

PROJECT MEMORANDUM



Project: 597 Horahora Road Subdivision [RM240115] **Memo:** 3/R0 **Page:** 1 of 32

Topic: Landscape, Natural Character and Visual Effects

Content: Technical Review and Report to the Consultant Planner

Date: 10 July 2026

Attention: Sydney Harris / Elosie Lonnberg-Shaw (Consultant Planners)

From: Dave Mansergh (Landscape Architect & Recreation Planner)

INTRODUCTION

K. & L. Tylee have applied to the South Waikato District Council for resource consent for 73 Lot rural lifestyle subdivision (plus access and reserve lots) at 597 Horahora Road. The application is supported by an assessment of landscape, natural character and visual effects (“LVEA”) prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LVEA adopts an approach that is broadly consistent with the Te Tangi a te Manu – Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines (“TTatM”) and provides an adequate basis for understanding the nature and scale of potential landscape, natural character and visual effects. It distinguishes between natural character, landscape character and visual amenity, identifies the relevant viewing audiences, and is supported by site visits, photography and ZTV mapping.

I generally concur with the LVEA’s descriptive analysis and its ratings for landscape character and natural character effects. However, I consider that some of the visual effect ratings are slightly lower than I would have applied. This reflects a difference in professional judgement rather than a flaw in the methodology or assessment approach and is not considered fatal to the application.

The LVEA provides a sufficient assessment of the landscape-related statutory provisions, although some tension remains between the Rural Lifestyle Zone, which anticipates rural lifestyle subdivision, and the ONL overlay, which seeks to protect outstanding landscape values. The proposal will result in a permanent change to part of the Horahora ONL, and this should be recognised in the decision-making process.

Cultural landscape matters, including tangata whenua values, cannot be fully resolved by the LVEA in the absence of a Cultural Impact Assessment or direct tangata whenua evidence.

From a landscape perspective, there is no reason why consent cannot be granted, subject to the full implementation of the mitigation package recommended in the LVEA and *Landscape Masterplan* through a clear, enforceable *Landscape, Visual Amenity and Mitigation Planting Plan* (“LVAMPP”) process and associated consent notices.

PURPOSE AND APPROACH

This document has been prepared as part of the review process to assess the content and adequacy of information of the LVA. The purpose of this document is to:

- a. Provide an independent, expert assessment of the adequacy and reliability of the LVA. Specifically, the review serves to:
 - i. Ensure the methods, data, assumptions, and conclusions are robust, methodologically sound, and consistent with accepted best practice.

- ii. Confirm the assessment aligns with the requirements of the relevant statutory provision (landscape only).
- iii. Identify any apparent bias or omissions that may misrepresent the nature or scale of potential effects.
- b. Provide confidence to the hearing panels that the technical evidence can be relied upon when considering the application, and if not, why not?
- c. Highlight limitations or areas where further information or assessment may be required.
- d. Provide advice about appropriate mitigation measures and consent conditions.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

The following documents have been reviewed:

- a. *597 Horahora Road - Subdivision Landscape and Visual Assessment*. 26 June 2026. Revision 4. Boffa Miskell Ltd.

The above document incorporates the landscape, natural character and visual effects assessment (in the main body of the report), assessment methodology (appendix 1), Landscape Masterplan and design guidelines (appendix 2) and the Graphic Supplement (appendix 3).

For this review, the landscape, natural character and visual effects reporting contained in that document is referred to as “**the assessment**” or “**LVEA**”. The latest version incorporates the responses to the requests for further information made during the review process.

Relevant sections of the *Addendum to Application for Subdivision and Land Use Consent – K & L Tylee, RM 240115*, the most recent document provided to Council informing the current application, were reviewed for background information and context. Documents that have been sighted or reviewed and that have now been superseded are not listed.

This review was carried out within the context of the requirements of the RMA, the findings, and recommendations of *Te Tangi a te Manu Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines (TTatM)* and the Quality Planning website. The following factors have been considered:

- a. If the assessment methodology used is consistent with the current accepted (“best practice”) approach to landscape, natural character and visual assessment and has been applied consistently.
- b. If the values and attributes of the existing landscape have been described in enough detail to convey a clear understanding of the existing landscape, then an amenity baseline against which the assessment is undertaken. This should include any differences that exist between the existing physical environment, the consented environment, and the permitted baseline (where applicable).
- c. If the proposal has been described in enough detail to convey how it will alter the existing landscape, and, as part of the landscape assessment, how it will affect visual amenity.
- d. If the effects, including cumulative effects of the proposal on natural character and the landscape (including its visual amenity), have been described and rated consistently, and any relevant issues have been identified.
- e. The accuracy and usefulness of any attached plans, maps, graphics, and visualisations.
- f. If the relevant statutory matters and provisions have been identified and addressed in sufficient detail.
- g. The extent to which any proposed mitigation approach avoids, remedies and/or mitigates any unacceptable adverse effects on the landscape, natural character, and visual amenity values within an acceptable time frame.
- h. If the conclusions and recommendations are supported by the analysis within the assessment.

This review is limited to determining whether the currently accepted approach to landscape, visual and natural character assessment has been followed by determining if it is likely that another experienced landscape architect would reach the same or similar conclusions, by applying the same methodologies given the information presented within the report. *TTatM* states:

A peer review is a focused appraisal of the principal assessment, not a parallel assessment¹.

And

A peer reviewer will typically review the assessment report, make a site visit, and write a short report confirming (or not) that the assessment:

- *follows a sound methodology and method for the purpose*
- *considers the relevant statutory provisions and any relevant 'other matters'*
- *accurately describes, interprets, and evaluates the relevant landscape character and values*
- *analyses the effects on landscape values (for proposal-driven assessments) in a balanced and reasoned way*
- *reaches credible findings supported by reasons*
- *makes appropriate recommendations with respect to findings (depending on the type of assessment).²*

Consideration is given to the scale of the application and the level of detail provided within the landscape assessment. *TTatM* states:

2.12 Specifically, a proposal-driven assessment of effects should be proportionate to the proposal's scale and potential effects consistent with the principle in RMA Schedule 4 (2)(3)(c). An assessment for a small project with incidental effects should be brief, whereas that for a large project with potentially significant effects should be detailed.

REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following a preliminary review of the landscape assessment, a request for further information was made on 22 April 2025. A second request for further information was made on 2 September 2025. Copies of the further information requests (Memo 1/R1 and Memo 2/R0) are attached to the s42A report.

The following review includes consideration of the responses to the further information requests. Where the information submitted as part of the request differs from that contained in the original reporting (e.g. effect ratings), the further information has been assumed to take precedent.

REVIEW OF THE LANDSCAPE & VISUAL ASSESSMENT SUBMITTED IN SUPPORT OF THE APPLICATION

This section of my memorandum assesses the content and adequacy of the landscape assessment (including s92 responses) against the key recommendations contained in the *TTatM*.

The Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises a 73-lot subdivision, plus access and reserve lots, within the Rural Lifestyle Zone ("RLZ"). Lot sizes range from 3,153m² to 2.5567ha, with an average lot size of 5,668m². The subdivision is to be undertaken in three stages. Stage 1 comprises lots 1–15 at the northern end of the site. Stage 2 covers the southern part of the site and comprises lots 63–83. Stage 3 comprises the central part of the site and includes 37 lots plus one reserve lot. It should be noted that the lot numbering from the original scheme has been retained, with some lots removed from the amended proposal.

The LVEA notes that the subdivision design and layout is influenced by site constraints and opportunities, including the irregular shape of the land, the presence of ecological areas, including wetland and native

¹ 6.58 *TTatM*

² 6.61 *TTatM*

vegetation, and the location of suitable access points from the road. The staged approach enables development of the less complex areas first, beginning with Stage 1, before progressing to the southern part of the site and then the larger central area.

Roading to vest is proposed as part of the subdivision and has been aligned to reduce, as far as possible, the number of rear lots. A reserve area is included adjoining the river, providing public access and recreational opportunities for residents and users of the adjacent cycle trail. The reserve is located on lower ground near the river, enabling opportunities for rest stops, picnicking and potential long-term boat ramp access.

The LVEA emphasises that the subdivision design has been “design-led”, with the stated intention of ensuring that the layout, future building design and mitigation planting respond to the unique characteristics of the site and its wider environmental context, while mitigating adverse environmental effects as far as practicable.

Key components of the proposal, as described in the LVEA, include:

- a) 73 rural lifestyle lots ranging from 3,153m² to 2.5567ha, with an average lot size of 5,668m².
- b) Three stages of development:
 - i. Stage 1 – 15 lots at the northern end of the site.
 - ii. Stage 2 – 21 lots at the southern end of the site, comprising lots 63–83.
 - iii. Stage 3 – the central part of the site, comprising 37 lots plus one reserve lot.
- c) A layout influenced by site constraints, including site shape, ecological areas and access visibility.
- d) Roothing to vest, designed to reduce rear-lot formation as far as practicable.
- e) A reserve area adjoining the river, providing public access, cycle-trail connectivity, picnicking opportunities and potential long-term boat ramp access.
- f) A 10m esplanade strip along the lake frontage to provide informal public pedestrian access.
- a) A “design-led” approach intended to integrate subdivision layout, future building design and mitigation planting with the site and environmental characteristics.

TTatM recommends that an outline of a proposal should focus on those aspects of the development that are relevant to the explanation of landscape effects.

Reviewer Comment

The project overview, landscape masterplan, and earthworks plans, together provide sufficient detail to understand and assess the proposal and its effects in the context of the existing environment.

To avoid confusion, it should be noted that the lot numbering from the original scheme has been retained, with some lots removed from the amended proposal; as a result, the plans show lot numbers extending to 83, although the subdivision now comprises 73 residential lots.

Method

TTatM states:

5.02 While landscape assessment methods vary, they are all based on landscape character and values. Character is an expression of the landscape’s collective attributes. Values are the reasons a landscape is valued. Values,

though, are embodied in attributes. Effects are consequences for a landscape's values resulting from changes to attributes. The landscape's values are managed through managing such attributes.³

The landscape assessment states that the assessment process follows the concepts and principles in *Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines* ("TTatM"). A full methodology is included in Appendix 1 of the LVEA, and the assessment adopts a seven-point effects rating scale ranging from very low to very high.

