



26 MAR 2025

Commercial in Confidence

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Fast-track Approvals Act referral application: Ashbourne, FTAA-2502-1006

Dear Chris

Thank you for the opportunity to comment as Minister for Economic Growth on this application for referral under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act). I have considered whether this application is likely to have 'significant economic benefits', under s22(2)(a)(iv) of the Act, based on the information provided in the application. I will leave it to you and other relevant Ministers to assess the other criteria.

The following aspects of the project are likely to have economic benefits:

- The construction of 520 residential units, including commercial space for a cafe, a childcare facility and other retail services
- The construction of 218 retirement living units, including the provision of aged care services and facilities
- The construction of two solar farms that will supply energy to the development and wider electricity network.

The project will create construction jobs in the short- to medium-term and jobs in commercial services, such as aged care and retail, as the construction phases are completed.

However, I am unable to assess the significance of these economic benefits because the application provides little information on this. This project then might be best considered in terms of providing additional housing supply (under s22(2)(a)(iii) of the Act) rather than providing significant economic benefits.

Sincerely

Hon Nicola Willis
Minister for Economic Growth

Invitation to provide written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

You have been invited to provide written comments to the Minister for Infrastructure (the Minister) on an application to refer a project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) to the fast-track process.

To comment on the project application, if you have obtained a link to register through the portal, you may provide comments directly through the portal.

Alternatively, you may wish to fill in the details on the attached form and reply by **Email** to info@fasttrack.govt.nz. Please mark in the subject line: "Comments on [Name] project Fast-track Application (Your name/organisation) by date."

Before the due date, for assistance on how to respond or about this template or with using the portal, please email contact@fasttrack.govt.nz or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 327 875).

Written comments must be received by MfE, on behalf of the Minister for Infrastructure, no later than the due date.

Important information

Your personal information will be held by MfE and be used in relation to the project application and process. You have the right to access and correct personal information held by MfE.

A copy of your comments, including all personal information, will be provided to the Minister and the applicant.

If you are a corporate entity making comments on this application, your full contact details will be publicly available.

For individuals, your name will be publicly available, but your contact details (phone number, address, and email) will not be publicly available.

A copy of your comments will also be published on the Fast-track website. If you believe any of the information you have provided is confidential or sensitive and should be withheld from publication, please highlight the information concerned and provide an explanation to support your request for withholding it. Your comment and explanation will be decided by the Ministry on whether to withhold the information from publication.

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All information held by MfE is subject to the Official Information Act 1982.

More information on the fast-track approvals process and providing comments can be found at [Process overview](#) | [Fast-track website](#)

Your written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Project name	Ashbourne Project
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Before the due date, for assistance on how to respond or about this template or with using the portal, please email contact@fasttrack.govt.nz or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 327 875).

All sections of this form with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

1. Contact Details			
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.			
Organisation name (if relevant)	Minister for Seniors		
*First name	Casey		
*Last name	Costello		
Postal address	Freepost Parliament, Private Bag 18 888, Parliament Buildings, Wellington 6160		
*Contact phone number	0800 7273 6282	Alternative	
*Email	Casey.costello@parliament.govt.nz		

2. Please provide your comments on this application
If you need more space, please attach additional pages. Please include your name, page numbers and the project name on the additional pages.

Note: All comments will be made available to the public and the applicant when the Ministry for the Environment proactively releases advice provided to the Minister for the Environment.

- 1 The following comments are provided not only to inform the decision to refer the project to a panel, but also to indicate some opportunities for the Developer to consider in respect of detailed design should the project go ahead.
- 2 I am supportive of projects to increase supply of housing, particularly housing options appropriate for older New Zealanders and which increase aged residential care facility capacity.
- 3 The development of the site will increase the supply of housing in Matamata, providing a number of living options for older people. The developer is encouraged to not only consider the retirement village being suitable for

older people, but also to ensure housing options in the residential area are suitable for all life stages, including older people.

- 4 The site is currently zoned a mix of rural and rural lifestyle with no plans by the Council for urban residential development. This may impact on the level of amenity available to residents and connectedness and quality of access to Matamata services and facilities.
- 5 The retirement village complex includes the provision of an aged residential care facility. A positive feature of the aged residential care facility is the provision of nurses' accommodation to attract nurses to work there.
- 6 The retirement village is likely to be isolated for some time. The early stages of the retirement village development are close to Station Road. The early stages of the residential development are at the opposite end of the site. The staging plans indicate the two developments may not link up until the latter part of the 10-year development.
- 7 The location of the retirement village is approximately 3km away from Matamata town centre by road, which is further than the residential development. There is public transport from Matamata to Hamilton, but no bus stops near the retirement village. Consideration should be given to providing communal transport for those that live at the retirement village to have access to services and facilities in Matamata.
- 8 No information has been provided regarding the proposed retirement village facilities. The staging indicates that the facilities will be developed over time with some at stage one. The facilities will be particularly important given the retirement village's distance from town. The new commercial area is not planned to be built until at least midway through the 10-year development, with no indication that access to the commercial area will be easily accessible from the retirement village at that time.
- 9 The residential development plans for good connection with the surrounding existing residential area via Peakedale Drive with footpaths either side of the road. The retirement village will only connect with Station Road, until towards the end of the development when it will link to the new residential development. Station Road is a 'collector' road with a posted speed limit of 100km/hr outside the proposed retirement village. The Developer has plans to form a rural pathway from the retirement village along Station Road. A rural pathway may not be a good option for older people as rural pathways are often not built to a paved standard. The Developer should give consideration to providing safe and effective connections at early stages of the development.
- 10 There is no detail on what the land reserved for future development to the west of the retirement village might be used for. There seems to be little

provision to connect the retirement village through to that area apart from the greenway active path area to the south of the retirement village.

