44,948

Our land agent has been unable to have any meaningful

223

00:12:45,028 --> 00:12:45,828

engagement,

224

00:12:46,908 --> 00:12:50,848

and as yet the document is unsigned, so we need clarification

225

00:12:50,908 --> 00:12:51,168

there.

226

00:12:52,168 --> 00:12:55,788

Interesting point, Lincolnshire County Council has produced a

227

00:12:56,388 --> 00:12:58,928

281-page document on this proposal.

228

00:12:59,528 --> 00:13:03,268

It claims that between 57 million and 76

229

00:13:03,308 --> 00:13:06,828

million will be lost to the local economy over the 40-year

230

00:13:06,928 --> 00:13:10,848

span of the solar farm. These important issues need

231

00:13:10,888 --> 00:13:12,968

to be addressed at this examination.

232

00:13:15,808 --> 00:13:16,188

Thank you.

233

00:13:16,408 --> 00:13:17,388  
Thank you, Miss Pennington.

234  
00:13:17,568 --> 00:13:17,928  
Thank you.

235  
00:13:18,708 --> 00:13:20,507  
Does anyone have any questions for Miss Pennington?

236  
00:13:20,988 --> 00:13:24,118  
Miss Pennington, just before you leave, obviously your

237  
00:13:25,028 --> 00:13:28,408  
land agent is trying to engage with the applicant.

238  
00:13:28,468 --> 00:13:29,518  
Yes.

239  
00:13:29,548 --> 00:13:33,448  
Can you just confirm that you are having, there is an issue with  
that level

240  
00:13:33,488 --> 00:13:34,288  
of engagement?

241  
00:13:34,728 --> 00:13:38,248  
Unless things have changed recently, I think there's an issue with  
lots of land

242  
00:13:38,348 --> 00:13:38,908  
agents.

243  
00:13:39,028 --> 00:13:39,368  
Okay.

244  
00:13:39,408 --> 00:13:43,328  
I don't think it's just mine. I think we've got a local group, so  
there is

245  
00:13:43,408 --> 00:13:46,928  
an issue with all of them. They're not getting the answers that  
they're wanting.

246

00:13:47,008 --> 00:13:49,088

Okay. Thank you for that information.

247

00:13:49,098 --> 00:13:49,098

Okay.

248

00:13:49,148 --> 00:13:50,468

Thank you.

249

00:13:54,128 --> 00:13:57,548

Next on my list is Ms. Jane Thompson,

250

00:13:58,068 --> 00:13:59,908

who I understand is online.

251

00:14:04,308 --> 00:14:05,348

Are you there, Ms. Thompson?

252

00:14:06,448 --> 00:14:06,808

I am.

253

00:14:07,808 --> 00:14:08,748

You have three minutes.

254

00:14:09,588 --> 00:14:13,408

Thank you very much. My name is Jane Thompson, and I'm a resident of

255

00:14:13,448 --> 00:14:17,168

Fleet Parish. From the outset, Meridian appears to have approached this project on

256

00:14:17,208 --> 00:14:20,628

the assumption that this development will proceed, and that their

257

00:14:20,688 --> 00:14:24,668

objective is to simply to satisfy the requirements necessary to

258

00:14:24,708 --> 00:14:28,688

obtain the DC0. One of the principal justifications given for

259

00:14:28,768 --> 00:14:32,288

selecting this location is its proximity to a

260

00:14:32,388 --> 00:14:35,688

substation and the availability of four willing landowners.

261

00:14:36,268 --> 00:14:40,008

However, the proposed connection is dependent on infrastructure that doesn't

262

00:14:40,048 --> 00:14:43,998

currently exist. I also struggle to understand how the willingness of

263

00:14:44,008 --> 00:14:47,768

four landowners can provide a sufficient or morally justifiable

264

00:14:47,848 --> 00:14:51,668

reason to impose such significant and long-lasting disruption on a

265

00:14:51,708 --> 00:14:53,968

population of more than 10,000 people.

266

00:14:54,608 --> 00:14:58,108

People choose to live in rural communities because of the

267

00:14:58,148 --> 00:15:01,368

qualities these communities provide with countryside,

268

00:15:01,668 --> 00:15:05,188

agricultural landscapes, and tranquility, wildlife, and a

269

00:15:05,268 --> 00:15:08,768

connection to the land. Living alongside what will

270

00:15:08,808 --> 00:15:12,668

effectively become an extensive industrial energy development is not

271

00:15:12,728 --> 00:15:15,748

something most residents would reasonably expect or choose.

272

00:15:16,328 --> 00:15:20,248

The scale of this proposal therefore matters enormously.

273

00:15:20,288 --> 00:15:24,188

It's not simply the installation of a few pieces of infrastructure, it represents a

274

00:15:24,248 --> 00:15:28,188

fundamental change to the character of the countryside and to the environment

275

00:15:28,508 --> 00:15:30,808

in which thousands of people live.

276

00:15:30,948 --> 00:15:33,908

I would ask the inspector to consider the wider purpose there

277

00:15:33,988 --> 00:15:37,838

also of the ownership of this development and of developments of

278

00:15:37,888 --> 00:15:41,388

this kind. Why should productive agricultural lands and open

279

00:15:41,428 --> 00:15:45,108

countryside be sacrificed primarily to generate

280

00:15:45,148 --> 00:15:47,148

financial returns for global investors?

