



Integrating nature and culture

Landscape Assessment Report

Proposed Northern and Southern Solar Farms
Ashbourne Development
Station Road
Matamata 3472

Document Quality Assurance

Proposed Northern and Southern Solar Farms, Ashbourne Development, Station Road, Matamata– Landscape Assessment Report
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Author Qualifications

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- Appendix 1: Viewpoint Location Map (Public Realm)
- Appendix 2.1-2.2 : Viewpoints 1-2 (Public Realm)

1. Introduction

The proposal

- 1.1. Unity developments (**the Applicant**) is seeking two (2) solar farms on sites that are both located on Station Road, these are referred to as the **Northern solar farm** and **Southern solar farm** respectively.

The subject site

- 1.2. The northern solar farm is approximately 135,000 m² (135 ha) in size southern solar farm is approximately 248,000 m² (248 ha) in size.
- 1.3. The northern solar farm is not addressed but is located on the northern verge of Station Road. The legal description of this site is Lot 2 DP 567678.
- 1.4. The northern solar farm is bordered to the west by 182 and 196 Station Road and an unaddressed lot.
- 1.5. The northern solar farm is bordered the north by 195 Peria Road and 60 James Avenue.
- 1.6. The northern solar farm is bordered to the east by 164 Station Road and an un-addressed lot.
- 1.7. The northern solar farm also enclaves 172 Station Road, with the western, eastern and northern boundaries of this lot all shared with the northern solar farm.
- 1.8. The southern solar farm sits across three (3) parcels, the western-most of which is addressed as 247A Station Road (Part Lot 1 DP 21055), with the remaining two parcels to the east are not addressed but have the legal descriptions Lot 2 DP 21055 and Lot 3 DPS 14362.
- 1.9. The southern solar farm sits at the southern extent of the wider Ashbourne development, and as such, will be bordered to on its northern boundary by a combination of a greenway/stormwater reserve, retirement village and residential development (which also extends to border the site on its eastern boundary).
- 1.10. The layout of the southern solar farm as described above is shown below in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Location Plan showing both southern and northern solar farm in context of current environment and wider Ashbourne development¹

- 1.11. The southern solar farm is bordered to the south by 72A Hinuera Road.
- 1.12. The land to the west of the southern solar farm (between the western boundary of the southern solar farm and the stream) is also owned by the applicant.
- 1.13. The land to the north of the greenway and the west of the proposed retirement village is also owned by the applicant.

Planning context

- 1.14. Both the northern and southern solar farms sit within the 'Rural Zone' of the Matamata-Piako District Plan (MPDP).
- 1.15. The northern solar farm is bordered on its eastern boundary and the eastern half of its northern boundary by areas of 'Rural Residential' zoning.
- 1.16. The land to the north and east of the southern solar farm (i.e. where the proposed residential community will be established) is zoned a combination of 'Rural Residential' and 'Rural Residential 2' zoning.

¹ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/02 – Project Scope Plan – dated 30/05/25

Scope of assessment

- 1.17. Provisions in the MPDP relevant to this assessment relate to visual impacts in terms of layout, character of the zone, and wider amenity values. Alignment with these provisions is covered through an assessment of the proposed development in context with relevant 'issues' and 'policies'.
- 1.18. This report will provide an overview of the existing environment, a description of the change proposed, and identify how such change will affect the physical landscape, landscape character and/or visual amenity values of the site and surrounding area. This assessment is based on the current receiving environment. Although this report contains references to various planning provisions it is not intended to be a planning assessment.
- 1.19. This report should be read in conjunction with the project architectural, civil engineering and landscape architectural drawings.
- 1.20. A series of visual simulations have been prepared for both solar farms by Greenwood Associates and will be utilised as a reference when assessing the level of potential landscape effects.

2. Methodology

- 2.1. This assessment of landscape and visual amenity effects has been undertaken with reference to the Te Tangi A Te Manu Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines² ('The Guidelines').
- 2.2. The significance of effects identified within this assessment are based upon a seven-point scale ranging from very low; low; low-moderate; moderate; moderate-high; high; very high; ratings.
- 2.3. As per section 6.21 of the Guidelines the following ranking scale will be used for the assessment of landscape effects (both physical and visual).

Table 1: Seven-Point Rating Scale

VERY LOW	LOW	LOW-MOD	MODERATE	MOD-HIGH	HIGH	VERY HIGH
LOW			MODERATE		HIGH	

- 2.4. As per section 6.22 of the Guidelines no descriptor of these ratings (i.e. of what low means) is given in this report based on the summation of the following Environment Court's "Matakana Island" decision (*Western Bay of Plenty District Council v Bay of Plenty Regional Council* [2019] NZEnvC 110) at [25] (note **emphasis** added):

"We think that [people] are likely to be able to understand qualitative assessment of low, medium and high, and combinations or qualifications of those terms without the need

² Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

*for explanation. We do not consider ratings of that kind to constitute a fully systematic evaluation system in a field as complex as landscape: in this context, the system **depends far more on the substantive content of the assessment**, especially the identification of attributes and **values**, than on the fairly basic relativities of low-medium-high...*

2.5. However, to provide some context, Table 2 below, and the subsequent paragraph (sourced from section 6.37 of the Guidelines) aligns the seven-point rating scale in Table 1 above against the 'less than minor' to 'significant' ratings scale typically used when assessing effects under the Resource Management Act 1991 (“RMA”).

Table 2: Seven-Point Guideline Rating Scale Measured Against the RMA Rating Scale

			SIGNIFICANT			
LESS THAN MINOR		MINOR	MORE THAN MINOR			
VERY LOW	LOW	LOW-MOD	MODERATE	MOD-HIGH	HIGH	VERY HIGH

"Effects are identified by establishing and describing the prevailing landscape character by identifying the landscape values of the site and the perception of the site within the wider landscape, (reference may be made in this regard to existing statutory documents and previous landscape assessments undertaken by others) and assessing the effects of the proposal in either enhancing or degenerating from these values. These effects will be measured using the seven-point rating scale given above in Table 1 and Table 2"³

- 2.6. This landscape assessment follows section 10 of the Guidelines.
- 2.7. In this case, prior to conducting the assessment, a desktop study was completed which included a review of the relevant information relating to the landscape and visual amenity aspects of the proposal. This information included:
- Architectural plans and elevations
 - Civil engineering plans and elevations
 - Landscape architectural plans and elevations
 - Matamata-Piako District Plan (MPDP) including relevant planning maps
 - Aerial photography
 - Ground contours
- 2.8. A site visit was undertaken on the 24th of June 2024 and the 8th of November 2024 in order to further understand the site and the surrounding context. The site visits focused on the potential physical impact the proposal would have on the landscape, what changes there would be to the landscape character of the site and

³ Section 6.7 - Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

surrounding area and the identification of viewing audiences to inform potential visual (landscape and amenity) effects.

- 2.9. Two (2) viewpoints within the public realm, comprising two (2) individual photographs were selected from sixty (60) photographs taken during the site visit. These views were selected from locations within the wider landscape where it was considered conceivable, based on site observations, that the proposal would be visible (refer appendix 1 for viewpoints map).

3. Existing Environment

- 3.1. The purpose of this section is to provide a description of the site as it currently sits, both in a local and wider context. This analysis allows for a definition of the existing landscape character and serves as the basis for the analysis of potential effects of the proposal upon the prevailing landscape values.

Site Location and Site Description / Wider Landscape Description

Site Location and Description

- 3.2. The sites for both solar farms are currently accessed from Station Road.
- 3.3. The northern solar farm is surrounded by a combination of rural and rural-residential properties, as outlined in sections 1.2-1.7 the northern solar farm is bordered by eight (8) lots, of these eight (8) lots, five (5) contain dwellings.
- 3.4. The site of the southern solar farm is currently surrounded by farmland with the areas to the north, west and east also owned by the applicant and either proposed or expected to be developed with a combination of residential and retirement village communities and outdoor recreation spaces, with a working farm bordering the solar farm to the south.
- 3.5. Farther afield, to the west of the southern solar farm, 319 Station Road, sits at a higher elevation with 2 x dwellings present.
- 3.6. The site of the northern solar farm has been housed livestock in the recent past, at the time of my site visit various paddocks were being re-sown.
- 3.7. The site of the southern solar farm currently functions as a working dairy farm.
- 3.8. The site of the northern solar farm contains three (3) drainage trenches that carry stormwater in a west-east direction towards a drainage trench at the eastern boundary that runs northwards towards the northern boundary.
- 3.9. The site of the southern solar farm also contains six (6) drainage trenches running in a south-north direction and a trench on a portion of the southern boundary that runs in an east-west direction.

Wider Context

3.10. This sub-section addresses the visual appearance and subsequent landscape character of the wider landscape.

3.11. The settlement of Matamata that sits to the north / east of both sites can be considered to represent a typical 'New Zealand Rural Village' with the following features present;

- An architectural signature with appreciable variance in residential built form in terms of bulk and architectural style.
- Established trees spread across private lots.
- Variable planting across the public realm
- Remnant areas of native vegetation spread through residential neighbourhoods, primarily located at riparian margins.

