IN THE MATTER	of the Resource Management Act 1991
AND	
IN THE MATTER	of an application by SkyPlay Adventures Limited and Tauhara North 2 Trust (applicants) and Taupo District Council (Consent Authority) in relation to an application for Land Use Consent RM190270

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF JASON ANTONI HOGAN ON BEHALF OF SKY PLAY ADVENTURES

(Landscape and Visual)

10 September 2020

INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and Experience

1. My name is Jason Antoni Hogan. I am a director of LA4 Landscape Architects. I have 28 years experience as a landscape architect both in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Science from the University of Canterbury and a post-graduate degree in Landscape Architecture with honours from Lincoln University. I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and a member of the Resource Management Law Association and Urban Design Forum. During my career, I have prepared landscape and visual assessments for a wide range of activities and developments.

Involvement in the Project

2. My involvement with this project to date has been in the preparation of a landscape and visual assessment of the proposal (technical report) to inform the Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE) prepared as part of this application.

Purpose and Scope of Evidence

3. The purpose of this evidence is to present the key relevant matters and findings of my technical report and the subsequent S92 requests.

4. My evidence will address the following matters

   - Key elements of the proposal
   - The existing environment (site setting and surrounds)
   - Summary of conclusions
   - Review of relevant submissions
   - Comment on the Planners report
   - Comment on the proposed conditions of consent
   - Conclusion and recommendations.

5. Apart from graphic material (within the accompanying Annexure), which details the changes to the proposal since the preparation of my original assessment, I refer you to the Appendices of this original document for relevant graphic material, maps, details of the proposal, and photo-simulations of the development which were used to assist in the assessment process.

Documents and Materials Referenced

6. In producing this statement of evidence I have reviewed the following evidence and materials:

(a) Waikato Regional Landscape Assessment 2010[1]

(b) The Outstanding and Amenity Landscapes of the Taupo District (2009)[2]

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 Practice Note dated 1 December 2014. 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.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

8. The proposal is for an adventure tourism facility which consists of a series of zip-lines crossing the Waikato River in the area to the north of the Huka Falls extending downstream for almost a 1km. It includes 5 zip-lines and 8 associated station platforms for launching and receiving passengers. These range in height from 2m to 17.6m. They are of timber and steel frame construction with the footprint of the largest platform being 5 x 6m. Other elements of the proposal include a small carpark (18 spaces) and office near an established café and small tourism facility off SH5 and a series of tracks through the regenerating bush linking into the existing track network.

9. Planting, vegetation management and pest control are also proposed as part of the development to reinstate areas where minor vegetation clearance is required and to enhance the existing regenerating forest as part of the overall 'natural adventure' visitor experience.

Changes to the Proposal Since the Preparation of my Original Assessment (refer to Annexure 1)

10. Since I prepared the original landscape and visual assessment in August 2020 there has been an alteration to the alignment of Zip-run 5. The stations associated with this run include Station 7 and Station 8. The course layout plans issued for final consent approval (dated 09.09.2020) show that Station 7 remains in the original location and form, but Station 8 has been relocated to the south up the river bank approximately 30m. The platform height remains unchanged. I have been informed that the reason for this is to avoid the zipline crossing

[1] Buckland.M.C & O'Connor Planning Consultants Ltd (2010). Waikato Regional Landscape

[2] Isthmus Group 2009.

over a small Island and former pa site located within the river channel. Based on my knowledge of the site, this change results in no material change to my assessment, or conclusion reached.

The Existing Environment

11. The Waikato River is the most prominent of a number of significant natural features in the local area. From its source at Lake Taupo the River meanders through the landscape enclosed by the enveloping and fragmented mantle of vegetation. In this area, SH5, which provides the main entrance to Taupo from the north, runs more or less parallel to the river. SH1 traverses the river to the north of the nearby settlement of Wairakei to form the East Taupo Arterial (ETA). The combination of natural features and key transport connections has resulted in a strong tourism focus locally.

12. One of the key attractions of the area is Te Taheke Hukahuka (Huka Falls) which attracts very high visitor numbers. Infrastructure to support this use includes a large carpark, bridge, lookout areas and tracks. The track network then extends north on either side of the river supporting wider recreational use of the area. To the north of the falls the river flows wide and deep. Here densely vegetated slopes extend along the river's edge northward almost as far as the ETA bridge. At the top of the slopes either side of this section of the river the land levels out to gently undulating terrain. On the western side this is characterised by more fragmented vegetation patterns, SH5 and the scattering of associated tourism and recreation-related facilities that have considerable influence on the character of this entrance into Taupo. On the eastern side beyond the river slope there is an abrupt transition into open pasture and cropland.