281

00:15:47,648 --> 00:15:51,488

Foreign investment in energy infrastructure itself does not guarantee energy

282

00:15:51,568 --> 00:15:55,428

security for local communities or for the UK, and we would ask that this

283

00:15:55,468 --> 00:15:59,448

development genuinely strengthens our long-term energy resilience, or whether

284

00:15:59,488 --> 00:16:02,028  
it's primarily structured around commercial return.

285  
00:16:02,748 --> 00:16:04,768  
There's also the important environmental

286  
00:16:05,688 --> 00:16:09,068  
and ethical questions surrounding the manufacture of so-called green energy

287  
00:16:09,148 --> 00:16:12,077  
infrastructure. If components are manufactured-

288  
00:16:12,077 --> 00:16:12,178  
Ms. Thompson

289  
00:16:12,178 --> 00:16:12,388  
Yes?

290  
00:16:12,508 --> 00:16:13,748  
Sorry, you have one minute left.

291  
00:16:14,368 --> 00:16:17,908  
Thank you. If components are manufactured overseas using energy

292  
00:16:18,068 --> 00:16:21,688  
generated from fossil fuels, transported using vast,

293  
00:16:21,828 --> 00:16:25,788  
across vast distances, and produced under environmental and labor

294  
00:16:25,848 --> 00:16:29,288  
standards that differ significantly from ours, then

295  
00:16:29,327 --> 00:16:32,848  
environmental credentials of development deserve proper

296  
00:16:32,908 --> 00:16:36,708  
scrutiny. It seems contradictory to describe a development as

297  
00:16:36,808 --> 00:16:40,588

clean and green without fully accounting for the environmental cost of

298

00:16:40,668 --> 00:16:43,788

manufacturing, transporting, and ultimately disposing of the

299

00:16:44,488 --> 00:16:48,448

infrastructure. The environmental costs should be considered in full.

300

00:16:48,848 --> 00:16:52,728

I would respectfully ask the inspector not to reduce the decision to a question of

301

00:16:52,768 --> 00:16:56,348

whether Meridian can tick the necessary boxes to obtain

302

00:16:56,408 --> 00:17:00,128

consent. The real question is whether this is genuinely in the public

303

00:17:00,228 --> 00:17:04,008

interest, whether the public interest outweighs considerable

304

00:17:04,048 --> 00:17:06,788

long-term and potentially irreversible costs.

305

00:17:06,828 --> 00:17:10,288

Please consider not only the proposal in front of you today, but the

306

00:17:10,328 --> 00:17:14,048

consequences of that decision for the people who live here in this

307

00:17:14,108 --> 00:17:17,148

countryside for decades and generations to come.

308

00:17:18,429 --> 00:17:18,888

Thank you.

309

00:17:19,508 --> 00:17:21,969

Thank you, Ms. Thompson. Any questions?

310

00:17:24,888 --> 00:17:28,648

Next, we have Counselor Paul Locke, who I understand is also

311

00:17:28,688 --> 00:17:29,148

online.

312

00:17:31,768 --> 00:17:33,988

Counselor Locke, you have three minutes.

313

00:17:35,628 --> 00:17:39,508

Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Paul Locke, and I'm speaking as

314

00:17:39,568 --> 00:17:43,428

a Lincolnshire County counselor on behalf of my residents, who feel increasingly

315

00:17:43,508 --> 00:17:47,088

overwhelmed by the scale of national significant infrastructure being

316

00:17:47,128 --> 00:17:50,988

imposed across our county. So let me be clear from the outset, this

317

00:17:51,048 --> 00:17:53,068

is not an objection to renewable energy.

318

00:17:53,778 --> 00:17:57,628

Our residents understand the need for energy security, and they understand the

319

00:17:57,668 --> 00:18:01,468

need to reduce emissions. What they struggle to understand is why Lincolnshire is

320

00:18:01,508 --> 00:18:05,468

increasingly expected to carry such a disproportionate share of the nation's energy

321

00:18:05,508 --> 00:18:09,358

infrastructure, while the impacts on local communities are repeatedly

322

00:18:09,368 --> 00:18:11,938

described as manageable, acceptable, or temporary.

323

00:18:12,728 --> 00:18:14,488

My first concern is deliverability.

324

00:18:15,088 --> 00:18:18,428

Residents are being asked to accept significant uncertain impacts of their

325

00:18:18,468 --> 00:18:20,908

communities based on promised future benefits.

326

00:18:21,328 --> 00:18:24,888

Yet they are entitled to ask a straightforward question: what happens if the wider

327

00:18:24,948 --> 00:18:28,548

infrastructure required to fully support this development does not arrive as

328

00:18:28,568 --> 00:18:31,968

planned? The impacts on local people are immediate and real.

329

00:18:32,428 --> 00:18:36,398

The benefits rely upon assumptions for future infrastructure and

330

00:18:36,448 --> 00:18:38,147

decisions beyond this application.

331

00:18:38,648 --> 00:18:41,818

That is why the burden of proof must rest firmly with the applicant.

332

00:18:42,268 --> 00:18:45,758

It should not fall upon local communities to demonstrate what might go wrong.

333

00:18:46,548 --> 00:18:48,468

My second concern is cumulative impact.

334

00:18:48,988 --> 00:18:51,568  
Meridian is not arriving in an untouched landscape.

335  
00:18:51,608 --> 00:18:55,328  
Across Lincolnshire, we're experiencing an unprecedented concentration of

336  
00:18:55,408 --> 00:18:59,288  
solar farms, substations, grid infrastructure, and other energy products.