3.12. Like other towns through New Zealand there is a natural transition between older dwellings (c.1960s-1970s) and newer dwellings (2020s), reflecting the changing statutory provisions where the urban edge is pushed farther into traditional rural land to facilitate more housing. Figure 2 below provides an example of this transition at Jellicoe Street, approximately 700m from the Peakedale Drive entrance to the site.



Figure 2: Panoramic image showing transition between c.1960s -1970s residential (left of image) and 2020s residential (right of image)⁴

3.13. Matamata is surrounded by rural land, with the transition between the traditional 'New Zealand Rural Village' and rural land managed at the edges of the settlement largely through the use of rural-residential lifestyle properties that ease this transition by gradually reducing the density of built-form before opening up to a traditional rural landscape.

3.14. The rural land surrounding Matamata is predominantly flat with small localised rolling landforms and gullies, the predominant landscape features visible within the wider landscape are the Kaimai ranges to the east and Te Tapui to the west.

3.15. The surrounding rural land can be considered a typical 'New Zealand rural landscape' with the following natural and cultural elements present that have a readily perceptible association with rural amenity and hence, rural character;

- Rectilinear planting (shelter belts / hedge rows) present at internal and external boundaries

⁴ Source: Image taken by myself 26/04/2024

- Naturally distributed planting located at riparian corridors (stream edges, gullies and overland flow paths)
- Larger standalone trees present through open stock paddocks
- Standalone dwellings surrounded by ornamental planting and bounded by open paddocks
- Rural amenity buildings (sheds)
- Land divided in rectilinear fashion into paddocks with post and wire fencing, which is occasionally reinforced with rectilinear planting (refer above).

3.16. The rural and urban edges are well defined through a change in building density with a transition from traditional medium density housing to rural lifestyle lots evident at the margins of Matamata, and in the context of the site this is evident at Station Road. Figure 3 below provides a transitional series of photographs taken along Station Road when travelling in a westerly direction showing the transition from traditional medium density residential lots to rural-residential lots.



Figure 3: Transitional imagery showing residential to rural-residential⁵

3.17. In the sense of a change from an urban to a rural environment, the rural-residential properties shown above act as a 'staged transition' by decreasing housing density but maintaining elements of both rural and urban character.

3.18. Figure 4 below shows the transition between rural-residential and traditional rural environments.



Figure 4: Transitional imagery showing rural-residential to rural⁶

3.19. This transition is also apparent in the residential areas to the north of the wider site of the proposed northern solar farm with Eldonwood Drive acting as a transition between traditional medium density residential lots and lifestyle lots, Figure 5 below is an aerial photo showing this transition between medium density residential and rural-residential lifestyle blocks.

⁵ Source: Image taken by myself 24/06/2024

⁶ Source: Image taken by myself 24/06/2024



Figure 5: Aerial image showing transition from residential to rural-residential adjacent to site (note: open field at left of image is the site where the proposed residential and retirement communities will be established)⁷

Landscape Elements

3.20. This section discusses the notable landscape elements both within the subject site and local context, and for the purposes of this document these have been divided into two subcategories, natural elements and cultural elements. Natural landscape elements broadly consist of vegetation, landforms and coastlines. Cultural landscape elements consist of manmade structures that could be considered to be potentially character defining such as walls, residential and commercial built form and pieces of infrastructure (bridges, pathways).

Natural elements

3.21. The sites of both solar farms currently function as working farms, and as such are predominantly flat and contain little vegetation outside of pasture grass and occasional standalone trees (the majority of which are exotic).

3.22. Figure 6 below shows the typical profile of the northern solar farm when viewed from the north-east corner of the site (looking southwards).



Figure 6: Image of site of proposed northern solar farm from north-east corner of site looking southwards⁸

3.23. Figure 7 below shows the typical profile of the southern solar farm when viewed from the near the northern boundary (left image) and southern boundary (right image) looking eastwards.

⁷ Source: Google Earth – retrieved 23/09/2024

⁸ Source: Image taken by myself 08/11/2024



Figure 7: Image of site of proposed southern solar farm looking eastwards from near the northern (left image) and southern (right image) boundaries respectively⁹

Cultural elements

3.24. Cultural elements across the sites of both proposed solar farms are consistent with those that can be reasonably expected to be found across a working farm;

- Post and wire farm fences,
- Farm gates,
- Water troughs.

3.25. The fences and gates at the external boundaries of each site will be retained, with the internal fences and other listed elements to be removed.

3.26. I do not consider any of these identified cultural elements to be deemed as notable.

Landscape Character

3.27. Landscape character describes peoples visual or cogitative perception of both natural and developed landscapes. It is also synonymous to a “sense of place” and represents an attitude concerning one’s environs.

3.28. Landscape character is also informed by the amenity of the area; amenity¹⁰ describes peoples visual or cogitative perceptions of activities that occur in an area. For example, a large open pastured area punctuated with ancillary buildings would lead to the perception that the area is used for farming activities and thus having a rural amenity. Therefore, in terms of landscape character this example area would be perceived as having a rural character.

3.29. It should be noted that landscape character and amenity are not mutually exclusive and certain physical landscape elements may be both considered defining elements of both landscape character and amenity.

⁹ Source: Image taken by myself 08/11/2024

¹⁰ As per RMA **amenity values** means those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes.

- 3.30. Taking the preceding analyses through sections 3.2-3.26, I do not consider that either 'Site One' nor 'Site Two' have any features that distinguish them from the surrounding rural and rural-residential landscape, with both sites largely congruent with the surrounding environment in terms of visual appearance, land use and distribution of landscape elements.
- 3.31. I consider that the greatest character defining element, that gives the landscape its greatest 'sense of place' is the measured transition, outlined in the preceding analyses, between the urban area and the surrounding rural landscape, with the areas to the north of the site of the proposed southern solar farm (i.e.: where the proposed retirement village is proposed) playing a key role in this by effectively representing the rural edge by containing a number of the landscape elements listed in sections 3.15 and 3.21-3.25.
- 3.32. Whereas the site of the proposed southern solar farm, due to its long, narrow size is able to absorb into the surrounding rural-residential landscape and thus acts as a constituent element in the transition between the urban and rural edges.
- 3.33. In terms of surrounding built-form, as outlined in the preceding analyses this is a combination of both traditional medium density residential built form, laid out in single house lots and larger rural-residential properties.
- 3.34. Within the residential areas surrounding eastern portions of the wider site that will contain the proposed southern farm the extension of the urban edge can be witnessed at Jellicoe Road and at Eldonwood Drive.
- 3.35. Taking the above into account and based upon site observations the landscape character of the site and its immediate surrounds to be **defined as rural-residential**, with the 'ruralness' increasing around the area of the western extents of the proposed southern solar farm due to the distance from residential and rural-residential built-form.

Landscape Sensitivity to Absorb Change

- 3.36. This section outlines actions that would potentially adversely affect the landscape character described above. In broad terms, if a landscape is highly sensitive to change then relatively minor actions could have a high level of effect on the prevailing landscape character, whereas if a landscape has a lower sensitivity to change then any actions that potentially adversely affect the prevailing landscape character would need to be greater and more deliberate in nature.

A landscape's sensitivity to absorb change reflects the ability of the landscape to accept change to its original state. This level of sensitivity is influenced by the following, previously discussed factors:

- position within the wider landscape (including degree of visibility);
- landscape elements; and
- landscape character.

3.37. As outlined through sections 3.27-3.35, I consider the key landscape character element to be the measured transition from the urban environment (Matamata township to the surrounding rural landscape, a transition that is managed through the presence of rural-residential developments acting as sort of transition zone between the rural and urban landscapes.

3.38. The proposal (refer section 5 for further detail) for two solar farms (refer Figure 1) can be considered to be deemed as 'non-rural' in appearance.

3.39. Whilst solar farms are becoming more prevalent in New Zealand within the rural landscape, their appearance and activity cannot be considered to be readily associated with a typical rural New Zealand environment. Than would a rural-residential development

3.40. Therefore, integrating the solar farms into the landscape through using means that can be readily associated with a rural character will be critical to absorbing these elements into the wider environment and will also be critical to managing the effects on the immediate neighbours (these effects will be primarily visual and aural). This process can be referred to as 'managing the landscape values'.

Managing the landscape values – Proposed northern solar farm

3.41. The working elements of the proposed northern solar farm (i.e.: the solar panels) will be located approximately 105m away from the Station Road frontage, the southern extents will be partially visible from the Station Road corridor and thus will need to be integrated into the existing rural-residential community. The solar farm will also be visible from the neighbouring properties to the north, south, east and west.

3.42. As the northern solar farm can be considered to be perceived as an 'industrial' form within the landscape, the most effective measure to integrate this piece of infrastructure into the landscape will be to provide screening at the perimeter of the solar farm to obscure the solar panels from view. This will also address the effects on neighbours, particularly those identified in sections 1.2-1.7.

3.43. Having visited the site and studied the available aerial photography, I can conclude that there is little organic, natural planting across the rural-residential community that surrounds the site of the proposed northern solar farm primarily due to the dearth of natural riparian corridors. The localised planting signature largely consists of rectilinear planting at internal and common boundaries ranging from lower hedge rows to taller shelter belts as outlined in Figure 8 below.