13. The vegetation is the area is characterised by low dense regenerating indigenous cover inter-mixed with scattered clusters of large remnant exotic tree species. The dense vegetation combined with the landform and river combine to contribute significantly to the natural and scenic values of the areas. These natural values are tempered somewhat however by the significant infrastructure elements locally, including the state highways, ETA bridge and nearby Wairakei geothermal power plant which also have a significant influence on the quality and character of the wider landscape.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

14. The following summarises the main conclusions of my assessment:

Landscape Effects

- The proposal would result in minimal biophysical effects. Construction would necessitate limited vegetation clearance associated with the immediate station platforms and access tracks. Consequently in the context of the setting, there would be relatively insignificant effects on existing vegetation patterns

and continuity of vegetative cover. The construction techniques proposed mean that no excavation or concrete would be required for the in-ground footings. Minor earthworks would be required for the carpark in an area that is already modified and largely cleared of vegetation.

- The magnitude of change and extent of landscape effects is very small.
- The character of the development is consistent with established recreational and tourism activities in the wider area.
- Proposed planting, vegetation management and pest control could readily mitigate the effects of any vegetation clearance and have positive effects for the regenerating indigenous vegetation of the area.

Natural Character Effects

- The highest degree of natural character in the study area is associated with the Waikato River. The river will not be directly affected by the proposal.
- Effects to the bio-physical resource would be short-term, being largely limited to the period during, and shortly following construction
- Any effects on natural character would be limited and localised, reversible, and could be mitigated through the restorative planting and vegetation management proposed.

Visual Effects

- The visual catchment area is quite limited and strongly defined by the landform and existing vegetation.
- The most sensitive audiences are likely to be tourists and recreational users of the area. For these audiences there would be relatively limited opportunities to see the components of the development, which are also dispersed over a wide area, so will not be seen collectively.
- The most visually sensitive areas include the Waikato River and its immediate environs, which exhibit the highest degree of natural character and amenity values. The proposal will have a negligible influence on these areas. Platforms and structures located within the river valley would cause limited and very localised disturbance and would be well integrated visually due to their appearance, form and the vegetated backdrop.
- Six of the eight stations are located within the bush-clad valley where they will be readily integrated. Consequently, only two of the stations, being those in the elevated locations on the interface with the *Eastern Plateau* (Stations 1 and 7*)* are likely to have any visual prominence. It should be noted however that these are simple structures with a high degree of visual

permeability and are consistent with the type of outdoor recreational infrastructure that could be readily anticipated in this area given the nature of the landscape and the landuse.

- Where Stations 1 & 7 are visible from the east beyond the river valley, they would be viewed as relatively insignificant elements as part of the wider large scale and open rural landscape. One which has limited visual sensitivity and the ability to accommodate these simple structures within a backdrop of hills to the west without detracting significantly from the rural character and amenity currently experienced.

15. Consequently, I consider that the proposal is consistent with the intent of the key relevant statutory documents and management strategies which seek to facilitate public access use and enjoyment of this area while maintaining and enhancing the natural and scenic values.

SUBMISSIONS

16. I have reviewed the submissions. Within, there are few references specifically regarding landscape and visual considerations. However, the following submission has some relevance:

Nukuhau Pa (Dominic Bowden)

17. In the reasons for opposing the development several references are made to "visual pollution" (refer to bullet points 5 and 21), "in a natural and pristine environment"

Comment

18. Although the area could, without doubt, be described as natural, it is by no means pristine, particularly the terrestrial components. As discussed the prevailing character is significantly influenced by past modification (vegetation clearance), exotic vegetation (including invasive weed species), existing recreational use and tourism activities, as well as adjacent infrastructure and activity.

19. Also, the scale, character and distribution of the built elements associated with the proposal in my view would by no means constitute "visual pollution", as they are consistent with the recreational character established and can be largely successfully integrated into the setting.

