

LANDSCAPE PEER REVIEW

TO_Laura Buttimore

PNCC REF_ SUB21/47781

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SUBJECT_ Peer Review of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment included as an appendix to the Resource Consent Application for a 6 Lot rural subdivision at PT LOT 1 DP 8787, LOT 2 DP 18489, and LOT 1 DP 19869 BLK II CAPE S (42 Leith Road), New Plymouth.

TYPE_Discretionary

Dear Laura

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Natural Capital have been engaged by New Plymouth District Council (**NPDC**) to review The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (**LVIA**) provided with the Resource Consent Application for the above subdivision proposal. It has been reviewed to determine whether the information provided adequately enables a clear understanding of the landscape, including both rural, natural character, and general amenity values; and whether this understanding informs a complete assessment of likely and potential visual and landscape effects created by the proposal on the receiving environment and identified receptors.

1.2. The Peer Review follows the following process:

- Consent application familiarisation
- Site Visit (The site has only been viewed from the road as at 25 August).
- Review as to the adequacy of the following areas of assessment:
 - Methodology
 - Landscape Description
 - View Catchment and Viewing Audience
 - Landscape Effects Assessment
 - Visual Effects Assessment
 - Mitigation Strategy
- Recommendations

1.3. The site is located within the Rural Environment Area (Map E2) of the Operative District Plan (ODP) and the Rural Production Zone of the Proposed District Plan (PDP).

1.4. The proposed subdivision seeks to create five (5) lifestyle lots and one (1) balance lot which will retain farming operations. Allotment sizes proposed are:

- Lot 1: 2.92ha
- Lot 2: 5555m²
- Lot 3: 5500m²
- Lot 4: 4271m² (Corner Leith and SH45)
- Lot 5: Current size 2459m² – proposed 1.01ha
- Lot 6: Balance Title at 41.43ha.

2. REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

- 2.1. The site was observed on several occasions including 9 June 2021, 6 August 2021, and 17th August 2021 while travelling past to another location. The site was not accessed, and therefore I have not viewed the site from within each Lot or looked at the waterways and fencing. Although Riparian plans are available from TRC with the permission of the landowner, one has not been provided.

3. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Whether the methodology used represents best practice, is robust, and appropriate for assessing the actual or potential landscape effects of the activity.

- 3.1. The LVIA adopts an approach to assessment that aligns with the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects Draft Aotearoa Guidelines for assessment concepts and principles 2021.

4. DESCRIPTION OF LANDSCAPE CONTEXT & RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

That the description of the existing environment, landscape and visual amenity values are adequately covered.

- 4.1 The report refers to the AEE for detail on the receiving environment but provides a brief summary; the pertinent points being:
- 4.2 The site is *“relatively flat within the purview of Leith Road, transitioning to an undulating gully system to the east of the farm race that runs parallel with the road...The portion of the site subject to landscape change through this proposal, is the land adjacent to the Leith Road frontage. This land rises to high point in the vicinity of proposed Lot 2 and 3. The road elevation more or less mirrors this. There is no vegetation within lots 1, 2, or 3, except for a roadside boxthorn hedgerow.”*
- 4.3 The highpoint is described as being in the vicinity of Lot 2 & 3, but is not specific. There is a moderate road cutting along the road boundary of Lots 2 & 3. More detail around the specifics of the area of land which will be subject to change would be helpful (by accounting for lot size/shape, boundary setbacks, and likely location of dwelling platforms with respect to the high point). It is noted the area provides ‘spectacular’ views of Maunga Taranaki, and that *“The defining aspects of the site (in the area of Lots 1-3) that contributes to its rural character are spaciousness and generally elevated outlook.”*
- 4.4 From my observations of the site, the greatest area of ‘flat’ land would be that associated with Lot 4 and the dairy sheds, and a small area between Lot 4 and proposed Lot 3. From that point, the topography begins to gently rise toward the highpoint outlined in the LVIA. Between this highpoint and Lot 1 / 94 Leith Road, there are at least 5 hummocks or hillocks and 1 weaving depression toward the

north. See additional photos at the end of this document and **Figure 16 in the AEE**. These topographical features are not outlined in the LVIA.

