

**Proposed Eight Shed Poultry Breeder – Lifestyle Chickens Ltd**

RC245697 – 227 Hunters Road, Dunsandel

## **LANDSCAPE PEER REVIEW**

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**To:** Tim Heggarty, Consultant Planner to Selwyn District Council

**Copy:** Janette Dovey, Team Leader Resource Consents, Selwyn District Council

**From:** Jeremy Head, Registered NZILA Landscape Architect  
Jeremy Head Landscape Architect 2022 Ltd.

**Date:** 23 October 2024

### **Peer review scope**

I have been asked to peer review the Landscape Assessment Report (**LAR**) prepared by Christopher Campbell from Greenwood Associates Landscape Architecture Ltd on behalf of the Applicant, Lifestyle Chickens Ltd.

I have read Mr Campbell's LAR and his 16 October 2024 memo responding to a s92 request for further information (**RFI**) from Council. Mr Campbell's response to the RFI was helpful. I have read the relevant objectives, policies, and rules from the Partially Operative District Plan (**PODP**) and Operative District Plan (**ODP**). I have also read the parts of the Kinetic Environmental AEE relevant to the statutory framework concerning landscape matters. The AEE concludes that the application is on balance non-complying.

I visited the site's surrounds on 1 October 2024, to examine the landscape character and values of the site and its context and confirm the observations and findings in the LAR. The Selwyn District Council's consultant planner also attended the site visit.

This peer review is an evaluation of the principal assessment and does not attempt to provide a parallel assessment. The purpose of this peer review is to assist the decision maker (and others) by checking the assessment's methodology and findings and fleshing out any gaps if and when required. My peer review is structured to generally step through and comment on the main headings (although not all of them) in the same order as they appear in the LAR for convenience.

### **Methodological approach**

Mr Campbell's methodology draws from Te Tangi a te Manu; Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines (**TTatM**) which is relied upon to underpin the assessment process. Following the guidance set down in TTatM is now considered standard best practice for landscape architects.

As such, the methodological approach is thorough, clearly articulated and sound. The site photographs used in Appendix 3.1 – 3.8 follow best practice in terms of size and focal length. The widely accepted seven-point scale of effects is used.

## Existing Environment

A description of the existing landscape includes the wider landscape and site, broken down further into 'natural' and 'cultural' elements. This section also includes subheadings covering 'landscape character' and the landscapes ability to 'absorb change' - in a general sense. Following my visit to the area, my observations of the landscape character of the site and around it, accord with Mr Campbell's. My only caveat is that in my opinion, the landscape character around the site is typically open and expansive where built forms are small scale and subservient to the broad and productive agricultural landscape patterns.

## Relevant Statutory Context

Statutory matters relevant to landscape are addressed in section 4 of the LAR, under the Resource Management Act; Operative Selwyn District Plan; and Partially Operative Selwyn District Plan – Appeals Version, which I understand is the appropriate and most relevant version of the district plan to consider. Regional planning documents are stated as being included in section 4 but are not actually addressed, although they are in the AEE. The approach used in this section identifies the key rules in both the ODP and PODP, and how these rules inform anticipated landscape effects. However, a clear statutory assessment and response to each departure from the plan standards is not explicit other than a reference to the AEE at paragraph [4.8] and an acknowledgement of how the statutory expectations helped direct the effects assessment in the LAR conclusion<sup>1</sup>.

More focus and assessment against the relevant objectives and policies in the PODP listed in the AEE at 4.6 would assist with determining the cumulative effects of the several breaches to the plan standards and how the overall proposal fits with the prevailing landscape character. This will be commented on further shortly.

## Proposal

The specifics of the Proposal are described at a level of detail relevant to landscape effects and avoids doubling up on the more detailed content in the AEE. I note that the colours for the two dwellings' wall cladding is proposed to be white, which is highly reflective and in general can make buildings appear larger than they in fact are. This in my opinion is an odd colour choice given that the proposal will exceed maximum building coverage standards, where any effects of this would be expected to be minimised by the Applicant as much as possible. In my view a recessive colour, similar to the proposed 'dark grey' for the rooves would be more appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Campbell response to S92 Queries; 16 October 2024.

