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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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INDEPENDENT PLANNING COMMISSION

NEW ENGLAND SOLAR FARM ARMIDALE – COUNCIL MEETING

PANEL:

ANDREW HUTTON (Chair)
ZADA LIPMAN
SNOW BARLOW

ASSISTING PANEL:

BRAD JAMES (Senior Planning Officer)
CALLUM FIRTH (Student Planner)
KYM STATHAM (Events Coordinator)

URALLA SHIRE COUNCIL:

MICHAEL PEARCE (Mayor)
BOB CROUCH (Deputy Mayor)
TOM O'CONNOR (Councillor)
LEVI SAMPSON (Councillor)
ISABEL STRUTT (Councillor)
NATASHA LEDGER (Councillor)
DAVID ABE (Acting General Manager)
MATT CLARKSON (Manager – Development & Planning)
TERRY SEYMOUR (Director – Infrastructure & Development)
SUSIE GLASSON (Executive Manager of Corporate Service)
SIMON PAUL (Chief Financial Officer)

LOCATION:

MEMORIAL HALL URALLA
27 SALISBURY STREET, URALLA, NSW

DATE:

2.09 PM, TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2020

MR A. HUTTON: All right. Good afternoon, and welcome and thank you, everyone, for coming along this afternoon. Ah, before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owner on the land on which we met, the Hanowhen People, and I'd like to pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to the
5 Elders from other communities who may be here today. Welcome to the meeting today. Ah, UPC Renewables, the applicant, is seeking to develop a new 720-megawatt solar farm and battery storage facility located six kilometres east of Uralla and eight kilometres south of Armidale in the Uralla Shire local government area.

10 My name is Andrew Hutton. I'm the chair of this particular IPC panel. Joining me are my fellow commissioners, Professor Zada Lipman on my right and Professor Snow Barlow on my left. Brad James and Callum, ah, for – ah, from the Commission's secretariat are also in attendance. In the interests of openness and transparency and to ensure that we capture all the information today, we will be
15 recording the meeting and a full transcript will be produced and made available on the Commission's website. This is – ah, this meeting is really one part of the Commission's decision-making process and will form one of several sources of information upon which the Commission will base its decision.

20 It is important that, as commissioner, we are able to ask questions of attendees to clarify issues whenever we consider it is appropriate. If you are asked a question and you're not in the position to give an answer, please feel free to take the question on notice and provide any additional information in writing which we will then also put
25 up on our website. I do request that all members here today introduce themselves before speaking the first time and that all members also ensure they do not speak over each other just so we can ensure accuracy of the transcript. We will now begin. What I would – um, what I'd like to do just to kick off proceedings is if you wouldn't mind just, um, starting the Mayor, go around the table and introduce yourself. That'd be most helpful. Thank you.

30 MR M. PEARCE: My name is Michael Pearce. I'm the Mayor of Uralla Shire Council, and welcome this afternoon to - - -

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Yeah.

35 MR PEARCE: Thank you.

MR T. O'CONNOR: Councillor Tom O'Connor from the shire.

40 MR L. SAMPSON: Councillor Levi Sampson.

MS I. STRUTT: Councillor Isabel Strutt.

MR B. CROUCH: Councillor Bob Crouch, Deputy Mayor.

45 MR D. ABE: David Abe, um, Acting General Manager.

MR B. JAMES: Ah, Brad James from the secretariat.

PROF Z. LIPMAN: Zada Lipman, Commissioner.

5 MR HUTTON: Now Andrew Hutton, Commissioner.

PROF S. BARLOW: Snow Barlow, Commissioner.

MR C. FIRTH: Callum Firth from the secretariat.

10

MR T. SEYMOUR: Terry Seymore, Director of Infrastructure and Development.

MS N. LEDGER: Natasha Ledger, councillor.

15 MR M. CLARKSON: Matt Clarkson, Manager of Development and Planning.

MR S. PAUL: Simon Paul, Chief Financial Officer.

MS S. GLASSON: Susie Glasson, Executive Manager, Corporate Services.

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MR HUTTON: Great. All right. Thank you. It's appreciated. Um, I guess the purpose of our meeting today is to ask some questions of council, I guess, to, um, seek clarification or to – to obtain further information. So I think at this point, um, um, Matt or Terry, I'll direct our questions to you, but if you feel that there's
25 appropriate for, um, someone else to respond, we'd welcome – welcome that. The first question we're – we're interested in, um, the council's feedback in relation to the development, ah, now that the applicant has, um, removed the southern array and the workers' accommodation aspects from their proposal as part of their amended application, ah, and I guess understand the extent to which that removal goes to
30 addressing a number of the issues that you highlighted in your submission on 19 March, whether you have any comment.