337  
00:19:00,048 --> 00:19:03,148  
Each application is assessed individually, and each concludes the impacts are

338  
00:19:03,168 --> 00:19:07,068  
acceptable. But residents do not experience these developments individually.

339  
00:19:07,218 --> 00:19:09,208  
They're experiencing them collectively.

340  
00:19:09,768 --> 00:19:13,448  
They see more substations appearing, more pylons crossing the landscape, more

341  
00:19:13,548 --> 00:19:16,808  
agricultural land changing use, and more infrastructure being

342  
00:19:16,908 --> 00:19:19,708  
concentrated into the same rural areas.

343  
00:19:19,788 --> 00:19:23,528  
As a result, many residents are asking a simple question: when is

344  
00:19:23,588 --> 00:19:27,488  
enough enough? There is a growing perception that Lincolnshire is being treated

345  
00:19:27,528 --> 00:19:31,108  
as a convenient location because we have available land and rural

346

00:19:31,128 --> 00:19:34,828  
population. But Lincolnshire is not vacant space on a map.

347  
00:19:35,288 --> 00:19:37,828  
It is our home, our countryside, and our communities.

348  
00:19:38,168 --> 00:19:38,688  
Councillor Lock.

349  
00:19:38,708 --> 00:19:39,188  
And finally-

350  
00:19:39,768 --> 00:19:40,098  
Sorry, you have-

351  
00:19:40,118 --> 00:19:43,708  
... I want to address trust. My residents feel the decisions affecting their

352  
00:19:43,728 --> 00:19:47,448  
communities are increasingly being made far away from those communities.

353  
00:19:47,488 --> 00:19:51,398  
They participate in consultations, submit representations, and engage with

354  
00:19:51,428 --> 00:19:55,368  
examinations. Yet many question how much influence local voices truly

355  
00:19:55,488 --> 00:19:58,478  
have. Whether that perception is fair or not, it exists.

356  
00:19:58,638 --> 00:20:02,058  
The public confidence in the planning process depends upon local evidence being

357  
00:20:02,108 --> 00:20:06,008  
taken seriously. I therefore ask the EA to rigorously test

358  
00:20:06,018 --> 00:20:08,988

the evidence, challenge the assumptions, and fully assess the community

359

00:20:08,998 --> 00:20:12,708

effects of this proposal alongside the other developments.

360

00:20:13,468 --> 00:20:15,948

We're not saying not here because we oppose renewable energy.

361

00:20:16,108 --> 00:20:19,298

We're asking for fairness, balance, and proper scrutiny, and if

362

00:20:19,628 --> 00:20:23,228

uncertainty remains regarding deliverability or cumulative

363

00:20:23,267 --> 00:20:26,508

impacts, those uncertainties should weigh heavily against granting

364

00:20:26,528 --> 00:20:30,308

consent. And I'd like to thank our officers at LCC for

365

00:20:30,388 --> 00:20:34,008

such a detailed report. I do hope the evidence in that is

366

00:20:34,348 --> 00:20:35,908

well-read. Thank you.

367

00:20:37,108 --> 00:20:38,948

Thank you, Councillor Lock. Any questions?

368

00:20:41,568 --> 00:20:45,348

Next we have Ms. Makinson on behalf of Lincolnshire

369

00:20:45,448 --> 00:20:47,888

Against Needless Destruction or

370

00:20:48,188 --> 00:20:51,337

LAND. Ms. Makinson, are you there?

371

00:20:52,328 --> 00:20:53,168

Hello. Thank you.

372

00:20:53,208 --> 00:20:55,598

Can I just check, have I pronounced your surname correctly?

373

00:20:56,468 --> 00:20:57,768

Makinson, but it's fine.

374

00:20:58,898 --> 00:21:01,438

Makinson. I'd rather get it right, so thank you. You have five minutes, Ms.

375

00:21:01,548 --> 00:21:02,028

Makinson.

376

00:21:02,128 --> 00:21:02,568

Thank you.

377

00:21:03,668 --> 00:21:06,048

As a campaign, we're not against renewable energy.

378

00:21:06,248 --> 00:21:10,228

We support projects that are properly planned, suitably located, and

379

00:21:10,248 --> 00:21:11,328

at a sensible scale,

380

00:21:12,288 --> 00:21:13,768

and Meridian is neither of those.

381

00:21:14,748 --> 00:21:18,508

And it is being advanced far before its full effects have been

382

00:21:18,528 --> 00:21:20,828

established and its safeguards are in place.

383

00:21:22,368 --> 00:21:26,068

Whilst we're here mainly to discuss Meridian, I feel it's important to highlight

384

00:21:26,108 --> 00:21:29,978

that Lincolnshire is facing an unprecedented concentration of

385

00:21:30,088 --> 00:21:34,048

large energy projects. Meridian sits within multiple solar

386

00:21:34,108 --> 00:21:37,868

schemes, substations, and transmission lines, which have

387

00:21:38,048 --> 00:21:40,468

separate consultations and changing timelines.

388

00:21:41,468 --> 00:21:45,188

For almost three years now, communities have been trying to understand how these

389

00:21:45,228 --> 00:21:49,038

proposals connect. We face thousands of pages, different

390

00:21:49,108 --> 00:21:52,928

project boundaries, and overlapping consultations, and people are

391

00:21:52,968 --> 00:21:56,408

genuinely struggling to keep up. Whilst we

392

00:21:56,468 --> 00:21:59,358

often talk about the commu- I can't even say it,

393

00:22:00,008 --> 00:22:03,828

cumulative impact reports, the cumulative impact has

394

00:22:03,888 --> 00:22:06,028

already begun long before construction.

