My observations today draw upon the countryside charity's recent submission to the government's Environmental Audit Committee which considered evidence on the future contribution of solar energy to the UK's transition to Net Zero. Also, the findings of a 2023 CPRE Rutland Renewable Energy Study which researched the future energy requirements of the Rutland community with particular regard for the potential contribution of solar and onshore wind.

CPRE Rutland is of the view that well executed solar energy projects of **appropriate scale and location** utilising the latest in panel design and construct have a significant role to play in the nation's future energy provision. Local community support for any project and the use of rooftops and brownfield sites (rather than agricultural land) will be key components of the rapid adoption of the technology. There appear to be no consistency in government policy on this matter. Local agriculture-based communities are set to be destroyed by such projects as the Mallard Pass Solar Farm which will severely impact Lincolnshire and Rutland. Regrettably, current planning policy and practice is endangering swathes of valuable agricultural land at a time when severe economic hardship and a war in Europe highlight the value of home grown food.

CPRE believes that solar should be on roofs and brown field sites. It is in government's hands to ensure this. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) alone has many brown field sites lying unused which would lend themselves to energy production. Why support the loss of farms and green space at such a critical time for the food supply chain? The position defies logic and will undoubtedly have political consequences for rural MPs. The Inspectorate's report is the opportunity to set an example and recommend stopping the loss of productive land and highlight the need to relocate such a large scale project to a brown field site. Such sites include a significant number of former airbases dotted around the region and the country.

Most of the current applications for large solar farms appear to be driven by financial opportunity rather than being part of an integrated strategy of energy supply. Foreign investment seems to be a significant force in the market with little evidence of long term commitment to the UK. The community benefit offered to supporting communities touted by some of these investors does not stand up to scrutiny and is frequently not transparent. There is, therefore, considerable public disquiet over such large scale applications as that being considered today.

With regard to the application the inspectorate is invited to note the following facts.

1. Alternatives are available The success of **offshore wind** to date supported by the current growth rate in **rooftop solar** means that the UK is projected to be self-sufficient and actually able to export energy by the year 2030. This alone challenges the need to cover farmland and greenfield sites with huge solar installations
2. Rutland currently has solar farm applications under consideration which will cover over 2% of its countryside. This compares with the national position of 0.1%. This is clearly unjust and disproportionate from a Rutland perspective
3. Current planning policy in Rutland offers the opportunity to meet the county's energy needs almost entirely with a small number of turbines on the Rutland plateau to the north of the county with minimal footprint on green space
4. A mini nuclear reactor such as that developed by Rolls Royce located on say a disused military site would be more than enough to meet the region's future energy requirement
5. Important data to be considered by the Inspectorate lies within 'The May 2003 Rutland Landscape Character Analysis' by David Tyldesley and Associates. It states that, "The environmental quality of the County of Rutland, particularly of the landscape, is very high. It is widely appreciated by residents and visitors alike."

6. Understanding Rutland as a tourist destination is paramount in any planning deliberation with significant countryside impact. The relevant facts are well evidenced in the Future Rutland Conversation published by the county council and the recent successful levelling up bid undertaken jointly by Melton Borough and Rutland council. Tourism lies at the heart of Rutland's economy. This project will not enhance its sustainability. It will detract from it.
7. The wild life of north Rutland and nearby Rutland Water has an international profile attracting visitors from all over the world. The change of character and impact upon on bio diversity necessitated by the mallard pass project brings little cheer to its future prospects and again a negative contribution to sustainability.
8. The desire to industrialise a large piece of countryside for financial gain when there are clearly better energy alternatives is difficult to comprehend and invokes scepticism on the project's statement of purpose. Given the reported performance of offshore wind, and the potential of onshore wind, in line with current strategic planning policy, there is no sound or science based planning reason for this project to be approved.

Rather than just stating all that is wrong with this application the CPRE funded Rutland Renewable Energy Study, published just two weeks ago, provides clear community based evidence of what would be right for Rutland with regard to renewables, and demonstrates the benefits to Rutland of a low carbon future. In total, the renewables that residents of Rutland have proposed as suitable for the local countryside in the county, would generate **more than** its domestic and commercial needs. Throughout the discussions that created the vision, it was clear that Rutland residents wanted to be careful not to sacrifice the beauty of the local landscape for the sake of generating a commodity (electricity). However, there was also a recognition that having appropriate scale and well sited renewable energy in the area could bring valuable benefits to the county. If the schemes proposed in the vision were to go ahead, residents would like to see some of the financial returns be invested back into the community to enhance the local landscape in other ways, for instance through heat pump subsidies for buildings thought suitable. Similarly, there was a clear desire for solar and wind to bring investment in genuine biodiversity improvements such as local hedge and verge planting to support pollinators, provide wildlife corridors and prevent soil erosion. In related CPRE workshops it was suggested that the creation and management of new networks of hedgerows to shield 'brown field 'solar developments could provide an important source of land based employment and training in rural skills for young people in the county. Finally, there was a clear feeling that any growth in renewable energy generation across Rutland should also translate into lower prices for local residents so that clean energy produced in the county also helps to tackle fuel poverty. The charity can see little such community benefit from the Mallard Pass proposal.

Too often the shift to low carbon energy across England has become divisive and confrontational when rural communities have been presented with a proposed scheme in their landscape which they have had little input on and must either accept or reject. By developing a proactive vision for the future incorporating a small number of on shore turbines linked to roof top and brown field energy provision, the residents of Rutland have sent a clear message about the importance of their landscape and what renewables done well would look like in their local context.

In summary, this published community vision shows that the residents of Rutland are prepared to play a significant role in the effort to avert the climate emergency. This vision would generate enough low carbon electricity, not just to meet the needs of Rutland now, but also well into a future. Residents have shown that they are in favour of renewable energy not just in principle, but would also support hosting new installations in their countryside as long as these developments are sited sensitively to protect or enhance the stunning views across their landscape. There is an especially clear appetite for renewable energy schemes with a limited footprint that contribute to the restoration and enhancement of the habitats, nature and wildlife that Rutland residents evidentially value so much.

This very recent study, which incorporates the relevant present and future energy requirement

statistics supplied by Western Power acts as a supplement to the well documented Future Rutland Conversation undertaken by the county council.

CPRE's view is clear. Mallard Pass does not offer a sustainable future. A better plan exists that has community support and could still generate profit. The nation needs every acre of productive land to ensure its future food supply and independence.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit opinion and evidence to the inspectorate. The charity is happy to offer further evidence if required.

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