Figure 8: Example of existing streetscape treatment in neighbouring rural-residential community (western boundary of 206 Station Road¹¹)

3.44. Therefore, I consider it prudent to adopt such an approach at the perimeter of the northern solar farm. Whilst providing a screen to obscure elements within the landscape can be considered a blunt instrument and not necessarily utilising the natural elements of the landscape, in this instance I consider it appropriate as the surrounding rural / rural-residential landscape contains a number of shelter belts and similar linearly arranged planting.

Managing the landscape values – Proposed southern solar farm

3.45. The southern solar farm sits at the southern boundary of the site, therefore when taking into account the position of the proposed retirement village and residential communities, it will effectively define the urban-rural edge within the wider landscape.

3.46. Due to a combination of existing vegetation and the prevailing topography the location of the proposed southern solar farm is obscured from view and I consider it unlikely that it will be visible (outside of potential glimpsed views) from the public realm. This can be seen in Figure 9 below with the supplied image obtained, by myself, at the secondary entrance to 319 Station Road, a location that sits on an approximate 490m south-east bearing from the closest point of the proposed solar farm and at the same approximate vertical level (+69m) as the location of the proposed solar farm.

¹¹ Source: Image taken by myself 24/06/2024



Figure 9: View towards southern solar farm from nearby public realm¹²

3.47. The above image demonstrates that the proposed solar farm will be obscured from view when observed at the same approximate elevation, therefore any perception of alteration to the rural edge will be experienced from the neighbouring property to the west/ south-west of the southern solar farm (319 Station Road) and the properties to the south (72A and 74A Hinuera Road). Figure 10 below shows the view from within the site (at the location of the proposed southern solar farm) showing the level of exposure to 319 Station Road.



Figure 10: View from location of solar farm towards 319 Station Road¹³

3.48. Therefore it will be necessary to provide screening at the western portions of the solar farm, which is currently being proposed within the solar farm boundaries, as well as part of the Greenway / Stormwater Reserve, due to the depth of the reserve at this juncture.

3.49. This will allow for a vegetated barrier and will minimise any potential shading effects on the solar panels during the late afternoon. This vegetated edge will also have the dual effect of screening the remainder of the development from view and thus creating a rural edge by utilising a natural drainage corridor for placement of vegetation, with such a 'naturalistic' distribution a common outcome in terms of vegetation layout within rural areas.

¹² Source: Image taken by myself 26/04/2024

¹³ Source: Image taken by myself 26/04/2024

- 3.50. With regards to the southern boundary of the southern solar farm more screen planting will be required at this boundary to create a rural edge through the provision of a shelter belt. Shelter belt planting will need also be required at the eastern boundary of the southern solar farm to provide screening to future residents of the proposed residential, and, to a lesser degree, to provide obscuration when viewed from the dwellings at 72A and 74A Hinuera Road.
- 3.51. The preceding 'managing of landscape values' have been carried to the proposal (refer section 5) to ensure that the solar farms are effectively integrated into the current (and proposed) environment.
- 3.52. The subsequent analysis of the proposal (refer section 5) to be carried out in section 6 will focus on the effectiveness of these measures in absorbing the proposed solar farm into the landscape and how these measures affect the prevailing landscape character values.

4. Relevant Statutory Context

- 4.1. This section will outline relevant clauses from national, regional and local policy and/or statutory regulations that impact the analysis of landscape effects generated by the proposal (refer section 5).

Resource Management Act 1991

- 4.2. Part 2 of the RMA sets out its purpose and principles. Part 2, section 5 states that the purpose of the RMA is to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. Section 6 sets out the matters of importance that must be recognised and provided for in achieving the purpose of the RMA. Section 7 contains other matters that must be given particular regard to, and section 8 states that the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi must be taken into account in achieving the purpose of the RMA.
- 4.3. The protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is identified as a matter of national importance in section 6(b).
- 4.4. Section 7 identifies a range of matters that shall be given particular regard to in achieving the purpose of the RMA. Of relevance to this proposal is section 7(c) the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values. This is considered in this report in relation to potential effects on landscape elements, character, and visual amenity.

Matamata – Pikao District Plan

- 4.5. As per section 1.14 the sites of both proposed solar farms sit within the 'Rural Zone' of the MPDP.

4.6. Having reviewed the MPDP, I consider the following objectives and policies to be pertinent to this assessment, in that they have relevance to the implementation of a solar farm and refer to issues of visual amenity and landscape character.

Table 3: Pertinent objectives and policies from the MPDP

MPDP – Objectives and policies pertinent to landscape assessment – Section 2.4 Sustainable Management Strategy				
1 – Controlling Activities				
<i>Obj. I.D</i>	<i>Objective Description</i>	<i>Pol. I.D</i>	<i>Policy Description</i>	<i>Reason for selection</i>
O3	To recognise that the rural environment is primarily a place for rural production activities while also providing for a variety of other activities, including rural lifestyle, intensive farming, rural based industry and significant infrastructure networks and sites, which are dependent on a rural location.	P3	Activities should not establish in rural areas unless they are able to be undertaken without constraining the lawful operation of existing activities.	References 'infrastructure networks' of which a solar farm can be considered to be.
MPDP – Objectives and policies pertinent to landscape assessment – Section 3.5 Amenity				
1 – Development Standards				
<i>Obj. I.D</i>	<i>Objective Description</i>	<i>Pol. I.D</i>	<i>Policy Description</i>	<i>Reason for selection</i>
O1	To maintain and enhance a high standard of amenity in the built environment without constraining development innovation and building variety.	P1	To ensure that development in residential and rural areas achieves adequate levels of daylight admission, privacy and open space for development sites and adjacent properties.	References issues of privacy (in terms of this proposal a more reverse sensitivity activity)
O2	To minimise the adverse effects created by building scale or dominance, shading, building location and site layout.	P3	To maintain the open space character of residential and rural areas by ensuring that development is compatible in scale to surrounding activities and structures.	References issues of character and scale within the landscape
2 – Design, appearance and character				
<i>Obj. I.D</i>	<i>Objective Description</i>	<i>Pol. I.D</i>	<i>Policy Description</i>	<i>Reason for selection</i>
O3	To ensure that the design of subdivisions and the potential future development maintains or enhances the rural character, landscape and amenity of the zone and the surrounding area.	P5	To encourage a varied and interesting built form by supporting initiatives and providing development amenity incentives for comprehensive and innovative subdivision and development design.	References the maintenance of amenity and rural character.
		P7	To ensure that the rural landscape, character and amenity values are maintained by avoiding inappropriate adverse effects, including cumulative adverse effects, from subdivision and potential future development.	References the maintenance of amenity and rural character.

4.7. Taking the above 'issues' and 'objectives' into account it can be concluded that preserving the local amenity character values within the rural environment are key

outcomes within the rural zone, therefore the assessment through section 6 will take this into account when considering the final rating of assessment of effects.

- 4.8. The following standards from section 3.2.1 – Building envelope from section 3.2 Rural and Rural-Residential Zones can be considered applicable to this assessment as they address issues of yard separation, thus any infringement of these yards could be considered to have potential adverse effects on the amenity values of the neighbours.

i. Maximum height - 10m

ii. Height relative to site boundary

No part of any building shall exceed a height of 3m plus the shortest horizontal distance between that part of the building and the nearest site boundary.

iii. Yards

Rural front yards.....25m

- 4.9. The following standards from section 6.5.5 – Rural subdivision from section 6 Subdivision, can be considered applicable to this assessment as they address issues of rural amenity and character (note: my **emphasis** added as these elements relate directly to rural amenity and character).

ii Rural amenity and character

*a. Effect on the rural environment, including **character, amenity and visual effects**.*

b. The potential location of future development and the effect on the surrounding environment.

c. The extent of existing vegetation which is to be retained.

d. A variety of lot sizes is provided in accordance with the rural provisions. The clustering of lots will only be considered in specific circumstances where it can be demonstrated that a more appropriate form of rural amenity and design is achieved, cumulative effects are avoided and appropriate mitigation is provided.

iii Visual

*a. The **visual effects** of a subdivision will be assessed in **terms of the likely effect** on:*

- The **surrounding environment and general landscape character** (including ridgelines and view planes) with particular consideration of public roads, public reserves, identified significant features, Residential zones, dwellings in Rural zones, or marae in the vicinity of the proposed facility;*
- Design elements in relation to the locality, with reference to the existing landscape character of the locality and amenity values;*
- The **mitigating effects of any proposed landscaping**.*

*b. **In making an assessment of visual impact** for a subdivision consent potential building platforms shall be identified and regard shall be had to the following and conditions may be imposed in respect of these matters:*

- The scale of a potential building;*
- Height, cross sectional area, colour and texture of possible buildings on the building platforms identified;*

- **Distance of structures to site boundaries, the degree of compatibility with surrounding properties;**
 - **Site location in terms of the general locality,** topography, geographical features, adjoining land use, **i.e. landscape character,** rural houses;
 - **Proposed planting, fencing** and other landscaping treatments.
- c. In **assessing any proposed landscaping** regard shall be had to:
- Whether existing landscape features are integrated into the new subdivision layout;
 - **Whether the layout and design are of a high standard, and provide a visual environment that is interesting** and in scale with the proposed subdivision and possible future development;
 - **Size and type of trees to be planted at the time of planting and at maturity having considered:**
 - The **character** of the site;
 - The **character** of adjacent properties;
 - **Potential shadowing in winter of adjacent properties** or reserves;
 - Underground and overground services;
 - Suitability of the species to the location;
 - Suitability of the maintenance plan and watering programme to the species.
 - The timing of implementation of the landscape plan and the maintenance of approved planting;
 - Whether the type and the location of planting promotes public safety;
 - Whether the Landscape Plan is certified by an appropriately qualified person as consisting of hardy plants suited to the location and capable of achieving the appropriate screening or enhancement purposes desired in the circumstances;
 - The Preliminary Visual and Landscape Study, October 1992 (Volume I);
 - Whether any landscaping or screening adversely affects the safe and efficient operation and function of the transportation networks.
- iv. Reverse sensitivity
- a. The **avoidance of conflicts between activities and potential reverse sensitivity effects on lawfully established activities.**
 - b. Where conflict or reverse sensitivity effects cannot be avoided, the effectiveness and appropriateness of mitigation measures to protect lawfully established activities.

