

BEFORE THE HEARING PANEL

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of Proposed Plan Change 37 - Nukuhau (private) by AN Rajasingham LPT Trustees No 124 Limited anors to the Taupo District Council to rezone c.78ha of land in the Nukuhau area from Rural Environment to a mix of General Residential and Mixed Density Residential with a Neighbourhood Shopping Centre overlay.

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF STEFAN STEYN

Dated 20 OCTOBER 2021

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INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Stefan Steyn. I am a Senior Landscape Architect at WSP.
2. I have the following qualifications relevant to the evidence I shall give:
 - a) I have a Bachelors degree in Landscape Architecture; and
 - b) I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects
3. I have practiced as a Landscape Architect for 18 years. I have 14 and a half years' experience in New Zealand as a Landscape Architect. Prior to that I have had three and a half years' experience in the United Kingdom and one year in the Republic of South Africa.
4. I have a broad skills base with experience spanning across landscape planning, assessment, management and design for a diverse range of projects in both urban and rural contexts.
5. In New Zealand I have practised as a Landscape Architect in Hamilton and Napier, undertaking work for clients from Local and Regional Councils, Central Government agencies such as the Department of Internal Affairs, the Department of Conservation and the New Zealand Transport Agency, energy and infrastructure companies, educational institutions and private developers.
6. I have been engaged by the applicant to provide evidence in relation to landscape effects and urban design in respect of Private Plan Change 37: Nukuhau Private Plan Change (**PC37**).

CODE OF CONDUCT

7. I have read the Environment Court Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014 and agree to comply with it. I confirm that the opinions expressed in this statement are within my area of expertise except where I state that I have relied on the evidence of other persons. I have not omitted to consider materials or facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I have expressed.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

8. My evidence will address the landscape and visual assessment undertaken, the landscape context and visual catchment, the effects on views and visual amenity and various mitigations of those effects.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

9. The PC37 area is located on land adjoining the urban-rural fringe of Taupō. Rural land use activities are generally situated on the mid and upper hill slopes of the caldera. The lower slopes are predominantly residential in nature with lawns, gardens and amenity planting, both native and exotic.
10. Apart from a few stands of trees and shelterbelts both the eastern and western portions of the PPC area have a relatively open pastoral character. It adjoins a predominantly rural land use to the north and west. To the south and east the land use patterns are residential.
11. The PPC area will have a Moderate - Low effect on the existing landscape as it will result in the loss of pasture and the large stand of trees.

12. The PPC area will be seen as a logical extension of the existing urban edge and will achieve a degree of visual coherence. Therefore, the PPC area will have a Moderate - Low effect on the immediate land use patterns.
13. Overall, the effect of the residential development on landscape character and landscape values will be limited and is therefore given a rating of Moderate - Low.
14. Extensive analysis was undertaken in respect of effects on views and visual amenity as recorded in the Report at section 6.2. Identifying multiple viewpoints resulted in effects ranging from very low to moderate.
15. In terms of mitigation, landscape and urban design principles (See Section 2 of the Report) were incorporated into the Layout Plan. These landscape measures will help to minimise or alleviate potential landscape change, and any anticipated negative visual effects that the PC37 area may have on the existing landscape and to integrate the development into the wider environment.
16. The PPC area is not considered to have any significantly adverse landscape or visual effects because of urban expansion on the surrounding landscape character or visual environment and is therefore considered to be consistent with the wider landscape context.
17. Overall, PC37, if developed as proposed with the suggested mitigation, into a residential subdivision with a majority mix of general to medium density properties and smaller areas of reserves and commercial activity, will result in landscape and visual effects that can be considered to be Moderate - Low.

ANALYSIS

18. As part of the preparation of the structure planning for the PC37 area, I was commissioned to assist with a landscape and visual assessment (**LVA**) of the proposed plan change area and its surrounds.
19. In February 2019 I attended a site visit of the PC37 area and the general surroundings. In October 2019 I presented a written report of that assessment which is set out at Appendix G to the Plan Change Application documents (**Report**).
20. The broad landscape context is that of the Taupō Volcanic Zone, which stretches from White Island in the north to Mt Ruapehu in the south. This area encompasses the Taupō caldera, Lake Taupō (the Lake) and three active peaks – Mt Tongariro, Mt Ngāuruhoe and Mt Ruapehu, (the three highest summits in the North Island).
21. On a local scale the landscape is defined by Lake Taupō, gentle sloping to steep hills of the caldera, all of which provides its residents with a sense of enclosure within the wider landscape. Distinguishing characteristics of the landscape is the diverse range of geography, geological and geothermal elements, views of the Lake and dominant features such as Maunganamu, Mt Tauhara, Mt Tongariro and Mt Ruapehu in the distance.
22. The PC37 area is located on land adjoining the urban-rural fringe of Taupō. Rural land use activities are generally situated on the mid and upper hill slopes of the caldera. The lower slopes are predominantly residential in nature with lawns, gardens and amenity planting, both native and exotic.
23. Most of the rural farmland to the north and west of the PPC area has an open rural character that includes pastoral farming, small scale forestry woodlots and rural lifestyle activities with rectilinear shelterbelts. Apart

from a small number of lifestyle properties this rural area is characterised by minimal built development.

