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Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
Planning Department
Moorlands House
Stockwell Street
Leek
ST13 6HQ.

19th September 2019

Dear Sir or Madam

Request For A Screening Opinion Under The Town And County Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017, Regulation 6. Proposed Development Of A Ground Mounted Solar Farm On Land at Rownall Farm, Cellarhead, ST9 9LB

We writing on behalf of Grüne Energien Solar GmbH (the 'applicant') to request a screening opinion to determine whether there is a requirement for an Environmental Impact assessment (EIA) to accompany a planning application for the development at the above location. This request is made under Regulation 6 of the Town & Country Planning (EIA) regulations 2017 (as amended).

Therefore, in accordance with Regulation 6 of the EIA regulations we have provided the following information.

1. A plan that sufficiently identifies the land.
2. A description of the development, including in particular;
    a. A description of the physical characteristics of the development and where relevant of any demolition works.
    b. A description of the location of the development with particular regard to the environmental sensitivity of the geographic areas likely to be affected.

3. A description of the aspects of the environment likely to be significantly affected by the development.
4. To the extent that information is available, a description of any likely significant effects of the proposed development on the environment resulting from;
    a. The expected residues and emissions and the production of waste where relevant and
    b. The use of natural resources, in particular soil, water and biodiversity and
5. Such other information or representations as the person making the request may wish to provide or make, including and features of the proposed development or any measures to avoid or prevent what might otherwise have been considered significant adverse impacts on the environment.

We look forward to receiving the Screening Opinion within three weeks of receipt of this screening request as specified in the Regulations and confirmation that the Screening Opinion will be published on the Public Register.

Yours Sincerely.

Marco Pannicke.

APPLICATION SITE

The application site occupies approximately ha of agricultural land comprising of a number of arable fields of various shapes and sizes and is fully located within the administrative area of Staffordshire Moorlands. The nearest settlement to the site is the urban settlement of Werrington which is located approximately 1km to the south of the site. The site is located adjacent to the post code ST9 9LB which has a OS grid reference of ST 94228 49843

The site is surrounded by agricultural land. The site lies close to the large urban settlement of Stoke on Trent, 3km to the west of the site. The site is 2km situated to the north of the A52 which is one of the main arterial routes into the City of Stoke on Trent.

There are a number of public rights of way that cross the site and run along the perimeter of the site. These public rights of way would remain open during and after the construction process. The site does not have any statutory environmental designations.

NATURE AND PURPOSE OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT.

Description of Proposed Development.

The proposed development is for the 'construction of a solar park to include the installation of solar photovoltaic panels to generate approximately up to 40mw of electricity with DNO and Client substations, inverters, perimeter stock fencing, access tracks and CCTV'. Landscaping and other associated works together with the retention and extension of existing hedgerows' and will consist of the following.;

- Fixed Solar panels (facing south) mounted on a metal framework structure. (table)
- Each table with have a height of between 2.4m – 3.0m at the rear of each table and 1.0m-0.8m to the front of each table.
- Solar panels will measure 2m (l) X 1m (w) x 0.05m (d)
- DNO substation which will require an area of approx. 25m x 50m
- Customer substation requiring an area of approx' 22m x 23m
- Circa 40No inverter/transformer stations measuring 7m (l) x 2.5 (w) x 3m (d).
- CCTV cameras positioned on 3m posts around the site boundary
- 2.4m high fencing and timber posts placed at regular intervals, (type; deer fencing).
- Gravel access tracks will be kept to a minimum across the site.
- Grid connection and associated works necessary for the export of electricity to the local grid network.
- Storage containers for operations and maintenance purposes
- Communication and monitoring equipment and communication cabinet to allow immediate communication between the site and the DNO (Western Power Distribution)

