date: 22 September 2026

your reference: [redacted]

our reference: n/a

ask for: Sam Dewar

email: [redacted]

Floor 6

St Magnus House

3 Lower Thames Street

London

EC3R 6HD

Council Offices
Priory Road
Spalding
Lincolnshire PE11 2XE

[redacted]

Sent via online portal and by email to: meridiansolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Local Impact Report: Meridian Solar Project

Interested Party Reference: [redacted]

Submitted by: South Holland District Council 22nd September 2026

Application: Development Consent Order (DCO) by Meridian Solar Farm Limited for the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of a solar photovoltaic (PV) and battery energy storage system (BESS) facility (capacity up to 750MW) and 400kV connection infrastructure.

1. Introduction

This Local Impact Report (LIR) is submitted on behalf of South Holland District Council in accordance with Section 60(3) of the Planning Act 2008 (as amended) and the Planning Inspectorate's LIR guidance.

This report identifies the specific positive, neutral, and negative local impacts of the proposed Meridian Solar project on the South Holland district. Based on existing local knowledge and evidence, the report evaluates the scheme's compliance with local planning policy and provides commentary on the adequacy of the submitted Environmental Statement (ES) and proposed mitigation. It does not perform a balancing exercise, as weighing positive impacts against negative ones is the statutory responsibility of the Examining Authority (ExA).

This LIR's primary purpose is to identify the policies in Local Plans as far as they are relevant to the proposed development and the extent to which the development accords with these policies. It does this under topic-based headings (following the form of the overarching National Policy Statement (NPS) for Energy (EN-1)) reflecting the likely nature of impacts. The key issues for the local authorities and the local communities are then identified, followed by commentary on the extent the applicant has addresses these issues.

2. Scheme Description & Local Context

The Meridian Solar project is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under Sections 14(1)(a) and 15(2) of the Planning Act 2008. The key elements impacting South Holland include:

- **Solar Development Areas:** Ground-mounted solar PV arrays across four land parcels (Areas A, B, C, and D) spanning approximately 1,100 hectares between the River Welland and Sutton St. Edmund.
- **Associated Infrastructure:** Co-located battery energy storage systems (BESS) and on-site substations.
- **Grid Connection Route:** An approximate 12 to 13 km 400kV overhead line connection utilizing steel pylons, connecting into National Grid's planned Weston Marsh substation located east of Spalding.
- **Construction Phase:** It is estimated the construction will take between 2 and 3 years.
- **Operational Phase:** A proposed 40-year operational lifespan before decommissioning.

3. Statutory Development Plan Policies

The relevant local statutory development plan is the **South East Lincolnshire Local Plan 2011–2036 (SELLP)**, jointly adopted by South Holland District Council and Boston Borough Council in March 2019. The primary policies used to evaluate local impacts include:

- **Policy 2 (Development Management):** General sustainable development criteria.
- **Policy 3 (Design of New Development):** High-quality design and amenity protection.
- **Policy 4 (Approach to Flood Risk):** Sequential test requirements and surface water management.

- **Policy 28 (The Natural Environment):** Protection of natural assets and biodiversity net gain.
- **Policy 29 (The Historic Environment):** Conservation of the historic environment and archaeology.
- **Policy 30 (Pollution):** Mitigation against adverse impacts from air quality, noise, vibration, light, and water quality.
- **Policy 31 (Climate Change and Renewable & Low Carbon Energy):** Support for renewable energy balanced against environmental and landscape impacts.
- **Policy 32 (Community, Health and Wellbeing):** Protection of public health and inclusive communities.
- **Policy 33 (Delivering a More Sustainable Transport Network):** Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety.

4. Impact Assessment

The Local Impact Report guidance indicates this report should provide a statement of positive, neutral and negative local impacts but should not contain a balancing exercise, as that is for the Examining Authority to determine. The existing statutory consultation responses should be read in conjunction with this LIR as well as the SOCG once agreed.

