



Volume 3: Solar Farms

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 Substantive
Application

Matamata, Waikato

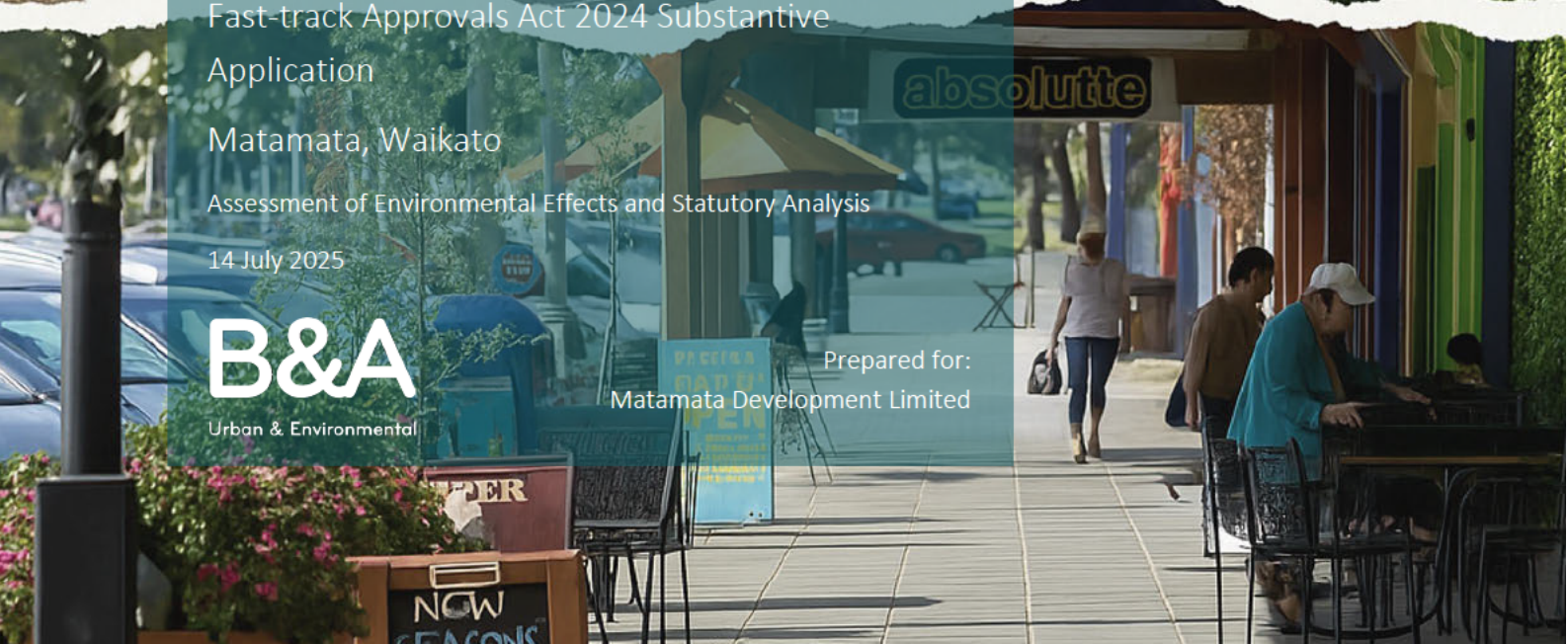
Assessment of Environmental Effects and Statutory Analysis

14 July 2025

B&A

Urban & Environmental

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Glossary of Terms

Term	Explanation
AEE	Assessment of Environmental Effects
CIA	Cultural Impact Assessment
DSI	Detailed Site Investigation
EIA	Economic Impact Assessment
EPA	Environmental Protection Authority
FTAA	Fast-track Approvals Act 2024
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
HAIL	Hazardous Activities and Industries List
MPDC	Matamata-Piako District Council
MPODP	Matamata-Piako Operative District Plan
NES	National Environmental Standard
NES:AQ	Resource Management (National Environment Standard for Air Quality) Regulations 2004
NES:CS	Resource Management (National Environmental Standard for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health) Regulations 2011
NES:F	Resource Management (National Environmental Standard for Freshwater) Regulations 2020
NPS:FM	National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020
NPS:HPL	National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land 2022
NPS:IB	National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023
NPS:REG	National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011
NPS:UD	National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020
RAP	Remedial Action Plan
RITS	Waikato's Regional Infrastructure Technical Standards
RMA	Resource Management Act 1991
WORPS	Waikato Operative Regional Policy Statement
WRC	Waikato Regional Council
WPRPS	Waikato Proposed Regional Policy Statement
WRP	Waikato Operative Regional Plan

1.0 Introduction

This report, referred to as **Volume 3**, of the Substantive Application has been prepared in support of the application by Matamata Development Limited for a consent to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) under the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA). The 43-hectare site subject to this part of the application is located within the Ashbourne development and referred to as the 'Northern and Southern Solar Farms'.

This application is seeking approval for land use resource consent to enable the construction of two solar farms, with the ability to power approximately 7,000 homes within the community:

- The establishment of two solar farms, consisting of approximately 50,000 solar panels installed in rows of up to 110m in length;
- The grazing of livestock below the solar panels, which have an average height of 2.5m above ground when fully tilted, allowing ample room for the ongoing productive use of the land;
- Construction of an access and roading within the northern solar farm from Station Road;
- Construction of an access and roading within the southern solar farm, to be accessed from a new public road proposed within **Volume 5** of this application; and
- Approximately 11,200m³ of earthworks, including 153m³ of cut, 5,400m³ of fill, and a topsoil strip of approximately 5,915m³ to establish roading and prepare the site for the installation of solar arrays.

The information provided in this application is sufficiently detailed to correspond to the scale and significance of the matters that will be assessed in considering whether to grant the approvals sought, including any adverse effects of the activities to which the approvals relate. This takes into account any proposal by the applicant to manage the adverse effects of an activity through conditions.

The Overview Report, submitted as Volume 1 of this application, is to be read in conjunction with this document. The Overview Report provides a summary of the overall Ashbourne development, consultation, a summary of the reasons for consent, and the proposed conditions of consent. It also addresses the specific information requirements to be included with a Fast Track application as set out under the FTAA.

This report is structured to present a comprehensive and bundled assessment of the relevant considerations for the two proposed Solar Farms (northern and southern). District and Regional matters are assessed in parallel, to reflect the intertwined nature of the consenting context and the similarity of issues at play. The Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA) anticipates this type of approach, where a single panel appointment oversees all relevant considerations and presenting and assessing the relevant matters in an integrated approach is considered a practicable method for assisting evaluation. Whilst this report includes two distinct sites (Northern and Southern Solar), many of the issues and considerations are similar. With the Northern Solar part of the earlier staging, the conditions approach to each site are different, and reflect the staged and site-specific nature of the activities being proposed.

2.0 Ashbourne Solar Farms Site Context

This section of the application is provided in accordance with Clause 5(1)(b) of Schedule 5 of the FTTA.

The following is a broad site and locality description, with these supporting technical documents providing additional context:

- Cultural Impact Assessment (refer **Appendix 1H**)
- Assessment of Ecological Effects (refer **Appendix 1I**)
- Economic Impact Assessment (refer **Appendix 1K**)
- Land Use Capability Assessment (refer **Appendix 1L**)
- Geotechnical Assessment Report (refer **Appendix 1M**)
- Hydrological Report (refer **Appendix 1N**)
- Integrated Transportation Assessment (refer **Appendix 1P**)
- Urban Design Report (refer **Appendix 1Q**)

2.1 Site Description

The site addressed in this volume of the AEE is located adjacent to the wider Ashbourne development and referred to as the Northern Solar Farm and Southern Solar Farm (**the Site**). The Northern Solar Farm is located to the northern side of Station Road. The Southern Solar Farm is located at the south-west edge of the Ashbourne development. The location of the Site is shown in **Figure 1** below. A broad summary of the site and locality details is provided below.

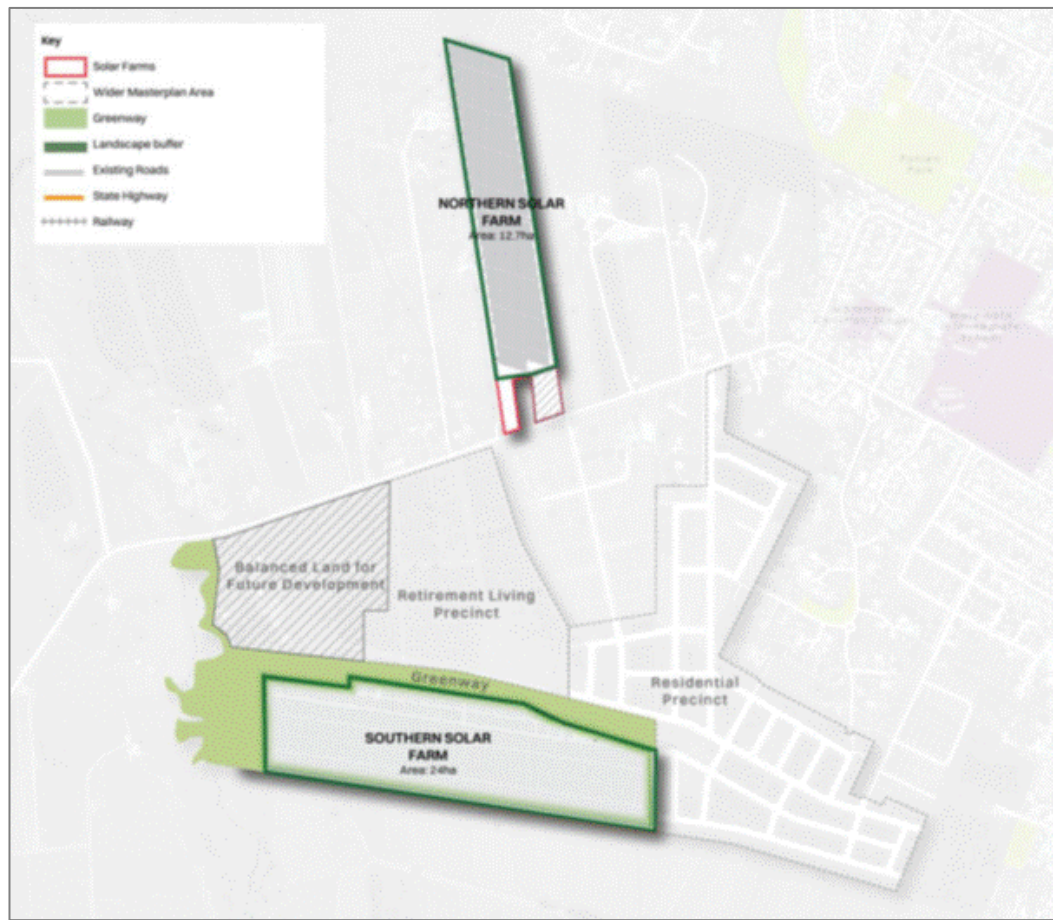


Figure 1: Site Location Plan. Source: Urban Design Assessment

The site is irregularly shaped and relatively flat. The Northern Solar Farm is bound by a rural property to the north, rural residential properties to the east and west, and a rural residential property and Station Road to the south. The Southern Solar Farm is bound by rural properties.

The northern solar farm (labelled as Lot 7 in the Proposed Scheme Plan – Appendix 2A of the application) has an area of 12.74ha, while the southern solar farm (labelled as Lot 3 in the Proposed Scheme Plan – Appendix 2A of the application) is twice the size with an area of 30.27ha.

2.2 Zoning

The Northern and Southern Solar Farms are both zoned Rural under the Matamata Piako Operative District Plan (MPODP). There are no overlays or constraints noted.

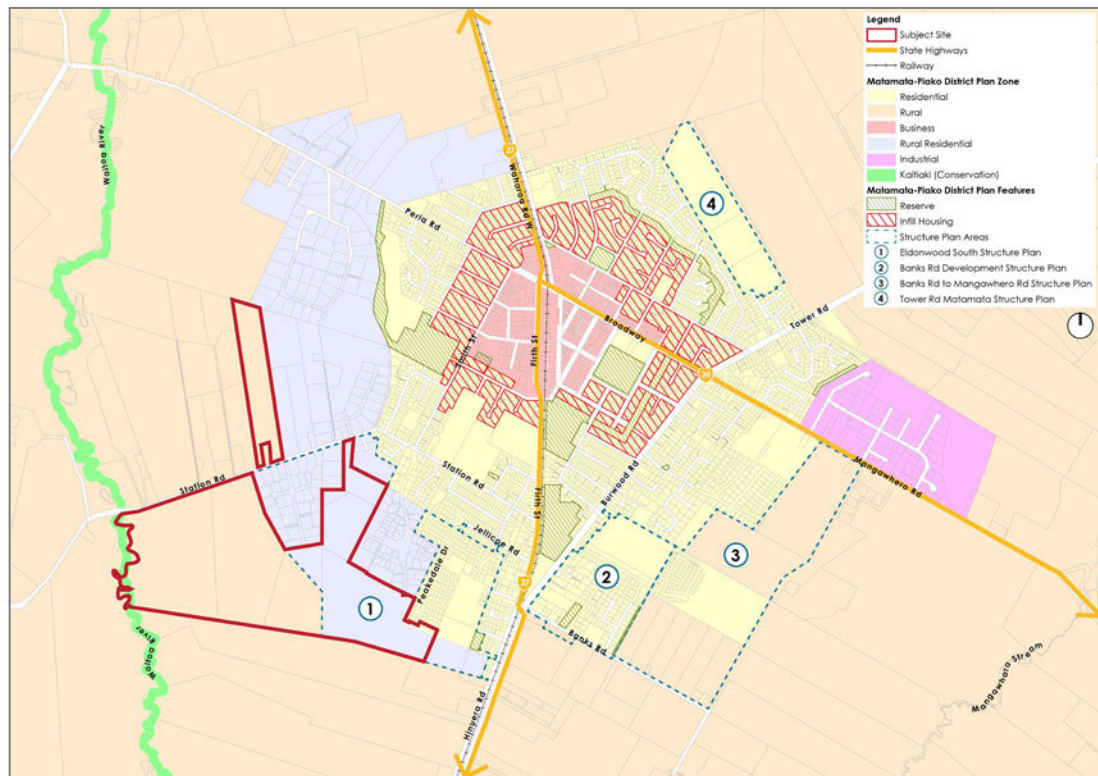


Figure 2: Zoning of the Ashbourne Development site under the MPODP.