The assessment records that site visits were undertaken on 13 November 2023 and 7 February 2024 to appraise the site's characteristics and establish the viewing catchment and viewing audiences. Photographs were taken on site and from the surrounding area. Access to private properties on the opposite side of the Waikato River was not obtained. A further boat-based site visit was undertaken on 30 May 2025 to view the site and its surrounds from the Waikato River. The LVEA also records that Ms R. Ryder (who has taken over responsibility for the assessment following the departure of Ms. J Soanes from Boffa Miskell Ltd) undertook a further site visit with the project team on 15 May 2026, reviewed the background information, and participated in engagement with hapū and neighbouring property representatives. The assessment has been updated to respond to SWDC requests for further information arising from the peer review process.

Supporting material includes a Graphic Supplement, comprising a site context plan, planning context plan, site layout plan, viewpoint plan, private properties plan, and ZTV diagrams for the combined proposal and each stage. The LVEA is also supported by a Landscape Masterplan, which addresses landscape design intent, broad and site-specific context, the landscape masterplan for Stages 1, 2 and 3, look and feel, connectivity, open space, landscape planting strategy/zones, and lot design matters including built form, colour/material and site design.

Appendix 1 sets out a structured assessment method consistent with TTatM. It separates natural character, landscape, and visual effects, while recognising that these assessments are closely related. Natural character effects are described as changes to the characteristics, qualities and degree of modification of waterbodies and their margins. Landscape effects address changes to landscape character and values, including relevant physical, sensory and associative attributes. Visual effects address how changes to the physical landscape are experienced by viewing audiences.

The method also identifies an iterative design process, where mitigation is considered through the design development process to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects. Cumulative effects are addressed in the methodology, including additional or combined landscape change, and cumulative visual effects experienced in combination, in succession, or sequentially when moving through the landscape.

Reviewer Comment

In my opinion, the methodology adopted in the LVEA and Appendix A is consistent with the principles and recommendations of Te Tangi a te Manu. The structured separation of natural character, landscape, and visual effects, and the use of a seven-point effects scale, are appropriate and align with accepted best practice. The inclusion of multiple site visits, including from the Waikato River, provides a sound basis for understanding the site and its context.

The iterative process is reflected in the masterplan and modifications to the application since it was lodged.

³ 5.02 TTatM

Effects Ratings

The LCVEA uses the following seven-point scale for the rating of effects, consistent with the recommendations of the *Te Tangi a te Manu*. The “less than minor”, “minor”, and “more than minor” thresholds used by the RMA, and the “significant” threshold used within the context of the NZCPS are explicitly defined.

very low	low	low-mod	moderate	mod-high	high	very high
less than minor		minor	more than minor			
					significant ¹⁴	

Figure 1: Boffa Miskell Effect Rating Table.

Reviewer Comment

This allows the consistent identification and comparison of effect levels using a standard scale.

Identification of the Existing Site and Surrounding Landscape and Natural Character Context (The Existing Environment and Relevant Landscape)

Paragraph 5.13 of TTatM recommends the following steps in the identification and analysis of the existing landscape:

- identify the relevant landscape (its extent and context)
- describe and analyse the attributes
- interpret how the attributes come together as the landscape’s character
- evaluate and explain the landscape’s values and the attributes on which the values depend.⁴

Identification of the Relevant Landscape

Paragraph 5.15 of TTatM states:

5.15 Identify the spatial extent of the relevant landscape. This is a key matter that has implications for what is deemed to be an area’s character and values. Differences between assessments are sometimes down to the extent of landscape considered relevant.

The guidelines go on to say:

6.15 Effects are to be assessed at the relevant spatial context (see paragraphs 5.15–5.17). Beware of understatement by diluting effects across an unreasonably wide area or overstatement by concentrating on an unreasonably narrow context.

Reviewer Comment

The LVEA identifies the relevant landscape as the part of the Waikato Lowlands and Waikato River corridor directly affected by the proposed subdivision. This includes the application site itself, the adjoining river terraces, and nearby rural and recreational areas from which the development will be visible. While the relevant landscape is not explicitly mapped, the report includes a 1 km buffer around the site and supporting ZTV mapping, which together identify the area most likely to experience effects. In my opinion, this provides an adequate basis for defining the relevant landscape, consistent with the approach recommended in TTatM.

⁴ 5.13 TTatM

It is noted that some elevated locations outside the 1km buffer may overlook the proposed subdivision and, given its scale, may experience a noticeable change within the visual catchment. These locations are not assessed in the LVEA. However, in my experience, beyond approximately 1km the visual effects of subdivision development typically diminish more rapidly, as the development is increasingly seen within the context of the wider landscape.

Description and Analysis of the Landscape's Existing Attributes, Interpretation of Character and Explanation of Values

The landscape assessment identifies that the site is located within the Waikato Lowlands, a flat and low-lying landscape contrasting with the surrounding hill country. The landscape comprises pasture, hedges, exotic and indigenous trees, and is strongly defined by the Waikato River, which has been extensively modified through hydroelectric development. The dams and associated lakes form distinctive features of the South Waikato, contributing to its identity as both a productive and modified landscape. Dairy farming is the dominant rural land use, with rural lifestyle development occurring along the river terraces, particularly near Horahora Road and Lake Karapiro.

Recreation is an important element, with the Waikato River Trail running past the site along Horahora Road, linking north towards the Pokaiwhenua Bridge carpark and Lake Karapiro, and south towards Arapuni. Recreational facilities in the vicinity include Horahora Domain, which includes a caravan park and water ski club, and Finlay Park Adventure Camp and Epworth Retreat and Recreation Centre, which include river-related recreation facilities such as a slide and jetties.

The site itself comprises 45.61ha of Rural Lifestyle-zoned land between Horahora Road and the Waikato River. It is predominantly used for sheep and beef grazing, with two gullies containing exotic and native vegetation linking to the river. The gullies divide Stages 2 and 3 of the proposed subdivision. The landform includes remnant river terraces, with steeper river slopes at the northern end and through parts of the property, and gentler contours where the site lowers towards the river. Vegetation along the river edge, outside the site, is a mix of mature exotic trees, native revegetation and weed species.

The site includes Significant Natural Area (SNA) buffers associated with riparian gullies and the river edge and is overlain by an Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL) classification. No archaeological or contaminated sites are recorded.

Landform descriptions are provided for each stage of the subdivision. Stage 1 has undulating ground and terracing ranging from 2m to 5m, separated by lower flat areas that provide stormwater flow paths to the river. Stage 2 has undulating ground, smaller terraces up to 2m high, and lower depressions through the middle of the site. Stage 3 contains four distinct terraces, with the northern terrace approximately 23m above the Waikato River water level.

The landscape assessment identifies that the visual catchment varies due to the site's linear form, topography, and existing mature vegetation. Key audiences include residents and rural workers along Horahora Road, Oreipunga Road and Finlay Road, users of local roads, recreational users of the Waikato River Trail, Finlay Park and Epworth Camp, users of the Waikato River, and wider viewing audiences. Rural dwellings on Oreipunga Road are also identified.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) modelling was undertaken using non-ground LiDAR / surface-level mapping, which includes existing topography, buildings and vegetation. The modelling simulates the potential visibility of future buildings, using one observer point for each future lot at a height of 6m, and considers the proposed earthworks. The modelling excludes proposed mitigation planting and is intended to identify the potential visual catchment and inform field assessment, rather than determine the degree of visual effect.

The landscape assessment notes that while the wider Waikato River has been identified as an Outstanding Natural Feature (ONF), the site itself is classified as an Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL).

The Waikato Regional Landscape Assessment identifies the natural character of the Waikato River and Reservoirs as Medium. However, the LVEA describes the site and its surrounding river margin as having a high degree of modification, including productive rural land use, introduced exotic vegetation, existing structures, residential and recreational development, and other human activity. The assessment considers abiotic, biotic and experiential attributes, including landform and river waters, exotic and native vegetation, and visible modifications such as hydroelectric infrastructure, bridges, pylons, floodgates, stop banks and recreation facilities. An ecological assessment by Blue Wattle Ecology identifies most areas as having low to negligible ecological value, with the Stream Gully Link area rated as moderate. These findings have informed the natural character assessment.

Overall, the LVEA concludes that, while the site borders the Waikato River, the proposed subdivision will be experienced in the context of existing rural and recreational modifications and will result in a **low-moderate** adverse effect on natural character.

Reviewer Comment

While the LVEA does not present its landscape analysis under separate physical, associative and experiential headings, these factors are covered substantively within the assessment. Physical attributes are considered through the description of landform, vegetation, existing land use and earthworks; associative values are partially addressed in references to tangata whenua associations with the Waikato River, recreation values, shared and recognised values, and nearby community and recreational facilities; and experiential values are addressed through the analysis of views, visual catchment and audience experiences. The methodology in Appendix 1 also confirms that landscape characterisation should include physical, sensory and associative landscape dimensions, and that natural character assessment involves consideration of biophysical and experiential factors.

In relation to tangata whenua values, the LVEA records that iwi consultation has been led by Cogswell, and that a site visit was undertaken with representatives from Raukawa and Ngāti Koroki Kahukura on 7 February 2024. It also records that Ms. Ryder participated in engagement with Ngāti Koroki Kahukura and Taumatawīwī Trusts.

The LVEA acknowledges the importance of the whenua, the awa and the history of the area to Māori, including the mana of the Waikato River, its identification as an Outstanding Natural Feature, and its role as a living entity with cultural, historical and spiritual associations. It also refers to Raukawa's wider cultural landscape as an interconnected network of mountains, rivers, wetlands and other significant features valued as taonga.

However, the LVEA also records that no formal mana whenua feedback, Cultural Values Assessment or Cultural Impact Assessment had been prepared at the time of the assessment. As such, while the LVEA gives recognition to known tangata whenua associations at a landscape assessment level, it should not be read as a substitute for direct cultural assessment or formal mana whenua advice. The assessment anticipates that engagement and collaborative design with mana whenua will continue through the detailed design of open space and streetscape components, including opportunities for cultural interpretation and landscape design integration. On that basis, the LVEA is incomplete in respect of tangata whenua cultural landscape values. While it provides an assessment of physical, experiential and associative landscape matters within the expertise of the landscape assessor, it does not provide a complete assessment of the whakapapa, cultural sightline, mana whenua relationship or cultural effects matters raised in this submission.

In my opinion, while this approach is broadly consistent with Te Tangi a te Manu and provides sufficient information to understand the nature and magnitude of potential landscape, natural character and visual effects, subject to any further cultural matters raised through ongoing mana whenua engagement.