5. Proposal

5.1. This section will address each proposed solar farm separately

Layout

5.2. The proposed layout for both proposed solar farms is provided on the project landscape architectural and civil engineering drawings

Northern Solar Farm

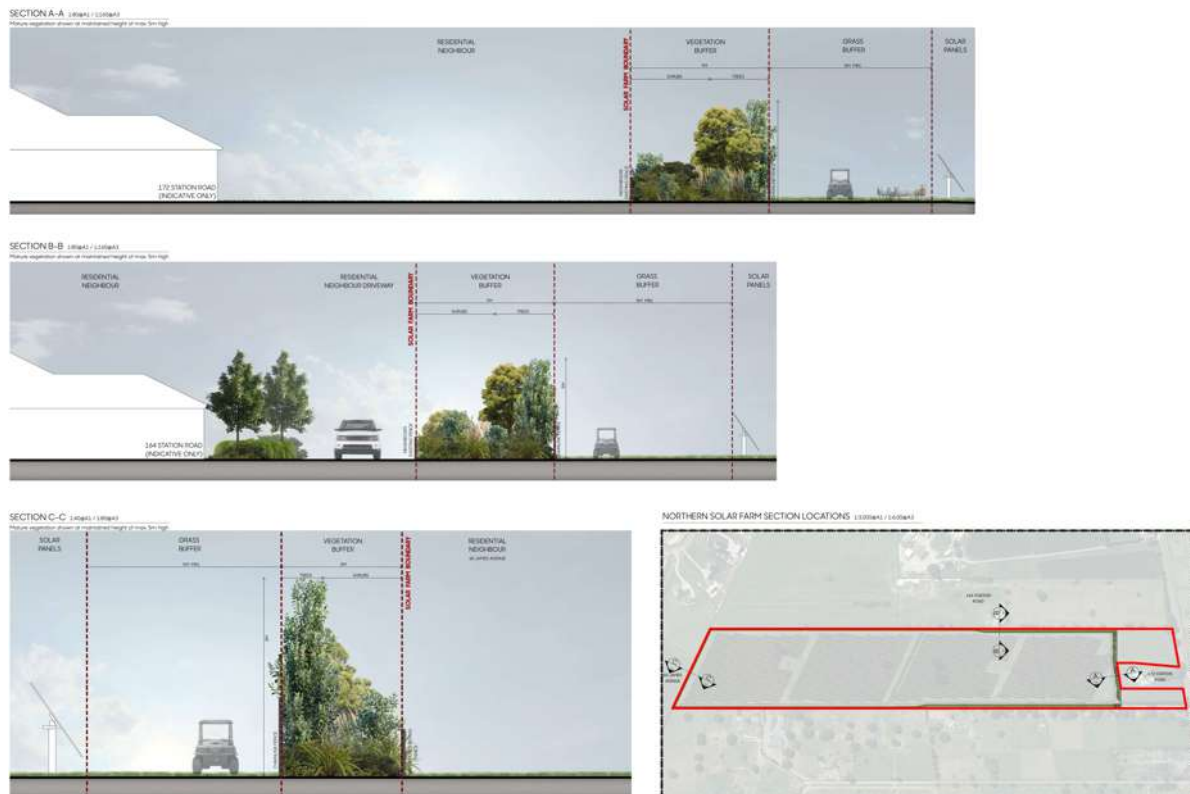


Figure 12: Indicative sections at the boundary with neighbouring properties showing the variance between 3m and 7m buffer planting¹⁵

- 5.5. At the southern boundary of the proposed northern solar farm, this boundary planting is enhanced with the provision of seventeen (17) native trees, these are intended to screen the solar panels from view from 172 Station Road, the proposed layout is shown below in Figure 13. Placing these trees at the southern boundary also minimises shadowing of the solar panels.

¹⁵ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/05 – Northern Solar Farm – Sections– dated 30/05/25



Figure 13: Proposed planting layout at southern boundary of solar farm with 172 Station Road¹⁶

- 5.6. The two (2) strips of land to the west and east of 172 Station Road, whilst owned by the applicant will not be developed at this stage and are not considered to be a part of the northern solar farm.

Southern Solar Farm

- 5.7. The layout of the proposed northern solar farm is shown below in Figure 14.

¹⁶ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/04 – Northern Solar Farm – Detailed Planting Plan– dated 30/05/25



Figure 14: Layout plan of southern solar farm¹⁷

5.8. The perimeter of the site is ringed by a combination of shrub and tree planting, which varies between 3m and 7m. The deeper width of planting occurs at the interface with future residential properties, this is shown below in Figure 15.

¹⁷ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/03 – Northern Solar Farm – Overall Planting Plan– dated 30/05/25



Figure 15: Indicative sections at the boundary with neighbouring properties showing the variance between 3m and 7m buffer planting¹⁸

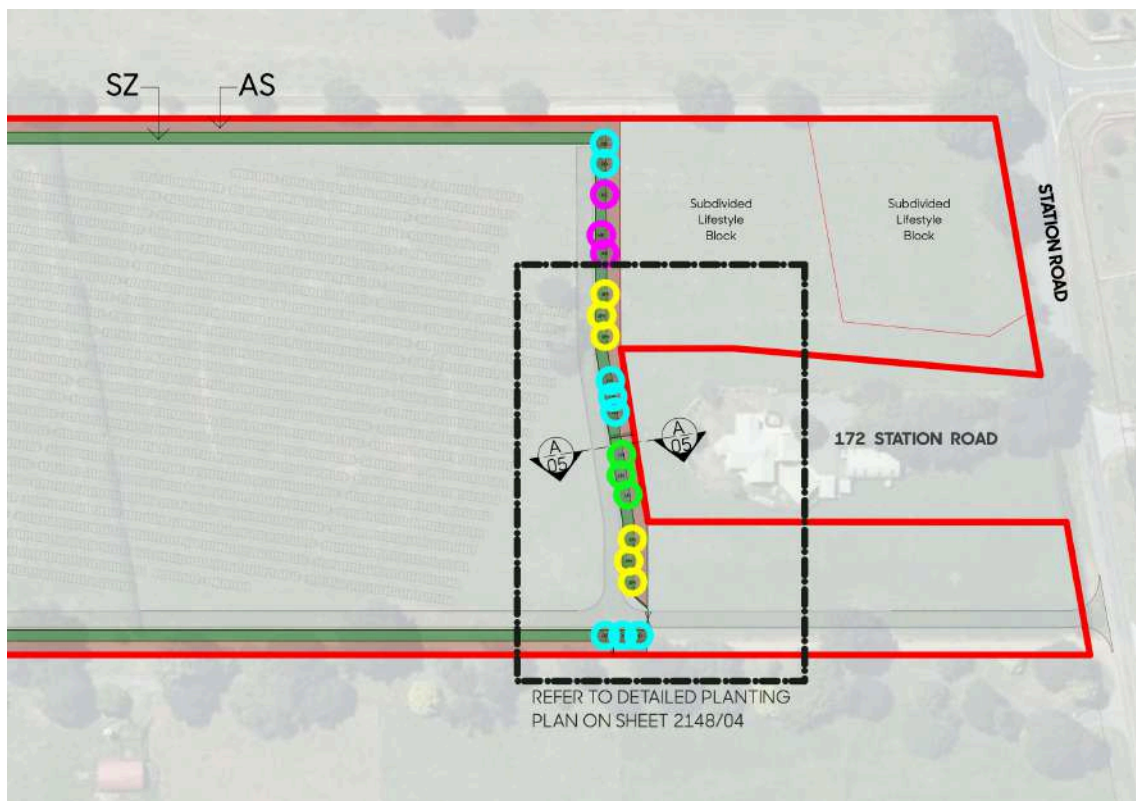
- 5.9. At the southern boundary of the proposed southern solar farm, this boundary planting is enhanced with the provision of seventy-three (73) native trees, these are intended to provide enhanced screening of the solar panels when viewed from within 72A Hinuera Road, the proposed layout is shown below in Figure 13. Placing these trees at the southern boundary also minimises shadowing of the solar panels.

¹⁸ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/05 – Northern Solar Farm – Sections– dated 30/05/25



Figure 16: Proposed planting layout at southern boundary of solar farm with 72A Hinuera Road¹⁹

5.10. The two (2) strips of land to the west and east of 172 Station Road, whilst owned by the applicant will not be developed at this stage and are not considered to be a part of the northern solar farm. These strips are better described as 'legs' and are shown below, with the 'leg' to the east of 172 Station Road to be converted into two lifestyle blocks. This arrangement is shown below in Figure 17.