In alignment with LIR statutory guidance, the expected local impacts on South Holland are categorised as follows:

Potential Positive Impacts

- Generation of up to 750MW of renewable energy contributing to national low-carbon transition goals.
- Short-term construction phase socio-economic activity.

Potential Neutral Impacts

- Ecological and biodiversity impacts, subject to agreements and mitigation approvals from Natural England and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.

Potential Negative Impacts

- **Agriculture:** Long-term loss (40 years) of highly sensitive Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land (74% Grade 1 and 2), severely disrupting South Holland's agricultural supply chain.
- **Landscape & Visual:** Unacceptable and long-term adverse visual effects on the open Fenland landscape, heavily exacerbated by the 400kV overhead pylons.
- **Cumulative Landscape Harm:** Industrialization of the rural character when assessed alongside adjacent NSIPs (e.g., Grimsby to Walpole, Weston Marsh).
- **Socio-Economics:** Creation of only 5 net local jobs over 40 years and inadequate, unratified community benefit proposals that fail to fund requested local infrastructure (e.g., Crowland community facilities).
- **Air Quality & Health:** Sustained construction dust risks to residents and crops, alongside omitted BESS fire hazard assessments.
- **Noise, Vibration & Traffic:** Overnight operational noise from BESS/substations and severe construction traffic impacts on unsuitable rural roads, raising objections from local parishes like Cowbit.

The following sections identify the relevant policies within the development plan, the key issues raised by the proposed development and the extent to the applicant addresses them:

4.1 Agriculture and Soils

Local Plan Policy

The relevant policies within the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan include:

- Policy 2 'Development Management' – requires proposals to demonstrate sustainable development considerations have been met through a number of criteria.
- Policy 28 'The Natural Environment' – Requires the protection, enhancement and management of natural assets, by ensuring all development proposals provide an overall net gain in biodiversity.
- Policy 30 'Pollution' Development proposals will not be permitted where, taking account of any proposed mitigation measures they would lead to unacceptable adverse impacts upon bland quality and condition.

- Policy 31 ‘Climate Change and Renewable and Low Carbon Energy’ - All development proposals will be required to demonstrate that the consequences of current climate change has been addressed, minimised and mitigated.

Commentary

We wish to raise concern over the amount of highly sensitive land affected over the four PV land parcel areas (74%). The extent of land impacted and the loss of mostly high or very highly sensitive land is a concern. It is noted that following decommissioning the Applicant states that the original grading will be returned to, however as noted in the submitted documentation, the operational phase is expected to be 40 years, therefore the claim of a temporary impact is not accepted.

The impact of losing land for food production for at least 40 years is considered significant with agricultural sectors in South Holland impacted significantly, whilst the Applicant has provided a dismissal of food security impacts, this is not accepted by the Council with the impacts to the region likely to be very significant for a generation of farming.

Adequacy of Application

Given climate conditions changing the applicant’s case for soil quality being maintained is not accepted and the lack of space for arable use of the land remains, therefore the impact of 40 years of food production loss has not been correctly acknowledged. Further evidence for location of concrete foundations on Grade 1 and 2 soils is required with justification why other and lesser graded land areas have not been chosen.

4.2 Landscape and Visual Impact

Local Planning Policy

The relevant policies of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan 2011–2036 are Policy 3: Design of New Development and Policy 31: Climate Change and Renewable Energy.

Policy 3 requires development to respond positively to its landscape and townscape surroundings. Policy 31 supports renewable energy development provided that, individually or cumulatively, it would cause no significant harm to visual amenity, landscape character or quality, or the skyscape.

The supporting text to Policy 31 describes the Fens as a large-scale, flat and open landscape characterised by extensive views, level horizons and large skies. These are important components of the local landscape character and sense of place.

Commentary

The Proposed Development would introduce extensive energy infrastructure into this open agricultural landscape, including solar panels, substations and an approximately 13 km long 400 kV overhead grid connection.

