SMD/2023/0523: Installation of a solar farm comprising ground mounted solar PV panels with a generating capacity of up to 49.99MW including mounting system, underground cabling, stock proof fence, CCTV, internal tracks and associated infrastructure, landscaping, biodiversity net gain and environmental enhancements for a temporary period of 40 years.

Representations of CPRE Staffordshire, the countryside charity.

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 local and national climate change targets.

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 area of open countryside.

The cumulative impact of the development must also be considered given the number of similar developments in the area (for example SMD/2023/0568, SMD/2023/0318, SMD/2022/0444 and SMD/2022/0548). This application should not be considered in isolation but rather as part of a wider pattern of development.

The application site is within the Green Belt. Policy SS10 (Other Rural Areas Strategy) of the SMDC Local Plan states that "These areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside."

We do not consider that the application is in line with this policy.

Even with screening, the proposal would also have an adverse impact on the landscape of the Churnet Valley, which occurs immediately to the east of the site, extending to the northeast, east and south-east. Policy SD 2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan states that the degree to which the scale and nature of a proposal impacts on the landscape must be considered.

CPRE Staffordshire is a strong supporter of rooftop solar and a 'roof-first' approach to prioritise opportunities to install solar panels on suitable brownfield land. Recently published research by the UCL Energy Institute for CPRE found that installing solar panels on existing rooftops and other land such as car parks could provide at least 40-50GW of low carbon electricity in

England by 2035, contributing more than half of the total national target of 70GW of solar energy by 2035.