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MR SEYMOUR: I think, um – and. Matt, jump in if you want, but the, ah, issue regarding the staff accommodation I think you've addressed in requiring, ah, an
35 assessment and, um, report be done.

35

MR HUTTON: Yep.

MR SEYMOUR: And submitted to the secretariat for their approval. Um, I – I
40 thought that addressed that. Um, the removal of the southern array just made a difference in terms of the – the traffic routes, ah, which is reflected in the, ah, amended, um, conditions. The only thing of concern – or question I have is with the traffic routes, is that council, ah, requested some standards that aren't reflected in your draft conditions.

45

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR SEYMOUR: And - - -

MR HUTTON: Just to clarify, the – um, the Commission is separate to the Department of Planning, who have drafted the – ah, put forward the draft conditions.
5 So just to – for clarification.

MR SEYMOUR: Yeah, yeah.

MR HUTTON: We're independent of the Department of Planning.
10

MR SEYMOUR: Oh, okay. So the Department of Planning's draft conditions for the roads don't reflect council's advice, which was based on the Austroads standards and we appreciate that the, um – the – I guess those – the application of those standards was based on traffic volume during the construction phase but I would – I
15 would expect that there would be some sort of a safety and risk assessment supporting why those standards are applicable because the construction phase is actually quite a – a reasonable period of time and our estimate of the cost to provide the standard that we – we recommended based on those Austroads standards wasn't a significant cost in – in the context of a entire development.

MR HUTTON: I understand from the department's assessment report that, as you mentioned, you've got some residual concerns about the roads and the road upgrades. Do – do your comments, um, ah, reflect the – the – the entire length of that road into the development site or if – if you'll notice in the assessment report,
20 that's sort of broken up into sections.

MR SEYMOUR: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: And they've upgraded – ah, proposed alternate upgrades depending
30 on various sections as we go in.

MR SEYMOUR: That's right. So we – we had – we had written to UPC and copied in the, um, department what we thought were appropriate. Um, we compared that with what UPC thought was appropriate, and the draft conditions have come in
35 actually less than either of those, um, which seemed a bit odd, but I guess there's a – some sort of a safety risk assessment behind that that somebody can hold up one day if there is an accident as to why those standards weren't relied on.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Um, another point that was – thank you for that. Another
40 point that was raised in your submission was in relation to a requirement for the development to give consideration to cradle to grave, so looking at the – the commencement right through to, um, deconstruction and – and – and, effectively, re-establishment of the site, and one of the points that you raise in your submission which we would appreciate some comment on was the – the – the comment in
45 relation to bonding arrangements and we were keen to get, um, some feedback on your thinking, or council's thinking around, um, what – what that – they were

looking at there when they made – made that suggestion around bonding and how that might work.

5 MR SEYMOUR: Yes. I think that was something that you raised. It was - - -

MR CROUCH: That was something that I raised in – in response to community concerns. Yes, I – I spent much of my career – early career in particular, working on abandoned mine sites.

10 MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR CROUCH: Where companies had simply come to the end of a project, run out of ore and walked away.

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR CROUCH: Ah, mining – where – where current mining takes place, bonds are required and, in many other cases, where there's significant impact on the local environment, bonds are required. Now, the way I saw it working, and I'll give – give
20 it to you in the piece of paper - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Thank you.

MR CROUCH: - - - later on, the – the way I saw it working would perhaps be an
25 annual bond that UPC would be required to pay but, over a 30-year lifespan, they would effectively have set aside the cost of rehabilitation because any of these projects, it doesn't necessarily stay with the – the people who propose it and, whilst they have the very best of intentions, they can on-sell. It could be on-sold two or
30 three times through the life of the project and it – it's good business sense from their perspective just to walk away.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. And so you've got - - -

35 MR CROUCH: I - - -

MR HUTTON: - - - um, a – a submission or – that you'd like to present to the Commission.

40 MR CROUCH: Well, the – ah, the – the section I've written on decommissioning and rehabilitation - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

45 MR CROUCH: - - - I've written – this section's very weak. What it says is 18 months after the cessation of operations the applicant must rehabilitate the site to the satisfaction of the secretariat, and then I outline my – my background in rehabilitating mining areas. I'm a firm believer in bonds. I suggest in this case the

bond take the form of an annual restriction reserved for rehabilitation. That way the cost of rehabilitation is provided for and should happen. Without specific funding it's most probable it will not. I also believe that rehabilitation should be followed by ongoing monitoring for at least 10 years to ensure the rehabilitation has been adequate.

MR HUTTON: Okay. All right. Thank you for that. That's appreciated. Um, the department's draft conditions, um, in schedule 3, condition 28, put forward some expectations around rehabilitation of the site. I'm not sure whether you've had the benefit of looking at those.