- 11 The location of the stormwater ponds is shown in concept on the plans. If the proposal progresses consideration should be given to a more naturalistic form that could become an amenity for residents.
- 12 Matamata Developments Ltd have a holding company Unity Developments Ltd. Unity Developments Ltd's website indicates that they are a land development company active from late 2023, but there is no information about projects they have undertaken or whether they have any experience or expertise with retirement villages.
- 13 If the project is referred to use the fast-track consenting process, I would welcome the opportunity to comment on the development in more detail.

Your written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Project name	Ashbourne
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All sections of this form with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

1. Contact Details			
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.			
Organisation name (if relevant)	Waikato Regional Council		
*First name	Joao Paulo		
*Last name	Silva		
Postal address	Private Bag 3038, Waikato Mail Centre, Hamilton, 3240		
*Contact phone number	07 9497179	Alternative	s 9(2)(a)
*Email	s 9(2)(a)		

2. Please provide your comments on this application
<p>If you need more space, please attach additional pages. Please include your name, page numbers and the project name on the additional pages.</p> <p>Note: Waikato Regional Council (WRC) received notification of this application late (18 March) and has been unable to view the application documents in the Fast Track portal. All that WRC were able to see in the portal was the letter requesting feedback and the template document. WRC contacted the EPA on 21st March requesting access to the application documents; these were not supplied until 31st March, when we requested an extension of time from 1st April to 6th April to allow appropriate time to review the documents. However, as of the 1st April, we haven't had a response.</p> <p>Is this project of regional significance?</p> <p>WRC staff consider that the solar farm component of this application could be considered as regionally significant, as renewable energy has been identified as a priority by central</p>

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government¹. However, we do not consider the remainder of the application to be regionally significant based on the criteria listed in s22(2)(a) of the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act). In particular, we consider the retirement village component of the application and lifestyle block adjoining the solar farm to be inconsistent with the Waikato Regional Policy Statement and national direction.

While the proposal will increase the supply of housing in the Future Proof sub-region (consisting of Waikato District, Hamilton City, Waipā District and Matamata-Piako District), the most recent Housing Capacity Assessment² shows that Matamata will be able to meet the demand for housing in the short and medium terms (1-10 years). The capacity assessment does show an insufficiency of housing over the long-term (11-30 year) period, but this allows Matamata-Piako District Council sufficient time to identify and rezone suitable land, aligned with infrastructure provision, to meet this insufficiency.

Therefore, we consider that only the solar farm component of this application is of regional significance.

In addition, WRC has issued necessary consents, or is currently assessing applications, for a number of retirement villages in recent years, including the recently constructed 132 villa Matamata Country Club. WRC is also aware of a number of other retirement living proposals, or extensions to existing retirement villages, in the Future Proof sub-region. Future Proof is currently undertaking work to better understand if there is a need for this type of retirement village to be located on rural land, based on a number of factors such as housing and locational preference, affordability, and infrastructure requirements etc.

Is this project consistent with local or regional planning documents, including spatial strategies:

Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS)

As mentioned above, based on the short amount of time we had to assess the application documents, it was challenging to provide a fully informed commentary about the proposal in terms of the WRPS and the decisions version of *Change 1 National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and Future Proof Strategy Update*³. However, an assessment against objective 01 in the Urban form and development chapter (UFD-01) of the WRPS as well as the associated methods and policies is necessary. In addition, an assessment against Appendix 13 of the WRPS

¹ The National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation recognises the importance of renewable energy and will help New Zealand achieve the Government's target of 90 per cent of electricity from renewable sources by 2025. National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation | Ministry for the Environment

² waikato.rc.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/FutureProofAdministration/Ebrct-OS97pOqXxrz5rZEaIBBSAuBtQ8Ke7InK3J_k9VAw?e=bfhgTD

³ This change to the WRPS is not yet operative as it is subject to three limited appeals that do not affect this application.

would also be necessary to understand how it will contribute to well-functioning urban environments, infrastructure capacity and affordability, housing affordability etc.

The proposed development may have potential impacts on biodiversity which would need to be assessed against the ECO– Ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity chapter.

The application states that numerous assessments have been undertaken on site (e.g. ecological, bats, lizards, fish, vegetation, wetlands) but does not provide any evidence for this other than listing them as ‘completed’. We consider that riparian areas with large trees (such as the western edge of the larger site) appears to provide suitable habitat for bats. In addition, the rank grass throughout the site could provide habitat for copper skink and wetlands can also provide habitat for numerous bird species.

We acknowledge that quotes from statutory and non-statutory policy documents have been presented but lack understanding of the whole picture and how they relate to the site (which has not been described or mapped appropriately). For example, relevant policies have not been addressed, such as Policy 15 from National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity, which reads that: *‘Specified highly mobile fauna are identified and managed to maintain their populations across their natural range’* as well as Policy 8: *‘The importance of maintaining indigenous biodiversity outside SNAs is recognised and provided for’*.