In my opinion this issue may need to be further addressed through consultation between the applicant and the mana whenua to determine if the effects of the proposal on the cultural landscape can be avoided, remedied or mitigated to an acceptable level

*I concur with the LVEA's finding that, in all other respects, the effect of the subdivision on natural character is likely to be **low-moderate**.*

Statutory Context

The landscape assessment identifies the site is in the *Rural Lifestyle* ("RLZ") zone and subject to the Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL10) overlay. The proposal is located adjacent to the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro and as outlined in the AEE, seeks subdivision consent together with land-use consent for one dwelling and one accessory building per lot, with any additional buildings requiring separate consent. The assessment identifies the statutory policy framework and provisions relevant to the assessment of landscape, natural character and visual effects as including:

- a) Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA): The assessment summarises the Part 2 provisions, with reference to s6(a) (preservation of the natural character of lakes and rivers and their margins), s6(b) (protection of ONFs/ONLs), and s6(d) (public access to and along lakes and rivers). Section 7 (amenity values) and Section 8 (Treaty principles) are also identified as relevant.
- b) The Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS): The assessment identifies the WRPS as a higher order document directing the protection of natural character, the safeguarding of ONLs/ONFs, and the maintenance or enhancement of amenity.
- c) South Waikato District Plan (SWDP): The assessment focusses on the provisions of the South Waikato District Plan, with the following objectives and policies identified as being relevant:
 - i. Rural Lifestyle Zone (RLZ): RLZ-O2, RLZ-O3 (avoid non-rural activities; identify and address effects on the Waikato River and its catchment). RLZ-P3 to RLZ-P5 (provide for lifestyle subdivision in zoned locations; clustering; setbacks from the Waikato River and infrastructure; safeguard landscape, visual amenity, and biodiversity values; manage reverse sensitivity).
 - ii. Ecological / Natural Environment Values (ECO & NATC): ECO-O1 to ECO-O5 (maintain ecological values; safeguard biodiversity; recognise intrinsic values). NATC-O2, NATC-O3 (preserve natural character of lakes and rivers and margins; address catchment effects). NATC-P1 to NATC-P5 (manage adverse effects of land-use; promote land management consistent with natural character; subdivision density/scale/location to preserve natural character; esplanade reserves/strips in priority locations; implement Vision & Strategy for Waikato River).
 - iii. Natural Features and Landscapes (NFL): NFL-O1 to NFL-O5 (protect ONLs/ONFs; maintain amenity in ONLs/SALs; recognise iwi relationships; safeguard Waikato River values). NFL-P1, NFL-P3 to NFL-P6 (promote land management consistent with soil productivity and ONL protection; avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects of vegetation clearance, landform modification, and prominent structures; recognise effects on cultural and spiritual relationships of iwi; implement the Vision & Strategy for the Waikato River).

- iv. Public Access (PA): PA-O1 to PA-O4 (maintain/enhance public access; safeguard natural and recreational values; recognise iwi relationships). PA-P1 to PA-P4 (esplanade reserves/strips in priority locations; implement Vision & Strategy; improve public access to and along rivers; establish and manage public reserves and walkways).
- v. Subdivision (SUB): SUB-O3 to SUB-O5 (safe and efficient subdivision integrated with transport; protection of ONLs; preservation of natural character). SUB-P6, SUB-P7 (avoid inappropriate rural subdivision; enable lifestyle subdivision in zoned locations).
- vi. Urban / Built Environment (UB): UB-P13 (implement Vision & Strategy for the Waikato River by managing subdivision and land-use to protect river health and wellbeing, including setbacks, vegetation/earthworks/stormwater controls, biodiversity maintenance, and esplanade creation).

Non-statutory documents, which inform the statutory provisions, have also been reviewed within the LVEA, including the Waikato Regional Landscape Assessment, which informed the WRPS, and the South Waikato District Landscape Assessment, which informed the SWDP.

The South Waikato District Landscape Assessment (Isthmus, 2009) is described as identifying ONLs, ONFs and SALs, with the site located in *Tirau Hills Character Unit 1*. The assessment discusses Isthmus' 2012 appraisal of the Horahora Road reach, which concluded that Significant Amenity Landscape (SAL) status was more appropriate for the site than ONL status.

The LVEA also identifies that, following submissions on the Proposed District Plan, the property was included within an ONL overlay, contrary to the recommendation of the Isthmus assessor. The assessment notes that this creates a degree of inconsistency between the District Plan mapping and the Isthmus narrative but acknowledges the plan maps as the regulatory framework. The LVEA also notes that there are no localised area or site-specific values identified in the baseline study for the ONL across the site.

The LVEA also records that, at the time of preparation, no Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) had been provided. This is relevant to the assessment of provisions addressing tangata whenua relationships with the Waikato River and associated landscapes.

Reviewer Comment

The LVEA identifies the relevant statutory provisions across the RMA, the Waikato Regional Policy Statement, the South Waikato District Plan, and associated landscape assessments. In my opinion, the LVEA appropriately summarises the key landscape, natural character, visual amenity and public access provisions relevant to the site, including those for the Rural Lifestyle Zone ("RLZ"), Ecological and Natural Character values ("ECO" and "NATC"), Natural Features and Landscapes ("NFL"), Public Access ("PA"), Subdivision ("SUB"), and relevant Waikato River provisions.

The LVEA discusses the ONL status of the site and surrounding landscape. It records that the site was not originally recommended for inclusion within the ONL by Isthmus, but was subsequently included within the ONL overlay following submissions on the Proposed District Plan and further appraisal of the Horahora Road section of the Waikato River. Regardless of that history, the operative South Waikato District Plan confirms that the site is within an Outstanding Natural Landscape ("ONL"), and this forms the relevant statutory planning framework for the assessment.

At the same time, the site is zoned Rural Lifestyle. This creates a degree of tension between the ONL provisions, which seek to protect landscape values from inappropriate subdivision, use and development, and



the RLZ provisions, which provide for rural lifestyle subdivision and development within specifically zoned locations. This tension is recognised in the Issues section of 13.3-RLZ of the OSWDP where it says:

Some of the identified rural lifestyle locations are within identified significant natural areas or identified outstanding or significant amenity landscapes. They also have areas of indigenous biodiversity, and ecosystems with values that should be recognised and provided for. Provisions have been included to recognise and protect the significant natural areas and landscape values of these areas, with a focus on the location and design of residential units. These provisions will also assist toward achieving the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River.

In my opinion, the LVEA appropriately recognises this context by assessing the proposal against both sets of provisions, including the extent to which the subdivision layout, building controls, setbacks, open space, esplanade provision and mitigation planting respond to the landscape and natural character values of the Waikato River and the wider ONL.

The LVEA also identifies provisions relating to the relationship of Raukawa and Te Arawa River Iwi with the Waikato River and the landscapes of the district. It records that no Cultural Impact Assessment has been provided for the application. As such, while the LVEA recognises tangata whenua associations at a landscape assessment level, any outstanding cultural matters remain subject to mana whenua feedback and the wider planning assessment.

Overall, I consider that the LVEA provides a sufficient planning framework to understand how the relevant landscape, natural character, visual amenity, public access and subdivision provisions interact with the assessment of effects. This is consistent with the approach recommended in Te Tangi a te Manu, where statutory provisions help identify the relevant landscape values and frame the assessment of whether effects are appropriate within the receiving environment.

Effects Assessment

The landscape assessment identifies that landscape and visual impacts result from natural or induced changes to landform, vegetation, or the introduction of new structures or activities. These can affect landscape character and quality, amenity, and public or private views. The LVEA states that effects are evaluated as a combination of the sensitivity and visibility of the receiving landscape, together with the scale and nature of the proposed development. The assessment focuses on natural character, landscape and rural character, visual amenity, and consistency with statutory provisions.

The LVEA notes that subdivision inevitably results in a transition to a new form of land use, with consequent changes to character and amenity. In this case, the change is anticipated to some degree given the site's Rural Lifestyle zoning.

The assessment is based on the presumption that the proposed Landscape Masterplan will be implemented successfully.

Natural Character Effects

The LVEA describes the highest levels of natural character as occurring where human modification is least evident. It identifies the adjacent reach of the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro as being modified, with key physical

attributes including the terraced landform and proximity to the lake edge. Experiential attributes include jetties, pylons, maimai, the cycleway, dams, bridges, pasture, exotic trees, rural-residential development and nearby recreational facilities, all of which contribute to the modified context. The assessment identifies that the proposed subdivision would be experienced within this setting and would result in a ***low-moderate adverse effect on natural character***.

Landscape Character Effects

The assessment describes the site as managed farmland without built development, forming part of the rural edge on the eastern side of the Waikato River. The development of the 45.61ha site as a 73-lot rural lifestyle subdivision is acknowledged as resulting in a substantial change to the existing open rural and pastoral character of the site.

At the site level, the LVEA identifies landscape character effects as ***moderate adverse*** after construction and before mitigation establishment, reducing to ***low-moderate adverse*** after mitigation planting has established. At the broader scale, the LVEA concludes that the overall rural landscape character of Horahora and its environs would remain, with subdivision effects largely contained to the site and its immediate context. It considers the broader landscape would continue to be perceived as predominantly rural, with the subdivision read as one of several localised areas of lifestyle and recreational development. Effects on wider landscape character are assessed as ***low-moderate adverse*** after construction, ***reducing to low adverse following mitigation establishment***.

The LVEA also refers to inconsistencies between the ONL classification and the Isthmus report, but notes that the site retains significant amenity values, making it more able to accommodate subdivision compared to other river-adjacent locations.

Identified recommended mitigation measures include:

- a) Retention and enhancement of gullies with native planting.
- b) Integration of planting with river and gully environments to soften built form.
- c) Setbacks from the river to provide buffer and visual relief.
- d) Design controls promoting sympathetic architecture, recessive colours, natural materials, non-reflective finishes, and protection of key viewshafts.
- e) Planting to strengthen riparian and subdivision edges.

Direct Landscape Effects

Earthworks are acknowledged as permanent and involve modification of the site's terraces for roads, swales, and lot platforms. However, the revised LVEA records a substantial reduction in the scale of earthworks, with approximately 72,000m³ of cut to fill across all three stages. Stage 1 involves approximately 40,000m³, Stage 2 approximately 20,000m³, and Stage 3 approximately 12,000m³ of cut to fill. The earthworks are contained within the site and avoid cuts along the river boundary.

While the gullies and some existing vegetation will be retained and enhanced, the existing pastoral vegetation pattern will be substantially altered by subdivision infrastructure, future dwellings, roads, stormwater swales, and mitigation planting. Direct landscape effects are assessed as moderate adverse after construction and before mitigation establishment, reducing to low-moderate adverse after mitigation planting has established. Biophysical vegetation effects are assessed as low-moderate adverse before mitigation establishment, reducing to low adverse once planting has established.

