



## Meeting note

<b>Project name</b>	Meridian Solar Farm
<b>File reference</b>	EN010169
<b>Status</b>	Final
<b>Author</b>	The Planning Inspectorate
<b>Date</b>	27 September 2023
<b>Meeting with</b>	Meridian Solar Farm Ltd.
<b>Venue</b>	Microsoft Teams
<b>Meeting objectives</b>	Meridian Solar Farm Inception Meeting
<b>Circulation</b>	All attendees

### Summary of key points discussed, and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted.

### Introductions

Introductions were given by both the Inspectorate's team and the Applicant (Meridian Solar Farm Ltd.) This included a summary of the background of Downing LLP as a parent company.

### Proposed Development

#### Project Overview

The Applicant outlined a proposal for a new solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating facility co-located with battery storage to be located south of Spalding within South Holland District Council. The site boundaries will be enclosed between the River Welland and Sutton St. Edmund.

The facility aims to provide a capacity for up to 750MW of electricity to export to the national network.

Options for the proposed point of connection (PoC) are currently being explored with National Grid, to integrate with National Grid's wider reinforcement project. The Applicant

stated that National Grid have been very supportive towards the project since inception and have helped to identify possible PoCs.

The proposed connection will form part of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application.

A generation license application is being prepared; where the Applicant has proposed a target submission date of October 2023. Land agreement and EIA activity are currently ongoing.

### **Land Agreements**

The proposed development will cover 900 hectares under the interest of five key landowners. The Applicant explained that discussion and agreement with these landowners are currently ongoing.

As the PoC to the National Grid requires a connection route, the Applicant aims to secure options for easement for any required route.

Areas of royal domain have been identified between the project and any PoC which the Applicant aims to mitigate and avoid wherever possible.

The Applicant explained that it is working to secure voluntary access to commence survey work, to build on the 12 months of previous survey work around the site.

### **Environmental Considerations**

The Applicant discussed that environmental impacts have been avoided where possible. In the coming months, the Applicant will engage with local (County) archaeologists to discuss the approach to assessment of the potential effects on buried heritage assets further.

Based on desk assessment information, the Applicant has identified two Scheduled Monuments within the proposed DCO boundary. Several listed buildings have also been identified.

There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) located near the site. The Nene Washes and The Wash International Designations are also located approximately 15km to the north of the site.

The location of the Proposed Development within identified Flood Zones may have an impact on panel design.

The Applicant considered that a full landscape and visual impact assessment will be required due to the topography of the local environment.

In addition, initial desk based work indicates parts of the site are designated as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. The Applicant has had sight of a 1960's survey carried out by the Ministry for Agriculture Fisheries & Food (MAFF). This information will also be taken into consideration for assessment and design work. The Applicant will also be undertaking its own up to date survey work.

The Applicant has planned a wintering birds survey for Winter 2023/24. Other surveys will be taking place in Spring for great crested newt HSI (Habitat Suitability Index) and eDNA for presence/absence, as well as otter and water vole. Additional assessments are being

planned to include baseline noise, traffic, Flood Risk, Water Framework Directive screening, contaminated land, air quality, and glint and glare. The Applicant confirmed that an EIA scoping request and accompanying Report is still being prepared.

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

The Applicant highlighted primary stakeholders such as South Holland District Council (SHDC), Host District Ward Members, Members of Parliament, Host Parish Councils, Host County Electoral Division Members and Lincolnshire County Council. The Applicant has been engaging with South Holland District Council to date.

## **Project Programme**

The Applicant aims to begin Non-Statutory Consultation Workshops in May 2024, and to undertake Statutory Consultation from October 2024.

The applicant noted an expected DCO submission date in September 2025.

## **Next Steps**

The Applicant and the Inspectorate discussed the next steps for the pre-application stage. The Applicant will supply the Inspectorate with the necessary information to create a page on the NI website and set up a project email address and provide key contact details for ongoing liaison.

The Applicant confirmed they would provide the Inspectorate with the proposed DCO boundary, in advance of their Scoping Report Submission, including the relevant information required by the Inspectorate in advance of this submission and a list of relevant Local Authority Contacts.

## **AOB**

The Applicant and the Inspectorate discussed the prospect of submitting draft application documents for feedback and the likely timescales associated with this. It was noted that the Applicant may benefit in having a further meeting with the Inspectorate ahead of their planned statutory consultation to allow the Inspectorate to provide any comment on consultation material and/or statutory consultation process.

