TOWN PLANNING REPORT

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR UTILITY INSTALLATION
SEPTEMBER 2023

PREPARED FOR POWERCOR AUSTRALIA LTD

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by Spiire Australia Pty Ltd on behalf of Powercor Australia Ltd in support of a planning permit application for the use and development of a utility installation in Stawell, Victoria.

The proposed works are required to connect a new micro solar farm at 105 Dane Road into the electrical network at 58 Dane Road, Stawell.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide an overview of the subject site and surrounding area;
- Outline the proposal;
- Identify the relevant planning controls, policies and guidelines within the Northern Grampians Planning Scheme; and
- Provide an assessment of the proposal against the relevant planning requirements.

This report is accompanied by, and should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Land Titles – Appendix A.
- Construction Plan, prepared by Powercor – Appendix B.
- Siting Plan, prepared by Spiire – Appendix C.
- Ecology Report, prepared by TreeWishes Landcare Advice – Appendix D.

1.2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A summary of the key details of the proposal is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Project Synopsis

Project Synopsis	
Proposal	Use and development of a utility installation.
Land details	▸ 58 Dane Road, Stawell (Lot 2/LP134593) ▸ 105 Dane Road, Stawell (20~Z/PP3499) ▸ Road reserve of Dane Road
Planning Scheme	Northern Grampians Planning Scheme

Project Synopsis		
Zones	▸ Farming Zone (FZ) ▸ Rural Living Zone – Schedule 3 (RLZ3)	
Overlays	N/A	
Permit triggers	Clause 35.07-1	To use the land for a utility installation within the FZ.
	Clause 35.07-4	To construct or carry our works for a utility installation within the FZ.
	Clause 35.03-1	To use the land for a utility installation within the RLZ3.
	Clause 35.03-4	To construct or carry our works for a utility installation within the RLZ3.
Area of Aboriginal cultural heritage?	Yes – Refer to Section 4.7.	

1.3 APPROVAL HISTORY & BACKGROUND

A Planning Permit (reference PA2101072) was granted in November 2021 for the use and development of a solar energy facility and utility installation, as well as the removal of native vegetation at 105 Dane Road, Stawell. This approval facilitates the construction of a 5MW micro solar farm on the land, referred to as the 'Stawell Solar Farm'. This new solar has been developed by ACEnergy who lease the land on which the solar farm has been constructed.

Once the solar farm is operational, the electricity generated on site will be distributed within the Northern Grampians region using the connection proposed as part of this application.

2. APPLICATION AREA

2.1 APPLICATION AREA

The connection will start within the property at 58 Dane Road where there is an existing electrical alignment. New overhead powerlines will then be installed between 8 new poles, across the road reserve of Dane Road and into the property of 105 Dane Road where the powerline will run for approximately 953 route metres east until it reaches the solar farm connection point.

All new poles will be located within private property and as such, the application area includes 58 Dane Road, 105 Dane Road.

The land is primarily used for cropping and grazing purposes, with part of the land at 105 Dane Road also used as a micro solar farm as discussed above.

Dane Road is an unsealed road which runs east-west and separates the two properties. During preliminary investigations, the road reserve was identified as containing both patches of native grasses and mature native trees. As a result, Powercor have avoided impacting on any native vegetation by locating all new poles within the private property.

Figure 1 below illustrates the route of the new connection.

Figure 1. Connection Route

2.2 LAND TITLE INFORMATION

The land is formally described as Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision 134593 (58 Dane Road) and Crown Allotment 20 Section Z Parish of Stawell (105 Dane Road).

Powercor have negotiated with the relevant landowners to install the new poles within the properties and will establish easements on both Titles so that the powerlines can be accessed for maintenance in the future.

A copy of the Title for each site is included at Appendix A

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 DESCRIPTION

The connection will involve the construction of eight (8) new poles and 953 route metres of overhead powerline (conductor). The poles will be 14 metres tall and constructed from concrete.

This proposal should be read in conjunction with the:

- Construction Plan, prepared by Powercor – Appendix B.
- Siting Plan, prepared by Spiire – Appendix C.
- Ecology Report, prepared by TreeWishes Landcare Advice – Appendix D.