• Gated and secure access from the nearest public highway	
POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON THE ENVIRONMENT	
Section 1 – Applicable Thresholds.	
Does the proposed development fall within Schedule 1?	No
If yes, what is the applicable description?	N/A
If yes the project is automatically requires EIA.	
If no, does the Proposed Development fall within Schedule 2?	Yes
If 'yes', what is the applicable description?	3a *industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water.*
Is the project located in a sensitive area?	No
If Yes proceed to Section 2.	
If no, what is the corresponding applicable threshold in Schedule 2?	The site exceeds 0.5ha
Does the project exceed the applicable threshold?	Yes
If Yes proceed to Section 2	
If No and the project is not located within or adjacent to a defined 'Sensitive Area' the proposed development is unlikely to constitute EIA development	
Section 2 Assessment of Possible Effects.	
Topic	Analysis
Population	During construction it is considered unlikely that the proposals will result in a significant change in the population as works are unlikely to relocate to the area on a permanent basis. The construction will have a temporary effect on employment provision through the creation of construction jobs. A minor beneficial effect is therefore expected. Once operational, the proposed development does not provide any permanent residential accommodation and accordingly will not have any significant effect on the population. The only vehicle movements will be fro the occasional maintenance vehicle that would have a negligible impact on the population.

Topic	Analysis
Human Health	During the construction phase there would be potential for some minor pollution or nuisance consistent with construction work. ie lighting of external works, dust/noise from vehicles and construction processes and plant noise. However, construction activities would be appropriately controlled to an acceptable level through the adoption of construction best practice and appropriate safety measures. During operation there would be no unusual risks to human health. The development relies on well established, safe modern technology and correct Health & Safety signage will be displayed on the site to inform of the potential risk from working near electrical equipment and to discourage trespass. There would therefore be no unusual risk to human health and significant effects are not expected or anticipated.
Biodiversity	The application site is not located within any European sites or areas protected under national legislation. The closest designated site is Wetley Moor, which is designated as a SSSI. This site is located 2km to the south west of the site. Whilst there may be an effect on biodiversity, the majority of the application site contains land that is utilised for agricultural purposes that is under regular change. There considering this factor, it is unlikely sensitive ecological receptors have established within the site. As a result, through the implementation of appropriate measures effects can be managed and are unlikely to be unusually complex or significant.
Land	The site comprises of 66ha of agricultural land for which a detailed Agricultural Land classification will be supplied as part of the planning application. Having reviewed the Natural England ALC mapping for this area it is apparent that the land is a mix of Grade 4 (poor). There may be a very small area of land to the south east of the site that may be grade 3. (Moderate or Good). Further ALC studies and reports will clarify this during the planning application submission. It is understood that the current split between arable and pasture land is approximately; Arable = 60ha Pasture = 6ha

	Furthermore, considering the nature of the construction and operation of a solar farm, there would be a limited loss of natural resources, thus the majority of the agricultural land will maintain its function once decommissioned, as a result significant impacts are not anticipated.

Topic	Analysis
Soil	Due to the nature of solar farms, it is unlikely that the construction of the proposed development would lead to the loss of soils as appropriate construction techniques will be implemented to reduce below ground works and as such, significant effects are not considered to be likely. The soil has no history to indicate there would be any form of contaminants present, yet if found and contamination would be controlled during construction through the imposition of appropriate planning conditions to ensure any contamination risks are addressed. Furthermore, most of the soil will not be physically impacted from the development and therefore its degradation is considered to be unlikely. No significant impacts are therefore anticipated.
Water	There are a number of small watercourses and waterbodies that are adjacent to the site. The site lies within the Environment Agency Flood Risk Zone 1, meaning the site has less than 1 in 1000 annual probability of flooding by river sources. National Planning Policy requires that all planning applications above certain thresholds to include a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA), including mitigation in the form of a drainage strategy. An FRA drainage strategy will be provided as part of the planning application and as such the proposed development is unlikely to have a significant effect.
Air	The site is located just outside an air quality management area. (AQMA). Whilst there may be dust generated during construction, this can be reduced using construction management measures. Therefore, it is considered unlikely that the proposals will have a significant effect on air quality in construction. The only vehicle movements would be from the occasional maintenance vehicle that would not give rise to significant effects on air quality. Due to the nature of the development, once operational there would be no emissions generated by the development. No significant effects are therefore anticipated.