2.3 Land Use and Access

Both solar farms are currently in use as working farms. The northern solar farm is accessed from Station Road (collector road), while the southern solar farm currently has no road access. This will be facilitated as part of this proposal, and is further addressed below and in **Volume 5** of this application.

2.4 Surrounding Environment

The surrounding environment is characterised by rural and rural-residential uses. The northern solar farm is bordered to the east, south, and west by rural residential properties, ranging in size from 5,000m² (174 Station Road) to 5.8ha (182 Station Road). A working farm is located to the north, along with rural residential properties on James Avenue (approximately 1.5ha in size). The southern solar farm is bound on all sides by rural use, with working farms on all boundaries, along with the Waitoa River to the west.

The future surrounding environment enabled by the Ashbourne Development for the southern solar farm will also include residential use to the east, a greenway corridor to the north with adjacent Retirement Village living. A greenway providing active modes and ecological opportunities will be located to the north of the Southern Solar Farm. These activities are discussed in **Volume 5** of this application.

2.5 Records of Title and Land Ownership

The Records of Title for the site and associated interests registered at the time of application are attached at **Appendix 1A** of Volume 1 and summarised in **Table 1** below. There are no limitations on the Records of Title that restrict the proposed land use.

Table 1: Landholdings within the Solar Farm Site

Stage	Area	Legal Description	Owner
Northern Solar Farm	13.5 ha	Lot 2 DP 567678 and Lot 2 DP 21055	
Southern Solar Farm	27.3831 ha	Lot 2 DP 567678 & Lot 2 DP 21055	
	33.79 ha	Lot 1 DP 21055	
	13.716 ha	Lot 3 DP South Auckland 14362	

It is noted that the establishment of appropriate site boundaries are enabled by the subdivision consent applied for as Volume 2 of this application. For completeness, the Northern Solar Farm will be situated on proposed Lot 7 and the Southern Solar Farm will be situated on proposed Lot 3.

2.6 Geology and Topography

A Geotechnical Investigation Report (GIR) has been prepared by CMW Geosciences (CMW) and is provided in **Appendix 1M**. The GIR confirms that the site can generally be described as near level, except near to the western boundary of the southern solar farm which slopes towards the Waitoa River. Published geological maps for the area depict the regional geology as comprising cross-bedded pumice sand, silt and gravel of the Hinuera Formation. Refer to the Geotechnical Investigation Report (**Appendix 1M**) for further details.

2.7 Groundwater

The WGA Hydrological Effects Assessment has addressed groundwater levels along the site and their report is included in **Appendix 1N**. The investigation was undertaken in May-June 2024, and found that groundwater was encountered within the CPTs and boreholes. The interpreted groundwater levels for the Northern Solar Farm are between 1.8m – 4.2m, and for the Southern Solar Farm between 3.3m – 3.8m.

2.8 Vegetation

Both solar farms are currently in use as working farms, and are predominantly flat with little vegetation outside of pasture grass and several standalone exotic trees. Refer to the Landscape Assessment prepared by Greenwoods Associates (refer **Appendix 3C**) for further details.

2.9 Existing Infrastructure

The Infrastructure Report prepared by Maven Associates (refer **Appendix 3F**) confirms that there is no stormwater, water supply or wastewater reticulation within the project area for the solar farms, with the exception of a limited number of farm/roadside drains and streams. There are farm

drain networks through these sites, that all connect into a downstream primary farm drain. However, there is existing water supply and wastewater infrastructure surrounding the project area. Stormwater in the surrounding environment appears to be predominantly disposed of via soakage and the farm drains outlined above.

2.10 Contamination

A Preliminary and Detailed Site Investigation ('PSI/DSI') has been prepared by SLR Consulting NZ and included in **Appendix 1R**. The PSI/DSI concludes that the wider Ashbourne site is HAIL (A10), however concentrations of contaminants within soil samples were below the NES:CS Soil Contamination Standards concentrations.

Contamination matters and relevant consents are addressed in Volume 2 of the AEE, and are not further discussed in this report.

2.11 Land Use Capability

A Land Use Capability Classification Assessment of the wider Ashbourne site has been prepared by Landsystems and is included as **Appendix 1L**. The assessment carried out by Landsystems includes an on-site assessment at a greater level to the NZLRI regional scale. Their assessment confirms that the site is predominantly underlain by LUC2 soils with limited extents of LUC1, 3, and 4 soils. The assessment also identifies a finer detail of land quality and constraints within the LUC2 and 3 classes, as illustrated in **Figure 3** below.

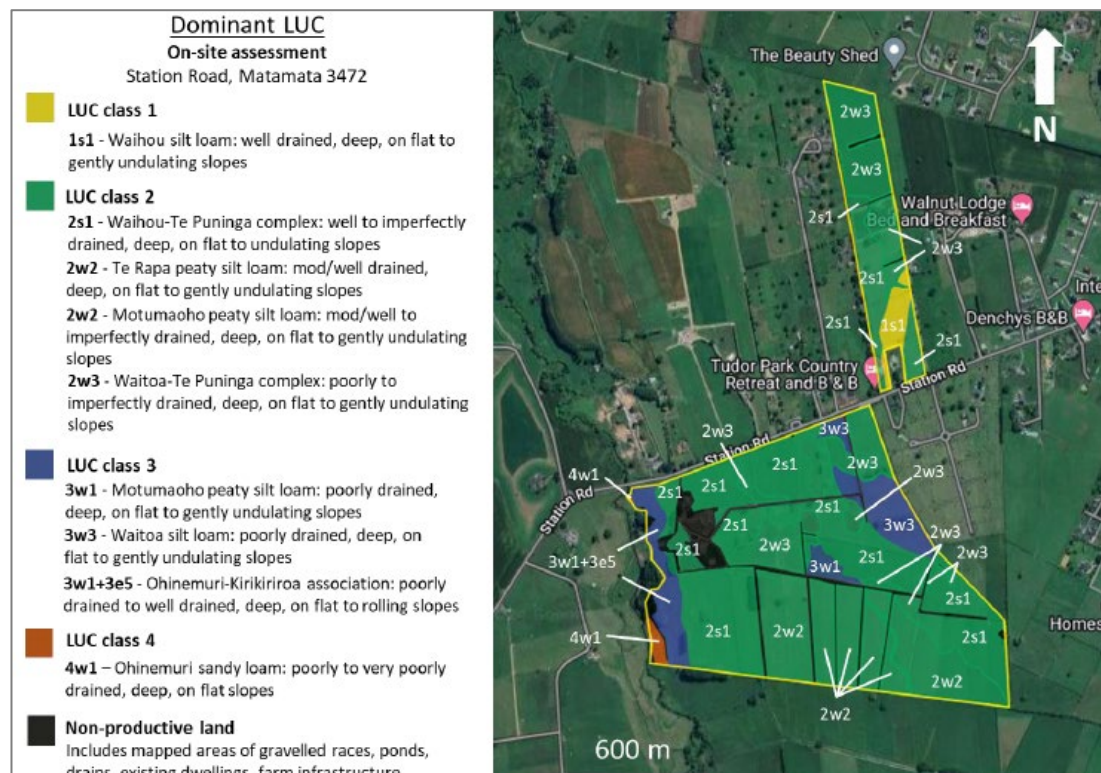


Figure 3: On-site LUC assessment. Source: Landsystems.

2.12 Ecology

An Ecological Impact Assessment ('EclA') has been prepared by Ecological Solutions and is included as **Appendix 1I**. This includes an assessment of existing terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems within the site.

2.13 Terrestrial Ecology

The Ashbourne Development site largely dominated by exotic pasture, hedgerows, and exotic specimen trees. New planting has also been established within the margins of the Waitoa River over a width of 5-10m along parts of the river. While the site is located within a Threatened Environment Classification 1 area, the site itself has minimal indigenous vegetation.

In terms of fauna and habitat, the wider site does not contain any high value habitat for threatened birds or lizards. Native birds observed on site were all considered 'Not Threatened', and no lizards were detected during habitat surveys. Surveys confirm that the site is used for commuting and foraging by long-tailed bats, predominantly along the Waitoa River corridor, where the eastern margin of the River is located within the site.

2.14 Freshwater Ecology

The Ecological Impact Assessment (**Appendix 1I**) has identified a number of freshwater ecology features within the wider Ashbourne Development site, as shown in below. As illustrated, there are no freshwater features located within the Northern Solar Farm or Southern Solar Farm site.

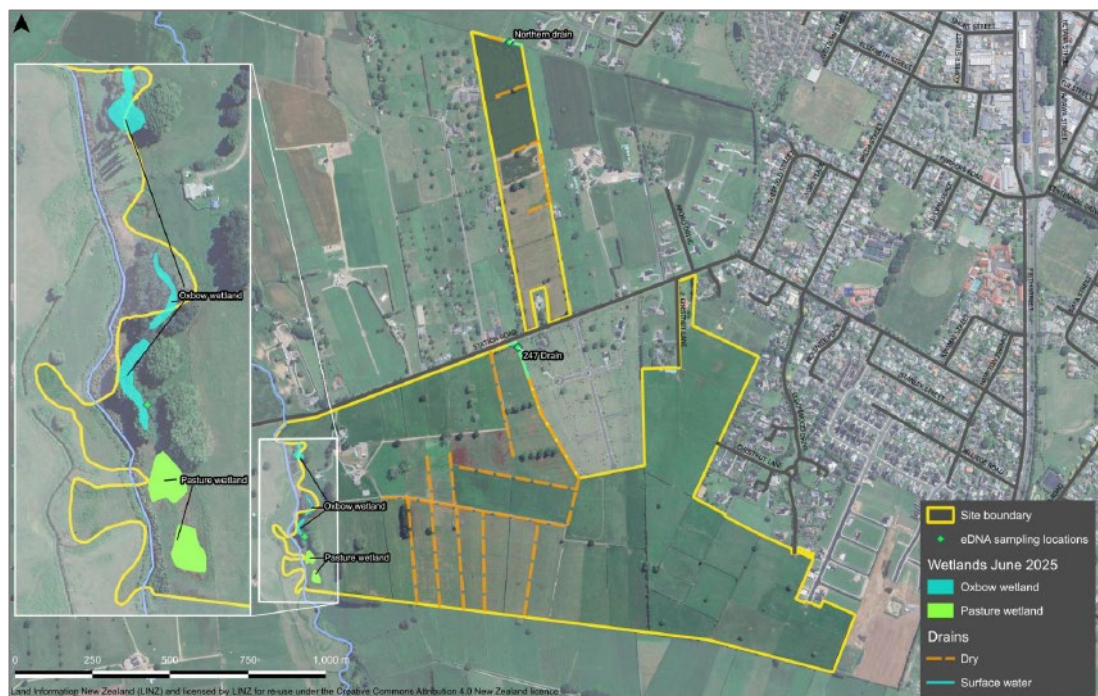


Figure 4: Freshwater ecology features on the Ashbourne Development site. Source: Ecological Solutions.

2.15 Cultural Environment

A Cultural Impact Assessment ('CIA'), included as **Appendix 1H**, was prepared in support of this application.

Matamata's history is rooted in the influence of both Māori and European settlers. In Māori language, Matamata means "headland", and refers to a significant pā established by the Ngāti Hauā chief Te Waharoa in 1830.

Matamata was historically a cross roads for Māori travelers, with early journeys giving way to European explorers. Following the land wars of 1865, Josiah Clifton Firth leased a vast estate which he named Matamata, farming livestock and horticulture.

3.0 Proposal

3.1 Overview

This section of the application is a summary of the key elements of the proposal provided in accordance with Clause 5(1)(a) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA.

This application seeks approval for land use resource consent to enable the construction of the Northern and Southern Solar Farms within the Ashbourne development. Specifically, the application seeks approval to undertake the following:

- The establishment of two solar farms, consisting of approximately 50,000 solar panels installed in rows of up to 110m in length;
- The grazing of livestock below the solar panels, which have an average height of 2.5m above ground when fully tilted, allowing ample room for the ongoing productive use of the land;
- Construction of an access and roading within the northern solar farm from Station Road;
- Construction of an access and roading within the southern solar farm, to be accessed from a new public road proposed within **Volume 5** of this application; and
- Approximately 11,200m³ of earthworks, including 153m³ of cut, 5,400m³ of fill, and a topsoil strip of approximately 5,915m³ to establish roading and prepare the site for the installation of solar arrays.

More comprehensive descriptions on specific aspects of the proposal are set out in the specialist reports and plans accompanying the Volume 3 application, and the following reports and plans from Volume 2:

- Cultural Impact Assessment – **Appendix 1H**;
- Assessment of Ecological Effects – **Appendix 1I**;
- Land Use Capability Classification Assessment – **Appendix 1L**;
- Geotechnical Investigation Report – **Appendix 1M**;
- Hydrogeological Assessment – **Appendix 1N**;
- Transportation Assessment – **Appendix 1P**; and
- Urban Design Assessment – **Appendix 1Q**.

For completeness, approval is sought under s42(4) of the FTAA for a resource consent that would otherwise be applied for under the Resource Management Act 1991.

3.2 Construction Methodology

This assessment is supported by the anticipated outputs of a detailed construction methodology to be provided to Council for certification prior to commencement.

3.2.1 Construction Phasing

Due to the extent of the project, it is proposed to be delivered in two stages, with the northern solar farm being delivered in Stage 1 and the southern solar farm being delivered in Stage 2.

3.2.2 Enabling Works

Enabling works will be carried out prior to the commencement of each stage of earthworks. These works will include removing any vegetation within the earthwork's extent and stripping of topsoil, fencing, trenching, cabling, planting, and piling. Note that it is proposed to remove all existing vegetation from the solar farm sites.

3.2.3 Earthworks

The proposed earthworks will be carried out over a total area of 18,970m². As set out in Section 3.2.1, the earthworks will be completed over two stages, as follows:

	Stage 1 – Northern Solar Farm	Stage 2 – Southern Solar Farm
Earthworks Area	10,774m ²	8,196m ²
Total Cut	105m ³	48m ³
Total Fill	2,617m ³	2,731m ³
Balance (Fill)	2,512m ³	2,638m ³
Topsoil Strip	3,232m ³	2,459m ³

Some minor earthworks on the southern solar farm will be undertaken within 100m of the Waitoa River. Specific erosion and sediment controls have been developed for works within proximity to the waterway.

3.2.4 Erosion and Sediment Control

Erosion and sediment control measures will be installed prior to any works occurring on the site to minimise adverse effects associated with the discharge of sediment into the receiving environment. The receiving environment in this instance is the Waitoa River.

Erosion and sediment controls measures will be established prior to commencement of works. An Erosion and Sediment Control Plan can be adequately managed via a condition of consent for the solar farms has been included with this application, refer **Appendix 3F**.

