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To: Selwyn District Council
From: Hugh Nicholson, Urban Designer
Date: 15th December 2021
Re: Plan Change 72 Prebbleton – Urban Design and Landscape Review

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Trices Road Rezoning Group has lodged a private plan change request (Plan Change 72 with Selwyn District Council to rezone 28.7 hectares of rural zoned land near Prebbleton for residential use. This will enable the development of approximately 290 residential sites.
- 1.2 I have been asked by the Selwyn District Council to carry out a peer review of the *Urban Design Statement* (dated 9/11/2020) and the *RFI 4 – Landscape matters and visual assessment* (revised 18/05/2021) provided by a+urban. Where necessary I have provided additional comments on urban design effects in relation to the urban form of Prebbleton, and commented on matters raised in submissions that relate to urban design or landscape architecture.
- 1.3 My assessment is focused on the urban design effects in relation to the urban form of Prebbleton and does consider the urban form implications for Greater Christchurch which are addressed in Mr Cleese's evidence.

2.0 Outline Development Plan (ODP)

- 2.1 The plan change area is bounded by Trices, Birchs and Hamptons Roads, and is located between Prebbleton township to the north and the new district-wide reserve, Birchs Road Park, to the south. The majority of the site would be zoned Living Z with areas of Living Z (medium density) identified towards the centre of the site around proposed green spaces to provide higher amenity. An area zoned Living 3 (Large Lot Residential) is proposed along the southern part of Birches Road "to protect the well-established landscaped edge that forms a gateway into Prebbleton". A minimum net density of 12 households per hectare is proposed over the ODP area, excluding the proposed Living 3 zone on Birches Road.

- 2.2 The land to the north and west has been zoned for residential use and has largely been developed. Work has started on the new Birchs Road Park to the south which will include bike tracks, sports fields, stretches of native bush, and a dog park, and will be constructed in stages over the next five years.
- 2.3 The Plan Change area is approximately 1.0 kilometres (as the crow flies) from the Countdown supermarket with the new Prebbleton Village commercial development just beyond, and 1.5 kilometres from the Prebbleton School. When additional distances within the Plan Change area are included these are probably greater than the distances most people would regularly walk, however, they are easily cyclable and bus route 80 Lincoln-Parklands runs down Birchs Road adjacent to the site. The site would have good access to the Prebbleton Domain to the north and the new Birchs Road Park to the south.
- 2.4 In general, I consider that the proposed plan change is an appropriate location for urban growth linking Prebbleton with the new district-wide reserve on Birchs Road, and rezoning a block of rural land which has existing residential land to the north and west and the new reserve to the south. In my opinion the proposed minimum net density of 12 households per hectare is appropriate, however, I consider that it should cover the entire plan change area. I do not believe that there is any particular justification for providing larger lots along the southern part of the Birchs Road frontage and note that the well-established landscape edge is on a separate title and could be maintained separately on this strip of land if desired.

3.0 Connections and Frontages

- 3.1 The ODP provides three connections to the north of the site, one connection to the west and two connections to the east and south (one connection to the south is a pedestrian-cycle connection). In order to provide a positive level of connectivity between the plan change area, the existing township and the new park, I recommend that two continuous north-south connections, and one continuous east-west connection with a second connection to the east (see Figure 1) are included on the ODP.
- 3.2 The existing Little River Rail Trail runs down Trices Road adjacent to the site, through the smaller suburban streets to the north, and across the Prebbleton Domain to the town centre, although the route is somewhat confused at the intersection of Trices and Birchs Road. The Rail Trail would provide an obvious cycle and pedestrian route to the town centre and I recommend that if the plan change is granted then the ODP (and associated narrative) are updated to include the extension of the Rail Trail from the intersection of Trices and Birchs Roads eastward along the frontage of the site to the intersection of Trices and Stonebridge Way, with a cycle crossing provided on Trices Road at this location to provide clear and safe access to the Rail Trail down Stonebridge Way.
- 3.3 If the plan change is granted, I recommend that the upgrade of the Trices Road and Hamptons Road frontages with footpaths is included in the ODP (and associated narrative)

to reflect the changed residential land use. I also recommend that property access and appropriate pedestrian / cycle crossing facilities on Trices, Birchs and Hamptons Roads are included in the ODP (and associated narrative) to improve passive surveillance of the street, and to support pedestrian and cycling within the Prebbleton township.

