

MERIDIAN ACTION GROUP

WRITTEN REPRESENTATION

Overview

Our objection to the proposed solar farm has its focus on three main themes:

- loss of BMV land and the consequent threat to food security
- the impact on the local community
- impact on already poor infrastructure

These points are detailed in our Relevant Representation previously submitted to the PI.

In this written statement MAG outlines how its concerns are supported by major stakeholders. Additionally other matters on concern are highlighted.

This article from the local newspaper, the Lincolnshire Free Press, provides a comprehensive summary of the objections that have been submitted by major stakeholders who will be affected by the plans. Particular attention is drawn to the comments of the Environment Agency and the South Holland Internal Drainage Board.

The source for this information is an article published by the Lincolnshire Free Press dated 3 August 2026.

This is a summary of the Lincolnshire Free Press article

Overview of the Project

- **Proposal:** Meridian Solar Farm Ltd is seeking government permission to build a massive 750MW solar facility covering 1,616 hectares across four land parcels near Crowland, Shepeau Stow, and Sutton St Edmund. The plans include solar arrays and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).
- **Developer's Position:** Head of NSIP Projects David Vernon states that flood risks have been carefully evaluated by experts and that a Flood Risk Assessment shows no material increase in flood risk with mitigation. He expressed confidence in the plans as they enter formal Planning Inspectorate (PINS) examination.

Key Concerns & Objections

1. Environment Agency (EA) & Flood Risk

- **Inadequate Understanding:** The EA lodged objections stating the developer has shown an "inadequate understanding of tidal flood risk" and fenland flood dynamics.
- **Crowland and Cowbit Washes:** Meridian failed to adequately recognise the status of these designated large raised reservoirs, which are vital for protecting local areas from flooding.
- **Land & Access Issues:** Meridian seeks to compulsory purchase a parcel of land (an inland drainage ditch/bank) managed by the EA under the Reservoirs Act without clear justification. The EA also stressed the need for permanent access to maintain reservoir banks.

- Other Issues: Inadequate flood modelling, development within Flood Zone 3b, inconsistent climate change sensitivity testing, and insufficient consideration of impacts on EA flood defence assets.

2. South Holland Internal Drainage Board (SHIDB)

- Drainage Efficiency: Over 100 proposed cable/road crossings over watercourses threaten drainage efficiency and could increase flood risk to properties, infrastructure, and farmland.
- Lack of Engagement: SHIDB cannot support the project due to a "lack of clarity" and a failure by the developer to progress discussions addressing their concerns.

3. Infrastructure & Utility Companies

- Anglian Water & National Grid: Anglian Water noted a disappointing lack of engagement, while National Grid placed a holding objection to ensure asset protection.
- InterGen (Spalding Power Station): Raised "serious concerns" that solar connections could cross or run near its high-pressure gas pipeline, leaving safety protections unaddressed.

4. Landowners & Statutory Bodies

- Compulsory Purchases: Objections have been raised by Network Rail (stating CPO tests haven't been met) and St John's College, Cambridge over compulsory land acquisitions.
- Natural England: Warned that Meridian's assessment methods understate the permanent loss of "Best and Most Versatile" (BMV) agricultural land. Concerns were also raised about four ancient trees on site.
- Ministry of Defence: Raised additional concerns regarding the plans.

5. Local Campaigners (Meridian Action Group - MAG)

- Local campaigners expressed frustration at Meridian's unwillingness to engage or clarify concerns, stating that the widespread objections from major organisations validate the community's worries about a multi-million-pound project being pursued with "little regard" for major risks.

End. Accreditation Victoria Fear LFP

Note: Use of AI Gemini to summarise Lincolnshire Free Press article - AI not used in any other part of the submission. I have compared this summary to the original article and take responsibility for the summarised article.

Flood Risk

In MAG's that view these objections demonstrate that Meridian Solar's plans are either flawed or incomplete. They appear to have little recognition of the special nature of the Fens. Drainage was the driver of their creation in the 18th Century, The Fen Characteristics remain as important today.