The Applicant's LVIA identifies numerous significant adverse landscape and visual effects during construction and operation. Some significant effects would remain at Year 15 after mitigation planting has established.

Within South Holland, the principal impacts would include:

- a reduction in the openness and rural character of the landscape;
- the introduction of additional industrial and utilitarian features;
- increased vertical emphasis and visual clutter from pylons and overhead conductors;
- effects upon open horizons and the characteristic Fenland skyscape; and
- significant views experienced by residents and users of local roads and public rights of way.
- The height and geographical extent of the overhead connection mean that it would be visible across a wide area. The pylons and conductors could not be effectively screened by planting and would remain prominent against the skyline in a number of views.

Adequacy of Application

The Council is concerned that a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment has not been undertaken. Several residential properties are situated close to the Proposed Development, and the Applicant's LVIA identifies significant effects for representative residential receptors, including effects which would remain significant at Year 15.

While a significant visual effect does not necessarily mean that the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold would be crossed, the proximity of properties, scale of development, open landscape and limited screening indicate that a property-specific assessment would have been appropriate.

The information provided does not clearly demonstrate how the outlook, orientation, principal rooms, gardens and existing screening of individual properties were considered. The Council

therefore considers that the conclusion that the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold would not be approached has not been sufficiently justified.

The Council is particularly concerned about the effects of the proposed 400 kV overhead Grid Connection Route.

The Applicant acknowledges that undergrounding would largely avoid the permanent landscape and visual effects associated with pylons and overhead conductors. However, the alternatives assessment principally compares a wholly overhead route with a wholly underground route.

There is limited evidence that a landscape-led hybrid option was assessed, targeting undergrounding at those sections where permanent landscape and visual effects would be greatest. A short underground section near Delgate Bank is proposed to address an engineering constraint, demonstrating that partial undergrounding is technically possible.

The Council considers that the discounting of undergrounding has not been supported by a sufficiently transparent assessment of reasonable hybrid alternatives or of the landscape and visual benefits that partial undergrounding could provide.

Proposed planting would provide some screening of lower-level infrastructure but would not mitigate views of the pylons and conductors. The Applicant acknowledges that significant landscape and visual effects cannot be fully mitigated.

The Proposed Development would also be experienced alongside existing and proposed energy infrastructure. This could result in a substantial concentration of pylons, overhead lines and substations, further industrialising the landscape. The cumulative relationship between these projects should therefore be carefully coordinated and assessed.

The Council recognises the renewable energy benefits of the Proposed Development. However, it would result in extensive and, in some locations, long-term significant adverse landscape and visual effects within South Holland. The Council's principal concerns are the effects of the 400 kV overhead connection, the limited scope for effective mitigation, the absence of a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment, insufficient consideration of partial undergrounding and the potential cumulative effects of other energy infrastructure.

4.3 Noise and Vibration

Local Plan Policy

The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan contains Policy 30, it states that development proposals will not be permitted where, taking account of any proposed mitigation measures, they would lead to unacceptable adverse impacts upon:

1. health and safety of the public;
2. the amenities of the area; or
3. the natural, historic and built environment;

by way of:

- air quality, including fumes and odour;
- noise including vibration;
- light levels;
- land quality and condition; or
- surface and groundwater quality.

Policy 30 states that planning applications must include an assessment of the impact of the proposed development from poor air quality, the impact on air quality from the proposed development and the impact on amenity from existing uses. Proposals will be refused if impact cannot be suitable mitigated or avoided.

Commentary

There is the potential for construction and operational noise and vibration to impact on human health and result in a negative impact.

We appreciate that the noise is technically reversable, but given the schemes 40 year lifespan we do consider this to be permanent in the lifetimes of those receptors who live there, and good acoustic design should be applied to the scheme to reduce this impact to as low as reasonably practicable.