We also consider that the assessment of possible effects of development activities does not consider loss of habitat for bats, lizards, birds, etc. It also only assesses possible effects to the selective excerpts.

We also note that attachment 11 at page 48 states that: *‘Overall, biodiversity has been assessed as low’*, however, we consider this to be out of context as it was referring to the comparison to its pre-habitation state. Using the pre-habitation state for indigenous biodiversity will result in biodiversity being assessed low across most of NZ inhabited areas with only the more resilient species surviving in sub-optimal habitats.

Therefore, the potential effects from this proposal on biodiversity are inconclusive, no ecology related assessments nor even summaries have been presented.

Other relevant WRPS provisions may also apply to this application. For example, the application is potentially inconsistent with objective HAZ-O1 – Natural hazards and associated policies and methods as discussed below.

WRC has concerns regarding flooding at this site. The map (attachment 1 - regional model depth), was prepared by WRC on 30 August 2024 based on draft outputs from the WRC regionwide modelling program. It shows modelled flood depths at the site for the existing climate 1% AEP event. The model is in early stages of development and does not include assets such as culverts, pump stations, flood gates or the urban stormwater infrastructure.

In addition, the model also makes no allowance for groundwater infiltration. The applicant noted that their area has a high groundwater table and as such, during larger events when the soils are saturated there is likely to be limited infiltration. We expect during more normal conditions that

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soakage rates in the area would be reasonably high, however, we consider that the model does not overestimate the flood depths for the 1% AEP event at this location.

The map illustrating flood depths suggests a significant portion of the site will be flooded. We generally do not support the infilling of flood plains for development. We consider that reducing flows to the north of Station Road would be beneficial to the drainage of the wider district and network, as there are extensive flooding issues downstream on the Waitoa River. This means that water flows into the river must be reduced. The relevant provisions under the WRPS are:

- HAZ-O1– Natural hazards
- HAZ-P1 – Natural hazard risk management approach
- HAZ-P2 – Manage activities to reduce the risks from natural hazards
- HAZ-M13 – Control of subdivision, use and development for other natural hazards and associated risk.

The area also interacts with the Waitoa River and the Piako River catchment schemes in connection with the stormwater reserve and proposed greenway.

We note that the area has a soil and river Conservation Act 1987 status, and therefore, the design should be approved by the scheme zone team at WRC. Adequate provisions are needed to avoid any blockages in the flood plain and to allow room for the river to wander and move without putting assets, people or property at risk, within its natural area.

The land in question is identified as having high class soils under the WRPS. Therefore, the portion of the application that sits in the rural zone needs to consider the relevant provisions regarding high class soils under the WRPS and as highly productive land under the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL). The relevant WRPS provisions are:

- Objective LF-O5 - High class soils
- Objective LF-O4 - Values of soil
- Policy LF-P11 - High class soils
- Implementation Method LF-M41 - – Manage the form and location of development.

The application states that the site is “generally classified as moderate productive land”. This is incorrect. The land is classified as LUC 2 on the existing regional New Zealand Land Resource Inventory (NZLRI) LUC layer and meets the transitional definition of highly productive land under the NPS-HPL. Only the regional NZLRI LUC is definitive of the occurrence of HPL.⁴

⁴ Environment Courts Blue Grass decision dated 18th April 2024 ((ENV-2018-CHC-293) found that more detailed mapping undertaken since 17 October 2022 does not prevail over the identification of land as Land Use Capability Class 1, 2, or 3, as mapped by the New Zealand Land Resource Inventory and determines for the purposes of Clause 3.5(7) of the NPS-HPL whether land is highly productive land.

Both solar farms, a lifestyle block and the retirement village are in the rural zone and on highly productive land. We acknowledge that the amended NPS-HPL⁵ provides a pathway for specified infrastructure to be developed under Clause 3.9(2)(j)(i). However, both retirement village and lifestyle block must be avoided under the NPS-HPL (Policies 5, 6, 7 and 8) and are also contrary to the WRPS provisions for High Class Soils. In addition, we note that this proposed component of the application is not part of the Eldonwood Structure Plan as indicated by the applicant. Therefore, this is not an area identified for future urban development.

The Housing Assessment identified a long-term housing shortfall in Matamata. However, clause 3.6 (4)(a) of the NPS-HPL is directed towards short and medium terms (10 years) and therefore the proposal does not meet the criteria. In terms of Clause 3.10 there is no evidence that the land has a permanent or long-term constraints and is not able to be economically viable for at least 30 years.

We consider that this application is partially inconsistent with NPS-HPL and WRPS.

Waikato Regional Plan (WRP)

As mentioned above, based on the short amount of time we had to assess the application documents, it was challenging to provide a fully informed commentary about the proposal in terms of the WRP. However, we highlight a number of matters that will need to be considered should the application proceed.

In terms of water supply, the application proposes to connect to the existing Matamata reticulated supply, this means that there will be no additional impact on groundwater and surface water resources in the Piako River Catchment that are not already accounted for by consents held by Matamata Piako District Council (MPDC). There is no further detail on water supply provided, including volumes required to service the development. MPDC will need to review their available capacity under their existing consent and potentially revise and update their Water Management Plan for this new development area.