MR CROUCH: Yeah, that – that simply says 18 months after the cessation of operations - - -

MR HUTTON: Yep. Yep. Okay.

MR CROUCH: - - - the applicant must rehabilitate the site to the satisfaction of the secretariat.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR CROUCH: Whatever that may mean.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Okay. All right. Thank you. Appreciate that feedback. Um - - -

MR SEYMOUR: Sorry. Just – just on that.

MR HUTTON: Mmm.

MR SEYMOUR: And as, ah, Councillor Crouch has said, is that the applicant may not even exist as an entity any more, and I think that's the point of the bonds, is that there needs to be some surety at the stage when you're dealing with the applicant that that is somehow provided for because I just don't see – and I agree with Councillor Crouch – that that can be enforced in every way.

MR HUTTON: No. I appreciate those comments. Thank you. Um, one other point you raised in your submission, ah, was around, um, meeting the objectives of the community strategic plan and – and it was quite, um, ah, strong at the front of the submission. Does the – is council satisfied that the application as presented, um, adequately addresses those objectives and, if not, is there anything that you think, um, would add value to what's proposed in line of, um, what your community strategic plan objectives are? And you're – and you're welcome to take that on notice if you want to - - -

MR O'CONNOR: I – I think that's a good point and I think we should take it on notice. Nothing jumped out at me to say this doesn't accord with it, but it's probably worthwhile if we do go back and have a bit of a look just – just to check that off. Yeah.

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MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR CROUCH: Again, if I may - - -

10 MR HUTTON: Yeah, please. Yeah.

MR CROUCH: - - - add something. I – I believe this does – addressed – and it is welcome in terms of our community strategic plan in that it assists development of the shire.

15

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR CROUCH: But it needs to be compatible with our present lifestyle, too, which – which is addressed in the community strategic plan and I'm sure in the information staff puts together - - -

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MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MS STRUTT: - - - will – yeah, will be covered.

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MR HUTTON: Great. All right. Thank you, Bob. Um, one of the – the, um, conditions that's been presented by the department is around the preparation – and you alluded to it earlier, Terry, around this requirement for an accommodation and employment strategy, and council is a key stakeholder in that as it's written. Um, there's consultation with council as a – a key element of that – that – that, um, requirement. Um, that particular plan, as the draft, ah, conditions also requires, um, consideration of, ah, cumulative impacts because, as we understand it, there's potential for other renewable energy projects in the shire, in the council area, and so cumulative impacts are something that, um, needs consideration.

30

The key elements of the, um, condition around basically ensuring that we've got sufficient accommodation, um, that the cumulative impacts of any other SSD projects are met, that there's a focus on local employment and also monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy. Ah, I just wanted to see whether, um, anyone has a comment in relation to, um, ah, giving a thought to that – what that plan might look like and are you satisfied that it's an appropriate control to address the concerns that you've highlighted around, um, ah, I guess, drawing on the benefits to – to the shire.

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MR SEYMOUR: I – Matt? I – I, um – I didn't see how you could really do it any other way apart from this – this condition. Um, it – it's unknown what – what the situation will be in two years or whenever they actually start to work on it, this will vary. Um, I think with some of the initial statements from the applicant, we didn't

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see that the – that there was actually enough in terms of local labour to, you know, fulfil the labour requirements, um, and I – we – we felt that the notion that they'd just be sourced locally, you wouldn't have to provide any accommodation was probably a little under – underdone. And so I – I think that accommodation/employment strategy requirement is probably the only other – the only way you can really deal with it.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

10 MR ABE: Oh, David Abe. One of the other discussions we did have was about whether there was any opportunity for young traineeships as part of the construction program, so for some of our youth, they actually have some training into a new – a career path as a result of the construction of the project.

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Okay.

MR O'CONNOR: Um, Councillor O'Connor. Um, on page 41 of the assessment, they talk about workforce accommodation and they talk about the assessment is that the 700 workers would be required during the construction period and UPC is committed to source workers from the local community where possible. The department is satisfied that there is sufficient accommodation in the nearby towns, such as Uralla, Armidale and Tamworth. Um, if you drive into Armidale, you'll find that they've got many, many, many, um, motels accommodation. However, at different times during the year that accommodation is totally booked out. Um, it's similar with Tamworth. Tamworth has occasions during the year in which they are totally – in fact, there is overflow from both of those into Uralla for accommodation.

20 Since the construction period is some three years, um, I'm sure that the maximum of 700 won't be there all the time. However, I severely doubt whether or not 700 additional people can be accommodated at pressure times within the New England area in existing accommodation availability. I think it's – I think that statement lacks, um, ability to be performed. I think the – the accommodation of – of casual workers will not be able to be accommodated locally.

