

# **Landscape Advice**

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**In consideration of Proposed Plan Change 4 and landscape related issues raised by submitters**

**Prepared for Selwyn District Council by Andrew Craig**  
July 2009

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This landscape report has been prepared in response to submissions (McIntosh, Jung and others) to proposed Plan Change 4 (PC4). These submissions raise concerns relating to the landscape. Other submissions (1300 – Lincoln Estates and 1301 B. Moir) do not appear to identify landscape issues, and are therefore not addressed in this report.

As briefed<sup>1</sup> this report addresses the following.

- A peer review of a landscape assessment prepared on behalf of Broadfield Estates Ltd (whose land is subject to PC4), by Robert Watson Landscape Architects Ltd.
- Consideration of the landscape matters raised by the submitters regarding proposed Plan Change 4.
- A determination as to whether mitigation measures further to those proposed by Robert Watson are needed arising from implementation of PC4.

In preparing this report I undertook a site visit on July 9, 2009. The purpose of the site visit was to assess the landscape character and amenity within the proposed PC4 area and its immediate surrounds. In particular, I took note of the submitter's land (McIntosh & Ors) and its relationship to the land subject to PC4. On my visit I also ascertained what kind of zone environments existed in the area. This gave me some idea as to what the potential effects would be under various development scenarios.

I understand that McIntosh and Jung et al own two separate blocks of land that adjoin the area of land subject to PC 4. The submitter's land is excluded from the latter. Consequently I further understand that their preferred relief is to oppose proposed PC6 *'...in its entirety unless provision is made as part of the Plan Change for rezoning our land...to Living 1 deferred....'*<sup>2</sup> I am aware too, that the submitters applied for consent to subdivide their land, which was declined. They have since re-applied for consent to subdivide their properties into eight 1ha lots. I have read the decision<sup>3</sup> and have noted the landscape matters considered by the Commissioner.

## 2.0 PEER REVIEW OF ROBERT WATSON'S LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

In any landscape assessment prepared as part of a proposed plan change involving the rezoning of land, the following matters need to be considered.

- The landscape character and amenity of the land subject to the proposed plan change and its immediate surrounds.
- Landscape constraints and opportunities.
- Potential land use options and their effects on the landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Mactier, May 29, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Submission Page 6

<sup>3</sup> David Collins Commissioner 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007

- Statutory matters, principally relating to the landscape relevant District Plan objectives and policies.

In his report Mr Watson makes the following observations, which I have summarised

#### Existing landscape character

- Wider landscape has low level of naturalness due to relatively high level of modification.
- Land form is flat which gives it low visual sensitivity.
- Therefore high visual absorption capability.
- That the two streams that run through the site are in poor condition with regard to their naturalness.
- Low naturalness within site due to modification.
- No significant buildings are on site.
- Low visual sensitivity due to flat topography, predominance of exotic vegetation, visual enclosure and low naturalness.
- Visual amenity is rated 'medium.'

**Comment:** With regard to the existing landscape, the proportion of built form to open space needs to be described as the District Plan promotes this as being the principle means by which rural character is delivered. A map or aerial photograph showing the location of existing buildings would be useful in this regard. This information is useful because it indicates levels of modification and green open space that in turn shows the magnitude of change to the landscape brought about through rezoning.

My observation of the site is that there exist two building clusters, with a major one being located more or less central to the site. The other is located alongside Edwards Street. Because buildings are not scattered throughout the site, a sense of open space prevails. Thus the site displays a reasonably high level of rural open space character, despite the presence of many shelter belts. Consequently there is considerable contrast between the adjoining urban environment of Lincoln Township and the PC4 land.

#### The Proposal

- Extent and layout of the site is described.
- The two waterways within or bordering the site will be enhanced.
- The rezoning is subject to an Outline Development Plan and will adopt low impact urban design and development principles.