The LVEA concludes that substantial and permanent change will occur within the site and its immediate surroundings, but that the wider rural landform character along the Waikato River will remain largely intact. It considers that mitigation planting, restoration, open space provision and design responses will assist in integrating the subdivision into its landscape context and provide ecological and amenity enhancement.

Visual Effects

The landscape assessment identifies that visual amenity effects depend on the nature of the proposal, the absorption capacity of the receiving landscape, the characteristics of the surrounding area, and the sensitivity of different audiences. Sensitivity is considered to vary depending on factors such as whether the viewer is a resident or a transient user, the nature of the view, the distance, and the likely duration of viewing.

The LVEA states that the subdivision will result in a change from rural farmland to a more developed rural lifestyle environment. Effects will depend on the detailed design of boundary treatments, setbacks, planting, architectural guidelines, and open space/reserve layout. The assessment emphasises that such development is anticipated in the Rural Lifestyle Zone under the District Plan.

Effects from Public Vantage Points

- a) **Horahora Road:** The subdivision will be directly visible where the road approaches and passes the site. While the change will be notable at a local scale, the overall effect on the journey is described as a small modification, with broader views to the Waikato River and Maungatautari retained. Effects are assessed as low-moderate adverse locally, reducing to low adverse overall.
- b) **Waikato River Trail:** Experiences will be like those of road users, although trail users will experience the views at a lower speed. Effects are assessed as low adverse where views of the subdivision are available from the trail, and very low / neutral elsewhere.
- c) **Waikato River:** Views vary depending on stage location. Stage 1 may expose partial views of rooftops, softened by planting. Stage 2 is largely screened by embankments and riparian vegetation. Stage 3 is mostly screened by existing vegetation, although more open views are possible near the proposed reserve. Effects range from very low / neutral where views are heavily screened to low-moderate adverse where more open views are available.
- d) **Finlay Park and Epworth Camp:** Stage 1 may be visible from certain locations above or beyond existing vegetation and river embankments. Stages 2 and 3 are unlikely to be visible due to intervening landform and river embankments. Effects are expected to be low to moderate adverse where Stage 1 views are available following establishment of site-wide planting, and low / neutral elsewhere.

Effects from Private Vantage Points

Effect ratings from the updated LVEA visual effects table are summarised below:

- a) 739, 737 and 735 Horahora Road: These properties are located approximately 200m from the site and look east across Horahora Road towards Stages 2 and 3. Effects are assessed as **low-moderate** adverse during construction, reducing to **low adverse** after mitigation planting has established.
- b) 104 and 1/104 Finlay Road: These properties are close to Stage 1 and are likely to experience open views towards the Waikato River and Stage 1 development. Construction effects are rated as **low to moderate**, reducing to **low adverse** after mitigation planting has established. The assessment also notes that construction effects may be **moderate** for Stage 1 and **low-moderate** for later stages.
- c) Oreipunga Road properties: The LVEA identifies views from several properties on the western side of the river. For 537 and 539 Oreipunga Road, effects are assessed as **low** adverse during construction, reducing to **very low** adverse after mitigation establishment. For 599 Oreipunga Road and 367 / 417 Oreipunga Road,

effects are assessed as **low adverse** during construction and **low adverse** after mitigation establishment. For 289 Oreipunga Road and 389 Oreipunga Road, effects are assessed as **very low** during construction and **very low** after mitigation establishment.

- d) Finlay Road properties: The updated table identifies **low adverse** construction and mitigated effects for 80 Finlay Road and 43 Finlay Road. For 117 Finlay Road and 116 Finlay Road, construction effects are assessed as **low to moderate**, reducing to **low adverse** after mitigation establishment. For 110 Finlay Road, effects are assessed as **very low** during construction and after mitigation establishment.
- e) Wider area properties: For other properties in the wider area, the subdivision may be discernible but is not expected to be prominent or uncharacteristic within the broader rural and Waikato River landscape context. Effects are generally assessed as very low to low adverse, depending on location, distance, intervening landform and vegetation.

The LVEA concludes that the principal audiences affected will be nearby residents, Horahora Road users, Waikato River users, and visitors to Finlay Park and Epworth Camp. The most noticeable changes will be for road users and neighbouring residents, with effects generally ranging from low-moderate to moderate adverse during construction or where close/open views are available, reducing to low or very low adverse following establishment of mitigation planting.

Summary of Effects Table

The Summary of Effects table contained in the LVEA is generally consistent with the detailed narrative assessment of natural character, landscape, and visual effects. It applies the seven-point scale recommended in Te Tangi a te Manu, distinguishes between effect types, and records levels of effect before and after mitigation establishment. In my opinion, the table provides a coherent synthesis of the LVEA findings and presents sufficient information, within the context of the relevant landscape description and planning provisions, to understand the nature and magnitude of effects.

Updated Visual Effects Table

The revised LVEA now incorporates an updated visual effects table that supplements the earlier narrative assessment by identifying additional private properties and providing ratings for both the construction phase and Year 5 following mitigation establishment. For the overlapping properties, the updated table is generally consistent with the LVEA narrative in identifying higher adverse effects during construction that reduce to low or very low adverse following mitigation. For the purposes of this review, the updated ratings contained in the LVEA visual effects table have been adopted.

Reviewer Comments

The assessment separates natural character, landscape character and visual amenity effects, reflecting TTatM's emphasis on treating these strands as related but distinct. It also considers the physical, sensory and associative attributes of the site and its context, consistent with TTatM's recommended framework.

For natural character, the LVEA describes the abiotic, biotic and experiential attributes of the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro corridor. It identifies the relevant river reach as modified, including by hydroelectric infrastructure, farming, rural-residential development, recreation facilities, exotic vegetation and other built elements. While the wider river corridor retains important natural character values, the site itself and its immediate margins are highly modified. This is consistent with my observation of the site and surroundings.

*I concur with the LVEA's finding that the proposal will result in a **low-moderate** adverse effect on natural character.*

For landscape character, the assessment identifies the existing elements, patterns and sense of place of the river corridor and surrounding rural environment, and evaluates the change anticipated from conversion of open pastoral land to rural lifestyle development. The updated proposal reduces the number of lots and the extent of earthworks, particularly within Stage 3, but the proposal will still result in a substantial and permanent change to the character of the site itself. I agree with the LVEA's conclusion that landscape character effects will be greatest at the site and immediate setting, reducing in the wider landscape context where the subdivision will be read as part of a broader pattern of rural, rural-residential and recreational development along the Waikato River.

*For visual effects, the LVEA identifies the key viewing audiences, including Horahora Road users, Waikato River Trail users, Waikato River users, nearby residents, and users of recreation facilities such as Finlay Park and Epworth Camp. The assessment is structured around audience sensitivity, distance, viewing conditions, intervening landform and vegetation, and the likely extent of visibility. The updated visual effects assessment appropriately distinguishes between construction-stage effects and effects following establishment of mitigation planting. Effects are generally greatest for nearby residents and local road users, where close or open views are available, and are lower for more distant audiences. During construction and before the mitigation becomes established, visual effect levels will range between **low-moderate** and **very low**. Following establishment of mitigation planting, most visual effects are assessed as reducing to **low** or **very low adverse**.*

While I consider some of the visual effect ratings to be slightly lower than I would have applied, this reflects a difference in professional judgement rather than a methodological flaw in the LVEA. The assessment has considered the relevant viewing audiences, the nature of available views, the scale of change, and the proposed mitigation measures. On that basis, I do not consider the difference in rating to be fatal to the assessment or to the application. However, it reinforces the importance of ensuring that the recommended mitigation measures and design controls are fully secured, implemented and maintained.

Overall, I consider that the LVEA provides sufficient information, within the context of the relevant landscape description and planning provisions, to understand the nature and magnitude of natural character, landscape and visual effects. The methodology, use of the TTatM seven-point scale, and identification of viewing audiences, supported by site visits, photographs and ZTV mapping, are consistent with best practice and provide an adequate basis for assessment.

Subject to the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the mitigation measures identified in the Landscape Masterplan and design guidelines, the proposal's effects on rural amenity, landscape character and visual amenity can be mitigated to an appropriate level. However, some tension remains between the Rural Lifestyle zoning, which anticipates rural lifestyle subdivision and development, and the ONL overlay, which seeks to protect the landscape from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. Within that context, the assessment is not simply whether rural lifestyle development will change the landscape, as some change is anticipated by the zoning, but whether the scale, layout, design controls and mitigation response are sufficient to ensure that the development is appropriate within the ONL.

In my opinion, from a landscape perspective, the amended proposal, including the reduced lot yield, reduced earthworks, river setbacks, esplanade provision, planting strategy and design controls, provides an adequate response to that tension within the context of the application site. These are broadly consistent with those required for the development of recently rezoned rural lifestyle land at Whakamaru.

I acknowledge however that these measures may not be sufficient to address potential iwi concerns relating to the whakapapa, hīkoi and kōrero tuku iho dimensions of the ONL from a tangata whenua perspective; this cannot be fully assessed within the scope of this review, as the LVEA has not yet had the benefit from a Cultural Impact Assessment.

Statutory Assessment

The statutory assessment considers the proposal against the relevant provisions of the South Waikato District Plan. The assessment notes that the site is zoned Rural Lifestyle Zone (“RLZ”) but also subject to an Outstanding Natural Landscape (“ONL”) overlay.

Within the assessment table, the LVEA evaluates the proposal against the objectives and policies relating to landscape character, natural character, amenity, and subdivision design. The LVEA concludes that:

- a) The proposed subdivision responds to its zoning and is broadly consistent with the purpose of the RLZ.
- b) While the ONL overlay highlights the sensitivity and recognised values of the site, the assessment considers the degree of modification within the local landscape and the mitigation measures proposed.
- c) The proposal will result in localised and moderate adverse landscape and visual effects, but these will be appropriately managed through design responses, planting, and setbacks.

Overall, the assessment concludes that the proposal can achieve the intent of the relevant objectives and policies, and the effects are acceptable within the statutory framework provided by the District Plan.

Reviewer Comments

In my opinion, the statutory assessment addresses the policy framework most relevant to landscape, natural character and visual amenity matters. This restricted focus is appropriate and is consistent with the recommendations of TTatM, given the technical nature of the LVEA. It is not the role of the landscape assessor to undertake a full and balanced evaluation of all relevant planning provisions; rather, it is to provide expert landscape advice to the applicant’s planner.