395

00:22:06,528 --> 00:22:10,108

It's begun with the people in these communities.

396

00:22:10,568 --> 00:22:13,658

Confusion and planning fatigue are leaving people defeated.

397

00:22:14,588 --> 00:22:18,068

And whilst I recognize that the examining authority is not responsible for the

398

00:22:18,108 --> 00:22:21,568

wider planning system, I feel it's an important issue that should be

399

00:22:21,608 --> 00:22:22,168

recorded,

400

00:22:23,108 --> 00:22:26,928

as just today National Grid have launched yet another consultation for

401

00:22:27,028 --> 00:22:30,988

another pylon route through the county, which will impact many of the residents

402

00:22:31,048 --> 00:22:32,428

here within Meridian.

403

00:22:34,508 --> 00:22:37,588

Meridian does not yet have a confirmed Gate 2 connection.

404

00:22:38,468 --> 00:22:42,168

Its own grid connection statement says it's received only a Gate 1 offer

405

00:22:43,228 --> 00:22:46,188

with an initial connection date after 2035.

406

00:22:46,808 --> 00:22:48,028

It intends to apply for

407

00:22:48,968 --> 00:22:50,828

Gate 2 in a future round.

408

00:22:52,248 --> 00:22:56,148

Meridian plans to connect to Western Marsh B, a substation that

409

00:22:56,528 --> 00:23:00,478

as yet does not exist, has no consent, and forms part

410

00:23:00,628 --> 00:23:04,018

of National Grid's separate Grimsby to Walpole proposal.

411

00:23:05,328 --> 00:23:08,818

So Meridian is asking for consent now, including

412

00:23:08,888 --> 00:23:12,388

extensive land powers, on an assumption that a substation,

413

00:23:12,848 --> 00:23:16,168

transmission network, and grid capacity will be available.

414

00:23:16,868 --> 00:23:18,748

This is putting the cart before the horse.

415

00:23:20,688 --> 00:23:23,928

Agricultural land shows why evidence must come first.

416

00:23:24,608 --> 00:23:28,368

The applicant's outline soil management plan says detailed surveys of

417

00:23:28,448 --> 00:23:31,748

land quality for parts of the scheme will be carried out

418

00:23:32,048 --> 00:23:35,948

only after consent. It also says the results

419

00:23:35,968 --> 00:23:37,628

are unlikely to change the routes.

420

00:23:38,488 --> 00:23:39,928

Surely, that's the wrong way around.

421

00:23:40,468 --> 00:23:44,208

We should know the quality of the land before the powers are granted.

422

00:23:44,288 --> 00:23:47,608

It should help decide where the development goes.

423

00:23:47,728 --> 00:23:51,068

Forty years of out of production is an entire farming

424

00:23:51,148 --> 00:23:55,008

generation. The same applies to the flood risk and

425

00:23:55,028 --> 00:23:58,808

battery safety. This is a low-lying area that relies on

426

00:23:58,828 --> 00:24:02,568

drainage. The applicant must show that the largest possible

427

00:24:02,608 --> 00:24:06,508

scheme can be operated safely. Can emergency crews reach

428

00:24:06,568 --> 00:24:10,488

the batteries during a flood? Is there enough water to fight

429

00:24:10,508 --> 00:24:13,658

a fire? Where would contaminated fire water

430

00:24:13,728 --> 00:24:17,168

go? How would nearby homes, farms, water courses be

431

00:24:17,188 --> 00:24:20,788

protected? These questions must be answered before consent,

432

00:24:21,108 --> 00:24:21,928

not afterwards.

433

00:24:23,444 --> 00:24:27,244

Before granting these powers, the examining authority must establish

434

00:24:27,404 --> 00:24:31,224

whether Meridian has sufficiently certain and deliverable

435

00:24:31,364 --> 00:24:34,984

route to the grid. Intending to apply for gate two

436

00:24:35,044 --> 00:24:37,983

later is not the same as having a confirmed connection.

437

00:24:39,164 --> 00:24:43,144

Land therefore asks the examining authority to

438

00:24:43,184 --> 00:24:45,664

examine the order in which this is happening.

439

00:24:46,264 --> 00:24:49,684

Please test Meridian together with the grid project it depends on.

440

00:24:50,444 --> 00:24:54,104

If the applicant cannot show a confirmed and deliverable grid route

441

00:24:54,644 --> 00:24:58,624

and close these gaps on farmland, flooding, and safety, Meridian is

442

00:24:58,664 --> 00:25:02,104

not ready for consent, and we would ask that the current scheme be

443

00:25:02,144 --> 00:25:03,884

refused and reconsidered

444

00:25:04,704 --> 00:25:08,184

when the wider infrastructure picture is clearer. Thank you.

445

00:25:10,344 --> 00:25:13,364

Thank you, Ms. Makinson. Any questions for Ms. Makinson?

446

00:25:14,944 --> 00:25:15,444

Thank you.

447

00:25:17,484 --> 00:25:20,824

And then we have Counselor Shreed?

448

00:25:20,924 --> 00:25:21,504

Shred?

449

00:25:22,524 --> 00:25:24,844

Apologies, I'm not sure how to pronounce it.

450

00:25:26,444 --> 00:25:27,264

Do you mean Sheard?