4.0 Landscape Character and Visual Impact

- 4.1 The 28.7 hectare site is composed of six rural residential properties between two and eight hectares in size. The site is flat with shelterbelts delineating individual properties and acting as windbreaks. There are a number of large exotic trees including one 'plantation' in the centre of the site and a strip of trees along the southern part of the Birchs Road frontage.
- 4.2 The properties are characterised by large single-storey houses with a number of associated garages and farm sheds.
- 4.3 The site is on the southern edge of Prebbleton with residential zoning across Trices Road to the north and across Birchs Road to the west. Houses on the southern edge of the older Stonebridge subdivision have generally 'turned their backs' on Trices Road with 1.8 metre high fences, but the newer Mersham Green subdivision addresses Trices Road with low front fences and front doors facing the street.
- 4.4 I note that while the site is largely surrounded by large scale shelterbelts and hedges at the moment, I consider it likely that most of these will be removed as part of a residential development in order to provide better sunlight access and improved amenity for the sections. A possible exception is the landscape strip along the southern end of the boundary with Birchs Road, however, no specific mechanism for retaining this has been proposed.
- 4.4 I have used a seven point scale drawn from the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architect's (NZILA) *Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*¹ to assess the scale of effects of the Plan Change on the landscape character and the visual impact of the changes.

very low	low	moderate-low	moderate	moderate-high	high	very high
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- 4.5 In my opinion that the proposed plan change would have a moderate-low impact on the landscape character reflecting the change from a rural residential landscape with small numbers of houses and a predominantly natural character to a residential landscape with a higher number of buildings and a suburban character.

¹ *Te Tangi A Te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, (Final Draft), New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, May 2021, pp. 63-65

- 4.6 Bearing in mind that visual quality is one of the attributes that contribute to landscape character, and that the site is largely surrounded by existing shelterbelts and hedges, in my opinion the visual impact of the plan change on the adjacent houses on Trices and Birchs Roads would be *low*. This reflects that while the landscape character would change there would be no significant loss of views, and there is an existing rural residential character.
- 4.7 I consider that the visual impact on the house and property at 2 Hamptons Road would be *moderate*, reflecting the length of the shared boundary and the change from a rural character and outlook to a suburban character. This is partly mitigated by the setback of the house from the boundary.
- 4.8 The owners of 2 Hamptons Road have made a submission asking that the strip of land between Birchs Road Park and the plan change area be included in the plan change and rezoned as Living Z. Putting aside the legal question of scope, in my opinion including this strip of land as part of the plan change would provide a better outcome in terms of urban form and function.
- 4.9 As well as removing a strip of rural land surrounded on three sides by residential and recreation land uses², the development of housing on the strip would potentially provide improved passive surveillance of the street and park, and an improved sense of community ownership. An additional connection (on the ODP) that extends the eastern north-south connection through the strip of land from Hamptons Road to the Birchs Road Park would provide better connectivity between Prebbleton township and the new park.
- 4.10 I have reviewed the mitigation measures proposed for the changes in landscape character and visual impact by Ms Lauenstein, and while I regard these as positive features of the proposed design, they do not alter my assessment of the changes in landscape character or the visual impact of the plan change.

5.0 Submissions

- 5.1 I have reviewed the summary of submissions and identified two broad themes that are related to urban design matters. I have identified some submissions which refer to each of the areas but the listed submissions are intended as examples only and should not be regarded as a comprehensive list of all submissions on each theme.
- 5.2 Loss of identity and change in character of Prebbleton is a common theme in submissions with submitters mentioning the loss of the 'village' feel or small-town character, together with suggestions that Prebbleton might become part of Christchurch. For example submissions: 0005, 0006, 0029, 0031, 0032, 0033.