There is no commentary on construction water requirements. The Piako River catchment is over-allocated, so surface water will not be a viable source. Should there be a need to take surface water for any stage of this development, s124C(1)(c) RMA will be relevant. If the development needs water for construction purposes (e.g. dust suppression) and MPDC will not supply this, the applicant may need to consider obtaining resource consent to take water on the site. There are a large number of applications to take surface water in the Piako River catchment awaiting processing by WRC that would be considered a competing application for surface water. Taking groundwater from a bore in this vicinity will be taking water from the Southern Hauraki Aquifer, which has allocation available within the management level as per the WRP. With the Piako River catchment currently over-allocated taking surface water from a nearby tributary will encounter allocation difficulties.

⁵ NPS-HPL-with-2024-Amendments.pdf

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Future Proof Strategy

The proposal is inconsistent with the Future Proof Strategy. The Strategy is the future development strategy (as required by the NPS Urban Development) for the Future Proof sub-region. The Strategy was updated in 2024 and identifies sufficient residential capacity for the sub-region as a whole for 30+ years. It has a compact and concentrated approach to growth with future development focused in and around key growth areas which are identified on the settlement pattern map.

Matamata is not identified as an area for growth. The strategy does highlight an insufficiency for housing in the long term (11-30 years). The strategy includes criteria for assessing unanticipated land uses, such as this one, to ensure that they are in line with the Future Proof development principles and that the proposal land use is appropriate. This application would be better suited to a plan change to the Matamata-Piako District Plan where it can be assessed against this criteria. This would also allow the community the chance to be engaged in the process.

The strategy also supports protecting highly productive land for primary production.

Reverse sensitivity

We consider that reverse sensitivity issues may arise from the proposal. The applicant is proposing to have medium density residential development adjoining the rural zone. WRPS UFD-01 (7) directs development to minimise the potential for reverse sensitivity. WRPS UFD-M2 directs that local authorities should have particular regard to the potential for reverse sensitivity when assessing resource consent and plan change applications.

We also note that having solar farms at the periphery of urban areas could result in reverse sensitivity and amenity issues and, in addition, could restrict development on that side of the town.

Transport

The application generally meets the transport provisions under the WRPS and Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP). However, we note that the proposed retirement village will place elderly people at the edge of town, which is not ideal for accessibility to key services, and WRC can confirm there are no plans to add bus services in the area.

Conclusion

WRC staff consider that this proposal would be better assessed through a plan change (RMA Schedule 1) process with MPDC, instead of the fast-track process.

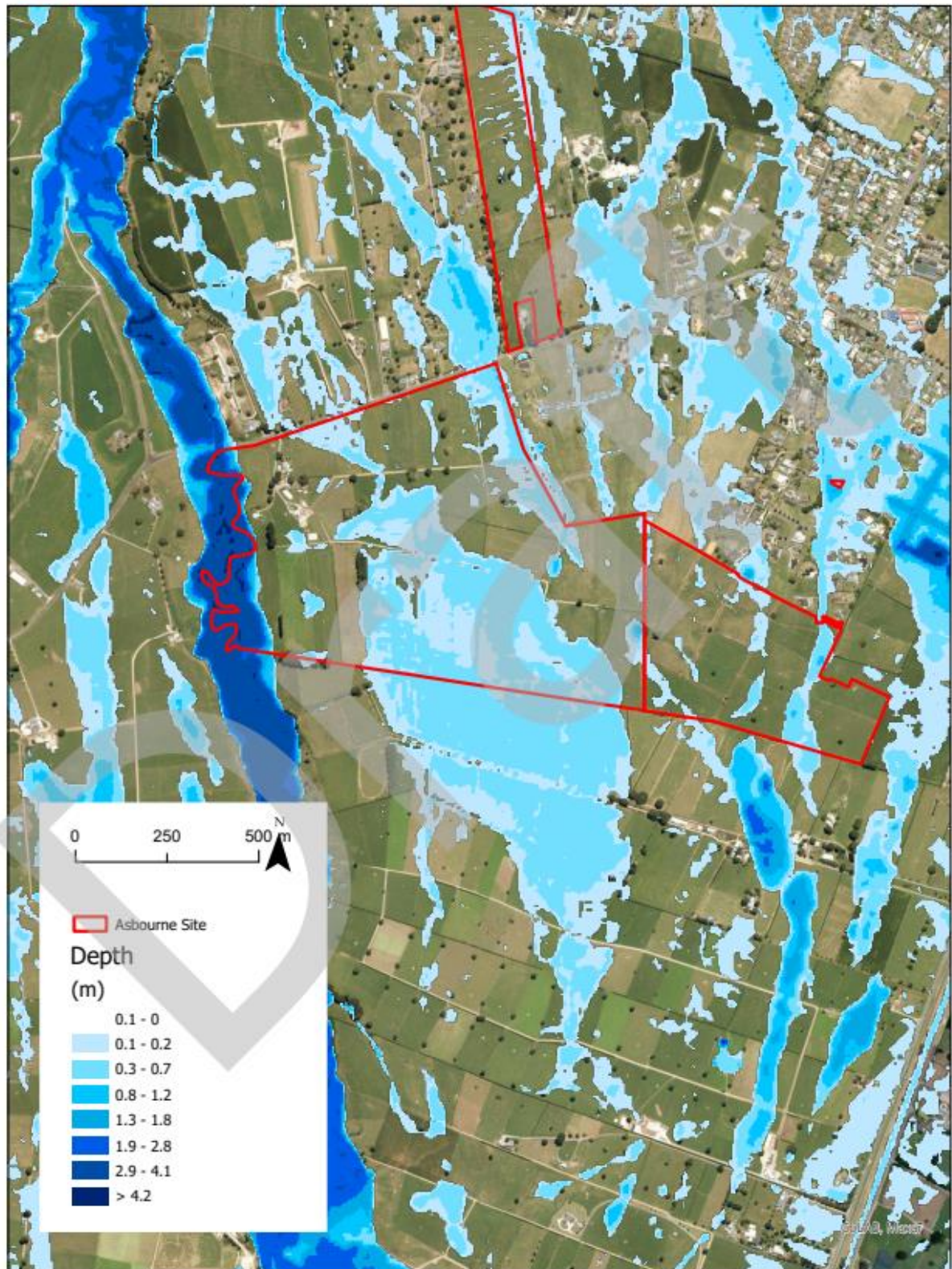
We consider only part of this proposal to be regional significant. This is limited to the solar farms in connection with central government goals. The relevant Housing Capacity Assessment from Future Proof, signals that there is sufficient housing capacity in the Matamata district for the short and medium terms.

