The Rt Hon Sir John Hayes CBE MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Planning Inspectorate
c/o QUADIENT
69 Buckingham Avenue
Slough
SL1 4PN
MeridianSolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

i October 2026

Dear Sir or Madam,

Meridian Solar Development (Downing Renewable Developments)
Reference Number: EN010169

I am writing further to the Planning Inspectorate hearings for the 'Meridian' solar development, specifically the Preliminary Meeting on September 8, and the Issue Specific Hearing on September 9.

Firstly, I was very grateful to be given the opportunity to speak in the hearings, and to do so via video call, given the clash with Parliamentary business. In those hearings a number of highly concerning matters were raised by the applicant, Downing Renewable Development, for which I am seeking clarification on behalf of my constituents in South Holland and the Deepings.

It was clear from the hearings that the developer has not grasped the required level of detail on a number of aspects, with so many fundamental questions posed by me, Lincolnshire County Council, Anglia Water, the Environment Agency and the Meridian Action Group left unanswered - not to mention the many questions posed by the planning officers!

Of particular concern was the lack of clarity on site selection. As I have set out, choosing to locate a giant solar development - in reality, four separate large solar developments - on 1,100 hectares (2,700 acres) of grade 1 and 2 farmland, the very best agricultural land, is wrong given how much vital land is taken out of food production. From the hearings it was unclear why alternate sites not on prime farmland were not considered or chosen.

Presumably the applicant maintains site selection relates to the connection point, but given National Grid's representative made clear

Constituency Office: 24-25 Westlode Street, Spalding, Lincolnshire, PE1 1 2AF
Email: [redacted]

there is no grid connection for the planned solar development, any such arguments have no valid basis, and must be addressed fully. Indeed, National Grid referred to the application, for these reasons, as 'speculative' and 'presumptive'.

At the hearing, the developer claimed the site was selected on the basis of topography, flood risk and land use - yet on all three measures, it is plainly unsuitable. Such a large industrial development would harm the otherwise rural countryside, would be located on flood risk zone 3 land, and, as set out above, is built entirely on Best and Most Versatile Farmland.

The developer did not clarify which other sites within 15 km of Weston Marsh they considered but given the availability of brownfield land and lower grade farmland within that distance, not to mention land that is not in a flood risk zone 3 category, it is essential that they provide clarity on the alternatives. Indeed, as Lincolnshire County Council raised in the hearings, failure to provide justification on the site selection will lead many to conclude that land parcels were chosen solely on the basis of their size, and thus revenue for Downing.

Bizarrely, in the hearings it was mentioned that the panels will be installed on a 'long term temporary' basis. My understanding is that the development consent order is for 40 years; does the applicant consider 40 years to meet the definition of 'temporary', or do they intend to replace the millions panels in the intervening period? If so, will the details for this enormous disruption in years to come be set out in writing, as I was unable to locate them in the documentation to date.

There was much confusion from the applicant about whether the land would be returned to its original farming use following the 40 year period, and indeed how his would be achieved. Given the loss of so much grade 1 and 2 farmland, it is surely incumbent on the developer to set out how they can guarantee returning the soil in its original condition. I await the applicant's detailed response to this, in particular.

The cluttering of energy infrastructure in the Weston Marsh area has long been a particular concern, and, as Lincolnshire County Council highlighted in the hearings, the applicant must do more to set out how they are able to avoid harming the historical landscape of the Fens, given its natural vistas will be fundamentally altered if this proposal is taken forward. As the Council also raised, Lincolnshire has already

vastly exceeded its quota of solar and other energy infrastructure projects in the past few years.

The issue of water was raised prominently in the hearings. It was troubling to hear such insufficient detail in response to the Environment Agency and Anglia Water's concerns about proposed water usage, and in particular the apparent decision not to provide a water resource assessment despite one being requested. Clearly, the construction and maintenance of such a large site will pose a challenge to water supply locally, and, given the summer of drought we have just experienced, these are particular pressing matters which require thorough responses.