¹⁹ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/04 – Northern Solar Farm – Detailed Planting Plan– dated 30/05/25

Figure 17: Two 'legs' at southern portion of northern solar farm (including proposed lifestyle blocks) surrounding 172 Station Road ²⁰

Grazing

- 5.11. The areas between the solar panels will remain in pasture grass, in order to maintain the grass at an acceptable level sheep will graze the sites with free reign to move in and around the solar panels

Security Fencing

- 5.12. Both solar farms will be enclosed with 2.2m height chain link fences to prevent access to the solar panels, these fences will sit behind the aforementioned boundary planting. This fence sits at distances of 3m – 7m from the boundary of the site to allow for buffer planting between this fence and the neighbouring properties.

Vegetation retention / removal

- 5.13. All vegetation will be removed from within the boundaries of the proposed solar farms.

Landscape architectural response to the site

- 5.14. The full extent of the landscape response to the site can be found on the project landscape architectural drawings.
- 5.15. As outlined through sections 5.4-5.6 and 5.8-5.10 the landscape architectural response to the site consists of buffer planting ranging from 3m to 7m wide, with the wider locations at the interfaces with existing neighbouring dwellings.
- 5.16. The 3m buffer areas are planted with planting mix 'SZ', which contains an assortment of native shrubs / small trees that will reach a maximum height of 5m. Being large native shrubs these species are evergreens and thus will maintain their screen effect throughout the year.
- 5.17. These shrubs can also be easily trimmed to maintain a height of 5m, this 5m height restriction ensures that there are no shadows cast over the solar panels, thus reducing their efficiency.
- 5.18. Larger trees (heights of up to 10m) are located at the southern boundary of each proposed solar farm, this limits their casting of shadows over the adjacent solar panels and allows for additional screening, and from a visual perspective, allows for a continuation of the 'shelter belt' patterning across the wider rural landscape.
- 5.19. Where the buffer planting is increased to 7m in width, the planting includes the aforementioned 'SZ' mix and the 'AS' mix, the 'SZ' mix containing the 5m high

²⁰ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawing 2148/04 – Northern Solar Farm – Detailed Planting Plan– dated 30/05/25

shrubs / small trees for the initial 3.5m width when measured from the 2.2m fence towards the neighbouring property, with the 'AS' mix, which contains native shrubs with a maximum height of 2.5m, this allows for a layering of planting at the interfaces with neighbouring dwellings, that will provide screening to the solar panels but does not see 5m high shrubs / small trees directly on the boundary (refer Figure 12 for cross sections)

Infringements

- 5.20. As the security fences are more than 2m in height they are considered as buildings under the MPDP, and as such infringe the 10m side/rear yard and 25m front yard setbacks.

6. Assessment of landscape effects

- 6.1. The following assessment of effects will be separated into three (3) sub-sections, physical landscape effects, effects on visual amenity and effects on landscape character. Physical landscape effects will address the physical changes to the site (both direct and in-direct), effects on visual amenity will address the effects on visual amenity from both the public and private realms and will utilise viewpoints to aid in these assessments and effects on landscape character will surmise the both the physical effects and effects on visual amenity with regards to the prevailing landscape character as addressed in sections 3.27- 3.35.

Physical landscape effects

- 6.2. This section considers the physical effects of the proposal outlined in section 5 upon the natural landscape elements of the site and its immediate surrounds. The effect of the proposal upon the landscape elements of the site is linked to the landscape's sensitivity to change.
- 6.3. Physical landscape effects are not necessarily limited to the site itself, but also to immediately surrounding areas. For example, if a site was sitting on a slope that formed part of a greater landform, flattening that portion of the slope could be considered to be an adverse effect not only on the site itself but also the surrounding landscape.

Effects on the immediate site - Physical landscape effects

- 6.4. Both the sites of the proposed northern and southern solar farm requires minimal earthworks to accommodate the proposed solar panels, with earthworks limited to the existing farm track, all existing drainage channels will be retained.
- 6.5. All existing vegetation located within the sites of the proposed solar farms will be removed.
- 6.6. All existing farm fences, except those at the external boundaries will be removed.

Effects on the surrounding areas - Physical landscape effects

- 6.7. All physical works will occur within the boundaries of the site with no alteration to the landscape outside of the site boundaries required to accommodate the proposal.
- 6.8. The presence of solar panels at the site will introduce an element that is not commonly associated with a rural / rural-residential environment. These effects will be assessed in the subsequent assessment of effects of visual amenity and landscape character.

Effects upon visual amenity

- 6.9. Visual amenity is another key component to people's identification and perception of landscape character. Visual amenity effects result from changes to specific views and the visual amenity experienced by people. The magnitude (or level) of change must be considered in relation to the sensitivity of the viewing audience when evaluating the significance of an effect. The sensitivity may be influenced by a number of factors, which include but are not limited to the number of people who may see it, the reason for being at the viewpoint or looking at the view, the existing character of the view, the duration for which the proposal may be seen and the viewing distance.
- 6.10. Through individual public realm viewpoint analysis, I will comment on the effects upon visual amenity and landscape character and will provide a subsequent analysis on the effects upon landscape character (which takes into account both physical alteration to the landscape and effects upon visual amenity) in section 7 of this report.
- 6.11. As outlined in section 1.20, Greenwood Associates have prepared a series of visual simulations of both proposed solar farms, I will utilise these viewpoints for the following assessments, as well additional viewpoints obtained during my site visit.
- 6.12. A glint and glare assessment was produced by Lightyears for both solar farms, this report should be read in conjunction with this assessment.
- 6.13. In terms of the northern solar farm the glint and glare surmises the effects (in terms of glint and glare on nearby residents (referred to as 'receptors' in the glint and glare assessment) the following conclusion is provided;

'The results indicate that none of the receptors are at risk of glare. The assessment confirmed no exposure at any receptor, demonstrating no potential for after-images or flash blindness. Overall, the findings show no ocular impact from solar glare.

*It should be noted the software simulation uses clear sky weather data where glint and glare is not reduced due to atmospheric conditions or clouds, which provides a worst-case scenario. In reality, clouds, fog and other atmospheric conditions will result in less glare than simulated in this report.'*²¹

²¹ Source: 'Matamata Solar Farm Stage – 1 – Glint and Glare Assessment – Date: 18th October 2024

- 6.14. In terms of the southern solar farm the glint and glare surmises the effects (in terms of glint and glare on nearby residents (referred to as 'receptors' in the glint and glare assessment) the following conclusion is provided;

The results show that all receptors, apart from one, experience no risk of glare. The potential for a temporary after image (yellow glare) is estimated at 6 minutes. Additionally, the low potential for afterimages is expected to last less than 5 minutes. The results are shown in Appendix A.

To mitigate the issue of after images caused by yellow glare, a secondary planting strip / barrier 5- meters high, offset by 5-meters from the northern and western boundaries of the proposed solar farm could be established. This enhancement would eliminate the risk of yellow glare and reduce green glare to just 27 minutes per year. Detailed results of this additional barrier's impact are presented in Appendix B.

It should be noted the software simulation uses clear sky weather data where glint and glare is not reduced due to atmospheric conditions or clouds, which provides a worst-case scenario. In reality, clouds, fog and other atmospheric conditions will result in less glare than simulated in this report.²²

- 6.15. The receptor referred to in the above conclusion is the 'Station Road Receptor' which is expected to receive glint and glare at a low level of intensity periodically from mid-September to mid-April. In order to mitigate this glint and glare on Station Road the following solution was proposed;

To mitigate the issue of after images caused by yellow glare, a secondary planting strip / barrier 5- meters high, offset by 5-meters from the northern and western boundaries of the proposed solar farm could be established, as illustrated in Figure 20. This approach aims to eliminate the impact of yellow glare and its associated after images entirely, while also reducing green glare to 27 minutes (or 0.5 hours). Furthermore, this measure would decrease the duration of glare from 7 months a year to just 3 months (March, September, and October), as shown below..²³



- 6.16. I am of the opinion that the landscape architectural response to the site has taken the above recommendation into account and therefore the glint and glare experienced on Station Road can be considered at the 'reduced' duration (3

²² Source: 'Matamata Solar Farm Stage – 2 – Glint and Glare Assessment – Date: 18th October 2024

²³ Source: 'Matamata Solar Farm Stage – 1 – Glint and Glare Assessment – Date: 18th October 2024

months March, September, October) as outlined in the excerpt in section 3.15 above, therefore when assessing the effects of the southern solar farm on visual amenity, I will consider the reduced glare as outlined above.

Visual catchment and Viewing audiences

6.17. Viewpoints for analysis of effects on the localised landscape character were determined by analysing key public locations (reserves, public parks), nearby static viewpoints (bus stops, car parks) and, where possible, public areas near potential private viewing audiences.

6.18. Based upon my site visit and analysis I consider that the primary public and private viewing audiences comprise the following:

Public viewing audiences – Northern Solar Farm

6.19. Based on my observations during the site visits undertaken on the 24th of June and 8th of November 2025, I consider that the views to the northern solar farm from the public realm are primarily limited to Station Road when travelling westwards (i.e.: away from Matamata township), with the majority of the exposure to the site occurring from neighbouring properties within the private realm.

