



Monday 5th October 2026

Meridian Solar Farm – Deadline 2 Written Representation Following the Open Floor and Issue Specific Hearings

Registration identification number: FBFAD9CBD

I am submitting this representation following the Open Floor Hearing on 8th September 2026 and the Issue Specific Hearing on 9th September 2026.

I feel it is important to reiterate, as I have done in all of my previous submissions, that I am not against renewable energy. I support solar and other renewable energy as part of improving our energy security and reducing carbon emissions.

However, I do not believe this should come at the expense of large areas of our best agricultural land, food security, the local environment, our drainage systems or the communities who will be living alongside these developments.

Having listened to the evidence presented at both hearings, I remain concerned that there are still a number of important questions around this proposal which have not yet been satisfactorily resolved.

Landowner and Land Agent Engagement

At the Open Floor Hearing, concerns were raised about the level of engagement between the Applicant and land agents in relation to the project and the land affected.

The Applicant advised that this would be followed up. However, I remain concerned that, at this stage of the examination, important questions relating to land and the impact of the scheme are still outstanding.

A project of this scale should involve proper and open engagement with those directly affected well in advance of reaching this point in the examination. It is concerning that important questions about the land and the impact of the scheme remain unresolved at this stage.

Grid Connection and Loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

After watching the Issue Specific Hearing, I remain concerned about the uncertainty surrounding the proposed grid connection and what this means for the Applicant's justification for using significant areas of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land.

The Applicant confirmed that there is a Gate 1 offer in place, but this does not reserve capacity or guarantee a connection. The hearing also made clear that the final arrangements remain subject to ongoing discussions and other major infrastructure projects.

Mr Bassford, representing National Grid, stated:

"At this stage, the appropriate point is not to authorise the grid connection, as its destination, its route, its approach are uncertain and it is premature to authorise it."

This raises questions about the deliverability of the proposed development and is particularly relevant to the site-selection process.

The Applicant has indicated that BMV land was unavoidable because of the search area associated with the proposed grid connection. If that connection remains uncertain, I believe it is reasonable to question whether the justification for selecting these sites remains sufficiently established.

The Examining Authority also raised BMV land in the context of paragraph 4.3.15 of National Policy Statement EN-1, which requires impacts on agricultural land to be considered and impacts on BMV land to be minimised.

I do not believe BMV land should simply be accepted as unavoidable because of the way the search area has been defined. This is some of the best agricultural land in the country, producing food and supporting farming businesses, employment and the local economy. I believe its loss or long-term change of use should be given significant weight, particularly given the increasing importance of food security.

There were also questions about whether the land would genuinely be restored following decommissioning. The Applicant's post-submission BMV Land Take document identifies approximately 15 hectares of hardstanding which it considers could not be returned to its previous Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) following deconstruction.

This raises a significant question as to whether this element of the land loss can properly be regarded as temporary, particularly where the Applicant's own documentation identifies that the land may not be capable of being returned to its previous agricultural condition.

I therefore ask the Examining Authority to consider whether the Applicant has demonstrated a sufficiently credible and deliverable grid connection and whether the site-selection case remains justified in light of that uncertainty.

I also ask that the Applicant's use of BMV agricultural land, the consideration of reasonable alternatives and the potential permanent loss of agricultural land are given appropriate weight when considering the overall benefits and impacts of the proposal.

Flood Risk, Drainage and Water Supply

Flood risk was also raised by the Examining Authority as part of the site-selection discussion.

The Environment Agency has raised concerns around flood risk and water resources, including matters relating to Crowland and Cowbit Washes and the South Holland Main Drain. There are also concerns about existing flood flow routes potentially being interrupted.

Given the nature of this area and the importance of our drainage infrastructure, I believe these matters need to be satisfactorily addressed and supported by sufficient evidence before the Examining Authority can be satisfied that the development can be delivered safely without unacceptable effects on the existing drainage and water environment.

The Examining Authority also raised the safety of construction workers in relation to flooding. The Applicant indicated that welfare facilities would be raised above flood levels, although their exact locations remained flexible.

