

**BEFORE HEARING COMMISSIONERS
IN TAUPŌ**

UNDER THE Resource Management Act 1991 (“**Act**”)
IN THE MATTER OF Proposed Plan Change 42 Rural Chapter - General
Rural Environment and Rural Lifestyle Environment
AND IN THE MATTER OF a submission seeking the rezoning of the site
located at 387 Whakaroa Road to Rural Lifestyle
Zone and associated relief

BETWEEN **STEVE HAWKINS**
Submitter

AND **TAUPŌ DISTRICT COUNCIL**
Planning authority

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF STEPHANIE LOUISE BLICK

Before a Hearing Panel: Chairperson David McMahon, Commissioner Liz Burge,
and Councillors Yvonne Westerman and Kevin Taylor.

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

Background, qualifications and experience

1. My full name is Stephanie Louise Blick.
2. I am the Director and Principal Planner of Scope Planning Limited, based in Wellington. Prior to this, I was the Planning Manager at Egmont Dixon Limited.
3. I hold a Bachelor of Science Degree from Victoria University of Wellington and a Bachelor of Social Science Degree (with first class honours) in Resource and Environmental Planning from Waikato University.
4. I have over 15 years’ experience in the field of resource management with extensive experience in land development and structure planned projects.

5. My experience includes lead planner and project coordination roles for masterplanning projects, formal submissions and Council plan changes. Recent experience includes engaged by Porirua City Council in a project coordination role on the Proposed Northern Growth Area Plan Variation to the Proposed District Plan.
6. I am an Associate member of the New Zealand Planning Institute, and I am also a member of the Resource Management Law Association.

Expert witness code of conduct

7. I have been provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court's 2023 Practice Note. While this is not an Environment Court hearing, I have read and agree to comply with that Code. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying upon the specified evidence of another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

SECTION 2. MY INVOLVEMENT IN THE TE TUHI ESTATES' PROJECT

8. I was engaged by Steve Hawkins on behalf of Te Tuhi Estates Ltd in mid-2021 to provide planning advice in relation to the Te Tuhi Estates project. Early involvement in this project included:
 - (a) Site visits;
 - (b) Review of the previous (now lapsed) subdivision and land use applications and decisions;
 - (c) Input and assistance in the preparation of initial concept designs;
 - (d) Planning advice to the project team on relevant provisions of the Taupo District Plan; and,
 - (e) Preparation for, and attendance at two formal pre-application meetings held with Taupo District Council.
9. In late 2022 I took parental leave and in March 2023 Mr Andrew Cumming was engaged on the project as a Lead Planner role. Since Mr Cumming's engagement I have continued to provide planning advice and support and

have most recently been assisting the project team with engagement with the Department of Conservation.

Taupo District Council Engagement

10. Two formal pre-application meetings were held with Taupo District Council officers to discuss the project as described below.

16 August 2021 Pre-Application Meeting

11. The key points were discussed at the meeting were as follows:
 - (a) There was consideration of proposing a consent similar to a lapsed consent granted previously (RM060466).
 - (b) Staging and implementation of the development.
 - (c) Necessary technical reporting including landscape and traffic reports.
12. Key points raised by Council officers were as follows:
 - (a) The removal of the Mapara Valley Structure Plan from the District Plan would lead to a reversion to rural zoning.
 - (b) Presence of an escarpment area and fault line avoidance zones.
 - (c) Absence of wastewater servicing.
 - (d) Queries about density, development of the proposal, balanced lot sizes, and landscape-oriented design.
 - (e) Considering affected parties' perspectives, including how the area is viewed from the lake.
13. The project team, including myself talked through initial assessments and concepts for the project:
 - (a) Interest in carbon credit planting and community/non-residential elements.
 - (b) Consideration of communal systems, climate change, and diverse site activities.

- (c) On-site servicing including private wastewater systems with septic tanks or nitrogen-reducing systems for each lot.
- (d) Private road infrastructure and sustainable / communal maintenance approaches.
- (e) Connectivity to existing walkways and tracks in the area.