3.2.5 Contamination

As outlined above, a PSI and DSI have been prepared by SLR Consulting NZ and are included in **Appendix 1R**. The site is classified as a 'piece of land' under Regulation 5(7) of the NESCS, and while contaminant concentrations were above the predicted background soil criteria, they were below the respective NESCS soil contamination standards.

Works on site are proposed to be carried out in accordance with the Contaminated Site Management Plan ('CSMP') included as **Appendix 1S** and Acid Sulphate Soil Management Plan ('ASSMP'), provided as **Appendix 1T**.

3.2.6 Construction Controls and Noise and Vibration

3.2.7 Cultural Monitoring

To address the recommendations received in the CIA (**Appendix 1H**), the opportunity for cultural monitoring by representatives of relevant mana whenua will be made available. This will include

site monitoring inspections at the commencement of works, during works, and at the conclusion of works, and is provided for within the proposed conditions of consent (refer **Appendix 3M**).

3.2.8 Noise and Vibration

A Construction Noise and Vibration Report has been prepared by Styles Group (refer **Appendix 3H**). The report concludes that during construction of the northern solar farm, there is an exceedance to the permitted noise limits at one receiver, being 164 Station Road as illustrated in **Figure 5** below. The exceedance is 2 dB L_{a10} above the permitted noise level of 70 dB L_{a10} .



Figure 5: 164 Station Road (outlined in blue) in relation to the subject site (outlined red). Source: eMap

The report additionally concludes that the construction of the southern solar farm is anticipated to comply with permitted noise levels for all adjacent properties (including those to be established by **Volumes 4 and 5** of this application).

Further, the report concludes that during operation, both solar farms will be able to readily comply with permitted operational noise limits. The applicant proposes to adopt the recommendations of Styles Group (refer **Appendix 3H**), and a draft Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan ('CNVMP') has been prepared for each solar farm, included as **Appendix 3I** and **Appendix 3J**.

3.2.9 Draft Management Plans

High-level draft Stormwater Management Plan and Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan have been included with the application (refer **Appendix 3F** and **Appendix 3I** and **Appendix 3J** respectively) to provide an overview of the typical measures contractors will implement to manage adverse effects associated with stormwater and noise. earthworks and construction activities.

In addition, a draft Ecological Management Plan ('EMP') (refer **Appendix 1J**) has been prepared for the wider Ashbourne Development site to manage potential ecological effects during construction.

In particular, the EMP sets out the management of birds, bats, lizards, and fish for each component of the development i.e. residential, solar, retirement etc.

3.3 Built Components

3.3.1 Northern Solar Farm

The Northern Solar Farm is proposed to contain the following built components:

- A total of approximately 14,700 solar panels, with appropriate inverters to convert from DC power to AC power across the panels. The proposed site layout is illustrated in Figure 6 below;

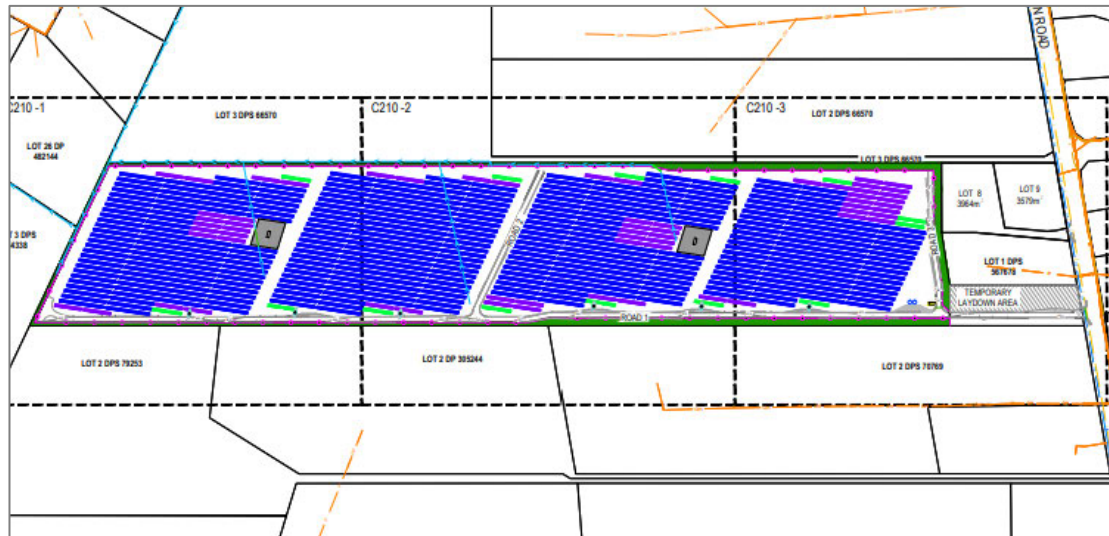


Figure 6: Northern Solar Farm Layout. Source: Maven

- A container site office will be provided near the entrance within the site, intended for occasional use by maintenance staff attending site;
- Two power transformers will be located centrally within the solar farm, as illustrated by grey squares in **Figure 6** above. The transformers on the northern solar farm are up to 11kV, and are housed in 20ft containers, as illustrated in **Figure 7** below; and

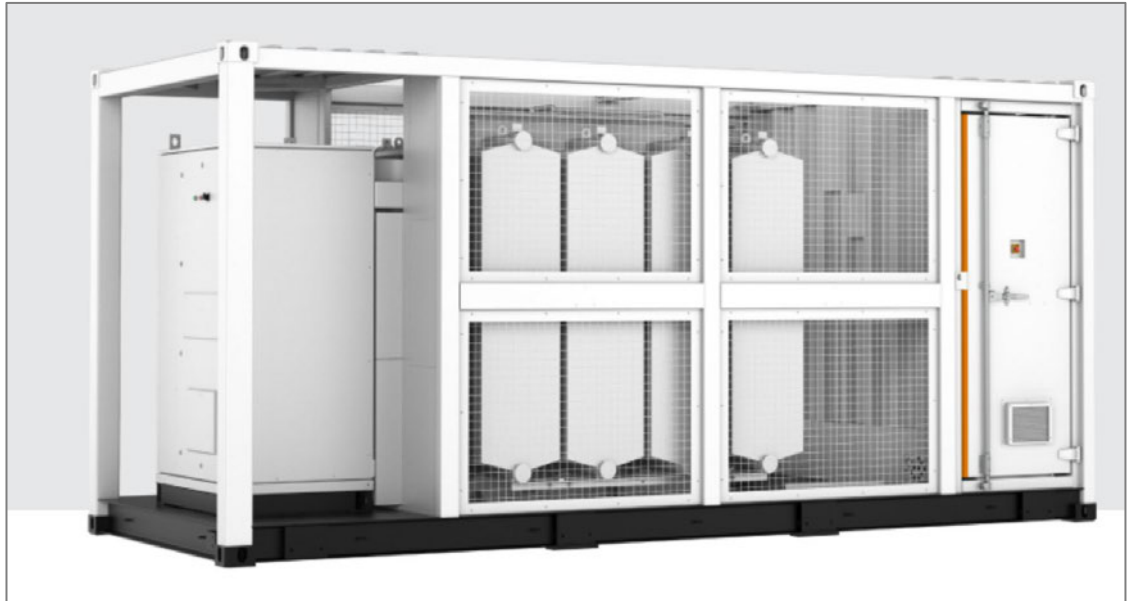


Figure 7: Indicative container appearance for transformer housing. Source: Lightyears Solar

- The northern solar farm is proposed to be enclosed by a 2.2m high security fence, setback by a minimum of 3m from the boundary of the solar farm. Generous planting is proposed between the boundary and the fence, see **Figure 8** below.

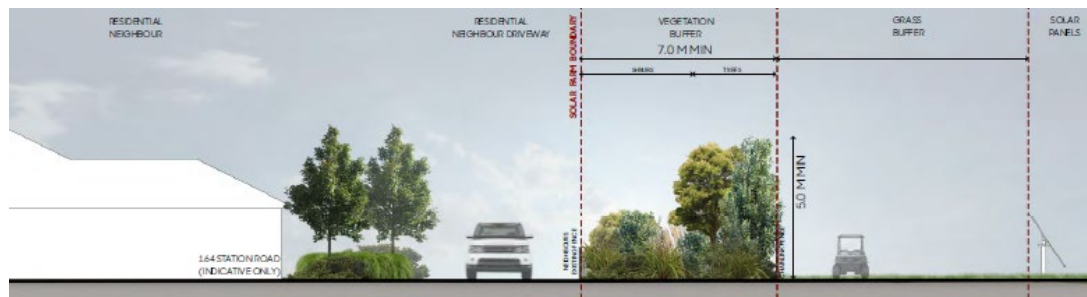


Figure 8: Example of vegetation buffer at 10 years maturity in the context of adjoining existing residential dwellings

3.3.2 Southern Solar Farm

The Southern Solar Farm is proposed to contain the following built components:

- A total of approximately 34,000 solar panels, with appropriate inverters to convert from DC power to AC power. The proposed site layout is illustrated in Figure 9 below;

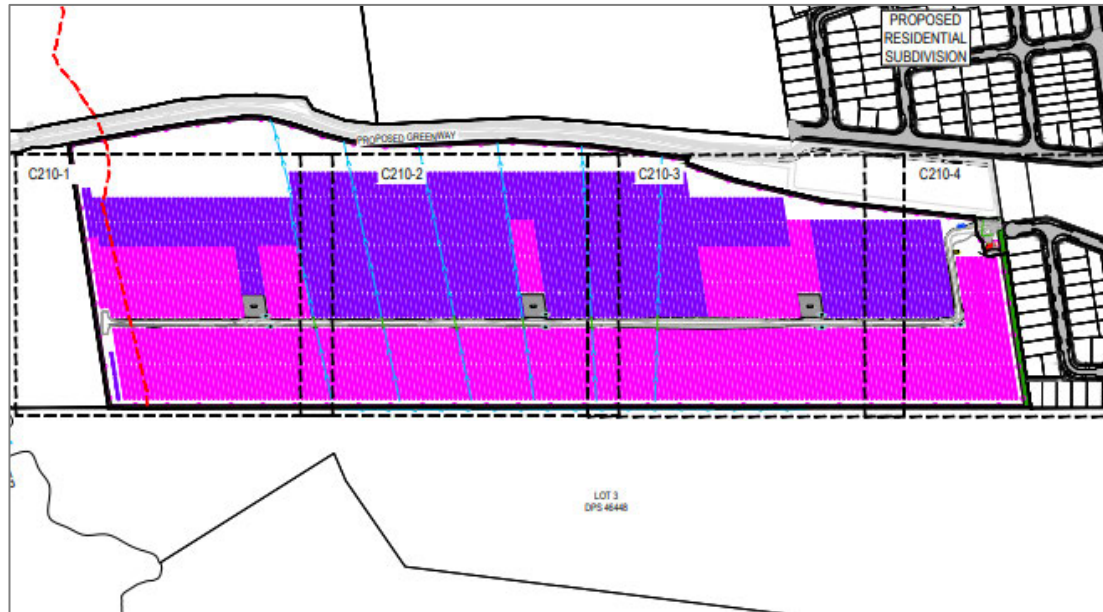


Figure 9: Northern Solar Farm Layout. Source: Maven

- A container site office will be provided near the entrance within the site, intended for occasional use by maintenance staff attending site;
- Three power transformers will be located centrally within the solar farm, as illustrated by grey squares in **Figure 6** above. The transformers on the southern solar farm are up to 33kV, and are housed in 20ft containers, as illustrated in **Figure 7** above; and
- The southern solar farm is proposed to be enclosed by a 2.2m high security fence, setback by a minimum of 3m from the boundary of the solar farm. Generous planting is proposed between the boundary and the fence, see Figure 8 below.

3.4 Access and Transportation

Access to the Northern Solar Farm will be provided from Station Road, which is a Collector Road with a posted speed of 80 km/hr. Vehicle access to the Southern Solar Farm will be constructed as part of Stage 3 of the Ashbourne Residential subdivision.

Following construction, vehicle movements to the site are anticipated to be infrequent, with vehicle trips limited to personnel visiting the site for maintenance checks. As a matter of conservatism, the vehicle movements have been assumed at 2 per site per day within the Integrated Transport Assessment (refer **Appendix 1P**).

Access roads will be constructed within each of the solar farms of sufficient widths to accommodate a 12.6m long rigid truck to ensure fire truck access is feasible to the sites.

3.5 Servicing

The solar farms sites are proposed to be serviced as follows:

- **Wastewater** – no wastewater connections is required or provided to the solar farm sites;
- **Stormwater** – both solar farm sites will utilise existing farm drains for conveyance and ground soakage to manage stormwater. The potential for contaminants is low, with limited vehicle movements and no contamination potential from the solar panels;

- **Water** – An extension to the existing water supply in Station Road is proposed for the northern solar farm. For the southern solar farm, an extension from Stage 3 of the Ashbourne residential subdivision (refer **Volume 5** of this application) is proposed; and
- **Power & Telecommunications** – Connections into the existing networks are proposed for the northern solar farm. For the southern solar farm, connection into new power and telecommunications networks to be provided in Stage 3 of the Ashbourne residential subdivision are proposed

3.6 Summary of Monitoring and Mitigation Measures

In accordance with clause 5(1)(d) and (g) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA, a detailed list of mitigation measures incorporating both management plans and monitoring measures has been provided with **Volume 1 (Appendix 1G)**.

3.7 Consent Duration

Section 43 of the FTAA requires the substantive application to:

- State whether the application relates to a priority project, and if so, states specific requirements (s43(h));
- With reference to the requirements of s13(4), include a statement of whether the project is planned to proceed in stages and if so, an outline of the nature and timing of the stages, together with other requirements that relate to the referral application (s43(2)).

This application does not relate to a priority project.

3.8 Other activities

This section is provided in accordance with Clause 5(1)(e) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA.

For completeness, the following is noted:

- Residential subdivision and development, along with the construction of a greenway and commercial node is addressed in **Volume 5** of this application; and
- The construction of a Retirement Village and Care Hospital is addressed in **Volume 4** of this application.

There are no other activities that form part of the proposal to which this consent application relates.

3.9 Other Approvals Required

This section is provided in accordance with Clause 5(1)(f) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA.

A wildlife approval is required under the Wildlife Act 1953 and will be sought separately to this FTAA application. No other approvals are required as part of the Ashbourne Solar Farms development, noting that the remediation of contaminated land is addressed in **Volume 2** and the discharge of stormwater to water is addressed in **Volume 5**.