² Policy B4.3.3 of the Selwyn District Plan directs that zoning patterns should not "leave land zoned Rural surrounded on three or more boundaries with land zoned Living or Business"

- 5.3 People's sense of belonging or emotional attachment to a place is generally understood to be based on their shared experiences of a specific territory over time³. Changes such as PC72 are likely to threaten the perception that local people have of their town, in the disruption of existing urban patterns and the introduction of new physical and social elements.
- 5.4 A significant number of submitters are concerned that the 'higher' densities proposed in the Living Z zone would adversely affect the character of Prebbleton and the adjacent residential areas which currently have larger lot sizes. For example submissions: 0005, 0007, 0010, 0011, 0016, 0017, 0019, 0020, 0021, 0022, 0029, 0030, 0031, 0032, 0033, 0035, 0040, 0041, 0048, 0049.
- 5.5 Christchurch City Council is seeking that the PC72 be declined in the first instance, but if approved that the density is increased to 15 households per hectare (hh/ha).
- 5.6 At a minimum net density of 12 hh/ha the Living Z zone is a low-density form of development. In Christchurch the minimum density in residential suburban areas is 15 households per hectare, with minimums of 30 households per hectare in medium density residential areas, and 50 households per hectare in the central city.
- 5.7 There are a range of benefits from an increased density⁴ including:
 - a. *Social*: improving social interaction and diversity, improving access to and viability of community services;
 - b. *Economic*: improving the economic viability of development and infrastructure;
 - c. *Transport*: supporting increased usage of public transport and reducing car travel;
 - d. *Environmental*: increasing energy efficiency and decreasing resource consumption and pollution, reducing demand for land.
- 5.8 I do not support densities of less than 12 hh/ha in this location. In my opinion a lower density would have adverse effects on the provision of active transport options and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- 5.9 In considering whether the minimum net density should be increased to 15hh/ha as requested by the CCC, I find the matter finely balanced. While I consider that there would be benefits to increasing the density, particularly in terms of the efficient use of land and infrastructure, I am concerned that areas of true medium density housing (terrace housing or apartments) would be required to reach 15hh/ha. In my opinion it would be more appropriate to site medium density housing closer to the centre of the township within easy

³ Carmona, M., Heath, T., Oc, T., Tiesdell, S., *Public Places, Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design*, 2006, Architectural Press, p.97

⁴ Ibid, p.183

walking distances of the community facilities and commercial activities in the centre. On balance I consider that a minimum net density of 12 hh/ha is appropriate in this location.

6.0 Summary

- 6.1 In general, I consider that the proposed plan change is an appropriate location for urban growth that links Prebbleton with the new district-wide reserve on Birchs Road, and rezones a block of rural land which has residential land to the north and west, and the new reserve to the south. In my opinion the proposed minimum net density of 12 households per hectare is appropriate and should apply to the whole site.
- 6.2 If the plan change is granted, I recommend that two continuous north-south connections and one continuous east-west connection with a second connection to the east are included in the ODP (and associated narrative) in order to provide a positive level of connectivity between the plan change area, the existing township and the new district park (see Fig. 1).
- 6.3 If the plan change is granted, I recommend that the upgrades of the Trices Road and Hamptons Road frontages with footpaths, pedestrian / cyclist crossing facilities and property accessways are included in the ODP (and associated narratives) in order to create residential street edges.
- 6.4 I note that the proposed plan change would have a *moderate-low* impact on the landscape character reflecting the change from a rural residential landscape with small numbers of houses and a predominantly natural character to a residential landscape with a higher number of buildings and a suburban character.
- 6.5 In my opinion the visual impact of the PC72 on the adjacent houses on Trices and Birchs Roads would be *low* reflecting that the extensive existing shelterbelts and the existing rural residential land use. I consider that the visual impact on the house and property at 2 Hamptons Road would be *moderate*, reflecting the length of the shared boundary and the change from a rural outlook to a suburban outlook.
- 6.6 Putting aside the question of scope, I consider that including the strip of land between Hamptons Road and the Birchs Road Park (part of 2 Hamptons Road) as part of the plan change would provide a better outcome in terms of urban form and function. If the strip of land is included as part of the plan change area I recommend that the ODP (and associated narrative) should include rezoning the strip as Living Z and extending the eastern north-south connection from Hamptons Road through to the new Birchs Road Park.

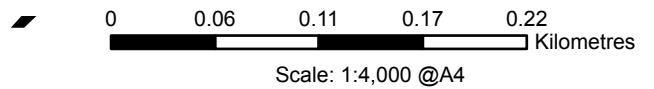
Hugh Nicholson

UrbanShift

Figure 1 - Plan Change 72 Connectivity

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