

**BEFORE THE WAIKATO DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** Private Plan Change 20

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF THOMAS ROBERT LINES**

**Registered Landscape Architect**

26 February 2018

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## **1.0 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERTISE**

- 1.1 My full name is Thomas Robert Lines. I am a Registered Landscape Architect at Boffa Miskell Limited (“Boffa Miskell”), a national firm of consulting Planners, Landscape Architects, Urban Designers and Ecologists.
- 1.2 I hold the qualification of Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects. I have practiced as a Landscape Architect for over 7 years within the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and New Zealand.
- 1.3 During this time, I have undertaken a number of landscape and visual assessments working in rural, coastal and urban environments; primarily in the North Island of New Zealand. These assessments have typically focused on evaluating the existing character and visual quality of the landscape and the visual sensitivities of audiences in relation to a range of potential activities, including urban development.
- 1.4 Of particular relevance to this application, is my experience on the Whenuapai Structure Plan where I provided landscape and visual advice on the opportunities and constraints of future development within a 1500Ha study area. I have also assessed the landscape and visual effects of a number of subdivision applications in rural environments including Waimana Point along the Mahurangi Peninsula and in Waipu, north of Auckland.

## **2.0 CODE OF CONDUCT**

3.0 I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses as contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014, and I agree to comply with it as if this hearing was before the Environment Court. My qualifications as an expert are set out above. I confirm that the issues addressed in this brief of evidence are within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed.

## **4.0 SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

5.0 I have been engaged by Lakeside Developments 2017 Limited to prepare evidence in relation to the landscape and/ visual effects associated with the proposed private plan change.

5.1 I have worked with the project team since the fourth quarter of 2016 and am the author of the Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment report (LVEA) which accompanied the Plan Change request.

5.2 It is not my intention to repeat the content of my assessment but rather summarise the key points from the assessment and focus on the issues that are raised through the submission process and the Council officer's report.

5.3 Therefore, this statement of evidence will:

- Outline my methodology of assessment;
- Provide a brief overview of the receiving environment;
- Provide a summary of the landscape and visual assessment findings;
- Determine whether the plan change delivers the anticipated landscape outcomes for the site and Te Kauwhata area;

- Provide a response to the key landscape and visual issues raised in the submissions;
- Provide a response to the Council officer's report;
- Conclusion.

## 6.0 METHODOLOGY

- 6.1 My assessment which has informed this evidence was undertaken with reference to a number of nationally and internationally recognised guidance documents. These include the Quality Planning Landscape Guidance Note<sup>1</sup> with its signposts to examples of best practice (including: the UK guidelines for landscape and visual impact assessment<sup>2</sup>).
- 6.2 An outline of the effects ratings and definitions used in the LVEA is provided in **Appendix 1** of this evidence. In summary, the significance of effects is based upon a seven-point scale which ranges from very low; low; moderate-low; moderate; moderate-high; high and very high ratings.
- 6.3 Prior to conducting the assessment, a desktop study was completed which included a review of the relevant information relating to the landscape and visual aspects of the proposal. This information included:
- The Waikato District Plan ('WDP');
  - The Waikato Regional Plan ('WRP');
  - Notified plan change drawings including the 'Zone Plan';
  - Aerial photography (2016), Drone footage (2016), Google Earth, 'Streetview'; and
  - Survey data.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.qualityplanning.org.nz/index.php/planning-tools/land/landscape>

<sup>2</sup> Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition, 2013

- 6.4 Following the desktop study, in order to further understand both the site and the surrounding context, a site visit was undertaken on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2016. The site visit focused on ground-truthing the site conditions, confirming the viewing audiences and better understanding the characteristics of the surrounding natural and built landscape.
- 6.5 I visited the surrounding context of the site a second time on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2017 to confirm my assessment findings and include a number of additional viewpoints.

