



PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE DRURY SOUTH BUSINESS PROJECT  
LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL PEER REVIEW  
13 APRIL 2010

Project PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE DRURY SOUTH BUSINESS PROJECT  
Client STEVENSONS  
Report PEER REVIEW LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT  
Author GAVIN LISTER  
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Our reference 2776  
Status FINAL

**PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE: DRURY SOUTH BUSINESS PROJECT  
PEER REVIEW: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL EFFECTS ASSESSMENT (DRAFT)**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Isthmus was commissioned by the applicant to provide an internal peer review of the 'Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects' report ('the report') prepared by Rachel de Lambert of Boffa Miskell.
- 1.2 The peer review was carried out by Gavin Lister who is a director of Isthmus with 22 years experience in a wide range of urban and rural development projects throughout New Zealand. Gavin is qualified in both landscape architecture and urban design, and is a registered member and Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects.
- 1.3 A site visit was carried out on 15 March 2010. Preliminary comments were made on a draft version of the landscape and visual effects assessment and these were responded to in subsequent revisions. The review is based on the following questions:
- Does the structure and focus of the report reflect the nature of the project and the main RMA issues?
  - Are best practice methodologies used?
  - Does the assessment describe the proposal accurately in such a way that the effects can be fairly assessed?
  - Are the important landscape and urban design issues identified?
  - Are adequate measures taken to avoid, remedy and mitigate effects? To what extent to these measures represent best practice?
  - Are the nature and degree of effects accurately analysed? Do they deal with both biophysical and perceptual effects (including visual effects)? Are there any gaps?
  - Is the overall appraisal of the significance of effects credible?

## 2 STRUCTURE AND FOCUS OF REPORT

- 2.1 In my opinion the structure of the report is appropriate: It describes the proposal, describes the existing environment, identifies the main issues, describes the measures taken to avoid, remedy and mitigate effects, analyses the nature and degree of effects, and draws the different strands of the assessment together in a credible summary and conclusion.
- 2.2 The report acknowledges that there will be adverse effects<sup>1</sup> but places these effects within the context of the strategic need for industrial land, the suitability of the site for such activities, and the measures taken to avoid, remedy and mitigate the effects. It therefore assesses the effects in the context of broad RMA section 5 perspectives in a way suitable for a Plan Change application of this type.
- 2.3 The report does not specifically address provisions of the relevant Plans, leaving these to be addressed in a separate planning report. However it is structured in a way that would enable the conclusions relating to section 6 and 7 matters to be extracted. The report does include specific discussion relating to the Metropolitan Urban Limit (MUL) policies of the Auckland Regional Policy Statement (RPS), and to open space strategies of the Franklin and Papakura District Councils.

## 3 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The report describes the proposal accurately and in sufficient detail to enable the biophysical and perceptual effects to be properly assessed. In particular it describes those aspects of the project relevant to the main issues including:
- i) The extent of earthworks required to form flat land sufficiently elevated above the flood plain for industrial activities;
  - ii) The modifications to and rehabilitation of the Hingaia/Maketu Stream corridor and other tributary watercourses;
  - iii) The urban and industrial character of the proposal; and
  - iv) The project's circulation, activity types, and landscape treatment intentions.
- 3.2 The report also refers to 'Design Assessment Criteria' and 'Landscape Performance Standards' which form part of the proposed Plan Change.

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<sup>1</sup> Mainly on landform and natural hydrology; rural amenity; visual amenity from SH1 and from some surrounding properties, as discussed below