25 MR HUTTON: Snow, do you have a point?

PROF BARLOW: Can I try and tease that out a little?

MR O'CONNOR: Yeah.

40 PROF BARLOW: That's, um - - -

MR O'CONNOR: Sure. There – there are – there are two - - -

45 PROF BARLOW: Wait a minute.

MR O'CONNOR: Oh, sorry.

PROF BARLOW: But what my question really is, um, do we expect that all the 700 workers will have to, ah, come here requiring accommodation? Are there – there – is there an existing workforce in the Armidale/Uralla area that might be already accommodated that could contribute to that workforce?

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MR O'CONNOR: The – the simple answer to that is, yes, there is, but not to the full degree.

PROF BARLOW: Oh, no.

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MR O'CONNOR: At the – at the moment we've got a major construction in Armidale for the, um, senior high school and, at the moment, if you wish to get a, um, plumber, electrician, ah, builder, um, you will find great difficulty. I know because I have called for them for – from time to time and I know at this moment that there is – they're up to their ears in work. And so the – the ability for our workforce to provide that additional work, um, will have two – two flow-on effects. One is that they won't be able to accommodate and then anyone in the unfortunate position of having to, ah, undertake a construction of any type will – will have a premium because of the – the use of – of the available resource within our area. So those are the two, you know, um, unfortunate by-products of having – um, using up our local workforce for a major development. Not that I don't – oh, it's not that I'm criticising. I just think that those are some things which – which I think they'll find themselves difficult to meet their requirements.

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MR CLARKSON: I might just add to that a bit. We've had – um, we've gone through a number of – of grants programs where we've been, um, building – building infrastructure and we've certainly found that, um, we've had trouble attracting skilled and semi-skilled workers to – to work on those projects and – and when they – as you said, when they have to come, often there's a bit of a premium. So if – if – if part of their strategy is to get a – a significant number of people from the local workforce, I think that that might be flawed.

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MR HUTTON: But do I take it that you would – um, you would – you do welcome the opportunity to work with the applicant around, um, a strategy. Obviously, I understand there are some challenges. Yes. Sorry, Councillor.

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MR CROUCH: I – with – with respect to what Councillor O'Connor has said, and that's true, so I understand UPC are in negotiation with the university because they – they have – ah, you – you need to check with UPC on this because the information I have in this area is fifth, or sixth or seventh-hand.

40

MR HUTTON: Well, I can – I can confirm, ah, that they have advised us, as a Commission, that they are looking at university accommodation as – as part of the solution.

45

MR CROUCH: Yeah, the – the – the university is – is vastly – well, the number of students internally have – has dropped off considerably with the increase in distance education and they have quite a bit of vacant accommodation a lot of the time.

5 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah.

MR SEYMOUR: I think though the – the accommodation and employment strategy would tease all that – that out.

10 MR CROUCH: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

15 MR SEYMOUR: Because, I would say it's a moving feast and it – things will change over the next period of time as – as they do.

MR CROUCH: It calls for development in consultation with council.

20 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So that's great.

PROF BARLOW: As a – could I ask?

MR HUTTON: Yeah, yeah. Go ahead, please.

25 PROF BARLOW: Just as a question of information, when is the Armidale High School – how long is that going to take? Will it overlap with the, ah, you know, projected timeframe for this project?

30 MR CROUCH: It's currently running six month early.

MR O'CONNOR: Yes, it's running early. It's due for, um, first intake in 2021 and, ah, it's – it's well on course.

35 PROF BARLOW: Thank you.

MS LEDGER: Just in relation to – Natasha Ledger. Just in relation to as a comment and teasing it out, I thought there was a set percentage of workers that will be recruited from the region. I didn't hear you say the percentage.

40 MR O'CONNOR: Nuh.

MS LEDGER: Was there a percentage that you – was agreed upon to hire - - -

45 MR HUTTON: I – I'm not aware of a percentage that's been stated. It may have been, but I'm not aware of it. Yeah.

MS LEDGER: Yeah, because it just stated that – er, there was no allocation of how many you agreed to take from the region and how many you have already.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

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MS LEDGER: So I think, um, I – I – I'm pretty sure when we went through this that a percentage was discussed.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

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MS LEDGER: So I'd like that teased out and - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

15

MS LEDGER: - - - I'd like to reply to it.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Okay.

MS LEDGER: So how do we go about doing that?

20

MR HUTTON: Well, I think, um, if council could take the opportunity to respond, um, to the secretariat and the Commission on that point, that'd be very useful for our considerations.

25

MS LEDGER: Thank you.