451

00:25:27,604 --> 00:25:28,124  
Sheard.

452

00:25:30,314 --> 00:25:30,834  
Not to worry. Thank you.

453

00:25:30,844 --> 00:25:34,324  
Apologies. It's spelt wrong on my list. Yes. Sheard.

454

00:25:35,514 --> 00:25:35,984  
Thank you.

455

00:25:36,304 --> 00:25:36,594  
You have two minutes.

456

00:25:36,594 --> 00:25:39,464  
So good afternoon. Thank you. Good afternoon.

457

00:25:39,524 --> 00:25:43,344  
My name is Counselor Ingrid Sheard, and I'm speaking as a local  
Lincolnshire

458

00:25:43,404 --> 00:25:46,904  
county counselor and as the deputy mayor of Greater Lincolnshire,

459

00:25:46,984 --> 00:25:49,664  
representing communities affected by this proposal.

460

00:25:50,524 --> 00:25:54,104  
I would like to focus on the practical impacts that residents will  
experience

461

00:25:54,484 --> 00:25:58,254  
if this development proceeds. My first concern is the loss of

462

00:25:58,344 --> 00:26:01,664  
productive agricultural land and the implications for food

463

00:26:01,764 --> 00:26:05,344

security. The applicant's own environmental statement

464

00:26:05,544 --> 00:26:09,304

identifies approximately 418 hectares

465

00:26:09,744 --> 00:26:13,404

of best and most versatile agricultural land within the development

466

00:26:13,524 --> 00:26:16,364

area, including grade one and two farmland.

467

00:26:17,024 --> 00:26:20,904

The applicant also acknowledges significant adverse effects on

468

00:26:20,964 --> 00:26:24,884

some of that land. That point is important because it

469

00:26:24,964 --> 00:26:28,824

is not being raised solely by objectors, it is acknowledged within the

470

00:26:28,904 --> 00:26:30,404

applicant's own assessment.

471

00:26:31,264 --> 00:26:35,033

Residents are regularly assured that solar developments are temporary and

472

00:26:35,064 --> 00:26:38,664

reversible. However, the applicant also recognizes that

473

00:26:38,704 --> 00:26:42,464

restoration to former agricultural classifications cannot be

474

00:26:42,504 --> 00:26:46,164

guaranteed, and that uncertainty remains regarding long-term

475

00:26:46,244 --> 00:26:49,744

soil impacts. That leaves local communities with an

476

00:26:49,804 --> 00:26:53,644

understandable concern. If restoration cannot be

477

00:26:53,684 --> 00:26:56,944

guaranteed, how can reversibility be guaranteed?

478

00:26:58,284 --> 00:27:00,724

Prime agricultural land is a national asset.

479

00:27:01,384 --> 00:27:05,364

Once degraded, it cannot simply be recreated elsewhere.

480

00:27:05,444 --> 00:27:09,424

Food security remains critically important, and residents believe that some

481

00:27:09,484 --> 00:27:13,404

of the country's best farmland should be afforded significant weight in this

482

00:27:13,464 --> 00:27:14,284

examination.

483

00:27:15,184 --> 00:27:18,704

My second concern relates to local roads and rural communities.

484

00:27:19,424 --> 00:27:23,224

The applicant's assessment concludes that there will be no significant traffic

485

00:27:23,304 --> 00:27:27,284

effects, but many residents find that difficult to reconcile

486

00:27:27,324 --> 00:27:30,824

with their lived experience of major construction projects.

487

00:27:31,564 --> 00:27:35,514

Roads such as Holes Grove, Martins Road, James Road, and Barrier

488

00:27:35,604 --> 00:27:39,504

Bank were designed to serve rural and agricultural communities.

489

00:27:40,024 --> 00:27:43,604

They were not designed to function as construction routes for nationally

490

00:27:43,664 --> 00:27:45,724

significant infrastructure projects.

491

00:27:45,964 --> 00:27:46,944

Counselor Sheard-

492

00:27:47,334 --> 00:27:47,334

Across-

493

00:27:47,384 --> 00:27:48,404

You have one minute left.

494

00:27:49,344 --> 00:27:53,274

Thank you. Across Lincolnshire, we have already seen the consequences that

495

00:27:53,304 --> 00:27:54,924

heavy construction traffic bring.

496

00:27:55,444 --> 00:27:59,344

Residents have experienced damaged verges, deteriorating road edges,

497

00:27:59,504 --> 00:28:03,444

mud, dust, noise, and increased conflict between local traffic and heavy

498

00:28:03,464 --> 00:28:07,234

goods vehicles. Beyond the technical modeling, there is also

499

00:28:07,244 --> 00:28:11,184

human impact. Residents often feel less safe using the

500

00:28:11,224 --> 00:28:15,144

roads they have driven for years. Communities face disruption for

501

00:28:15,184 --> 00:28:18,984

extended periods, and that disruption cannot be captured within

502

00:28:19,024 --> 00:28:21,064

transport assessments or spreadsheets.

503

00:28:21,444 --> 00:28:25,144

In closing, I ask the examining authority to give substantial weight to the

504

00:28:25,224 --> 00:28:28,904

acknowledged impacts on agricultural land, the uncertainty

505

00:28:28,984 --> 00:28:32,624

around soil restoration, and the practicable

506

00:28:33,604 --> 00:28:36,544

consequences for rural communities and local roads.

507

00:28:36,764 --> 00:28:40,584

The land affected by this proposal is not empty land awaiting development.

