



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Planning Inspectorate  
c/o QUADIENT  
69 Buckingham Avenue  
Slough  
SL1 4PN

2<sup>nd</sup> September 2026

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Ref EN010169**

I am writing with a formal submission in response to the application by Meridian Solar Farm Limited, part of Downing Renewable Developments, for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Meridian Solar Farm Project (Ref EN010169).

I would like to formally object to the application for the solar development on land south of Spalding near to Crowland, Shepeau Stow, Cowbit and Whaplode Drove in my constituency of South Holland and the Deepings.

Principally, I am concerned about the impact the development will have on prime agricultural land in the area, given its extraordinary size of approximately 1,100 hectares (2,700 acres), equivalent to 1,400 football pitches. The total size of the development would be bigger than the entire village of Cowbit.

It is frankly unconscionable that this proposal will see over 1,000 hectares of prime agricultural land removed from food production, as virtually all of the proposed solar development is located on Grade 2 farmland, with some of it, and indeed the site boundary for the proposed substation also, planned for the very best Grade 1 farmland.

The land earmarked for a Grid Connection Corridor is very clearly Grade 1 farmland, and, as the application highlights, these fields are currently used for growing sugar beet, winter cereals, and oilseed rape amongst other crops.

Grade 1 and 2 farmland, rated 'excellent' and 'very good' respectively, is highly fertile, productive farmland, otherwise known as 'Best and Most Versatile' (BMV) farmland. It is essential that farmland remains in production to ensure that food prices remain affordable and that food security is assured.

You will likely be aware that this part of Lincolnshire boasts more Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land than any other in England, and that this use of land is critical to the production and consumption of food nationally. Lincolnshire grows 30% of the



UK's vegetables, 20% of its sugar beet, and 20% of England's potatoes, and, as such, the area is the centre of UK food production. As the most productive land is so scarce – just 16% of land in England is grade 1 or 2 - it is reasonable to ensure that solar panels be located on the 22.5% of land that is classified as grades 4 and 5 land.

BMV agricultural land should not be used for development of any kind, and indeed Government policy is clear that solar developers must recognise this. As the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero said in an oral Ministerial Statement in the House of Commons, 'Energy Markets', on March 5th 2026:

*'... we operate under guidance from the last Government about avoiding the best available land where at all possible.'*

National Planning policy currently supports this position, with the current National Planning Policy Framework stating that:

*"where significant development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, areas of poorer quality land should be preferred to those of a higher quality."*

The current National Planning Policy Framework also states that:

*"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

*a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*

*b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland; "*

Given the sheer number of sites elsewhere in the region that are not grade 1, 2 or even 3a farmland, it is extraordinary that this location was chosen in the first instance, and there is no evidence from the supporting documents that more suitable alternate sites were considered. Surely, responsible energy companies should be obliged to pursue alternative approaches, including solar on industrial roof space and brownfield land, before consideration is given to industrialising vast swathes of the productive Lincolnshire countryside.



The consultation documents also make clear that there has been no truly independent analysis of the soil, with the strong likelihood that the land in question might even be Grade 1 farmland were it analysed afresh.

Furthermore, assurances that the panels “will not degrade the quality of soils” and “solar PV areas will remain under a grass cover which will facilitate a recovery of topsoil organic matter” is of little relevance given the land taken out of farming will likely never be used for food production again. Moreover, evidence from elsewhere is that farmland, in particular soil drainage, is irreparably damaged as a result of piles driven into the ground for solar panels. The net effect on the farmland on the soil will be wholly negative.

Having examined the application documents, I am concerned about the lack of clarity regarding the number, size and location of proposed additional infrastructure required as part of the development. This includes multiple structures such as pylons or substations, with the consultation mentioning “an approximate 12 to 13 kilometres (km) overhead line”, but without specifying where precisely this would be located. Clearly, additional overhead power lines would be plainly inappropriate for the landscape, standing out significantly on the otherwise flat, natural Fenland topography.