MR HUTTON: Um, and we – we have a – an opportunity for the next seven days after the public meeting for there to be a submission that the – the panel will give regard to. So I encourage you to take that opportunity. Yeah. Sorry. I didn't – sorry, I didn't see you there.

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MR SAMPSON: That's all right. Levi Sampson. Um, from my recollection, um, a large majority of the workers were not required to have any particular skillset. Um, from my knowledge, the – a lot of the, ah, construction was, ah, pretty much a pack and place type. They were just putting holes and they were just putting things on top of things, and that was about it.

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MR HUTTON: Right.

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MR SAMPSON: So you're not looking at, like, premium, um, workers to do. A large majority of the workforce just is general labour force.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Right. I'll move on. Um, one of the other things that was in the letter was in relation to, um, a – a technical submission. I'm just seeking clarification. Um, was it the council's intention to submit a separate technical submission on those key points or do we take that letter as submitted as,

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um, as that submission? Just don't want to miss – miss that if that's something that you're intending to do.

5 MR CLARKSON: From memory, that submission included – I think it was the preamble that was the general – general submission from council and the – the second part of it was the technical submission - - -

MR HUTTON: Okay.

10 MR CLARKSON: - - - from the council staff.

MR HUTTON: Take that as the technical submission. Thank you. Because there is some quite technical references and things in there. I just want to make sure there wasn't an expectation that you might submit another document to the Commission.
15

MR CLARKSON: Not - - -

MR HUTTON: So thank you.

20 MR CLARKSON: Not at this stage.

MR HUTTON: Thank you. One of the other, um, things we were interested in getting feedback from is the proposal from the applicant to establish a community grants program where they will be putting forward, um, up to \$100,000 per year in the early phases of the operation to – up to 180, um, thousand as the operation gets up to full production. Um, does council have any, um, comment around that community grants process or – or any thoughts that they would like to share with the – the panel, um, in terms of whether that's a good initiative or so forth? Yes, Councillor.
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30

MR O'CONNOR: Um, I'll be speaking this evening as a member of the Community Reference Group for that item.

MR HUTTON: Okay.
35

MR O'CONNOR: So I won't be making a statement as a councillor but I will be as a community member and member of that committee tonight.

MR HUTTON: Great. Thank you.
40

MR O'CONNOR: Or later.

MR HUTTON: Later, yeah.

45 MR SEYMOUR: That – that process has largely travelled in parallel to council. So council hasn't actually been involved in it. It was directly through UPC and - - -

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR SEYMOUR: And the community, so - - -

5 MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR SEYMOUR: I think they called for, and established, a – a reference group, and that’s what Council O’Connor is part of. Yeah. So it wasn’t a council function.

10 MR HUTTON: Initiative, yeah. Okay.

MR CROUCH: May – may I add something there?

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah, please. Yeah.

MR CROUCH: Um, while – whilst it’s not a council issue, it is of a lot of interest to our community, ah, that they’ve established it. They – the proposal UPC put up proposed that 50,000 be committed during construction and 250 – \$250 per megawatt annually. It’s referred to in the state’s significant development application but it’s not included in the conditions of consent and that’s of concern to me in that not being a condition of consent, and the current personnel and UPC have the very best of intentions, it’s not a legal requirement that they do it is my understanding, and I believe it should be included in the conditions of consent.

25 MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you.

MS STRUTT: Thank you. Isabel Strutt, just by way of some feedback from the community. Ah, I was – attended a – a community group meeting yesterday and this particular community group has already approached, ah, UPC in relation to some funding for a project that they’re undertaking. They’re very appreciative of the principle of the community assistance fund. Um, feedback that I’ve heard in the community is that people are appreciative of that fund and the intent of UPC to – to feedback into the community. UPC had a drop-in session at their office a couple of weeks ago and I usually call into those sessions just – just to hear and to get an update, and I was interested to see the, um – the chart and the report on the wall of their – of where – the planning that they now have around that community assistance grant, um, idea. It – it looked to be quite well thought out. Um, I’d be interested to hear a little bit more about how they’re going to administer it, but it appears to be of good intent and – and good initial branding.

40 MR HUTTON: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

MR SEYMOUR: Can I ask the – how has this requirement been enshrined in other development approval conditions where there’s a – a community contribution by the applicant?

MR HUTTON: I don’t know.

MR JAMES: I can't recall of the top of my head.

MR HUTTON: This is – this is just – ah, we're just, I guess, looking at this a unique proposition that UPC have put forward as part of this development. Um - - -

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PROF LIPMAN: There've been quite a few of those, but they're usually not in the conditions, just expressed as a voluntary commitment unless it's a – a VPA.

MR CLARKSON: Yeah. Well, it'd just take the form of a voluntary planning agreement.

10

PROF LIPMAN: If it's a voluntary planning agreement, then, of course, it's enforceable and enshrined – well, not in the conditions but in a contract between council and the applicant.

