

**BEFORE HEARING COMMISSIONER  
FOR SELWYN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**UNDER**

the Resource Management  
Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER**

Private Plan Change Request  
79 (PC79)

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

**URBAN DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE**

**5 APRIL 2023**

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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.
- f. Urban design and landscape peer reviewer and witness at eight private plan change hearings for the Selwyn District Council including PCs 67, 69, 71, 72, 73, 74, 81 and 82. I have been an expert witness in Environment Court mediations for two of these plan changes.

## **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 2023 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 PC79 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 Prebbleton, 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 Prebbleton 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*”<sup>1</sup> that enable more people to live near a centre or employment opportunities, and which are well serviced by public transport<sup>2</sup>.
- 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 change<sup>3</sup>.
- 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”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020, Objective 1, p.10

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Objective 3, p.10

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Policy 1, p.10-11

<sup>4</sup> Canterbury Regional Policy Statement, Objective 6.2.3 Sustainability

- 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 sustainable<sup>5</sup>.
- 4.7 The objectives of **SDP** seek that *“growth of existing townships has a compact urban form”*<sup>6</sup>, and that a *“high level of connectivity is provided both within the development and with adjoining land areas”*<sup>7</sup>.
- 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”*<sup>8</sup>, and that townships should be encouraged to grow in a compact shape where practical<sup>9</sup>.
- 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”*<sup>10</sup>.
- 4.10 Policy B4.3.65 in the **SDP** encourages rezoning of any land for new business development in Prebbleton to adjoin the existing Business 1 Zone on the east side of Springs Road in order to consolidate the business activities and to reduce the potential for ‘reverse sensitivity’ effects.
- 4.11 Policy B4.3.66 in the **SDP** directs that any potential adverse effects of rezoning land for new residential or business development at Prebbleton on the ‘rural-urban’ landscape contrast of the area with Christchurch City are considered. It seeks to maintain the land *‘in a line’* between West Melton and Tai Tapu in “rural and recreational” uses.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Policy 6.3.2 Development form and urban design

<sup>6</sup> Operative Selwyn District Plan (Townships Volume), Objective B3.4.4

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Objective B3.4.5

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Policy B4.3.3

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Policy B4.3.6

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Policy B4.2.10

- 4.12 Policy B4.3.64 in the **SDP** encourages new residential development to be located to the east and west of the existing township, and Policy B4.3.65 discourages further expansion of Prebbleton to the north and south adjacent to Springs Road<sup>11</sup>.
- 4.13 Drawing on the strategic directions outlined above I have reviewed the urban form proposed in PC79 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.

## **5. EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

- 5.1 The site is a 36.58 ha block of land to the south of Prebbleton adjacent to the new district park on Birchs Road, Springs Reserve. The topography of the site is flat with rural land uses including grass paddocks, farm buildings, shelterbelts and a horse training oval. There are several residential dwellings off Birchs Road and one off Hamptons Road.
- 5.2 There are no pedestrian facilities along the frontage of the site on Birchs or Hamptons Roads, however, the existing Little River Rail Trail provides a shared path on the opposite (eastern) side of Birchs Road. There is an existing water race which runs along the northern side of Hamptons Road and the western side of Birchs Road adjacent 142 Birchs Road.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Policies B4.3.64 & B4.3.65



Figure 1: Aerial photograph of the site (outlined in blue) with Springs Reserve to the east

## 6. COMPACT URBAN FORM

- 6.1 Prebbleton is a small township situated approximately 1.5 kilometres south of State Highway 76 (SH76) near Hornby. The original settlement was established in the 1850's by the Prebble brothers<sup>12</sup> and clustered around a store and a hotel. Prebbleton School was opened in 1857 and the original All Saints Church was built in 1873.
- 6.2 In the last two decades Prebbleton has been transformed from a small rural service town to a rural / lifestyle settlement with many residents commuting to Christchurch. Between 2006 and 2018 the population of Prebbleton grew by more than 225%<sup>13</sup> with a significant proportion of the new dwellings on large-lot or rural residential sections. The growth of the township between 1940 and 2023 can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. The recent Prebbleton Village retail development reflects the changing demographic of the town.
- 6.3 The original settlement and the early growth (including the Meadow Mushrooms factory) occurred along Springs Road. Much of the later lifestyle growth has occurred in low density subdivisions to the east and west of Springs Road.

