Meridian Solar

Meridian Solar Farm

EN010169

Volume 8

Post-Submission Application Documents

8.17 Statement of Common Ground with Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

APFP Regulation 5(2)(q)

Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009

September 2026

Contents

1. Introduction **3**
1.1. Overview 3
2. Record of Engagement **4**
2.1. Summary of Engagement Undertaken 4
3. Statement of Common Ground **5**
3.1. Ecology and Biodiversity 5
4. Signatures **22**

Tables

Table 2-1: Record of Engagement 4
Table 3-1: Areas of Discussion with Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust 5

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

1.1.1. This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared to support the examination process for the proposed Meridian Solar Farm. A DCO application has been made by Meridian Solar Farm Limited ('the Applicant') to the Secretary of State pursuant to Section 37 of the Planning Act 2008[1] which was accepted for examination by the Secretary of State pursuant to Section 55 of the Planning Act 2008 on 15 April 2026.

1.1.2. SoCGs are an established means in the planning process of allowing all parties to identify and focus on specific issues that may need to be considered during the examination. The purpose and possible content of SoCGs is detailed in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's guidance entitled 'Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the examination stage of an application' (2026)[2], which states:

"*A SoCG is a written statement prepared jointly by the applicant and another interested party or parties but led and submitted by the applicant, setting out the factual matters about the application on which they agree, for example, on data or methodologies concerning the determination of any significant effects, but can just as helpfully record disagreement.*

…

SoCGs are expected to be concise and focused on the key issues, with the scope agreed between the parties from the outset of discussions on the application during the pre-application stage. SoCGs are often revised during the course of the examination as matters are agreed or disagreements clarified between the applicant and interested parties."

1.1.3. This document relates to matters between the Applicant and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust. It has been prepared jointly by the Applicant and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust has reviewed the Applicant's position as set

[1] The Planning Act 2008. Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/29/contents [Accessed 11 August 2026]
[2] MHCLG (2026) Guidance Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the examination stage of an application. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/planning-act-2008-guidance-on-the-examination-stage-of-an-application [Accessed 2 September 2026]

out. It confirms to the Examining Authority where agreement has been reached between the parties, and where agreement has not (yet) been reached. This SoCG does not seek to replicate information that is available elsewhere, either within the DCO application and/or examination documents, referring out where appropriate.

1.1.4. The terminology used within the SoCG to reflect the status between the parties is either:

- "Agreed" to indicate where a matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of the parties.
- "Not Agreed" to indicate a final position where parties cannot agree.
- "Under Discussion" to indicate where matters are subject of on-going discussion with the aim to either resolve or refine the extent of disagreement between the parties.

1.1.5. Where matters would require the involvement of third parties in order to come to an agreement, these dependencies are noted.

2. Record of Engagement

2.1. Summary of Engagement Undertaken

2.1.1. Table 2-1 summarises the key meetings and correspondence between the parties subject to this SoCG.

Table 2-1: Record of Engagement

Date	Form of Engagement	Details
28/07/2026	Online Meeting	Meeting to discuss Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's Relevant Representation [RR-112].