- 4.5 These hillocks, although gently rolling create a unique landscape which will have different outcomes post development depending on where and how dwelling platforms are located and managed. For example, **Figure 4 within the AEE** is taken from the top of a hillock in proposed Lot 1 and illustrates the height gained from this location – views of the existing dwelling on proposed Lot 5 are visible, as is the crest of the hillock associated with Lot 2 & 3, and if the photograph panned toward the right (west), the dwelling at 43 Leith Road, would be visible. Views between 94 Leith Road and this site would be open as that dwelling is two storied with an elevated area above a double garage to its east.
- 4.6 The site's qualities that set it apart from others in the area are described in 6.5 as *“Overall, the site's distinctive landscape pattern arises from its elevated parts of open pasture and roadside hedge.”*
- 4.7 The description of the Leith Road landscape associated with the application site is reiterated as being 'spacious' in point 5.7 when it states *“while the Leith Road frontage of the site is spacious, on the opposite side of the road are three dwellings and a stand of protected bush. This creates a backdrop to the site when viewed from SH45 travelling south.”*
- 4.8 From my observations, although there are three dwellings on the western side of Leith Road, these are not visible when ascending the passing lane on SH45 travelling south; the dwelling on Lot 4, the paddocks associated with Lot 2 & 3, a glimpse of part of a shed or dwelling on Lot 5 amidst trees, and the bush atop of the pa “Puketi” within the QEII are, visible.
- 4.9 It is only at the point one slows to turn into Leith Road that views of the dwelling on 19 Leith Road become available within its vegetated boundaries. A low profile and natural coloured dwelling, it does not dominate views. No views of the dwelling on 43 or 63 are available.

5. VIEWING CATCHMENT & VIEWING AUDIENCE

That all key viewpoints are covered, and the actual or potential landscape and visual effects of the activity have been adequately considered.

- 5.1. **Fig. 5 of the AEE** illustrates views from the proposed 'common boundary' between Lot 2 & 3 suggesting it may align with the highpoint of the hillock, but this is not explicit. Views take in the shed and dwelling on 63 Leith Road. Views toward the dwelling at 94 Leith Road are obscured behind an evergreen shrub, but visible, albeit in **Fig. 17 of the AEE**.
- 5.2. **Fig. 18 of the AEE** illustrates a view toward 19 Leith Road. The description states *“views from 17 (should be 19) screened by existing hedgeline”*. The height restriction proposed on these Lots is 6m. An average person taking a photo is likely around 1.6m high (eye height) and therefore, the dwelling at 19 Leith Road is likely to see dwellings rising above this landform in their direct northern aspect. **Fig. 7 of the LVIA** illustrates a break in the boundary vegetation of 19 Leith Road which allows views northward. Dwellings on Lot 2 and 3 could be quite dominant and prominent from this dwelling, but this is somewhat inconclusive.

6. LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

That all key actual or potential landscape effects of the activity have been adequately considered.

- 6.1. The rise in the road beside the entrance to 43 and 42 Leith Road has some risk associated with it. Additional driveways in this location should allow for safe sight lines – from a landscape perspective, I

support using the northwestern corner of Lot 2 where the white post and rail fence angles toward the road from the driveway into Lot 5 as an access. I also support using the farm gate to the southeast of Lot 3 to access that site, should the proposal be approved. This is preferable to creating a cut through the centre of the hillock that defines the high point (and is associated with a decent road cutting). This should be avoided.

7. VISUAL EFFECTS

Has the report described how the proposed development will change existing natural character values and visual quality and amenity values s7(c) & (f) of the RMA1991?