However, some limitations are evident. While the LVEA identifies a range of provisions that give effect to the Vision and Strategy for the Waikato River, the analysis is necessarily high-level and some matters relating to river health, ecological effects and cultural effects are deferred to other technical assessments or recorded as outside the scope of the landscape assessment. In my opinion, the analysis nevertheless provides sufficient information, within the context of the relevant landscape description and policy framework, to understand the relationship between the proposal, the identified landscape, natural character and visual effects, and the key landscape planning provisions.

With reference to RLZ-P5(a), I do not agree with the LVEA's conclusion that the proposal completely avoids the creation of a lineal development pattern along Horahora roads. However I acknowledge that the narrow and elongated shape of the parent site, constrained between Horahora Road and the Waikato River, offers limited opportunity for a genuinely clustered pattern, particularly within Stages 1 and 2. While the central area has a more clustered internal layout, parts of the proposal retain a linear relationship with Horahora Road and the river corridor. That said, the masterplan's roadside and inter-lot native planting, supported by height and colour controls, the 25m river setback, the retention and enhancement of gullies, and the proposed reserve / esplanade provision, will in my opinion, help soften the road edge, filter views from Horahora Road, and reduce the apparent linearity of built development. In short, while the layout retains linear characteristics, the proposed planting framework and design controls should screen much of the built form and mitigate the associated visual effects.

Further, I would not characterise the proposal as achieving NFL-O2 and NFL-O3 without qualification. The LVEA identifies that the landscape values in this area are associated with the riverbed formations and terraces, the associated escarpment of geomorphic interest, marginal areas of riverine wetlands, and minor areas of indigenous riparian and wetland vegetation. While the amended proposal has reduced the number of lots and substantially reduced the scale of earthworks, particularly in Stage 3, the proposal will still result in permanent modification of parts of the river-terrace landform and a substantial change from open pastoral land to rural lifestyle development.

In my opinion, this highlights the tension between the more enabling provisions of the Rural Lifestyle Zone, which anticipate rural lifestyle subdivision and development in this location, and the Natural Features and Landscapes provisions, which seek to protect ONL values from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. Within that context, the relevant question is not whether the proposal will change the landscape, as some change is anticipated by the zoning, but whether the scale, layout, design controls and mitigation response are sufficient to ensure that the development is appropriate within the ONL.

Subject to the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the mitigation measures identified in the Landscape Masterplan and design guidelines, I consider that the proposal's effects on rural amenity, landscape character and visual amenity can be mitigated to an appropriate level. However, this does not remove the underlying policy tension between the RLZ and ONL provisions, nor does it resolve any outstanding tangata whenua concerns that may arise in relation to the ONL.

Recommendations of the LVEA

The landscape assessment identifies a suite of design controls and mitigation measures intended to manage landscape and visual effects, ensure integration of the subdivision with the Waikato River setting, and maintain an appropriate rural lifestyle character. The LVEA recommends that these measures be secured through a combination of consent notices, consent conditions, design guidelines, private covenants and subsequent design approval processes.

The LVEA identifies that the mitigation measures would be implemented through:

- a) Design Standards:
 - i. The identification of an 800m² building platform on each lot at the time of building consent for the first structure on the property. The principal dwelling and any detached sheds must be located within this

platform. In-ground swimming pools, tennis courts and driveways may be located outside the identified platform.

- ii. A maximum building height of 6m above final ground level, following the earthworks consented as part of the subdivision.
- iii. Colours and materials for all dwellings and accessory buildings to be in accordance with the approved colour chart, with selected colour palettes having a reflectance value of less than 20% for roofs and less than 30% for walls. The LVEA refers to the Resene British Standard 5252 range as a guide only, with all colours and materials requiring approval.
- iv. Detached accessory buildings, water tanks and other vertical infrastructure to be located beside or behind the dwelling when viewed from the Waikato River.
- v. A preference for open frontages facing the river and gully spaces. Where fencing is required, it is to be a maximum of 1.2m high and consist of post-and-rail or post-and-wire/netting fencing.
- vi. Side boundary fencing is not to be placed within the 10m esplanade strip, and continuous public pedestrian access across property river frontages is to be provided for in perpetuity.
- vii. Dark tinted glass is required, with mirror glazing not permitted.

The LVEA recommends that, where these requirements cannot be complied with at the time of building consent, a separate land-use consent should be required.

b) River setback:

- i. All structures are to be set back a minimum of 25m from the top of the bank of the Waikato River.

c) On-lot landscaping:

- i. All “on-lot planting” shown on the Landscape Masterplan must be installed before the Code of Compliance or the principal dwelling is issued.
- ii. The “on-lot planting” must be maintained in perpetuity, with any dead or dying plants replaced as soon as practicable.

d) Boundary interface planting, native trees and site-wide mitigation landscaping:

- i. The boundary interface planting, native trees and site-wide mitigation planting shown on the Landscape Masterplan must be maintained in perpetuity in accordance with the Landscape Implementation and Maintenance Programme.
- ii. Any dead or dying plants must be replaced as soon as practicable.

e) Landscape Design Approval and Design Guidelines:

- i. Future dwellings are to be in accordance with the approved Design Guidelines.
- ii. Lot owners are required to confirm compliance with the Design Guidelines by providing written confirmation from the developer’s representative to Council with the building consent application.
- iii. The Landscape Masterplan anticipates that the Design Guidelines and design review process will be used by property owners, architects, architectural designers, builders, landscape architects and landscapers.
- iv. The approval process is anticipated to require plans and drawings to be submitted to a Design Review Panel before building consent is sought. The Design Review Panel would be able to approve or decline submitted designs where they are not in keeping with the intent of the Design Guidelines.
- v. Information required for design review is expected to include site plans, floor plans, elevations, landscape plans, fencing, service areas, landscape management and maintenance, materials, colours and finishes, and a list of any non-compliances.

f) Landscape, Visual Amenity and Mitigation Planting Plan (“LVAMPP”):

- i. A LVAMPP is to be prepared and submitted to Council as a condition of consent and certified prior to s224 or each stage.

- ii. The LVAMPP is to be in general accordance with the Landscape Masterplan submitted with the consent.
 - iii. The Landscape Masterplan records that the LVAMPP is to be developed in consultation with ecologists and mana whenua.
 - iv. The LVAMPP must include:
 - detailed landscape and planting plans for the development, including site-wide planting, on-lot planting and tree options;
 - specific consideration of the western boundary / Waikato River interface and gully frontages, including any requirements for lots located along the river interface;
 - a schedule of species to be planted for site-wide mitigation, including botanical and common names, numbers, locations, spacing, plant sizes at time of planting, planting densities, expected average heights after 10 years and at maturity, timing of planting, and existing planting to be retained;
 - an implementation and maintenance programme prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect;
 - measures to minimise clearing or storing of existing topsoil, to preserve soil quality for placement and planting;
 - proposed site preparation and plant establishment methods; and
 - ongoing and long-term vegetation maintenance and monitoring requirements.
- g) Implementation of the approved LVAMPP:
- i. The certified LVAMPP is to be implemented in accordance with the approved staging.
 - ii. Boundary interface planting, native trees and site-wide mitigation planting must be planted in accordance with the LVAMPP prior to the issue of s224 for each stage.
 - iii. Boundary interface planting, native trees and site-wide mitigation planting must be implemented within a planting season, identified as April to September.
 - iv. A consent notice is to be registered requiring future implementation of the LVAMPP for the on-lot planting areas.

Reviewer Comment

I am in general agreement with the recommendations contained in the landscape assessment, subject to tidying the wording of the recommended conditions of consent to ensure clarity, enforceability, and alignment with Council certification processes.

THE LANDSCAPE MASTERPLAN

The Horahora Road Subdivision Landscape Masterplan, Revision E, sets the landscape and built-form framework for the amended rural lifestyle subdivision. although the Masterplan retains some earlier lot-numbering references, making it slightly confusing, it is consistent with the LVEA and shows the proposal as comprising 73 residential lot. Its purpose is to ensure that the development integrates with the surrounding Waikato River / Lake Karapiro setting while enabling rural lifestyle use.

The Masterplan includes context mapping, an overall masterplan and staged plans, and thematic sheets addressing landscape design intent, look and feel, connectivity, open space, planting strategy and zones, and lot-level design guidance. It also outlines a design approval process intended to secure the built-form, planting and site-design outcomes relied on by the LVEA.

The Masterplan contains both core mitigation measures and broader design-quality guidance. The mitigation measures critical to the assimilation of the proposal into the wider landscape context are those that directly

manage the scale, location, visibility, reflectivity, screening and landscape integration of the subdivision, and which are relied on by the LVEA to reduce landscape, natural character and visual effects. Other elements are more concerned with achieving a coherent look and feel for the subdivision and supporting a high-quality rural lifestyle outcome. While those matters may assist the overall presentation and marketability of the development, they are less important from a landscape mitigation perspective unless they materially affect the prominence of built form, the treatment of key interfaces, or the establishment and maintenance of the planting framework.

The critical mitigation features include the reduced size of the subdivision (through the amended application) layout and staging, retention and restoration of gully areas, the proposed river-edge reserve and 10m esplanade strip, the 25m building setback from the top of the Waikato River bank, site-wide native mitigation planting, Horahora Road boundary interface planting, on-lot planting, clusters of native trees, ecological reserve and gully planting, open or low rural-style fencing along river and gully interfaces, the 800m² building platform, 6m building height limit, recessive colour and reflectivity controls, dark tinted glazing, avoidance of mirror glazing, and the location of accessory buildings, water tanks and other vertical infrastructure beside or behind dwellings when viewed from the Waikato River.

In terms of the configuration of the proposal, open space is structured around a river-edge reserve and the proposed 10m esplanade strip, providing informal public access along the lake frontage (although in many areas this will not be physically possible). Gully areas, ecological reserves, existing wetlands and natural feature protection areas are retained and restored as part of the wider green network. Shared path links, proposed cycleway and walkway connections link internal streets with Horahora Road, the Waikato River Trail and the river edge.

Planting is predominantly native and tiered, including herbaceous plants, shrubs, canopy trees and emergent trees. The planting strategy is intended to reinforce local identity, enhance ecological function, filter views of built form and integrate the development with the existing landform and river corridor. The Masterplan identifies planting zones including planting and natural feature protection areas, ecological reserve planting, Horahora Road boundary interface planting, site-wide mitigation planting, on-lot amenity planting and clusters of native trees.