The hearing demonstrated why flexibility has to be carefully considered where facilities need to remain accessible and safe during construction, particularly in an area where flood risk and drainage are significant considerations.

Anglian Water has also raised concerns about the proposed water supply. The Applicant has suggested that water could be tankered to the site, but has acknowledged that mains water may be required.

A water resources assessment was requested because of the lack of detail, while the Applicant indicated that this would not be provided.

A water supply strategy is expected through the examination, and I will await that information. However, I remain concerned that such basic requirements for a development of this scale have not yet been fully established.

Construction and Cumulative Impact on Local Communities

The Applicant confirmed that all four development areas are intended to be constructed concurrently.

This is important because the impact on local communities and infrastructure will therefore be experienced cumulatively, with construction traffic, noise, disturbance, drainage impacts and environmental effects across the different areas potentially being experienced simultaneously.

The Examining Authority itself questioned whether a concurrent construction programme could be disruptive to local communities and whether a phased approach might reduce those impacts.

I believe this needs to be considered alongside the wider cumulative impact of other major developments taking place or being proposed within the area.

Residents do not experience individual planning applications in isolation. The same rural roads, drainage systems, agricultural land, landscape and communities would be utilised and impacted by multiple projects.

The cumulative effects of construction therefore need to be considered realistically, including the potential for construction activity from different developments to overlap.

This is particularly important in South Holland, where communities are already facing, or may face, a significant concentration of solar, battery, grid and other major infrastructure proposals.

The cumulative impact is not simply the combined footprint of individual projects. It is also the combined effect on the rural road network, agricultural land, drainage infrastructure, landscape, wildlife and the communities who will experience these developments over a prolonged period.

Ornithology

Concerns were raised around bird collision risk associated with the increasing amount of overhead infrastructure in the area, particularly around the proposed new substations at Weston Marsh.

During the hearing, the Applicant confirmed that cranes, whooper swans and geese are present in the area. Concerns were also raised about birds colliding with existing electricity infrastructure.

Mr Pennington described finding three swans deceased as a result of striking an electricity line in fog, highlighting the potential risk associated with overhead infrastructure in poor visibility.

With Meridian, National Grid and other proposed developments potentially connecting into the proposed Weston Marsh substations, there is the potential for a significant increase in overhead infrastructure and cabling.

The cumulative impact this could have on birds, and other wildlife therefore needs to be properly considered.

The Applicant referred to utilising line markers as a mitigation measure. However, I remain concerned about how effective these would be in poor visibility on foggy days, particularly where bird collisions with existing infrastructure have already been raised during the hearing.

I therefore ask the Examining Authority to consider not only the proposed pylons and new overhead cabling associated with Meridian Solar in isolation, but also the cumulative bird collision risk arising from Meridian alongside existing and proposed overhead infrastructure in the area.

Employment and Community Benefits

The proposal includes a number of claimed employment and community benefits. I recognise that these may provide some benefit to the local area, but I believe it is important to consider their nature, scale, and how securely they would be delivered.

Employment

The Applicant has stated that around 207 jobs would be created during construction, but only around 11 net full-time equivalent operational jobs have been identified.

I recognise that the project could bring temporary economic benefits through construction employment. However, the hearing also raised the potential loss of existing agricultural employment and associated downstream food-processing employment as productive agricultural land is taken out of use.

I believe these potential employment losses should be properly considered alongside the employment created by the development when assessing its overall economic impact.

I therefore ask the Examining Authority to consider the wider net employment impact of the proposal, including both the employment it creates and any agricultural and downstream employment that could be lost as a result of taking productive agricultural land out of use.

Proposed Permissive Path

The proposed 20-metre-wide permissive path between Queens Bank and Shepeau Stow, connecting existing Public Rights of Way (PROW), could be a positive benefit for the local community.

However, Lincolnshire County Council has requested that it should be made a permanent PROW rather than a permissive path. I support this request.

A permissive path is different from a permanent PROW and, as currently proposed, would only remain for the duration of the scheme, with the landowner being able to withdraw access at any point.

If this is intended to provide a lasting community benefit, I believe it should be made permanent so that local people can continue to use it after the development has been decommissioned.