Given that Matamata has only a longer-term housing supply issue, there is no pressing need to progress this application through the fast-track legislation. Therefore, we consider that this proposal would be better assessed through a plan change (RMA Schedule 1) process with MPDC. This would also ensure that the community has the opportunity to express opinions regarding having solar farms on the fringe of their town.

The portion of the application comprising development in the rural zone is inconsistent with the WRPS provisions for High Class Soils, national direction (NPS-HPL), and potentially natural hazards relating to flooding

Attachment 1 - Modelled flood depths for the area:

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Modelled Flood Depth - Draft
1% AEP Existing Climate, rainfall on grid, no losses, structures not modelled.

Note: All comments will be made available to the public and the applicant when the Ministry for the Environment proactively releases advice provided to the Minister for the Environment.

Your written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Project name	Ashbourne
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All sections of this form with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

1. Contact Details			
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.			
Organisation name (if relevant)	Matamata-Piako District Council		
*First name	Nathan		
*Last name	Sutherland		
Postal address	PO Box 266, Te Aroha 3342		
*Contact phone number	(07)884 0060	Alternative	
*Email	s 9(2)(a)		

2. Please provide your comments on this application
<p><u>1.0 Introduction</u></p> <p>Thank you for giving the Matamata-Piako District Council (the "Council") the opportunity to provide comments on the referral application for the Ashbourne development. The proposal involves a multi-use development covering four precincts, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A residential community comprising of 520 units, a green space and commercial node. 2. A multi-functional greenway, that extends westward from the commercial node out to the Waitoa River. 3. A retirement living community containing approximately 218 units, a hospital and supporting facilities; and 4. Two solar farms, with the potential to integrate into the wider electricity network. <p>The Council notes that the purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA) is to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits, and that its involvement and influence on resource consent applications lodged under the FTAA is limited when compared with those lodged under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). However, in being involved in the process, the Council is committed to achieving the best outcomes for its communities as far as its influence allows.</p> <p><u>2.0 Local authority obligations</u></p>

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The Council acknowledges that under section 17(3) of the FTAA, the Minister must invite comments from the relevant local authorities and that a local authority must provide comments advising of –

- (a) Any applications that have been lodged with the local authority that would be competing applications if a substantive application for the project were lodged; and
- (b) In relation to any proposed approval of the kind described in section 42(4)(a), any existing resource consents of the kind referred to in section 30(3)(a).

In terms of section 17(3)(a), the Council is aware of two potentially competing resource consent applications if a substantive application for the project were lodged. These applications are both in the processing phase, with details provided below.

Type of consent	Council ref.	Description	Status
Subdivision	101.2022.12662	Application for a three-lot rural residential subdivision at 127 Station Road, Matamata (Lot 1 DPS 65481)	Processing – On hold pending applicant's approval of draft conditions
Land-use	102.2024.13094	Application to hold Matamata's annual Agricultural and Pastoral show at Station Road, Matamata. (Lot 4 DP 384886 and Lot 5 DP 384886)	Processing – On hold pending the applicant's response to a further information request

However, given that the owners of these properties have signed an agreement to sell their respective properties to the applicant, it is expected that these applications will either be withdrawn or if they are granted, will remain unexercised.

For section 17(3)(b), the Council is unaware of any existing resource consents of the kind referred to in section 30(3)(a), but understands that these resource consents typically involve matters outside its functions as a territorial authority.

3.0 Minister's decision on a referral application

Section 21 of the FTAA outlines the criteria for the Minister's decision to accept a referral application and conversely, the Minister's decision to decline a referral application. For the Minister to accept a referral application, they must effectively be satisfied that the project meets the criteria outlined in section 22 of the FTAA. The Council has provided comment on the acceptance criteria under section 4.0 further below.