Built form is to be controlled to reduce visual prominence and maintain an appropriate rural lifestyle character. Each lot is to contain an 800m² building platform. Maximum building height is to be 6m above final ground level, and structures are to be set back at least 25m from the top of the riverbank. Colours and materials are to be recessive and non-reflective, with indicative LRV limits of less than 20% for roofs and less than 30% for walls. Dwellings are to sit with the landform, and accessory buildings, water tanks and vertical elements are to be located beside or behind the dwelling when viewed from the Waikato River. Fencing on river and gully interfaces is to remain visually open, using rural-style fencing to a maximum height of 1.2m where required.

The Masterplan shows that road verges, accessways, reserve edges, gully margins and on-lot areas will be planted to create a continuous vegetated framework. Stormwater swales and earthworks are to be integrated with the landscape structure, with the gully landforms and river embankment retained and supplemented by planting.

The LEVA recommends that the masterplan be developed and implemented though a consent condition that requires the production of a *Landscape, Visual Amenity and Mitigation Planting Plan* ("LVAMPP"), to be submitted to the Council for certification before the s224 process for each stage.

Consent notices and design guidelines are intended to secure the key lot-level controls, including building platforms, setbacks, height, colours and materials, fencing, landscape planting and design approval. The

Masterplan anticipates review by a Design Review Panel before building consent, with written confirmation of compliance provided to Council.

Collectively, these measures are intended to integrate the subdivision within the Waikato River corridor, enhance gully and riparian landscape values, maintain an appropriate rural lifestyle character, and provide a clear implementation pathway for the mitigation relied on by the LVEA.

Reviewer Comment

The Landscape Masterplan uses native mitigation planting as the primary tool to reduce the scheme's linear appearance along Horahora Road. Rather than relying on a continuous hedge, it applies staggered bands and inter-lot clusters of native planting with varying depth and height, punctuated by taller canopy trees. This interrupts sightlines, breaks the frontage into shorter visual units, and counters the impression of a single ribbon of lots. On-lot structure planting extends the visual filter behind the road edge toward the river, further softening building edges in views from the road and trail. Because the planting is to be established early and maintained, with replacement of losses, the screening effect is expected to increase over time and assist the subdivision to integrate into the landscape.

In my opinion, the mitigation package needs to be implemented as a whole to achieve the landscape, natural character and visual outcomes relied on by the LVEA. This is particularly important given the site's ONL status. The successful integration of the proposal into the landscape depends on the integrated mitigation package contained in the masterplan including screen planting, integration planting, building setback distances from the river, building height limits, recessive colour and material controls, fencing controls, on-lot planting, Horahora Road boundary interface planting, site-wide mitigation planting, gully and ecological reserve planting, and long-term maintenance.

If key elements of that package are omitted, weakened or not maintained, the ability of the proposal to integrate into the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro landscape would be reduced. The proposed LVAMPP process is therefore a critical mitigation mechanism, as it is intended to translate the Masterplan into detailed planting plans, species schedules, implementation requirements, maintenance and monitoring.

If consent is granted, I recommend that the conditions include clear and enforceable landscape requirements for the preparation, certification, implementation and maintenance of an LVAMPP, prepared generally in accordance with the Landscape Masterplan and the recommendations of the LVEA. A set of draft landscape conditions is appended to this report.

I agree with the LVEA recommendation that the LVAMPP should be certified prior to s224 for each stage and that site-wide mitigation planting be implemented prior to s224 for each stage, with consent notices used to secure future implementation of on-lot planting areas.

SUBMISSIONS RECIEVED

33 Submissions on the application were received by the Council, of which 29 have been identified as raising issues relating to the effects of the proposal on the landscape, natural character, visual character and amenity. These are submissions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33.

It should be noted that the submission period closed before the proposal was amended to reduce the number of residential lots from 81 to 73. Accordingly, references in the submissions to 80 or 81 lots, 160 or 162 potential dwellings, and larger earthworks volumes should be read considering the amended proposal assessed in the

revised LVEA, which comprises 73 residential lots, reduced earthworks, particularly in Stage 3, and a 10m esplanade strip along the lake frontage.

The submissions raise a broad and consistent set of landscape, natural character, visual amenity and rural character concerns. Many submitters are concerned that the proposal would change the existing open rural and river-edge character of the site, introduce a more suburban or urban pattern of development, and reduce the amenity currently experienced from Horahora Road, the Waikato River Trail, neighbouring properties and the wider Waikato River / Lake Karapiro setting.

The summary table (Smartsheet) indicates that several submissions raise concerns about the loss of natural or rural landscape values. The main landscape, natural character, visual and amenity issues raised in the submissions can be summarised as follows:

- a) Scale, density and fit with the receiving environment
 - i. Concern that the proposal is too intensive for its rural and river-edge setting.
 - ii. Concern that the proposal would appear urban, suburban or quasi-urban, rather than rural lifestyle in character.
 - iii. Concern that approval could contribute to further rural-residential development along the Waikato River corridor.
- b) ONL status and Waikato River setting
 - i. Concern that the site's ONL status and its relationship with the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro require a more landscape-led design response.
 - ii. Concern that the proposal would not adequately protect ONL values, particularly in relation to earthworks, river terrace landform, visual prominence and built development close to the river corridor.
- c) Rural character, amenity and sense of place
 - i. Concern about loss of open rural character, rural spaciousness, peace, quietness and existing rural views.
 - ii. Concern that the proposal would change the character of Horahora Road and the Waikato River valley from rural / pastoral to rural-residential or suburban.
- d) Landform and earthworks
 - i. Concern that earthworks would permanently alter the river terrace landform.
 - ii. Concern that modification of the terraces would affect features that contribute to the site's landscape values and ONL status.
- e) Visual effects and views
 - i. Concern about views from Horahora Road, the Waikato River Trail, the Waikato River, neighbouring properties and land on the opposite side of the river.
 - ii. Concern about the visibility of dwellings, accessways, lighting and domestic elements, and the potential loss of rural and river outlooks.
- f) Planting and design controls
 - i. Concern that planting and design controls may not be sufficient to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects.
 - ii. Concern about whether planting is sufficiently strategic, whether it addresses wider landscape effects, and whether mitigation can be secured and maintained over time.
- g) Public access and Waikato River Trail amenity

- i. Concern that the proposal should provide improved public access to and along the Waikato River, including potential realignment or extension of the Waikato River Trail.
- h) Cultural landscape and tangata whenua values
 - i. Concern about effects on cultural landscape values, including relationships with the awa, whakapapa, cultural sightlines, access and the cumulative pattern of development along the river margin.
- i) Construction and temporary amenity effects
 - i. Concern about construction effects, including visual disruption, dust, noise and traffic.
 - ii. Concern that, given the likely duration of staging, these effects should not be treated as short-term or temporary only.
- j) Lighting and night-time amenity
 - i. Concern about light spill, loss of rural darkness and cumulative night-time effects.

Review of the Substantial Submissions

The substantial submissions (i.e. those supported by additional information contained in the pdf file available on the Council Website) generally raise concerns about the scale and density of the proposed subdivision, the ONL, the relationship of the site to the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro, loss of rural character, effects on visual amenity, landform modification, and the adequacy of the proposed mitigation planting and design controls.

Submission 12 (P. Martin) raises concerns about the visual, landscape, natural character and amenity effects of the proposal on the Horahora Valley / Waikato River setting. The submission considers that the valley would be “irreparably visually marred”⁵ by development with a “distinctly suburban appearance”⁵, and that this would be incongruous within the ONL. It also raises concerns that the design lacks sensitivity to the existing landscape, that linear lot boundaries and planting patterns would reinforce a suburban character, and that the proposed planting is “insufficient to mitigate the visual impacts”⁶ of the development. The submission also identifies concern with earthworks effects on the river-formed terraces, construction duration and the loss of views to the awa.

While the submitter strongly opposed the application the submission requests that “*Should the subdivision be approved, it is requested that provision be made within the consent to route the Waikato River Trails along the riverbank...*”⁷

Reviewer Comment

The amended application appears to address some of the landscape, visual amenity and public access concerns raised by this submission. In particular, the revised LVEA records that the proposal has been reduced to 73 residential lots, incorporates a “substantial reduction in the scale of earthworks, in particular Stage 3”⁸, and includes a 10m esplanade strip along the lake frontage for public access. These amendments address, at least in part, the submitter’s concerns about the scale of development, visual prominence, landform modification, effects on the river terraces, and the absence of public access along the Waikato River corridor.

The revised LVEA and Landscape Masterplan also provide a more developed mitigation framework than the proposal described in the submission. This includes the 25m river setback, site-wide native mitigation planting,

⁵ Para 1 – Submission 12 – Peter Martin ++

⁶ Para 7 IBID

⁷ Para 9 IBID

⁸Page 1 - LVEA

on-lot planting, clustering of native specimen trees, the 800m² building platform, 6m building height limit, colour and material controls, water tank and accessory building location controls, low rural-style fencing, and the LVAMPP process. These measures address the submitter's concerns that the subdivision would have a suburban appearance, that planting would be insufficient, and that natural landforms and strategic planting groupings had not been adequately used to soften and integrate the development.

However, the amendments do not fully remove the concerns raised. The proposal will still result in a clear change from open rural land to rural lifestyle development, and the success of the mitigation relies on the full implementation and long-term maintenance of the planting and design controls. The submission also seeks routing of the Waikato River Trail along the riverbank. While the amended proposal includes a 10m esplanade strip, the practicality and extent of any future trail alignment along the river edge will need to be addressed through the planning and access assessment.

Submission 23 (Bates Family Trust) raises detailed concerns about the site's ONL status, its adjoining relationship with the Waikato River ONF, and the extent to which the proposal responds to its landscape setting. The submission states that *"the landscape should be a principal driver of subdivision design"*⁹ and considers that the proposal would create *"ribbon development along the river corridor and along Horahora Road"*¹⁰. In the submitter's view, the proposal has not been designed to retain the "rural amenity and look" of the valley, does not adequately safeguard landscape character, visual amenity or biodiversity values, and is "unsympathetic to the current landform and landscape".

The submission also raises concern that the proposed earthworks would permanently transform the valley landform, particularly within Stage 3. It states that the final landform would be *"entirely different from that which exists at present with natural contours removed and building platforms raised to the same height as Horahora Road"*¹¹. Related concerns are raised about the adequacy of mitigation, including that the landscape plan does not provide sufficient planting, there is *"...no apparent design continuity in landscape treatment or consistency in fencing or site layout"*¹², and there are *"...no clear mechanisms for ensuring design outcomes are achieved and maintained in perpetuity"*¹³.

The submission further identifies uncertainty around the visual effects of future development, including the absence of defined building platforms and access locations, and the potential for additional built form through detached minor residential dwellings. It states that the increased density of development would cause adverse visual effects when viewed from 735 Horahora Road, *"especially after the existing commercial tree crop is harvested"*¹⁴.