3. Statement of Common Ground

3.1. Ecology and Biodiversity

Table 3-1: Areas of Discussion with Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
1.1	Local Wildlife Sites	Sly's Connection Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and South Holland Main Drain West LWS, are located within the proposed Photovoltaic (PV) area. In line with Policy 28 of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan, development should not have any negative impacts on locally-designated sites, such as LWS's.	There are no watercourse crossings proposed across Sly's Connection LWS or any other direct works within this LWS. However, works are proposed to an existing bridge crossing the South Holland Main Drain West LWS, which may comprise upgrades to the existing bridge or its replacement. These works will be required to provide an access track. Whilst the exact design of the crossing will be determined at the detailed design stage, the design parameters used for assessment are set out in Table 2-1 of **ES Chapter 2: The Scheme** [AS-017]. Measures to minimise impacts on the LWS are set out within the **Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (OCEMP)** (Doc Ref. 7.10 Rev 2), including (but not limited to) specification of stand-offs (typically 10m), where reasonably	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			practicable, fenced buffers, bank protection, sediment/pollution control, dust control, trenchless techniques at sensitive reaches and pre-works checks. With these measures in place, **ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity** (Doc Ref. 6.1 Rev 1) concludes that the residual effect on the Sly's Connection and South Holland Main Drain West LWSs is minor adverse (not significant).	
1.2	Water Vole and Otters	A species of concern for both Sly's Connection LWS and South Holland Main Drain West LWS are water vole, with evidence of burrows and a siting being recorded during 2024 (Sly's Connection LWS) and 2025 surveys (South Holland Main Drain West LWS). Evidence of otter presence has also been recorded during 2023 breeding bird survey and the 2025 water vole and otter survey in and around South Holland Main Drain West LWS. The survey results, together with desk study records, indicates a permanent otter presence along South Holland Main Drain.	Pre-construction surveys for water vole and otter are also to be undertaken as secured through the **OCEMP** (Doc Ref 7.10 Rev 2) and appropriate protected species licences to be applied for from Natural England prior to the works being undertaken to ensure appropriate mitigation. With these measures in place, **ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity** (Doc Ref. 6.1 Rev 1) concludes that the residual effect on water vole and otter is minor adverse (not significant). Natural England have agreed the assessment approach and have raised no further comments in their relevant representation	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
		Where water vole and otter are likely to be present within the LWS, works such as crossing points should be avoided. There are several crossing points that are yet to be surveyed for water voles and otters, as access could not be obtained from landowners. These areas should be surveyed before a development consent order is granted, as well as updated surveys from within 12 months of works commencing.	[RR-112] with regards to the assessment of impacts on water voles and otter. The Applicant notes Natural England's relevant representation [RR-112] response in respect of otters which states that although the River Welland and South Holland Main Drain are identified as part of otter territories, Natural England agrees with the Applicant's assessment that a likely significant effect on this species as a result of impacts to functionally linked land can be ruled out. Further, Natural England state that the Scheme design has ensured there is no direct loss of key functionally linked habitats along these watercourses, and embedded measures, such as those set out in Table 3-5 of the **OCEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.10 Rev 2) for otter and water vole, are likely to avoid any significant disturbance to the species. These include buffering of watercourses, avoidance of night works and pre-construction surveys. As noted above, pre-construction surveys will be undertaken for both water vole and otter to inform current (at that time) licensing requirements prior to construction.	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			Water vole licensing is known to be necessary, the specifics of which (CL 31 Displacement licence) has been agreed with Natural England. The updated species surveys will confirm current (at that time) requirements of the licencing. The Applicant notes Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's request that the locations not previously surveyed for water vole and otter are surveyed prior to the grant of development consent. However, the Applicant does not consider further surveys prior to the grant of development consent to be necessary, as the requirement for protected species licences is already recognised and agreed with Natural England. Furthermore, the purpose of the pre-construction surveys, as mentioned above, is to ensure mitigation during the construction phase is based on the latest species information. Should there have been any changes to Otter or Water Vole distribution within the Order Limits, mitigation measures, where required, will be updated accordingly, ensuring that any presence of protected	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			species is appropriately managed at the time works are carried out.	
1.3	Impacts on Whooper Swans	Whooper swan, a Schedule 1 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and an amber-listed Bird of Conservation Concern, was recorded in nationally significant numbers during the 2023-24 wintering bird surveys. A peak count of 250 individuals was recorded within the Section D PV area in November 2023, representing around 25% of the county wintering population and exceeding the 1% national significance threshold of 200 birds. This suggests the area is important for whooper swans and may function as supporting habitat linked to nearby designated sites, including the Ouse Washes SPA and potentially the Nene Washes. The survey findings indicate that the proposed solar array and overhead lines could adversely affect a substantial whooper swan population through habitat loss and collision risk. Although the Wintering Bird Survey recommends avoiding works in key areas used by whooper swans, further detail is	The following measures have been established within the DCO Application to minimise impacts on whooper swan: • Measures set out within the **OCEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.10 Rev 2), including updates provided at Deadline 1, with regards to minimising disturbance during the construction works such as high-noise works within 1,100m of FLL areas during the wintering and migratory bird season (September to March) and visual screening will be installed between FLL areas and worksites located within 600m to minimise visual disturbance to birds. • Measures set out within the **Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (OLEMP)** (Doc Ref. 7.16 Rev 1) with regards to habitat management areas, species monitoring and adaptive management responsibilities. This specifically applies to the areas between the Order Limits and the	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