3.10 Proposed Conditions of Consent

In accordance with clause 5(1)(k) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA, the proposed conditions of this consent are attached as **Appendix 3M**

4.0 Approvals Required

In accordance with Section 42(4)(a) this application is seeking approval for a resource consent that would otherwise be applied for under the RMA.

In summary, consent is required under the provisions of the NESCS, Waikato Regional Plan ('WRP'), and MPODP as identified below. A full Activities and Standards Assessment is included as **Appendix 3K**.

4.1 National Environmental Standards

Resource consents required under the NES-CS in accordance with clause 5(1)(f) of Schedule 5 of the Act are as follows:

- The proposal includes land disturbance that does not meet the requirements for a permitted activity under Regulation 8 and is a **controlled activity** under Regulation 9(1).

For completeness, all NES have been considered and assessed to determine whether resource consent is required, as outlined in **Appendix 3L**.

Table 2: Assessment of National Environmental Standards.

National Environmental Standard	
National Environmental Standards for Air Quality 2004	This is not applicable as no specific consents relating to this standard are required for the project.
National Environmental Standards for Sources of Drinking Water 2007	This is not applicable as the project does not affect sources of drinking water.
National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities 2009	This is not applicable as the project does not provide for high voltage transmission lines.
National Environmental Standard for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health 2011	This is applicable and consent is required as a controlled activity under Regulation 9(1).
National Environmental Standards for Telecommunications Facilities 2016	This is not applicable as the proposal does not seek consent for telecommunications facilities.
National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry 2017	This is not applicable as the proposal does not relate to plantation forestry.
National Environmental Standard for Freshwater 2020	This is not applicable as the site does not contain any freshwater bodies or features.
National Environmental Standard for Marine Aquaculture 2020	This is not applicable as the proposal does not relate to marine aquaculture.
National Environmental Standard for Storing Tyres Outdoors 2021	This is not applicable as the proposal does not provide for the storage of tyres.

4.2 Waikato Operative Regional Plan

Resource consents required under the WRP in accordance with clause 5(1)(f) of Schedule 5 of the Act are as follows:

- The proposal includes drilling below the water table for temporary activities, including dewatering during construction and investigation for pump testing. This is a **Controlled activity** under Rule 3.8.4.7.
- The Southern Solar Farm will utilise existing culvert catchments for the conveyance of stormwater. This is a **Controlled activity** as per Rule 4.2.9.3.

4.3 Matamata-Piako Operative District Plan

Resource consents required under the MPODP in accordance with clause 5(1)(f) of Schedule 5 of the Act are as follows:

- Solar Farms are provided for within the definition of *Community-scale renewable energy generation* which is a **Permitted** activity in the Rural Zone, as per Activity Status Table 8.3.1.
- The proposed northern and southern solar farms infringe yard and building coverage provisions within Rules 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, and are therefore both **Restricted Discretionary** activity in the Rural Zone under Rule 3.2.1(iii) - Yards and 3.2.2 – Building Coverage.
- 5.2.1(iv) General Noise – Construction noise from the site shall meet the limits recommended in Table 1 of NZS6803P:1984. Construction of the northern solar farm will result in an exceedance to the permitted noise levels for one receiver (162 Station Road) of 2dB, and is therefore a **Restricted Discretionary** activity.
- The southern solar farm crossing does not comply with Standards 9.1.2(iv)(a)(i) and 9.1.2(vii)(a)(ii) and is therefore a **Restricted Discretionary** activity.

4.4 Associated Permitted Activities

The following relevant activities are associated with the solar farms and fall within the permitted activity status of the Waikato Regional Plan and Matamata Piako Operative District Plan.

Table 3: Permitted Activities under the WRC and MPODP

Relevant Rule/Regulation	Comments
Waikato Regional Plan	
3.5 Discharges	
3.5.11.4 Permitted Activity Rule – Discharge of Stormwater to Water	On the southern solar farm, stormwater discharge from the existing farm drains will discharge to the Waitoa River via the proposed greenway (refer Volume 5) complying with permitted activity standards. Sediment and erosion control measures are provided for during construction (refer Appendix 3F and Volume 5). This is therefore considered to be a permitted activity
3.5.11.5 Permitted Activity Rule – Discharge of Stormwater Onto or Into Land	Stormwater will be discharged to the ground, and is anticipated to comply with permitted

Relevant Rule/Regulation	Comments
	activity standards. Refer to the Infrastructure Report (Appendix 3F) for further details
5.1 Accelerated Erosion	
5.1.4.11 Permitted Activity Rule – Soil Disturbance, Roding and Tracking and Vegetation Clearance	Earthwork activities will be carried out in accordance with appropriate management plans, and are limited to top soil strips and earthworks required for the construction of access roads for both solar farms, as outlined in the Infrastructure Report (refer Appendix 3F). Land disturbance is anticipated to comply with permitted activity standards.
6.2 The Discharge of Agrichemicals into Air	
6.2.4.8 Permitted Activity Rule – Spot Spraying Using Hand Held Spray Equipment	Any spot spraying required during construction will comply with the permitted activity standards
6.2.4.9 Permitted Activity Rule – Widespread Application of Agrichemical(s)	As outlined in the Infrastructure Report (refer Appendix 3F), chemical treatment management measures will be applied throughout earthworks that are anticipated to comply with permitted activity standards.
Matamata Piako Operative District Plan	
1. General	
1.1 Accessory buildings for any permitted or controlled activity	As the solar farm activities are expressly provided for under Section 8.3.1, the construction of accessory buildings associated with this activity are also permitted.
1.4 Demolition of buildings and structures except those outlined in Schedules 1, 2, and 3	No scheduled buildings or structures exist on site. The demolition of existing buildings and structures is therefore a permitted activity.
9. Rural Based Activities	
9.7 Farming	Stock grazing is proposed underneath the solar arrays. This is a permitted activity.
8.2 Electricity Transmission and Distribution Activities	
8.2.1(1) Underground electrical cables and ancillary electrical equipment	New underground electrical cables are proposed to the boundaries of both solar farms. These are intended to connect into new underground electrical cables to be installed by PowerCo to connect the solar farms to relevant substations. Refer to the Infrastructure Report and Engineering Drawings for further details (refer Appendix 3F). This is considered to be a permitted activity.
8.2.1(9) New and extensions to existing transformers, substations, and switching stations conveying electricity at a voltage up to	The proposed transformers for the southern solar farm will be 33kV. While the northern solar farm transformers will be 11kv, it is also considered to be captured under this rule.

Relevant Rule/Regulation	Comments
and including 66kV and ancillary buildings (not otherwise provided for in Activity Table 8.2.1)	The transformers proposed on the site are therefore considered a permitted activity.
8.2 Electricity Transmission and Distribution Activities	
2. Community-scale renewable energy generation	<p>The solar farms are expected to provide energy for approximately 7,000 homes, which is considered to meet the definition of 'community-scale energy generation as per Part B, Chapter 15 of the MPODP</p> <p>The establishment of solar farms is therefore a permitted activity in the Rural zone. For completeness, it is noted that consent is required under this rule for non-compliance with development standards as outlined above.</p>
8.5 Water, Wastewater and Stormwater	
1. Water, wastewater, and stormwater connections to public networks	No stormwater or wastewater connections to public networks are proposed. Water connections from the public network will be extended to the southern solar farm site from the proposed residential subdivision (refer Volume 5 of this application), and from the existing public network on Station Road for the northern solar farm. This is considered to be a permitted activity.
2. Ventilation, drop shafts and manholes	As confirmed by the Infrastructure Report (refer Appendix 3F), this is a permitted activity.
3. Underground pipelines and fittings for the conveyance of water, wastewater, and stormwater	As confirmed by the Infrastructure Report (refer Appendix 3F), this is a permitted activity.
7. Water storage tanks	2x 25,000L water storage tanks are proposed on each solar farm for firefighting purposes. These comply with zone standards, and are considered permitted.
11. Stormwater detention by means of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rain gardens; ▪ Infiltration trenches; ▪ Wetlands; ▪ All stormwater detention facilities and ponds on sites subject to a DCP 	Existing farm drains will be utilised, along with ground soakage. As confirmed by the Infrastructure Report (refer Appendix 3F), this is a permitted activity.
14. Water and irrigation races, open drains, and channels (not being secondary flow paths)	As confirmed by the Infrastructure Report (refer Appendix 3F), this is a permitted activity.
9.1.2 Access	
3.2. An existing vehicle crossing that changes in character, scale, or intensity of use, meeting	The existing vehicle crossing to the northern solar farm is proposed to be widened and re-

Relevant Rule/Regulation	Comments
the performance standards in 9.1.2(iv)(a)(i)–(iv).	used, and is anticipated to comply with relevant Standards.

4.5 Overall Activity Status

Overall, the proposal requires assessment as a **Controlled activity** under the NESCS, a **Controlled activity** under the WRP, and a **Restricted Discretionary activity** under the MPODP.

5.0 Assessment of Effects

This section of the report is provided in accordance with Clauses 6 and 7 of Schedule 5 of the FTAA.

These provisions require an assessment of the actual or potential effects on the environment. Clause 6 sets out the information required in the assessment of environmental effects and this is included throughout this volume of the application as well as the Overview Report in **Volume 1**.

Clause 7 of Schedule 5 of the FTAA outlines the matters to be covered in the assessment of environmental effects. This includes:

- *Any effect on the people in the neighbourhood and, if relevant, the wider community, including any social, economic, or cultural effects:*
- *Any physical effect on the locality, including landscape and visual effects:*
- *Any effect on ecosystems, including effects on plants or animals and physical disturbance of habitats in the vicinity:*
- *Any effect on natural and physical resources that have aesthetic, recreational, scientific, historical, spiritual, or cultural value, or other special value, for present or future generations:*
- *Any discharge of contaminants into the environment and options for the treatment and disposal of contaminants:*
- *Any unreasonable emission of noise:*
- *Any risk to the neighbourhood, the wider community, or the environment through natural hazards or hazardous installations*

These matters are addressed in this section of the report below.

The existing environment, in particular the existing land uses and allotment areas of the subject site, as well as sites in the surrounding environment, are a relevant consideration to the proposal and are set out in **Section 2.3** above.

The activities which are permitted on the site under the MPODP, WRP, and NES are identified in **Section 4.4** above.

As outlined in Section 1.0 above, this report is structured to present a comprehensive and bundled assessment of the relevant considerations for the two proposed Solar Farms (northern and southern). District and Regional matters are assessed in parallel, to reflect the intertwined nature of the consenting context and the similarity of issues at play.

An assessment of actual and potential effects on people and the environment is set out below, as well as within the supporting specialist reports. It is considered that effects in relation to the following matters are relevant:

- Positive effects;
- Visual Landscape and Amenity effects;
- Glint and Glare effects;
- Ecological effects;
- Contaminated land effects;

- Traffic effects;
- Construction effects;
- Noise and Vibration effects;
- Infrastructure effects;
- Stormwater effects; and

These matters are set out and discussed below. Contaminated land, heritage, and archaeological effects are assessed in **Volume 2** of the AEE.

5.1 Positive Effects

The development accords with the purpose of the FTAA to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits. The development will result in significant public benefit through the creation of two solar farms with the delivery of the project being accelerated through the FTAA process in comparison to a 'conventional' consenting process. Furthermore, the proposal is considered to result in the following positive effects as outlined in **Appendix 1K**

- \$34 million in construction value
- 36 direct and indirect construction jobs during construction of the solar farms
- Approximately 5 FTE roles to support the site management, panel maintenance and electrical servicing, based on a review of over twenty comparable solar farm projects.

The solar farms will deliver a number of positive effects, including economic, infrastructure, and environmental benefits for the local community and broader region. The full extent of the Economic effects is covered in the Economic Impact Assessment ('EIA'), included as **Appendix 1K**.

Given the nature of the project, the solar farms are additionally considered to contribute to a more resilient energy system in the Waikato region by reducing energy costs and improving energy resilience and stability.

5.1.1 Environmental Effects

Further, the proposed solar farms will have positive environmental benefits by generating electricity without emitting greenhouse gases or contributing to air pollution. As set out in the EIA, an acre of solar panels are able to offset more carbon emissions per year than an acre of carbon-sequestering trees.

The solar farms will operate as agrivoltaic systems, with continued grazing of stock below the solar panels. This dual-use is considered to represent the most productive use of land.

5.2 Visual Landscape and Amenity Effects

This assessment is supported by the Landscape Assessment prepared by Greenwoods Associates, included as **Appendix 3C**.

5.2.1 Landscape & Visual Effects

As described in **Section 2.4**, the solar farms are located on existing working farms. Both the northern and southern farm are largely flat with limited existing vegetation. It is noted that the

Matamata-Piako District Plan specifically provides for solar farms of this scale as a permitted activity in the rural zone, and it is therefore considered that the establishment of solar farms in the rural area are readily anticipated.

Generous landscape buffers are proposed around both solar farms on all boundaries, being a minimum depth of 3m. These buffers have been designed to completely screen views of the solar farm once mature from all boundaries (between 5-15 years from planting), as illustrated in **Figure 10** and **Figure 11** below for the Northern Solar Farm. Further illustrative examples are provided within the Landscape Drawings (refer **Appendix 3B**).



Figure 10: Example landscape buffer 5-years after planting. Source: Greenwoods Associates



Figure 11: Example Landscape Buffer 15-years after planting. Source: Greenwoods Associates

As set out within the Landscape Assessment (Appendix 3C), the surrounding rural area is characterised by shelter belt and buffer planting areas that are considered to have a similar appearance to the buffer planting proposed around the solar farms. The assessment concludes that the overall effect of the solar farms on the prevailing landscape character can be considered as Low.

An example of the landscape buffer treatment for the Southern Solar Farm is provided below.



Figure 12: Example Landscape Buffer Southern Solar Farm. Source: Greenwoods Associates



Figure 13: Example Landscape Buffer Southern Solar Farm – 5 years. Source: Greenwoods Associates



Figure 14: Example Landscape Buffer Southern Solar Farm – 15 years. Source: Greenwoods Associates

The Landscape Assessment (refer **Appendix 3B**), undertaken by Greenwoods Associates, goes into detailed consideration the different visual and landscape considerations for the proposed Northern and Southern Solar Farms. The assessment considers the physical landscape effects of the proposal, the effects on visual amenity (both adjoining and public), and effects on prevailing landscape character values.

Overall, the Landscape Assessment, **Appendix 3C**, concludes that the level of cumulative adverse landscape effects generated by the proposal in its completed form (5+ years from initial installation) will be low.