Battery Energy Storage System

The Applicant has referred to the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) as a community benefit because of its contribution to the wider electricity system.

I recognise the wider benefits of energy storage and the potential role of BESS in supporting the electricity network.

However, I do not believe infrastructure which forms part of the Applicant's own scheme should automatically be presented as a community benefit.

The wider energy system benefits of the BESS should be distinguished from additional benefits provided specifically to the communities affected by the development.

Community Benefit Fund

The proposed £500,000 per annum Community Benefit Fund is another area where I remain concerned.

Whilst the Examining Authority made it clear during the hearing that the Community Benefit Fund (CBF) sits outside the examination and is not a matter for the Secretary of State to determine as part of the DCO, it was questioned why the fund had not been included within the scheme and why it had not been secured through the DCO or a Section 106 agreement.

The Applicant's own Post-Submission Application Document 8.30 – Post ISH1 Note states:

"4.2.1. The Applicant does not propose to secure the community benefit fund within the DCO or via an associated planning agreement."

The Applicant then states:

"4.2.2. Although the CBF is not secured by a planning agreement, the Applicant remains committed to delivering the CBF should the Scheme be granted consent."

I recognise the Applicant's stated commitment to providing the fund and its intention that communities living closest to the Scheme should benefit from it.

However, a commitment is not the same as a formally secured obligation.

By choosing not to secure the fund through the DCO or an associated agreement, there is no formal mechanism within the scheme providing the same certainty that the £500,000 per annum will actually be delivered.

If the Applicant intends to provide this funding if consent is granted, I do not understand why there should be an issue with formally securing that commitment. Doing so would provide greater clarity and certainty for the communities who would be affected by the development.

I therefore ask the Examining Authority to consider carefully what weight should be given to the proposed Community Benefit Fund when it is not formally secured, and whether the Applicant's stated commitment should be secured through an appropriate mechanism if the fund is to be relied upon as a benefit of the Scheme.

Conclusion

Having listened to both the Open Floor Hearing and the Issue Specific Hearing, I remain concerned that there are still too many important concerns and questions around this proposal which have not been satisfactorily resolved.

The uncertainty around the grid connection is particularly significant. National Grid has expressed concerns about the proposed arrangements. The final destination and route remain uncertain, and the Applicant's current Gate 1 position does not provide certainty that the proposed connection will ultimately be delivered as currently envisaged.

Alongside this, there is the loss of significant areas of BMV agricultural land, including approximately 15 hectares of hardstanding which the Applicant's own documentation identifies as potentially incapable of being returned to its previous agricultural classification.

There are also outstanding concerns around flood risk, drainage, water supply, concurrent construction impacts and bird collision risk.

The claimed community benefits also need to be considered carefully.

A permissive path is different from a permanent Public Right of Way. Infrastructure which forms part of the Applicant's own scheme should not automatically be treated as a community benefit. And an unsecured £500,000 annual fund is not the same as a formally secured benefit.

I recognise that the Applicant has provided evidence and responses during the examination and that further information is still being provided.

However, I do not believe that the existence of further information to come should mean that fundamental matters are given less weight at this stage.

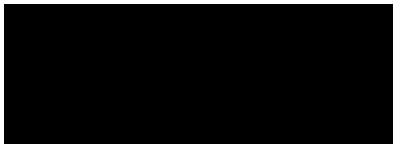
I am not against renewable energy. There is a need for renewable energy and improved energy security. But we also need to protect our food security, our agricultural land, our drainage systems, our wildlife and our rural communities.

In my view, significant and potentially long-term impacts should not be accepted on the basis that fundamental matters may be resolved at some point in the future.

The evidence heard at the Open Floor and Issue Specific Hearings has highlighted a number of significant unresolved matters which require careful consideration before the examination reaches its conclusion.

I therefore remain strongly concerned about the Meridian Solar Farm proposal and ask the Examining Authority to give significant weight to the unresolved issues identified above when considering the proposal and ultimately making its recommendation to the Secretary of State.

Yours faithfully,



District Councillor for 'The Saints Ward' – Gedney Hill, Sutton St. James, Sutton St. Edmund & Throckenholt
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