

Meridian Solar

Phase One Consultation Newsletter

Introducing Meridian Solar

Welcome to our Phase One consultation for Meridian Solar.

Meridian Solar is a proposed solar farm south of Spalding and Holbeach which would supply 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.

This newsletter and the consultation provide us with an opportunity to introduce our initial proposals, the benefits that Meridian Solar would bring, both locally and nationally, and most importantly, to hear what's most important to you as we develop our plans.

Our consultation formally opens on Thursday 30 May 2024. It will be open for 6 weeks, closing at 11:59pm on Thursday 11 July 2024.

We want to hear from you on what you think is important as we develop our plans.

This consultation newsletter provides details on Downing Renewable Developments (DRD), the plans for Meridian Solar, and how to be involved with phase one of our consultation on the Scheme.

More information, including our feedback form and details of upcoming events, can be found on our website www.meridiansolarfarm.co.uk

About us

Meridian Solar is being developed by DRD.

DRD was founded to deliver the renewable energy critical to the transition to a low carbon economy and achieving net zero. More information about DRD can be found on our website www.downing-renewables.co.uk



Powering approximately 215,000 homes, roughly the equivalent of powering all the homes in South Holland, East Lindsey, North Kesteven and Lincoln combined.



Benefitting biodiversity and local ecology.



Providing around 750 megawatts of electricity for export to the national transmission network.

"Downing has a long history of making sustainable investments to help transition the world from fossil fuels to renewable energy. We are excited by the opportunity that Meridian Solar can bring on a national and local scale, and look forward to working with the community and stakeholders to bring this project forward"

- **David Vernon, Head of NSIP Projects, DRD.**

Why a solar farm?

The way we produce our energy is changing. The demand for electricity is continuing to increase and there is a clear need for affordable and reliable energy generation to be developed.

Why here?

Our choice of a suitable solar farm location was driven by the search for opportunities to connect to the national grid, which are limited to certain parts of the UK. This is coupled with careful site analysis to identify the most suitable land available in the area.

National Grid's projects are currently creating opportunities for new renewable energy projects to be developed as part of the UK's renewable energy transition. In our case, the planned Weston Marsh substation east of Spalding was identified as a suitable grid connection opportunity. This was the starting point that led to careful consideration of site options, based on a range of key factors.

Some of these included:

- Land characteristics and environmental qualities/constraints
- The availability of willing and engaging landowners
- Access to established transport links
- Ability to include appropriate areas for landscape buffers, environmental enhancement, and recreation areas

While we have carried out a range of surveys already, further surveys and assessments will be undertaken to understand the Site and surrounding area's environmental characteristics to inform our design.

We have also ensured in selecting the Site, that there is sufficient land within the Scheme to introduce buffers, environmental enhancement zones, and potential areas for recreation.

In the next seven years, National Grid need to build five times the amount of infrastructure they have in the last 30 years. Projects like the Great Grid Upgrade, the largest electricity grid overhaul in generations, are part of efforts to carry our clean, secure energy, from where it's generated to where we need it.

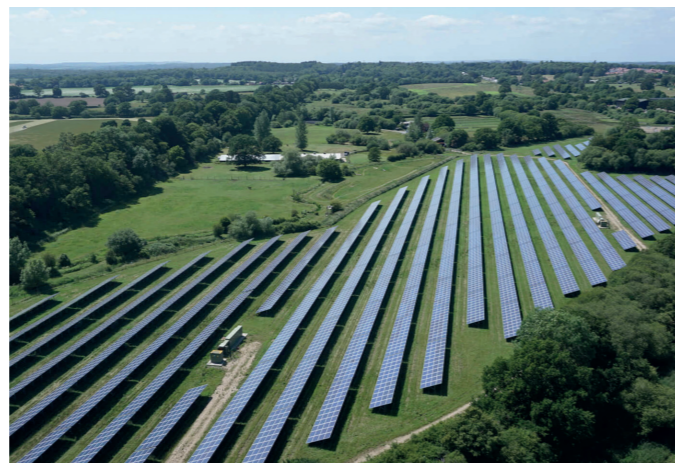
Meridian Solar community benefits

Renewable energy generation offers wide benefits to the UK, but we are also passionate about directly supporting the communities associated with our projects through community benefit schemes. Forming a strong relationship with the community is important to us and we are continually exploring ways we can better support local initiatives

Recent examples from other projects include:

- Providing rooftop solar installations
- Installing Electric Vehicle charging points
- Providing Permissive Paths for walking and recreational use
- Creating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), apprenticeship and employment opportunities

During this non-statutory consultation, we are seeking feedback on suggested community benefits packages and how these could be managed – such as through the local council or a trust.



Oakfield Solar, Hampshire, UK, operated by DRD since 2020

About Meridian Solar

We have a long-term vision for Meridian Solar where we will endeavour to provide wildlife and habitat improvements, support local farmers and agriculture, as well as investing in the local community.