In addition, with the inclusion of a suitably worded condition to address the ongoing maintenance requirements of the planting buffer treatment for both the northern and southern solar farms the overall outcomes and effects have been fully understood.

We rely on the expertise of Greenwoods Associates, and the methodology applied to treat the periphery of the northern and southern solar farms to an extent that is considered no more than minor in the wider environment, and less than minor in the context of immediately adjacent and adjoining properties, where the baseline of a solar farm being permitted in the MPDP gives strong direction around the scale and anticipated occurrence of renewable energy generation within the rural zoned environment.

Overall, while the proposal will result in a noticeable change in the appearance of the site that is atypical for the surrounding area, any adverse visual landscape and amenity effects are considered to be less than minor, taking into account the proposed landscape buffer and the ability for solar farms to be established as a permitted activity in the rural zone.

5.3 Glint and Glare Effects

Appendix 3D Glint and Glare Assessment (Northern) and Appendix 3E Glint and Glare Assessment (Southern) outline the methodology for assessing glint and glare effects. This is based on proven methodology for interpreting and understanding the effects of glint and glare. This is described in Section 2.0 of **Appendix 3D**.

As outlined in Section 6.0 of **Appendix 3D**;

The results indicate that none of the receptors are at risk of glare, the assessment has 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.

I rely on the expertise of the Glint and Glare Assessment(s) and consider any potential effects are suitably managed and addressed, such that they are less than minor.

5.4 Ecological Effects

Terrestrial ecology within the site is identified in the EclA included as **Appendix 1I**. The EclA identifies that potential terrestrial ecological effects within the Solar Farm(s) sites are associated with the removal of existing vegetation, which is dominated by exotic species.

The EclA finds that potential effects of the proposal on botanical value, birds, lizards, and their respective habitats will range from very low to positive as a result of existing low ecological values and the implementation of new landscaping planting, including indigenous species. Potential effects have been identified in relation to lizards, bats and bat habitat, and any indigenous fish in the existing farm drains. The proposal seeks to mitigate these potential effects through the adoption of management plans, including a Lizard Management Plan, Bat Management Plan, and a Fish Relocation Plan. The EclA finds that the level of effect on these potential values can be mitigated to very low to low.

The proposed solar farms will not create effects on freshwater ecology values as there are no waterbodies present within the site.

Overall, and based on the above, it is considered that ecological effects can be appropriately mitigated to be less than minor.

5.5 Traffic Effects

As outlined in **Appendix 1P** the northern and southern solar farms have negligible associated traffic effects. The tracking curves within Appendix 1P Traffic Attachment B confirm that larger trucks (like a fire engine) are able to easily navigate around the solar farms in the event of requiring to do so.

The Southern Solar Farm access has been tested with a semitrailer (see Appendix) – this is to ensure that the solar panels can be installed. The access requires at least a 5.0m width. This is considered acceptable at the end of the cul-de-sac and will have limited impact on pedestrians following construction.

The Northern Solar Farm access is proposed to be via two one-way access points during construction, and then once construction is completed, the eastern access will be used for the two rural residential dwellings. At the boundary, the access to the Solar Farm will need to be wider during construction. The access will need to be 10m temporarily during construction, this can then be narrowed at the permanent vehicle crossing compliant with standard rural DG307.

A draft construction traffic management plan, **Appendix 1P** Traffic Attachment C, outlines considerations for managing temporary construction effects associated with the wider Ashbourne development, including the northern and southern solar farms.

Based on the very low nature of the trip distribution of the solar farm activity, post construction the ongoing maintenance requirements will have negligible effects, such that any effects are less than minor.

5.6 Construction Effects

The proposal will result in temporary construction effects for the duration of the proposed earthworks, including construction traffic, noise, sediment and dust effects. Each of these effects are addressed below. The proposed construction works are an unavoidable precursor to the provision of the development. Measures will be put in place to mitigate and reduce the potential for any adverse traffic, dust, or sediment laden stormwater discharge effects during the construction phase.

5.6.1 Construction Traffic Effects

In terms of heavy vehicle movement, it is noted that earthworks will be contained within the applicant's landholding and, therefore, will largely be internal to the site. Vehicle movements will be limited to the transportation of machinery and equipment to and from the site, the importation of construction materials, and vehicles associated with site staff, inspectors, and consultants. A draft high-level Construction Transportation Management Plan has been provided within **Appendix 1P**, demonstrating that effects can be adequately managed.

The proposed construction works are an unavoidable precursor to the provision of renewable energy enabled under the MPDP. Measures will be put in place to mitigate and reduce the

potential for any adverse traffic, dust, or sediment laden stormwater discharge effects during the construction phase.

5.6.2 Noise and Vibration Effects

5.6.3 Construction Noise and Vibration

The proposal will result in temporary construction effects for the duration of the proposed earthworks, including traffic, noise, sediment and dust effects. The Acoustic Assessment undertaken by Styles Group (refer **Appendix 3H**) confirms that the construction activities for the northern solar farm will comply with all permitted noise standards under the MPODP.

The construction of the southern solar farm will result in an exceedance to the permitted noise limits to one receiver at 164 Station Road. as set out in the Acoustic Assessment, the exceedance is considered to be small in scale and adverse effects can be appropriately managed. The recommendations of the acoustic report have been incorporated into the proposed conditions (refer **Appendix 3M**).

All practicable measures will be put into place to reduce the potential sources of noise and vibration through construction. In terms of heavy vehicle traffic, it is noted that the scale of earthworks and construction are unlikely to be frequent or intense in number. The provision of a detailed construction methodology is proposed as a consent condition to ensure construction activities, and any associated traffic effects, are appropriately managed.

5.6.4 Operational Noise

The acoustic assessment submitted in support of the application (refer **Appendix 3H**) confirms that during the ongoing operation of the solar farms, it is anticipated that both farms will operate within permitted noise levels. Therefore, the operational effects of the solar farms are considered to be less than minor for all surrounding occupiers.

Overall, potential adverse construction related effects will be less than minor and temporary, considering practicable measures consistent with the scale of works will be implemented to minimise effects.

5.6.5 Erosion and Sediment Effects

The proposed area and volume of earthworks will increase the potential for the generation and discharge of elevated levels of sediment. If not managed, sediments may discharge into adjacent properties and waterbodies, which can ultimately adversely affect local water quality.

To avoid and mitigate these potential adverse effects, a number of erosion and sediment control measures will be implemented prior to earthworks commencing and will be in place for the duration of the earthworks until the site is stabilised. The proposed measures are aligned with best practice methodology for managing erosion and sediment control, and will adopt similarities to those methods outlined in the Earthworks Management Plan associated with the retirement village (refer **Appendix 4F**). These measures will ensure that sediment is contained within the site works area, without discharging into the adjoining waterbodies.

Overall, subject to ensuring that the proposed erosion and sediment control measures are implemented and in place for the duration of the earthworks period, potential discharges of sediments on the immediately surrounding area, and associated effects to water quality, will be less than minor.

Overall, the construction effects of the proposal are considered appropriate, and any actual and potential adverse effects on the environment of allowing the activity are less than minor.

5.7 Contaminated Land Effects

The PSI/DSI prepared by SLR Consulting, included as **Appendix 1R**, identifies that it is likely HAIL activities have been undertaken on the site, including pesticide use and storage. While it was identified that buildings on the wider Ashbourne site had potential to contain asbestos materials, no asbestos was noted during soil sampling.

To mitigate any potential effects on human health and environmental discharge associated with any future disturbance of contaminated soils, SLR recommend works across the site be undertaken in accordance with the CSMP included as **Appendix 1S**. This document details the remediation goals and methodology, environmental management procedures, unexpected contamination discovery protocol, health and safety measures, testing requirements and validation reporting. The adherence to the CSMP has been adopted as proposed conditions of consent.

SLR Consulting have additionally prepared an ASSMP provided as **Appendix 1T**, to outline how potential or actual acid sulphate soils will be identified, managed, and mitigated during earthworks and construction activities enabled by Volumes 3-5 of this application. Mapping provided by Waikato Regional Council identifies isolated pockets of high-risk soils within the Site, with the majority of the Site mapped as low-risk. SLR recommends that works across the site be undertaken in accordance with the ASSMP, and adherence to the ASSMP has been adopted as proposed conditions of consent.

By undertaking the works in accordance with the CSMP and ASSMP, SLR conclude that potential adverse effects on human health and the environment from contaminated land and acid sulphate soils will be acceptable.

Based on the findings of the PSI/DSI and proposed CSMP and ASSMP, it is considered that the proposed earthworks can be appropriately managed to avoid adverse effects on human health and the receiving environment.

5.8 Infrastructure Effects

The proposed solar farms will be serviced by reticulated water networks, with stormwater to be disposed of via ground soakage. No wastewater connections are proposed for the site. Water supply will be achieved through an extension of the existing public reticulated networks located in and/or adjoining the site. The southern solar farm will connect into the public extension proposed to service the Ashbourne Development (refer **Volume 5** of this application).

The two rural residential lots proposed adjacent to the northern solar farm will be served by reticulated water through connection into the existing water main on Station Road. The residential lots will rely on ground soakage for the disposal of stormwater, and onsite wastewater treatment devices will be required. The details of servicing for the rural residential lots will be dealt with by a future resource consent, with this application being limited to the subdivision of these Lots. Notwithstanding, the Infrastructure Report and Engineering Drawings (refer **Appendix 3F**) demonstrate that the Lots are capable of accommodating on-site wastewater disposal and stormwater soakage devices which comply with relevant setbacks and standards under the MPDP.

Overall, the proposed development can be adequately serviced without resulting in adverse effects on the capacity of the existing reticulation and infrastructure.

5.9 Stormwater Effects

The proposal involves the development of minor impervious surface within the sites, primarily associated with roading and transformer structures. The solar panel strings are impervious, however will be raised above the existing ground with pasture laid below.

Given the low number of vehicle movements anticipated within the site, no treatment is proposed for stormwater runoff from the road. Further, the solar panel strings will be regularly maintained and cleaned, with no potential for contaminants anticipated to arise from these structures. As a matter of conservatism, a Hazardous Substances Management Plan has been prepared in support of this application, and is included as **Appendix 10**. The stormwater runoff from the solar panels is considered to be clean water runoff, and will soak into the ground as per the existing situation.

Given the low impervious coverage across the site, the Infrastructure Report (refer **Appendix 3F**) anticipates that the post-development scenario will result in a negligible change to the existing situation for stormwater. Therefore, it is considered that the overall effects of stormwater servicing for the site are less than minor.

5.10 Productive Capacity Effects

A Land Use Capability Classification Assessment of the wider Ashbourne site has been prepared by Landsystems and is included as **Appendix 1L**. The findings of their assessment is summarised:

- The site (included as part of the assessment of 'Area 1 and 2') is primarily underlain by LUC2 soils and the Land Use Capability Classification Assessment confirms that the land use capacity is overstated at a regional scale;
- The drainage and slope characteristics of the land to be utilised for the proposed northern and southern solar farms is likely suitable for dual use solar farming, allowing the productive potential of the soil to continue to be utilised for pasture production and sheep grazing, whilst supporting primary electricity generation.

Overall, and having particular regard to the site's proximity to the urban area, the capacity constraints identified by Landsystems, and the design and location of the wider Ashbourne Development, it is considered that the effects of the Solar Farms on productive capacity values will be acceptable.

5.11 Mitigation and Monitoring

Clause 6(1)(d) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA requires that an AEE include a "description of the mitigation measures (including safeguards and contingency plans where relevant) to be undertaken to help prevent or reduce the actual or potential effect of the activity".

A description of the mitigation measures proposed is provided in the technical assessments appending to this AEE, summarised in the preceding sections, and detailed within the Overview Report in **Volume 1** of this application. They are further documented in the proposed consent conditions within **Appendix 3M**.

Clause 6(1)(g) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA also requires that an AEE include *“if the scale and significance of the activity’s effects are such that monitoring is required, a description of how the effects will be monitored and by whom, if the activity is approved”*.

The monitoring that is proposed as part of the construction of the development is also documented in the proposed consent conditions, as applicable.

5.12 Summary of Effects

The proposed solar farms represent a suitable use of the subject site and will result in environmental outcomes that can reasonably be anticipated and accommodated on the site. The proposal will result in effects on the environment that are less than minor, subject to the recommendations stated in the various specialist reports. Appropriate mitigation measures have been identified and noted through this report.

It is noted that the construction of solar farms of this scale is anticipated as a permitted activity in the Matamata-Piako District Plan, and the proposed agrivoltaic nature of the solar farms will enable the continued productive use of the pasture land underneath the solar arrays.

As described above, there are significant positive effects from the development of the site. The solar farms will provide a low-emission, renewable energy source for the local area on a site that is well-suited to this use. The works additionally have positive economic effects, increasing work in the region during construction and, to a lesser extent, an on-going basis.

Overall, the proposal is considered appropriate, and any actual and potential adverse effects on the environment of allowing the activity are considered to be less than minor.

6.0 Assessment of Relevant Statutory Considerations

This section of the application is provided in accordance with Clauses 5(1)(h), 5(2), and 5(3) of Schedule 5 of the FTAA. The FTAA requires that applications must include an assessment of the activity against the relevant provisions and requirements of those documents listed in Clause 5(2) being:

- (a) *a national environmental standard;*
- (b) *other regulations made under the Resource Management Act 1991;*
- (c) *a national policy statement;*
- (d) *a New Zealand coastal policy statement;*
- (e) *a regional policy statement or proposed regional policy statement;*
- (f) *a plan or proposed plan; and*
- (g) *a planning document recognised by a relevant iwi authority and lodged with a local authority*

The relevant statutory documents as identified in **Table 4** below. The relevant documents have been assessed in detail at **Appendix 3L** and are summarised in the sections below.