## 4 EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

- 4.1 The report fairly describes and appraises the existing environment. It describes both biophysical<sup>2</sup> and perceptual aspects<sup>3</sup> covering the matters listed in the 'Pigeon Bay Factors' with the exception of tangata whenua values which I understand are to be addressed in a separate report.
- 4.2 In my opinion the report identifies those aspects of the environment most pertinent to an appraisal of effects including the following:
- i) The Hingaia/Maketu Stream as the most significant natural feature,
  - ii) The visibility and rural character of the land between the motorway and the Hingaia/Maketu Stream and the consequent visual sensitivity of this land,
  - iii) The visibility from the Macwhinney Drive area and consequent potential visual amenity effects from this area.
- 4.3 The existing environment is a rural area albeit modified by a range of activities typical of peri-urban areas. I agree with the report's overall appraisal of the area as "*generally pleasant but not remarkable*". The report also correctly identifies<sup>4</sup> that the project would not affect any areas identified as outstanding natural features and landscapes under s6(b) of the RMA. The report does not specifically address s6(a) but it does describe the fact that the Hingaia/Maketu Stream is the most significant natural feature, that it is nevertheless substantially modified and lies within a modified surrounding environment, and that it contains both indigenous remnants and exotic vegetation.

## 5 ISSUES

- 5.1 In my view the report correctly identifies the main potential landscape effects as follows:
- i) Effects of the earthworks/urbanisation on natural landform and streams,
  - ii) Effects of urbanisation on the current rural character,
  - iii) Specifically the effects of urbanisation on the existing rural nature of views from SH1,
  - iv) Visual effects on surrounding rural and lifestyle properties, including the Macwhinney Drive area, properties on Fitzgerald Road, and properties south of Willow Road in the Ararimu area.

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<sup>2</sup> landform, vegetation, hydrology, land use

<sup>3</sup> visual features, character, visibility

<sup>4</sup> In the 'Effects' section at page 21 of the report

5.2 As discussed above, in my view the report also correctly contextualises these effects as follows:

- i) It places the project in the context of a shortage of industrial land in Auckland, and specifically in the southern sector of the region. The report relies on other specialist reports in making this conclusion.
- ii) It appraises the site as suitable for such activities, taking into account its proximity to transport, its relatively flat topography, and its complementarities to the existing Stevenson's quarry.<sup>5</sup>

## 6 MITIGATION (DESIGN)

6.1 The report notes that both Boffa Miskell and Surface Design were involved in the landscape and urban design from an early stage in the project. Measures to address the main issues are clearly integral to the design and include the following:

- i) Internal grid of large trees to provide scale context and reduce visibility of industrial buildings, including softening views from elevated viewpoints,
- ii) Zoning of business park type activities in the Motorway Edge Precinct (MEP) adjacent to SH1 rather than lower amenity heavier industrial activities,
- iii) Circulation that will separate quarry / industrial traffic from rural roads, and provide more direct connections to motorway interchanges north and south,
- iv) Tailoring the boundaries of the proposed Land Extensive Business Activities<sup>6</sup> (LEBA) area to logical topographic edges and changes in land use character,<sup>7</sup>
- v) Rehabilitating the main Hingaia/Maketu Stream as a spine for natural process, open space and visual reasons,
- vi) Landscape buffers provided along the northern and southern edges and adjacent to part of the motorway frontage, and
- vii) Performance standards and assessment criteria for future activities.

6.2 In my opinion the concept design is of a high standard and the principles represented by the criteria would lead to a quality outcome if implemented in accordance with their spirit. The criteria are, however, general in nature and use such terms as 'wherever practicable' that are open to a range of interpretations. In reality the performance standards are a more certain benchmark to the quality of future development. The proposed standards are typical of what one might expect

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<sup>5</sup> The quarry already affects the amenity of adjacent land, industrial activities will be less sensitive to the quarry, and at the same time such land use will help avoid future reverse sensitivity issues relating to the quarry.

<sup>6</sup> i.e. Industrial type activities

<sup>7</sup> The scarp followed by Fitzgerald Road and a ridge in the vicinity of Willow Road are logical boundaries to the north and south of the proposed industrial area that will help contain visual effects within a confined valley.

for the relevant zones with some notable additional standards including the requirement for substantial shelter belts on lot boundaries and bold frontage flax planting in industrial zones, and landscape standards relating to the MEP. The standards for this zone include a 30% maximum building coverage (15m maximum height) and a 30% permeable landscape area which would reduce to 20% if the applicant adopts a 'fully planted permeable car parking design layout' that is specified in the standards. In my view these standards would improve the amenity compared to what one might typically expect in such business zones.