- Planting, footpaths and reserves are described.
- A detailed landscape plan is provided for the reserves and stream environments.

**Comment:** The Outline Development Plan (ODP) needs to better show how the proposed zone will be integrated with those areas that adjoin it – particularly with reference to the Lincoln Structure Plan. This is an issue that has been identified by one of the submitters (Lincoln Estates - 1300) At a broad conceptual level the landscape plan could also reflect this, where the landscape treatment for the entire stream system is seen to be consistent in its design.

A key component of any new urban development affecting landscape character and amenity concerns building density. 10.5 lots per hectare are offered in this case<sup>4</sup> although the Lincoln Structure Plan indicates 15 lots per hectare for that part of the zone adjoining Edwards Street. This affects open space and is particularly important regarding the relationship of buildings to the street, reserves and natural features such as the two waterways that bound the site. While the existing building bulk and location controls (setbacks, height, and site coverage) for Living 1 zone will apply, there are features of the site, namely the two streams that are unique, which I understand will be determined by a 9m minimum setback. The relationship of buildings to these is important where it is desirable to avoid building dominance, while providing a high level of integration with the stream environment. This can be achieved, for example, through the avoidance of high opaque fences along the esplanade reserve boundary. Other controls might concern earthworks in the vicinity of the stream environments – subject to existing rules.

The landscape concept plan (Liffey Springs) prepared by Mr Watson is detailed and will produce a very good landscape outcome. At the subdivision stage a landscape plan for the street environments might be useful also, since mention is made of it in Mr Watson's report regarding the use of native tree species. The ODP also indicates that a 3m landscape strip is to be provided alongside Edward Street, and again a landscape plan would be of assistance at the subdivision stage. A public open space tree planting guide currently being developed by the Council will assist in this regard.

#### Visual Impact

- Subdivision layout and planting to reflect form and character of surrounding landscape.
- Emphasis is placed on the enhancement of natural features.
- Views from surrounding quarters are assessed as being not adversely affected due to either existing vegetative screening, proposed vegetation and in relation to the adjoining urban area, a 1.8m high paling fence.

**Comment:** The biggest visual impact is going to arise from the radical change from rural to residential landscape character, which is briefly mentioned but not covered in any great detail in Mr Watson's report. A

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<sup>4</sup> Plan Change Application June 2008 proposed rule 12.1.3.25

consequence of this will be lost rural outlook and amenity from neighbouring properties. Instead of green open space and trees, people will see houses and associated gardens. Initially the houses will be dominant until amenity planting vegetation matures. It is expected that this will take around 15 years to override building dominance, although green amenity will be apparent much earlier. The provision of street trees will greatly assist in this regard.

The green openness that provides rural amenity will also be lost. However, residential environments also provide amenity resulting from well designed and maintained houses, high quality landscaping in both public and private spaces, and good integration with natural features. A general description of the character and amenity of the future living environment would help to better understand anticipated outcomes in this case.

The visual impact assessment from various quarters suggests that there may be adverse effects arising from the proposal, where it is implied that screening is a positive outcome. If there are adverse effects, then these need to be identified. As mentioned, the most apparent adverse effect will result from the major change in landscape character and subsequent loss of rural outlook.

The emphasis on enhancement of the waterways and reserves is clearly a substantial positive effect. It should be stressed that benefits to a wider public will be considerable where these waterways and reserves are linked to the township and surrounds.

The final consideration in this regard concerns the new urban / rural boundary. It is evident from the ODP and landscape plan that this will display very high amenity derived from the natural character of the enhanced waterways. A relatively short stretch without this enhancement will occur between Edward Street and the recreation reserve. How this boundary is treated is important with a view to maintaining a contrast between the urban and rural while providing high amenity. The existing boundary displays poor amenity due to the high paling fences, thereby denying visual access to the rural and vice versa. The developer should aim to avoid such fences along this boundary.