15

MS LEDGER: Um, just – just to further that, if I may. Um, I understand that this is a – a new project and everything, so I've got a new idea, and I'm not too sure – ah, you've asked the community what they would like but I'm not too sure what you could offer as incentive there. Um, and a wild proposal for me would be to also employ or provide to the community a couple of electric cars we can plug into the system to show how effective it is for our tourist industry so they can hire it out for the day and go travelling. I think those are really good incentives at work. So I think it promotes on the whole, um, and – and to Australia-wide how good and – and – and, um – the good things that can come from a solar relationship.

25

MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you. Just a couple of final points. It's, um, obviously well-documented, some of the challenges that council's had with water during the drought and – and this particular development is proposing to, um, ah, use water as – principally as part of the construction process but also during operation. I'm just keen to get council's, um, feedback and – on whether it had any thought around, um, the supply of – of water. Um, one of the – one of the comments made by the applicant in an earlier meeting which, um, is transcribed so you can check the detail, is around the potential for there to be a relationship with council for the use of recycled water. Um, has anybody got any comment or feedback on that as a – as an approach, um, to address the use of water on the site?

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MR SEYMOUR: I suppose going back not too long ago, there wasn't much casual water lying around in farm dams or creeks or storages and, um, that's kinda changed markedly over the last three weeks or so, um, but, having said that – and I can't really say too much, but there are some discussions with the applicant about the potential for using recycled water – or using – using our effluent from the sewerage treatment plant, but they're only just discussions at this point in time.

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MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah.

45

MR SEYMOUR: Um, as we would have discussions with any other interested party thow may - - -

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR SEYMOUR: - - - you know, have a need, um - - -

5 MR HUTTON: Okay. Um, do any of the other commissioners have any other questions? Snow?

10 PROF BARLOW: Zada, do you have? I have a – have a couple of questions but maybe Zada - - -

MR HUTTON: Please, go head, Zada.

15 PROF LIPMAN: I think we've covered – you've covered most of the things that I, um, wanted to raise.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

20 PROF BARLOW: Perhaps the – the only one which is a general, which we have really covered, about how the council sees this as a – you know, a sustainable development opportunity for – for the council and, um, to increase development in the area while maintaining the tourism component. So we haven't really talked about the tourism component, and do you see this as a threat to the tourism component?

25 MR O'CONNOR: As an individual councillor, not as a council decisions. Um, having travelled overseas and seen, um, wind turbines on – on the ocean, ah, in Wales, um, in – in Portugal, seen masses of, um, panels in parts of America – the US, um, I have to say that, yes, they do. They have an attraction, um, and there is people who go, you know, and have a look at it. I have family in Toowoomba, so I travel up and down and, as you come across and going down towards Warwick on the left-hand side there's a huge array of, um – of panels and they are – you know, they are very striking. I have to tell you, in the past when – before they were installed, I drove over that hill and paid no attention.

35 So – so, yes, they do attract attention. They – they are, in a lot of cases, seen by some people as terrible and by other people as artistic or something that they take photos of. So the jury's out as to whether or not it improves or doesn't improve, but I don't think – I think that there is definitely a, um, impact from them which is more positive than negative. That's my personal opinion.

40

MR SEYMOUR: I think one of the other things is that Uralla's well-known for being the home to Z-Net – to Z-Net Uralla, which is Zero Net Energy and this is like a very big Zero Net project. So I don't know whether it's a tourism thing but it kind of fits a bit with that Z-Net brand or – or – or trademark.

45

MR ABE: I think it – partly this is pretty well obscured from the main routes through town anyway and we – as a town, they're pretty well billed with a lot of the

tourism line as a good place to stop, have coffee, have a meal and that, and it's pretty popular on the weekends for that reason, from Armidale coming back. So I don't see that this would actually have that much of an impact on it. Um, I was working at Moree when they did the solar power station out there. Was some discussion about having an interpretation centre there. That didn't really come off. I think basically it's – it's just there. It's not anything that sort of raises a lot of interest. The only time you might get a conversation about it is the plane going out of Moree. There's a – you know, you look down on it. But I can't see that – in terms of once it's built, it fits in with what, as Terry said, Z-Net's doing. It's kinda like a thing, probably gives us net production of energy, probably some bragging rights that not many communities have after that, but I think it - - -

MR CROUCH: I – I should preface what I'm saying, like Councillor O'Connor did, that what I'm saying is my personal opinion. We – we haven't reached agreement with some of those around council. Um, I think it's – people will come and look at it. I've driven around Mudgee looking at what they've done down there – Mudgee, Gulgong. But, at the same time, it does detract from our landscape. I believe it would be appropriate, under the, um, schedule 4 of the environmental management section for the development consent that in – in the first sentence, rather than just:

20 *Prior to commencing the development the applicant must prepare an environmental management strategy for the development to the satisfaction of the secretary,*

25 in there, it should be, “to the satisfaction of the secretary in consultation with council and the local community.”

