

Gedney Hill Parish Council Response to proposed Meridian Solar Farm Consultation

Views on solar

1. What are your views on solar farms as part of the renewable infrastructure needed to meet the UK Government's commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050?

Supportive

Supportive, but I have some concerns

Unsupportive, but I would like to find out more

Completely against

Unsure

GHPC – Unsupportive, but I would like to find out more

Please explain why

The community of GH were asked if they were, for, against or indifferent to the proposal. Of those who responded:

87 % were against the proposal

10% were indifferent to the proposal (with an indication this is a 'done deal' and nothing they say will change the decision).

3% were in favour of the proposal

2. What are your views of the development of solar farms located in the South Holland area, Lincolnshire, England?

Supportive

Supportive, but I have some concerns

Unsupportive, but I support the development of solar farms generally

Completely against

Unsure

GHPC – Unsupportive, but I support the development of solar farms generally

Please explain why

The National policy statement for renewable infrastructure states that:

In determining the suitability of the site location applicants should, where possible, utilise suitable previously developed land, brownfield land, contaminated land and industrial land. Where the proposed use of any agricultural land has been shown to be necessary, poorer quality land should be preferred to high quality land avoiding the use of 'Best and Most Versatile' agricultural land where possible.

It appears that the Meridian Solar Farm proposal does not do this. Much of the land indicated for use is currently agricultural and on the most part either Best and Most Versatile of grade 1, 2 or 3a land. The disregarding of the National Policy Statement is of great concern to the parishioners of Gedney Hill. The proposed loss of high quality land is disappointing and we are concerned that the plans to remediate the land at the end of the project's life means that it is unlikely that the land will be suitable to be used for agriculture in the future.

Much is written about how the proposed solar farm will help the UK meet statutory Net Zero and other climate ambitions but we are concerned about the cost of losing prime agricultural land, the climate negative impact during the construction period and decommissioning periods, and the carbon cost of importing solar panels from China. These negative factors must be taken into account when assessing the gains the project provides.

We are concerned over the use of concrete, which is one of the most carbon intensive processes and causes considerable lasting damage to the soil. In addition the creation of hard surfaces by the concrete exacerbates surface run off that can lead to accelerated soil erosion, water pollution and flooding. If this is addressed on site it may cause problems down the line in adjacent villages.

We are concerned over the loss of biodiversity and feel little consideration is being given to the diverse nature of the area. Existing habitats will be lost during the construction stage with absolutely no guarantee or evidence that new wildlife or fauna will thrive in and around the solar farm.

Currently the area is home to rabbits, stoats, weasels, pine martins, Red Deer, muntjac, badgers, snakes, amphibians, butterflies, bees, insects, moths, bats and an abundant variety of indigenous birds such as buzzards, red kites, wood peckers, kestrels, herons, swans and owls as well as a host of migratory birds who will lose their traditional migration routes, feeding and breeding areas. Fauna will also be negatively impacted.

Plans indicate that vegetation and animals would return to the site once the panels are established. Our understanding is that it is more likely only scrub grass and weeds would thrive in the areas between the panels which we do not believe would encourage animals, birds or insects to return to the area.

The Lincolnshire Fens are flat, drained marshlands, renowned for fertile farmland, producing crops such as wheat, barley, and potatoes. The Fens are also a key part of the UK's food production network. None of which suggests the Fens should be a site for a large industrial project such as the proposed solar farm. The proposed Meridian Solar Farm will disfigure the countryside and will be a significant blot on the landscape, seen from miles around. The

proposed security fencing and lighting will add to the stark and visually intrusive nature of the development. We also believe that the plans to mitigate the impact of the lighting and fencing are not in keeping with the current landscape.

We are deeply concerned by the limited plans for the end of life stage of the project. We do not feel there are currently realistic plans in place to remove the panels, concrete and infrastructure at the end of the project, leading to the return of the fields to the existing high farming grade standard.

