The countryside charity
Cheshire

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Cheshire East Council
Planning and Building Control,
Delamere House,
Delamere Street,
Crewe,
C1 2JZ

4 August, 2026

Dear Sir or Madam,

COMMENTS ON CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL APPLICATION ref. 26/2482/EIA: EIA Screening Opinion Request for proposed construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) farm, land at Over Tabley, Knutsford

I am writing on behalf of CPRE (formerly the Campaign to Protect Rural England) Cheshire Branch regarding the above-mentioned application.

As the Council will be aware, the need or otherwise for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is considered under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 ("the Regulations").

Industrial installations for the production of electricity (such as solar farms) fall within Schedule 2 of the Regulations where their site area exceeds 0.5 hectare. This means that the proposal would constitute EIA development i.e. require an EIA to be submitted if it would be *"…likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location"*.

CPRE Cheshire notes that the Government guidance on this matter (in the Planning Practice Guidance note "Environmental Impact Assessment") is somewhat minimalist in its approach, stating for example that *"…only a very small proportion of Schedule 2 development will require an Environmental Impact Assessment".* Nevertheless, we believe that the Council should require an EIA in this instance, or at the very least insist upon an equivalent level of detailed evidence to be submitted with any planning application. Our reasons for this view are due to the scale, nature and likely harmful impacts of the proposal particularly on the landscape and its impacts on the use of productive farmland. Further details of these matters are set our below.

With an area of 63 hectares the site size is 126 times the lower size threshold for Schedule 2 proposals. Furthermore, whilst the site does not form part of any "Sensitive Area" as defined in the Regulations it is nevertheless within and would inevitably impact significantly on an area of attractive rural landscape.

The applicant also identifies (based on trial pit analysis) that the site comprises a mix of Grades 1, 2, 3a (all Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land). Research undertaken by CPRE in 2022 found that the UK lost 14,500 hectares of the country's best agricultural land in just the previous 12 years. Further research published in 2025 found that due to harms caused by flooding etc. the UK's remaining stock of BMV land is likely to be severely over-estimated. We note that the applicant proposes to decommission the site at the end of the project, but this would only be after 40 years.

Whilst in theory some agricultural use of the land may be feasible whilst the solar panels were still present this would be likely to comprise at most the grazing of sheep (for example). The versatility and range of food growing uses that the land could be put to during this period would be severely impacted.

It is essential that these and other environmental matters raised by local residents (such as impacts on biodiversity) are robustly assessed. We urge the Council to take these matters into account in its decision about whether an EIA is required.

Yours faithfully,

JONATHAN CLARKE
Chair of CPRE Cheshire Branch