An ecologist has assessed the impact of these works. The process involved:

- Preparation of an initial plan by Powercor which indicated where poles are likely to be placed.
- A desktop review and physical site visit by an ecologist to assess the proposed location of poles to identify any vegetation impacts.
- Recommendations by the ecologist to move any poles or to only access areas via certain routes to avoid impacting any native vegetation.
- Powercor incorporate this advice in the final design of the route, which could involve moving poles or looking at different tracks/roads to access infrastructure, so that works can occur with minimal or no vegetation impact.

In this instance, the initial location of Pole 4 had impacts to native roadside vegetation. Powercor were able to shift this pole and the associated ground stay so that it is located inside private property (crop paddock), thus avoiding all native vegetation impacts.

The above process demonstrates how Powercor can avoid and minimise environmental impacts. With regards to this process, it has resulted in no native vegetation needing to be removed.

3.2 CONSTRUCTION METHODOLOGY

Powercor is adept at minimising environmental or community impacts during the construction or replacement of electrical infrastructure, and frequently undertake new and replacement projects without impact, facilitating the delivery of critical electrical infrastructure within communities.

Powercor's construction technique/methodology enables works to occur with minimal disturbance to existing biodiversity or ground disturbance. A description of the methodology and examples of previous works conducted by Powercor is provided below:

- The existing pole will be accessed via trucks which will use the existing access track through the crop paddock within private property. The construction methodology will then involve a truck pulling up to the pole with a boom lift to attached new conductor.

  Figure 2 illustrates how pole top works are undertaken.

- New poles will be installed via a truck accessing the location using a track within private property. The method will then involve an arm reaching out from the parked truck to auger a hole (see Figure 3). Another arm would then put the pole into place (Figure 4).

- New ground stays are anchored into the ground and are required to stabilise poles. These stays have a narrow screw-like peg which is anchored into the ground at a 45- or 60-degree angle. These stays have very little ground disturbance and keep tension on the pole. A diagram of a typical ground stay is provided at Figure 5.

Existing easements and access tracks are utilised where practicable so that any clearing associated with vehicle access is avoided.

Any recommendations from the ecologist, such as where to access pole from and to undertake works in dry conditions are included when undertaking construction.

Provided these techniques are implemented, it is considered the proposed works can be completed with no impacts to vegetation. The above procedures would be outlined in the standard Construction Environment Management Plan for the project to ensure compliance.

Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 below depict the typical construction methodology.

Figure 2. Example of how pole top works are undertaken

Figure 3. Example of a truck arm remaining on road verge to auger a hole

Figure 4. Example of new pole being installed

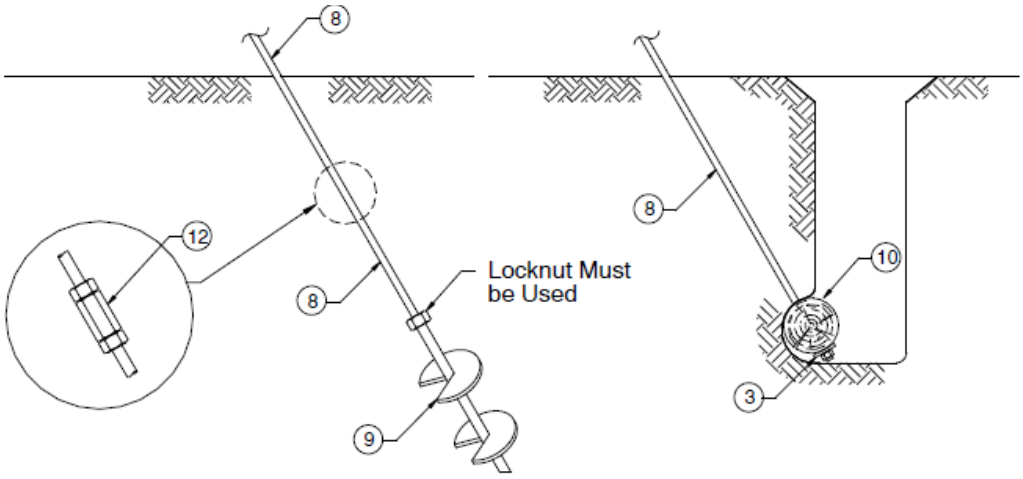

Figure 5. Ground stay anchor assembly

4. PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of the relevant planning controls and provisions contained within the Northern Grampians Planning Scheme.