PLANNERS REPORT

20. The planner's report of the application reviews landscape and natural values in some detail. Within the associated discussion Mr Whittaker acknowledges the high landscape and natural values associated with the area, but also recognises the influence of

existing tourist activity and recreational infrastructure on the character and quality of the area:

> *"this establishes a context which is more accommodating of the Zipline proposal and one which can be assessed as an extension of tourist activities within a portion of the river corridor which already includes man-made structures and landscape modification"….*[3]

21. To conclude Mr Whittaker states that he largely supports the findings of my assessment and states that he considers that the landscape and visual effects will be minor.

22. He notes however:

> *…"the applicant's landscape assessment, while referencing tangata whenua values, has not provided any real discussion or assessment of the landscape impacts from a cultural perspective."*[4]

23. As is evident from the submissions to this application by various Iwi groups, there are undoubtedly considerable cultural values associated with the study area. Although I acknowledge that the concept of *landscape* involves the interaction of the physical environment and human cultural perceptions and associations, beyond this, I do not consider that it is my position to comment in detail on such cultural matters in an area so rich in Maori history and tradition. Rather, that this is best dealt with by a suitably qualified cultural specialist who has a deeper understanding of the multi-layered cultural and spiritual dimensions of the area .

PROPOSED CONDITIONS

24. I have read the proposed conditions. Although there are no conditions specific to landscape and visual matters, I see that the proposed ecological conditions are relevant with regard to mitigation of areas disturbed by the construction of the Zipline infrastructure and general landscape enhancement of the area. Further, I consider that the relevant conditions proposed should ensure that the desired ecological enhancements and associated landscape (natural character) and visual (visual integration of structures and tracks) occur as part of the proposal.

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[3] S42A Hearing Report. Para 12.71

[4] S42A Hearin Report. Para 12.63

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

25. Although the proposed development spans a number of landscape character areas exhibiting mixed character and quality, the main components are largely located within the Waikato River valley. Despite historic modification the river valley retains significant landscape values and a high level of visual amenity as a result of a combination of the river, landform and the regenerating native forest. These physical characteristics and experiential qualities of the landscape in combination with the proximity of several other natural attractions and the major transport connections mean that the area is also very popular as a tourist destination and for recreational activities. Consequently these are also significant contributors to the established character.

26. This proposal embraces both the natural assets of the local landscape and the desire for people to experience what it has to offer in a way that maximises the potential exposure and enjoyment of the landscape setting. However it achieves this in a manner which will avoid any significant disruption to both the physical landscape resource or the associated qualities and characteristics that contribute to the considerable landscape and amenity values.

27. In doing so the proposal is consistent with the relevant policy directions of the key statutory planning documents, not only in relation to landscape and visual considerations but also concerning recreational use.

28. Accordingly, I consider that proposal is suitable in landscape and visual terms and combined with the proposed mitigation measures would provide positive landscape and environmental outcomes for the area.