## **7.0 SITE AND EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

*(Refer Appendix 2, Figures LV01-LV04)*

- 7.1 The subject site is located on pastoral farmland on the southern fringes of the Te Kauwhata township. Te Kauwhata's land use includes a diverse range of agricultural and horticultural activities, including dairy and dry stock as well as fruit orchards, market gardens and viticulture.
- 7.2 In recent years, Te Kauwhata has undergone growth in residential development. These include development along Rosalyn Boulevard, 'Glenvale' development, Blunt Road, Swan Road, and Matua Close and Waerenga Road to the east of the town centre.
- 7.3 Lake Waikare is located south east of the town, and adjoins the eastern boundary of the site. It is the largest lake in the lower Waikato catchment, with 3,442 hectares of open water, with very poor water quality<sup>3</sup>. Lake Waikare is the most notable landscape feature within Te Kauwhata's immediate vicinity and is listed as an Outstanding Natural Feature ("ONF") in the WDP. Between Lake Waikare and SH1 is a densely vegetated area encompassing Lake Kopuera. North of Te Kauwhata lies Whangamarino which is also an ONF. Whangamarino is the second largest wetland in the North Island and supports a wide diversity of waterfowl.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/waikato-region/lakes/lake-waikare/>

- 7.4 The site covers approximately 194 ha and is accessed from Scott Road which runs off Te Kauwhata Road to the west of the existing town. The northern boundary of the site adjoins the southern extent of the Te Kauwhata township, the eastern extent meets Lake Waikare, the southern extent meets open farmland and the western extent meets the main trunk railway line.
- 7.5 The site is zoned Rural in the Waikato District Plan (“WDP”). This rural character is evident throughout the site and surrounding area with a working agricultural landscape, associated buildings and infrastructure being prominent features. This includes rolling hills punctuated by clusters of mature exotic vegetation, open fields and lakeside/wetland vegetation.
- 7.6 The site is topographically characterised by a number of rolling ridges and small gullies leading down to lowlands and floodplains to the east, along the shores of Lake Waikare. Vegetative cover within the site consists mainly of open grass fields for the purpose of grazing livestock, low hedgerows and mature vegetation in distinct pockets.
- 7.7 The site contains a small number of buildings and built structures, which include farm buildings and milking sheds, in addition to post and wire fences and gates dividing the fields. Three (3) residential properties also exist within the site at No. 67, 94A and 98 Scott Road.
- 7.8 The major natural elements associated with the site are the waters of Lake Waikare, and areas of native vegetation along its north western embankments. The natural patterns and processes which are most notable, stem primarily from the relationship Lake Waikare has with this vegetation. In combination, these elements and processes, result in a context which in places retains some degree of both indigenous and perceived naturalness.
- 7.9 In general, the level of indigenous or perceived naturalness derived from the site has been reduced to a very low level by the historic and ongoing agricultural practices. Despite this, I consider that

there are natural character values which should be maintained and where possible enhanced, particularly around the edge of Lake Waikare.

- 7.10 As a result of its location, context, and topography, the site has a wide visual catchment. encompassing a large area. It is set within gently rolling hills with the township of Te Kauwhata to the north, Lake Waikare to the east, SH1 and the main trunk railway to the west, and open farmland to the south.
- 7.11 To the north, the visual catchment contains parts of the township of Te Kauwhata including the Domain and its associated playing fields. The visual catchment to the east extends beyond the eastern shoreline of Lake Waikare (approximately 5km away) to the adjoining hillside slopes. To the south, the visual catchment reaches toward Ohinewai and the eastern extent of the Taupiri Range. To the west, the catchment extends over the forested area around Lake Kopuera, toward the pastoral lands of Rangiriri, and beyond, toward Glen Murray.

## **8.0 ASSESSMENT FINDINGS**

- 8.1 A full assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the proposal is contained within the LVEA. I do not intend on repeating that information within my evidence. Rather, I will provide a summary of the findings of my assessment.

### **Natural Character Effects**

- 8.2 I consider that the site is a modified environment (due to its managed agricultural uses), albeit with a number of defined areas of more natural character derived mainly from native vegetation. The areas which retain the highest degree of naturalness i.e. the vegetation on the embankment of Lake Waikare would not be affected by the plan change, and are proposed to be legally and physically protected.

- 8.3 The level of anticipated human modification to the Lake Waikare margin (such as pathways and seating areas in response to making the area a public space), may alter some people's perception of the level of naturalness within and around Lake Waikare, however I consider this change would have a low adverse effect on the perception of natural character associated with the Lake Waikare margin. Public access would also make this natural area more available for people to see and enjoy.

### **Landscape Effects**

- 8.4 I recognise that the application would ultimately change the existing rural character and land use of the site from rural farmland to a structured pattern of residential development. Notwithstanding this, I also acknowledge that the proposed 'Living: Te Kauwhata Lakeside' and 'Business' zoning occupying the central and western portions of the proposal and consider it is an appropriate response to addressing and protecting the sensitive edges and key landscape values of the site. With consideration to the wider context, and the contribution of the site's characteristics to the rural character of the area, and the rural backdrop in views from Lake Waikare, I am of the opinion that the proposed zoning and anticipated development brought about by the plan change would result in a moderate to high adverse landscape character effect.

