

**BEFORE HEARING COMMISSIONERS
IN TAUPO**

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.

BETWEEN **STEVE HAWKINS**
Submitter

AND **TAUPŌ DISTRICT COUNCIL**
Planning authority

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF LAUREN WHITE

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

INTRODUCTION

Background, qualifications and experience

1. My full name is Lauren White.
2. I am an urban designer and hold a Bachelor of Architectural Studies and a Master of City Planning and Urban Design from the University of Cape Town, South Africa (1992).
3. I am currently the owner and Director of Urban Acumen Limited, a company I established in 2020 and through which I provide urban design services to a variety of clients. I have been in this role for three years. Prior to this position, I was employed as a senior urban designer by GHD for two years and Harrison Grierson Consultants for 13 years. Prior to

this, and before immigrating to New Zealand, I worked overseas for nearly 5 years.

4. I have a background in architecture and approximately 25 years' urban design experience across a wide range of projects in both the public and private sector. I have extensive experience in designing and delivering housing developments in green and brownfield locations across New Zealand, and participating in private plan changes, resource consent applications and design review processes.
5. I am a chair of the Auckland Urban Design Panel, on the staff of the University of Auckland where I contribute to the Master of Urban Design programme and also assist a number of District Councils with urban design advice in the processing of resource consent applications.
6. My relevant recent experience includes providing design input on the development of Loch Views in Acacia Bay which adopted a landscape sensitive approach to residential subdivision and applied a number of conditions and guidelines to ensure future buildings and planting are embedded and integrated into the wider landscape.

Involvement in the Project

7. I have been involved in design and planning for the development of this site for approximately two years. In late 2021, I prepared preliminary concept plans based on the clustered development approach which underpinned the 2010 Environment Court subdivision approval for 65 allotments. The design brief for site development was to plan the site for appropriate rural residential development and explore options to include appropriate non-residential activities, such as tourist facilities, shared community amenities, hobby farms etc.
8. At that time, and after initial engagement with Taupō District Council, Mr Dave Mansergh (Mansergh Graham Landscape Architects) was engaged to provide expert advice with respect to the landscape and visual effects of the development concept. Since that time, I have visited the site and worked alongside Mr Mansergh and the wider multi-disciplinary design team to advance concepts for development and restoration.

9. Together with Mr Paul James, land development engineer (Envelope Engineering), Mr Mansergh and I became the core design team over the following 18 months, continuously refining the design concept as further information became available and additional assessments were undertaken.
10. Whilst I am a qualified urban designer, I consider my role on this project as a more general designer, providing vision and ideas and responding to opportunities and constraints identified by other core team members, particularly Mr Mansergh. In my opinion, the proposed development does not constitute an *urban* environment and is not subject to the conventional best practice urban design principles and assessment typically adopted in urban environments. To my mind, it represents a rural residential environment that has been designed in response to a wide range of design drivers, specifically the unique characteristics and capacity of the site itself, its location and the aim to advance a viable and sustainable long term use which delivers a “win – win” outcome for the site, its landscape values and Taupo generally.
11. In association with the wider design team, including planner Mr. Andrew Cumming (acplanning), I have also prepared the Te Tuhi Design Report and the Te Tuhi Conditions of Consent, Covenants and Design Guidelines. These documents are attached to this Statement of Evidence as Attachment 1 and 2 respectively. The documents are intended to accompany a comprehensive subdivision and land use consent application for the site and to inform the Te Tuhi Development Area Structure Plan that Mr Cumming has recommended applies to the site to modify the provisions of the Rural Lifestyle Environment Zoning being sought for the site through these proceedings.

Purpose and scope of evidence

12. The purpose of my evidence is to provide background information on the design rationale and design process and provide an opinion on the proposed design outcomes.

Expert witness code of conduct

13. 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.

The Design Approach and Process

14. The design approach and process has been instrumental in achieving a supportable development proposal given the site's rural zoning and identification (by Taupo District Council) as an Outstanding Landscape Area (ONL65).
15. Recognising the current activity status of the activity under the Operative District Plan (non-complying), the identified natural values and site constraints, the methodology for the design process has included:
 - a site visit to understand the unique location of the site and existing and future context
 - appreciating the site specific opportunities and constraints and their implications for development
 - analysing the site itself with respect to physical characteristics, natural features, and interfaces etc.
 - reviewing the relevant objectives and policies for the rural environment, the outstanding landscape area and the approach recommended in the Design Guide for Rural Subdivision (Taupo District Council 2012)
 - developing and agreeing a vision and design drivers for the design team
 - working with the project landscape architect and planner to explore a framework for supportable development
 - preparing a concept plan for testing by the wider project team
 - utilising a three dimensional model to understand and test design proposals
 - revising the overall concept plan in response to feedback