		needed within the OCEMP and OLEMP to demonstrate how impacts on this nationally significant population will be avoided or mitigated.	River Welland, where higher numbers of whooper swans were recorded. • Avoiding works in key areas currently used by whooper swans is a key form of embedded mitigation, which has been used to inform the routing of Grid Connection, as set out within **ES Appendix 9-14: Habitats Regulations Assessment** (Doc Ref. 6.3 Rev 1). • Bird flight diverters, including night-visible types, where appropriate, have been incorporated within the Scheme design where potential for collision risk has been identified for whooper swans, and secured via the **Design Parameters** (Doc Ref. 7.4 Rev 2) and the **Outline Operational Environmental Management Plan (OOEMP)** (Doc Ref 7.11 Rev 1). Impacts on whooper swan have been assessed within **ES Appendix 9-14: Habitats Regulations Assessment** (Doc Ref. 6.3 Rev 1) as part of the SPA bird assemblage. With mitigation measures in place, as summarised	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			above, no significant effects are considered likely.	
1.4	Impacts on other wintering birds	The 2023-24 wintering bird survey recorded bird populations of at least county importance, including gadwall, lapwing, pintail, teal, and wigeon, on seasonally flooded land adjacent to the River Welland. It is not clear from the report whether the bird counts of county significance are located within the PV area itself, or on the coastal floodplain grazing marsh just outside of the works boundary. Either way, this area is clearly an important for wetland birds, and functionally linked to the Nene Washes SPA, so care should be taken to protect and enhance this habitat. Therefore, appropriate measures to protect and enhance this habitat should be included within the OLEMP.	Seasonally flooded land, used by wintering birds, falls outside the construction footprint and the Order Limits, but measures to protect and minimise disturbance to wintering birds have been secured through the **OCEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.10 Rev 2). The proposed mitigation measures include scheduling vegetation clearance outside the bird nesting season (March to September) where practicable, or undertaking nesting bird checks immediately prior to works where this is not possible. Additionally, night-time working near flooded fields and drains will be avoided where practicable, and lighting at compounds located near sensitive riparian habitats and wintering bird areas will be minimised. The Applicant has updated **ES Appendix 9-14: Habitats Regulations Assessment Report** (Doc Ref. 6.3 Rev 1) for Deadline 1 to include further clarification of the identification of areas classed as Functionally Linked Land (FLL). In addition, the Applicant has updated the **OCEMP** (Doc	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			Ref. 7.10 Rev 2) to clarify measures specifically relevant to minimise impacts on FLL. These measures are outlined in row 1.3 of this table. Habitat management areas have also been set aside and species monitoring and adaptive management responsibilities secured through the **OLEMP** (Doc Ref 7.16 Rev 1).	
1.5	Bird Flight Diverters	We are pleased to see bird flight diverters included in the plans for the grid connection route. Golden plover, which are a designated feature of The Wash Ramsar site, were observed during the 2023-24 vantage point surveys flying within the 50-75 m collision risk zone. Although some of the areas observed to be utilised by golden plover are planned to have flight diverters, the stretch of the grid connection north of Weston Hills is not planned to use diverters, despite golden plover using this area. We request that the proposed line marker spans are extended to cover this area.	The early Vantage Point surveys (**ES Appendix 9-6: Grid Connection Route Wintering Bird Survey Report 2023 – 2024** (Doc Ref. 6.3 Rev 1)) recorded occasional golden plover to the east of Weston Hills, but these were significantly fewer than those recorded to the west of the Grid Connection Route, south of Weston Hills, where bird diverters are proposed, as shown on **ES Figure 9-6** [APP-104]. Sightings to the east of Weston Hills were further away from the Grid Connection Route, and flights across the route westward would be directly toward Lower Fulney and Spalding, so would not be likely frequent flight routes and birds flying between these	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			two locations would cross the route where the diverters are proposed. The survey evidence does not indicate a likely significant collision risk in areas other than those identified for diverters, and therefore does not support any need to increase the proposed extent. The **OOEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.11 Rev 1) outlines proposed post-installation incident logging.	
1.6	Skylarks	Skylarks are likely breeding throughout the Site. As ground-nesting birds, skylarks depend on open sightlines around their nests to reduce the risk of predation, and there is currently limited evidence of territory establishment within existing solar farms. Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust has raised concerns that the cumulative effect of multiple proposed solar farm developments across Greater Lincolnshire could negatively affect regional skylark populations. While the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust welcomes the proposed Farmland Bird Mitigation Strategy, we would like to see further information on the number of Skylark territories currently impacted by the development and how	As set out within the **OLEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.16 Rev 1), the following detail will be provided within the Farmland Bird Mitigation Strategy post-DCO consent: • Operational stage skylark territory surveys will be completed in years 1, 2 and 5 and would be compared to the existing baseline; • Peak counts of singing skylark totalled 95 across the Site, which is estimated to represent around half that number of territories taking account of repeat observations and unsuccessful territories, which would be approximately 50 territories.	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
		many of these will be offset by the mitigation area.	• The Scheme is providing 151.8ha of arable land with skylark plots and 129ha species-rich grassland, a total of 280.8ha. This is equivalent to around 0.2 territories per hectare, which is the within the range of expected carrying capacity for good quality habitat. With this mitigation in place, effects are unlikely to be significant, even in combination with other schemes.Adaptive management would occur if targets not met.	
1.7	Habitat Surveys	Following the extension of the order limits for the grid connection route, habitat surveys of the new area have only been conducted from the road. We disagree that is sufficient for the purpose of informing the DCO Application , and stress the importance of conducting thorough surveys prior to receiving DCO, in order to inform the measures necessary to avoid and mitigate impacts on the environment. In addition, vantage point bird surveys are yet to be conducted for the extended grid connection route. With this extended area being even	The Applicant maintains that the assessment of that part of the Order Limits which was extended to allow the Grid Connection Route to connect to the Weston Marsh B substation is sufficient for the purposes of informing the DCO Application for the following reasons: • NGET Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) data and bird survey data for the Grimsby to Walpole DCO	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
		closer to The Wash SPA, there is further importance for these surveys to be conducted to determine the impact of the overhead lines on birds.	project[3] have been used to supplement the assessment, in addition to the walkover survey completed for the Scheme. This data was received in GIS format from NGET and it informed the preparation of habitat mapping shown on **ES Figure 9-3** [APP-100]. The data received from NGET covered the entirety of the extended part of the Order Limits, as the Grimsby to Walpole and WMEL projects propose works in the same fields as the Scheme. • As demonstrated by the walkover survey undertaken for the Scheme, this extended area is homogenous with the wider surrounds given its arable nature. • It is also noted that this part of the Order Limits would be subject to the construction of the Weston Marsh B	