The proposal triggers the requirement for a planning permit for the following:

4.1 LAND USE DEFINITION

The works are best described as a 'utility installation' rather than a 'minor utility insulation' as the definition of a minor utility installation excludes any power lines directly associated with an energy generation facility (being the Stawell Solar Farm).

The Northern Grampians Planning Scheme defines a 'utility installation' as:

> *"Land used:*
>
> *a) for telecommunications;*
>
> *b) to transmit or distribute gas or oil;*
>
> *c) to transmit, distribute or store power, including battery storage;*
>
> *d) to collect, treat, transmit, store, or distribute water;*
>
> *e) to collect, treat, or dispose of storm or flood water, sewage, or sullage.*
>
> *It includes any associated flow measurement device or a structure to gauge waterway flow."*

In accordance with Amendment VC157, which was gazetted on 15 March 2019, a planning permit is therefore required for power lines associated with an energy generation facility that obtained approval after March 2019.

4.2 POLICY

- Clause 02.03-2 Environmental and Landscape Values
  - *Support development on land that is already cleared to avoid the removal of remnant vegetation*.
- Clause 13.02-1S Bushfire Planning
  - *To strengthen the resilience of settlements and communities to bushfire through risk-based planning that prioritises the protection of human life.*
- Clause 19.01-1S Energy Supply
  - *To facilitate appropriate development of energy supply infrastructure.*
    - *Support the development of energy generation, storage, transmission, and distribution infrastructure to transition to a low-carbon economy.*
    - *Develop appropriate infrastructure to meet community demand for energy services.*

- *Support energy infrastructure projects in locations that minimise land use conflicts and that take advantage of existing resources and infrastructure networks.*

- Clause 19.01-2S Renewable Energy
  - *To support the provision and use of renewable energy in a manner that ensures appropriate siting and design considerations are met.*
    - *Facilitate renewable energy development in appropriate locations.*
- Clause 19.01-2R Renewable Energy – Wimmera Southern Mallee
  - *Support the development of locally generated renewable energy, including bioenergy clusters.*

4.3 ZONE

The project is located within the Farming Zone (FZ).

The purpose of the FZ includes (as relevant):

- *To implement the Municipal Planning Strategy and the Planning Policy Framework.*
- *To ensure that non-agricultural uses, including dwellings, do not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture.*

The Schedule to the FZ does not apply any specific requirements relevant to these works.

A utility installation is a 'Section 2' use within the FZ.

Pursuant to Clause 35.07-1 of the Northern Grampians Planning Scheme, a planning permit is required to use the land for the purpose of a utility installation.

Pursuant to Clause 35.07-4 of the Northern Grampians Planning Scheme, a planning permit is also required to carry out works associated with a utility installation (being a Section 2 use).

The applicable zone is shown in Figure 6 overleaf.

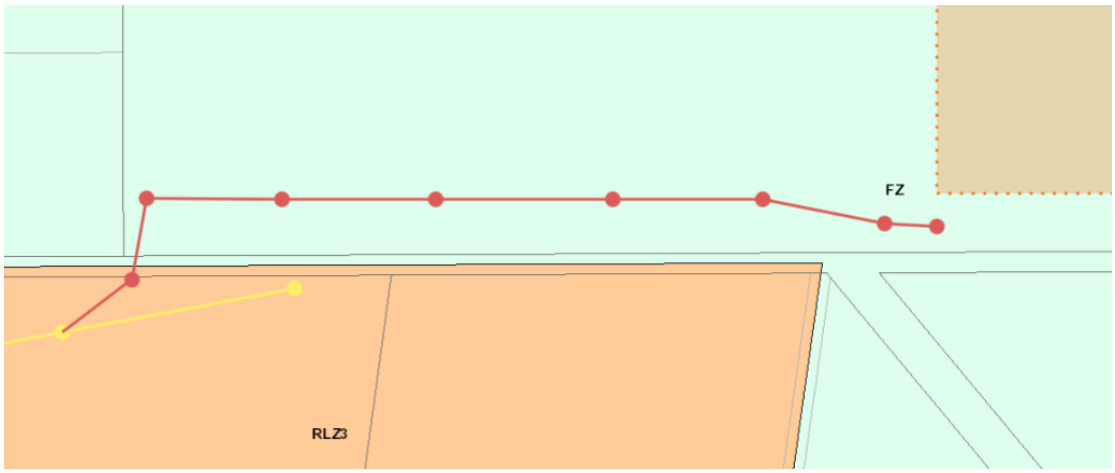

Figure 6. Zones

4.4 OVERLAY

The proposed works are not subject to any overlays.