- finalising the detailed design of the development with respect to roading, lot layouts, circulation etc. and consistency with design intentions
 - on-site testing of each preliminary building platform with the project designer, landscape architect and engineer to assess land form, visibility and outlook
 - identifying/categorising each building platform with respect to its visual sensitivity
 - identifying individual lot boundaries along with functional balance lots that align with practical options for on-going land management
 - preparing a mitigation planting plan to ensure landscape and visual integration of development
 - finalising bespoke building platforms for each lot that integrate with mitigation planting
 - crafting specific conditions of consent to ensure any effects of development are appropriately and sufficiently mitigated and the landscape values of the site are restored and enhanced, as well as preparing design guidelines to promote a high quality built and natural landscape is achieved.
16. In my experience, this careful and iterative “landscape driven” design process is appropriate given the prominence and identified landscape sensitivity of the site and has resulted in a supportable proposal.

Consideration of Alternatives

17. My support for the proposal is dependent on that of the landscape architect, the alignment of the proposal with the objectives and guidance contained within the Design Guide for Rural Subdivision (Taupo District Council 2012) and on the consideration of alternatives.
18. As part of developing and testing the design concept, consideration was given to the potential advantages and disadvantages of other development scenarios. These scenarios and commentary on their relative advantages

and disadvantages are included in the Te Tuhi Design Report appended to this statement (Appendix 1).

19. Three alternative scenarios were explored and assessed by the project team against a wide range of criteria. Many of these criteria are beyond my field of expertise and I rely on the input/opinion of fellow team members in this regard.
20. In summary, the proposal compares favourably against the other development scenarios, particularly due to:
- The ability to support significant revegetation and associated positive effects on natural and landscape character, indigenous biodiversity, carbon sequestration and water quality in Lake Taupo;
 - the balance between residential density and infrastructure costs and the enhancement of overall landscape values;
 - the ability for development to mitigate any potential adverse effects on the values of the Outstanding Landscape Area through careful subdivision design, building design, mitigation planting and associated ongoing consent conditions, covenants and design guidelines;
 - the opportunity for access to the site for both the wider public and local iwi and the appreciation of the unique location and views; and
 - the contribution the development can make to the local economy of Taupo, replacing an existing use which has limited benefit to the wider community, a highly modified natural landscape, potential negative effects on the lake itself and marginal long term viability.

Urban or Rural?

21. I am aware that other proposals in the Taupo area have been unsuccessful on the basis that they result in an “urbanisation” of the rural environment.¹ In the light of this, I have given some thought to the nature of the Te Tuhi proposal and whether or not it is *urban* or *rural* in nature.

¹ Kaiapo Bay Limited, Decision Report 2019 referencing 3b.2.1 ii

“Prevent urbanisation of the rural environment except as provided through the TD2050 Structure Plan Process and associated plan change process to prevent a dispersed pattern of settlement and the resulting inefficiencies in the management of resources.”

NPS:UD 2020

22. The National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 defines an urban environment as “*an area of land (regardless of size, and irrespective of local authority or statistical boundaries) that:*
- *is, or is intended to be, predominantly urban in character; and*
 - *is, or is intended to be, part of a housing and labour market of at least 10,000 people”*
23. Firstly, I address the issue of character and what constitutes urban or rural character. Proposed Plan Change 42 defines rural character as follows:
- Buildings on different sites are separated from each other in a way that creates a sense of privacy.
 - Accessory buildings that do not dominate the landscape.
 - Dwellings may be large but are surrounded by open space and do not dominate the landscape.
 - A general absence of urban infrastructure including community stormwater and wastewater services.
 - An environment which includes residential activities, rural productive activities and home business activities.
 - Noise related to production activities during the day but low levels of noise at night.
 - Low levels of light spill.
 - Limited signage that directly relates to the activity operating on the site.
24. The proposal is generally consistent with the above outcomes due to:
- Buildings are carefully positioned in a way that they have outlook over open space, and planting between building platforms (protected by covenant) that promotes privacy

- Controls on the location, number, footprint, height and reflectivity of buildings (set out in the structure plan) and guidelines for their form, materiality and location to ensure they do not dominate the landscape
- Roads with rural character provided through swales and clusters of street trees, rather than kerb and channel and more regular tree spacings typical in urban or suburban areas
- Communal waste water infrastructure, on site stormwater and rural type roads
- A combination of residential activity, tourist facilities, and an equestrian centre
- Controls of levels of artificial light (set out in the Structure Plan)
- Low anticipated levels of noise and signage (controlled by the Rural Lifestyle Environment provisions)

25. In my opinion, Te Tuhi Estate will therefore be more rural in character than urban. However, I acknowledge that given its distance from Taupo (15 -20 minute drive) and the population of Taupō, Te Tuhi Estate could be considered to be part of Taupō's housing and labour market.