We are developing a site comprising around 1,000 hectares over four land parcels:

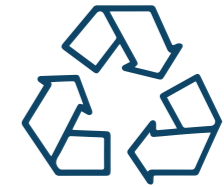
- Parcel A, Cloot Drove – orange
- Parcel B, Queen's Bank – purple
- Parcel C, Martins Road – light blue
- Parcel D, Langary Gate Road – dark blue

The land in the Scheme would encompass the development of the solar panels and related infrastructure for the Scheme, including the grid connection, and areas reserved for potential environmental mitigation and enhancement zones, recreational areas and community benefit initiatives.



Bourne Park Solar, Dorset, UK, operated by DRD since 2020

We are designing the Scheme in line with the following design principles:



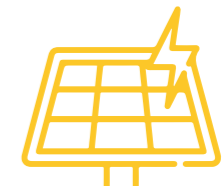
Sustainability

Meridian Solar will be designed to support the transition to Net Zero and assist the UK in achieving Net Zero targets by 2050. Our design will be flexible to take advantage of new sustainable and efficient technologies that emerge.



People

Meaningful engagement will be carried out with communities and stakeholders. We will, where possible, work with local communities to understand how best to protect and enhance their environment and the local area.



Environment

We will look to manage, protect and, where possible, enhance the landscape and design the Site sensitively with consideration to the local heritage, culture and in support of its ecological value. The Scheme will utilise topic environmental studies to inform design and suitable mitigation measures and will be supported by a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that details all of the relevant measures.

What makes up Meridian Solar

The proposals for Meridian Solar involve four land parcels. The land in the Scheme will include the development of the solar panels and related infrastructure for the Scheme, including the grid connection, and areas reserved for the potential environmental mitigation and enhancement zones, recreational areas and community benefit initiatives.



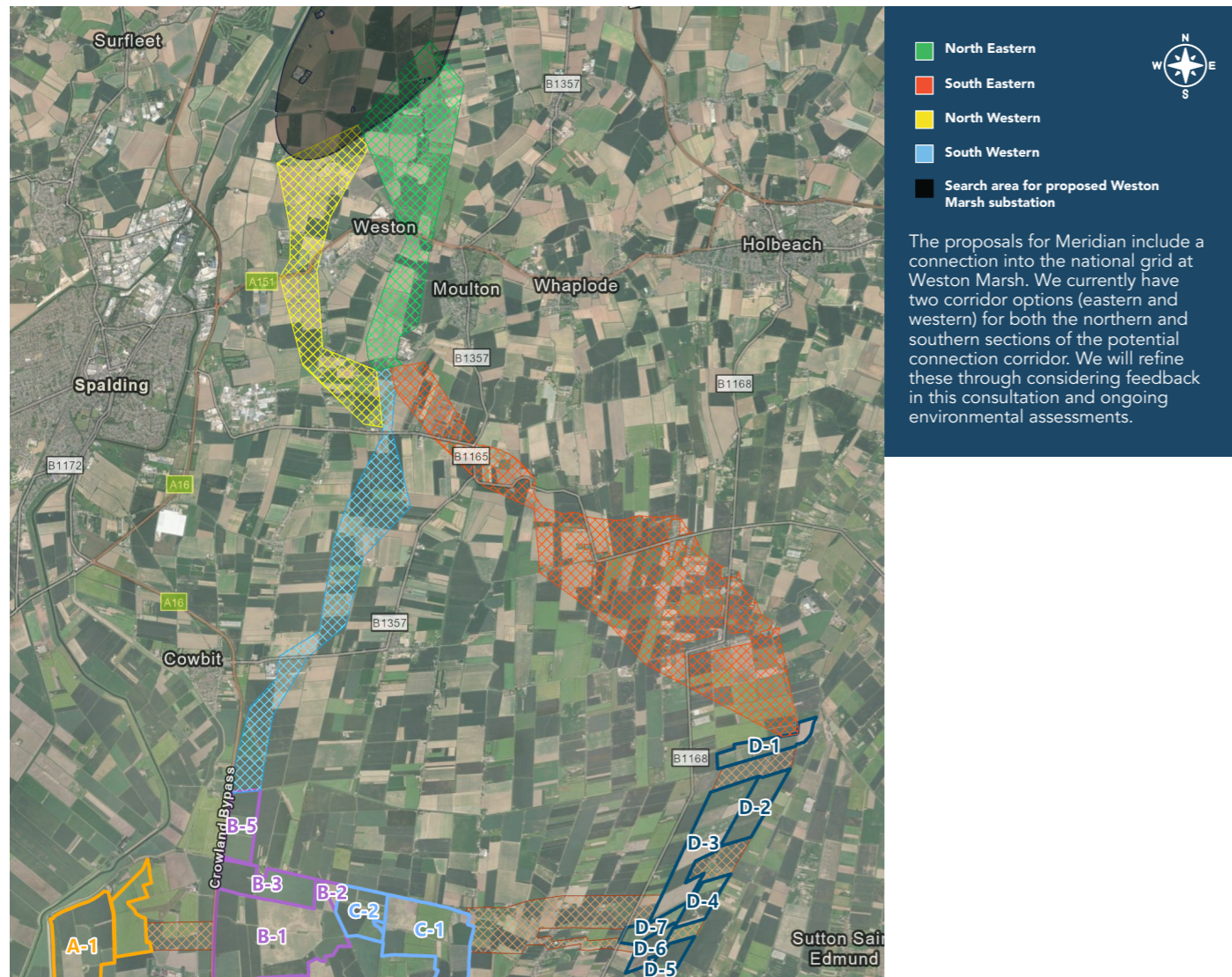
The Connection Corridors

We are exploring different options for connecting the solar farm into the national grid at the proposed Marsh substation.