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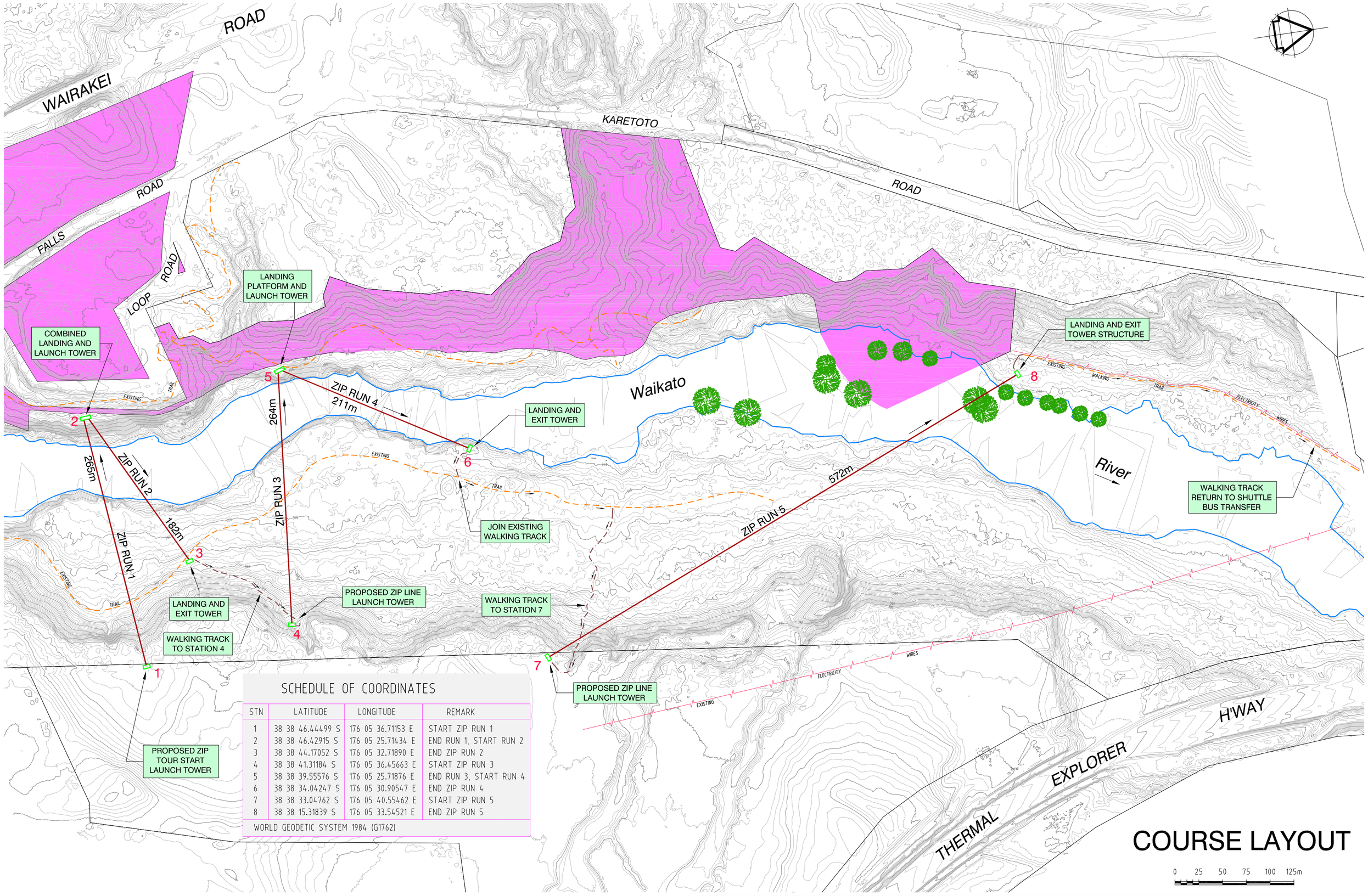
ANNEXURES ACCOMPANYING

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF JASON ANTONI HOGAN ON BEHALF OF SKY PLAY ADVENTURES

(Landscape and Visual)

10 September 2020

ORIGINAL COURSE LAYOUT



SCHEDULE OF COORDINATES

STN	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	REMARK
1	38 38 46.44499 S	176 05 36.71153 E	START ZIP RUN 1
2	38 38 46.42915 S	176 05 25.71434 E	END RUN 1, START RUN 2
3	38 38 44.17052 S	176 05 32.71890 E	END ZIP RUN 2
4	38 38 41.31184 S	176 05 36.45663 E	START ZIP RUN 3
5	38 38 39.55576 S	176 05 25.71876 E	END RUN 3, START RUN 4
6	38 38 34.04247 S	176 05 30.90547 E	END ZIP RUN 4
7	38 38 33.04762 S	176 05 40.55462 E	START ZIP RUN 5
8	38 38 15.31839 S	176 05 33.54521 E	END ZIP RUN 5

WORLD GEODETIC SYSTEM 1984 (G1762)