In terms of amenity and character, the submission states that the development will *"adversely affect the amenity and character of the valley both temporarily and permanently"*¹⁵. It also raises concern that the proposal does not provide for an esplanade reserve, stating that there is *"no justification for failing to provide a 10m esplanade reserve"*¹⁶ where the site is within an ONL and adjoins an ONF. The submission seeks relocation of the Waikato River Trail onto esplanade reserve land, or equivalent land within the site where river-margin access is not practical, to provide public access along the Waikato River corridor and enhance the WRT. It also raises concern that there are no proposed controls to address temporary effects associated with the development.

⁹ Para 4 – Submission 23 Bates Family Trust.pdf

¹⁰ Para 5 IBID

¹¹ Para 6 IBID

¹² Para 8 IBID

¹³ Para 9 IBID

¹⁴ Para 13 IBID

¹⁵ Para 14 IBID

¹⁶ Para 15 IBID

Issues relating to the effect of earthworks on the ONL, the extent to which the proposal is consistent with the relevant policy provisions and temporary effects are also raised.

Reviewer Comment

The amended application appears to address some of the landscape, amenity and public access concerns raised by this submission. In particular, the revised LVEA records a reduction in the proposal to 73 residential lots, a substantial reduction in the scale of earthworks, especially in Stage 3, and the inclusion of a 10m esplanade strip along the lake frontage for public access. These amendments address, at least in part, the submitter's concerns about excessive density, landform modification, absence of esplanade provision, and the need for the proposal to better respond to the Waikato River / ONL setting.

The revised LVEA and recommendations also provide greater certainty around the design and mitigation framework than was available when the submission was made. This includes the requirement for an 800m² building platform on each lot, a 6m maximum building height, recessive colour and reflectivity controls, location controls for accessory buildings and water tanks, open or low rural-style fencing, dark tinted glazing, the 25m river setback, site-wide mitigation planting, on-lot planting, and the LVAMPP process. These measures address the submitter's concerns about insufficient planting, lack of design continuity, uncertainty around building platforms, and the need for mechanisms to secure and maintain design outcomes over time.

However, the amendments do not remove all the issues raised. The proposal will still result in a permanent change from open pastoral land to rural lifestyle development, will retain some linear characteristics along Horahora Road and the river corridor, and will still rely heavily on the successful implementation and long-term maintenance of the mitigation package. Accordingly, if consent is granted, the matters raised in this submission reinforce the need for clear and enforceable conditions securing the LVAMPP, planting implementation, built-form controls, fencing controls, and ongoing maintenance.

Submission 24 (C. and J. Hogg) raises concerns about the scale and density of the proposal, its non-complying activity status, and the potential precedent it could create for further rural-residential development. The submission raises concern that granting the proposal will set a precedent for other proposals and will result in increased urban sprawl. It also raises concerns about effects on tourist and recreation experiences, stating: "This subdivision replaces the "remote" and "undisturbed" experience visitors seek with a suburban landscape, compromising the tranquil amenity of the Little Waipa Reserve and the wider tourism appeal of the Arapuni area."¹⁷

Reviewer Comment

The amended application addresses some of the scale and visual amenity concerns raised by this submission, through the reduced lot yield, reduced earthworks and expanded mitigation package. However, the submission's concerns about the proposal's suburban character, potential effects on the Waikato River Trail experience, and loss of tranquil rural amenity do not appear to be fully resolved.

Submission 28 (Outdoor Access Commission) raises concerns about public access, landscape character, visual amenity and the recreational experience of Waikato River Trail users. The submission states: "The proposal provides insufficient public access to mitigate the effects the subdivision will have on the landscape character and visual amenity for users of the Waikato River Trail."¹⁸, and that the current river trail alignment along Horahora Road would be adversely affected by the proposal. It also notes that the Waikato River Trail is

¹⁷ Para 7 – Submission 24 – C & J Hogg.pdf

¹⁸ Para 6 – Submission 28 – Rachel Cook, Outdoor Access Commission.pdf

elevated in places, allowing for extended rural and river views, and considers that subdivision development over time is likely to obscure these views, altering the landscape character and visual amenity experienced by trail users.

The submission strongly supports public access to and along the Waikato River, describing the subdivision as a “clear and important opportunity to secure permanent public access along the river margin”¹⁹. It states that access along the river is not only about physical access to water, but also provides for walking, viewing, resting, ecological restoration, cultural recognition, and future adaptability. The submission considers that an esplanade reserve, public access easement or other public access instrument would provide a public amenity margin and enable people to “walk alongside, view, appreciate, and reconnect with the river”²⁰.

The submission identifies the proposal as a strategic opportunity to improve the Waikato River Trail that should be enhanced. It promotes relocating the river trail away from Horahora Road and closer to the river margin to improve safety, reduce conflicts with traffic and new driveways, and enhance the recreational experience for trail users and future residents. It also raises concern that, without an alternative route, trail users may be exposed to construction disruption and safety risks over an extended period, which it does not consider to be temporary.

Overall, the key landscape and amenity concern is that the subdivision could diminish the rural, river-edge and recreational experience of the Waikato River Trail unless permanent, practical public access is secured along the river corridor. The submission seeks either public access to and along the Waikato River as part of the subdivision or decline of the application on the basis that it fails to mitigate landscape character and visual amenity effects and does not meet public access expectations.

Reviewer Comment

The amended application addresses some public access concerns through the proposed 10m esplanade strip along the lake frontage. However, it does not include realigning the Waikato River Trail from Horahora Road through the subdivision or along the river margin. This is probably due to steepness of the riverbank and may be difficult to achieve.

The submitter’s concerns about the rural character and visual amenity experienced from the existing trail (and safety concerns relating to driveways) therefore remain relevant.

Submission 30 (Ngaati Koroki Kahukura Trust) raises cultural landscape concerns centred on the Waikato River, tangata whenua relationships with whenua and waterways, and the proposal’s potential effect on ancestral landscape values. The submission identifies the site as part of “a coherent ancestral landscape centred on the Waikato River”²¹, including the awa as a tuupuna, intervening whenua, pā sites across the river, and sightlines to Ngaati Koroki Kahukura’s ancestral maunga, Maungatautari. It describes this as “a whakapapa-connected system, not an isolated site”²¹, and states that the proposal would disrupt key sightlines and relationships, fragment the integrity of the landscape and diminish the mana of the area.

The submission also identifies that a Cultural Impact Assessment led by tangata whenua has not been adequately undertaken, resulting in uncertainty about the proposal’s cultural effects.

¹⁹ Para 9 IBID

²⁰ Para 11 IBID

²¹ Section 7 – Submission 30 - Ngaati Koroki Kahukura Trust.pdf



Reviewer Comment

The submission raises cultural landscape matters that cannot be fully resolved through a landscape review alone. The LVEA acknowledges tangata whenua associations with the Waikato River and records that, at the time of preparation, no formal mana whenua feedback, Cultural Values Assessment or Cultural Impact Assessment had been prepared for the application. It also records “Unknown” against provisions relating to the relationship of Raukawa and Te Arawa River Iwi with the landscapes of the district, noting that “No CIA has been provided for this application”.

On that basis, the LVEA is incomplete in respect of tangata whenua cultural landscape values. While it provides an assessment of physical, experiential and associative landscape matters within the expertise of the landscape assessor, it does not provide a complete assessment of the whakapapa, cultural sightline, mana whenua relationship or cultural effects matters raised in this submission.

In my opinion this issue is may need to be further addressed through consultation between the applicant and the Ngaati Koroki Kahukura Trust to determine if the effects of the proposal on the cultural landscape can be avoided, remedied or mitigated to an acceptable level .

Submission 33 (Raukawa Charitable Trust) raises concerns about along the awa where it says: “Raukawa have fundamental concerns with the ongoing pattern of rural residential development along the margins of our awa. We are seeing more and more of this type of zoning and development, and the effects are cumulative. The awa is a taonga, and its margins are not just land for development — they are places where our relationship with wai is expressed and maintained.”²²

The submission raises specific concerns about the linear form of the proposal. It states that the Rural Residential Zone anticipates “a more clustered and integrated form of development, with consideration of natural features, open space, and amenity values, rather than long, linear patterns of subdivision along sensitive areas such as river margins”²³. It considers that the proposal enables residential lots to back directly onto the awa, and says: “This is not a clustered form of development and does not reflect a design response that responds to the landscape or the cultural significance of the river. Instead, it creates a long stretch of private lots along the river edge.”²⁴

The submission also raises concerns about access and esplanade provision. It states that the absence of an esplanade reserve or strip is not a minor technical matter and affects Raukawa’s ability to maintain an ongoing relationship with the awa. It further states that access does not always require direct contact with the water, but does require the ability “...to be present alongside the awa, to observe it, and to maintain an ongoing and living relationship with it”²⁵.

The submission seeks decline, or significant redesign, including an esplanade reserve or strip providing safe, practical and continuous access along the river corridor, avoidance of long linear development, and a more clustered and integrated layout.

²² Para 3.1 - Submission 33 - Raukawa Charitable Trust.pdf

²³ Para 5.1 IBID

²⁴ Para 5.2 IBID

²⁵ Para 6.2 IBID

Reviewer Comment

The amended application appears to partially address some of the access, intensity and landscape integration concerns raised by this submission. In particular, the revised proposal reduces the number of residential lots, reduces the extent of earthworks, particularly in Stage 3, and includes a 10m esplanade strip along the lake frontage.

However, the amendments do not fully resolve the matters raised by Raukawa. The proposal will still result in rural lifestyle development along a substantial length of the awa, and the extent to which the esplanade strip provides safe, practical and continuous access remains a matter for the planning and access assessment. More importantly, the submission raises cultural landscape matters relating to Raukawa's relationship with the awa, kaitiakitanga, cumulative river-margin development and the ability to maintain a living connection with the Waikato River.

As with the Ngaati Koroki Kahukura Trust submission, this issue is may need to be further addressed through consultation between the applicant and the Raukawa Charitable Trust to determine if the effects of the proposal on the cultural landscape can be avoided, remedied or mitigated to an acceptable level .

Comments on the Submissions Received

In most cases the submissions reinforce issues already identified in the LVEA or through the peer review process, including the proposed change to the site's existing landscape rural character, the appropriateness of rural lifestyle subdivision within an ONL, effects on the natural characteristics of the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro setting, effects on public and private views, the adequacy of mitigation planting and design controls, and the need to secure mitigation outcomes over time.