- 7.1. The 5 lifestyle lots will be accessed from the 745m section of Leith Road that links SH45 to Perth Road. Two of the lifestyles Lots already contain dwellings and driveways.
- 7.2. One of these dwellings is on a separate title (42 Leith Road) but is owned by the applicant (they are rated together). It will undergo a boundary adjustment but will continue to breach Rur 17 for side boundary setbacks of a 'habitable' dwelling and Rur 18 for side boundary setbacks for 'other' dwellings.
- 7.3. The other dwelling is located near the corner of Leith Road and SH45 – it is set back approximately 9m from Leith Road and 61m from SH45. Therefore, it is in breach of Rur 83 with respect to its 30m setback from Leith Road.
- 7.4. The LVIA describes these dwellings and their situations as *“essential ‘as-is’ “which includes a desirable degree of openness and spaciousness across paddock areas”*. I'm not sure what this means. It sounds as if their current relationship with the spacious landscape around them is essential and should remain as-is. Which is could be taken as contrary to the increase in density proposed by the subdivision.
- 7.5. **Specific Private Receptor Effects**
 - 7.5.1. 94 Leith Road is 2 storied, with views extending toward Maunga Taranaki, across the subject site. The LVIA rates the effect on visual amenity of this property as Low. No detail is provided on whether this dwelling is likely to view all the proposed lots together – or what mitigation is proposed to manage such an effect, if this is possible. Without going into the upstairs area of the dwelling but looking at the photo in **Fig. 4 of the AEE**, it is possible that a dwelling on Lot 1 will be seen together with dwellings on Lot 2 and 3 (depending on location of dwellings with respect to the high points), potentially the existing dwelling on Lot 5, and the dwelling already established at 43 Leith Road.
 - 7.5.2. I agree with the assessment of 6 Perth Road.
 - 7.5.3. Views between Lots 2 & 3 and 63 Leith Road are touched on earlier in this report and may require further consideration to where future dwellings on Lot 2 & 3 will go and how high they will stand above the existing high point. However, I agree 63 is well vegetated around its own boundary by tree lucerne and native species. It is possible the effect on this receptor may be greater than very-low when considering the likely orientation of dwellings toward the north and the possibility of being 'overlooked'. There are no photos from the hillock in Lot 1 toward 63 so it is difficult to assess the relationship between these two sites.
 - 7.5.4. 43 Leith Road is described as having an *“elevated position with views directly toward the site”* with a 'moderate' level of effect likely. However, the description then states that *“views really [are] not available until the driveway exit”*. Effects are proposed to be lowered to 'low' with mitigation. It is difficult to assess what the receptor will see without being at the same elevation as the road is lower than the dwelling. The AEE does not include any photos of the

site and this dwelling. **Fig. 10 of the LVIA** from the driveway to Lot 5 is the best depiction of the relationship between views from the dwelling and Lots 2 & 3.

- 7.5.5. 19 Leith Road, as described in the LVIA sits behind extensive boundary planting with one opening to the north as shown in **Fig 7. of the LVIA**. The effect on this receptor is assessed as very-low, but as with 63 Leith Road, dwellings on Lots 2 and 3 will be elevated above it and to the north of this receptor. Depending on location, bulk, and scale, these dwellings may stack, and/or appear prominent. I note there are powerlines between the receptor and Lots 2 & 3.
- 7.5.6. The undeveloped property between 43 & 63 Leith Road is 6.9ha and contains some of the QEII that is also in 43 Leith Road. The lot terminates to the southeast along the same alignment as the southeastern boundary of 43 Leith Road. As described in the LVIA the most likely location for a dwelling on this lot is opposite Lot 1. The LVIA assesses the level of likely effect as low to very-low with mitigation. The existing entrance to Lot 1 on Leith Road (defined by a pipe gate) is directly opposite the entrance to 63 Leith Road and the current access to this undeveloped Lot. I therefore conclude the effect is largely dependent on where a dwelling is likely to go on Lot 1 (on top of the hillock or elsewhere, as these have different effects and would necessitate different mitigation approaches).

7.6. Users of Leith, Perth Roads & SH45

- 7.6.1. The LVIA states that users of Leith Road “*see little of the site because of roadside hedging*”. This is contrary to the statement made earlier that the “*defining aspects of the site (in the area of Lots 1-3) that contributes to its rural character are spaciousness and generally elevated outlook*”.
- 7.6.2. Given the number of dwellings and development of Leith Road along its western side, the spaciousness and openness of the subject site paddocks between the dwellings already present is emphasised. Depending on management of the roadside hedge there is the potential to screen the lower parts of development from views directly adjacent the site, but the hedge is relatively ineffectual at screening development from 94 Leith Road, or views across the site heading south along Leith Road (atop of the rise), and when turning into Leith Road, as the hillock area of Lots 2 & 3 is elevated.
- 7.6.3. Views into/across the site when approaching the junction of Leith/Perth Road along Perth Road are likely secondary to navigating the corner and junction where primary attention will be placed. Furthermore, the hedge and road cutting in this area tend to screen views to the hillock.
- 7.6.4. SH45 views are more distant and, as described in the LVIA are peripheral to north/south travel along the road. Lot 4 is clearly visible, and the house within vegetation on Lot 5 beds into its current landform context. Lot 1 is not visible. Further consideration about dwelling placement, and vegetation buffers could be useful to ensure the open space associated with the rising hillock is protected/maintained as this area of openness and spaciousness is, to me, the most vulnerable to change and the area which will have the greatest adverse effect if dominated by dwellings (and associated activities).
- 7.6.5. Change could also occur to the dwelling on Lot 4. I.e: it could be removed from site, renovated, extended etc. Ensuring change in that respect is appropriate with respect to SH45 is appropriate. Vegetation could be removed from the dwelling on Lot 5 also making it more prominent in the landscape given its white exterior.