Section 21(3) provides the instances when the Minister must decline a referral application, which include the project not meeting the acceptance criteria, it involving an ineligible activity, or the application for the project not being submitted with enough information to inform a decision. The Council makes no overarching comment as to whether the project meets the acceptance criteria, noting that many of the matters that the Minister may consider lie outside its expertise. However, it does not believe the project to involve an ineligible activity and considers that the Minister will have sufficient information to make a decision on the referral application.

Under section 21(4), the Minister may still decline a referral application whether or not it meets the acceptance criteria for reasons outlined in subsection (5). The Council makes the following comments regarding these, noting that they are made from its role as a district council:

- (a) The Council is not aware of the project's inconsistency with a Treaty Settlement, a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe or joint management agreement. It notes that it has no formal relationship agreements with any iwi or hapū in the district.
- (b) The Council considers that applying for resource consent for a residential community and retirement living complex at this scale is a "cart before the horse" approach, and that it would be more appropriate to assess the project through a private plan change under the RMA. This is discussed in more detail in the Council's comments regarding the consistency of the project with local and regional planning documents.
- (c) Although the project, particularly the residential and retirement elements of it is unanticipated by the District Plan in its proposed location, it does not appear likely to generate significant adverse effects on the environment.
- (d) The applicant is not known to the Council as having a poor compliance history under the RMA.
- (e) It is not appropriate for the Council to comment on this matter.
- (f) The project does not include an activity that is prohibited under the RMA.
- (g) There are resource consent applications within the project site that are as yet undecided. These could be considered competing, should they be granted. However, it is noted that the owners of the properties associated with these applications have signed agreements to sell these to the applicant.
- (h) As noted above, the Council is unaware of any existing resource consents of the kind referred to in section 30(3)(a), but understands that these resource consents typically involve matters outside its functions as a territorial authority

4.0 Criteria for assessing a referral application

Section 22 of the FTTA outlines the criteria for accepting a referral application. This criteria is relatively simple, with the project firstly needing to be an infrastructure or development project that has significant regional or national benefits. Secondly, referring the project through the fast-track process would facilitate it without materially affecting the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process.

In determining whether the project fits into the first criteria, the Minister may consider a range of matters, which include whether the project:

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- (i) has been identified as a priority project in a central government, local government, or sector plan or strategy (for example, in a general policy statement or spatial strategy), or a central government infrastructure priority list:
 - (ii) will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure or enable the continued functioning of existing regionally or nationally significant infrastructure:
 - (iii) will increase the supply of housing, address housing needs, or contribute to a well-functioning urban environment (within the meaning of policy 1 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020):
 - (iv) will deliver significant economic benefits:
 - (v) will support primary industries, including aquaculture:
 - (vi) will support development of natural resources, including minerals and petroleum:
 - (vii) will support climate change mitigation, including the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions:
 - (viii) will support climate change adaptation, reduce risks arising from natural hazards, or support recovery from events caused by natural hazards:
 - (ix) will address significant environmental issues:
 - (x) is consistent with local or regional planning documents, including spatial strategies:
- (b) any other matters the Minister considers relevant.

The Council has limited its comments to those related to points (iii) and (x). It generally agrees with the applicant's assessment of points (i), (ii), (v) and (vi) as set out in Attachment A of the Referral Application Form. For those remaining points, the Council either does not have any meaningful comments to make or considers that they are best commented on by others.

4.1 Increase the supply of housing, address housing needs, or contribute to a well-functioning urban environment

The applicant notes that the project will deliver more than 500 new homes and over 200 retirement living units, providing the opportunity for a variety of housing types, locations and prices in a logical and accessible location¹. However, they have not explicitly determined whether the project will increase the supply of housing, address housing needs, or contribute to a well-functioning urban environment.

The project will obviously increase the supply of housing within Matamata and it might be argued that it is addressing a housing need by providing for a range of lot sizes and varying house typologies. However, the Council is aware of several other developments within the existing Residential Zone that are also doing this, so it is debatable whether or not this is a need that requires addressing. In terms of contributing to a well-functioning urban environment, the Council considers that the project will meet at least several of the criteria outlined in policy 1 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020.

4.2 Consistency with local or regional planning documents

On page 13 of the referral application form, the applicant submits that the proposal is consistent with the Matamata-Piako District Plan (MPDP). This is a broad statement considering the different facets of the application. The Council agrees that some aspects of the proposal are likely to be consistent with MPDP, but considers that others are not. This is expanded further below.

The sustainable management strategy section of the MPDP identifies the significant resource management issues within the district, one of them being renewable electricity generation. The MPDP anticipates that there will be a demand for new electricity generation and transmission, and that the most sustainable way to meet this demand is to generate energy from the country's abundance of renewable resources. However, it also notes that

renewable energy facilities can coincide with and impact on areas and landscapes of high value. So, while the benefits of renewable energy manifest at a national level, the adverse effects of such are more keenly felt at a local level.

Objective O1 under the energy efficiency and renewable electricity generation heading in the sustainable management section of the MPDP aims for energy demand to be met in a sustainable manner that maximises the efficient use of energy, enables the operation, maintenance, upgrading and development of renewable energy generation activities and associated electricity transmission.