This is especially concerning in respect of the impact on wildlife. As the PEIR Non-Technical Summary makes clear, “the presence of pylons and overhead cabling in the

Grid Connection Corridor and Inter-Array Areas may pose a collision risk to bird species associated with The Wash and the Nene Washes”, going on to highlight that “the operation of the Scheme could result in long-term negative effects at the Local level on the Nene Washes and The Wash”. Specifically, the document warns the pylons “may pose a collision risk to birds, including whooper swans, flying across the area.” Mindful that the nearby coastal saltmarsh is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), this, clearly, breaks national policy.

The sections in the application relating to ‘Ecology and Biodiversity’ are equally worrying. The report details the loss of “stretches of hedgerow”; warns that “some habitat for breeding and wintering birds may be lost”; says that bats are likely to be impacted during construction; and cautions that suitable habitat for great crested newts on the site “may be lost”. Noting this impact on habitats and other biodiversity, it is clear that from an ecological perspective alone these fields are unsuitable for large scale industrial development.

As such, given there is a requirement to provide evidence of biodiversity net gain resulting from planning proposals, I am unclear how this application can be good



for the natural environment in any way, and the Environmental Impact Report does nothing to assuage my concerns in this regard.

In the consultation's section on 'Cultural Heritage' there is a troubling reference to the proposals leading to "permanent moderate adverse effects on the physical feature and setting of the Scheduled Monument, 'Medieval boundary earthworks at Queens Bank (10090080)', located adjacent to the Site as a result of construction activities." As a site of archaeological and historic interest, I am worried that the development risks harming this important monument, and I am concerned that not enough weight is given in the documents to mitigating this.

I note, too, that the site falls almost entirely within a Flood Zone 3 area which means "there is a high probability of flooding from rivers and the sea." I would therefore expect further detail to be given in terms of flood mitigation plans before any approval were granted.

I have been contacted by many residents in the area of the proposed development who are anxious about how the local road infrastructure, mostly single-track roads already in poor condition, could cope with the increased volume of traffic resulting from the construction and ongoing maintenance of the site. The application includes scant details on access, an aspect that is especially critical given the large geographical spread of the different sites in question and the aforementioned small rural roads.

It is also deeply concerning that the Impact Assessment highlights that noise resulting from the proposed substation "would likely result in long-term temporary moderate to major adverse effects, considered significant." In a quiet, peaceful rural setting, without

undulations to mitigate the transmission of noise, sound is magnified, and will change the character of the surrounding environment.

My constituents have also raised repeated concerns that they have not been properly made aware of the plans for this vast application, with apparently few Parish Council meetings scheduled. Other residents have received letters implying planning permission has been granted and that compulsory purchase powers to buy land are imminent. Much clearer, more accessible information must be disseminated to residents living nearby far in advance of any decision being made.

Given the size of the land in question, this application could also affect the viability of the businesses that currently farm the land and other plots nearby. There appears to be no acknowledgement of this potential impact on the local economy addressed within the consultation. I note that recent analysis from Lincolnshire County Council warns that the plans will cost the local economy up to £76 million,



and deter tourists from visiting the area, and I am not aware that Downing Renewable Developments have set out suitable mitigations for this.

Furthermore, the fact this application is set over four sites effectively means that multiple communities are impacted by the plans. As such, this proposal should have been treated as four smaller, individual applications, and so subject to the usual planning process by South Holland District Council, at the local, democratic level, rather than being treated as one site to be determined at a national level.

I am also puzzled that the application, with great enthusiasm, claims that the operational site would "provide enough clean energy to power approximately 215,000 UK homes", implying that it is people living nearby who will reap the rewards, whereas the reality is that no one in the locale will benefit from cheaper or more plentiful energy as a result of this enormous project.

Having surveyed over a thousand residents living nearby, the overwhelming response was of strong opposition to the plans, with many specifically citing the loss of prime farmland as their biggest concern. In other meetings, letters, emails and calls, my constituents have made clear to me that they want to protect farmland and Lincolnshire's landscape, and I will continue to do all that I can to fight for their cause.

For all of the reasons set out above, this proposal will have a detrimental impact on the Fenland farmland and profoundly reduce local amenity, changing the character and nature of the surrounding environment forever.

I would be grateful therefore if my letter is registered as a formal objection to this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

**The Rt Hon Sir John Hayes CBE MP**  
**South Holland and The Deepings**