[3] NGET (2025) Supplementary Preliminary Environmental Information Report: Section 5 New Weston Marsh Substations A and B. Appendix 4A Bird Survey Data 2022-24. Available at: https://www.nationalgrid.com/document/565626/download [Accessed 15/08/2026]

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			Substation and the overhead line works associated with the Grimsby to Walpole and Weston Marsh to East Leicestershire schemes, prior to the construction of the Scheme. As such, within the future baseline, these schemes may have already removed or disturbed existing habitats, protected and notable species, where present. However, in order to ensure a worst-case assessment, the assessment assumes a baseline of no disturbance as a result of cumulative schemes, so that all potential effects of the Scheme are considered. As such, the assessment presented within **ES Chapter 9: Ecology and Biodiversity** (Doc Ref. 6.1 Rev 1) adopts a precautionary approach, where no disturbance to existing baseline is assumed. • The **OCEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.10 Rev 2) commits to further pre-construction surveys, with any resultant actions and mitigation to be incorporated within the detailed CEMP.	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
1.8	Biodiversity Net Gain	The Biodiversity Net Gain Report states that *"All habitats are proposed to reach a 'poor' target condition, with the exception of other neutral grassland, which is expected to reach 'moderate' condition."* However, in Appendix 3: Habitat Condition Assessment for Baseline and Post Development Habitats, many habitat parcels are listed as being moderate condition modified grassland post-development. It is not clear what condition is proposed for the area under the solar panels, but it is unrealistic for this shaded area to reach any higher than poor condition. Additionally, the area lost to the support structures of the solar panels should be accounted for within the metric calculations.	The statement of 'moderate' condition in Appendix 3 of the **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report** [APP-274] was an error, and it is confirmed that the metric has assumed 'poor' condition, including grassland under and around the solar panels. This has been corrected within the **BNG Report** (Doc Ref. 7.9 Rev 1) submitted at Deadline 1. For the structure supports, a 5% loss has been applied to account for the loss associated with the pylon footprints. In addition, the **BNG Report** (Doc Ref. 7.9 Rev 1) has been updated to include a separate 5% loss for the solar panel mounting structures. The updates made to the BNG calculations do not impact on the Scheme's commitment to deliver 10% BNG for habitat area units, 400% for hedgerow units and 10% for watercourse units, as secured through Requirement 8 of the **Draft DCO** (Doc Ref. 3.1 Rev 2).	Under Discussion
1.9	Outline Landscape & Ecology Management Plan	The OLEMP lists various strategies for avoiding and mitigating harm to habitats and species during the development, however these are frequently followed by phrases	The Applicant has reviewed the use of the phrase 'where reasonably practicable' within the **OLEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.16 Rev 1). The	Under Discussion