Much of our land is at or below sea and the Fens are flat. Drainage and flood prevention is through a network of rivers, drains, dykes and watercourses backed by flood plains such as Cowbit & Crowland Washes. Cowbit Wash was flooded for much of 2025.

The EA is developing a vision for the future use of Crowland and Cowbit Washes (flood storage reservoir) which will explore options for multi-benefit uses, including flooding,

climate change adaptation and environmental benefits. (Response to Parliamentary Question From Sir John Hayes MP October 2024).

The South Holland Internal Drainage Board (IDB) is a public body that manages water levels in an area where there is this special need for drainage. IDBs undertake works to reduce flood risk to people and property, and manage water levels for agricultural and environmental needs within their district.

Working with the EA and Anglian Water, the role of the SHIDB cannot be minimised.

Loss of BMV Land

Lincolnshire County Council commissioned Reading Agricultural Consultants to review the Soil and Agricultural components of the Environmental Statement. Their review of the application highlights a number of concerns over the manner in which the ALC work in particular has been undertaken and how the the results from the surveys have been interpreted, which has a significant bearing on the assessment of the extent of BMV land within the application boundary.

Meridian Solar have downgraded 157.83 hectares graded as 3a (Areas B & C) but because the land 'is not managed differently to the wider site area, which is graded 3b, it has been merged into that area'. Similarly Meridian Solar have used a justification for a 'field average approach' to assess land quality resulting in 15.24% of Parcels A & D due to wetness limitations.

This approach is not part of the ALC system, which relies on observed soil characteristics rather than current cropping or the appearance of the soil surface on arable land to determine the Grade of land. There is no justification for moving significant areas of land observed to be Grade 3a into the non-BMV category and this is a serious error in the Meridian reports (Reading Agricultural Consultants)

MAG have previously submitted their view that the proportion of BMV land is flawed. The review findings of Reading Agricultural Services reinforces our concern of this vital subject.

We ask that the Planning Inspectorate require the subject of land quality be revisited with independent land consultants being retained to review and recalculate the land quality using the ALC methodology funded, but not managed, by Meridian Solar.

The impact on the Local Community

Using content from Relevant Responses MAG have analysed the representations which relate to issues of impact on the local community as expressed by individuals exc. businesses.

The top seven issues identified are:

- Loss of high quality agricultural land -133 comments
- Inadequate road infrastructure/heave traffic/road safety-65 comments
- Alternative locations for solar - 61 comments
- Adverse effect on local community inc. disturbance & disruption, health, economic impact, threat to leisure, infrastructure inadequate - 53 comments
- Food security threat - 52 comments
- Adverse visual impact - 44 comments
- Wildlife & diversity - 42 Comments

Road Infrastructure

The road infrastructure is rural, typified by narrow roads, many single lane, and bounded by dykes and other watercourses. The proposed development will essentially mean that they predominantly become construction roadways favouring the needs of heavy traffic both in number and size and weight over the needs of the local community. This will extend over a 4 year period,

These roads have uneven surfaces and are badly cracked due to the underlying soil structure. The application has little information about how they are to be maintained during construction and reinstated after construction. Similar concern is expressed about what will happen on decommissioning.

Indicative of the issues related to the roads is the work that is being undertaken to repair and resurface Halls Drove over half its length. This is a 4 week programme, the road having been extensively patch repaired over the past 2-3 years. This is one of the routes identified for construction traffic for the solar farm. The road is closed along its length with side roads similarly affected. During the construction period there have been 3 burst water mains on side roads likely to have been caused by construction traffic using inadequate roads,

The usage of such roads demonstrates the inadequacies of this rural road network and the disruption and disturbance likely to be caused to the local community.

In summary Meridian Solar demonstrate little understanding of the impact that the proposed solar development will have on the rural Fen community and landscape including flood risk.