MR HUTTON: Okay. We'll take that on notice. Thank you.

30 MR CLARKSON: I might just tie that question back to the – the first one – first one that you asked. We, um – I think by removing that – that southern array, that really did remove a lot of the community's concerns about negative impacts 'cause the – the southern array in the – ah, in the initial plans completely encircled a – a – quite a prominent sunrise industry in the shire. So the removal of that really did make a – make a huge difference, I think, to the – the amenity impacts of the – of the overall development.

MR HUTTON: Okay. Thank you.

40 PROF LIPMAN: Can I just follow on. Are – is there any – ah, what are your feelings about, ah, the impact that it could have on prime agricultural land?

MR ABE: Look, it does have some impact 'cause you're removing production.

45 MR CROUCH: Yea, you're – you are removing production from the area. That – that will – two or three thousand hectares by themselves would have a minimal impact.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

MR CROUCH: But when you start removing largescale – and the cumulative impact, I would expect there to be – to be an impact on – you know, we – we’ve just
5 had a local rural supply store come back to town. We haven’t had one probably 10 years or more. It would impact on their income. Um, it will impact on the wool brokers. But, having said that again, if – if the development goes ahead properly, you can run sheep in conjunction with the panels if they’re installed, ah, to the right angles and the right height, all that sorta thing. It would restrict the use of cattle,
10 obviously. They’re – they’re just more destructive beasts. But it – it will have some impact. Yes.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

15 MR CROUCH: Particularly in the cumulative context.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah.

MR CLARKSON: I guess the, um – the issue that I might, ah, see is that there
20 haven’t been any long-terms studies, um, to, ah, address any of the impacts over, say, a 25, 30 – 30 year, um, ah, presence on agricultural land and the rehabilitation after that. Um, one thing I was going to add before, too, just in the name of tourism, um, one thing that I was interested in primarily was whether or not that the community, in alignment with the Z-Net program, could somehow, um, work together to have like a
25 community energy program so that the community isn’t just a recipient of the – the – the business moving in but also a benefit for, you know, every household in the shire and in the neighbouring shires. I mean I think it’s 250,000 homes this, um, project can power.

30 Um, so, to me, that’s always been an interest, you know, in some form, you know, and there was talk about possibly building like a small substation or something like that, um, in alignment with the – the ongoing funding, ah, to the community projects. Um, I imagine that would be something that’d need to be addressed at like a – a regional level, perhaps with the joint regional councils and things like that, um, but
35 that was probably my only other - - -

MR HUTTON: Thank you. Councillor O’Connor.

MR O’CONNOR: I’m prefacing this as a – as a avid gardener, ah, in relation to
40 arrays of – you know, rows of an array will provide a – a huge amount of shade, and in this, um, area, without trees, there is a huge evaporation. So if you go around a garden where there are trees and where – where there is shade and there is rainfall, then that – that moisture stays there for days. So the array will provide shade to preserve, um, the, um, the moisture. So I see a benefit from having artificial shade,
45 um, which will increase the, um, moisture content of the ground which will – will increase the growth of, um, appropriate grasses and that would be, as Councillor Crouch has said, for sheep. That would be a – you know, be a huge increase. And,

in fact, I think you'll find that there'll be a – a dry sheep equivalent arrays in the areas that have got arrays over ones that don't.

MR HUTTON: Okay.

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MR O'CONNOR: So that's just my, um, yeah, expectation from the – the benefit that we get from shade in this area.

MR HUTTON: Thank you, Dave.

10

MR ABE: The – ah, just one – I think it's an important point as part of the restoration at the completion of the life of the development. If it can be returned back to agricultural land, I think that's probably the benefit, and that way the – it's being borrowed for a benefit but also then returns back into production at some phase as well.

15

MR HUTTON: Okay.

20

MS LEDGER: I believe it has a significant impact on our whole community and we need to be duly compensated. Ah, I – I – especially in the tourism industry, as I stressed before, I think that we needed to add something more to that to add to the resilience of the community. Um, there was – we met the community and it was a hard bargain to drive with them and I don't think they are fully satisfied but they're working together with council and they've moved to the southern array, and that's nice, um, but it – it was hard work to get there and there was much resilience, and I think that to prop up our tourist industry, and to help us with our tourist industry and to make sure our tourist industry that's very important in this shire doesn't drop down, that that be looked at, compensated, and – and work together to improve how we can better make an outcome there. Um, and the prime agricultural land as well. I appreciate what David Abe has said today about rehabilitation, to this extent, even the

25

30

MR HUTTON: Okay. Any other questions from the commissioners?