### Evaluation

- Basically a short summary where it is concluded that the proposal will have a minimal impact on the visual amenity of the area.

**Comment:** Amenity per se will prevail, where its rural source will be supplanted by an urban source. As mentioned though, the change in character will be radical resulting in very different source of amenity. It is likely that some will find this adverse, whereas others will see it as a positive effect. Observation shows that new development in the Lincoln township area are generally of a very high standard, and if this were the same then confidence can be had that a high level of urban amenity will be achieved.

### **Overall comments**

Robert Watson's report and accompanying landscape plan gives a good description of the enhancement proposals within the ODP area. Consequently the general tenor of the report promotes positive outcomes

where the existing environment is downplayed (low naturalness, highly modified, medium coherence) when compared to the proposed plan change. Much reliance is put on the waterway enhancement which will be a major positive effect benefiting not only future residents, but also the wider community.

Some exploration of connections to the surrounding area, particularly with respect to the Lincoln Structure Plan would have given greater confidence that the proposal is well integrated.

It would also have been useful to explore the District Plan's objectives and policies that have a bearing on landscape outcomes, in particular those relating to the growth of townships. An assessment of these would provide a checklist that would ideally be fully met by the proposal, thereby giving confidence that the relevant objectives and policies, particularly those concerning the growth of townships<sup>5</sup> including subdivision, are being implemented and achieved. On the face of it, it appears that the PC4 proposed will comfortably implement and achieve the relevant objectives and policies.

The final point concerns the section 32 requirement to consider alternative uses for the site. While it is accepted that the land has been identified in the Lincoln Structure Plan as being suitable for Living 1 zoning, all other alternatives and their effects on the landscape need to be considered. The alternatives might include, for example, recreational open space, maintaining the status quo, business activity, educational use, community facilities, conservation or other such uses.

### **3.0 LANDSCAPE MATTERS RAISED BY THE SUBMITTERS TO PLAN CHANGE 4**

In the submissions lodged in opposition to proposed Plan Change 4 (K & D McIntosh and Ors) a number of issues were raised that concern landscape matters. For the most part, the submitters consider Plan Change 4 with reference and comparison to their land which adjoins the plan change site (Broadfield Estates).

In their submission (prepared by Ms Fiona Aston, consultant planner) they raise the follow landscape matters.

#### Rural Character

The submitters consider their land to have moderate naturalness because it is devoid of built structures. This is compared to the PC 4 site which Robert Watson assesses as having low naturalness due to the prevalence of exotic plant species, the nature of land use and modifications.

I would describe the PC4 land as having moderate naturalness with a bias toward the low end of the scale due to the above characteristics. The submitters land, in comparison displays moderate naturalness at the higher end of the scale because built elements are absent. Adding to the naturalness

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<sup>5</sup> Selwyn District Plan – Township Volume, Part B

of both sites however, are the waterways. Although degraded to varying degrees, their existing natural character is amplified by the fact that there are no other significant natural features in the vicinity. As Mr Watson's landscape plan shows, the waterways have considerable potential for enhancement.

The submitters believe that the visual impact arising from urbanisation of the PC4 land will be adverse to them due to a change in landscape character. The character will indeed change significantly – from rural to urban. However, the outlook from the submitters land will not be overly affected by this change for two main reasons.

The first is that there will be a substantial buffer of esplanade reserve, recreation reserve and storm water management area. This will be located between the submitter's land and that of the proposed Living 1 zone. This buffer will be further reinforced by the presence of a proposed road. The buffer forms a wedge that widens as it moves away from the township. Consequently a substantial amount of green open space will intrude from the adjoining rural hinterland that will effectively cleave the PC4 site and that of the submitters.

The second point is that existing and proposed landscaping along the esplanade strip of the L1 creek will effectively screen the Living zone from the submitter's site. The effect of this is evident in the photograph below.

