

Meridian Solar Farm – EN010169

Meridian Solar Farm Ltd

Section 51 Advice Log

Version: 05 December 2024

There is a statutory duty under [section 51 \(s51\) of the Planning Act 2008](#) for the Planning Inspectorate to record the advice that it gives in relation to an application or potential application, and to make this publicly available.

This document comprises a record of the advice that has been provided by the Inspectorate to the applicant (Meridian Solar Farm Ltd) and their consultants during the pre-application stage. It will be updated by the Inspectorate after every interaction with the applicant during which s51 has been provided. The applicant will always be given the opportunity to comment on the Inspectorate's draft record of advice before it is published.

The applicant will use this Advice Log as the basis for demonstrating regard to section 51 advice within the application.

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Date of meeting	Meeting overview
19 November 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grid connection • Non-statutory consultation summary • Stakeholder engagement update • Statutory consultation programme • PEIR update • Invoicing and finance • Dates of forthcoming meetings • Programme document feedback (post meeting note)

Project name -s51 Advice Library

Topic

Meeting date: 19 November 2024

Grid Connection

The Inspectorate stressed the importance of providing detailed evidence to justify the final design of the overall project, particularly around the grid connection to the Weston Marsh substation. The applicant explained that there is a current presumption for an overhead line (assuming a 400kV steel lattice), partly driven by considerations relating to planning policy, soil conditions and the potential for the presence of buried archaeology in the area. The considerations around design and a single grid connection corridor will form part of the statutory consultation. The final proposed order limits and grid connection design options will be applied for within the Development Consent Order.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Inspectorate advised on the benefits of carrying out a wide scope of engagement with the community around the proposed application. It was recommended that the applicant expand on its level of engagement with the local schools and communities. The applicant agreed to consider this approach. The applicant did advise that an update newsletter following the non-statutory consultation held earlier this year was sent to Parish Councils and other stakeholders. Parish Council meetings have been attended on request to discuss the update.

Statutory Consultation Programme

The Applicant was advised to regularly update the Inspectorate at key milestones on how the design aspects of the project are evolving and to provide as much detail on what the applicant will be consulting on during the statutory consultation period, as well as any agreements the applicant has with relevant statutory consultees. In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the Applicant said that there had been discussions with nearby private airfields in relation to the project which were being considered further. The applicant also said that they were aware of other projects in the area that are due to undertake consultation in a similar timeframe and if there is any overlap, they will seek to differentiate their consultation accordingly. Additionally, the applicant reported that it is due to progress Statements of Common Ground with relevant consultees soon.

PEIR Update

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to include all information gathered from its assessments within the PEIR including how the project evolves over the coming months. The Inspectorate confirmed that it will not look at any draft PEIR documents. In answer to questions from the Inspectorate, the Applicant said highway surveys were ongoing together with discussions with Lincolnshire Council

	<p>on the methodology to be used. Discussions with the Environment Agency on the Flood Risk Assessment and Water Framework Directive assessment are being planned. Discussions with Natural England regarding ornithology surveys had been held.</p>
Invoicing and Finance	<p>The Planning Inspectorate clarified the terms of its pre-application service, as its published Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects: 2024 Pre-application Prospectus (see paragraph 14) explains the daily rate for its pre-application fees and how costs are calculated for its different service tiers and invoicing cycle, while the government's guidance on the Planning Act 2008: Infrastructure Planning (Fees) Regulations 2010 - cost recovery by the Planning Inspectorate and public authorities explains how applicants will be charged by the Planning Inspectorate (see paragraph 15)</p>
Dates of forthcoming meetings	<p>The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to provide an updated programme document with more specific timescales for its remaining pre-application activities and milestones and the importance of providing detailed agendas in advance to denote any specific topics requiring advice from the Inspectorate. The Applicant stated that it will provide an updated Programme Plan with more refined meeting dates. The next meeting is expected to take place mid to late January 2025.</p>
Draft Documents	<p>The Inspectorate expressed the importance of having advanced notice of what draft documents the Applicant requires to be reviewed to determine what resources need to be allocated. The Inspectorate advised that this needs to be at least three months before the DCO submission date.</p>
Further Information	<p>The Inspectorate requested further information on limits of deviation, potential flood mitigation and if the applicant is seeking an upper limit on the number of panels. The applicant agreed to provide an update on this at the next meeting along with what will be consulted on in the Statutory Consultation.</p>
Programme Document feedback (post-meeting note)	<p>The Applicant supplied the Inspectorate with its initial Programme Document in line with the Expression of Interest process, after the publication of the 2024 Pre-application Prospectus. Having reviewed the document, the Inspectorate considers overall that it covers the expected content as set out in the government's pre-application guidance at paragraph 10, namely setting out realistic timescales and related information on its pre-application activities. However, in updating its Programme Document, the Applicant should:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out the main issues / topics identified arising from the proposed application, even if this includes initial information at this stage • include whether the local authorities, statutory consultees and others are content with the proposed programme • include dates in its programme timetable for the Adequacy of Consultation Milestone and any Evidence Plan meetings (it is stated that multiparty meetings may be requested and if so, these should also be included as soon as practicable) • Include an Issues Tracker and if this will be shared with local authorities, statutory consultees and others and indicate whether these parties agree with the status of the issues raised and any possible mitigation • identify and include the risks to achievement of the pre-application stage and the process by which these are managed • include any progress with any Planning Performance Agreements with relevant Local Authorities or statutory undertakers. <p>It would also be helpful if the Programme Document explained how the design approach will be managed and communicated during pre-application as well as any relevant information about the development of the draft DCO and Explanatory Memorandum. The applicant will need to publish its Programme Document on its website as soon as practicable.</p>
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