

**BEFORE HEARING COMMISSIONER
FOR SELWYN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

UNDER

the Resource Management
Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER

Private Plan Change Request
74 (PC74)

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF HUGH ANTHONY NICHOLSON
ON BEHALF OF SELWYN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

URBAN DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE

28 November 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My full name is Hugh Anthony Nicholson. I am a Director at UrbanShift which is an independent consultancy that provides urban design and landscape architecture advice to local authorities and private clients.
- 1.2 I hold a Post-Graduate Diploma of Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Urban Design from the University of Sydney. I have more than twenty years' experience in both the public and private sectors. I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA).
- 1.3 Prior to my current role, I worked as the Design Lead for the *Ōtākaro Avon River Regeneration Plan* for Regenerate Christchurch for two years, and as a Principal Urban Designer for Christchurch City Council for ten years. Before this I worked as an Urban Designer for the Wellington City Council for seven years.
- 1.4 I am a chair / member of the Nelson City / Tasman District Urban Design Panel and the Akaroa Design Review Panel. I was a member of the advisory panel for the development of the National Guidelines for Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) for the Ministry of Justice, and a member of the Technical Advisory Group for the Wellington Waterfront.
- 1.5 My experience includes:
 - a. Project leader for the establishment of the Christchurch Urban Design Panel which reviews significant resource consent applications and significant Council public space projects (2008);
 - b. Project leader for *Public Space Public Life Studies* in Wellington (2004) and Christchurch (2009) in association with Gehl Architects which surveyed how people used different public spaces around the city centre, and how the quality of these public spaces could be improved;

- c. Steering group and design lead for *Share an Idea* and the Draft *Christchurch Central Recovery Plan* including associated draft district plan amendments to the central city zones which were subsequently reviewed and incorporated into the *Christchurch Central Recovery Plan*;
- d. Expert urban design witness for Christchurch City Council to the Independent Hearings Panel for the Christchurch Replacement District Plan on the Strategic Directions and Central City chapters;
- e. Design reviewer for more than fifty resource consent applications for major central city rebuilds for the Christchurch City Council including the Justice & Emergency Precinct, the Central Library, the Bus Interchange and the Christchurch Hospital Outpatients and Acute Services Buildings.

2. CODE OF CONDUCT

- 2.1 I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014 and that I agree to comply with it. I confirm that I have considered all the material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express, and that this evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on the evidence of another person.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 I have been asked by the Selwyn District Council to carry out a peer review of the landscape and urban design assessments provided as part of the applications for PC74 including the responses to the Requests for Further Information. Where necessary I have provided additional comments on urban design effects in relation to the urban form of West Melton, and commented on matters raised in submissions that relate to urban design or landscape architecture.

- 3.2 My assessment is focused on the urban design effects in relation to the urban form of West Melton and does consider the urban form implications for Greater Christchurch.

4. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

- 4.1 In my peer review and in providing evidence I have drawn strategic direction on good urban form from three sources, the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (**NPSUD**), the Canterbury Regional Policy Statement (**CRPS**) and the Operative Selwyn District Plan (**SDP**), all of which provide overarching guidance.
- 4.2 The **NPSUD** seeks to provide “*well-functioning urban environments*”¹ that enable more people to live near a centre or employment opportunities, and which are well serviced by public transport².
- 4.3 In particular the **NPSUD** promotes urban environments that provide good accessibility between housing, jobs, community services, and natural and open spaces, support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and are resilient to the likely effects of climate change³.
- 4.4 The **CRPS** seeks to manage the urban form and settlement pattern of Christchurch through the consolidation and intensification of urban areas.
- 4.5 The objectives of the **CRPS** direct that residential development should be of a high quality and incorporate “good urban design”⁴.
- 4.6 The **CRPS** also seeks housing developments that give effect to the listed principles of good urban design, and to those in the NZ Urban Design Protocol 2005. These principles refer to the need for well-integrated places that have high-quality connections including walking, cycling and public transport, and that are environmentally sustainable⁵.