### **Visual Amenity Effects**

- 8.5 I will now address my findings in regard to the likely impacts on the identified viewing audiences. I will refer to the original viewpoint photography that was used within the Landscape Report, which I have annotated and attached within my folio of figures along with a viewpoint location plan (**refer Appendix 2, figure LV05**)
- 8.6 For viewing audiences along Scott Road, (**refer Appendix 2, figure LV08**), the open undeveloped site, utilised for rural land practices would be replaced with a suburban development that would form a notable change, and overall would in my opinion detract from the

level of visual amenity currently derived for these viewers. I remain of the opinion that the adverse effects of this change is likely to be high to very high from locations similar to those depicted in this viewpoint.

- 8.7 For viewing audiences within the Te Kauwhata township and its environs, (**refer Appendix 2, figures LV06 to LV07 & LV09 to LV12**), I anticipate that adverse visual effects would range from moderate to high due to a combination of their sensitivity to change, proximity to the site, and fixed expansive views of the rural landscape currently occupying the site.
- 8.8 I consider that viewing audiences to the south and east of the site (**refer Appendix 2, figures LV13 to LV16**), would experience adverse visual amenity effects ranging from very low to moderate respectively, given the distance away from the site and settlement backdrop of Te Kawuhata. I note that viewing audiences from locations towards the south are few in number as the land is predominantly rural.
- 8.9 In regard to viewing audiences towards the west, (**refer Appendix 2, figures LV17 to LV19**), I anticipate adverse effects ranging from low to moderate, as development along elevated portions of the site would be clearly visible and occupy the visible ridgelines within the site.

## **9.0 FULFILLMENT OF THE ANTICIPATED LANDSCAPE & VISUAL OUTCOMES OF TE KAUWHATA**

- 9.1 In my opinion, the plan change broadly encapsulates the key landscape elements of Te Kauwhata and the site, and it retains these to deliver the anticipated outcomes under the Te Kauwhata Structure Plan. I consider that the plan change would:
- Provide significant public open space which is conveniently accessible to existing and future residents;

- Retain visual connections to the lake from existing areas within the Te Kauwhata township;
- Strengthen the landscape and amenity values of the lake margin through planting;
- Retain visually prominent areas of open space around the margins of the site as rural zoning;
- Provide views towards Lake Waikare and surrounding rural landscape from proposed development areas within the site;
- Recognise the cultural and historical values of the area by providing a cultural reserve to vest with mana whenua.

## **10.0 RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED BY SUBMITTERS**

10.1 I have reviewed the submissions received in regard to the plan change. Upon my review I note that there are a number of common themes in regard to landscape and visual matters which relate to, loss of village character and the impact of urban expansion across the site; the loss of rural outlook; and the various beneficial outcomes that the plan change would bring upon the community. For simplicity I have grouped these matters into headings below with my responses.

### **Village Character and Urban Expansion**

10.2 A number of submitters raise concern over the potential loss of village character due to the urban expansion across the site. I do not consider that the village character would be lost due to this plan change, although I do recognise that the plan change would increase the scale of Te Kauwhata and alter the fundamental character of the site (from a rural to urbanised environment).

10.3 In my opinion, the village character of Te Kauwhata is defined by:

- The visual and physical connections with the Whangamarino Wetland, Lake Waikare and the rural landscape;
- The abundance of residential land uses within the development area of Te Kauwhata;
- The definitive edge where the surrounding rural landscape meets the clustered nature of the village;

### Visual and Physical Connections

10.4 I believe that the plan change would enhance the visual and physical connections with Lake Waikare and therefore reflects these core characteristics. I also consider that the arrangement of the proposed rural zoning in the plan change provides a unique opportunity to protect key landscape values, reintegrate the rural characteristics of the area amongst the developed areas of Te Kauwhata, and provide residents with the opportunity to reconnect with the rural amenity values of the area as outlined below.

### Residential land uses

10.5 I consider that Te Kauwhata is also defined by the residential land uses which characterise the village, being a montage of Living, New Residential, Living Zone Te Kauwhata West, and areas of Countryside Living as illustrated in the Waikato District Plan ('WDP'). The proposed zones of development within the plan change remain inherently consistent with the activity of these land uses.