4.5 PARTICULAR & GENERAL PROVISIONS

The following provisions are considered relevant:

- Clause 52.17 – This clause ensures that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation by applying a 3-step approach to avoid, minimise and offset.

  The removal of any native vegetation has been avoided with the exception of four (4) Grey Box trees. The removal of these trees are exempt from requiring a permit pursuant to Clause 52.17-1 which provides the following exemption:

  > *Native vegetation that is to be removed, destroyed or lopped that was either planted or grown as a result of direct seeding.*

  As discussed in the Ecology Report (Appendix D), all trees along this driveway have been planted and are therefore exempt from the requirements of Clause 52.17.

- Clause 65 – This clause outlines the items that the responsible authority must consider before deciding on an application. A response to the relevant items has been provided throughout this report.

4.6 BUSHFIRE

The works are located within a Bushfire Prone Area (BPA), as shown in Figure 7.

The works will not increase the risk of bushfires or increase the risk to human life or property as a result of a bushfire.

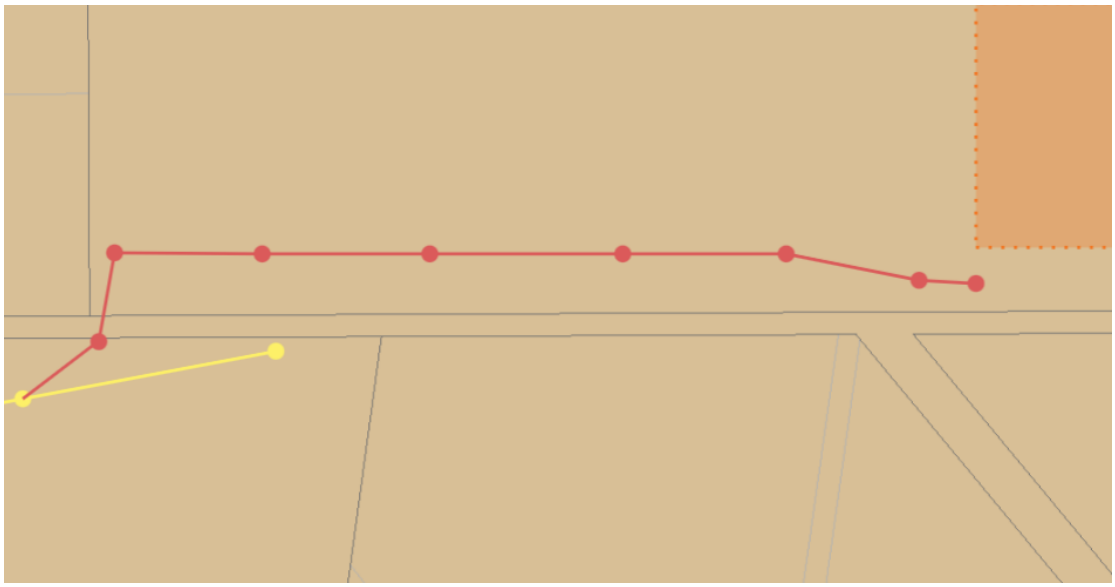

Figure 7. BPA extent

4.7 CULTURAL HERITAGE

The alignment is partially located within an area of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity. A Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) is required where a project is located within an area of sensitivity, and where the works are classified as a 'high impact activity'.

The definition of a high impact utility installation activity (as relevant) is *'works [that] are a linear project that is the construction of an overhead power line with a length exceeding one kilometre or for which more than 10 power poles are erected'* (Regulation 46, (1)(b)(xxvii)(A), *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations, 2018*)

As the connection is 8 poles and 953 route metres of overhead powerline, the works are not considered a high impact activity and a CHMP is not required.

The extent of the area of sensitivity is shown in Figure 8 below.