<sup>12</sup> <https://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Cyc03Cycl-t1-body1-d6-d4.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/prebbleton#population-and-dwellings>

- 6.4 The Selwyn District Council has commenced a five-year programme to develop a new district park, Springs Reserve, along Birchs Road which will include bike tracks, sports fields, stretches of native bush, and a dog park. The new park is intended to service the wider Springs Ward as well as Prebbleton.
- 6.5 The nearest part of the Plan Change 79 site (the site) is 1.5 kilometres as the crow flies from the Fresh Choice supermarket which is the southernmost part of the central commercial area. The furthest part of the site is 2.5 kilometres from the Fresh Choice supermarket as the crow flies.
- 6.6 Figure 4 shows 400, 800, 1,200 and 1,600 metre buffers around the central business area. These give some indication of walkable distances although actual walking distances will generally be greater than the buffers due to the orientation of the streets. Almost all of the existing residential areas in Prebbleton are within the 1,600 metre buffer.
- 6.7 The perimeter of the site is approximately 2.74 kilometres long. Of this approximately 120 metres (or 4%) borders Hamptons Road adjoining existing rural residential zoning. Approximately 0.5 kilometre adjoins Springs Reserve along Birchs Road, although I note that this is a district wide open space rather than a local reserve. If both of these areas were considered to be 'urban uses', then 23% of the edges of the site would adjoin existing residential or 'urban uses'. I consider that the district park is not necessarily an 'urban use' and should be considered as an open space forming part of the southern boundary of Prebbleton.
- 6.8 In my opinion the site would not contribute to a compact and consolidated form for Prebbleton. In particular the majority of the site is significantly further away from the centre of Prebbleton than existing residential areas, and less than 5% of the edges would adjoin existing residential areas in Prebbleton. In effect the proposed plan change would create a 'peninsula' of higher density residential land to the south of Prebbleton surrounded rural and open space land uses on more than 95% of its edges.

## 7. COMMERCIAL CENTRES

- 7.1 PC79 proposes creating a second B1 commercial centre in Prebbleton on Birchs Road. Both Rolleston and Lincoln are polycentric district centres with a primary town centre and smaller local or neighbourhood reserves that service more distant residential areas. The smaller rural service centres including West Melton, Prebbleton, Darfield and Leeston have a single town centre which provides a commercial and social focus for the community and contributes to their 'village' character.
- 7.2 I consider that providing a second B1 commercial centre in Prebbleton would have potential adverse effects on the existing town centre, both commercially and socially. In particular it is likely to attract patronage from traffic along Birchs Road, and from users of the Little River Rail Trail and Springs Reserve who otherwise might have visited the town centre.
- 7.3 I note that Submissions 0005 and 0006 are from the owners of 142 Birchs Road which is the site of the proposed B1 commercial area. They have submitted in opposition to PC79 and state that they have no intention of selling their land or developing it for commercial uses.
- 7.4 Although a small row of convenience shops might be appropriate for a plan change of this size, I note that the implementation of the proposed B1 commercial centre cannot be relied on given the opposition of the owners of 142 Birchs Road. In any case I consider that the proposed B1 commercial centre would result in a more dispersed urban form for the township and is not appropriate given Prebbleton's function as a rural service town.

## 8. RURAL / URBAN LANDSCAPE EDGE

- 8.1 The **SDP** directs that any potential adverse effects of rezoning land for new residential or business development at Prebbleton on the 'rural-urban' landscape contrast with Christchurch City are considered. It seeks to maintain land in "rural and recreational" uses '*in a line*' between West Melton and Tai Tapu (see Figure 5).

8.2 PC79 encroaches into the area of rural land between West Melton and Tai Tapu. It does not sever the line of rural land identified in Policy 4.3.66 of the SDP. In my opinion PC79 would contribute to a cumulative loss of rural-urban landscape contrast with Christchurch City, although I do not consider that PC79 on its own is a fatal blow.

8.3 In my opinion Hamptons Road forms the southern edge of Prebbleton with lower density L3 rural residential development on the northern side intended to create a low density transition to the suburban area of Prebbleton. The location of Springs Reserve as a significant public open space helps to define Hamptons Road as the southern edge of the town.