COURSE LAYOUT

A2

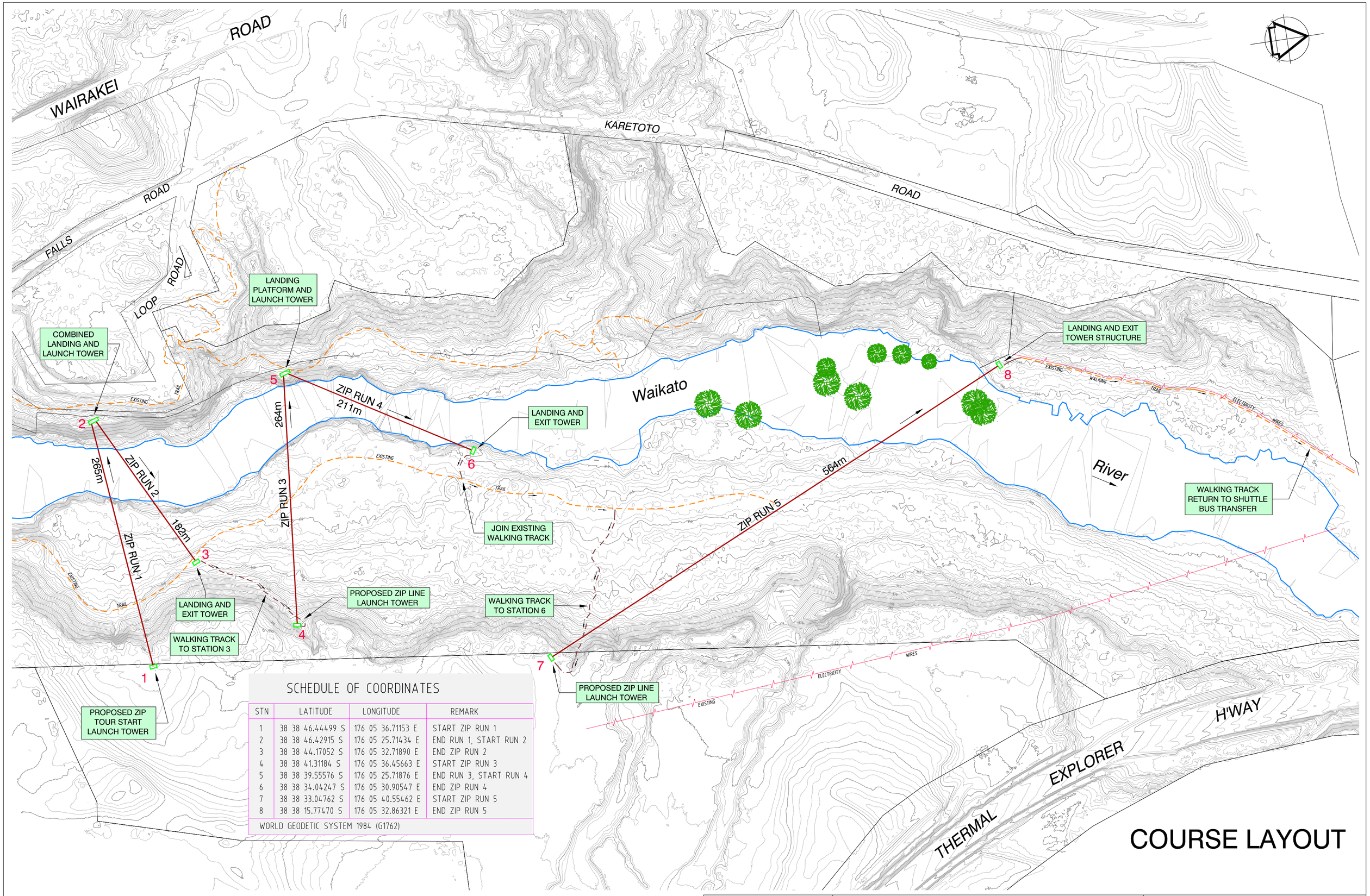
ZIP SUPPORT P\L
Unit 4, 4-6 Tengah Crescent
PO Box 135 Mona Vale NSW 1660
Tel: +61 2 9979 1016

SKY PLAY ADVENTURES
HUKA FALLS, WAIKATO RIVER, TAUPO, NEW ZEALAND
SCHEMATIC COURSE ROUTE & COORDINATES

ISSUED FOR FINAL CONCEPT APPROVAL 01.08.2019

SCALE:	PROJECT No:	DRAWING No:
1:2500	374	P-08

REVISED COURSE LAYOUT



SCHEDULE OF COORDINATES

STN	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	REMARK
1	38 38 46.44499 S	176 05 36.71153 E	START ZIP RUN 1
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5	38 38 39.55576 S	176 05 25.71876 E	END RUN 3, START RUN 4
6	38 38 34.04247 S	176 05 30.90547 E	END ZIP RUN 4
7	38 38 33.04762 S	176 05 40.55462 E	START ZIP RUN 5
8	38 38 15.77470 S	176 05 32.86321 E	END ZIP RUN 5

WORLD GEODETIC SYSTEM 1984 (G1762)

COURSE LAYOUT

A2

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SKY PLAY ADVENTURES
HUKA FALLS, WAIKATO RIVER, TAUPO, NEW ZEALAND
SCHEMATIC COURSE ROUTE & COORDINATES

RE-ISSUED FOR FINAL CONCEPT APPROVAL 08.09.2020

SCALE:	PROJECT No:	DRAWING No:
1:2500	374	P-08(i)