As for the building of the sites, pre-construction surveys were mentioned in relation to the increased heavy traffic on the narrow, single track roads, but no information was provided about when these would take place, whether local residents would be able to participate, and what accommodation would be made for construction taking place in the harvest season when there will be a larger than usual volume of tractors and farm machinery on the same roads.

The fact that the developer intends to build on all four sites simultaneously, with scant regard for the impact of months of heavy-duty construction traffic on the nearby single track roads, raises obvious safety risks, not to mention disruption to people living nearby. It suggests a thorough lack of understanding about the area in which they intend to build. As planning officers raised in the hearing, it would seem far more logical to build on sites sequentially, given that concurrent construction approach is very disruptive to local communities.

It was mentioned that the applicant plans to enhance to habitat in the vicinity of the solar panels, but no detail was given; they must set out what enhancements will look like, and exactly when they would be installed. Furthermore, it was clear the developer had not done the required engagement with the Environment Agency about the risks to eels, fish and other aquatic habitats, nor with Natural England regarding the noise impact and risk to birds from the accompanying pylons (potentially 216 feet tall!). Uncompleted surveys about the impact on fish or aquatic habitats raise serious questions about the harm this development would do to local rivers. There was also a notable lack of information how the proposal will impact on ground nesting birds, as raised several times.

The absence of clarity on accompanying pylons was troubling ; some were described at 14 foot high, others were described as 66m high (216 ft). This would make them much taller than average pylons, and on the flat Fenland landscape would be an extraordinary eyesore, effecting vistas unchanged for centuries. The impact would be wide ranging, from risking harm to birds migrating from the Wash (the nearby SSSI) to depressing local tourist numbers. For the applicant to describe the overhead lines as 'not significant' in this context, was staggering. As was discussed in the hearing, it was also unclear where planned pylons had been moved to reduce the impact on agriculture, something the applicant will want to set out clearly on a map.

Likewise, the section on substations left more questions than answers, specifically on why the two compounds were shown on separate plans rather than on one, so that people can assess how close they will be to one another, and also why no work has been undertaken to build the associated cables underground.

Another unanswered question arising from the hearings is how the panels (numbering millions) will be safely disposed of at the end of their life cycle.

The economic case for the proposal was briefly discussed in the hearings, but my constituents are no wiser about whether any jobs will be available to local people in South Holland as a result of this proposal. Confusingly, the applicant suggested that 83 local jobs will be created, though the definition of 'local' included people living 60 minutes' drive away. This assumed that people can drive 50 miles in 60 minutes - something which is barely possible in the South Lincolnshire Fens.

Like others in the hearing, I was surprised to learn that no agricultural jobs would be harmed as a result of 2,700 acres of prime farmland being taken out of food production, and it would be appropriate for the applicant to provide evidence of this claim.

Tellingly, the applicant's claim that the proposal will deliver £22.3 million of economic benefit was not explained in any detail. I look forward to the applicant providing to South Holland District Council, as requested, a skills supply chain plan which will set out how local skills and jobs will be utilised as part of the plans. The fact that there appears to be no present tie up with local colleges or apprenticeship programmes is disappointing, and a missed opportunity.

Finally, and most alarmingly of all, was that the common practise of setting out a clear community benefit fund was absent - meaning residents would suffer so much disruption with no gain whatsoever. Having dealt with many planning proposals over years as the local MP, I know well that the established process of Section 106 agreements, though imperfect, can provide genuine community benefits. If the applicant feels that the presence of their giant solar panels alone benefits the community in unspecified ways, and that no other kind of benefit to local people affected is necessary, they should say so up front.

More broadly, I remain of the view that this application is inappropriate and unsuitable for South Holland and given the nature of the imprecise and inadequate information supplied by the applicant to date on what was described as a 'speculative' application, I hope this proposal will be rejected.

I am happy for this submission to be entered formally as part of the process, and I would be happy to speak to any of these points, or others I have raised previously, in future hearings.

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

South Holland and The Deepings