## **9. CONNECTIVITY**

9.1 Connectivity refers to creating streets that are joined together in city-wide networks that provide more choices, and support increased resilience and safer places<sup>14</sup>. Well-connected street networks support walking and cycling.

9.2 The ODP provides two north-south connections, one primary road and one pedestrian / cycle path, and two east-west primary roads. These connections link to Hamptons and Birchs Roads to the north and east respectively, but terminate at existing rural land uses to the west and south.

9.3 The proposed north-south primary road connects to Hamptons Road at the northern end, however, most traffic is likely to use Birchs Road to access the town centre providing limited additional connectivity.

9.4 The proposed north-south pedestrian / cycle connection terminates at the proposed commercial zoning on Birchs Road. Assuming that it is intended to connect with Springs Reserve parking area on the opposite side of Birchs Road, I note that there are no safe pedestrian / cycle crossing points on Birchs Road to complete this connection.

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<sup>14</sup> *People Places Spaces: A design guide for urban New Zealand*, Ministry for the Environment, 2002, p.32

- 9.5 In my opinion PC79 would have a *low-moderate* level of connectivity with the existing Prebbleton township. While the internal connectivity is adequate, the external connections are primarily reliant on access to Birchs Road.

## 10. ACCESSIBILITY

- 10.1 Accessibility relates to providing access to public services and facilities particularly within easily walkable or cyclable distances<sup>15</sup>. The New Zealand Household Travel Survey (NZHTS) found that the average walking trip was 1.0km, and the average cycle trip distance was 4.0km<sup>16</sup>.
- 10.2 The walking distance from the northern end of the north-south primary road to the town centre via Birchs and Springs Roads is approximately two kilometres. Considering that most houses in the plan change area would be significantly further away than this, I consider that the site would not support easy walking access to the town centre.
- 10.3 The site is within the 4km average cycling distance to the town centre, and is sited adjacent to the Little River Rail Trail. Provided appropriate safe pedestrian / cycle crossing points could be provided on Birchs Road, I consider that the it would be within easy cycling distance of the town centre.
- 10.4 Metro bus route 80 Lincoln-Parklands runs along Birchs Road adjacent to the site and would provide a reasonable level of access to public transport for residents of PC79.
- 10.5 A strip of Business 1 land is indicated on the ODP at the northern end of the site. As noted previously the owners of the land have submitted that they oppose PC79 and do not intend to sell this land or develop it for commercial uses. In my opinion the proposed commercial area cannot be relied on and in any case the ODP does not provide direct vehicle access to the commercial area from PC79 except along Birchs Road, and does not

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<sup>15</sup> *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol*, Ministry for the Environment, 2005, p.21

<sup>16</sup> New Zealand Household Travel Survey, Ministry of Transport, 2015-2018, <https://www.transport.govt.nz/statistics-and-insights/household-travel/>



indicate how the commercial strip will be accessed over the existing water race at 142 Birchs Road.

- 10.6 In order to provide a basic level of accessibility the plan change needs to ensure that there are adequate pedestrian / cycle facilities around the edges of the site as well as safe pedestrian / cycle priority crossing points over adjacent roads to make pedestrian and cycle access a safe option. The ODP does not make provision for urban upgrades to Hamptons or Birchs Roads or for appropriate and safe pedestrian and cycle priority crossings to access the wider township.
- 10.7 In my opinion PC79 would have a *low* level of accessibility. This reflects the poor walkability to the town centre, the lack of pedestrian / cycle facilities around the edge of the site, and the lack of certainty regarding the proposed Business 1 land on Birchs Road.

## **11. OUTLINE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

- 11.1 The ODP contains a landscape concept, a wider context plan and a masterplan as well as three perspective drawings. It is unclear what the status of these drawings is particularly as they do not agree with the overall ODP plan. Three street cross-sections are provided however these are not required by the ODP narrative or identified on the ODP plan.
- 11.2 A central linear park is proposed with a shared pedestrian / cycle path running north-south from Birchs Road. From a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) best practice suggests that a street should be provided along one side of the linear park in order to promote activation and provide passive surveillance for the space.
- 11.3 The narrative suggests that the linear park is primarily a stormwater network feature and that further neighbourhood or local reserves may be required at subdivision stage. No indication is provided regarding the likely location of these reserves.