The corresponding policies then require:

- P1 The national significance of renewable energy generation activities (including their contribution to the national renewable electricity generation target), and the national, regional and local benefits of these activities are recognised.
- P2 Investigation into, operation, maintenance, upgrading, and development of new and existing renewable energy generation activities (including small and community scale renewable electricity generation) their connections to the electricity transmission grid are enabled while managing:
 - Significant adverse effects on the environment and ensuring that any residual environmental effects which cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated can be offset or compensated to benefit the affected community or the region; and
 - The potential for conflict with existing land uses/natural and physical resources.

From the above objective and policies, it is clear that the District Plan is enabling of renewable energy generation and recognises the national, regional and local significance of these. However, while it can be interpreted as being supportive, it also expects that any significant adverse effects of a particular activity will be avoided, remedied or mitigated. Given the level of detail provided with the application, it is not clear whether the two solar farms will generate a significant level of adverse effects or how any adverse effects would be avoided, remedied or mitigated. However, there are established methods for managing the adverse effects of solar operations, so provided these are implemented the probability that the adverse effects are significant is low. In this, it is worth noting that both solar farms adjoin or will adjoin Matamata's urban periphery so may be exposed to a far more sensitive audience than if they were situated well into the Rural Zone. These matters aside, the solar farms have the potential to be consistent with the expectations of the MPDP.

Turning to the residential elements of the project (both the retirement village and residential development), objective O1 under the residential and rural-residential growth heading looks to avoid inappropriate residential and rural-residential growth in the rural environment so as to protect the use of the district's rural land resource for rural production.

The corresponding policies then direct the decision maker to:

- P1 To direct and ensure the consolidation of residential development within appropriate existing zone boundaries of all settlements subject to the availability of infrastructure services, contiguous growth and the constraints of the environment.

¹ Paragraph 2.6.2(5), page 11, Referral Application Form

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|----|---|
| P2 | To manage the orderly and programmed expansion of residential areas consistent with the relevant structure plan and the ability to provide utility services. |
| P4 | To identify potential areas for future residential development which should be protected from new subdivision and development which may compromise the future intended use. |

In summary, the objective and policies relating to residential growth expect residential growth within the district to occur in a careful and considered manner, within the appropriate urban zones. Additionally, areas identified for future residential growth are earmarked and protected from activities that would impinge on this future use.

The Council suggests that the “residential” aspect of the project is not consistent with the District Plan’s objective and policies relating to residential growth. Firstly, the MPDP directs development to occur within appropriate existing zone boundaries. Based on this direction, there is an expectation that the land will be zoned for a particular type of development prior to that development occurring. This is good practice and enables a planning framework appropriate to a zone’s anticipated land-uses to be established.

It is also consistent with District Plan’s objectives and policies relating to, “Controlling activities”. Objective O1 under this heading expects activities to be managed in a manner that provides certainty to the public as to the potential location and effects of activities. A zone (created through a plan change) is typically established with a set of environmental standards set to reflect the values and environmental outcomes that are sought for that particular zone. This then creates certainty as to the potential location and effects of activities. While the Council acknowledges the perceived benefits of the fast-track process for applicants, in this case, it questions whether the residential development portion of the project would be better dealt under the RMA through a private plan change process.

In conjunction with identifying areas for future growth, rezoning through the plan change process allows councils to plan for and provide for a level of infrastructure that is appropriate for the activities anticipated in that zone. Through Plan Change 47, the Council has identified areas for future residential growth in Matamata, which are on the eastern side of the town between Banks and Mangawhero Roads. Through its Master Plans (30 year infrastructure plans), the Council is working towards providing the appropriate level of infrastructure to these areas for when they are rezoned residential.

The District Plan also expects that the new development and the expansion of existing development will take place in a manner that does not compromise the operation, maintenance, upgrading or development of infrastructure networks. Given that the development is unanticipated, it has the potential to unduly affect the ongoing operation of the Council’s infrastructure networks. At this early stage, it is not clear what degree of effect the project will have. Should the Minister accept the referral application and a substantive application is lodged, the Council is committed to working with the applicant to achieve a positive outcome. However, it believes that all costs associated with the development, whether related to the provision of infrastructure or otherwise should be borne entirely by the developer.

5.0 Summary

Many of the matters that the Minister may consider in accepting a referral application lie outside the expertise of the Council. Therefore, it is not appropriately placed to make overall recommendation to the Minister in relation to this matter. However, the Council does note that a resource consent application approach to residential development of this size would not be consistent with the expectations of the MPDP, given that it requires the *“consolidation of residential development within appropriate existing zone boundaries of all settlements subject to the availability of infrastructure services, contiguous growth and the constraints of the environment”*. Instead, it is anticipated that such developments would go through a plan change process, rather than being enabled through a resource consent.

The project would also not be consistent with the MPDP, in that it would involve residential development in a rural and rural-residential setting. Matamata is surrounded by highly productive land, which both the MPDP and the National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land look to protect for use in land based primary production. In addition, the Council has planned for future residential growth on the eastern side of Matamata (approximately 63ha) and is working toward providing a suitable level of infrastructure for when this area is rezoned. The degree of effect the project would have on the Council's infrastructure services is unclear at this point.

Note: All comments will be made available to the public and the applicant when the Ministry for the Environment proactively releases advice provided to the Minister for the Environment.

Your written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Project name	Ashbourne
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Before the due date, for assistance on how to respond or about this template or with using the portal, please email contact@fasttrack.govt.nz or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 327 875).