Adequacy of the application

Some major adverse and significant effects are currently predicted during some phases of construction. We would seek to ensure these are minimised though exploring the most appropriate construction methods, and to minimise the duration of those works as far as

reasonably practicable. The Application is required to provide assessment and evidence for the mitigation of these impacts.

4.4 Socio-Economic Impacts

Local Plan Policy

The South East Lincolnshire Local Plan does not have a single policy that considers this issue. However, Policy 31: Climate Change and Renewable and Low Carbon Energy does relate to this issue in part owing to it supporting renewable energy development. As a consequence, it encourages economic activity through the construction of such schemes and with its links to mitigating climate change ameliorates societal impact.

Commentary

The scheme provides a negligible direct employment benefit of only 5 net local jobs over its 40-year lifespan, failing to offset the disruption to the agricultural supply chain.

Previously it was requested that the applicant provided detail on how the development would benefit the local population, including proposed community benefits. The Environmental Statement however provides no assessment with further information stated as within the Planning Statement document. This statement details at paragraph 4.3.17 that approximately £500,000 per year of operation of the scheme is proposed if consent is gained. Without the proper assessment of the community funding and formal agreement within the examination process, there is no guarantee to the Council that sufficient offsets have been provided for.

Adequacy of the application

We will continue to work with the Developer to consider the socio-economic impact of the proposal and we are requesting areas of clarification.

The information provided to date is considered inadequate as we still have concerns over the administration of the fund with the current funding lacking formal guarantees within the DCO.

The agricultural land use loss for the development is not sufficiently assessed, with significant local impacts expected from the loss of large areas of arable land, seriously affecting the agricultural supply chain of South Holland.

From an economic and social perspective, the Council would like to see the development doing as much as it possibly can to maximise the benefits for local people and businesses for

hosting this infrastructure. We are still unsure as to how any potential community development fund would be administrated and indeed how it would be delivered through the planning NSIP process.

4.5 Traffic and Transport

Local Plan Policy

The relevant South East Lincolnshire Local Plan Policies include Policy 2: Development Management considers (criterion 4) and Policy 33: Traffic, Transport and Access.

Policy 2 states that proposals will be permitted provided that sustainable development considerations are met, specifically in relation to (4) access and vehicle generation levels.

Policy 33 states that Local Planning Authorities will work with partners to make the best use of and seek improvements to existing transport infrastructure and to demonstrate compliance with this policy and appropriate transport assessment and travel plan should be submitted as agreed with the Local Highway Authority. All development should contribute to the delivery of necessary transport infrastructure, either directly, where appropriate or indirectly such as through developer contributions.

Commentary

Regarding the traffic and transport impacts we would adopt the position of Lincolnshire County Council Highway Authority.

Proposed access roads for construction vehicles are not considered suitable with road weight limits and proximity to houses with resulting vibration harm a concern.

Adequacy of the application

Lincolnshire County Council act as highways Authority and may comment directly on the proposed development. Having reviewed the information put forward, there appear to be omissions including a detailed construction management plan, the impacts of the construction phase over two to three years and how remediation and reinstatement works will take place following construction, in particular at field access points.

5. Concluding Remarks

South Holland District Council acknowledges that the Meridian Solar project would contribute to national renewable energy targets by generating up to 750MW of low-carbon power. However, the proposed development presents severe conflicts with local planning policies due to the 40-year loss of highly sensitive Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land, which would heavily disrupt the region's agricultural supply chain and food production. Additionally, the 13-kilometre 400kV overhead grid connection would inflict unacceptable visual harm on the open Fenland landscape, a concern exacerbated by the lack of a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment and the applicant's insufficient exploration of underground alternatives. Combined with unresolved issues surrounding construction traffic on unsuitable rural roads, prolonged noise impacts, the creation of only five net local jobs, and a lack of formal guarantees for the proposed community funding, the Council asserts that the application currently fails to adequately assess or mitigate its profound socio-economic and environmental impacts on the district.

……

[redacted]

DPA Planning Ltd on behalf of South Holland District Council