- 11.4 The ODP does not identify how the street edges on Hamptons and Birchs Road will be treated or identify appropriate pedestrian / cycle priority crossing points required to provide access to the plan change area.
- 11.5 The ODP does not identify how the boundaries with rural areas will be treated in order to provide an appropriate landscape response while reducing the potential for reverse sensitivity.
- 11.6 In my opinion the proposed ODP has a number of issues and requires additional work to clearly identify the key spatial moves proposed as part of PC79.

## 12. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 12.1 I have reviewed the urban design, landscape and visual impact assessment in Appendix E of the application prepared by DCM Urban (October 2021).
- 12.2 I agree with Mr Compton-Moen's description of the existing site character and values in paragraph 3.1 of his report.
- 12.3 I have used a seven point scale drawn from the NZILA's *Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*<sup>17</sup> to assess the scale of effects of the Plan Change on the landscape character and the visual impact:

very low	low	mod-low	moderate	mod-high	high	very high
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- 12.4 In my opinion the effects of the proposed plan change on the landscape character from an open rural character to a residential subdivision would have a *moderate-high* impact reflecting the change from an open rural landscape with long views and a small number of built elements, to a suburban landscape with shorter views, enclosed spaces and a greater

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<sup>17</sup> *Te Tangi A Te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, May 2021, pp. 63-65

number of built elements. In forming this opinion I note that the surrounding areas have rural or open space land uses.

- 12.5 I have reviewed Mr Compton-Moen's visual impact analysis and broadly agree with his selection of viewpoints and description of the views.
- 12.6 Bearing in mind that the visual impact of the proposal is a subset of the attributes that contribute to change in landscape character, in my opinion the visual impact from the viewpoints on Hamptons Road and Birchs Road would be *moderate*. In forming this opinion I note that under the current zoning shelterbelts and hedges are common landscape features in rural zones and that these are likely to be removed and replaced with residential houses and gardens. I note that Mr Compton-Moen considers that the visual impact of the plan change from these viewpoints would be *minor*.
- 12.7 While the mitigation measures proposed by Mr Compton-Moen may be positive features of the proposal, the mechanisms for delivering these have not been provided in the proposed plan change. MM2, MM3, MM4, MM6 and MM7 would be desirable outcomes but they are not proposed to be implemented through the Plan Change and cannot be relied upon. MM5 provides some mitigation for changes to Birchs Road but fails to address the community severance or lack of passive surveillance created by lack of access onto the road.
- 12.8 In my opinion the landscape character and visual impacts of the proposed plan change would not be changed by the proposed mitigation measures and would remain *moderate-high* and *moderate* respectively.
- 12.9 I note that Policy 6 of the NPS-UD specifically directs that changes to amenity values such as landscape character and visual amenity need to be balanced against the positive effects of increased housing supply and choice, and are not, of themselves, an adverse effect.

### 13. SUBMISSIONS

- 13.1 A number of submitters consider that PC79 would have no connection with the existing township and would contribute to urban sprawl (for example PC79-0014, PC79-0028, PC79-0029) while other submit that the proposed development would be reliant on cars for travel (eg. PC0005, PC-0015, PC-0024).
- 13.2 I have addressed these matters in Section 6 *Compact Urban Form* and Section 10 *Accessibility* of my report and generally agree that the proposed plan change would not contribute to a compact urban form and that it would not be within easy walking distance of the town centre.

### 14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 In my opinion PC79 would not contribute to a compact and consolidated urban form for Prebbleton, and the proposed B1 commercial area would not adjoin the existing Business 1 Zone on the east side of Springs Road or consolidate business activities in Prebbleton. I consider that PC79 would have a *low-moderate* level of connectivity with the wider township, and a *low* level of accessibility to the town centre.
- 14.2 I consider that PC79 would contribute to a cumulative loss of the rural-urban landscape contrast with Christchurch City identified in Policy 4.3.66 of the SDP, and would undermine the establishment of Hamptons Road as the southern boundary of Prebbleton.
- 14.3 In my opinion the proposed ODP has a number of issues and does not adequately provide for the key spatial features discussed in the plan change.