Topic	Analysis
Climate	It is acknowledged that construction of the proposed development will result in the gaseous emissions from construction vehicles associated with construction of the solar farm. Although, considering the temporary nature of construction, it is considered that these emissions are unlikely to be complex or significant. Due to the nature of the development, once operational the facility will be generating energy from renewable sources (sunlight). Therefore, the development will only contribute positively to the local climate through reducing the requirement for fossil fuel-based energy production facilities. A positive effect is therefore anticipated.
Material Assets	Construction would require the use of natural resources as is standard with construction work. Ie power/water/construction materials. This is not considered to be an unusual or complex operation and accordingly no significant effects are anticipated. Due to the nature of the development, no natural resources would be required for the operation of the facility once constructed. No significant effects are therefore anticipated.
Cultural Heritage.	There are 5No Grade II listed assets located within hamlet of Rownall; which is located on the eastern boundary edge of the site. These are noted as; Ivy House Farm, Barns & Stables to the South West of Ivy House Farm Rownall Farmhouse Barn to the South West of Rownall Farmhouse. Stables at Rownall Hall (Hall is now demolished). There is a Schedule Ancient Monument '*Moated site and pond at Moor Hall Farm'* located 1km to the north of the site. The local cultural heritage would be considered and carefully explored and detailed in a Heritage Statement as part of the planning submission. This report will naturally consider the nature of the development and its potential impact on the setting and context of these designated heritage assets. It is

	considered however that any impacts are not significant or are expect to occur.
Landscape	The site does fall within a statutory landscape designation, namely the *Stoke* Green Belt. The site is located over 20km to the north of the *Cannock Chase* AONB. It is acknowledged that whilst it is anticipated there will be a change in the character of the immediate landscape setting, and there will be views onto the site from some of the surrounding receptors, these impacts are unlikely to be significant.

Topic	**Analysis**
Cumulative Impacts	There is are a number consented and operational solar farms that are in proximity to this site. These are; • Land at Heywood Grange, Tickhill Lane, ST10 2PL. 8.4mw scheme. 7.0km to the South East of the site. Located within the Green Belt. Land area = 14ha • Land at Moneystone Quarry, Cheadle Road, ST10 2DZ, 5.0mw. Located within the Greenbelt. Site is 14km to the east of this site. Land area = 14ha. • Land at Newton Farm, Draycott Road, SN10 4JN. 11.5mw. Site is 15km to the south if this site. Land area = 23ha. Due to the distance from these sites identified and the nature of solar developments, significant cumulative effects are not anticipated.
Further Relevant Comments.	
It is considered that the proposals fall within the category of under Schedule 2 (3a) as described on the EIA regulations 2017. Development proposals described under Schedule 2 require an EIA if they are considered *likely to have significant effects on the environment* by virtue of factors such as nature, size or location. Given that the proposed development exceeds the screening threshold in Schedule 2 (3a) of 0.5ha, it is appropriate to Screen the proposals with the Local Planning Authority to determine if there are any significant effects likely to arise from the proposals. The Screening process should consider the development proposals against the criteria and thresholds which are included within the EIA Regulations and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in determining the requirement for an Environmental Statement (ES) to accompany an application for planning permission.	

Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations provides selection criteria for Screening Schedule 2 development, which includes 3 broad categories for consideration; the characteristics of the development, the environmental sensitivity of the location; and the characteristics of the potential impacts.

The PPG under the Environmental Impact Assessment section (para 057), provides further indicative criteria and thresholds, as well as key issues to consider in the determination of likely significance of effects. For 3a '*Energy Industry'*, the criteria and advice given are;

- Indicative Criteria and Threshold – ''Thermal output more than 50mw, small stations using novel forms of generation should be carefully considered.''
- Key issues to Consider – ''Level of emissions to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact.''

The operational development is less than 50w and is unlikely to give rise to any significant impacts relating to air, transport or visual impacts or any further wide-ranging effects.

Conclusion.

Given the nature of the development proposals, it is considered that whilst there may be some effects upon the environment as a consequence of the proposed development, none of these are considered to constitute '*significant effects'* upon the environment, as set out in the government guidance. Accordingly, it is considered that the proposals **do not** constitute EIA development and would not require an Environmental Statement to be submitted with a planning application for a solar farm in this location.