



Meridian Solar

Non-statutory consultation summary

October 2024

Introduction

Welcome to our non-statutory consultation summary for Meridian Solar. Through this newsletter, we provide an overview of what engagement has happened so far, summarise the feedback collected, and explain what will happen with the responses we received.

Meridian Solar is a proposed solar farm south of Spalding and Holbeach which would generate around 750 Megawatts (MW) of electricity. The proposal also includes associated infrastructure such as co-located battery storage, and an approximate 12km Grid Connection to National Grid's planned Weston Marsh substation east of Spalding.

Between 30th May and 11th July 2024, we held our first public consultation on Meridian Solar. This was to introduce the project, explain the benefits and need for the proposed solar farm and, most importantly, gather early feedback from the local community.

Ahead of the first consultation, we also held a design workshop with people identified as having an interest in the project from a community, political or environmental perspective. This helped to inform the project design, which we are continuing to develop.

Meridian Solar is a company set up and owned by Downing Renewable Developments. The development will be guided by 3 design principles:



Sustainability

Support the UK's transition to Net Zero by 2050 and provide flexibility to take advantage of new sustainable and more efficient technologies as they emerge.



People

Engage meaningfully with communities and stakeholders, seeking feedback on the proposals, community benefit packages and how best to protect and enhance their environment and the local area.



Environment

Protect, enhance and sensitively consider the landscape, local heritage, culture and ecological value, with supportive use of environmental studies and the full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to evolve the design.

Project timeline



Q1 2024

Project launch



Q2 – Q3 2024

Design workshops and non-statutory consultation



Q3 – Q4 2024

Review of all feedback and constraints and the updating of design proposals



Q1 2025

Publication of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report and the Statement of Community Consultation to support a Statutory Consultation



Q2 2025

Design refinements and continued environmental and technical surveys



Q3 2025

DCO submission



The consultation process

Meridian Solar is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project.

We will therefore apply for a Development Consent Order under the Planning Act 2008, with the application submitted to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero for consideration.

While the decision sits with the Secretary of State, the view of community members, local authorities, statutory undertakers, other stakeholders and interest groups will be carefully considered. Our non-statutory consultation was the first stage of engagement, which will continue into statutory consultation in 2025.

“ We would like to thank everyone who participated in the non-statutory consultation for our proposed solar farm. Your engagement at the design workshop, public exhibitions, webinar, and through the community relations line has been invaluable in helping us better understand the views, concerns, and ideas from the local community. Our team is currently working through feedback, and where feasible, we will try to incorporate it into the design at statutory consultation. ”

David Vernon – Head of NSIP projects



Non-statutory consultation

Project evolution driven by your feedback

Feedback received during the non-statutory consultation will be carefully considered and is being used to help refine the project design.

We were pleased to meet over 200 people over three public exhibitions and one online webinar in the summer. These events allowed us to present the boundary for the project, explain our proposals, and collect feedback to refine the project design. This includes understanding potential environmental gains and your ideas for community benefits.

In addition to the public exhibitions, we also held a design workshop in early June. This created a platform for active participation in the design process.

In the design workshop, attendees were asked to identify key issues, constraints and features that are most important to them and the people who live in local communities. Feedback gathered from the design workshops alongside the 427 responses received as part of non-statutory consultation will inform ongoing design refinement.

Key topics received in feedback include:



Opportunities for community benefit was also a key area of feedback and we are committed to making a positive contribution in South Holland and beyond. Both consultation phases will be important in helping us to understand what local schemes or projects could be supported to benefit the communities located closest to the Scheme. Early suggestions from the non-statutory consultation included:



We are continuing to consider how these suggestions and other opportunities for community benefit could be supported as part of the ongoing development of Meridian Solar and look forward to hearing more from the community through statutory consultation.



What happens with your feedback?

The feedback received during the non-statutory consultation is being carefully reviewed and will play a key role in shaping the next stage of Meridian Solar.

In the coming months, we will continue to analyse all feedback to identify recurring themes, key concerns, and valuable ideas that could enhance the project's benefits and reduce the potential impacts. Where feasible, we will incorporate this input into the refined project design, which will be presented during our statutory consultation.

We are currently exploring the following in response to feedback:



Land Use and Agriculture

Many respondents raised concerns about the potential impact on agricultural land. We are committed to reducing the potential disruption to local farming practices and are exploring options to retain some agricultural use. Meridian Solar will also include areas not required for generating infrastructure.



Landscape and Visual Impact

There were points raised about how the solar farm may affect local views. We are working with landscape specialists to assess visual impact and are considering natural screening methods where necessary.



Biodiversity

Many respondents expressed a strong desire for the project to support local biodiversity. We are looking at ways to enhance habitats around the solar farm, including creating new habitats and installing wildlife corridors to encourage greater ecological diversity.



Traffic, access and Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

We received feedback on the current PRoW in the site, and are currently exploring opportunities to enhance the footpath network. There were also comments made about the impact of construction traffic on local roads. Our approach to reducing potential impacts will be explained in more detail in the Preliminary Environmental Information Report, which will be available at our statutory consultation.



Site Selection

One of the reasons the site for Meridian Solar was chosen was the grid capacity available at Weston Marsh, and willingness from landowners. It also balances technical requirements with potential disruption to landscape, biodiversity, and nearby communities. We are committed to refining the project's design and incorporating community feedback to minimise impacts and deliver local benefits.

We will also be discussing next steps for the community benefit fund with Local Authorities.

What happens next?

We are planning to hold our statutory consultation in early 2025.

Before this consultation takes place, we will prepare a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) which will be shared with and reviewed by South Holland District Council and Lincolnshire County Council. The SoCC will set out how we will undertake our statutory consultation, including how consultation will be made accessible, how it will be advertised and how local communities and stakeholders with an interest in the project can provide feedback.

As part of the statutory consultation, we will consult a wide variety of people who may be interested in Meridian Solar. We will also publish our Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) to inform consultees on how the project will interact with the environment and providing a preliminary assessment of any likely significant effects.

We are aware of other proposals in the area connecting into Weston Marsh. We have been and will continue to engage with National Grid to see how we can work together constructively.

Following the statutory consultation, we will have regard to the responses received in further refining our proposals. We will set out a summary of the responses provided in a Consultation Report, which will detail how we have had regard to the feedback received.

During this period, we will complete our Development Consent Order application and prepare the necessary application documents. We will then submit the application to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero via the Planning Inspectorate.



Brookside Solar, operated by DRD since 2020.

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