**Hugh Anthony Nicholson**

April 2022



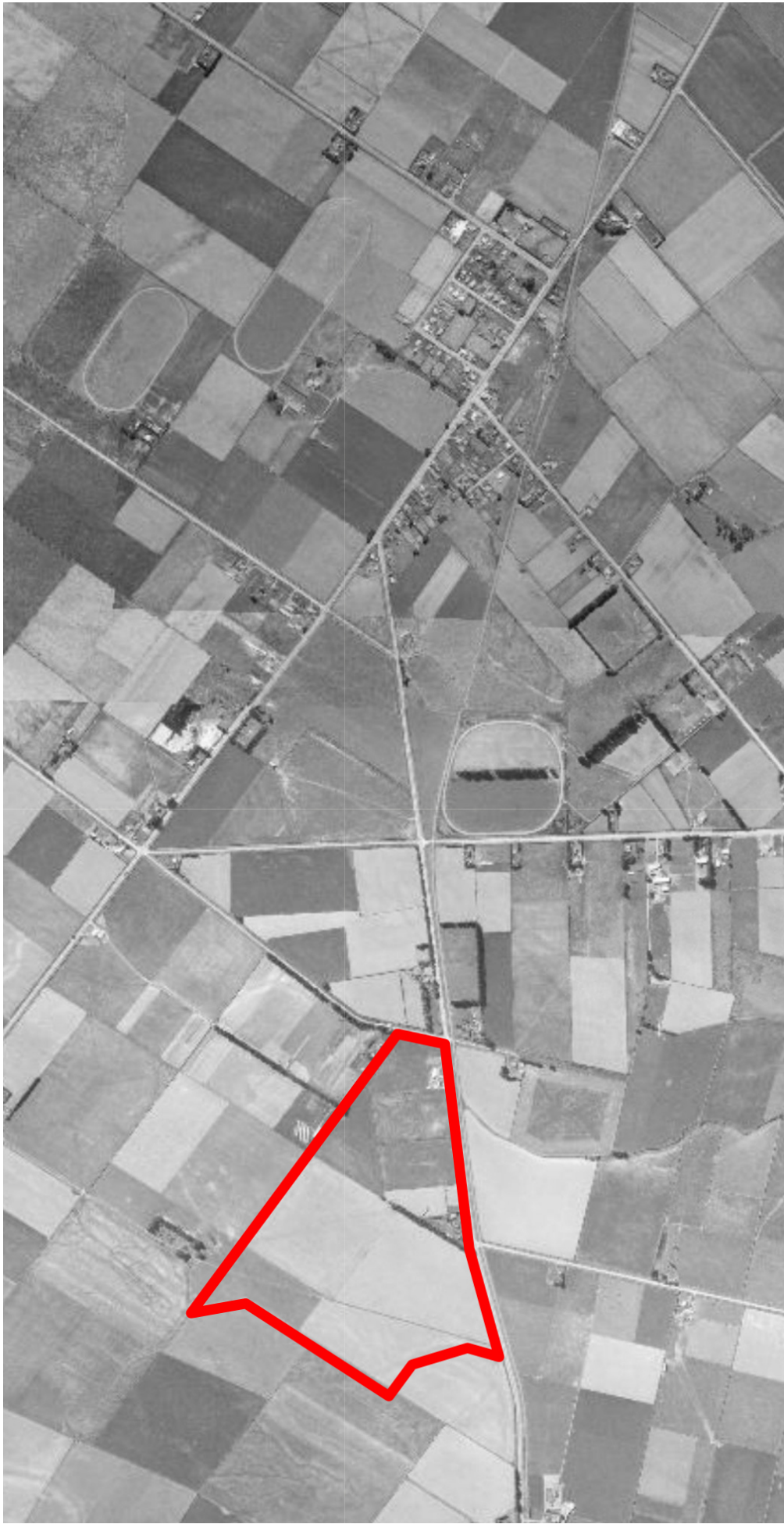
Figure 2: Prebbleton Aerials - 1940 to 1984  
(PC79 outlined in red)

0 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 Kilometres  
Scale: 1:15,000 @A3

