

23/37149/FUL | Construction of a ground mounted solar farm with associated infrastructure | Land East Of Horsley Hall Wincote Lane Wootton Stafford Staffordshire

Representations of CPRE Staffordshire (Campaign to Protect Rural England).

CPRE Staffordshire recognises that solar energy has an important role to play in meeting future energy needs. Renewable energy helps increase energy security and diversity, while making a significant contribution to meeting the UK's target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels.

However, we believe that the environmental objective of developing renewable energy through large solar farms should not come at the expense of the beauty, character and tranquillity of Staffordshire's countryside. The impacts of large-scale commercial photovoltaic farms with their associated infrastructure are difficult to mitigate in rural landscapes. The large size of the proposed development would have an adverse impact on the landscape character, natural beauty and tranquillity of what is currently a quiet rural area. We are extremely concerned that this large development would have an unacceptably adverse impact on the landscape and on people's ability to enjoy the countryside in its vicinity.

Policy N3(a) (Low Carbon Sources and Renewable Energy) of The Plan for Stafford Borough states:

"Development of schemes for the generation of renewable energy resources and initiatives for a low carbon economy, will be supported provided that:

- a. The technology is suitable for the proposed location, does not cause harm to residential amenity, the significance of heritage assets and their setting and has limited adverse effects on the surrounding landscape and townscape character."

Policy N8 (Landscape Character) states:

"Development proposals must be informed by, and be sympathetic to, landscape character and quality".

We believe that the proposed development contradicts both of the above policies due to its adverse impact on the landscape and its character.

An application for a solar farm in High Offley (15/23038/FUL) was rejected in 2015 on the grounds that the size, scale and visibility of the proposals would harm the character and appearance of the rural landscape, which would conflict with Policy N3(a) of the Local Plan for Stafford Borough.

The proposed development would also involve the loss of a substantial amount of high-quality productive arable farmland.

Paragraphs 174 to 188 of the NPPF state that "Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- (a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- (b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and

other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;”

We believe that the proposed development is not in accordance with these aspects of the NPPF.

In addition, the Preferred Options policies map does not show the location of the proposed development as one where applications for solar PV development would be supported.

CPRE is of the opinion that solar farm developments should avoid harm to views from publicly accessible land. The proposed development would substantially change the experience of people using this land. As well as the panels themselves, the security and perimeter fencing around solar farms can be visually intrusive.

The proposed development would also involve the loss of a substantial amount of high-quality productive arable farmland. In recognition of the growing importance of food security, CPRE believes that Grades 1, 2 and 3a agricultural land should not be used for solar farms. Grade 1, 2 and 3a farmland is in itself a major renewable energy resource and is defined as ‘the best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) in the NPPF. It is undesirable to take one renewable energy resource out of effective use in order to develop another. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the site is Grade 2 or Grade 3a land.

Solar developments need very careful consideration of their siting and scale. CPRE believes that the most suitable location for solar technologies is on industrial and other buildings with major roof surfaces, as well as car parks. [Recent research by the UCL Energy Institute](#), for CPRE, shows that the potential of brownfield sites to generate renewable energy is dramatically underused. Installing solar panels on new buildings, existing large warehouse rooftops and other land such as car parks, could provide at least 40-50 gigawatts (GW) of low carbon electricity, contributing more than half of the total national target of 70GW of solar energy by 2035.