Monday 21st September 2026

Meridian Solar - Written Representation to the Examining Authority

Registration identification number: [redacted]

As the elected District Councillor for The Saints Ward, representing Gedney Hill, Sutton St Edmund, Sutton St James and Throckenholt, I have listened to concerns raised by residents throughout the Meridian Solar application process, attended meetings, consultation events and briefings and have responded to every stage of the planning process to date.

I am submitting this representation to the examination to ensure that the concerns raised by residents and the wider rural communities which I represent, and who will be affected by the proposal, are properly considered alongside the evidence before the Examining Authority.

The principal concerns I wish to highlight are:

- Loss of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land and the implications for future food security
- Potential impact on drainage and flood risk
- Impact on our rural communities and local infrastructure
- Effect of construction traffic on rural roads
- Cumulative impact of major infrastructure development across this part of Lincolnshire.

These concerns have been repeatedly raised throughout the process, both directly with Meridian and with me by residents. Importantly, a number of these concerns have also been raised by organisations with technical expertise and responsibilities in relation to drainage, flood risk, water infrastructure, and other relevant matters.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land and Food Security

Lincolnshire is one of the country's most important agricultural areas. Our farmers produce a significant amount of food for the country, the high-quality agricultural land across the Fens is a valuable and finite resource. The removal of this land from agricultural production for in excess of 40 years should therefore be given serious consideration.

My concern is not solely due to the amount of land involved, but also the quality and productivity of that land and the consequences of removing it from agricultural production for the proposed lifetime of the development.

Legitimate questions have been raised in relation to the assessment and classification of agricultural land within the application, including the extent of BMV land affected. These matters should be properly examined rather than relying solely on the Applicant's assessment where evidence or methodology is disputed.

Food security should, in my view, be given significant consideration when determining the application, particularly at a time when there is considerable uncertainty in relation to global food supply, agricultural production and future land use.

Whilst I recognise the important role renewable energy can play in improving energy security, it should not be considered in isolation from food security.

The question for the examination is therefore not whether renewable energy is required, but how the benefits of this particular development should be balanced against the loss of huge amounts of the best and most versatile (BMV) agricultural land in the country and the other impacts associated with the proposal.

Flood Risk and Drainage

Living in the Fens, it is crucial to understand how important, and delicately balanced our drainage system is.

The landscape in this part of Lincolnshire is very different from much of the country being flat, low-lying, and reliant on a complex network of drains, dykes, rivers, pumping stations, flood storage areas, and flood protection infrastructure. All of this is fundamental to protecting homes, businesses, farmland and infrastructure.

The Applicant has undertaken its own assessments and proposed mitigation measures. However, concerns have also been raised by organisations with direct responsibility and technical expertise in managing water levels, drainage and flood risk in this area, including the South Holland Internal Drainage Board, North Level District Internal Drainage Board, the Environment Agency and Anglian Water.

In particular, I am concerned that the cumulative effect of numerous crossings, access arrangements, cables, construction activities, and associated infrastructure must not negatively impact the operation or maintenance of the existing drainage system on which the local area depends.

The Planning Inspectorate's examination process provides the opportunity for outstanding matters between the Applicant and relevant organisations to be properly considered, including through Statements of Common Ground and the examination of areas where agreement has not been reached, which is a crucial part of this process.

The drainage system of the Fens cannot be underestimated and shouldn't be treated as something that can simply be worked around. It is fundamental to how this landscape functions.

Any consent would therefore need to provide confidence that existing drainage and flood-defence infrastructure can continue to operate effectively throughout construction, operation, and decommissioning, with appropriate access for the organisations responsible for maintaining it.

Rural Roads and Local Infrastructure

I am also concerned about the impact of the proposed development on our rural roads and existing infrastructure.

Anyone who lives in our villages will know the condition and limitations of many of the roads in this area which are narrow, often bordered by drains and dykes, and were not designed to accommodate sustained volumes of large and heavy construction traffic.

Many roads throughout the district are already suffering from cracking, subsidence, and deterioration. The construction and eventual decommissioning of a development of this scale has the potential to place significant additional pressure on this already constrained road network.

It is crucial that, should this project be granted a Development Consent Order (DCO), clear and robust arrangements are in place in relation to:

- which roads will be used by construction traffic
- how the condition of those roads will be assessed before construction
- how they will be protected during construction
- who will be responsible for damage caused by construction traffic
- how and when repairs will be undertaken
- how the roads will be reinstated following construction and decommissioning.

These matters are particularly important because responsibility for local roads ultimately rests with Lincolnshire County Council as the highway's authority, and the consequences of damage should not simply fall upon the local authority and, ultimately, local taxpayers.

There should be clear accountability for the condition of the highway throughout the lifetime of the project, including a clear mechanism for addressing any damage attributable to construction or decommissioning activity.