1940-44



1960-64



1980-84

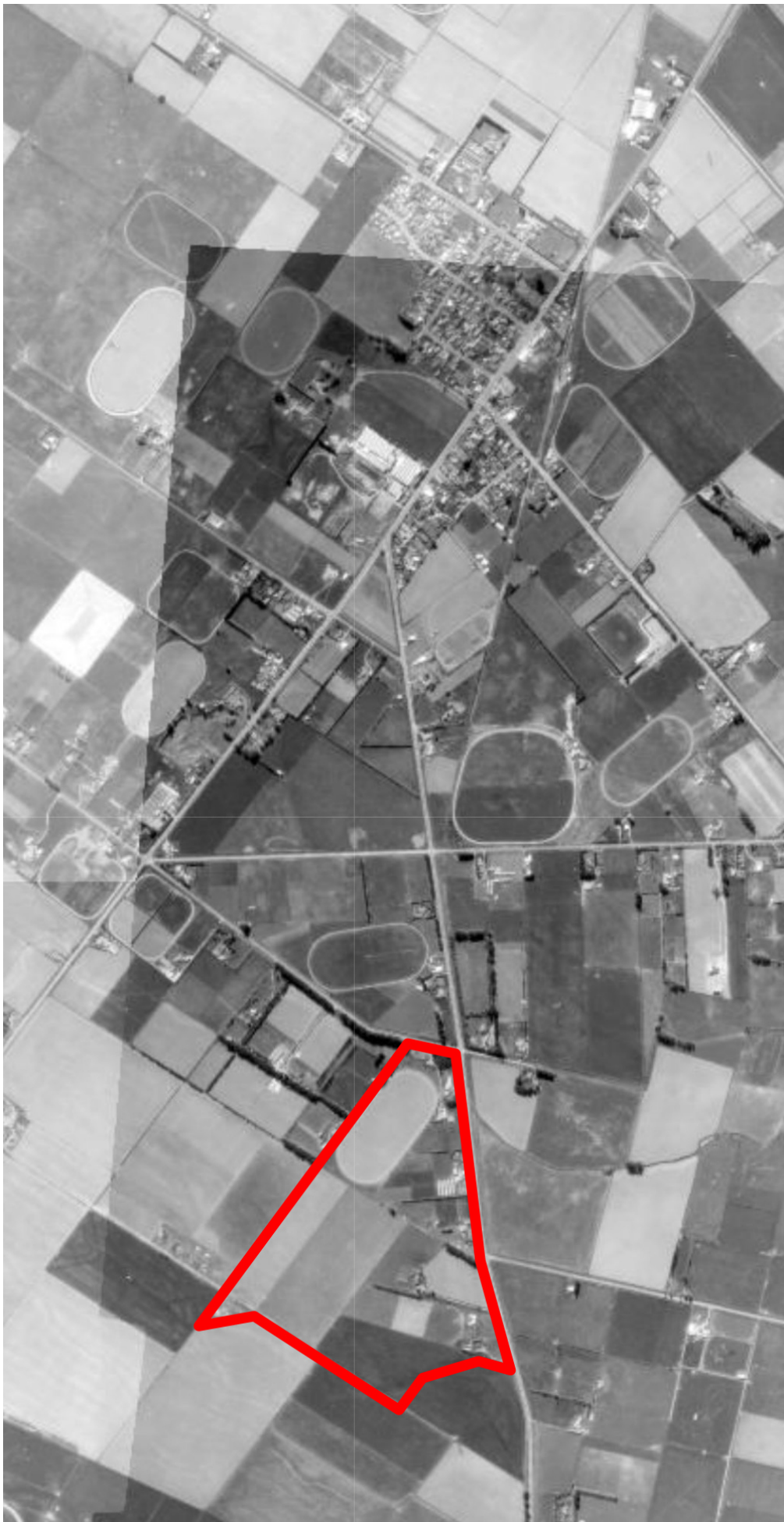