24. At the eastern and southern edge of the PPC area, urban land use patterns are diverse and more residential and structured in layout, comprised of general and low density residential and holiday dwellings. The residential properties contain a range of housing sizes and styles, with typical residential amenity gardens. In recent years there has been extensive urban residential development associated with Nukuhau, Rangatira Park and Huka Heights subdivisions.
25. To the south, the Nukuhau residential area is typical of a general density residential development. Immediately to the east of the eastern PPC area and to the north of Huka Falls Road, a small pocket of potentially higher density development is located (the zoning is 'Low Density Residential') but it has Land Use Consents for much higher density than typical in the remainder of the area.
26. Further north and also further down Huka Falls Road, existing low-density development creates a 'soft' urban-rural interface. Other land uses that contribute to the diverse character of the area include some minor commercial activity (local convenience centre), a church and green open space. Open space reserves and stormwater management areas follow existing gullies and provide recreational opportunities. It is clear that all of the surrounding land, both urban and rural has been modified by human activity over the years.
27. Apart from a few stands of trees and shelterbelts both the eastern and western portions of the PPC area have a relatively open pastoral character. It adjoins a predominantly rural land use to the north and west. To the south and east the land use patterns are residential.
28. I consider that the landscape character of the PC37 area is not highly vulnerable to change from earthworks of the scale envisaged by PC37.

Furthermore, it is anticipated that the proposed earthworks will take place gradually or in stages over a number of years, and ultimately blend into the already modified landform of the surrounding residential developments. In addition, once vegetation associated with the new housing development has been established the proposed change in landform will be difficult to discern and the PPC area will appear as an extension of the surrounding residential areas.

29. The PPC area will have a Moderate - Low effect on the existing landscape as it will result in the loss of pasture and the large stand of trees.
30. The PPC area will be seen as a logical extension of the existing urban edge and will achieve a degree of visual coherence. Therefore, the PPC area will have a Moderate - Low effect on the immediate land use patterns.
31. In the wider context, the changes arising from the PPC will result in a change to landform, landcover and landuse. Again, the proposed PPC area is already surrounded on two sides by residential land use activities and represents a continuation of the existing uses in the immediate area. The landscape value of the rural hinterland to the north is limited and not unique within the surrounding landscape and region. The close proximity to these residential environments, the broad scale of the rural pastoral farm land, combined with a low to moderate landscape sensitivity provides good opportunities for the surrounding environment to absorb the PPC area.
32. Overall, the effect of the residential development on landscape character and landscape values will be limited and is therefore given a rating of Moderate - Low.

33. Extensive analysis was undertaken in respect of effects on views and visual amenity as recorded in the Report at section 6.2. Identifying multiple viewpoints resulted in effects ranging from very low to moderate.
34. In terms of mitigation, landscape and urban design principles (See Section 2 of the Report) were incorporated into the Layout Plan. These landscape measures will help to minimise or alleviate potential landscape change, and any anticipated negative visual effects that the PC37 area may have on the existing landscape and to integrate the development into the wider environment.

CONCLUSION

35. Residential development and associated urban-residential activities dominate the land to the east and south of the PPC area. The zone change will permit residential development of the PPC area to expand on the existing urban development patterns by shifting the residential edge 500 m to 700 m further north into the rural environment.
36. The PPC area is not considered to have any significantly adverse landscape or visual effects because of urban expansion on the surrounding landscape character or visual environment and is therefore considered to be consistent with the wider landscape context. Overall, the proposed PPC, if developed as proposed with the suggested mitigation, into a residential subdivision with a majority mix of general to medium density properties and smaller areas of reserves and commercial activity, will result in landscape and visual effects that can be considered to be Moderate - Low.
37. In terms of the s 42A report I consider the points made in the Landscape Assessment report, prepared by Boffa Miskell, 3rd October 2021 (Peer Review Report).

38. In response to the comment with regards to the robustness of the Methodology, I would like to highlight that prior to the *Te Tangi a te Manu Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines* (Guidelines) taking effect, a variety of methodologies were used to produce Landscape and Visual Effects reports. The methodology that was utilised for this Landscape and Visual Assessment report combined the New Zealand Transport Agency's Landscape and Visual Assessment Guidelines, October 2013 (Draft) and the seven point scale of effects based on the draft NZILA assessment methodology. It is important to note that the New Zealand Transport Agency's Landscape and Visual Assessment Guidelines is an industry accepted and recognised methodology however, it is now superseded by the NZILA Guidelines.
39. In terms of the assessment of tāngata whenua values, I would like to specifically point out that the Landscape and Visual Assessment report was written when the Guidelines were still in a draft state and being consulted on. Due to the uncertainty surrounding this matter the tāngata whenua values were not assessed. In addition, the assessment of tāngata whenua values is outside the realm of expertise for Landscape Architects. This is supported in the Guidelines (Final Draft), April 2021 (Paragraph 5.38 to Paragraph 5.43). Therefore, it is my opinion that this matter should be addressed by a suitably qualified expert by means of a Cultural Impact Assessment.
40. I have noted that on Page 15 in the report it is recommended that *“viewshaft management through managing building heights and vegetation patterns is clearly articulated in the Structure Plan.”* In response I recommend that an assessment matter should be introduced into the Structure Plan to require that any application for subdivision demonstrates how streets and open space areas will optimise opportunities for longer

views to the volcanic peaks and the lake. Landscaping plans should demonstrate how this will be achieved in areas where planting is to occur.

Stefan Steyn

20 October 2021