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
		such as *"where reasonably practicable"*. We would like to see stronger commitments to avoidance and mitigation measures in the full LEMP, and a clearer plan of when these methods will be used, and where they are considered not reasonably practicable.	phrase is used 9 times across the document, in the following instances: • Paragraph 1.2.2 - The Scheme has been designed, where reasonably practicable, to avoid or reduce effects on landscape/visual and biodiversity features through siting of the Scheme components, including structures and new planting; • Paragraph 1.3.1 - The overarching objectives of the OLEMP are to: • Integrate the Scheme into its landscape setting and avoid or minimise adverse landscape, biodiversity, heritage, and visual effects, where reasonably practicable; • Paragraph 4.1.3 - The overall objective of the landscape design is to integrate the Scheme into its landscape setting and avoid or minimise adverse landscape and visual effects, where reasonably practicable. Accordingly, the landscape design aims to achieve the following: • To integrate the Scheme into the existing landscape pattern	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			where reasonably practicable by utilising and following existing features, including vegetation, where practicable. • Paragraph 4.2.12 - A minimum offset of 5-10m from existing vegetation boundaries (trees and shrubs) has been incorporated, where reasonably practicable. • Paragraph 4.3.1 - The Scheme has been designed to avoid the temporary or permanent loss of notable habitats (see Section 3.2 above), where reasonably practicable and will be constructed predominantly within arable habitats. • Paragraph 4.3.5 - Commitments embedded within the Scheme design that will contribute to the avoidance of and/ or reduction of potential effects on biodiversity include: • Retention of, and minimising loss of ditches, hedgerows, trees and field edge habitats where reasonably practicable; • Paragraph 5.6.6 - Species would be of local provenance and, where	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			reasonably practicable, the mix would contain species listed in the local BAP; • Receiving soils will be prepared to reduce nutrients where reasonably practicable. This could include spraying with a herbicide to remove existing material and incorporating a substrate to reduce nutrient levels or removing topsoil to expose the sub-soil. In all of the above instances, the use of the term 'where reasonably practicable' is considered appropriate. It is not possible for the Scheme to have no effects at all and in many cases the term relates to areas where flexibility is required for detailed design. Where effects do occur, further measures to minimise and compensate for this are set out within the **OCEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.10 Rev 2) and the **OLEMP** (Doc Ref. 7.16 Rev 1). The outline management plans are intended to provide a framework for the implementation of management and mitigation measures, reflecting the fact that detailed design and construction methodologies would be confirmed post-DCO consent. This flexibility ensures that	

Ref	Matter	Stakeholder Position	Meridian Solar Farm Position	Status
			the measures can be appropriately applied following the completion of pre-construction surveys, detailed design and the confirmation of detailed construction methodologies. Where a firm commitment or a mitigation requirement has been specified within the Environmental Statement, such qualifying phrases have not been used in the outline management plans. However, in other cases, flexibility is required for the tailoring of mitigation to the context of the Site and design requirements of the Scheme, and to ensure expedient design and construction of the Scheme.	

4. Signatures

4.1.1. This SoCG is agreed between the following:

Duly authorised for and on behalf of Meridian Solar Farm, the Applicant	Name Job Title Date Signature
Duly authorised for and on behalf of Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust	Name Job Title Date Signature