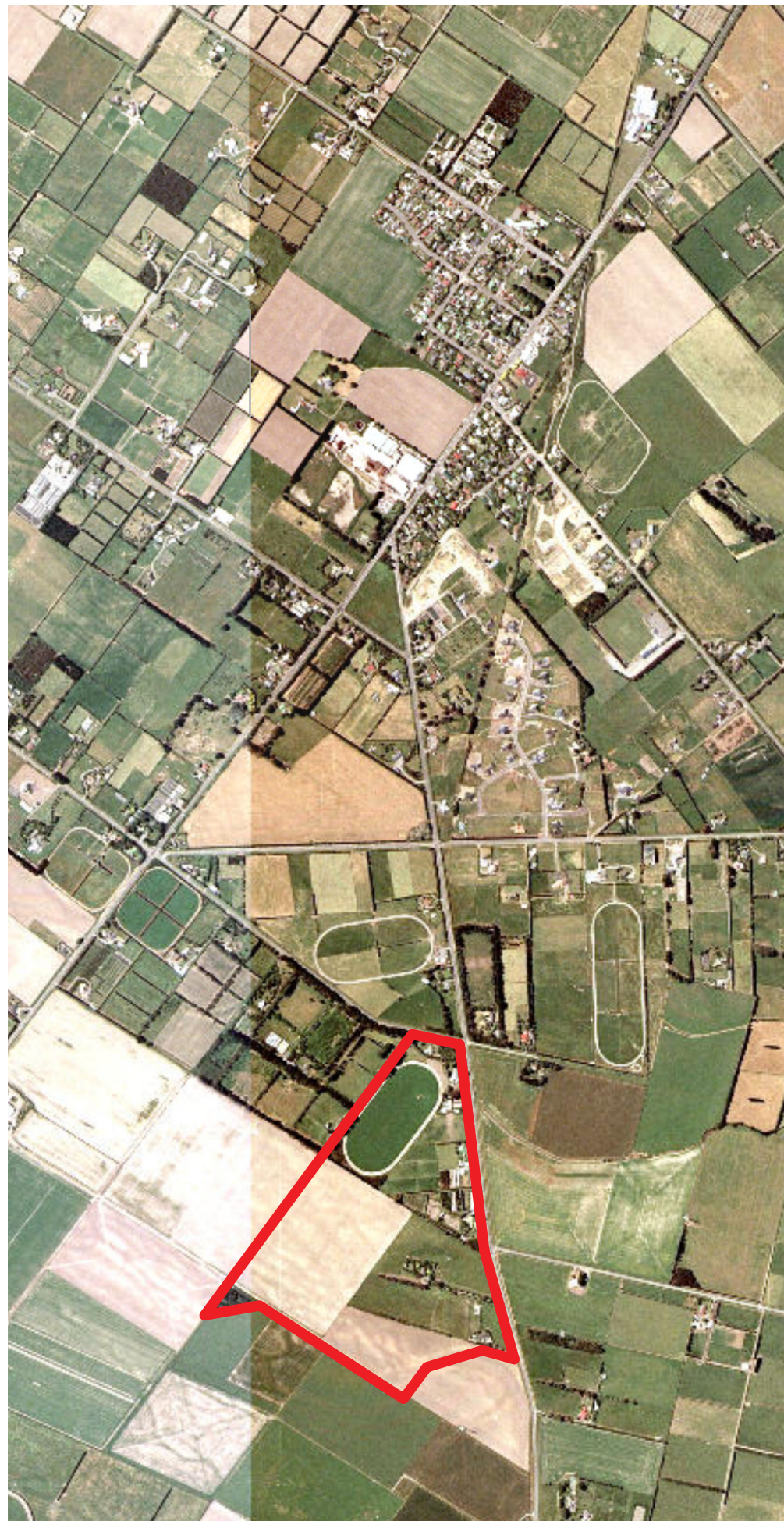