*Vegetation alongside L1 Creek*



**Photograph 1:** *Vegetation alongside L1 Creek (arrowed) and its enhancement with further vegetation will effectively screen the proposed Living 1 zone beyond. McIntosh land is in the foreground.*

The landscape plan prepared by Robert Watson indicates that the proposed planting will comprise native species, all of which are evergreen. The plan

also shows that the planting will be dense and is therefore able to provide effective screening. The submitters assert that this planting will not be adequate to mitigate effects, but I believe it will. There will however, be a period when planting will take time to mature or reach a height that is able to screen the submitter's land from the PC 4 land. If planting is implemented early in the site development phase, then there is a possibility that it will be well established by the time housing appears. Native plants can grow quickly, and so it would be reasonable to expect a fairly high degree of effective screening at around 5 years plus.

A further issue is raised by the submitters relating to effects caused by the proposed rezoning. The submitter states that *'having a 294 lot residential subdivision as a neighbour will have a very major adverse effect on rural character.'*<sup>6</sup> This view is reached in response to a decision concerning the submitter's land where consent was sought, and declined, to subdivide four rural residential lots. In that decision the commissioner concluded that 2ha lots would have a significant effect on rural character.

With regard to landscape matters there are two issues to consider.

The first is that all urban areas will have a rural / residential boundary. Thus there will always be a relationship between one environment and another. In principle, it cannot be said that one zone environment will adversely affect the other in terms of landscape character. This is because the character of each zone is completely different. So in the event of urban growth involving the rezoning of rural land, the only substantive change concerning the urban / rural boundary will involve a shift in the boundary. Generically the relationship of the urban to rural remains fundamentally the same.

The second issue concerns the change from rural character to urban. Rezoning for residential purposes will involve a radical change from rural to urban character. Thus rural character is lost when this occurs, to be supplanted by urban. To some people such a loss will be adverse, particularly where they derive amenity or pleasantness from the rural environment. The issue therefore is, if the character of rural land is to be maintained as required by District Plan provisions, then there will be a limit to building density. That is, the building density has to be such that it maintains rural character, meaning that the dominance of green open space has to prevail over built form. This cannot occur with rezoning for residential purposes hence the need for a plan change. If, on the other hand an attempt is made to establish residential activity approaching urban proportions on rural land without seeking a plan change, then the effects will most definitely be adverse. However, this is not the case in this instance, and so it cannot be argued that the effects on rural character are going to be adverse per se. All that can be argued is that the outlook from neighbouring rural land could be adversely affected due to the loss of existing rural character and amenity. For the reasons discussed earlier regarding the esplanade reserve planting and associated areas, it seems likely that such effects will not be especially significant with regard to the outlook for the submitters. It should also be noted that there are no dwellings on the submitters land at present, and therefore no permanent occupants will at this stage be affected by the PC4 rezoning and subsequent development.

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<sup>6</sup> Page 4



The submitters then consider PC4 with regard to the District Plan objectives and policies and in particular those relating to the growth of townships. They note that the PC4 land is peninsula like in its layout and extent and is therefore contrary to Policy B4.3.5 seeking a compact shape to townships where practical. On the Zone Plan (Map 114 & 117) the PC4 land does appear peninsula like, where it juts into the surrounding rural land. This appearance is aggravated by the rural land located to the west and the Ryelands rural residential block beyond. I note that the proposed Lincoln Structure Plan identifies this land as being suitable for residential development. If that is so, then the PC4 proposal will be more or less fully contiguous with the township. I also note that the Structure Plan identifies that residential development will not extend as far south toward the junction of the L1 and L2 Creeks as shown on the Broadfield Estates plan. If this plan were in accord with the Structure Plan, then compactness of the township will be better achieved. Notwithstanding that, it is my opinion that the compactness sought by Policy B4.3.5 will still be achieved, although this will be to a somewhat lesser extent to that envisaged by the Structure Plan.