6.20. Therefore, based on my site visit, I consider the areas of the public realm to have views towards the site to encapsulate the following

- Station Road: The proposed solar panels will be visible when approaching the site on Station Road when travelling westwards (represented by viewpoint 1-South). Note that when travelling eastwards the proposed solar panels are obscured by off-site shelter belt and specimen tree planting.

Private viewing audiences – Northern Solar Farm

6.21. As outlined in sections 1.4-1.7 and 3.3, the northern solar farm directly neighbours eight (8) rural-residential lots, five (5) of which contain dwellings, these lots are;

- 172 Station Road: This is the enclaved lot (to the south of the site) that is surrounded by the site, however the portions of the site enclaving this lot will not receive solar panels). The dwelling on this lot sits approximately 22m south its common northern boundary of the site which represents the southern extent of the proposed solar farm.
- 182 Station Road: This lot sits to the west of the site contains a single dwelling that sits approximately 35m west of the common boundary with the site, a number of large specimen trees are located along this boundary in an arrangement that can be described as a 'loose screen'.
- 196 Station Road: This lot sits to the west of the site contains a single dwelling and a series of ancillary buildings (farm sheds). The dwelling sits approximately 83m west of the common boundary with the site, with a

series of large specimen trees sitting within this gap between the dwelling and the common boundary with the site. The closest ancillary building to the site sits at a distance of 13m from the common boundary.

- 60 James Avenue: This lot sits to the north of the site and contains a single dwelling and associated garage, the dwelling sits approximately 80m from its common boundary with the site.
- 164 Station Road: This lot sits to the east of the site and contains a single dwelling that sits approximately 9m east of its common boundary with the site, and as such represents the closest dwelling to the site.

6.22. As these private areas were not accessible during the site visit, I will rely on 'reverse views' from within the site and imagery from near these locations.

6.23. As the images used for the private realm assessment were not obtained from within these respective neighbouring lots, I will not prepare formalised viewpoint images in the appendices of this report but rather will use in-line images to support the analyses. I will also make use of 'Viewpoint 02' from the Greenwood Associates visual simulation package (drawings 2148/12 – 16) which simulates the proposed boundary planting when standing at the common boundary with 182 Station Road and of viewpoint 03 (drawings 2148/18 – 21), which simulates the proposal from 172 Station Road.

Public viewing audiences – Southern Solar Farm

6.24. Based on my observations during the site visits undertaken on the 24th of June and 8th of November 2025, I consider that, despite its size, the southern solar farm will be largely obscured from view from the public realm, due its distance from the nearest point of public realm (Station Road) and the surrounding topography and vegetation providing a high level of obscuration resulting in any views towards the site of the southern solar farm being very brief and glimpsed. With the majority of exposure to the southern solar farm being from the neighbouring / nearby private lots to the west and south and from the future development areas of the site itself.

6.25. Therefore, based on my site visit, I consider the areas of the public realm to have views towards the site to encapsulate the following

- Station Road: The proposed solar panels will be visible, through glimpsed views when approaching the site on Station Road when travelling eastwards (represented by viewpoint 2 - North), however as noted in the preceding section 6.24, these views will be brief and glimpsed only.

Private viewing audiences – Southern Solar Farm

6.26. As outlined in sections 1.11, 1.12 and 3.4 the southern solar farm directly neighbours eight (8) rural-residential lots, five (5) of which contain dwellings, these lots are;

- 72A Hinuera Road: This lot shares its northern boundary with the site, however the dwelling on this lot sits approximately 630m south-east of the eastern extents of the proposed solar farm, and as such the majority of views towards the proposed solar farm will be from the western extents of this lot, which currently function as a working farm.
- 319 Station Road: This lot sits to the west of the wider development area and contains a dwelling that sits at the approximate same elevation as the site, this dwelling sits approximately 540m to the west of the western boundary of the southern solar farm, with some on-site ancillary buildings sitting approximately 290m to the west of the western boundary of the proposed solar farm

6.27. As these private areas were not accessible during the site visit, I will rely on 'reverse views' from within the site and imagery from near these locations.

6.28. As the images used for the private realm assessment were not obtained from within these respective neighbouring lots, I will not prepare formalised viewpoint images in the appendices of this report but rather will use in-line images to support the analyses. I will also make use of 'Viewpoint 01' and 'Viewpoint 02' from the Greenwood Associates visual simulation package (drawings 2148/22 – 29) which simulates the proposed boundary planting when standing at the common boundary with 319 Station Road and from within lower points of the wider development site to the west of the site.

Assessment Viewpoints – Public Realm

6.29. The assessment viewpoints are described in more detail in below with a map indicating the location of these viewpoints located in appendix 1. The photographs, which represent these viewpoints, are shown in appendices 2.1 and 2.2.

6.30. Note that 'degree of visibility' within the below table refers to the visibility of the proposal (refer section 5) and 'distance to site' refers to the distance to the closest point of the site.

Table 4: Assessment viewpoints

VP No.	Direction of View	Distance to site	Degree of visibility (Full / Partial / Obscured)	Reason for Selection
V01- Northern Farm	West	Approx. 200m	Partial	Represents the approximate initial view towards the solar farm when travelling westwards on Station Road, this solar farm will remain visible for an approximate distance of 200m after encountering this view.

V02 – Southern Farm	West	Approx. 460m	Obscured	Represents the point on Station Road where the proposed solar farm has the potential to be the most visible, however as shown in the supplied image the prevailing topography and distance to the site ensures that the proposed southern solar farm remains obscured from view. Other points on Station Road see the site of the Solar Farm obscured by an existing shelter belt hedge, half of which is slated to remain and be removed as the proposed retirement village expands.
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Assessment of Visual Amenity Effects – Public Realm

6.31. The visual effects likely to result from this proposal are described below in relation to the respective viewpoints. ‘Existing View’ refers to the contemporary view as it is presented in the supplied viewpoint images that append this report (i.e.: without the proposal present), ‘Proposed View’ refers to the view that is anticipated when the proposal is established.

Viewpoint V01 (Northern Solar Farm): Station Road travelling westwards

6.32. This viewpoint represents the initial view towards the proposed northern solar farm when travelling westwards on Station Road, this view will remain for the next approximate 200m before passing by the farm.

Existing View:

The view currently consists of an open paddock and a series of standalone exotic trees. I would consider this to represent a typical rural scene within New Zealand. Prior to reaching this point any viewing audience will have passed by a series of rural-residential properties on either side of the road (refer Figure 3 and Figure 4 on pages 11 and 11 respectively).

Proposed View:

Greenwood Associates have prepared a series of visual simulations from this viewpoint at the time of planting, five years on from planting and fifteen years from planting. These images are shown below in the above sequential order in Figure 18 below.



Figure 18: Visual simulations showing the maturation of proposed planting at the boundary of the solar farm when viewed from Station Road²⁴

Upon installation the solar panels will be visible and viewed against a foreground of a typical rural paddock with standalone trees and a backdrop of established trees on the neighbouring property (note: that the panels move with the sun to capture

²⁴ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawings 2148/09 - 11 – Northern Solar Farm – Viewpoint 01 – Time of planting / 5 years / 15 years– dated 30/05/25

maximum solar energy and the provided simulations show the panels sitting at their highest possible extension when capturing this sun). These panels will represent an element that is different to those (in terms of appearance and function) within the landscape.

As the planting matures a greater amount of these panels become obscured from view, with the majority of the panels being obscured after five years of growth and being fully obscured after 15 years of growth.

In the five year period between the installation of planting and the planting reaching near maturation the presence of the solar panels will represent a different element, although their duration of visibility will be short, it is also notable that as per the glint and glare assessment no glint or glare is expected to be experienced by those using Station Road.

The presence of existing trees in the foreground and background of the view also assist in absorbing the proposed solar panels into the landscape, whilst I acknowledge that the applicant does not have control over the retention / removal of these trees, I consider it reasonable to assume that outside of a major storm event that may fell these trees that they can be relied on to provide this absorption in the aforementioned five (5) year period as those in the background serve a function in providing shelter and screening to 182 Station Road and those in the foreground are not impeding any view or sitting in a perilous position close to a dwelling or other structure that may require their removal for safety reasons.

Upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting the solar panels will be largely indiscernible in the landscape and the main focus of the view will be the planting, that I consider to be in keeping with the local landscape character values by being arranged in a linear manner, whilst this may convey to a viewing audience that something is being screened, this a common occurrence within rural and rural-residential landscapes and thus will not appear to be in conflict with the prevailing landscape character values of the wider landscape.

It should also be noted that with the two lifestyle lots being proposed in the lots at the foreground of this view that built-form will, at one stage, be present in the foreground of the view, further obscuring the solar farm from view.

Taking the above factors into account, and considering the transitional nature of the view, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity of the proposal from this viewpoint (represented by four images) can be considered to be **Low**²⁵ upon installation of the panels and the surrounding planting, moderating to a **Very Low**²⁶ level after five (5) years of the proposed boundary planting having been installed.

Viewpoint V02: (Southern Solar Farm): Station Road travelling westwards

²⁵ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

²⁶ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

6.33. This viewpoint represents the initial view towards the proposed southern solar farm when travelling eastwards on Station Road.