### Rural Setting

10.6 The existing development boundaries of Te Kauwhata principally meet agricultural land, and the contrast between the residential and rural land uses generally form a defined 'edge', with development located off Waerenga Road. The proposed rural zoning would echo this edge and extend along the northern, eastern and southern boundaries of the site, retaining the rural edge characteristics of Te

Kauwhata. By preserving the rural land uses along these edges, residents and visitors would retain a visual connection to agricultural activities and Lake Waikare.

- 10.7 In my opinion, villages, by definition are inherently a clustered community, often surrounded by rural areas. They are typically not of a large lot size scattered broadly over a landscape as a dispersed settlement but are arranged to retain areas of undeveloped land. I consider that this characteristic is reflected in the plan change by retaining a compact form and preserving rural land along its northern, eastern and southern boundaries. I believe that by preserving large areas of open space, with smaller sections would preserve the village character of a settlement.

#### **Loss of Rural Outlook**

- 10.8 A number of submissions have raised concern over the loss of rural outlook. I consider that this is particularly the case for residents along Scott Road due to their proximity to the site, and a number of residents along south facing slopes within the village centre. I agree that there would be a loss of rural outlook for such residents and have identified high levels of visual effects in my assessment.

#### **Beneficial Outcomes**

- 10.9 A number of submitters offer support to aspects of the plan change in relation to landscape and visual amenity. A key area of support is the opening up of the foreshore of the lake for public access. I am also in support of this and I consider that by enabling public access to Lake Waikare and providing a variety of open spaces to be used by residents of the development, and the wider Te Kauwhata community, that this would not only have recreation and amenity benefits but would integrate the development with the existing town centre. I also agree with the support for the proposed cultural reserve to vest in mana whenua.

## **11.0 COUNCIL OFFICER'S REPORT**

11.1 I have read and understood the Council Officer's Report in regard to the proposed private plan change and have no further comments regarding landscape and visual matters.

## **12.0 CONCLUSION**

12.1 In summary the areas which retain the highest degree of naturalness both within the site and its immediate environment would be preserved and protected by the plan change. The urbanisation of the site, would result in adverse effects on the existing landscape character of the site, however this is inevitable with such a change of land use.

12.2 Development of the site would result in adverse visual amenity effects, the significance of which depends on the location and particular viewing audience affected. In my opinion these effects range from very low to very high adverse.

12.3 I consider that the Plan Change would also result in beneficial effects. These include recognition of the cultural and historical values of the area by providing a cultural reserve to vest with mana whenua, the provision of a network of public access, including to and around Lake Waikare, as well as significant replanting and enhancement works within the Lake Waikare margin.

THOMAS ROBERT LINES

Registered Landscape Architect

Boffa Miskell Limited

26 February 2018

## APPENDIX 1 Assessment Rating Scale

Effect Rating	Use and Definition
<b>Very High:</b>	Total loss to the characteristics or key attributes of the receiving environment and /or visual context amounting to a complete change of landscape character.
<b>High:</b>	Major change to the characteristics or key attributes of the receiving environment and /or the visual context within which it is seen; and/or a major effect on the perceived amenity derived from it. <u>Oxford English Dictionary Definition</u> High: adjective- <b>1.</b> Extending above the normal level. <b>2.</b> Great in amount, value, size, or intensity.
<b>Moderate- High:</b>	A moderate - high level of effect on the character or key attributes of the receiving environment and/or the visual context within which it is seen; and/or have a moderate - high level of effect on the perceived amenity derived from it.
<b>Moderate:</b>	A moderate level of effect on the character or key attributes of the receiving environment and/or the visual context within which it is seen; and/or have a moderate level of effect on the perceived amenity derived from it. <u>Oxford English Dictionary Definition</u> Moderate: adjective- average in amount, intensity, or degree
<b>Moderate - Low:</b>	A moderate - low level of effect on the character or key attributes of the receiving environment and/or the visual context within which it is seen; and/or have moderate - low level of effect on the perceived amenity derived from it.
<b>Low:</b>	A low level of effect on the character or key attributes of the receiving environment and/or the visual context within which it is seen; and/or have a low effect on the perceived amenity derived from it. <u>Oxford English Dictionary Definition</u> Low: adjective- <b>1.</b> Below average in amount, extent, or intensity.
<b>Very Low:</b>	Very low or no modification to key elements/ features/ characteristics of the baseline or available views, i.e. approximating a 'no change' situation.

## APPENDIX 2 Graphic Supplement