Meridian Solar Farm Project DCO
Application by Meridian Solar Farm Limited

POST HEARING SUBMISSIONS
ON BEHALF OF LINCOLNSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
AT DL1

Introduction

1. Lincolnshire County Council (**"LCC"** or **"the Council"**) attended the Preliminary Meeting (PM) and Issue Specific Hearing 1 (ISH1) held on the 8th September and 9th September 2026, respectively. A summary of LCC's oral representations at the ISH1 appears below.

Agenda Item 4 Scope of proposed development

2. Deliverability of the project and grid connection uncertainty is a fundamental concern for the Council and the key inter-relationship is with the Grimsby to Walpole overlap. The Council notes the concerns from NGET and their objection, which is relevant to the Council's position. Should the ExA be minded to recommend approval, the Council would then seek a requirement within the DCO restricting commencement of the development, including preliminary works, until consent has been secured for a grid connection.

3. Second point raised is on landscape and LVIA – the Council have some concerns with the LVIA and around the decisions relating to overhead lines versus undergrounding, to be set out in written submissions (reference Local Impact Report (LIR) paras 9.12 – 9.22).

Agenda Item 5: Assessment of alternatives

4. In terms of solar PV panel design, LCC have questioned why there was no consideration given to the use of vertical bifacial panels. It is noted that the Applicant intends to provide a response to that point (as raised in LCC's RR **[RR-111]**, and followed up in more detail in the LIR, para 7.34), so the Council will await that response at DL1 before commenting further.

5. As well as the first comment regarding agrivoltaics, there are four more headline points on alternatives, which are expanded on in writing in the LIR. The second item raised relates to flood risk and site selection (dealt with under ISH1 agenda item 7) and expanded on in our written submission (reference LIR paras 13.18 – 13.33); thirdly Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) and Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land, highlighting the lack of clarity in the application around the policy requirement to preferentially site such developments on

brownfield, contaminated or industrial land, and, where agricultural land has to be used, to use areas of lower ALC grade; fourthly, the assessment in terms of potential use of smaller parcels of land and the effect of applying a relatively high minimum size threshold, which immediately narrows site options and overrides other factors which may have led to more sustainable and policy compliant options being available (LCC can provide examples within Lincolnshire where smaller parcels have been successfully combined on similar solar schemes: see LIR paras 7.17 – 7.19); and lastly an overarching point that the Council would have expected to see some kind of strategic land use decision framework being employed to show evidence of a robust approach to land use and site selection. This will be raised in written submissions at DL1 through the LIR.

6. A comment was made that the main drivers for the area of search seem to be more related to land availability and landowner willingness rather than proximity to grid connection point or environmental constraints, so we are seeking clarity from the Applicant on initial siting zones, timing of discussions with NGET and NESO and dates and sequencing of decisions (to be raised in writing through the LIR, reference paragraphs 7.10 – 7.30).

Agenda Item 6: Interrelationships with other projects

7. There are a number of additional points LCC wish to raise on cumulative effects. This is relevant in terms of construction, and whether those construction periods are consecutive or concurrent, as discussed earlier in the ISH, but also in relation to other points.

8. Firstly, on landscape and the clustering of infrastructure around Weston Marsh and the impact on landscape character. Secondly on heritage and concerns over effects on historic landscape character from combined solar and grid infrastructure. Thirdly, on ecology, and loss of arable land and cumulative impact on ground nesting bird populations. Fourthly, in relation to waste and the estimated 16 million panels that would require disposal or recycling if all solar NSIP and TCPA schemes in Lincolnshire are consented, presenting a problem in terms of currently available facilities. Fifthly, relating to cumulative socio-economic impacts, for example, pressure on temporary worker accommodation and the impact on cumulative industrialisation on the visitor economy (worth £2.9 billion to Lincolnshire County).

9. Also, two further cumulative issues, firstly, on BMV, where the Council's position is that the County has already met its relative contributory proportion of solar development (e.g. most recently accounting for around 29% of all new solar development granted between Q3 2025 and Q1 2026, despite only having 5% of agricultural land). Also, the cumulative issue in respect of traffic issues, specifically concerns over the screening out of National Grid's Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire (WMEL) project from the assessment, and the effects of both developments on the A16 and A151, which the Council considers unacceptable, given the overlapping nature of the schemes (reference LIR 11.27 – 111.28).

Agenda Item 7: Flood risk, water quality and resources

10. From a Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) point of view, LCC has no additional comments to make further to those set out in the Council's RR **[RR-111]** and in our forthcoming written submissions (reference LIR 13.40).

11. However, from a planning perspective, there are a number of policy concerns regarding the sequential and exceptions test and whether those have been undertaken in a robust manner. Specifically, guidance states that for infrastructure of regional and national importance the area of search may extend beyond the LPA boundary, for e.g. consideration as to whether large scale development can be split across a number of alternative sites at lower risk of flooding (as raised briefly under Agenda Item 5: Assessment of alternatives).

12. The Council also questions the four reasons given by the Applicant for discounting areas of search within flood zones 1 and 2 to the south and southeast of the grid connection point (addressed in DL1 written submissions, LIR 13.24 – 13.32). LCC raised a brief comment on the six solar stations within Flood Zone 3b in Gotts catchment, a point which had already been discussed in the ISH in relation to sequential test. The Council also raised a comment on the exceptions test and reference to recovery of agricultural land and continued livestock grazing as a benefit. If that is to be relied on as a benefit as part of the exceptions test, the Council would want to see more clarification on the likelihood of it occurring with clear evidence (cross-references to other discussions on this matter during the ISH raised by the ExA). LCC will expand on this in DL1 written submissions (reference LIR 13.37 & 13.38).

Agenda Item 8: Habitats Regulations Assessment and Biodiversity

13. No comments on this agenda item raised by LCC.

Agenda Item 9: Socio-Economics

14. First point raised relates to generation of skills, supply chain and employment and whether the proposed plan covering this can be relied upon as a benefit. The Council's position is that it needs to be deliverable and therefore there needs to be a mechanism through which the objectives can be achieved. There is precedent in other NSIPs whereby an annual funding contribution is made for the lifetime of the development to ensure the objectives of the plan are achieved.

15. Also making comments on the 60 minute travel boundary and that we would question the 50 miles figure used, which we appreciate is a standard, but is not applicable to Lincolnshire. Getting 50 miles in an hour within Lincolnshire is impossible. This therefore reduces the number of potential local employees available and justifies the need for upskilling and recruitment. We would encourage the Applicant to continue to engage in dialogue with some of the local skills providers, e.g. Lincoln college, Boston College, LCC Employment and Skills team in particular, to assist in moving forward with the community fund

16. On the permissive path, the Council welcomes the proposal to create this as an enhancement to the existing PROW network and we agree with the principle of improving connectivity and public access. However, we would highlight that permissive paths do not carry the same protections as a public right of way and only exist at the discretion of the landowner, remaining temporary in character for the duration of the proposed development. LCC would seek further clarity as to why permanence to this permissive path cannot be achieved through dedication so that it can be used in perpetuity. The Council's initial view is that this could provide a permanent betterment.

17. The Council also wish to raise a further socio-economic matter insofar as the ES fails to assess the economic contribution of the agricultural land that would be lost. LCC's own consultants estimate that potential annual output loss from 1,064 hectares is between £1.43 million and £1.9 million, so over a 40 year development period that is a significant figure. This is to be expanded upon within written submissions at DL1 (reference LIR 15.32 – 15.38).

Agenda Item 10: Aviation Safety

18. No comments on this agenda item raised by LCC.

[22 September 2026]