Table 4: Summary of Relevant Statutory Documents

Document	Relevance to Project
National Environmental Standards	
National Environmental Standards for Air Quality 2004	This is not applicable as the proposal does not affect air quality.
National Environmental Standards for Sources of Drinking Water 2007	This is not applicable as the proposal does not effect sources of drinking water.
National Environmental Standards for Electricity Transmission Activities 2009	This is not applicable as the proposal does not include any relevant activities.
National Environmental Standards for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health 2011	This is applicable – refer to section 6.1.1
National Environmental Standards for Telecommunications Facilities 2016	This is not applicable as the proposal does not seek consent for telecommunications facilities.
National Environmental Standards for Plantation Forestry 2017	This is not applicable as the proposal does not relate to plantation forestry.
National Environmental Standards for Freshwater 2020	This is not applicable as no freshwater bodies are located in the site.
National Environmental Standard for Marine Aquaculture 2020	This is not applicable as the proposal does not relate to marine aquaculture.
National Environmental Standard for Storing Tyres Outdoors 2001	This is not applicable as the proposal does not provide for the storage of tyres.
National Policy Statements	
National Policy Statement on Electricity Transmission 2008	This is not applicable as no specific electricity transmission activities are proposed as part of this consent.
New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement	This is not applicable as the site is not located within the coastal environment.
National Policy Statement for Renewable Electricity Generation 2011	This is applicable – refer to section 6.2.1
National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020	This is applicable – refer to section 6.2.2.
National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020	This is applicable – refer to section 6.2.3.
National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land 2022	This is applicable – refer to section 6.2.4
National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023	This is applicable – refer to section 6.2.5
National Policy Statement for Greenhouse Gases from Industrial Process Heat 2023	This is not applicable as the proposal does not result in greenhouse gases from industrial heat processes.
Regional Policy Statement	
Waikato Regional Policy Statement	This is applicable – refer to section 6.3
Plans	
Waikato Regional Plan	This is applicable – refer to section 6.5

Matamata Piako District Plan	This is applicable – refer to section 6.6
Planning document recognised by a relevant iwi authority and lodged with a local authority	
Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato (Waikato River Vision and Strategy)	This is applicable – refer to section 6.4.

6.1 National Environmental Standards

6.1.1 National Environmental Standards for Assessing and Managing Contaminants in Soil to Protect Human Health 2011

The NESCS came into effect on 1 January 2012. All territorial authorities are required to give effect to and enforce the requirements of the NES in accordance with their functions under the RMA relating to contaminated land.

The purpose of the NESCS is to provide a nationally consistent set of planning controls and soil contaminant values. It seeks to ensure that land affected by contaminants in soil is appropriately identified and assessed before it is developed and, if necessary, the land is remediated or contaminants contained to ensure the land is safe for human use.

The relevant consent matters identified for the proposal under NESCS regulations have been identified in section 4.1 of this report and the potential effects on human health are assessed in section 5.7 of this report. In summary, the proposed change of use within the site can be appropriately managed to avoid adverse effects on human health and the environment.

The CSMP and ASSMP included as **Appendix 1S** and **Appendix 1T** outline the health and safety practices to be implemented on site during the handling of contaminated soils. The PSI/DSI included as **Appendix 1R** also confirm that contaminant concentrations are the respective NESCS soil contamination standards. On this basis, it is considered that the overarching purpose and objective of the NES to protect human health is achieved by this application.

6.1.2 Other National Environmental Standards

No other NES are considered to be relevant to the proposal.

6.2 National Policy Statements

6.2.1 National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Generation 2011

The National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Generation 2011 ('NPS:REG') recognises the importance of renewable energy and provides directions to local authorities on the development of renewable energy.

The proposal is considered to be consistent with the NPS:REG as summarised below:

- The proposal includes the construction and operation of two solar farms across two sites, and will provide for a new source of renewable electricity generation. The proposal will contribute to increasing the proportion of New Zealand's electricity that is generated from renewable energy sources, and will directly give effect to the NPS:REG; and
- The sites are considered suitable for the proposed activity given they are land extensive and relatively flat in topography. The proposal provides for the grazing of livestock below the solar arrays, mitigating adverse effects on soils and rural character. Substantial buffer planting is

additionally proposed, that at maturity, will be viewed as a shelterbelt which is in keeping with the surrounding rural context.

On this basis, it is considered that the overarching purpose and objective of the NES is achieved by this application.

6.2.2 National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management 2020

The National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management ('NPS:FM') provides local authorities with updated direction on how they should manage freshwater under the RMA.

The NPS:FM seeks to manage natural and physical resources to prioritise firstly, the health and well-being of water bodies and freshwater ecosystems, secondly, the health and needs of people, and thirdly the ability to provide for the social, economic, and cultural well-being of people and communities.

The NPS:FM is based around the concept of 'Te Mana o te Wai', which refers to the fundamental importance of water and recognises that protecting the health of freshwater protects the health and wellbeing of the wider environment.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be consistent with the following NPS-FM objectives and policies for the following reasons:

- It prioritises the health and well-being of freshwater ecosystems by restoring and enhancing the Waitoa River corridor, supporting water quality, habitat connectivity, and ecosystem resilience. The proposal avoids adverse effects on nearby waterways through thoughtful layout and planting, and the integration of renewable energy in a low-impact manner assists in future-proofing community resilience in alignment with broader climate and sustainability goals;
- The solar farms prioritise freshwater through careful and considered engineering and design, in alignment with the principles of Te Mana o te Wai. Tangata whenua have been involved and consulted to this point in the project, with ongoing engagement to occur. This application is supported by a Cultural Impact Assessment, included as **Appendix 1H**;
- The project ensures that the effects of the development on the whole-of-catchment basis are responded to, and freshwater management is incorporated into a broader climate-resilient and low-emissions development strategy; and
- The solar farms are specifically designed to avoid any impact on natural wetlands, with vegetated buffers used to protect nearby hydrological and ecological values. Significant values of connected freshwater systems are upheld and indigenous freshwater habitats are maintained and enhanced.

6.2.3 National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020

The National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 ('NPS:UD') ensures New Zealand's towns and cities are well-functioning urban environments that meet the changing needs of our diverse communities.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be consistent with the NPS-UD for the following reasons:

- The Ashbourne Development will support the delivery of a well-functioning, master planned urban environment that supports the social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being of the Matamata community. Overall, the proposal includes a diverse mix of housing, a

retirement precinct, a neighbourhood commercial centre, and an integrated open space network, providing for a range of community needs, lifestyles, and ages;

- Specifically, to the solar farms, the inclusion of a renewable energy source supports climate resilient outcomes within the urban environment, reducing the community's carbon footprint. While the solar farm component does not directly contribute to housing supply, it supports long-term affordability and resilience, supporting regional goals for renewable energy and climate resilience;
- The inclusion of the solar farms is considered to align with mana whenua aspirations around environmental sustainability and intergenerational wellbeing, supporting the transition to a low-emissions future in a way that is consistent with iwi values and long-term planning goals; and
- The solar farms represent a key-contributor to emissions reduction for the development, supporting the transition to renewable energy at a local scale. This enhances energy resilience and aligns with national and regional decarbonisation goals, helping to reduce the carbon footprint of both the development and the surrounding community.
- The proposal has been developed in partnership with Tangata Whenua, and is considered to align with mana whenua aspirations around environmental sustainability and intergenerational wellbeing, in a way that is consistent with iwi values and long-term planning goals; and
- The proposal takes into consideration climate change and urban resilience, particularly through the management of flood hazards via the stormwater management strategy. The wider Ashbourne development incorporates measures to support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through low-carbon transport options, and two solar farms to further support national decarbonisation objectives.

6.2.4 National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land 2022

The National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land 2022 ('NPS-HPL') seeks to protect New Zealand's most productive land, recognising it as a finite and nationally significant resource. The overarching objective seeks to ensure that highly productive land is protected for use in land-based primary production, both now and for future generations. The NPS-HPL includes specific policy direction on development and subdivision of highly productive land under Policies 7, 8, and 9 which seek to avoid non land-based primary production activities and subdivision, except where this is provided for under clauses 3.8 and 3.10. The provisions also seek to manage reverse sensitivity effects with respect to other land-based primary production activities on highly productive land.

The site falls within the definition of highly productive land under the NPS-HPL and the following comments are made with regard to the subdivision activity that is proposed under this application:

- A detailed Land Use Capability Classification Assessment has been completed for the site (refer **Appendix 1L**), which demonstrates that the productive capacity of the land is overstated in regional maps. In particular, the site includes lower productivity areas and some non-productive land. The overall productivity is additionally constrained by parcel configuration, existing rural-lifestyle fragmentation, and urban proximity – all limiting the long-term viability for large-scale primary production;

- The overall project provides a comprehensive, masterplanned urban form that avoids ad hoc subdivision, minimises reverse sensitivity issues, and consolidates growth in a strategic location.
- With respect to clause 3.10 and land that is subject to the NPS-HPL, the Land Use Capability Classification Assessment included as **Appendix 1L** identifies that finds that while the Ashbourne site is predominantly underlain by LUC2 soils, detailed mapping confirms that significant areas of the overall site are subject to drainage and topography limitations which restrict productive potential. These limitations affect the viability of the land for intensive land-based primary production activities and limit the extent to which this land would meet the mapping criteria for an area of highly productive land that is within a large and geographically cohesive area as required under clause 3.4;
- While the site is zoned Rural under the Matamata Piako District Plan, it is located adjacent to existing urban area and ESSP area which has been identified for urban development. The inclusion of the ESSP area in strategic growth planning (Future Proof Strategy, Waikato HBA) reflects the deliberate integration of urban expansion with productive land considerations. It is considered that the site is appropriately located to facilitate development that is both a logical extension of the ESSP area and necessary to meet projected housing needs of an ageing population. Alternative land of lesser productive value would not facilitate the same locational benefits of the site and the extent to which it can integrate with the ESSP area; and
- Although the proposal results in the loss of some rural land, it reflects a considered trade-off where primary production is no longer the most appropriate or sustainable use due to urban pressures and the current zoning. The proposal responds to the intent of Policy 4 by focusing development in a constrained area, thereby reducing pressure on more viable, contiguous productive land elsewhere in the district
- The solar farms support grazing of livestock beneath the solar arrays, which is considered to be in keeping with the intent of the NPS:HPL with respect to maintaining the productive capacity of land. The solar farm activities are temporary in nature, with a lifespan of approximately 35 years. The ongoing productive use of the land beneath the panels will ensure the ability for this land to be maintained in productive use long-term, including beyond the lifespan of the solar farms if sought.

For the reasons outlined above, and with particular regard to the detailed Land Use Capability Classification Assessment that has been undertaken, which identifies constraints to the viable productive capacity of the site, it is considered that the proposal generally in keeping with the overall intent of the NPS-HPL to protect productive land.

6.2.5 National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity 2023

The National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity 2023 ('NPS-IB') provides direction to protect, maintain and restore indigenous biodiversity requiring at least no further reduction nationally.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be consistent with the NPS-IB for the following reasons:

- The EclA included at **Appendix 1I** has identified all vegetation and ecological values within the site and concludes that the retirement village development will have low to positive effects on

ecological value in terms of vegetation, habitat, and freshwater features. The effects of the proposal on ecological values have been assessed in detail at section 5.4 above;

- No Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) were identified on-site;
- The proposed landscaping strategy for the site will achieve a net gain in ecological values through enhancement measures proposed, contributing to restoring indigenous biodiversity; and
- A proactive and precautionary approach has been taken to identify and support areas that may provide habitat or movement corridors for highly mobile indigenous fauna outside of SNAs. The proposed conditions include a suite of management plans to ensure that potential effects on lizards, bats, and fish can be avoided or appropriately mitigated during the construction phase.

6.3 Waikato Regional Policy Statement

The Waikato Regional Policy Statement ('RPS') sets out the overarching framework for sustainably managing the region's natural and physical resources, guiding regional and district plans under the Resource Management Act. The RPS seeks to protect and enhance the Waikato region's environmental, social, cultural, and economic wellbeing by addressing key issues such as water quality, land use, natural hazards, biodiversity, and the relationship of iwi with natural resources.

The assessment and comments with respect to key topics and domains under the Waikato RPS that are of relevance to the Ashbourne Solar Farms proposal are set out below.

Integrated Management

- The proposed solar farms recognise the inter-relationships between environmental, social, economic and cultural well-being, provided renewable energy generation in a low-impact manner, well-considered stormwater and earthworks strategy, and setbacks and planting to protect water quality where near to waterways;
- Mana whenua have been engaged with throughout the project, and the relationship of tangata whenua with the environment has been recognised and provided for, as set out within the Cultural Impact Assessment (refer **Appendix 1H**);
- The solar farms will directly contribute to the sustainable use of natural and physical resources to support renewable energy production; and
- A comprehensive landscaping strategy is proposed to ensure that the proposed solar farms maintain the rural character of the surrounding environment, which at maturity will read as a shelterbelt in keeping with the existing rural environment;

Land and Freshwater

- The proposal includes the discharge of stormwater to ground, with water quality maintained as stormwater runoff from the proposed solar panels is considered to be clean water, while the runoff from proposed access roads will be treated by road swales, contributing to the overall quality of freshwater within the region. Further, flow volumes are anticipated to be similar to those pre-development;
- The proposal will retain existing high class soils within the site, and will include livestock grazing beneath the solar arrays. Further, solar farms are anticipated as a permitted activity under the

Matamata Piako District Plan, and it is therefore considered that the activity is appropriate within the rural zone.

- While no wetlands or outstanding freshwater bodies are located directly within the site, protective and enhancement measures reduce downstream impacts and support broader regional outcomes;
- The proposed earthworks will be undertaken in accordance with the Waikato Regional Council 'Sedimentation and Erosion Control Guideline', and will include preventative erosion control measures as relevant to the proposed work; and

Ecosystems and Indigenous Biodiversity

- The project is considered to support restoring and enhancing the ecological integrity of a historically degraded, intensively farmed landscape. The site currently exhibits low ecological value due to extensive past modification, but the wider development actively reverses this through a comprehensive ecological strategy, as further detailed at **Appendix 1I** for the Ashbourne Development;
- The development takes a precautionary approach, protecting and enhancing these features through native planting and the implementation of management plans;
- It is considered that the development does not reduce the significance of any vegetation or habitat and contributes positively to site-wide ecological outcomes.

Energy, Infrastructure & Transport

- The proposed solar farms provide for a renewable source of electricity generation and contribute to a reduction on fossil fuel reliance over time.

Hazards & Risks

- The proposal results in a negligible impact on flood risk on the northern solar farm, with the minor increases associated with the southern solar farm directed to access roads which will flow to the proposed greenway (refer **Volume 5**). It is considered that flood hazards can therefore be appropriately managed and reduced;
- As discussed above, contaminated land will be appropriately managed to avoid the potential effects of the contamination during the proposed earthworks.

Urban Form & Development

- The solar farms are designed with a low built form, reducing potential dominance effects on the surrounding natural landscape and surrounding environment. Further, substantial landscape buffers are proposed around all boundaries of both solar farms, mitigating any adverse amenity effects associated with the solar farms at maturity;
- The proposal can be adequately serviced by infrastructure, including water supply necessary for firefighting purposes, and will provide for a renewable source of electricity;
- The proposal is supported by a suite of technical assessments providing a robust understanding of long-term effects and cumulative impacts of the development. It is anticipated that the proposed site layouts and landscape buffers will adequately manage the transition at site

boundaries between surrounding residential uses and the rural landscape, and adequately mitigate potential visual effects.