508

00:28:40,864 --> 00:28:44,644

It is productive farmland, valued countryside, and part of the

509

00:28:44,684 --> 00:28:48,154

established communities. These local impacts deserve careful

510

00:28:48,224 --> 00:28:51,964

consideration and the most rigorous scrutiny before any decision is

511

00:28:52,024 --> 00:28:53,024

reached. Thank you.

512

00:28:54,804 --> 00:28:58,144

Thank you, Counselor Sheard. Any questions for Counselor Sheard?

513

00:29:00,564 --> 00:29:04,364

That's everyone on my list. Can I check, is there

514

00:29:04,384 --> 00:29:07,424

anybody else in the room who wants to contribute today?

515

00:29:11,644 --> 00:29:12,644

And anybody online?

516

00:29:16,304 --> 00:29:19,144

Okay. Well, I'd like to thank everyone for their contributions today.

517

00:29:19,164 --> 00:29:22,854

It is appreciated that you've taken the time and the effort to address us

518

00:29:22,964 --> 00:29:26,724

directly. As we mentioned in our introduction, we'll now turn to the

519

00:29:26,784 --> 00:29:30,733

applicant's team and ask if there are any comments that they want to make on what

520

00:29:30,764 --> 00:29:34,744

we've just heard, or whether or not they'd prefer to respond in writing.

521

00:29:35,444 --> 00:29:35,894

Ms. Power?

522

00:29:36,244 --> 00:29:37,224

Yeah. I'll first

523

00:29:37,344 --> 00:29:41,064

briefly

524

00:29:44,733 --> 00:29:44,733

.

525

00:29:45,804 --> 00:29:49,664

Good afternoon, all. To reintroduce myself for those that were not here this

526

00:29:49,704 --> 00:29:53,544

morning, my name is Taylor Power. I'm a managing senior associate at law firm

527

00:29:53,584 --> 00:29:55,604

Pinsent Masons, and I represent the applicant.

528

00:29:56,924 --> 00:30:00,244

Just to begin, on behalf of the applicant, I would like to thank everyone who's

529

00:30:00,264 --> 00:30:03,824

attended, either in person or online, and spoken at today's

530

00:30:03,904 --> 00:30:07,844

hearing. Representatives from Meridian Solar, as well as its consultants, are

531

00:30:07,884 --> 00:30:11,574

here to listen to the concerns raised, and that's what we see the purpose of

532

00:30:11,624 --> 00:30:14,684

this hearing being, as well as obviously for the examining authority.

533

00:30:16,084 --> 00:30:19,824

I do not propose to provide a full response on all of the matters raised,

534

00:30:20,784 --> 00:30:23,214

however, I will briefly address a couple of the comments

535

00:30:24,328 --> 00:30:27,308

Many of the comments align with matters that have already been raised in relevant

536

00:30:27,368 --> 00:30:30,977

representations, and I would direct interested parties to the full

537

00:30:31,048 --> 00:30:33,968

response document that applicant will be submitting at deadline one.

538

00:30:34,828 --> 00:30:36,648

I also direct parties

539

00:30:37,488 --> 00:30:40,928

to the issue-specific hearing tomorrow and the further hearings that will happen in

540

00:30:40,968 --> 00:30:41,508

November,

541

00:30:42,348 --> 00:30:46,328

in particular tomorrow. I note that key strategic

542

00:30:46,368 --> 00:30:49,328

matters, including the interrelationship of the scheme with the National Grid

543

00:30:49,408 --> 00:30:53,298

projects in the area, as well as environmental topics like flood risk

544

00:30:53,368 --> 00:30:57,208

habitats and socioeconomic benefits of the scheme are all being

545

00:30:57,228 --> 00:31:00,948

discussed. So I know that it's a big ask to have people come along to the

546

00:31:00,988 --> 00:31:04,818

hearings. Perhaps you could listen back to the recordings later if you don't have

547

00:31:04,848 --> 00:31:07,608

the chance to come along tomorrow, but I would encourage it if you want to hear

548

00:31:07,648 --> 00:31:08,588

from our experts.

549

00:31:10,788 --> 00:31:14,648

I will now just briefly address some of the comments today

550

00:31:15,988 --> 00:31:19,628

before otherwise leaving matters to that relevant representation

551

00:31:19,688 --> 00:31:20,708  
report and the hearing.

552

00:31:22,088 --> 00:31:25,068  
So the process of determining an application for a nationally  
significant

553

00:31:25,168 --> 00:31:29,018  
infrastructure project is almost always involves a tension between  
the urgent

554

00:31:29,128 --> 00:31:32,848  
national need of low carbon generation, including solar, and

555

00:31:32,908 --> 00:31:36,728  
some local adverse effects, which are unfortunately often  
unavoidable

556

00:31:36,748 --> 00:31:40,268  
despite an applicant's best effort to avoid, minimize, or mitigate

557

00:31:40,308 --> 00:31:43,908  
them. The scheme's benefits include a substantial

558

00:31:43,968 --> 00:31:47,508  
contribution to the urgent need for renewable energy and a positive

559

00:31:47,588 --> 00:31:51,488  
contribution to energy security and on climate due to it displacing  
the

560

00:31:51,548 --> 00:31:55,488  
need for other forms of conventional energy that would emit  
greenhouse gases.