¹ National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020, Objective 1, p.10

² Ibid, Objective 3, p.10

³ Ibid, Policy 1, p.10-11

⁴ Canterbury Regional Policy Statement, Objective 6.2.3 Sustainability

⁵ Ibid, Policy 6.3.2 Development form and urban design

- 4.7 The objectives of **SDP** seek that *“growth of existing townships has a compact urban form”⁶*, and that a *“high level of connectivity is provided both within the development and with adjoining land areas”⁷*.
- 4.8 The policies in the **SDP** direct that zoning patterns should not *“leave land zoned Rural surrounded on three or more boundaries with land zoned Living or Business”⁸*, and that townships should be encouraged to grow in a compact shape where practical⁹.
- 4.9 Policy 4.2.10 in the **SDP** goes on to direct that new residential blocks should be *“small in scale, easily navigable and convenient to public transport services and community infrastructure such as schools, shops, sports fields and medical facilities, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists”¹⁰*.
- 4.10 Policy B4.3.98 anticipates new residential or business growth in West Melton on either side of Weedons Ross Road north of SH73 and south of Halkett Road. Only a limited extent of new low density residential development is envisaged south of SH73 in order to maintain a consolidated form for future
- 4.11 Drawing on the strategic directions outlined above I have reviewed the urban form proposed in PC74 in terms of:
- a. the extent to which it creates a consolidated and compact urban form, and the spatial distribution of densities;
 - b. the level of connectivity with the existing urban environment;
 - c. the accessibility to a range of services using a range of travel modes including walking, cycling and public transport;
 - d. The residential amenity values and character, and the treatment of the urban / rural interface.

⁶ Operative Selwyn District Plan (Townships Volume), Objective B3.4.4

⁷ Ibid, Objective B3.4.5

⁸ Ibid, Policy B4.3.3

⁹ Ibid, Policy B4.3.6

¹⁰ Ibid, Policy B4.2.10

5. EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

- 5.1 The site is a 20.69 ha block of land between SH73 and Halkett Road. The site is bounded by the existing Gainsborough subdivision to the west, and rural lifestyle blocks to the east. The land is generally flat with an existing dwelling, farm buildings and oval horse training track.
- 5.2 There are no pedestrian facilities along this section of SH73 or Halkett Road.



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of the site identified in red in the context of West Melton

6. COMPACT URBAN FORM

- 6.1 West Melton is a small township situated approximately 24 kilometres west of Christchurch on State Highway 73 (SH73). The main part of the township is located between the state highway and Halkett Road.
- 6.2 The township is characterised by single-storey modern dwellings on spacious sections with landscaped curvilinear streets. There is a network of pedestrian paths complementing the street network
- 6.3 While most of the township is located on the northern side of SH73, the community centre, skatepark and the West Melton Tavern are sited on the southern side. There is also a lower density subdivision (Wilfield subdivision) sited to the south-west of SH73.

- 6.4 The centre of West Melton is on Weedons Ross Road just north of SH73 between the West Melton Primary School and the local shopping centre. It is also the location of the nearest bus stop for the Christchurch-Darfield bus.
- 6.5 The revised ODP provides for a new connection to the existing West Melton township through a section on Rossington Drive. The proposed reserve is approximately 950 metres from the town centre via the Rossington Drive connection.
- 6.6 In my opinion the site has the potential to contribute to a compact and consolidated form for West Melton provided that the connectivity and density issues can be resolved.



Figure 2: Walkable catchments in West Melton (400m, 800m and 1,200m)

7. CONNECTIVITY

- 7.1 Connectivity refers to creating streets that are joined together in city-wide networks that provide more choices, and support increased resilience and safer places¹¹. Well-connected street networks support walking and cycling.

¹¹ *People Places Spaces: A design guide for urban New Zealand*, Ministry for the Environment, 2002, p.32

- 7.2 The revised ODP provides three connections, one northward onto Halkett Road, one southward onto SH73, and one westward onto Rossington Drive.
- 7.3 The revised ODP also identifies that the Halkett Road frontage will be upgraded to an urban standard and footpath extensions will be provided to the east to Wylies Road and to the west to Rossington Drive. No frontage upgrade to an urban standard is noted for the SH73 frontage, nor is a footpath extension to the pedestrian crossing point to the west identified.
- 7.4 I consider that if a future street connection could be provided to the east, and an urban upgrade to the SH73 frontage with a footpath extension to the west to the existing crossing facility, could be included in the ODP, the site could have a *moderate* level of connectivity.