6.4 Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato

Te Ture Whaimana – the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River sets the primary direction for the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of the Waikato and Waipā rivers and their catchments. It seeks to restore and protect the health and wellbeing of the rivers for present and future generations, recognising the mana and relationship of Waikato-Tainui and other iwi with these waterways.

As identified in the Overview Report at **Volume 1**, the Ashbourne development has been designed with clear alignment to the Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato), particularly in relation to enhancing water quality, recognising mana whenua relationships, restoring ecological health, and supporting integrated catchment management.

The Ashbourne solar farm sites are not located adjacent to the Waikato River or the Waitoa River, which is located at the western boundary of the wider Ashbourne site. Notwithstanding, the following comments are made with respect to the Ashbourne solar farms and the objectives and principles of Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato as the wider site is located within the Waikato River Catchment:

- Early engagement has occurred with iwi to ensure a holistic and integrated approach which allowed for iwi input into the design of the project;
- It provides necessary renewable energy to support wider housing and related infrastructure to enable development that will improve economic, employment, and in particular environmental outcomes – specifically freshwater quality;
- The project has the potential to strengthen environmental resilience and risk management from natural hazards, including flooding;
- Appropriate management of risks and adverse effects through a series of Management Plans through the project construction phase;
- The project avoids any direct discharge into sensitive freshwater environments and is designed to mitigate indirect cumulative impacts through staged development and infrastructure that aligns with river protection goals; and
- Extensive landscape planting and ecological restoration is proposed along the Waitoa River, a tributary of the Waikato River. The planting will improve the ecological integrity of the water body and reconnect people with the awa.

Overall, it is considered the proposal, and in particular the stormwater management strategy, is considered consistent with and supports the objectives and principles of Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato.

6.5 Waikato Regional Plan

The Waikato Regional Plan (WRP) implements the objectives and policies of the Waikato Regional Policy Statement by setting out detailed rules, methods, and standards for managing the region's land, water, air, and coastal resources. The WRP seeks to sustainably manage the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources, with a focus on maintaining and

enhancing water quality, managing discharges, protecting biodiversity, controlling soil erosion, and ensuring the sustainable allocation of water.

The assessment and comments with respect to key modules under the Waikato RPS that are of relevance to the Ashbourne Solar Farms proposal are set out below.

Matters of Significance to Māori

- Extensive consultation with Tangata Whenua has been undertaken as part of the Ashbourne Development, as detailed in the Consultation Report (refer **Appendix 1D**). A Cultural Impact Assessment and Letters of Support have been provided by Ngāti Hauā, Raukawa, and Ngāti Hinerangi, attached to this application as **Appendix 1H**.

Water

- As discussed above, the proposal includes the discharge of stormwater to ground, with water quality maintained as stormwater runoff from the proposed solar panels is considered to be clean water, while the runoff from proposed access roads will be treated by road swales, contributing to the overall quality of freshwater within the region. Further, flow volumes are anticipated to be similar to those pre-development;

Land and Soil

- The proposed earthworks will be undertaken in accordance with the Waikato Regional Council 'Sedimentation and Erosion Control Guideline', and will include preventative erosion control measures as relevant to the proposed works; and
- As discussed above, contaminated land will be appropriately managed to avoid the potential effects of the contamination during the proposed earthworks.

6.6 Matamata-Piako Operative District Plan

The MPODP provides the statutory framework for managing land use and development within the Matamata-Piako District. The District Plan seeks to promote the sustainable management of the district's natural and physical resources by setting objectives, policies, and rules for activities such as subdivision, land use, natural hazards, and rural and urban growth. Its provisions aim to ensure that development occurs in a way that maintains and enhances the district's environmental quality, character, and amenity values, while enabling the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of its communities.

The objectives and policies of the MPODP are contained in Part A. Assessment and comments with respect to key objectives and policies under the MPODP that are of relevance to the Ashbourne Solar Farms proposal are set out below.

Sustainable Management Strategy

- The proposed solar farms are a permitted activity under Section 8.3.1 and is therefore an activity that is anticipated to occur.
- The proposed solar farms will have low to positive effects on ecological values following the implementation of proposed mitigation measures. The proposal seeks to sustainably manage indigenous biodiversity through careful site selection, avoiding significant ecological areas, and implementing robust ecological management plans. These include measures to protect long-

tailed bats and copper skinks, restore wetland and riparian habitats, and enhance landscape values through native planting. Collectively, these actions support the ecological, landscape, and natural feature values of the site while enabling renewable energy generation.

- While solar farms are not a rural production activity, the scale at which they are proposed under this application is provided for in the Rural Zone. In this case, the extensive amount of land required to enable the activity is also considered to be dependent on a rural location.
- The solar farm is designed with a dual-use agrivoltaic model, allowing continued agricultural activity (specifically grazing) beneath the solar panels. This approach ensures that the productive capacity of the land is retained and that existing rural land uses are not displaced or constrained. Furthermore, it is considered that the solar farm sites are appropriately located and integrated into the wider development, with landscaping and security measures to mitigate reverse sensitivity effects. The solar farms have been designed to ensure it will not interfere with neighbouring rural operations, and its design actively avoids fragmentation or disruption of surrounding land-based primary production.
- As the proposal is for renewable energy generation that will provide energy for up to 7,000 homes, it will directly give effect to this objective.
- As detailed in the AEE, the proposal will not result in significant adverse effects or create any residual environmental effects that are required to be offset or compensated.

Environment – Land and Development and Environment – Amenity

- While the proposed solar farms are not a rural production activity, the proposal is a permitted activity. In addition, the sites will also provide for the grazing of livestock following the completion of construction, which will providing for the ongoing productive use of the land.
- The proposed discharge of stormwater will not adversely affect the intrinsic values of the land. No solid or liquid wastes are proposed to be disposed of within the sites.
- All earthworks will be undertaken in accordance with Waikato Regional Council's Erosion and sediment control guidelines, which will ensure potential effects of soil erosion and sedimentation on water quality can be appropriately managed.
- The proposed landscaping strategy, which includes the implementation of a planting buffer around the solar farms will be in keeping with the existing character of the surrounding rural area. On this basis, it is considered that the standard of amenity can be maintained.
- The proposed solar panel structures will comply with the bulk and location development controls. While the panels meet the definition of a building and exceed the maximum permitted coverage of 10%, it is considered that the low height profile of the panels, in combination with the provision for grazing activities in between solar panels will mitigate potential visual effects from dominance and shading.
- As identified above, the proposed solar farms will maintain existing character and amenity values associated with the surrounding rural environment through the implementation of the comprehensive landscaping strategy. In particular, upon maturity, all buffer planting will be viewed as a shelterbelt which will be in keeping with the surrounding rural context.
- The adoption of best practice methodologies for construction, including the draft construction noise and vibration management plans, for both the northern and southern solar farms. The

Plan, alongside other appropriate conditions of consent (to manage dust etc) and the temporary nature of construction works will ensure that adverse effects associated with noise, odour, dust, and vibration can be appropriately managed.

6.7 Statutory Considerations Summary

Overall, it is considered that the proposal is generally consistent with the policy direction of the relevant statutory documents, including with to policy direction contained in the NESCS, National Policy Statements for Freshwater, Renewable Energy Generation, Urban Development, and Indigenous Biodiversity, Waikato RPS, WRP, and MPODP with respect to the provision of infrastructure, including for three waters, stormwater management, landscaping, and design outcomes with respect to character and amenity.

The proposal includes the construction and operation of a solar farm across two sites, and will provide for a new source of renewable electricity generation. The proposal will contribute to increasing the proportion of New Zealand's electricity that is generated from renewable energy sources, and will directly give effect to the Objective of the NPS-REG. Although the proposed solar farm is not a land-based primary production activity, the proposal will provide for the grazing of livestock below the solar panels. This is considered to be in keeping with the intent of the NPS-HPL with respect to maintaining the productive capacity of land.

Overall, the application is considered to be consistent with, and not contrary to, the applicable provisions of the relevant National Environmental Standards, National Policy Statements, Waikato Regional Policy Statement, Waikato Regional Plan, and Matamata Piako District Plan.

7.0 Statutory Considerations Summary

Overall, the application is considered to be generally consistent with, and not contrary to, the applicable provisions of the relevant National Environmental Standards, National Policy Statements, Waikato RPS, and MPODP.

7.1 Declining an Approval under Section 85

The Panel must decline an approval if one or more of the situations in s 85(1). The situations relevant to all types of approvals that can be sought under the FTAA are:

- The approval is for an ineligible activity;
- The Panel considers that granting the approval would breach obligations relating to Treaty settlements and recognised customary rights; and
- In the case of an approval for a resource consent, the approval must be declined if it is in an area covered by clause 17(5) Schedule 5 in an area.

The Panel may also decline an approval if the Panel forms the view that:

- The activity or activities for which the approval is sought would have one or more adverse impacts; and
- Those adverse impacts are sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits that the Panel has considered, even after taking into account any

conditions that the Panel may set in relation to those adverse impacts, and any conditions or modifications that the applicant may agree to or propose to avoid, remedy, mitigate, offset, or compensate for those adverse impacts.

In subsections (3) and (4), adverse impact means any matter considered by the Panel in complying with Section 81(2) that weighs against granting the approval.

8.0 Assessment Against the Fast-track Approvals Act Decision Making Framework

8.1 Information Considered

In considering whether to grant the approvals sought in this application, the panel must meet the requirements of Section 81, which includes applying the specific decision-making clauses in Schedule 5.

This AEE and the Ashbourne Development as a whole, has been prepared considering the information referred to in s81(2)(a) of the FTAA to the extent it is currently available. Specifically:

- All of the technical reports supporting the application;
- The CIA received from Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Hinerangi and Raukawa and the careful analysis of Treaty settlements and iwi planning documents; and
- Feedback received from engagement.

8.2 Situations Where the Panel Must Decline an Approval

The Panel must decline an approval if 1 or more of the situations in s 85(1). The situations relevant to all types of approvals that can be sought under the FTAA are:

- The approval is for an ineligible activity;
- The Panel considers that granting the approval would breach obligations relating to Treaty settlements and recognised customary rights; and
- In the case of an approval for a resource consent, the approval must be declined if it is in an area covered by clause 17(5) Schedule 5 in an area.

The Panel may also decline an approval if the Panel forms the view that:

- The activity or activities for which the approval is sought would have one or more adverse impacts; and
- Those adverse impacts are sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits that the Panel has considered, even after taking into account any conditions that the Panel may set in relation to those adverse impacts, and any conditions or modifications that the applicant may agree to or propose to avoid, remedy, mitigate, offset, or compensate for those adverse impacts.

In subsections (3) and (4), adverse impact means any matter considered by the Panel in complying with Section 81(2) that weighs against granting the approval.

8.3 The Purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Act

The purpose of the FTAA is to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits by streamlining consenting and approval processes. Section 3 of the Act states:

“The purpose of this Act is to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits.”

8.4 Resource Consent Approvals Sought: Parts 2, 3, 6 and 8 to 10 of the Resource Management Act 1991 and Other Legislation Directing Decision-making

8.4.1 Part 2 of the Resource Management Act 1991

Ashbourne Development – Overall

This section of the application is provided in accordance with clauses 5(1)(g) and 17 of Schedule 5 of the Act. As the proposed subdivision will facilitate the entire Ashbourne Development, the below assessments have considered the development as a whole.

Part 2 contains the purpose and principles of the RMA. Section 5 sets out the purpose of the RMA and requires a broad judgement as to whether a proposal would promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. This exercise of this judgement is informed by the principles in sections 6 to 8 and considered in light of the particular circumstances of each application.

Section 5 of Part 2 identifies the purpose of the RMA as being the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. This means managing the use, development and protection of natural and physical resources in a way that enables people and communities to provide for their social, cultural and economic well-being and health and safety while sustaining those resources for future generations, protecting the life supporting capacity of ecosystems, and avoiding, remedying or mitigating adverse effects on the environment. It is considered that the proposed Ashbourne development is complementary to these objectives as it will provide for the social and economic well-being of people and communities by increasing employment and income within the local economy and provide for 530 new homes and 250 retirement villages to assist with the housing shortage and increasing ageing population within the Matamata District. Additionally, the development supports the delivery of a diverse and integrated urban environment through the provision of healthcare facilities and two solar farms capable of powering over 7,000 homes annually. The development is staged to respond to short-, medium-, and long-term housing demand, and incorporates infrastructure and design features that sustain the life-supporting capacity of ecosystems, mitigate adverse effects, and enhance environmental outcomes. The inclusion of a greenway and esplanade reserves along the Waitoa River demonstrates a commitment to ecological restoration and stormwater management, contributing to the long-term health of the natural environment. The preceding assessments, along with assessments in Volumes 3 – 5 demonstrate that the development will be appropriately managed and carried out in a manner which will not give rise to significant adverse environmental effects and which will, on balance, have significant positive effects for the region whilst managing potential adverse effects appropriately.

The Ashbourne development appropriately recognises and provides for Section 6 matters and provides for:

- The natural character of the Waitoa River and surrounding landscape is preserved and enhanced through riparian planting, ecological restoration, and the creation of public access via esplanade reserves;
- The greenway and Waitoa River corridor are designed to restore ecological function and enhance natural character through riparian planting and stormwater treatment;
- The development avoids areas of outstanding natural features and landscapes, and includes protocols for managing accidental discovery of archaeological sites;
- The relationship of Māori with their ancestral lands and waters is acknowledged through extensive and ongoing engagement with Mana Whenua, including Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Hinerangi, and Raukawa. Cultural values are integrated into the design of the greenway and public spaces, and opportunities for storytelling, wayfinding, and ecological restoration are embedded in the application through the masterplan. Feedback from Mana Whenua has been carefully considered and used to inform the Masterplan and application.