561

00:31:56,428 --> 00:31:59,708  
The scheme is also predicted to have beneficial impacts from  
construction

562

00:31:59,748 --> 00:32:03,588  
employment, as well as from proposed habitat creation and BNG

563

00:32:03,598 --> 00:32:04,288  
commitments.

564

00:32:05,368 --> 00:32:09,168  
We do, however, understand the concerns raised about the potential  
impacts of the

565

00:32:09,188 --> 00:32:13,128  
scheme. We take those concerns seriously, and this is why we've made  
sure

566

00:32:13,168 --> 00:32:16,908  
to assess these effects thoroughly in our environmental statement in  
order to

567

00:32:18,188 --> 00:32:22,028  
ensure that they can be given proper consideration in the decision  
alongside

568

00:32:22,108 --> 00:32:25,828  
other considerations, including representations made by interested  
parties.

569

00:32:27,508 --> 00:32:31,168  
I do just want to acknowledge the comments raised about agricultural  
land

570

00:32:31,268 --> 00:32:34,858  
by Sir Hayes, Ms. Pennington, Councillor Locke, Ms.

571

00:32:34,968 --> 00:32:36,268  
McKinson, and Mr. Sheard.

572

00:32:37,348 --> 00:32:38,888  
I acknowledge the concerns raised.

573

00:32:39,448 --> 00:32:43,298  
In line with policy, the applicant has ensured the siting and design  
of the

574

00:32:43,368 --> 00:32:47,188  
scheme infrastructure have avoided BMV land wherever practicable.

575

00:32:48,068 --> 00:32:51,908

The impacts on the large majority of land within the scheme will be temporary.

576

00:32:52,288 --> 00:32:56,008

They'll either be short-term temporary in terms of the grid connection route, where

577

00:32:56,048 --> 00:32:59,748

farming will be able to continue once the overhead line is constructed, or

578

00:32:59,828 --> 00:33:03,688

long-term temporary, whereby the land within the solar site will be predominantly

579

00:33:03,728 --> 00:33:05,748

returned to landowners at the end of the scheme.

580

00:33:06,988 --> 00:33:10,837

I do also note the concerns about the cumulative effect on Lincolnshire, and

581

00:33:10,908 --> 00:33:14,368

while the applicant acknowledges the breadth of projects that have been brought

582

00:33:14,428 --> 00:33:18,288

forward in this region, it's noted the analysis in the environmental

583

00:33:18,408 --> 00:33:21,588

statement that cumulatively, the solar projects in

584

00:33:21,628 --> 00:33:25,068

Lincolnshire will account for approximately 3% of all

585

00:33:25,128 --> 00:33:28,888

agricultural land in Lincolnshire, and cumulatively, an

586

00:33:28,968 --> 00:33:32,688

estimated 1.1% of BMV land would be temporarily

587

00:33:32,698 --> 00:33:36,588  
used and 0.02% of BMV land

588

00:33:36,648 --> 00:33:40,418  
permanently used across all of the identified solar projects in

589

00:33:40,428 --> 00:33:44,068  
Lincolnshire. So this is indicative that solar schemes represent,

590

00:33:44,288 --> 00:33:48,188  
while they feel like they're a large impact, they

591

00:33:48,308 --> 00:33:48,588  
do

592

00:33:49,568 --> 00:33:53,188  
represent a small proportion of agricultural and BMV land in the  
county.

593

00:33:55,268 --> 00:33:58,828  
I do also note the traffic concerns raised by Sir Hayes, Ms.

594

00:33:58,908 --> 00:33:59,647  
Pennington, Ms.

595

00:34:00,528 --> 00:34:02,098  
Thompson, and Ms. Sheard today,

596

00:34:03,268 --> 00:34:06,928  
particularly in respect of the concerns regarding the

597

00:34:07,028 --> 00:34:10,768  
state of existing local roads and whether they're appropriate for  
the nature of the

598

00:34:10,848 --> 00:34:14,569  
scheme. This is being carefully assessed by the applicant in the  
traffic

599

00:34:14,649 --> 00:34:15,028

chapter,

600

00:34:15,968 --> 00:34:19,308

and the applicant has committed to undertake precondition surveys before

601

00:34:19,348 --> 00:34:23,028

construction commencing, and undertake various street

602

00:34:23,069 --> 00:34:26,589

works to ensure that roads are up to standard for the types of vehicles and access

603

00:34:26,629 --> 00:34:27,208

required,

604

00:34:28,129 --> 00:34:31,728

and are remediated at the end of construction if any damage is

605

00:34:31,768 --> 00:34:33,368

considered to be caused by the scheme.

606

00:34:34,948 --> 00:34:38,669

I did just also want to note, given the question that was raised by the

607

00:34:38,688 --> 00:34:42,518

examining authority as well, regarding concerns about engagement with

608

00:34:42,548 --> 00:34:43,488

land agents.

609

00:34:45,048 --> 00:34:46,208

I checked with my client following Ms.

610

00:34:46,288 --> 00:34:50,218

Pennington's concerns, and we're very happy to speak with her directly after

611

00:34:50,228 --> 00:34:53,589

the hearing if there are concerns about ongoing engagement.

612

00:34:54,368 --> 00:34:55,328

I would note that

613

00:34:56,488 --> 00:35:00,168

what we have tried as an applicant team is to ensure that matters of land

614

00:35:00,208 --> 00:35:04,148

engagement are kept with agents, and then matters of design and concern about

615

00:35:04,158 --> 00:35:07,728

the detail of the scheme are kept within the context of the hearings and the

616

00:35:07,768 --> 00:35:11,338

examination process, and we would just remind parties that this is the best

617

00:35:11,428 --> 00:35:13,608

opportunity to raise those sorts of concerns.