- 6.3 A question arising from the design is the selection of SH1 as the 'defensible' boundary of the proposed urban area rather than the Hingaia Stream. SH1 clearly forms a 'defensible boundary' because of the lack of connections across the motorway but it also means an urban character adjoining the motorway. Adopting the Hingaia Stream as a boundary, on the other hand, might enable the area between the stream and SH1 to be retained as a rural or rural-residential corridor for the motorway approaches to Auckland. In my view this would be a preferable landscape outcome. However the assessment report sets out a number of logical reasons why the Hingaia Stream is not favoured as a boundary. Firstly, the report states that earthworks are required to prevent flooding of the land west of Hingaia Stream and that the spine road connection to the Ramarama Interchange would be required in this area in any event. Secondly it maintains that the land would not be viable for rural use or particularly desirable for rural-residential use because it is low-lying and would be sandwiched between the motorway and an industrial area and would also be further affected by the new Transpower switchyard. Thirdly, that continuing rural-residential use might engender reverse sensitivity issues that the Plan Change seeks to avoid, although in my view this could be addressed by adequate buffers. Fourthly, that the stream is unlikely to be a defensible boundary, that there is likely to be continued pressure for development of the land and that it would be better to plan for this in a comprehensive manner as proposed.<sup>8</sup> In summary, the motorway is a clearly defensible boundary but will lead to urban character adjacent to the motorway. Adopting the Hingaia Stream as a boundary would, in my opinion, lead to a higher amenity landscape experienced from the motorway, but would be less defensible for reasons set out by the applicant.

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<sup>8</sup>As discussed, the applicant proposes a business park type of development (MEP zone) with a landscape buffer for approximately 50% of the motorway frontage<sup>8</sup>, landscape standards relating to the extent of building coverage (30%) and permeable landscape (30%), and landscape assessment criteria. Such a use will lead to a clearly urban edge to the motorway, as acknowledged by the assessment report, although with landscape elements that will create a reasonably high amenity.

## 7 EFFECTS

### *Perceptual / Visual Effects*

- 7.1 The report uses an accepted methodology of identifying viewing audiences within the area of potential visibility, and analysing the degree, nature and significance of visual effect.
- 7.2 Photomontages were prepared from representative viewpoints to help visualise effects. In my opinion the viewpoints used are a fair representation: They cover views from all directions, a range of distances, and address views from the areas most likely to be affected including the motorway and Macwhinney Drive. The assessment author forwarded an outline of the method used to prepare the photomontages<sup>9</sup> which I confirm is in line with best practice, including use of surveyed viewpoints and reference points in the photos. The building forms used appear to be a fair representation of the type of buildings that might be expected in the zone. It is noted, though, that a correct reading distance is not provided on the photomontages.
- 7.3 In my opinion the visual effects are generally assessed in a fair manner. The report acknowledges that there will be visual amenity effects from some surrounding properties, and correctly, identifies the Macwhinney Drive lifestyle area as the most potentially affected. I agree with the report's appraisal of effects from this area. This subdivision is built around a small valley on the hillside north of the site, so that the subdivision as a whole, and many of the properties within it, are oriented north and north-west away from the site which is located to the south-west. However several of the properties are nevertheless oriented south-west toward the site (e.g. 337, 359 Macwhinney Drive) and others are on elevated sites with wide panoramas that include the site (e.g. 288, 310 Macwhinney Drive). The report refers to views from Fitzgerald Road being restricted by vegetation. However there are several properties on the south side of the road that will have clear views over the site. It is not clear the extent to which such properties are part of the project. Further detail would help clarify the extent of effects to properties in this area.
- 7.4 The report highlights the nature and extent of the change and the effects on rural character from the areas affected. I agree in general with these assessments. The report notes a range of activities that would be permitted in the rural zone, such as large scale glass-houses, packing sheds, expansive cultivation and a range of peri-urban activities, as a way of highlighting the extent to which the area might be modified under the current rural zoning. While the effect of such activities in

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<sup>9</sup> Email from M. Bain received 18 March 2010

modifying the rural character is relevant to some extent, the report acknowledges that there will be a clear difference between the modified rural landscape that currently exists and which retains a rural character despite the intrusions, and what will be an urban character.