Existing View:

The site of the solar farm is obscured from view by the prevailing topography and planting the sits in close proximity to Station Road, this obscuration continues farther down Station Road due an existing shelter belt located at the northern boundary of the wider development site, as shown below in Figure 19.



Figure 19: View towards southern solar farm from Station Road – showing obscuration by existing shelter belt²⁷

Proposed View:

The southern solar farm will continue to be obscured from view from within the public realm, as the vegetation and topography that combine to obscure the proposed solar farm from view are to be retained and will not be modified.

The shelter belt shown in Figure 19 will be removed at the portion of the site where the proposed retirement village will be installed, and slightly beyond (to allow views from the retirement village to the wider landscape), however portions will be retained which will obscure the proposed southern solar farm from view. In the event that the entirety of this shelter belt is removed, I consider it unlikely that the proposed solar farm will be visible due to the distance from Station Road and a combination of the prevailing topography, and in the event that it is, it will be limited

²⁷ Source: Image taken by myself 08/11/2024

to the upper reaches which will be obscured by the proposed planting at the boundaries of the proposed solar farm.

Additionally any future development of the retirement village to the west of what is currently proposed will obscure the solar farm from view.

Taking the above factors into account, and considering the transitional nature of the view, I am of the opinion that the effects from the supplied viewpoint on Station Road are **Very Low**²⁸ due to the high level of obscuration. In the event that the shelter belt shown in Figure 19 is removed, the level of visual effects can be considered to be **Low**²⁹ upon installation of the panels and the surrounding planting, moderating to a **Very Low**³⁰ level after five (5) years of the proposed boundary planting having been installed. In the event that this shelter belt is maintained (aside from the portion removed to accommodate the proposed retirement village) the level of effects will remain at **Very Low**³¹.

Summary of Effects on Visual Amenity - Public Realm

6.34. A summary of visual effects anticipated from each scheduled viewpoint is provided in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Assessment of Effects Viewpoints

VP No.	Level of effect on visual amenity
V01 – Northern Solar Farm	Low upon initial installation moderating to Very Low after five (5) years
V01 – Southern Solar Farm	Very Low (Could potentially be assessed as Low if a portion of shelter belt as shown in Figure 19 is removed, moderating to very low as the proposed boundary planting at the solar farm matures).

6.35. The proposed solar farms, whilst introducing an element that may not be readily associated with the existing rural and rural-residential environment are absorbed into the existing environment through the use of dense native boundary planting combined, taking this and the preceding individual viewpoint analyses, formulates my opinion that the cumulative effects of both solar farms on visual amenity from within the public realm are **Low**³² upon initial installation moderating to **Very Low**³³ five years on from the initial installation of the proposed boundary planting.

Assessment of Visual Amenity Effects – Private Realm

6.36. The neighbouring properties to both the northern and southern solar farms, which have the potential to have views towards the proposal that may have impacts upon visual amenity are outlined in sections 6.21 and 6.24 respectively.

²⁸ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

²⁹ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

³⁰ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

³¹ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

³² Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

³³ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

6.37. The yard infringement outlined in section 5.20 is considered in the following assessments.

172 Station Road (Northern Solar farm)

6.38. Figure 20 below provides a view from within the site of the Northern Solar Farm at the approximate angle that the solar farm will be visible from the dwelling located at 172 Station Road.



Figure 20: View towards northern solar farm from 172 Station Road³⁴

6.39. As outlined through sections 5.3-5.6 and shown in Figure 13 on page 24, the southern boundary of the site that directly faces the dwelling at 172 Station Road will be treated with a 7m buffer of layered 5m and 2.5m planting, which is interspersed with native trees, six (6) of which will sit directly in front of the dwelling at 172 Station Road.

6.40. A visual simulation has been prepared by Greenwood Associates showing the effects of the proposed boundary planting, this is provided below in shown in sequential order from date of install of planting, + 5 years and finally, 15 years after the installation of boundary planting.

³⁴ Source: Image taken by myself 08/11/2024



Figure 21: Visual simulations showing the maturation of proposed planting at the boundary of the solar farm when viewed from Station Road³⁵

³⁵ Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawings 2148/09 - 19 –21 Northern Solar Farm – Viewpoint 03 – Time of planting / 5 years / 15 years– dated 30/05/25

6.41. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.

6.42. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should have reached such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels, I expect that the proposed trees will reach maturity at approximately 15 years.

6.43. Therefore, the view from this dwelling will gradually change from that of the security fence and solar panels to one of a vegetated screen, which whilst different to the current outlook, is more akin to a rural character than a view of a security fence and solar panels, as a screen of vegetation can be considered an expectant outcome in a rural or rural-residential environment and is often used (and is used in the surrounding landscape) to achieve privacy between rural-residential lots.

6.44. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 172 Station Road brought about by the proposal to be **Moderate**³⁶ upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down to **Low**³⁷ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting.

184 Station Road (Northern Solar farm)

6.45. Greenwood Associates have produced a series of visual simulations from the common boundary of 184 Station Road and the proposed Northern Solar Farm, these simulations have been prepared at the time of planting, five (5) years after planting and fifteen (15) years after planting, this is reproduced below in Figure 22.

³⁶ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

³⁷ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022



Figure 22: Simulation at common boundary with 184 Station Road³⁸

³⁸ Source: Source: Greenwood Associates – 'Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development', drawings 2148/13 - 16 – Northern Solar Farm – Viewpoint 02 – Time of planting / 5 years / 15 years– dated 30/05/25³⁸

- 6.46. As outlined through sections 5.3-5.6 and shown in Figure 11 and Figure 12 on pages 22 and 23 respectively the common boundary of the site that directly faces the dwelling at 184 Station Road will be treated with a 7m buffer of layered 5m and 2.5m planting, which is interspersed with native trees, six (6) of which will sit directly in front of the dwelling at 172 Station Road.
- 6.47. As shown in the simulations, the initial view to the solar farm will consist of the 2.2m height security fence with native shrubs installed in front of the fence at a depth of 7m, at the time of install these plants can be expected to be approximately 0.3m in height so will have no discernible effect on screening of the solar panels or security fence.
- 6.48. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.
- 6.49. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should reach such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels.
- 6.50. Therefore, the view from this dwelling will gradually change from that of the security fence and solar panels to one of a vegetated screen, which whilst different to the current outlook, is more akin to a rural character than a view of a security fence and solar panels, as a screen of vegetation can be considered an expectant outcome in a rural or rural-residential environment and is often used (and is used in the surrounding landscape) to achieve privacy between rural-residential lots.
- 6.51. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 184 Station Road brought about by the proposal to be **Moderate**³⁹ upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down to **Low**⁴⁰ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting.

196 Station Road (Northern Solar farm)

- 6.52. The dwelling at 196 Station Road sits approximately 83m from the common boundary with the site. Due to this distance from the site, the boundary planting at this interface is restricted to a 3m wide band containing native shrub and small tree planting that is expected to reach heights of 5m upon maturity. This buffer planting is shown in the sections provided in Figure 12 on page 23. A reverse view from the eastern boundary back towards the dwelling at 196 Station Road is shown below in Figure 23.

³⁹ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁴⁰ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022



Figure 23: View towards dwelling at 196 Station Road from within proposed northern solar farm⁴¹

6.53. The initial view to the solar farm will consist of the 2.2m height security fence with native shrubs installed in front of the fence at a depth of 3m, at the time of install these plants can be expected to be approximately 0.3m in height so will have no discernible effect on screening of the solar panels or security fence.

6.54. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.

6.55. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should have reached such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels.

6.56. Therefore, the view from this dwelling will gradually change from that of the security fence and solar panels to one of a vegetated screen, which whilst different to the current outlook, is more akin to a rural character than a view of a security fence and solar panels, as a screen of vegetation can be considered an expectant outcome in a rural or rural-residential environment and is often used (and is used in the surrounding landscape) to achieve privacy between rural-residential lots.

6.57. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 196 Station Road brought about by the proposal

⁴¹ Source: Image taken by myself 08/11/2024

to be **Moderate**⁴² upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down **Low**⁴³ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting.

60 James Avenue (Northern Solar farm)

6.58. The dwelling at 60 James Avenue sits approximately 80m (on an angle) from the common boundary with the site. Due to this distance from the site, the boundary planting at this interface is restricted to a 3m wide band containing native shrub and small tree planting that is expected to reach heights of 5m upon maturity. This buffer planting is shown in the sections provided in Figure 12 on page 23. The image in Figure 24 below provides an image from the north-west corner of the site at the approximate bearing that the site will be viewed from the dwelling within the site



Figure 24: View across site from north-western corner at approximate bearing from dwelling at 60 James Street⁴⁴

6.59. The initial view to the solar farm will consist of the 2.2m height security fence with native shrubs installed in front of the fence at a depth of 3m, at the time of install these plants can be expected to be approximately 0.3m in height so will have no discernible effect on screening of the solar panels or security fence.

6.60. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.

⁴² Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁴³ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁴⁴ Source: Image taken by myself 08/11/2024

6.61. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should have reached such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels.

6.62. Therefore, the view from this dwelling will gradually change from that of the security fence and solar panels to one of a vegetated screen, which whilst different to the current outlook, is more akin to a rural character than a view of a security fence and solar panels, as a screen of vegetation can be considered an expectant outcome in a rural or rural-residential environment and is often used (and is used in the surrounding landscape) to achieve privacy between rural-residential lots.