8. MITIGATION

Has an appropriate strategy been identified or adopted in order to avoid, remedy or mitigate any unacceptable adverse effects on landscape values, natural character, and visual amenity?

8.1 In general, I agree with measures proposed to reduce the prominence of dwellings on the local and broader landscape. These are:

- Limiting lots 1 through 5 to one dwelling,
- Boundary fencing – Limited to rural type fencing,
- Recessive colours / low glare roofs (excluding glazing), to 20%,) – *I recommend adding the chromatic spectrum of browns, blacks, greys and blue.*
- Colour controls to dwelling exteriors – recommended 40% - *I recommend adding the chromatic spectrum of browns, blacks, greys and lowering this to 25%.*
- Height limit of 6m to all dwellings – *I recommend additional information on where a dwelling would be located on Lot 1, 2 & 3. Due to the rolling contour different effects will occur with different dwelling placements, ie: different receptors will be affected.*
- Night lighting management,
- Cut and fill recommendations
- Avoiding earthworks to the top of the hillock – *The top of the hillock and its relationship with the common boundary between Lot 2 & 3 is unclear. If the common boundary is aligned to the central axis of the hillock, the 15m and 30m setback rules apply.*
- Avoid dwelling construction on Lot 6 between the race and Leith Road – essentially a building restriction zone.
- Retaining the roadside hedge as barberry or replace with native species.

In addition, I recommend:

- Restricting the use of closed board fencing to all areas between the race and Leith Road.
- Further consideration of the landform within Lot 1 is recommended alongside its likelihood, and suitability to development – different effects will occur dependent on placement of a dwelling and different receptors will be affected.
- Using the access points as detailed in the AEE and report above to Lot 2 & 3. Avoid installing a new entrance that cuts through the centre of the hill/highpoint.
- Lot 3 may be able to reduce the effect on adjacent receptors (19, Leith Road, and SH45) further by locating dwellings off the high point of the hillock – and/or providing a greater certainty of where dwellings are going with respect to each other and the adjacent landform. A slight increase in Lot size, taking into consideration the 30m setback from Leith Road would allow a dwelling to be designed with a northerly, (northeast to northwest) aspect without applying for a boundary encroachment. The current building platform, although clearly large enough to accommodate a dwelling, limits the opportunities in this regard.
- From SH45, it would be preferable to retain the upper slopes of the paddock and set dwellings within vegetated boundaries. Buffers should be established along the southern and eastern boundaries of Lots 2 & 3 to help reduce the visual clutter that is known and expected as part of rural-residential subdivision. This could include above ground pools, play equipment (tramps), decks, tables, etc. Bearing in mind, views to the maunga and ocean will be desired by future owners. The intention would be to cluster the three dwellings of Lots 2, 3 & 5 together in a

triangle of sorts so that their corresponding vegetation assists with reducing the effects of the whole.

- Depending on how the rules are interpreted, if the dwelling on Lot 4 is removed and replaced, what mechanisms would be triggered and how can this be managed through this process so that the issue of boundary setbacks do not need to be re-litigated in the future?
- The existing vegetation along the driveway to Lot 5 and around the dwelling should be retained or replaced with species capable of creating the same screening. Currently views to the existing dwelling on Lot 5 are open along Leith Road between 63 and the junction with Perth Road. The dwelling is white.
- Lot 5 shall maintain the area between the dwelling and Leith Road (the extra paddock) as productive land.

Summary:

- Currently, the level of effect on 19, 43 and 94 Leith Road may be at least low (minor) if additional information is not provided.
- The level of effect on the character of the area is also potentially greater than minor if additional clarification and mitigation is unable to be provided.

Your sincerely



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