Location:

Is this location ideal for a solar power station, given its position at the edge of Wellsford's urban zone? The terrain's rolling to hilly nature makes it impossible to mitigate the visual impact of up to 180,000 solar panels. The site is observable from SH1, SH16, Prictor Rd, Davies Rd, and Clegg Rd, making it highly visible when entering or leaving Wellsford Township.

Prime & Elite Soil:

Given the land's classification as Prime and Elite for soil quality, would it be more appropriate for food production and farming, preserving the rural landscape and the natural terrain? This approach could support future growth as Auckland expands into satellite towns.

Contour / GeoTech:

The land's rolling to hilly terrain, featuring steeper gullies, requires significant modification for solar panels and substations, including leveling for panel arrays and substation platforms. Geotechnical assessment is crucial to ensure the land can support the extensive earthworks needed.

Future Growth:

Building a solar power station on the proposed site would influence Wellsford's development for over 30 years. Considering Auckland's rapid expansion, locations like Wellsford are prime for accommodating growth in satellite towns.

Visual Effects:

The visibility of the proposed hillside site will significantly impact over 60 households, a contrast that cannot be easily mitigated like at flat sites such as Kaitia. After visiting Kaitaia, it's clear that such locations—flat, non-intrusive to neighbors, and where visual impacts can be softened by planting—should set the standard for solar power stations.

Impact on Residents:

The announcement of the solar power station project led to a notable instance where a potential buyer withdrew from purchasing a lifestyle block, proposing a 20% lower offer than the asking price, which was rejected. Eventually, the seller had to reduce the asking price by 20% to attract another buyer. Many of the affected properties face southwest, directly overlooking the site, making the solar power station their predominant view. This indicates that merely the prospect of the solar power station becoming the main view from these 60+ households has already resulted in a 20% decrease in property values, with fewer buyers interested in such a vista for rural properties.

Flight Path - Air Traffic:

The proposed solar power station is situated beneath the established flight path of the Rescue Helicopter service connecting Whangarei and Auckland hospitals. This raises concerns about potential glare from the panels at certain times of the day. According to Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) advice, pilots may need to decide to reroute around this area if there's a risk of instrument visibility loss, even momentarily. This could result in extended critical flight durations. Additionally, the feasibility of emergency landings within a solar power station poses significant safety concerns.

Pylon Inspections:

Pylons and main trunk power lines undergo inspection via low-flying helicopters. Concerns raised by pilots I consulted include the availability of safe landing spots in emergencies and the potential impact of glare during low-altitude flights. The proposed site has main power pylons running along its western boundary, further complicating these issues.

Cleaning:

We seek clarification on whether chemicals are employed in cleaning the solar panels and, if so, the destination of the runoff. Should these substances infiltrate the water table and reach local creeks, there is concern for the wellbeing of native species inhabiting these waters.

Health of Creeks:

Currently, the creeks in the area are clean and vibrant; they serve as spots for swimming and watercress gathering, and they support a rich diversity of native freshwater species.

Flora & Fauna:

Native species, residing in patches of native bush on this site, face potential impacts from the proposed large-scale solar power station. Kiwi, occasionally heard in the area, highlight the need for thorough investigation into how changes to the land and its topography might affect local wildlife before proceeding.

Flooding & Erosion:

The concentrated runoff from the solar panels could worsen flooding in areas already vulnerable near the site, leading to increased erosion and altering the natural flow of creeks. Given the expectation of more severe weather events in the future, this raises significant concerns.

Health Risks:

Solar power plants emit electromagnetic radiation, primarily from the industrial equipment utilized in the station, rather than the solar panels themselves. This radiation can impact the health of nearby residents, potentially causing vision issues and headaches.

Disposal:

The typical lifespan of a solar power station ranges from 25 to 30 years, after which the panels, having surpassed their operational period, require dismantling. Studies indicate that recycling these panels is often not cost-effective, leading to the majority being disposed of in landfills. This includes panels that are damaged or fail during their service life and are subsequently replaced.

Lifestyle:

Residents with a shared boundary to the proposed site will experience changes in their rural lifestyle, impacting not just the visual aspects but also activities like duck shooting, pest control, and recreational use of waterways. These changes may affect their enjoyment and utilization of the land.

Earthworks & Infrastructure:

We are worried that the extensive earthworks and land recontouring needed for the solar panels and power plant infrastructure will result in prolonged periods of noise and dust pollution, potentially lasting months or even years. Leveling land, operating heavy machinery, transporting materials via public roads, installing tens of thousands of steel poles for panel support, and erecting hundreds of meters of 12-foot security fencing (complete with barbed wire and security cameras) will significantly impact local noise levels, air quality, and privacy during construction.

Notified Consent:

We request that, should this project apply for resource consent, the process be publicly notified and all impacted residents be promptly informed upon its submission.

lwi:

I spoke to a Kuia from Ngāti Manuhiri and was informed the area of the site was outside of their interests and we should approach Ngāti Whātua. Even though Energy Farms Ldt told me they have the blessing from Ngāti Manuhiri. So there seems to be a conflict between Iwi. Not all give their consent of blessing to this use of the Whenua / site.