TTatM recognises that sensitivity to change is a relevant consideration when assessing landscape and visual effects. In relation to visual effects, the LVEA methodology, states that the sensitivity of the viewing audience is assessed by considering the likely response of that audience to change and the value attached to views. It also notes that sensitivity may be influenced by factors such as whether the viewing audience comprises residents or motorists, the existing and likely future character of the view, viewing distance and duration.

The number of submissions raising landscape character and visual amenity concerns suggests that observer sensitivity to change is high, particularly where submitters have an existing relationship with the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro setting, Horahora Road, the Waikato River Trail, nearby dwellings, or the wider rural landscape.

While this does not determine the level of effect on its own, it is a relevant factor when considering how the proposed change will be experienced by affected viewing audiences.

The cultural landscape submissions raise matters beyond conventional visual or biophysical landscape assessment, including whakapapa, cultural sightlines, relationships with the awa, and cumulative effects of river-margin development. These matters cannot be further resolved by the LVEA without a Cultural Impact Assessment or direct tangata whenua evidence and therefore identify an important limitation in the available assessment material.

The amended application appears to address or partially some of the matters raised in the submission, however the extent to which the revised application addresses submitter concerns will need to be considered further at the hearing, following the presentation of submitter evidence.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In my opinion, the LVEA adopts an approach that is consistent with the recommendations of Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines. The assessment distinguishes between natural character, landscape character, and visual amenity, and considers relevant physical, biotic, and experiential attributes, supported by site visits, photographs, and ZTV mapping. This provides an adequate basis for understanding the nature and scale of potential effects.

The relevant landscape is identified through the mapped 1 km buffer and ZTV analysis, which together provide a reasonable indication of those parts of the landscape most likely to be affected by the proposal. While the LVEA does not explicitly structure its analysis under the headings of physical, associative, and experiential factors, these matters are addressed in substance, and the relevant viewing audiences are appropriately identified.

The assessment concludes that effects on natural character will be **low–moderate** adverse, landscape character effects will be **moderate** adverse within the site and **low–moderate adverse** at the wider landscape scale, and visual effects will range from **moderate adverse** for nearby residents and road users to **low** or **very low adverse** for more distant audiences. These findings are generally consistent with TTatM guidance and are supported by the ratings in the updated section 92 response, which has been adopted for this review.

As previously outlined, I concur with the descriptive analysis and the landscape character and natural character effect ratings applied in the LVEA. However, I consider that some of the visual effect ratings underestimate the likely level of visual effect.

The statutory assessment section of the LVEA addresses provisions of the South Waikato District Plan that are most relevant to landscape, natural character, and visual effects. While the analysis is broadly consistent with the relevant policy framework, some gaps are evident, particularly in relation to subdivision, ecological, and Waikato River provisions. Nonetheless, the assessment provides sufficient information to link the identified effects back to the policy framework, and to enable an understanding of how the proposal performs against the relevant landscape and amenity planning provisions.

While the LVEA concludes that all relevant planning provisions are achieved, I do not consider the proposal delivers all the outcomes those provisions seek. The divergence largely reflects an internal tension in the District Plan between preserving the ONL's characteristics and values and the enabling intent of the Rural Lifestyle Zone. This tension warrants careful consideration by the Commissioner(s).

Overall, I find that the LVEA applies an appropriate methodology, is broadly consistent with best practice guidance, and provides a sufficient basis for the Commissioner(s) to understand the nature and magnitude of landscape, natural character, and visual effects in the context of the relevant planning framework.

From a landscape perspective, there is no reason why consent cannot be granted subject to the implementation of all the mitigation recommendations contained in the LVEA through a LVAMPP process, recognising that the proposal will result in a permanent change to the nature and characteristics of part of the Horahora ONL (ONL 10) but is generally consistent with expected outcomes enabled by the underlying RLZ zoning.



Dave Mansergh

DipP&RM(Dist), BLA(Hons), MLA. Registered ANZILA
Director

DRAFT RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS OF CONSENT

Landscape, Visual Amenity and Mitigation Planting Plan

- 1) *Prior to the issue of a certificate under section 224(c) of the Resource Management Act 1991 for any stage of the subdivision, the consent holder shall submit a Landscape, Visual Amenity and Mitigation Planting Plan ("LVAMPP") for that stage to Council for certification. The purpose of the LVAMPP is to ensure that the subdivision is integrated into the Waikato River / Lake Karapiro landscape setting, and that the landscape, natural character and visual mitigation measures relied on in the LVEA are implemented and maintained.*
- 2) *The LVAMPP shall be in accordance with the Landscape Masterplan (Revision E - dated June 2026), prepared by Boffa Miskell and submitted with the application. The LVAMPP shall be prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced landscape architect and shall include:*
 - a. *detailed landscape and planting plans for the relevant stage, including site-wide mitigation planting, boundary interface planting, on-lot planting areas and native tree clusters;*
 - b. *specific treatment of the Waikato River interface, gully frontages, ecological reserve areas and lots adjoining the river or gully network;*
 - c. *identification of existing vegetation to be retained;*
 - d. *a planting schedule identifying botanical name, common name, plant numbers, plant locations, spacing, grades at planting, planting densities, expected average height after 10 years and expected mature height;*
 - e. *details of site preparation, including weed control, soil preparation, topsoil handling and measures to minimise unnecessary clearing or storage of existing topsoil;*
 - f. *plant establishment methods, including planting methodology, staking, mulching, plant protection and watering where required;*
 - g. *timing of planting;*
 - h. *an implementation programme for the relevant stage;*
 - i. *a maintenance and monitoring programme, including weed control, replacement planting, pest control where required, inspection frequency and reporting requirements; and*
 - j. *the party or parties responsible for implementation, maintenance and monitoring.*
- 3) *The LVAMPP shall be developed in consultation with the project ecologist and mana whenua, where relevant to ecological reserve planting, gully restoration, riparian interface planting and cultural landscape outcomes.*

Implementation of certified LVAMPP

- 4) *The consent holder shall implement the certified LVAMPP for each stage prior to the issue of a section 224(c) certificate for that stage, except for on-lot planting required by Condition 9(n). Within 20 working days of completion of planting for each stage, the consent holder shall provide Council with written confirmation from a suitably qualified landscape architect that the planting has been implemented in accordance with the certified LVAMPP.*

Maintenance and monitoring

- 5) *All planting required by the certified LVAMPP shall be maintained by the consent holder for a minimum establishment period of five years from the date of planting. This shall include the maintenance of any planting within a reserve area that is vested to the Council. The cost of all maintenance is to be borne by the consent holder for the duration of the maintenance period. During the maintenance period, the consent holder shall ensure that:*
 - a. *plants are maintained in a healthy and vigorous condition;*

- b. dead, dying, diseased or missing plants are replaced with the same species, or an alternative species certified by Council as achieving the same mitigation outcome;*
 - c. replacement planting is undertaken within the next available April to September planting season;*
 - d. weeds are controlled so they do not compromise plant establishment;*
 - e. plant guards, stakes and mulch are maintained or replaced where required; and*
 - f. stock, vehicles and construction activities are excluded from planted areas unless required for maintenance.*
- 6) *The consent holder shall provide Council with annual maintenance and monitoring reports for the first five years following planting. Each report shall be prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect and shall identify:*
- a. plant condition and survival;*
 - b. any plant losses and replacement planting undertaken or required;*
 - c. weed control undertaken;*
 - d. whether the planting is achieving the intended screening, softening and landscape integration outcomes; and*
 - e. any remedial works required.*
- 7) *At the end of the five-year maintenance period, the consent holder shall provide Council with written confirmation from a suitably qualified landscape architect that the planting has established and is achieving the intended mitigation outcomes. Any remedial works identified by that confirmation shall be completed before the maintenance obligation is released.*

Consent notices

- 8) *Prior to the issue of a section 224(c) certificate for the relevant stage, the consent holder shall arrange for consent notices to be registered on the Records of Title for all residential lots, pursuant to section 221 of the Resource Management Act 1991.*
- 9) *The consent notices shall require the following on each lot:*
- a. an 800m² building platform shall be identified at the time of the first building consent application for the lot;*
 - b. the principal dwelling and any detached shed or accessory building shall be located within the identified 800m² building platform;*
 - c. in-ground swimming pools, tennis courts and driveways may be located outside the 800m² building platform;*
 - d. no building or structure shall exceed 6m in height above final ground level established by the subdivision earthworks;*
 - e. all buildings and accessory buildings shall use recessive colours and materials, with roofs having a light reflectance value of less than 20% and walls having a light reflectance value of less than 30%;*
 - f. mirror glazing shall not be used;*
 - g. dark tinted glazing shall be used where glazing has the potential to be visible from the Waikato River, Horahora Road, public open space or adjoining properties;*
 - h. detached accessory buildings, water tanks and other vertical infrastructure shall be located beside or behind the principal dwelling when viewed from the Waikato River;*
 - i. all buildings and structures shall be set back at least 25m from the top of the bank of the Waikato River;*
 - j. frontages facing the Waikato River and gully spaces shall remain visually open, unless fencing is required;*

- k. where fencing is required along river or gully frontages, it shall be rural-style post-and-rail, post-and-wire or post-and-wire-netting fencing and shall not exceed 1.2m in height;*
- l. side boundary fencing shall not be located within the 10m esplanade strip;*
- m. continuous public pedestrian access across the river frontage shall be maintained within the 10m esplanade strip;*
- n. on-lot mitigation planting, identified on the Landscape Masterplan (Revision E - dated June 2026), prepared by Boffa Miskell, shall be implemented prior to the issue of the code of compliance and maintained in accordance with the certified LVAMPP; and*
- o. any dead, dying or removed on-lot planting shall be replaced in accordance with the certified LVAMPP.*
- p. The owner of each lot shall maintain the on-lot planting in perpetuity.*

10) Where any lot owner seeks to depart from the requirements secured by consent notice, separate land use consent shall be required unless the activity is otherwise permitted by the South Waikato District Plan.

Protection of mitigation areas during construction

11) Prior to the commencement of works within each stage, all vegetation and planting areas to be retained or established under the certified LVAMPP shall be clearly identified on site and protected from construction damage.

12) No construction storage, vehicle parking, spoil placement, equipment storage or construction compound shall be located within areas identified for retained vegetation, ecological reserve planting, gully planting, Waikato River interface planting, the 10m esplanade strip, or other mitigation planting areas, unless certified in writing by Council.

13) Any damage to retained vegetation or certified mitigation planting shall be remedied by the consent holder as soon as practicable, and no later than the next planting season, in accordance with written advice from a suitably qualified landscape architect.