

Memorandum

To: Christina Walker, Principal Planning and Policy Consultant / Project Manager
Laurence Beckett, Principal Planning and Policy Consultant

From: Rachael Annan, Principal Landscape Planner

Date: 10 February 2023

Subject: Marton Solar Farm (Harmony Energy) – Preliminary Landscape Advice

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MEMORANDUM

This memo provides preliminary landscape assessment advice and commentary on the proposed Marton Solar Farm, to inform your fast track referral planning report. It sets out that a design led approach to inform an assessment of landscape effects has been and will continue to be undertaken. This will ensure that the proposal is successfully integrated within its rural landscape location in the Rangitikei District. The **Preliminary Concept Plans** (both with and without the proposed solar panel array) are provided with this preliminary landscape advice to help illustrate relevant aspects of this memorandum. It is intended that a full assessment of landscape effects will follow for inclusion with a subsequent application for resource consent.

THE EXISTING LANDSCAPE OF THE APPLICATION SITE AND ITS SURROUNDS

The application site is located within the Rangitikei District within the Manawatū-Whanganui region in the lower North Island. The immediate setting is a rural landscape south of the settlement of Marton, approximately 40 kilometres northwest of Palmerston North.

The 120 hectare application site comprises two adjacent farm properties (379 Pukepapa Road and 196 Whales Line) located within a rural block between Pukepapa Road and Wellington Road to the west and east, and between Makirikiri Road and Whales Line to the north and south.

Pukepapa and Wellington Road are busier roads, leading directly to Marton (approximately 2.5 kilometres north of the site), while Makirikiri Road and Whales Line are quieter local roads. As illustrated by the Preliminary Concept Plan drawing set, northwest of the site is the minor crossroads settlement area of Crofton. However, intervening landform and existing vegetation was observed to afford very limited visibility between the application site and Crofton.

The predominant land use in the vicinity of and including the application site is mixed use agriculture; both livestock and open pasture crop farming. The preliminary concept plan illustrates the location and alignment of stream and more ephemeral streams through the site area. With the exception of the two dwellings (with surrounding vegetation, adjacent farms sheds and ancillary buildings), limited scattered trees, pylons and overhead lines, the application site is open and broad without other notable defining features.

The application site is also representative of the rolling landscape of the area, with a lower basin area to the southern central area and a high areas to the south west corner (diagonally opposite a local trig station at the intersection) and northern aspects.

Typical of a rural landscape setting just beyond a settlement area, a limited number of non-agricultural landscape features and elements of the surrounds include the infrastructure of the substation, pylons and transmission lines, local oxidation ponds, and a cattery and boarding kennels. Smaller land parcels of Crofton reflect rural residential and even large lot residential scale development, although not all allotments here have been developed as their zoning provides for.

At the time of the preliminary site visit in January 2023, a new dwelling was under construction on an adjacent rural property to the north of the site along Pukepapa Road.

The site does not contain any item recorded on the Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero nor are there any sites of significance located in the vicinity of the subject site (Application planning report).

A DESIGN LED MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT APPROACH

In accordance with *‘Te Tangi a te Manu’* (Tuia Pito Ora/NZILA Landscape Assessment Guidelines, 2022), the application layout has been design led, based on an analysis of landscape opportunities and constraints, providing a place responsive project approach. The **Preliminary Concept Plan** sets out a design mitigation approach in response to key ecological and landscape matters that have been identified.

Restoration planting is proposed for key waterways and overland flow paths onsite. Specific landscape mitigation measures have been incorporated into the design approach in relation to specific views from surrounding private and public property. For example, greater setbacks are provided in response to proximity and denser grouping of neighbouring dwellings.

OVERALL LANDSCAPE OUTCOME

Integrating the project into the landscape setting has involved consideration of both the physical and policy context. The application site is located within the rural zone and the proposal is understood to have discretionary activity status. The site is not within an outstanding natural landscape area.

Landscape relevant policy framework matters address issues including to *‘maintain the largely primary production qualities of the Rural Zone and manage land use so that character and amenity values are not compromised’* (Objective 6), and to *‘preserve the largely open space and unbuilt nature of the rural environment, and maintain the distinctive cultural landscapes associated with the predominance of primary production’* (Policy - A2-1.4).

With regards to renewable energy, the Policy A5-21 seeks to *‘enable the use and development of a range of renewable electricity generation methods in a manner that avoids, remedies or mitigates adverse environmental effects’*.

The proposal will maintain rural productive grazing, allowing for sheep grazing through the site, improve ecology outcomes, provide amenity mitigation and enhancement and provide for renewable energy production.

At this stage in the project process, there are no apparent fatal flaws with regards to landscape outcomes to establish a solar farm in this location. Design mitigation refinement can be undertaken, if required, to address any specific issues arising, such as in response to further assessment or consultation through subsequent design stages. On the basis of preliminary analysis and the design led approach to date, it is considered that there will be no significant adverse landscape effects of the proposal in this rural setting.