

IN THE MATTER of the Resource
Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER of a submission in respect
of the **PROPOSED
WAIKATO DISTRICT
PLAN** by **AMBURY
PROPERTIES LIMITED**
pursuant to Clause 6 of
Schedule 1 of the Act to
rezone 178ha of land at
Ohinewai

STATEMENT OF REBUTTAL EVIDENCE OF LYNN CRAIG TURNER

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 My name is Lynn Craig Turner. I am a director of New Zealand Comfort Group Ltd ("TCG") which is owned by myself, my brother Graeme (also a director), and other family interests. My role with TCG and our rationale for pursuing the Sleepyhead Estate proposal is set out in my evidence in chief.

2. WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL AND FUTURE PROOF OPPOSITION

2.1 The purpose of this statement of rebuttal evidence is to comment on the opposition of the Waikato Regional Council ("WRC") and Future Proof ("FP") to the Sleepyhead Estate proposal and to address a couple of issues raised in the evidence of Mr Tremaine for FP and Mr Mayhew for WRC. The issues raised by WRC and FP in opposing the proposed Ohinewai rezoning and the Sleepyhead Estate proposal focus mainly on the provision of housing and infrastructure, and potential effects on Huntly.

2.2 At the outset, I wish to say that I consider that their opposition and the concerns they have raised reflect an overly conservative and

doctrinaire approach to planning that fails to understand the concept of the Sleepyhead Estate development and the massive opportunity that the proposal represents for the mid-Waikato area. One of their own FP partners, the Waikato District Council ("WDC"), is an enthusiastic supporter of the proposal because its leaders have the vision to seek to capitalise on the one-off, unique opportunity that the Sleepyhead Estate represents.

2.3 TCG originally also had the support of WRC, as communicated by its then Chair, Alan Livingston. We are extremely disappointed that not only has that support been withdrawn but that WRC and FP have become the most vociferous opponents of our proposal. I feel that we are being treated with suspicion when all we want to do is undertake a development that will bring massive investment at a time when it is most needed, and will deliver significant economic, social and cultural benefits. These potential opportunities have been embraced not only by WDC but also the Tangata Whenua Governance Group which represents a number of Iwi organisations and marae in the broader area.

2.4 WRC and FP's position also appears to be inconsistent with the statement in the FP summary statement¹ that:

"The Future Proof settlement pattern needs to be agile enough to respond to change. A settlement pattern that has some built-in responsiveness provides an ability to capitalise on new opportunities that have potential to contribute significant economic, social or cultural benefits to our communities."

2.5 It seems to me that this precisely describes the context in which the TCG rezoning proposal should be seen. It is difficult to think of an opportunity which fits it more closely.

3. **IMPORTANCE OF THE RESIDENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE SLEEPYHEAD ESTATE CONCEPT**

3.1 Mr Tremaine's evidence confirms that FP supports the industrial component of the Sleepyhead Estate proposal as a result of the

¹ <https://www.futureproof.org.nz/assets/FutureProof/Future-Proof-Strategy-Nov-2017-Summary-Final-211117.pdf>

significant opportunities it offers in terms of generating employment for Huntly and the Waikato District² but that the residential component of the proposal should be removed.

- 3.2 This suggestion reflects a failure to understand the philosophy underpinning the entire proposal. Our concept is for a large industrial development that makes provision for an industrial “community” where one can eat, sleep, live, work and play in one place. In that way, a true community can be built which will encourage families to belong to something. It will also provide an ability for workers who fit the criteria to buy into housing they actually can afford to buy, for example, not spending money on transport. It is our view that business needs to take responsibility for its people. A further and most important consideration is our ability to attract existing staff to Ohinewai; provision of housing represents a key element in achieving this, as does the community aspect.
- 3.3 Staff availability and retention is the single biggest issue facing New Zealand businesses. I am also concerned school attendance levels are dropping. That is why we think that an innovative approach to education is necessary; our plans include training right from the get-go and other educational opportunities. Our vision is to create an environment that will enable us to attract and retain good people and to provide educational and housing opportunities – an environment in which our people can better themselves for the benefit of all – to create a context that provides more than just jobs.
- 3.4 In order to achieve that vision, we see the provision of housing (and services) alongside the jobs is fundamentally important – otherwise, Ohinewai would just become another industrial area with people having to travel there by car to work. The outcome would be something quite different. I believe it critical to achieve the outcome sought by TCG and supported so favourably by WDC to achieve an overall improvement in the wellbeing of the communities, rather than strict adherence to a planning document that in any event recognises the need for agility to seize opportunities such as this.

2 Evidence of Mr Tremaine, paragraph 6.3.

4. **PROVISION OF INFRASTRUCTURE**

- 4.1 It appears to me that WRC and FP are adopting an unduly cautious and somewhat pedantic approach to the issue of infrastructure. Our people have done a great deal of work on this and Watercare have confirmed that Ohinewai is provided for in the Mid Waikato Servicing Strategy. Discussions with WDC and Watercare are well advanced and the staging of our development as provided for in the proposed plan provisions is designed to ensure that the infrastructure necessary for each stage of development is in place when it is needed, even if the fine detail of that is not known right now.
- 4.2 We have also just entered into a memorandum of understanding with WDC which sets out the basis for each parties' responsibility for the provision and funding of the necessary infrastructure. This will form the basis of a private development agreement in due course. TCG and WDC are all set to "go", if we get the green light in the face of WRC and FP's opposition.

5. **EFFECTS ON HUNTLY**

- 5.1 Mr Tremaine for FP and Mr Keenan, Ms Hackell and Mr Mayhew for WRC raise concerns about the effects of the proposal on Huntly.
- 5.2 Potential adverse economic effects on Huntly are addressed in Mr Heath's evidence. TCG does not want to cause Huntly any harm; indeed, quite the opposite. We are committed to providing opportunities for economic uplift to Huntly and the surrounding area. That is one of the key drivers underpinning everything we are doing, including our drive to recruit and train locals and to establish an academy where people can be trained in key skills.
- 5.3 I am aware that there have been plans to reinvigorate Huntly for a long time but I do not see any evidence that they have been successful. The re-routing of State Highway 1 may lead to even worse decline.
- 5.4 Our proposal is a real opportunity to reverse that decline. It is a huge move for us to shift to Ohinewai and inevitably we will lose some staff who we will need to replace. We will therefore offer opportunities to members of the existing community for training and stable

employment. The benefits to the community will only increase as the Sleepyhead Estate is developed.

- 5.5 The economic analyses indicate that the introduction of new investment can provide a much-needed stimulus which is likely to have beneficial consequences at scale and act as a catalyst for exactly the type of regeneration envisaged by the various agencies to date. This has value – particularly when other approaches have to date failed.

6. **OPPORTUNITY VERSUS ORTHODOXY**

- 6.1 We are fully committed to proceeding with this development if our rezoning is approved. The level of overall expenditure is very significant (in excess of \$1 billion) and the economists agree that it would provide 2,600 jobs. Frankly, I am very surprised that WRC and FP would set their face against this development when such an opportunity exists. Whilst the Sleepyhead Estate was not provided for in the long-term planning documents, it represents an opportunity to create much needed jobs and prosperity in the area.

- 6.2 To conclude, the Sleepyhead Estate represents a massive, one-off opportunity, the like of which does not come along very often. Particularly in the current economic climate, such opportunities are all the more important. In my view, approving the rezoning of our Ohinewai site to enable the Sleepyhead Estate proposal to become a reality would represent a triumph of opportunity over orthodoxy (and vice versa). I encourage the Hearing Panel to approve the APL submission accordingly.

Lynn Craig Turner

24 August 2020