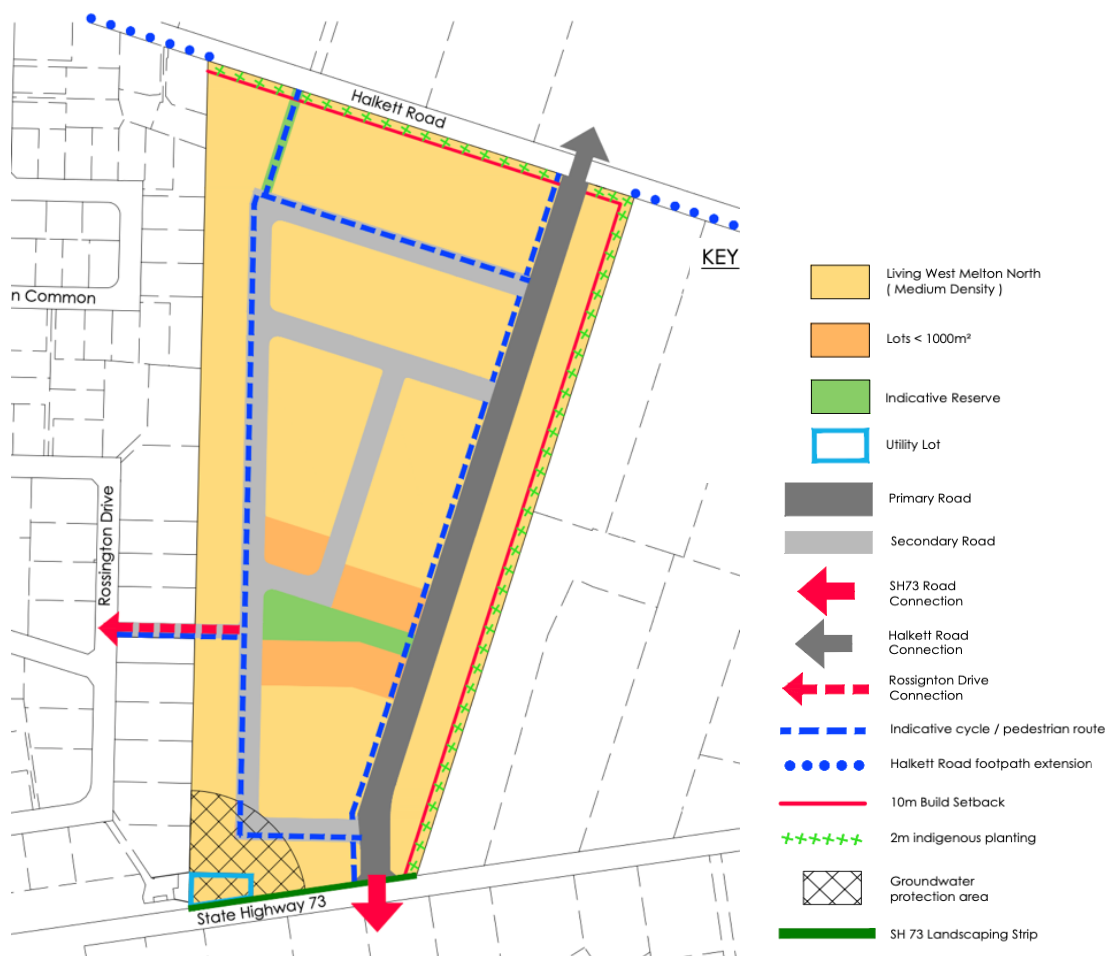


Figure 3: Revised ODP showing connections to Rossington Drive, Halkett Road and SH73.

8. ACCESSIBILITY

- 8.1 Accessibility relates to providing access to public services and facilities particularly within easily walkable or cyclable distances¹². The New Zealand Household Travel Survey (NZHTS) found that the average walking trip was 1.0km, and the average cycle trip distance was 4.0km¹³.
- 8.2 The walking distance from the proposed central reserve via Rossington Drive to the shops and community facilities in the town centre would be approximately 950 metres which is within the average walking and cycling distances identified in the NZHTS.
- 8.3 As with many small rural towns, the majority of trips for employment and supermarket / shopping are likely to involve the use of cars. West Melton is serviced by a single return bus trip each day.
- 8.4 Recognising the rural nature of West Melton, I consider that, with the recommended changes to the ODP, the proposed site would have a *moderate-high* level of accessibility reflecting the good access to services within the village balanced against limited public transport and the need to drive for employment and shopping opportunities.

