Summary document – South Holland DC LIR

Project Overview

- The Meridian Solar project is a proposed Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project featuring a solar photovoltaic and battery energy storage system facility with a capacity of up to 750MW.
- The development spans approximately 1,100 hectares across four land parcels between the River Welland and Sutton St. Edmund.
- It includes a 12 to 13 kilometre 400kV overhead line connection utilising steel pylons to connect to the planned Weston Marsh substation.
- The project has an estimated construction period of two to three years and a proposed 40-year operational lifespan before decommissioning.

Impact Assessment and Local Plan Compliance

South Holland District Council have submitted the Local Impact Report to identify the project's local impacts and evaluate its compliance with the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan 2011-2036.

- **Positive Impacts:** The project will generate up to 750MW of renewable energy to support low-carbon transition goals and create short-term socio-economic activity during the construction phase.
- **Neutral Impacts:** Ecological and biodiversity impacts are considered neutral, provided that mitigation and agreements with Natural England and the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust are approved.
- **Negative Impacts:** Severe conflicts with local planning policies due to widespread adverse effects on agriculture, the landscape, local socio-economics, air quality, noise, and traffic.

Key Areas of Concern

- **Agriculture and Soils:** The development impacts highly sensitive land, with 74% categorised as Grade 1 and 2 Best and Most Versatile agricultural land. The Council rejects the applicant's claim that this 40-year impact is temporary, arguing it will severely disrupt food production and the local agricultural supply chain.
- **Landscape and Visual Impact:** The introduction of extensive energy infrastructure and a 400kV overhead grid connection will cause unacceptable, long-term visual harm to the open, flat Fenland landscape. The Council noted the omission of a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment and criticised the applicant's failure to sufficiently explore partial undergrounding alternatives. Cumulative industrialisation with other nearby projects is also a major concern.
- **Socio-Economic Impacts:** The scheme is projected to create only five net local jobs over 40 years, which the Council states fails to offset the agricultural disruption. Furthermore, a proposed £500,000 annual community fund lacks formal guarantees within the Development Consent Order.
- **Traffic, Noise, and Health:** Construction traffic on unsuitable rural roads raises significant concerns regarding weight limits and vibration harm to nearby houses, and the application lacks a detailed construction management plan. The Council also highlights risks from sustained construction dust, omitted fire hazard assessments for the battery systems, and overnight operational noise from the infrastructure.