Figure 3: Prebbleton Aerials - 2000 - 2023

(PC79 outlined in red)

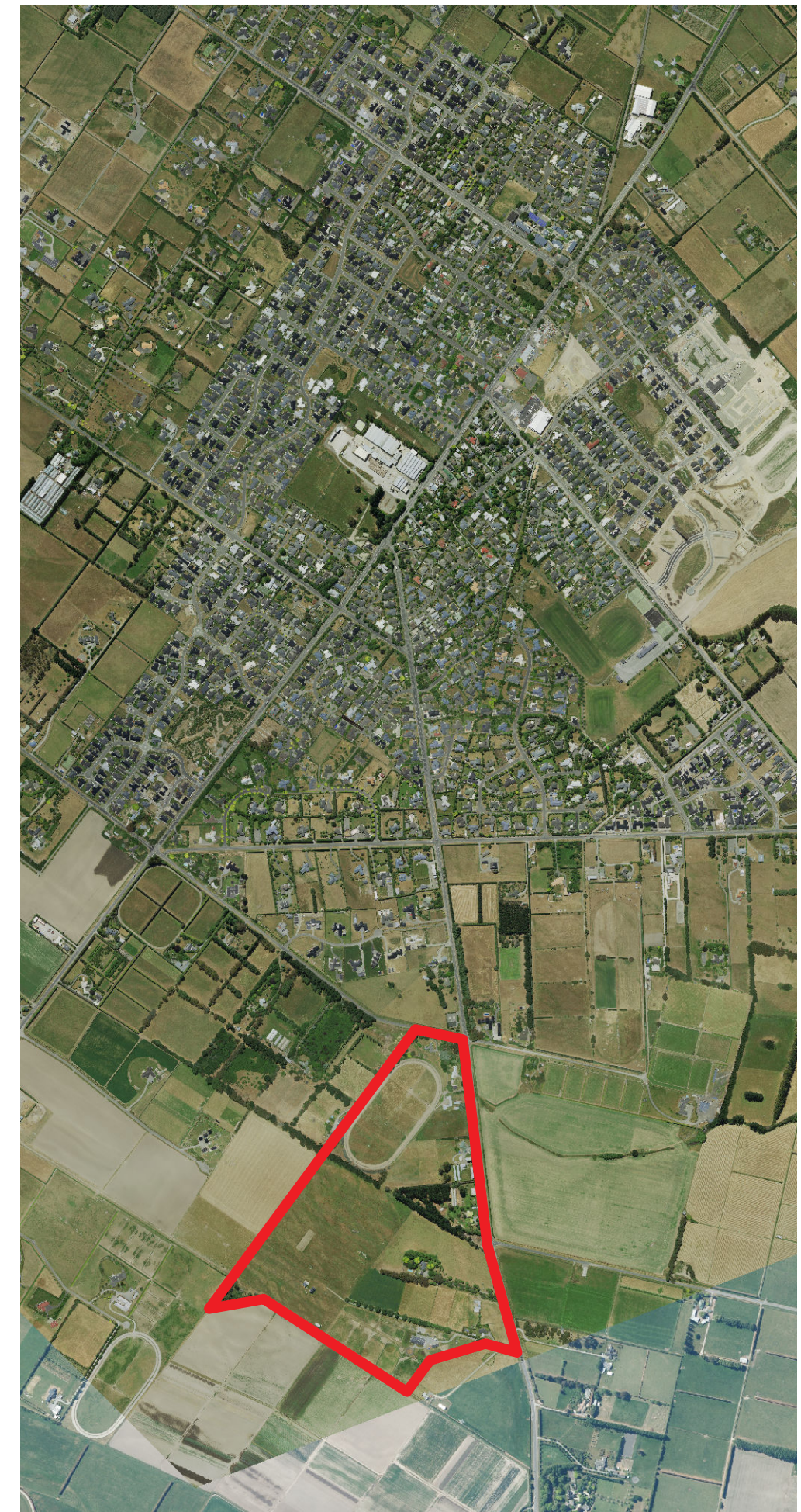
2000-04



2010-14



2000-23



0 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 Kilometres

Scale: 1:15,000 @A3



Figure 4: Prebbleton 400m Walkable Catchments

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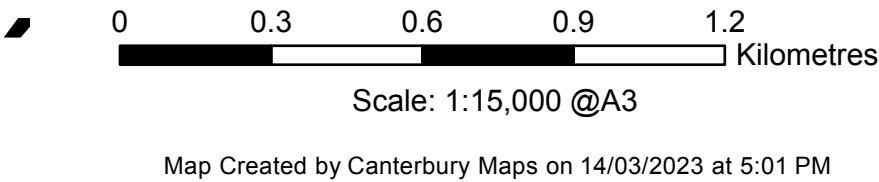





Figure 5: West Melton to Tai Tapu  
Line of Rural / Urban Landscape Contrast

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Kilometres

Scale: 1:70,000 @A3

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