Section 7 of the RMA identifies a number of “other matters” to be given particular regard by Council and includes (but is not limited to) Kaitiakitanga, the efficient use of natural and physical resources, the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values, and maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment. The Ashbourne development is also consistent with the relevant parts of section 7 because:

- It enables the efficient use and development of land and will not compromise the visual amenity of the environment and protect natural water resources as far as practicable. The proposal promotes a compact urban form, dual-use solar farming and staged infrastructure delivery;
- The project delivers a transit-oriented residential and neighbourhood centre that maintains and enhances the quality of the environment. The organisation of activities, open spaces and roading pattern are considered to be positive design responses and the buildings have been designed to present high quality urban outcomes;
- Particular regard has been given to kaitiakitanga through the iwi engagement process and the subsequent actions in response to recommendations from iwi including providing for cultural monitoring, the design of the greenway, approach to stormwater management and incorporating recommendations relating to planting;
- Amenity values are enhanced through high-quality urban design, including a legible street network, diverse housing typologies, and integrated public spaces. The urban design guidelines proposed will ensure high-quality amenity outcomes throughout the development;
- Restoration is prioritised of degraded farmland alongside the integration of green infrastructure elements into the design which will assist with enhancing biodiversity; and
- Solar farms will generate energy for over 7,000 homes annually, contributing to national renewable energy targets; and

- The development incorporates flood modelling and carefully designed stormwater management that has been designed with consideration to the effects of climate change and reducing the risk of flooding.

With regard to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Section 8 of the RMA), the proposal will not generate any significant adverse effects on the natural environment or on any sites of cultural importance. Engagement with Mana Whenua has been substantive and ongoing, informing the cultural, ecological, and spatial design of the development.

Solar Farms Proposal

The solar farm components of the Ashbourne development are generally consistent with the purpose and principles of Part 2 of the Resource Management Act 1991, demonstrating a balanced approach to sustainable management, environmental protection, cultural recognition, and efficient resource use. The solar farms are considered consistent with Part 2 of the RMA for the following reasons:

- Section 5 of the RMA:
 - Enables the sustainable use of natural and physical resources by generating renewable electricity for over 7,000 homes annually;
 - Supports the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of the community through clean energy generation and energy resilience;
 - Incorporates dual-use land management (agrivoltaics), allowing continued pastoral use beneath solar panels, preserving productive capacity; and
 - Avoids, remedies, or mitigates adverse effects through landscape integration, stormwater management, and ecological planting.
- Section 6 of the RMA:
 - Avoids adverse effects on the natural character of the Waitoa River and its margins by locating solar infrastructure outside sensitive riparian areas;
 - Maintains public access and enhances ecological values through adjacent greenway and esplanade reserve planting; and
 - Recognises and provides for the relationship of Māori with ancestral lands and waters through cultural engagement and design input.
- Section 7 of the RMA:
 - Demonstrates efficient use and development of land and energy resources by co-locating solar generation with low-intensity rural activity;
 - Maintains and enhances amenity values through landscape buffers and visual screening;
 - Responds to climate change by reducing reliance on fossil fuels and supporting regional emissions reduction; and
 - Upholds kaitiakitanga through ongoing collaboration with Mana Whenua and integration of indigenous planting and cultural values.
- Section 8 of the RMA:

- Reflects Treaty principles through early and ongoing engagement with Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Hinerangi, and Raukawa;
- Incorporates cultural values into the design of the wider development, including the greenway and landscape strategy; and
- Provides opportunities for cultural expression and stewardship in the management of land and water resources.

Overall, as the effects of the solar farm proposal and broader Ashbourne development are considered to be consistent with all of the above sections of the RMA, and the proposal generally accords with the relevant WRP and MPDP objectives, policies, and assessment criteria, it is considered that the proposal will not offend against the general resource management principles set out in Part 2 of the RMA.

8.4.2 Part 3 of the Resource Management Act 1991

Part 3 of the RMA relates to the duties and restrictions under the RMA. It is considered that the proposal meets Part 3 of the RMA because:

- All approvals sought are all approvals required under Section 9, 11, 13, 14 and 15 of the RMA;
- The proposal involves subdivision and a change in land use that does not comply with the permitted activity standards of the MPDP. As such, resource consent is required and has been appropriately sought;
- The site has been identified as containing contaminated soils due to historical agricultural activities. A Preliminary and Detailed Site Investigation (PSI/DSI) confirmed the presence of contaminants. Although concentrations were below the thresholds set by the NESCS, the site is classified as a "piece of land" under Regulation 5(7). Accordingly, a Controlled Activity consent has been sought under Regulation 9(3) of the NESCS. The proposal includes a CSMP and an ASSMP, which outline procedures for remediation, health and safety, and environmental protection during any future soil disturbance. This is consistent with Section 15 of the RMA;
- While no direct works are proposed within the Waitoa River bed, the creation of esplanade reserves and the greenway adjacent to the river will enhance public access and ecological values. Any future works that may affect the river or its margins will be subject to further assessment and consent under the relevant provisions of the RMA and the Waikato Regional Plan. This is consistent with Section 13 of the RMA;
- Construction noise and vibration effects have been assessed (**Appendix 3H**) and the noise limits set in the MPDP can be met. Operational noise from the solar farms is minimal, limited to occasional maintenance activities (e.g. inverter servicing or vegetation management). Construction noise will be temporary and managed under a Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan (CNVMP), following NZS 6803:1999 standards. The CNVMP will include restrictions on work hours, use of quieter machinery, and neighbour consultation to avoid unreasonable noise effects. As a result, Section 16 and 17 of the RMA has been complied with;
- Visual and amenity effects, including potential glint and glare, have been assessed and mitigated through:
 - Strategic placement of solar panels away from sensitive boundaries.

- Use of anti-reflective coatings on panels to minimise glare.
- Landscape buffers and planting to screen views from neighbouring properties and roads.

Reverse sensitivity effects are avoided through separation from residential areas and integration with the wider masterplan. The solar farms contribute positively to climate resilience and emissions reduction, aligning with broader environmental objectives. As a result, Section 17 of the RMA has been complied with.

8.4.3 Part 6 of the Resource Management Act 1991

Part 6 of the RMA relates to resource consents. It sets out how decisions on applications for resource consents are considered if applied for under the RMA. The relevant sections in Part 6 are addressed below:

- The primary decision-making section applying to both is Section 104 of the RMA. A comprehensive assessment against Section 104 has been undertaken above. In short, it concludes that the resource consent approvals sought are consistent with all of the planning instruments to which regard must be had;
- Under Section 105 RMA when deciding an application for a discharge permit the decision maker must have regard to the nature of the discharge and the sensitivity of the receiving environment to adverse effects; the applicant's reasons for the proposed choice; and any possible alternative methods of discharge, including discharge into any other receiving environment;
 - The Ashbourne development includes discharges of stormwater and potentially sediment-laden water associated with construction and urban development. These discharges will be directed to newly constructed stormwater basins and the greenway, which are specifically designed to treat and filter runoff before it reaches the Waitoa River. The receiving environment has been assessed as having low ecological value due to historic farming, and the proposal includes significant ecological restoration to improve its resilience and sensitivity.
 - The use of stormwater basins and greenway corridors reflects a deliberate design choice to integrate infrastructure with ecological and cultural values. These features provide not only stormwater treatment but also public amenity, biodiversity enhancement, and cultural storytelling opportunities, aligning with the project's place-based identity.
 - Alternatives such as direct discharge to water bodies were considered less appropriate due to potential adverse effects. The chosen method—filtration through vegetated greenway and engineered basins—represents best practice in low-impact urban design and water-sensitive development.
- Under Section 106 of the Act, a consent authority may refuse to grant a subdivision consent if it considers that there is significant risk from natural hazards, or sufficient provision has not been made for legal and physical access to each allotment to be created by the subdivision. The site has been assessed for natural hazard risks, particularly flooding associated with the Waitoa River. The proposed subdivision avoids areas subject to significant flood risk, and future land use consents include detailed stormwater management infrastructure, including greenways and basins designed to mitigate flood impacts, refer to **Appendix 3F**. All proposed lots have been designed to ensure legal and physical access is provided. Where access is not

immediately formed (e.g. for superlots), amalgamation conditions and future infrastructure delivery under subsequent land use consents will ensure compliance at the time of s224(c) certification. As such, there are no reasons to refuse to grant subdivision consent under Section 106 of the RMA.

- Section 107 specifies specific circumstances when a discharge consent cannot be granted. The proposal is not anticipated to give rise to any of the matters listed above. As detailed in the Infrastructure Assessment at **Appendix 3F**, the stormwater management approach for the development has been comprehensively considered to ensure stormwater discharge from the site will not adversely affect receiving freshwater or coastal environments. With regard to the discharge of contaminants from the disturbance of contaminated land, appropriate measures will be in place to ensure the discharge is managed and will not result in any of the listed matters above.

8.4.4 Part 8 of the Resource Management Act 1991

Part 8 of the RMA relates to designations and heritage orders. No heritage orders or designations apply to the site or are proposed.

8.4.5 Part 9 of the Resource Management Act 1991

Part 9 of the RMA relates to water conservation orders, freshwater farm plans and use of nitrogenous fertiliser. These matters are not relevant to any of the approvals sought.

8.4.6 Part 10 of the Resource Management Act 1991

Part 10 of the RMA relates to subdivision and reclamations. All of the provisions addressed below are relevant to the resource consent subdivision approvals sought:

- Specific conditions have been proposed in relation to the subdivision consent approval that is sought. These conditions align with Section 220 of the RMA;
- Some of the conditions proposed provide for the issue of a consent notice in accordance with Section 221 of the RMA;
- Esplanade reserves will be provided in accordance with the requirements of Section 230 of the RMA;
- Roads and reserves to vest, and easements are shown on the engineering drawings and accord with standard RMA practice; and
- All boundaries and allotments are shown on the scheme plans.

8.4.7 Other Relevant Legislation

There is no other primary legislation relevant to the RMA approvals being sought in this application under the RMA.

8.4.8 Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, it is considered that the solar farm application is consistent with the parts of the RMA relevant to decision making under the FTAA, and the documents to which they refer.

8.5 Decision on Whether to Grant the Approvals Sought in the Application

8.5.1 Resource Consent Approvals

As set out in section 8.2 above none of the situations that require the panel to decline an application.

Assessment of the application against Sections 81 and 85 support a decision to grant the approvals sought in the application.

The Ashbourne development broadly provides several benefits of regional significance. In particular:

- **Housing Supply and Urban Growth** - Ashbourne will deliver over 500 new residential units and 218 retirement living units, directly addressing the long-term housing shortfall identified in Matamata. The development supports a well-functioning urban environment with diverse housing typologies, enabling multi-generational living and improving housing affordability and choice;
- **Integrated Infrastructure and Community Services** - The proposal includes a neighbourhood commercial node, healthcare facilities, and a connected transport network. These elements will enhance local service provision, reduce reliance on the Matamata town centre, and support population growth in a planned and coordinated manner.
- **Renewable Energy Generation** - Two solar farms, covering over 36 hectares, will generate enough electricity to power more than 7,000 homes annually. This contributes to national renewable energy targets and supports regional energy resilience, while preserving productive land through dual-use agrivoltaic farming.
- **Environmental Enhancement and Climate Resilience** - The greenway corridor integrates stormwater management, ecological restoration, and active transport infrastructure. It improves the health of the Waitoa River, mitigates flood risk, and enhances biodiversity in an area previously degraded by intensive farming.
- **Cultural Recognition and Partnership** - The development has been shaped through extensive and ongoing engagement with Ngāti Hauā, Ngāti Hinerangi, and Raukawa, incorporating cultural values into the design of public spaces, planting, and wayfinding. This supports Treaty principles and strengthens regional identity.
- **Economic Stimulus and Employment** - Ashbourne will generate significant construction activity and long-term employment through its residential, commercial, and retirement precincts. It will stimulate the local economy and contribute to infrastructure investment across the district.

In addition to the above, the solar farm component of the proposal will provide several benefits of regional significance. In particular:

- **Energy generation** for over 7,000 homes annually, reducing reliance on external electricity supply and supporting local energy independence;
- **Job creation** during construction and ongoing maintenance phases, contributing to local employment and skills development;
- **Efficient land use** through agrivoltaic farming, allowing continued pastoral activity beneath solar panels, preserving economic productivity of the land;

- Support for regional infrastructure investment, with the solar farms integrated into a broader masterplanned community;
- Zero-emission renewable energy generation, contributing to national and regional climate change mitigation goals;
- Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, supporting Waikato's transition to a low-carbon economy;
- Energy security through local generation, reducing vulnerability to national grid disruptions or energy price volatility; and
- Climate resilience by reducing carbon footprint and supporting sustainable land management practices.

The potential adverse impacts of the proposal have been avoided, remedied or mitigated through the design of the proposal and the mitigation measures secured through conditions of consent, and the proposal is generally in accordance with the relevant planning documents.

The relevant test for declining an approval in section 85 of the FTAA is whether the adverse impacts of the proposal are sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits, noting that a panel cannot form the view that an adverse impact meets this threshold solely on the basis that the adverse impact is inconsistent with or contrary to a planning or policy document. In our opinion, the development proposed delivers extensive positive effects demonstrating that support the granting of the approvals sought in this application.

9.0 Proposed Conditions

This section of the application is provided in accordance with clause 5(1)(k) and clause 18 of Schedule 5 of the Act. These clauses require that an application provides conditions for the resource consent. The proposed conditions of consent which seek to implement the mitigation measures that have been identified as being necessary are included as **Appendix 3M**

In recommending the proposed conditions of consent for this application in accordance with Clause 5(1)(k) of Schedule 5, the conditions are proposed to:

- Appropriately manage adverse effects, including providing mitigation to prevent or reduce adverse effects during and after construction in accordance with Clause 6(1)(d) of Schedule 5; and
- Give effect to those matters that the panel must consider under Section 81(2)(a).

The conditions are not considered to be more onerous than necessary and comply with Section 83 with reference to Section 81(2)(d), and it is considered that they meet the requirements of the FTAA.

10.0 Conclusion

This part of the overall proposal involves the development of two Solar Farms within the Ashbourne development.

Based on the above report and information included in the Overview Report (**Volume 1**), it is considered that:

- Appropriate consultation and engagement has been undertaken with relevant stakeholders, including Matamata Piako District Council, Waikato Regional Council, Mana Whenua, and the administering agencies;
- Consideration of planning documents recognised by relevant iwi authorities and lodged with Waikato Regional Council has been undertaken;
- Having considered the actual and potential effects of the proposal, the proposal will generate less than minor adverse effects that, subject to appropriate conditions of consent, will be further avoided, remedied, or mitigated;
- The proposal is generally consistent with, and not considered to be inappropriate in the context of the relevant objectives and policies of the NESCS, NPS-REG, NPS-UD, NPS-HPL, NPS-IB, Waikato RPS, WRP, and MPODP;
- The proposal achieves the purpose of the FTAA to facilitate delivery of infrastructure and development projects within significant regional or national benefits; and
- The proposal is considered to be consistent with Parts 2, 3, 6, and 8-10 of the RMA.

It is therefore concluded that the proposal satisfies all matters the EPA is required to assess, and that it can be granted consent under the FTAA subject to conditions.