6.63. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 60 James Road brought about by the proposal to be **Moderate**⁴⁵ upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down **Low**⁴⁶ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting.

164 Station Road (Northern Solar farm)

6.64. The dwelling at 164 Station Road sits approximately 9m from the common boundary with the site. Due to this relative close proximity to the site, the boundary planting at this interface is widened to 6m and contains native shrub and small tree planting that is expected to reach heights of 5m upon maturity. This simulations prepared at the common boundary with 184 Station Road (refer Figure 22).

6.65. The initial view to the solar farm will consist of the 2.2m height security fence with native shrubs installed in front of the fence at a depth of 3m, at the time of install these plants can be expected to be approximately 0.3m in height so will have no discernible effect on screening of the solar panels or security fence.

6.66. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.

6.67. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should have reached such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels.

6.68. Therefore, the view from this dwelling will gradually change from that of the security fence and solar panels to one of a vegetated screen, which whilst different to the current outlook, is more akin to a rural character than a view of a security fence and solar panels, as a screen of vegetation can be considered an expectant outcome in a rural or rural-residential environment and is often used (and is used in the surrounding landscape) to achieve privacy between rural-residential lots.

⁴⁵ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁴⁶ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

6.69. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 164 Station Road brought about by the proposal to be **Moderate**⁴⁷ upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down **Low**⁴⁸ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting.

72A Hinuera Road (Southern Solar farm)

6.70. Greenwood Associates have produced a series of visual simulations from the common boundary of 72A Hinuera Road and the proposed Southern Solar Farm, these simulations have been prepared at the time of planting, five (5) years after planting and fifteen (15) years after planting, this is reproduced below in Figure 25.

⁴⁷ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁴⁸ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022



Figure 25: View towards southern solar farm from common boundary with 72A Hinuera Road, from top to bottom – simulation at installation, simulation at + 5 years installation, simulation at + 15 years installation⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Source: Source: Greenwood Associates – ‘Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development’, drawings 2148/28 - 30 – Southern Solar Farm – Viewpoint 01 – Time of planting / 5 years / 15 years– dated 30/05/25⁴⁹

- 6.71. As outlined through sections 5.7-5.10 and shown in Figure 14, Figure 15 and Figure 16 on pages 25-27 respectively the common boundary of the site that directly faces the dwelling at 72A Hinuera Road will be treated with a 3m buffer of layered 5m planting, which is interspersed with native trees.
- 6.72. As shown in the simulations, the initial view to the solar farm will consist of the 2.2m height security fence with native shrubs installed in front of the fence at a depth of 3m, at the time of install these plants can be expected to be approximately 0.3m in height so will have no discernible effect on screening of the solar panels or security fence.
- 6.73. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.
- 6.74. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should have reached such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels. I expect the trees to mature in fifteen years.
- 6.75. As outlined in section 6.26, the existing dwelling at site sits 630m from the proposed solar farm, therefore the views to the proposed solar farm will largely be experienced from the western extents of 72A Hinuera Road, rather than the dwelling and its associated outdoor living spaces and thus will not be viewed as often as is the case for properties where the dwellings are located closer to the proposed solar farm (as is the case for the preceding analyses for the northern solar farm).
- 6.76. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 184 Station Road brought about by the proposal to be **Low-Moderate**⁵⁰ upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down to **Very Low**⁵¹ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting.

319 Station Road (Southern Solar farm)

- 6.77. This lot sits to the west of the wider development area, the dwelling on this lot sits approximately 540m west of the western boundary of the solar farm, with a collection of ancillary buildings sitting closer at a distance of 290m from the western boundary of the solar farm.
- 6.78. Based on site observations, I do not anticipate that the proposed solar farm will be visible from within the dwelling (and associated curtilage) due to obscuration from established trees on the site and the prevailing topography coupled with this dwelling being over half a kilometre from the proposed solar farm, this can be seen in the supplied image for viewpoint 2 (public realm viewpoints).

⁵⁰ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁵¹ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

6.79. This is reinforced by the below image, which is taken near the western boundary of the proposed solar farm and the dwelling at 319 Station Road cannot be seen, although the ancillary buildings can be. Therefore I consider it a reasonable assumption that any effects on visual amenity will be experienced from the eastern portions of 319 Station Road in and around the location of the ancillary buildings.



Figure 26: Panoramic view near western boundary of proposed southern solar farm towards eastern extents of 319 Station Road⁵²

6.80. Greenwood Associates have produced a series of visual simulations from the within the wider development site to the west of the western boundary of the proposed southern solar farm, these simulations have been prepared at the time of planting, five (5) years after planting and fifteen (15) years after planting, this is reproduced below in Figure 27.

⁵² Source: Image taken by myself 04/06/2024



Figure 27: View towards southern solar farm from the west of the western boundary (of proposed solar farm), from top to bottom – simulation at installation, simulation at + 5 years installation, simulation at + 15 years installation⁵³

⁵³ Source: Source: Greenwood Associates – ‘Resource Consent Landscape Package for Unity Development’, drawings 2148/27 - 29 – Southern Solar Farm – Viewpoint 02 – Time of planting / 5 years / 15 years– dated 30/05/25⁵³

- 6.81. As shown in the simulations, the initial view to the solar farm will consist of the 2.2m height security fence with native shrubs installed in front of the fence at a depth of 3m, at the time of install these plants can be expected to be approximately 0.3m in height so will have no discernible effect on screening of the solar panels or security fence.
- 6.82. The initial installation will represent a change in outlook from a traditional rural scene to one that, as mentioned previously, could be more readily associated with an industrial setting than a rural one.
- 6.83. As the planting matures the security fence and solar panels will become obscured from view, I estimate that this process will take approximately 5 years, at which time the installed shrubs should have reached such a density that they will screen the majority of the fence and solar panels. I expect the trees to mature in fifteen years
- 6.84. It is possible that due to the angle of view even upon maturity of the aforementioned boundary planting the solar panels may continue to be visible as a 'field'.
- 6.85. This 'field' will not be viewed in isolation but rather as a foreground to the proposed residential community and retirement village, the proposed 'greenway' would also be visible as a backdrop to the field of solar panels, therefore the proposed southern solar farm will not be viewed in the context of a traditionally rural environment but rather as a residential one, as the proposed residential development to the east of the proposed solar farm will provide a (visually) logical continuation of the existing residential areas to the east of the wider development site.
- 6.86. Therefore, taking the preceding analyses into account, I am of the opinion that the effects upon visual amenity upon 184 Station Road brought about by the proposal to be **Moderate**⁵⁴ upon the initial installation of the proposal moderating down **Low**⁵⁵ upon maturation of the proposed boundary planting and as the remainder of the site develops.

7. Effect on prevailing landscape character values

- 7.1. As outlined through this report, the presence of a solar farm introduces an activity / structure that can be considered more readily associated with an industrial / commercial environment than a rural or rural-residential one.
- 7.2. The grazing of sheep within the proposed solar farms allows for the retention of some trace elements of rural character.

⁵⁴ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁵⁵ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

- 7.3. The solar farms themselves are not necessarily large generators of vehicular traffic, in that they do not require a permanent presence at site and only require periodic maintenance, there any presence of vehicles within the solar farms will not be at any greater of a level than if the two sites remained in their current rural land usage.
- 7.4. As outlined in the glint and glare assessment (refer sections 6.12-6.16) the glint and glare to the wider environment is considered to be at a relatively low level.
- 7.5. Ostensibly, the proposal to screen the solar farms to mitigate effects on visual amenity could be considered a blunt instrument with little appreciation of the landscape values. However, in the context of a surrounding rural and rural-residential environment the presence of buffer planting can be considered congruent to the surrounding landscape patterning / character, with the surrounding landscape containing a number of shelter belts and buffer planting areas that occur at external and internal boundaries and are utilised to shield areas of built-form.
- 7.6. Therefore, taking the above and the preceding analyses through section 6 the effect of the proposal on the prevailing landscape character values can be considered as **Low**⁵⁶ when examined in the context of the wider landscape.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. The proposal will see the establishment of two solar farms on different sites accessed from Station Road.
- 8.2. The northern solar farm, due to its position in an established rural-residential area has the greatest potential for adverse effects on neighbours, these effects are mitigated with the provision of a vegetated buffer at depths of 3m and 7m which allows for the 'setting back' of the perimeter security fence. The proposed planting will grow to a height that obscures the proposed security fence from view from neighbouring lots.
- 8.3. The proposed solar farms have little visual exposure to the public realm, however when visible the proposed buffer planting serves the same purpose as when viewed from the private realm by screening the proposed solar farm from view.
- 8.4. In instances where the proposed screening may not fully obscure the proposed southern solar farm from view, the presence of the solar farm in the context of the proposed nearby residential and retirement village communities also provides a degree of mitigation as the proposed southern solar farm will not be viewed in the context of a strictly 'traditionally rural' environment.
- 8.5. Overall, for the reasons outlined in detail in this report, I consider that the level of cumulative adverse landscape effects generated by the proposal in its completed form (+ 5 years from initial installation) will be **Low**⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022

⁵⁷ Te Tangi A Te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand landscape Assessment Guidelines – Published July 2022