4 August 2022 Pre-Application Meeting

- 14. The key purposes of this meeting were to update Council on the technical assessments that had been completed since the previous meeting and to engage with Council's consultant landscape architect (Mr Simon Button from Isthmus) to discuss and agree critical viewpoints to inform Landscape and Visual Assessment, with a focus on lake viewpoints.
- 15. The following points were discussed:
 - (a) Overview of concept development by Mr Dave Mansergh (project landscape architect) and Ms Lauren White (project designer)
 - (b) Overview of infrastructure requirements.
 - (c) Summary of remaining assessments and engagement to be completed.
 - (d) Discussion and agreement on critical viewpoints for Landscape and Visual Assessment, with a focus on lake viewpoints.
- 16. These pre-application meetings have guided how the proposed development has been progressed, including the approach to the Preferred Relief now being advanced through this plan change process.

Expert Conferencing

- 17. I participated in the expert planning conferencing held on Tuesday the 8th of August and my views are recorded in the Joint Witness Statement provided to the Panel on the 9th of August.

SECTION 3. PLANNING (PEER REVIEW) EVIDENCE

18. I have read the evidence of Mr Cumming and concur with this assessment and findings. I have not done so uncritically, but have carefully considered the issues and his evidence on the various matters, having regard to my background in the project as well as my wider planning experience. I have also had the benefit of having had some “distance” from the project with my stepping back due to parental responsibilities and so being able to look again at the issues with fresher eyes and without being too close to all the details (in other words, avoiding any trap of “not seeing the wood for the trees”).
19. The evidence of Mr Cumming discusses the assessment of the PC42 (Planning Change 42) and its alignment with the stated purposes and objectives, also referred to as "PC42 Matters," in relation to the Operative Rural Environment. Mr Cumming’s evidence evaluates how PC42 and the Preferred Relief (a proposed refinement) address various aspects of rural development and environmental protection. The main points can be summarised as follows (which I agree with):

Rural Character and Environmental Protection:

- (a) PC42 seeks to maintain "established character" but lacks clear definitions and objectives for enhancing rural character.
- (b) Mr Cumming observes that maintaining established character may not allow for appropriate change or enhancement.
- (c) The Preferred Relief (TTP) approach enhances rural character, landscape, and ecological values.

Primary Production Potential and Land Fragmentation:

- (d) PC42 aims to protect primary production potential by limiting subdivision below 10ha.
- (e) It is Mr Cummings opinion that, based on the Agricultural Assessment, that a blanket 10ha minimum allotment size may not be suitable for less productive land areas. (It does seem likely to me that 10ha subdivisions would not protect primary production, but rather would decrease it).

- (f) The TTP approach of clustering allotments preserves productive native bush units while allowing for rural lifestyle development.

Rural Industry and Geothermal Electricity Production:

- (g) PC42 enables 'rural industry' (as per a new definition introduced in the place change) with locational needs in the rural environment.
- (h) The TTP does not focus on rural industry.

Reverse Sensitivity Management:

- (i) PC42 includes provisions to manage reverse sensitivity through building setbacks and allotment separation.
- (j) TTP layout and activities minimize reverse sensitivity issues, particularly through obligations on rural residential sites.

Meeting Demand for Rural Lifestyle Opportunities:

- (k) The TTP seeks to address the lack of sufficient rural lifestyle opportunities to meet higher-end demand.

Alternatives to Farming (Agribusiness, Tourism, Visitor Accommodation):

- (l) PC42 enables alternatives to farming, but there is a lack of specific policy guidance.
- (m) The TTP explicitly provides for tourism activities, visitor accommodation, and rural industry with clear guidance through the Te Tuhi Precinct Plan.

Rural Infrastructure:

- (n) Both PC42 and TTP require on-site infrastructure, reducing reliance on existing services. TTP's proposed communal wastewater system ensures higher-quality discharges and minimizes infrastructure costs.

20. I concur with Mr Cumming's overall assessment that PC42 has shortcomings in preventing fragmentation, defining rural character, providing sufficient lifestyle opportunities, and offering clear policy guidance for alternatives to farming.
21. Based on the evidence of Mr Cumming and the technical assessments and evidence of the other experts, it is my view that the TTP, as Preferred Relief, generally offers substantially improved outcomes in the PC42 Matters canvassed extensively by Mr Cumming, that, overall can be considered as the purpose or objective of PC42.
22. I agree with Mr Cumming that there appear to be no policy impediments to granting the Preferred Relief.

Stephanie Blick

11 August 2023