- 7.5 The project responds to the greater visual sensitivity of the area between the Hingaia/Maketu Stream and SH1 by zoning that area for 'business park' style development (MEP zone), with performance standards for landscaping on each lot. A landscape buffer area is also proposed adjacent to part of the motorway frontage including planting and retention of several knolls which are the ends of spurs/valleys bisected by the motorway. Views from the motorway comprise a sequence of elevated views from the embankments interspersed by the spur cuttings. The embankments enable reasonably wide outlook. While the LEBA (industrial area) will be relatively screened behind vegetation on the Hingaia Stream, the foreground MEP land will be overlooked from the motorway. I agree that the measures proposed are likely to lead to a relatively high amenity business park character, but it will nevertheless be clearly urban in character as discussed above.

***Biophysical Landscape Effects***

- 7.6 The report correctly identifies the extent of the earthworks that will be required over most of the site to form flat development areas and to ensure sufficient elevation above flood levels.
- 7.7 I agree with the appraisal that earth-worked landforms will nestle unobtrusively within surrounding landforms, particularly in the LEP area east of the Hingaia/Maketu Stream.
- 7.8 The report correctly identifies the Hingaia/Maketu Stream as the most significant natural feature within the site. I support its rehabilitation as the main framework element.

***Urban Design Effects***

- 7.9 The main urban design matters include the circulation network; the activity mix and spatial integration; the building forms, streetscape and landscaping; and the underlying natural systems and landscape. These matters are addressed in the

report under the landscape and visual effects, and summarised again under the urban design heading.<sup>10</sup>

- 7.10 I agree with the general comments in response to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol, although these are high level principles rather than assessment criteria.

***Open Space Effects***

- 7.11 A separate open space analysis is also provided in relation to the Papakura District Council Open Space Strategy 2003 and the Franklin district Recreation and Open space Plan 2005. I agree with the analysis, which is that the Hingaia/Maketu Stream corridor is the most logical focus of open space in the area because it integrates circulation, natural processes, and includes the only substantial remnants of indigenous vegetation in the area. It has been integrated into the project's design as a central landscape feature which also provides a degree of screening and a logical boundary of the industrial area (LEP).

**8 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 In my opinion the overall conclusions are credible and fairly drawn from the assessment. The report acknowledges there will be some adverse effects, as one would expect from any proposal to zone land for industrial activities. But it also demonstrates that the land is generally suitable for such activities for a number of reasons, and that the project has been designed to avoid, remedy and mitigate effects to a great extent. It also places this within a strategic context of the existing quarry (and complementary nature of the proposed activities) and the regional shortage of land for such activities.

Gavin Lister  
Isthmus  
13 April 2010

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<sup>10</sup> The separation of urban design from the landscape and visual assessment is somewhat artificial in this instance, but I understand it was done to enable such matters to be addressed separately in the planning analysis.

Dale Paice

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Subject: Drury South

From: Gavin Lister [<mailto:Gavin.Lister@Isthmus.co.nz>]  
Sent: Tuesday, 12 April 2011 2:53 p.m.  
To: Rachel de Lambert  
Subject: Drury South

Proposed Plan Change Drury South Business Project

Earlier I carried out a peer review (13 April 2010) of the Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects.

I have now reviewed the updated report '*Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects, Updated Final, 14 December 2010, Rachael de Lambert, Boffa Miskell.*' I understand the following changes have been made:

1. A new introduction page 1
2. Two minor adjustments to the Plan Change boundary with a net change in area of approximately 1ha:
  - a. boundary refinement in the vicinity of the Link Road to Fitzgerald Road to exclude part of an adjacent property
  - b. boundary refinement adjacent to the headwater of the Hingaia Stream to include an area within a loop of the stream.
3. Minor adjustments to figures to reflect the boundary changes (which reduce the Plan Change area from 362ha to 361ha), and minor changes in references to former local authorities to reflect the recent changes in Auckland's local government.

These changes are minor and do not alter the substance and conclusions of my earlier peer review.

Gavin Lister  
Isthmus  
12 April 2011