All sections of this form with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

1. Contact Details			
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.			
Organisation name (if relevant)	NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi		
*First name	Nicola		
*Last name	Foran		
Postal address			
*Contact phone number	s 9(2)(a)	Alternative	
*Email	environmentalplanning@nzta.govt.nz		

2. Please provide your comments on this application
<p>NZTA thanks the Minister for the opportunity to comment on the referral of this application into the fast-track approvals process.</p> <p>NZTA has had limited pre-application engagement with the applicant regarding this project. This consisted of a discussion in August 2024 between the applicant's consultant and a NZTA representative, when the project was in a preliminary stage.</p> <p>As per the matters set out in the invitation to comment, NZTA provides the following commentary:</p> <p><i>1. Whether the project is likely to adversely affect the operation of the State Highway network</i></p> <p>NZTA would need to see the substantive application to be able to determine actual impacts on the state highway network, however developments of this nature usually impact the network through increased heavy vehicle movements during site development and construction, and a sustained increase in traffic volumes at the completion of the development. As part of the substantive application, NZTA would expect to see a comprehensive traffic impact assessment prepared, along with a construction management plan, and mitigation measures to address any adverse effects on the state highway resulting from this development.</p>

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2. Whether you consider there are any barriers to the applicant delivering the project

NZTA has no prior experience with this applicant, other than some brief pre-application engagement in August 2024. While this landuse development looks to be accessed from a local road, NZTA has no planned major upgrades planned for the adjacent section of SH27 that would be a barrier to the applicant for this delivering project. Whether any upgrades are required to accommodate the development (either for construction or operation) cannot be determined without further information – if upgrades are required, the developer would be required to work with NZTA and fund any works required.

Therefore, based on the information provided, NZTA has no concerns with this project, Ashbourne, being referred into the fast-track approvals process.

NZTA would welcome the opportunity to provide comments on any substantive application in due course.

Note: All comments will be made available to the public and the applicant when the Ministry for the Environment proactively releases advice provided to the Minister for the Environment.

Your written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Project name	Ashbourne
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Before the due date, for assistance on how to respond or about this template or with using the portal, please email contact@fasttrack.govt.nz or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 327 875).

All sections of this form with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

1. Contact Details			
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.			
Organisation name (if relevant)	Powerco Limited		
*First name	Gary		
*Last name	Scholfield		
Postal address	PO Box 13 075, Tauranga 3141		
*Contact phone number	s 9(2)(a)	Alternative	
*Email	planning@powerco.co.nz		

2. Please provide your comments on this application
<p>Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the application from Matamata Development Limited for referral of the Ashbourne project.</p> <p>Powerco is neutral on whether the project should be accepted for referral to the fast-track approvals process.</p> <p>In respect of your questions, I can advise as follows:</p> <p>Q: Whether the applicant requires approvals from you to connect to the local electricity grid.</p> <p>A: Yes, if the solar farm(s) are connected to the Powerco network, then connection approval and agreement(s) with Powerco will be required. An initial high-level review has been completed for a 8.93MW solar farm to be connected to our network, with subsequent assessment to follow. At present Powerco has not received an application for a connection associated with a 20MW site.</p> <p>Q: Whether you consider there are any barriers to the applicant delivering the project.</p>

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A: Requirements for connection of the solar farm(s) will be fully understood following detailed impact assessment and concept design. Powerco is unable to comment on whether there are barriers to the applicant delivering the project.

Note: All comments will be made available to the public and the applicant when the Ministry for the Environment proactively releases advice provided to the Minister for the Environment.

Your written comments on a project under the Fast Track Approvals Act 2024

Project name	Ashbourne – Matamata Development Limited
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Before the due date, for assistance on how to respond or about this template or with using the portal, please email contact@fasttrack.govt.nz or phone 0800 FASTRK (0800 327 875).

All sections of this form with an asterisk (*) must be completed.

1. Contact Details			
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.			
Organisation name (if relevant)	Transpower New Zealand Limited (Transpower)		
*First name	Jo		
*Last name	Mooar		
Postal address	PO Box 1021 Wellington 6011		
*Contact phone number	04 590 6060	Alternative	
*Email	s 9(2)(a)		

2. Please provide your comments on this application
<p>Transpower has been identified as an “other person” for the purpose of section 17(5) of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (Act). Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments about the Project, and its potential impact on National Grid assets.</p> <p>We have also been asked to comment on the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whether the applicant requires approvals from Transpower to connect to the local electricity grid, and whether those approvals are already in place;• Whether Transpower considers there are any barriers to the applicant delivering the project. <p>The Project is some distance from the existing National Grid, and has no direct effects on it.</p> <p>The Project does not propose to connect to the National Grid, and no approvals are required from Transpower for the Project. As discussed at section 3.0 of the <i>Lightyears Matamata Northern & Southern Solar Farms</i> report, the proposed solar generation plants are proposed to connect to “Powerco’s newly dedicated 33 kV distribution lines on Station Road.” Accordingly, the applicant</p>

would need to obtain any required connection approvals from Powerco, the electricity distribution business in the Project area, rather than Transpower.

Transpower is not familiar with the project. Nor are we aware of any barriers to the project being delivered.

Note: All comments will be made available to the public and the applicant when the Ministry for the Environment proactively releases advice provided to the Minister for the Environment.