Site layout

3. Which areas of the Scheme do your comments relate to? Please refer to the map provided on page 4 -5 in the newsletter.

Parcel A, Clout Drove – yellow

Parcel B, Queen’s Bank – light blue

Parcel C, Martins Road – purple

Parcel D, Langary Gate Road – dark blue

All of the above

GHPC response - Parcel D, Langary Gate Road – dark blue

4. We are in the early stages of developing our proposals. We are seeking your feedback to further develop and refine our plans. Do you have any comments on the potential layout for the land parcel(s) you have selected? This could be in regard to matters such as panel location, environmental considerations, or use of land.

The number of panels indicate a likely increase in localised temperatures and a change in climate. This comes at a time when we are attempting to reduce temperatures across the planet, and this year we have already seen record temperatures in April with above normal precipitation. We are deeply concerned that the climate impacts of this project outweigh the proposed benefits from the project.

The size and scale of the project is immense; much larger than anything currently built in the UK or Europe. The number of solar panels in one place is a cause for concern in terms of an increase in fire risk, Glint and Glare and loss of visibility. There are also concerns that there are already smaller solar farms in local area and it seems unequal to place more solar farms in the same relatively small area. There is little to show how such a huge development will affect the local community positively in terms of physically changing the look of the area and also mentally for those living through the heavy construction phase.

The current big views and open skies will be scarred by solar panels and fences. The security measures of high fencing and lights would prevent animals from being able to navigate through their habitats, with light pollution as another cause of harm to local wildlife.

Connection corridor

The electricity generated by Meridian Solar would be required to be transferred to the national grid. The planned grid connection for Meridian Solar is National Grid's proposed Weston Marsh Substation near Spalding. 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.

5. Which connection corridor do your comments relate to? Please refer to the map provided on page 6 in the newsletter.

North eastern

South eastern

North western

South western

All

GHPC – South eastern

6. Are there any specific local environmental constraints, or local issues, or concerns that you wish to make us aware of and that require consideration for the proposed connection to the national grid?

The use of local roads to access the site is of concern. The roads are narrow and currently in need of regular repair – the unique nature of the Fens mean that roads are uneven and prone to significant subsidence. An increase in volume and weight of traffic will contribute to more damage. Road traffic accidents are common – often blocking roads which would mean that construction traffic may need to find alternative routes through our small network of villages which could cause further negative issues. If roads collapse due to the volume and weight of the construction traffic the drains beneath could be damaged leading to significant flood damage to fields and properties across the region given the interconnected nature of the dykes and channels system in the Fens.

Access to site D is proposed to be via the A16 - a notorious accident blackspot. An increase in traffic using the A16 junction may increase the risk of accidents. The A16 is currently poorly tarmaced with lots of pot holes and is littered with spot repairs. Heavier traffic use will contribute to more holes and more road closures in order for them to be repaired, all creating an additional inconvenience for residents.

The parish is concerned that additional volumes of traffic will transit through Gedney Hill, either construction traffic or those trying to avoid the construction. This will have a significant negative impact on the quiet nature and safety of our village.

The parish is concerned about an increase in flooding to the local area. Any changes to the drainage system in Langary Gate is likely to have a knock on effect to the parish of Gedney Hill.

We are concerned that the proposed solar farm is already causing mental health issues amongst our parishioners. There is considerable fear and worry about the ramifications of the proposed solar farm being built in our area.

The Council would welcome the evidence that the project site, once completed, would be used to graze sheep, goats or pigs. This does not appear to be based on any credible evidence, particularly as these animals are not traditionally farmed in this part of Lincolnshire.

Noise and vibration are concerns during the construction stage. Parts of the village of Gedney Hill fall very close to the proposed site D. Parishioners are very concerned that the peace and tranquillity of the countryside will be lost during the construction period.

The local environment and landscape

We are currently preparing our Preliminary Environmental information Report (PEIR), which will provide an initial appraisal of the Scheme's potential impacts and opportunities for the environment.