So far, we have identified and mapped constraints in the broad area between our Site and Weston Marsh to identify potential corridor options.

We will continue our appraisal of these options, including consideration of any feedback received through this consultation, to select a preferred corridor and develop subsequent route options. Some of the key environmental considerations that will inform the preferred option will include landscape and visual amenity, ecology and ornithology, water bodies, historic features and archaeology, land use, and tourism and recreation.

Our proposal currently assumes that we will connect to the grid via an overhead line. This would likely be lattice towers carrying 400 kilovolt (kV) lines. We may investigate placing infrastructure underground if required to mitigate impacts.



Protecting and enhancing the environment

The environment is a key consideration informing how we are designing the project.

Some of the key environmental matters that we are investigating include:

- agricultural land and soils
- air quality
- climate change
- heritage and archaeology
- glint and glare
- landscape and visual amenity
- noise and vibration
- socio-economics and health
- traffic and transport
- water bodies and hydrology.

We understand that the protection of agricultural land is an important concern in Lincolnshire. Depending on the final design outcome, Meridian Solar would only cover up to approximately 0.06% of the agricultural land in the East of England.

We are completing an independent agricultural land classification survey to assess the quality of the land within the Site and its surrounds. This will inform our efforts to prioritise development in areas of lower agricultural value ⁽¹⁾according to DEFRA Survey).

With regard to wildlife habitat in the local area, we are exploring opportunities to protect, retain and manage existing areas and features of environmental significance within the Site. Importantly, we will also seek to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through the Scheme. BNG is a way of creating and improving natural habitats, and it is a prominent theme in UK infrastructure development. We will look to achieve BNG by:

- Creating new wildlife habitats, grasslands and wildflower meadows
- Employing measures such as the installation of bee hotels, log piles and bird and bat boxes

During this non-statutory consultation, we are seeking feedback on the environmental mitigation or biodiversity enhancements that can be implemented to ensure that we make improvements to BNG above and beyond government targets.

The consultation and consent 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. An Inspector(s), appointed by the Secretary of State, through the Planning Inspectorate (the Examining Authority), will examine the application, including a process that will include a number of public hearings, and make a recommendation to the Secretary of State, who will then decide whether the Scheme should be approved.

While the decision sits with the Secretary of State, the views of community members, local authorities and other interest groups will be carefully considered during examination of the DCO, and you will have regular opportunities to formally provide your views including during non-statutory, statutory consultation and the formal examination process

Our approach to consultation:

Phase one – Non-statutory Consultation, 30 May to 11 July 2024 (this round)

Phase two – Statutory Consultation, late 2024/early 2025

Consultation is an important factor in the development of our proposals. We value the local knowledge provided in your responses and where appropriate will seek to address it as part of our plans. As part of our Phase Two statutory consultation, we will also publish a Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) outlining how people can get involved.

⁽¹⁾You can find out more by visiting the DEFRA website here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agricultural-facts-england-regional-profiles/agricultural-facts-east-of-england-region>.

Have your say on Meridian Solar

How to have your say

We want to hear your views. You can provide feedback by:

- Completing our feedback form online at www.meridiansolarfarm.co.uk
- Completing a hard copy of the feedback form and returning it to FREEPOST DOWNING MERIDIAN
- Submitting your comments or completed form by email to enquiries@meridiansolar.co.uk

Our consultation documents, and an online version of this newsletter, are available on our website www.meridiansolarfarm.co.uk

If you wish to receive paper copies of these documents or need them in another format, please get in touch by freephone on **0800 652 6120**, or by email at enquiries@meridiansolar.co.uk

Please submit your response by **23:59pm on 11 July 2024**.

Meet the team

As part of our Phase One consultation, we are holding a series of public information events. At these events, you will be able to meet the team and ask questions about our proposals.

Date	Time	Location
Friday 14 June	14:00 – 20:00	Crowland Pavilion, Peterborough PE8 9QR
Saturday 15 June	10:00 – 16:00	Moulton Village Hall, Broad Ln, Moulton, Spalding PE12 6PN
Monday 24 June	14:00 – 20:00	Sutton St Edmund Village Hall, 273 Broadgate, Sutton St Edmund, Spalding PE12 0LR
Monday 1 July	18:00 – 19:00	Register on our website