Impact on Rural Communities

The impact on the communities surrounding the development also needs to be properly considered. The area included in this project covers an array of rural communities with limited infrastructure and services, and residents are already experiencing the effects of major development and infrastructure proposals across the wider area.

A development of this scale, particularly where construction is taking place across multiple areas, has the potential to result in significant disruption through construction traffic, noise, temporary works, road closures, changes to access and the general movement of construction activity.

The impact should therefore not be considered solely in terms of the solar arrays alone. The communities surrounding the development will experience the consequences of the construction process and associated infrastructure, and these impacts need to be mitigated against.

Cumulative Impact

I would also ask the Examining Authority to consider the cumulative impact of Meridian Solar alongside the other major solar and infrastructure projects proposed across this part of Lincolnshire.

Over the last 3 years, South Holland has been experiencing a significant concentration of solar development, with projects at various stages from operational through to those awaiting determination or appeal. The cumulative effect of these extends beyond the individual boundaries of each application. It includes the progressive change to the rural landscape, increasing pressure on productive agricultural land and the gradual introduction of large-scale energy infrastructure across extensive areas of the Fens.

The combined effect of these projects on agricultural land, food production, drainage, flood risk, rural roads, landscape, and local communities needs to be properly understood.

Cumulative impacts are a major concern locally, particularly when the wider grid infrastructure is also taken into account. The area is facing significant new infrastructure, including substations, overhead cables and pylons, as well as underground cable routes. Combined, this would result in construction activity and construction zones across the region for potentially the next 5–10 years. For the communities who live and work here, this is not simply a series of separate projects; it represents a prolonged period of change, construction activity, increased traffic and disruption across the wider rural area.

Assessing each proposal in isolation would underestimate the combined effect experienced by the communities who live and work here, as well as those who visit and use the surrounding countryside.

For context, below is a list of solar developments and their status within the wider area:

Development	**Area**	**Status**
Fendyke Farm, Sutton St James	45 hectares / 111 acres	Approved
Caudwell Farm, between Holbeach St Matthew and Holbeach St Marks	111 hectares / 275 acres	Approved
Grange Farm Solar, Sutton St James	21 hectares / 52 acres	Operational
Sutton Bridge Solar Farm	120 hectares / 296 acres	Operational
Land North West of Treading Bank, Tydd St Giles	96 hectares / 238 acres	Awaiting Decision
Malice Solar, Thorney	80 hectares / 197 acres	Approved
PACE, Sutton St Edmund	140 hectares / 346 acres	Appeal hearing on 29 September
Bicker Fen Solar Farm	97 hectares / 240 acres	Approved

The above development total is 710 hectares or 1755 acres with solar alone. Should Meridian be granted its DCO, this would be an additional 1100 hectares or 2700 acres. This is a total combined area of 1810 hectares / 4455 acres.

The Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) impacting the area in addition to Meridian include:

- Weston Marsh Substations – A & B
- National Grid Grimsby–Walpole
- Ossian Offshore Wind
- Outer Dowsing Offshore Wind
- National Grid Weston Marsh–East Leicestershire
- Eastern Green Link 3 & 4
- Eastern Green Link 5.

Whilst I appreciate that these are separate projects, with different developers, consenting processes and timescales, it is important to recognise that, for the communities living in this area, the impacts do not happen in isolation.

The same rural roads, drainage systems, agricultural land, and communities can be affected by more than one project. Construction activity may also overlap, adding further pressure to infrastructure and increasing the disruption experienced by residents.

I would therefore ask the Examining Authority to consider Meridian Solar within this wider picture and not simply look at the impacts of this application in isolation. It is important to consider how Meridian will add to the cumulative change already taking place across our rural Fenland communities.

For residents, the concern is not just about what one individual development will mean. It is about what the combined effect of all these projects will mean for our farmland, our landscape, our roads, our drainage systems, and the communities in which we live.

Conclusion

Whilst I recognise the need for renewable energy and energy security, we also need to consider our future food supply, protect our most productive farmland, maintain effective drainage and flood protection, protect our rural roads and ensure that the people who live and work in these communities are not overlooked when considering this proposal.

I therefore ask the Examining Authority to consider the concerns set out above and the evidence submitted by the Applicant, local authorities, statutory consultees, technical organisations, and local communities.

I will continue to engage with the examination process and to represent the interests of residents in The Saints Ward throughout this process.

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

District Councillor for 'The Saints Ward' – [redacted]

South Holland District Council, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, Lincolnshire. PE11 2XE

ChatGPT was used to assist with the formatting and structure of this document. The content, views and representations expressed are my own and are based on matters raised with me by residents and through reading documentation provided throughout the consultation and examination process.