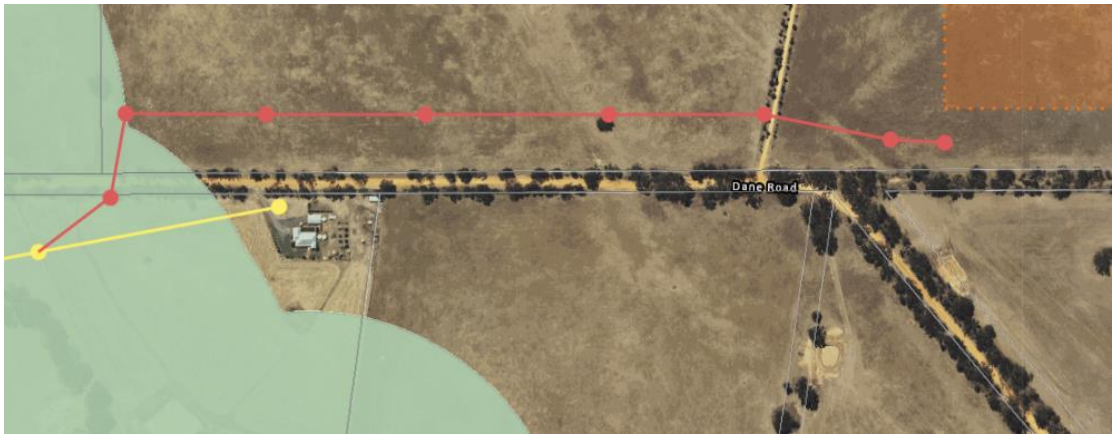

Figure 8. Area of sensitivity

5. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The Planning policy framework identifies the need to ensure the efficient provision of services and infrastructure while considering potential environmental impacts.

These works will provide necessary electrical infrastructure within the Northern Grampians Shire and will support the expansion of renewable energy industries. The Stawell Solar Farm, which this project supports, will provide for sustainable energy generation within the region. The works are required to ensure that the existing network can accommodate the increased power that will be generated by the solar farm and will also allow for the distribution of this power to the surrounding region.

Powercor are experienced in minimising any potential impacts on vegetation. The construction methods utilised will result in no vegetation impacts while undertaking works. A concerted effort was taken within the design process to ensure that any environmental impacts have been appropriately considered and minimised through strategic siting of the works and through mitigation strategies which will be implemented during construction.

Overall, it is considered that the proposal complies with the Planning policy framework by delivering a sensitively designed electrical upgrade that will provide a net community benefit.

5.1 USE & DEVELOPMENT

The use of the land for the purpose of a utility installation is considered appropriate in the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone.

The poles have been carefully sited to minimise the impact on productive agricultural land within the Farming Zone. This has been done by using an existing pole, and locating new poles close to the edge of the property boundary to avoid locating them in the middle of paddocks where possible. The remainder of the poles are within the Stawell Solar Farm facility and are not being used for agricultural purposes. Notwithstanding this, the use of the land for agricultural purpose can be maintained as cropping and grazing can still occur around these poles.

The proposed poles are not likely to generate any road safety concerns as all poles will be located within the private property, thereby not impacting on the existing function of the road.

New and replacement poles will be constructed of concrete and will range between 12.5 and 14 metres tall (above ground). The height of the poles is consistent with existing electrical infrastructure in the area. The newer poles will be significantly stronger than wooden poles and reduce the likelihood of electrical faults or damages.

The design and location of the poles is consistent within the surrounding site context and is unlikely to impact on any landscape features or visual amenity.

6. CONCLUSION

This application seeks planning approval for the use and development of land for the purpose of a utility installation.

The proposed works are required to connect the recently approved Stawell Solar Farm to the electricity network.

In summary, the proposal is considered appropriate for the following reasons:

- The proposal is consistent with the the Planning policy framework and provides necessary upgrades to electrical infrastructure within the Northern Grampians Shire;
- This project is required to support the recently approved development of the Stawell Solar Farm and will promote the expansion of renewable energy industries;
- The proposed works have been designed and located to avoid any impact on the environment and the removal of native vegetation;
- Powercor's construction methodology allows for no disturbance to biodiversity; and
- The proposed works will not adversely impact on cultural heritage.

Based on the details set out in this report, it is considered that a planning permit should be issued for this proposal.

APPENDIX A

TITLE DOCUMENTS

APPENDIX B

CONSTRUCTION PLAN

APPENDIX C

SITING PLAN

APPENDIX D

ECOLOGY REPORT