7. What environmental issues relating to the proposals are most important to you? Please tick your top three.

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

Other (please detail)

GHPC – agricultural land and soils, landscape and visual amenity, water bodies and hydrology traffic and transport

8. Please provide any further comments on why these topics are most important to you.

Almost everyone who responded negatively to the proposal, cited these issues. Each of these issues will make life harder for those living close to the proposed Solar Farm.

A quote from one parishioner 'there aren't many benefits to living in rural areas other than nature' the proposed solar farm is taking a large area of nature and replacing it with industry.

Community benefits

DRD is committed to making a positive contribution in South Holland and beyond. Our consultation is important in helping us to understand what local schemes or projects could be supported to benefit the communities located closest to the Scheme.

Recent examples from other projects include providing rooftop solar installations, installing electric vehicle charging points, providing permissive paths, and creating science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and employment opportunities.

9. Do you have any suggestions on what community benefits would be appropriate and/or are currently lacking in the local area?

A regular bus service linking local villages to the larger towns of Peterborough, Wisbech and Spalding.

A regular bus service to the local Doctors surgeries in Crowland and Parsons Drove.

Increased road maintenance.

Traffic calming measures through the local villages.

Mobile phone masts in each local village.

Superfast broadband connection in the local villages.

Solar panels on schools, village halls and churches.

Playgrounds in the local villages.

Job opportunities in the local villages.

Our consultation

Thank you for taking the time to share your views on Meridian Solar.

10. In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

Resident of the local area

Elected representative (Parish Council, Community Council, Local Authority or MP)

Local business owner

Local interest group

GHPC – Elected representative

11. Please rate the information we have published in terms of how clearly it was presented and how easy it was to understand.

Very good

Good

Average

Poor

Very poor

Unsure

GHPC - Average

12. Do you have any further comments about our consultation process or anything we can improve about our consultation?

The consultation process is weighted towards yourselves. The questions you ask and the answers you require leave little room for people to comment on the issues important to them.

The consultation process means that you are now aware of the objections that will be raised and have an answer for them.

About you

You do not have to supply personal details in your response to our consultation. However, this will help us to understand who has accessed our consultation and enable us to keep you updated on Meridian Solar.

We may publish a summary of the feedback received through this consultation, but no information about an individual would be revealed. The answers you provide to this

question are defined as 'special category data'. If you agree to provide Equality and Diversity information, you can withdraw your permission at any time.

Name: Vicki Watson (Clerk)

Organisation: Gedney Hill Parish Council

Postcode: PE12 0PW

Email: clerk@gedneyhillparishcouncil.gov.uk

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to say

What is your age?

Under 16

16-24

25-34

35-44

55-64

65+

Prefer not to say

Data privacy notice

DRD is committed to protecting your personal information. Whenever you provide such information, we are legally obliged to use it in line with all applicable laws concerning the protection of personal data, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

How will DRD use the information you submit?

We will use your responses collected via this consultation for a number of purposes, including:

- in the analysis of the feedback to the non-statutory consultation;
- to produce a Consultation Report, based on our analysis of responses (individuals will not be identified in the Report);
- to write to you with updates about the results of the consultation and other developments; and
- to keep up-to-date records of our communications with individuals and organisations.

Any personal information you include in this form will be handled and used by (or made available to) the following recipients to record, analyse and report on the feedback we receive:

- DRD and its consultants working on Meridian Solar, for the purposes of work relating to Meridian Solar only;
- the Planning Inspectorate (which will consider our application for development consent– any details published as part of this process will be anonymised);
- the Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero (who will make the decision on our application); and
- our legal advisers.

What rights do I have over my personal data?

Under the terms of the UK GDPR, you have certain rights over how your personal data is retained and used by Downing Renewable Developments. For more information, see our full data privacy statement <https://www.downing.co.uk/legals/privacy-and-cookie-policy>.