The submitters then consider various sections of the RMA. Of relevance to landscape matters are sections 7(c) concerning amenity values and 7(f) – quality of the environment. It is asserted that PC4 will not maintain the outcomes sought by these sections of the Act. Although these matters have been discussed above, it is important to reiterate that amenity values can and are derived from both rural and residential environments. The fundamental difference is that the character source of these amenity values differs substantially. For rural areas it is the abundance of green open space over built form. For residential areas it is the quality and maintenance of housing stock, of the streetscape, under-grounded services, and the provision of reserves. So while it is true that the amenity derived from rural character will be lost with respect to the PC4 land, it is equally true that amenity of a residential nature will occur. In either instance amenity per se will not be diminished or lost – just that the source of amenity will change. Thus sections 7(c) and 7(f) will be achieved, since these do not distinguish between the sources of amenity.

The submitters then advance a case to rezone their own land as ‘*Deferred Living 1.*’<sup>7</sup> In so doing they risk negating their arguments opposing PC4. Nonetheless, it is evident that there are considerable restraints on rezoning their land, most of which appear to be related to infrastructural, storm water drainage and transport matters. Landscape wise, there are constraints also. These largely concern the relationship of Living 1 to the neighbouring Ryelands Rural Residential block, which would be enveloped by the higher density housing to south. This would clearly be contrary to aforementioned Policy B4.3.5 where the submitter’s land would form an outlier to the township.

The only potential option that could be entertained landscape wise concerns the submitter’s application to subdivide their land into a total of 4 lots, where consent was declined. Nevertheless, in terms of their general character and amenity these would be consistent with that of the neighbouring Ryelands development. Additionally, the submitter’s land is quite well enclosed by natural and physical boundaries, namely L1 and L2 Creeks, the wastewater treatment plant and a water race to the south. Thus the submitter’s land is

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<sup>7</sup> Page 6

strongly contained where pressure for further outward growth would be substantially curtailed. Further, there would be a benefit whereby the subdivision would trigger enhancement of the esplanade reserve on the submitter's side of L1 Creek. Finally, such a proposal would be contiguous with the township and PC4 land. So from a landscape point of view there is a suite of circumstances that are favourable to the submitter in respect of rural residential development, but not Living 1. However, it is also understood that there are other reasons, alluded to above, that conspire against development, as outlined in the Commissioner's decision concerning the submitter's subdivision application.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES**

With respect to effects on the submitter's land (McIntosh & Ors) no additional mitigation measures are recommended. As discussed above, the chief mitigation measure arises from the proposed very substantial landscaped buffer that lies between the submitter's land and that subject to PC4. While rural character beyond the buffer will be supplanted by Living 1 activity, it is not anticipated that this will affect the submitters in any significant way. The existing trees alongside L1 Creek (see above photograph 1) indicate that views into the land to be developed for Living 1 use are not generally possible. And with the proposed native evergreen planting, this vegetative screening effect will continue.

However, there will be an interim period during site development involving the removal of existing exotic trees, namely willow, which are to be replaced with purely native vegetation. Consequently views between the submitter's land and that of PC4 will be opened up for a certain period. To help overcome the effect of this, it would be desirable to implement landscaping of the reserves as early as possible in development of the PC4 site. Vegetation would then have the opportunity to establish while the remainder of the site is developed. As noted earlier, most of the proposed plant species are fast growing, especially given the moisture content of local soils in the vicinity of the creek. It is expected that substantial screening will start being achieved at around year five after planting.

The only other area concerning adverse effects and their mitigation, relates to fencing along the new urban / rural boundary. It is important for such boundaries to display high landscape amenity. This amenity is achieved where there is some merging of rural and residential open space, such as that provided by internal boundary setbacks and peoples' gardens. Additionally, residents can take full advantage of rural outlook. Thus boundary demarcation with high opaque fences, such as those made with palings, should be avoided.

Apart from the above, no other avoidance or mitigation measures are recommended.