618

00:35:17,208 --> 00:35:20,608

I will leave the rest of the effects that are raised today to be addressed at

619

00:35:20,668 --> 00:35:24,188

tomorrow's hearing or at the future hearings by our experts, as well as, of course,

620

00:35:24,248 --> 00:35:27,618

all of the written submissions that the applicant has already put forward and will

621

00:35:27,648 --> 00:35:31,188

be putting forward through the rest of the examination process.

622

00:35:32,208 --> 00:35:35,808

But I suppose to summarize, the applicant considers that the remaining adverse

623

00:35:35,848 --> 00:35:39,688

effects that it has not been able to fully avoid are outweighed by the

624

00:35:39,728 --> 00:35:43,358

substantial benefits the scheme would deliver, namely a substantial

625

00:35:43,428 --> 00:35:47,348

contribution to meeting the urgent need for low-carbon generation, supporting

626

00:35:47,388 --> 00:35:51,028

the overarching aim of meeting net zero targets and fighting climate change and its

627

00:35:51,068 --> 00:35:54,708

effects, which ultimately will benefit us all. Thank you very much.

628

00:35:56,308 --> 00:35:57,048

Thank you, Ms. Power.

629

00:35:57,988 --> 00:36:01,848

Before I hand over to Ms. Corsini for the next agenda

630

00:36:01,908 --> 00:36:04,648

item, I've got some hands up online.

631

00:36:05,468 --> 00:36:09,328

I just want to remind you that we won't be able to take any

632

00:36:09,428 --> 00:36:13,368

more representations now because we've heard from the applicant, and

633

00:36:13,408 --> 00:36:17,268

they have to have the last say. I want to reassure you, there'll be lots of other

634

00:36:17,308 --> 00:36:21,218

opportunities for you to expand on the points and to respond to what you've

635

00:36:21,218 --> 00:36:21,588

heard.

636

00:36:22,468 --> 00:36:26,328

Do any of you have points of procedure that you want to raise?

637

00:36:27,188 --> 00:36:30,808

Shall I start with you, Ms. McKinson, because you've got your hand up

638

00:36:30,868 --> 00:36:31,308

first?

639

00:36:32,908 --> 00:36:35,348

Hi. No, I wanted to ask about the

640

00:36:36,328 --> 00:36:40,168

percentage of BMV land that was quoted by the applicant,

641

00:36:40,888 --> 00:36:41,308

as

642

00:36:42,128 --> 00:36:43,608

I haven't seen any evidence of that.

643

00:36:43,628 --> 00:36:43,758

We've dealt-

644

00:36:43,758 --> 00:36:47,628

Okay. Yeah, that's not something we can hear now because we've

645

00:36:47,668 --> 00:36:51,488

come to the end of the open floor hearing and everyone's had their fair say,

646

00:36:51,608 --> 00:36:54,908

but that is something we'll be looking at in more detail throughout the

647

00:36:54,948 --> 00:36:58,858

examination. We will be touching on BMV land tomorrow as

648

00:36:58,908 --> 00:37:02,728

well in the issue-specific hearing, so you'd be very welcome to come along to that

649

00:37:02,768 --> 00:37:05,288

and ask your questions there. Mr. Hayes.

650

00:37:05,478 --> 00:37:05,478

Thank you.

651

00:37:05,487 --> 00:37:06,388

Sorry, Sir Hayes.

652

00:37:07,368 --> 00:37:08,528

Sir John is the

653

00:37:09,468 --> 00:37:10,438

actually, but you're near enough.

654

00:37:10,888 --> 00:37:13,528

So, I do have a procedural question, actually.

655

00:37:14,928 --> 00:37:18,908

Of course, I won't go into the arguments about what's been said and what hasn't

656

00:37:18,918 --> 00:37:19,768

been said. Clearly,

657

00:37:20,588 --> 00:37:21,728

take your point that's inappropriate.

658

00:37:22,308 --> 00:37:26,168

But there has been a point about the character of consultation, the engagement

659

00:37:26,248 --> 00:37:26,908

with community.

660

00:37:27,908 --> 00:37:31,008

From a procedural perspective, I have to say

661

00:37:31,068 --> 00:37:33,708

Meridian's approach is

662

00:37:34,968 --> 00:37:37,648

woefully different from the approach

663

00:37:38,628 --> 00:37:41,188

by National Grid. That's been mentioned several times.

664

00:37:41,248 --> 00:37:43,348

They have application of pylons, as you know.

665

00:37:44,208 --> 00:37:48,168

National Grid, whatever one thinks about their proposals, have had a

666

00:37:48,228 --> 00:37:51,778

rigorous process of engagement with parish councils, parish meetings, and so on.

667

00:37:51,778 --> 00:37:52,428

So, Sir John, I think I'll-

668

00:37:52,448 --> 00:37:54,618

That hasn't happened in respect to Meridian

669

00:37:54,618 --> 00:37:57,428

... stop you there because, again, I think although that is a procedural point,

670

00:37:57,488 --> 00:38:01,448

it's a broader procedural point rather than for the purposes of this hearing.

671

00:38:02,088 --> 00:38:05,848

So, I think that's something that will need to be taken outside of this

672

00:38:05,868 --> 00:38:09,858

hearing, and if you submit anything to us in writing along those lines, then we'll

673