9. SUBMISSIONS

- 9.1 A number of submitters have opposed the 'small' section sizes proposed in PC74 and suggested that a minimum lot size should be required that protected the existing spacious character of West Melton. The suggested minimum lot sizes ranged from 1,000m², 1,500m², 1,600m² to 3,000m². The submissions include PC74 0002 (Ellis), 0003 (Neal), 0005 (Helm), 0010 (Slater), 0020 (Wilson), 0024 (Bayley), 0025 (Standfield), 0035 (Hey), 0040 (Laing), 0054 (Amberger), 0056 (Turner), 0067 (Clement), and 0068 (Reid).

¹² *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol*, Ministry for the Environment, 2005, p.21

¹³ New Zealand Household Travel Survey, Ministry of Transport, 2015-2018, <https://www.transport.govt.nz/statistics-and-insights/household-travel/>

- 9.2 PC74, if approved, is likely to detract from the character and some of the amenities enjoyed by local residents, however, Policy 6 of the NPS-UD specifically directs that these changes to amenity values need to be balanced against the positive effects of increased housing and types, and are not, of themselves, an adverse effect.
- 9.3 The current ODP does not specify a minimum density for the development. With sections between 1,000m² and 2000m² the proposed density is less than 10 households per hectare (hh/ha). In my opinion a minimum net density of 12 hh/ha would be a low-density form of development. In Christchurch the minimum density in residential suburban areas is 15 hh/ha, with minimums of 30 hh/ha in medium density residential areas, and 50 hh/ha in the central city.
- 9.4 There are a range of benefits from an increased density¹⁴ 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.
- 9.5 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 options for the provision of public transport and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, as well as the efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- 9.6 In considering whether the minimum net density should be 15hh/ha, 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

¹⁴ Carmona, M., Heath, T., Oc, T., Tiesdell, S., *Public Places, Urban Spaces: The Dimensions of Urban Design*, 2006, Architectural Press, p.183

(terrace housing or apartments) would be required to reach 15hh/ha. In my opinion it may be more appropriate to site medium density housing in larger urban centres with better access to community facilities and commercial activities. On balance I consider that a minimum net density of 12 hh/ha is appropriate in this location.

- 9.7 A number of submitters are concerned at the potential visual impact of the proposed water storage tanks in the proposed utility reserve in the south-west corner of the site. The submissions include PC74 0008 (Haughin), 0040 (Laing) and 0063 (Bowman).
- 9.8 While the PC74 proposes to set aside a utility reserve to enable the Selwyn District Council to improve the security of the existing West Melton reticulated water supply network, the improvements to the infrastructure are not part of this plan change request and will be addressed as part of a separate RMA process at a later date.
- 9.9 While the concerns of submitters are understandable, I consider that there are a range of design solutions that could mitigate the adverse visual impacts of new water infrastructure and that these would need to be addressed as part of a subsequent RMA process.

10. LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 I have reviewed the landscape assessment prepared by Mr Smith and generally agree with his assessment and conclusions.
- 10.2 I note that the ODP narrative does not include reference to the provision of post and rail fences along the northern and southern boundaries to provide a consistent fencing style with adjacent properties. I recommend that a requirement to provide post and rail fences along the northern and southern boundaries in addition to the landscape strip requirements is added to the ODP to assist in maintaining a consistent streetscape character in West Melton.

11. RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO THE ODP

11.1 If the Commissioner approves the plan change request I recommend that the following changes are made to the ODP:

- a. Include land for a future street connection to the east;
- b. Specify an urban upgrade to the SH73 frontage with a footpath extension to the west to the existing crossing facility in the ODP narrative;
- c. Specify a minimum density of 12hh/ha in the ODP narrative;
- d. Include a requirement to provide post and rail fences along the northern and southern boundaries in the ODP narrative.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 In my opinion, with the recommended changes to the ODP, the proposed rezoning in PC74 would provide a *moderate* level of connectivity and a *moderate-high* level of accessibility. I consider that with the recommended changes to the ODP, the plan change could contribute to a compact and consolidated urban form for West Melton.



Hugh Anthony Nicholson

August 2022