26. Both of the above criteria in the NPS:UD need to be met for an area of land to be deemed to be an "urban environment". As such, if the proposal for Te Tuhi Point can be shown to be predominantly rural in character then it would not be deemed to be urban in terms of the NPS:UD.

New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (MfE 2005)

27. The NZ Urban Design Protocol (UDP) does not explicitly define the term "urban" but addresses urban design in NZ's towns and cities, and identifies successful qualities of these *urban* environments to be:

- Competitive, thriving and innovative and accommodating effective transport systems, economic hubs and cultural and leisure facilities
- Liveable, with a range/choice of lifestyle opportunities
- Environmentally responsible

28. Given the limited size, land uses and employment opportunities as well as the lack of public transport, I consider it to be inconsistent with the above description.
29. Other well recognised urban design literature (*People + Places + Spaces: MfE 2002*) and the concept of the Urban Rural Transect, developed by the New Urbanists (*Andres Duany et al*) in the late 1990's), recognise that there is a range of environments on a continuum between urban and rural and no clear "dividing line". The Transect is "*a tool with which to design, correlating elements along a rural-to-urban continuum, enabling "the basis for a system of zoning that creates complex, contextually appropriate human environments."*"² Adapted from landscape ecology, the Transect identifies six zones, from urban core to natural zone, each containing elements and qualities that define a place's character. Based on the descriptions and images of the Transect, Te Tuhi Estate would align most closely with the T2 zone (Rural Zone), i.e. not fully natural but also not suburban.
30. Based on the reading of the above and other sources (including Statistics New Zealand and the Statistical Standard for Geographic Areas 2023), I am of the opinion that ascertaining whether a place is urban or rural should be informed by a number of criteria, namely:
- How it looks on the ground and is perceived by residents and visitors
 - How it functions with respect to people accessing jobs, transport and other facilities and services
 - How it is managed with respect to administrative services and infrastructure provision
31. There are two key aspects of the proposal which could be argued to make it "urban" in classification, namely:
- Its relationship to an urban core (Taupō) – it's location within commuting distance to the centre of Taupo potentially renders it part of the Taupō urban area; and

² <https://dirt.asla.org/2021/03/22/the-case-for-the-rural-to-urban-transect/>

- The rural residential allotments would be smaller than the controlled activity standard of 2ha anticipated by the proposed Rural Lifestyle Environment.
32. Notwithstanding the above two points, in my opinion, the development proposal has on balance more rural qualities than urban qualities. This is due to:
- Its clear physical and visual separation from other urban areas of Kinloch and Taupo;
 - Its *actual* very low density – 0.3 residential units/ha;
 - The *perception* of very low density due to the proportions and clustering of dwellings relative to the overall site size and the extent of planted/bush areas;
 - The clustering of buildings which reflects the typical “randomness” of buildings in rural areas (as opposed to regular spacings typical in urban or suburban environments);
 - The absence of any public transport or employment, community facilities or services which are typical of urban areas;
 - The private rural road layout and design profile with no kerbs or streetlighting;
 - Its self-sufficiency with respect to on-site waste water disposal and stormwater management;
 - The informal bush walkways/bridlepaths;
 - Some grazed areas and an equestrian area;
33. It is widely recognised that there is a continuum between truly “rural” and fully “urban” and a difficulty with defining each term.
34. The above discussion leads me to the conclusion that the proposal is still essentially rural in nature and therefore does not constitute an urbanisation of the rural environment. Indeed, it is relatively consistent with the anticipated outcomes of the Rural Lifestyle Environment as defined in PC42.

CONCLUSION

35. The proposal is the result of a collaborative multi-disciplinary design exercise which adopted a design approach which responds to the sites' existing landscape values and its unique opportunities and constraints. Its vision is to develop the site while restoring its planted landscape, providing opportunities for supporting facilities and recreation and ensuring a clear land ownership and management strategy.
36. The consideration of potential alternative development scenarios, including maintaining the status quo activity of farming, has shown that the proposal has a significant number of benefits, primarily that it results in a net positive effect on visual amenity values associated with the Outstanding Landscape Area.
37. The proposed subdivision design, identification of building platforms, and planting strategy will deliver a rural residential environment with qualities generally consistent with rural landscapes and those anticipated by the Rural Lifestyle Environment.

11 July 2023
Lauren White

Attachment 1 Te Tuhi Design Statement

Attachment 2 Te Tuhi Conditions of Consent, Covenants and Design Guidelines