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PROF BARLOW: No. I'm – I'm fine. Thank you.

PROF LIPMAN:

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MR HUTTON: Yeah. Um, thanks, Zada. Tomorrow, we – we're intending to have a, um – an inspection of the site with the applicant. Um, are there any locations that, um, council might recommend in relation to us visiting a particular location you think that'll benefit from us understanding, ah, the lay of the land and the project itself? We'd take – welcome any, ah, input.

45

MR SEYMOUR: Yeah, probably the road – the road in, which you'll have to travel across anyway.

MR HUTTON: Yeah. Yeah. No, we do intend to - - -

MR SEYMOUR: Um, taking particular note of those would be – would be good.

5 MR HUTTON: Yeah. No, we just – we do intend to travel into the development
site via the nominated road routes and we also intend to drive, um, around the
development to sort of get a sense of the scenic value of the region and – and those
sorts of things. So I just thought we'd ask in case there's somewhere that we haven't
10 got on our schedule that would add value to our time on the ground. Councillor
O'Connor.

MR O'CONNOR: Um, I, ah, was – was going to ask you a question about, um,
clause – or condition number 129 which is in relation to the rail, ah, where it says:

15 *The final decision on whether to use rail transport would depend on a number
of factors including timing and logistic sequencing of works and costs and
safety considerations.*

I read that as a – almost a get out of jail clause, um, which says you don't really have
20 to do it unless it really is in your favour. Um, so I would suggest that you should
look at the rail. Um,, it's on figure 1 – ah, figure 2, sorry, the insert, and it's at the –
it's along the rail corridor at the – the south-western end of the triangle in the, ah – in
the northern array. So that's where it is, and you'll see where Big Ridge Road is,
um, which is their main corridor. So I'd like to know how they intend to go from the
25 rail outlet to Big Ridge Road, which is their major entry, ah, and I think you need to
establish that as well because I think – I think they're put in in a place will make it,
um, cost and safety consideration exclusive.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

30 MR O'CONNOR: So, um - - -

MR HUTTON: I appreciate your comments. We don't have a – a – a comment to
make on the location other than that the applicant has advised us in their revised, ah,
35 application that they have introduced the – the rail load at option.

MR O'CONNOR: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: And they spoke to us in, um – in a meeting about the benefits and
40 the opportunities that that might bring.

MR O'CONNOR: Yeah.

MR HUTTON: So we are aware of it and certainly it's something that we're gonna
45 – we'll give consideration to, yeah.

MR O'CONNOR: Yeah. Well, we would have a number of our constituents who – who would be totally in favour, and I know one who would have to say – would say it was absolutely essential.

5 MR HUTTON: In favour of the rail option.

MR O'CONNOR: Rail option, yeah. The rail – anything to do with rail, they – they'd be in favour of.

10 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR O'CONNOR: But I have – I – I see a difficulty getting from the proposed rail spot to their preferred and principal road access.

15 MR HUTTON: Yeah.

MR O'CONNOR: And I don't see – I don't see how it's connected. Ah, it's there and there's the road. So we're talking about - - -

20 MR HUTTON: No. I – I appreciate that comment and we'll – we will take it up with the applicant tomorrow when we're on site.

MR O'CONNOR: That's good. Yeah.

25 MR HUTTON: Um, just to clarify that – that point. So thank you for that.

MR CLARKSON: We have drawn your attention to the, um – the AusRoad standard as the last two sections of the – the road, but if we are travelling out along that tomorrow, I might just encourage you to – to think about that with almost, um,
30 700 vehicles a day going along it and 3.7 metres wide with a lot of those heavy vehicles.

MR HUTTON: Yeah.

35 MR CLARKSON: Just to see - - -

MR HUTTON: No. We will be travelling as – out there as part of the, um – the site inspection, um, but, as it would be, um, this morning myself and Snow have driven along that road so we wanted to have a loo at that as well. So we are aware of the –
40 the – what – what it looks like and the conditions and so forth, so – but certainly that – that'll be something we'll be looking at tomorrow. All right. Well, I might, um – no further questions from the – the panel, I might call the meeting to a close, but before I do, I just thank you very much for your time. We certainly do welcome, as a Commission, the council and councillors' input to the process. As I said, this is part
45 of the – the ongoing process and this afternoon we're – we're having a – a public meeting here in the hall where we'll hear from registered speakers to talk to us

directly about their views. So thank you very much and, um, what I'll do is I'll call the meeting to a close. So thanks very much.

5 **MEETING ADJOURNED**

[2.55 pm]