STAFFORDSHIRE moorlands DISTRICT COUNCIL

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16/08/2023

Jacques Carboni
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Helsby
Cheshire
WA6 0AR

Dear Sir/Madam

Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017

Screening Opinion Requested in relation to a proposed development of a 35MW PV Solar PV development at New House Farm Cotton Lane Cotton Staffordshire ST10 3DT

I refer to your letter received 6th July 2023 in connection with the above proposal and your request therein for a Screening opinion under regulation 6 (1) of the above Regulations as to whether the proposal is EIA development requiring the submission of an Environmental Statement.

The proposal is for a solar farm. The site would extend to approx. 34.2 hectares with an installed capacity of 35 MWp. Such development falls within the description of development in Column 1, Section 3 (a) of Schedule 2 to the 2017 Regulations namely Energy industry; industrial installations for the production of electricity, steam and hot water. Column 2 confirms the threshold for such development to be 0.5 hectares. The proposal exceeds this threshold. The site is also near to a sensitive area as defined by Regulation 2 of the Regulations. The proposal is therefore 'Schedule 2 development' within the meaning of the 2017 Regulations and needs to be screened by the LPA to determine whether significant effects on the environment are likely and hence whether Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

In preparing this screening opinion the LPA has had regard to the selection criteria in Schedule 3 of the 2017 Regulations. The LPA has also had regard to the Indicative thresholds and criteria set out in the Planning Practice Guidance. This advises that key issues to consider for this description of development are levels of emission to air, arrangements for the transport of fuel and any visual impact. It also refers to an indicative threshold for output of more than 50 MW. The LPA has used the recommended Screening Matrix to prepare this opinion and this letter should be read in conjunction with the Matrix.

Characteristics of the development

There would be no significant emissions to air. The main impacts would be l a n d s c a p e , visual and ecological.

The development is large scale being well in excess of the threshold of 0.5 hectares. In terms of landscape/visual impact, a solar farm of this size is likely to have significant effects on the character and appearance of this upland fringe area, introducing as it would an urban form of development in a pastoral landscape which is identified as being very sensitive to the impacts

of development and land use change. There is no assessment of any potential impact upon the Peak District National Park, a designated landscape which lies within 3Km of the site.

Landscape mitigation and fencing are likely to significantly impact upon key characteristics of the landscape character type. The site is in a very prominent location with frontages to both the A52 and the C003 Ellastone Road, both well used routes and also a network of at least 8 public footpaths cross the site. The site is partly within the Churnet Valley. The site will be highly visible to many people including walkers and cyclists enjoying recreational time and the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside . Significant landscape and visual effects are anticipated and it is not demonstrated how these can be mitigated.

In terms of ecology the whole site is within risk zones of several SSSIs, the nearest being: Swineholes Wood and Black Heath SSSI, Rue Hill SSSI, Bath Pasture SSSI, Whiston Eaves SSSI and Froghall Meadow and Pastures SSSI. The site is part of the New House Farm Site of Biolofgical Importance, a Local Wild life site of County importance. There are other SBI's close by. There are watercourses/ drains within the site, which drain to the Cotton Brook, and then into the River Churnet.

Significant ecological effects are anticipated as a result of the loss and degradation of a Local Wildlife Site and possible other priority habitats. Impacts are anticipated to ground nesting priority birds, and severing of habitat corridors. There are in addition potential impacts to water quality with potential to impact local brooks and the River Churnet. It is not demonstrated how these significant effects could be mitigated.

Location of the development

The site is close to a Sensitive area in terms of the Regulations. The whole site is within risk zones of several SSSIs, the nearest being: Swineholes Wood and Black Heath SSSI, Rue Hill SSSI, Bath Pasture SSSI, Whiston Eaves SSSI and Froghall Meadow and Pastures SSSI. The site is within 3km of the Peak District National Park.

The site is also within the Churnet Valley, as area for which a SPD Churnet Valley Masterplan has been produced in recognition of its rich history and natural beauty.

For the reasons above (and in the Matrix) significant effects on sensitive areas is anticipated

Types and Characteristics of the potential impact

This is a large scale development in terms of the Regulations and the potential ecology, landcape and visual impacts described above are considered to be of a magnitude to suggest that an environmental statement is required. The impacts would affect a large number of people including those enjoying the area for recreational purposes. The significant effects identified are considered highly probable and in the case of biodiversity potentially irreversible. The proposal is stated to be temporary but the landscape and visual effects would be over 40 years, a significant period of time. In terms of cumulative impact an assessment is needed of other developments which could have a negative impact on the same receptors (priority ground nesting birds) and if not adequately mitigated result in long term or permanent loss of habitat.

As a result of its nature, scale and location the development is considered likely to have significant effects on the environment.

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Under regulation 6(9) it is hereby confirmed that in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the above development is EIA development.

Yours faithfully

X B.J. Haywood

Signed by: Ben Haywood

Head of Development Services