## Assessment of Landscape Effects

Physical landscape effects are discussed first with visual amenity effects covered second in much more detail. The physical landscape effects outlined in the LAR solely relate to changes to the physical site such as through earthworks and vegetation change which I agree certainly contribute towards physical landscape effects. However, there is no discussion under the 'physical landscape effects' heading that considers the proposed buildings and associated change in activity that will be introduced to the site, especially as the site will become over-built. As this section is split between 'physical' and 'visual', physical needs to also discuss the change in landscape character, irrespective of whether the changes can be seen. This is standard practice. It is of my view that an additional 960 m<sup>2</sup> (0.03%) of built footprint including two extra dwellings and what this all supports on the 30.689 hectare site warrants inclusion as it will contribute in some way to any effects on rural character. In short, the site will change from mostly open paddocks to an intensive shed-based operation combined with two dwellings.

Further discussion on the proposal's potential effects on landscape character was one of the RFI points raised. Mr Campbell responded to the request which shed more light on landscape effects beyond the visual, which was helpful although there was one key comment that I did not fully agree with. Mr Campbell states at paragraph :

*"When providing my final conclusion on the assessment of landscape effects of the proposal on the prevailing landscape character, I do not consider that the presence of the two (2) chicken farming operations (comprising of 8 sheds in 2 groups of 4) within a paddock degenerates from the prevailing rural character as ancillary buildings form a part of the rural landscape and serve a key function in serving rural activities."*<sup>2</sup>

In my opinion, while ancillary buildings are part and parcel of most rural landscapes, the prevailing rural character in this instance does not include large buildings. The landscape around the site is for the most part open, with a few small buildings dotted about. The prevailing rural character in this case is vast and expansive, other than where the occasional shelterbelt precludes views. Buildings are small-scale and low-key, often set amongst little planted enclaves for shelter and amenity. I agree with Mr Campbell that chicken breeding / farming is a rural activity and as such can be expected, however, so long as the scale of the activity is appropriate.

Cumulative effects need to also be carefully considered. The proposal includes over-size sheds and two non-complying dwellings. In addition to the buildings, part of the site will include areas of hardstand, parked vehicles, plus a variety of different activities establishing around each dwelling in their respective curtilage areas. The proposed dwellings may have a more urban rather than rural character.

My comments here are not to say that the change in landscape character following the proposal will be the 'death-knell' for the landscape if the proposal goes ahead. My comments are more to assist the decision maker that until such time as the perimeter screen planting establishes the proposal will appear quite 'different' to the norm in the area. This temporal aspect to these effects needs some acknowledgement.

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Campbell response to S92 Queries, Q1; 16 October 2024.

The LAR finds at paragraph [6.8] that physical landscape effects will be '**Very Low**' (adverse). While effects on landscape character do not need to be seen, as is more often the case, visible change contributes strongly to the perceived effects on landscape character. Te Tangi a te Manu recognises that visual effects contribute to or are a subset of broader landscape effects, or in other words changes to the established landscape character. As such it is of my opinion that the potentially adverse landscape effects of the proposal will be more apparent initially when the changes can be seen and where they may come as a surprise given the low built nature of the surrounding context. As such, I would expect that any adverse effects will be '**Low**' at 'day one' reducing over time to 'negligible' or 'nil' – when the perceived changes to the rural site will be no better nor worse – just a different rural outcome, attributed to the perimeter shelterbelts.

Visual effects are covered second in the LAR and in detail. While a receiving environment is not mapped (and it is not compulsory to do so in a landscape assessment), it is alluded to in paragraph [6.13]. In my view the range, number and physical locations for the photographic viewpoints included are fair and reasonable.

A comment is made at paragraph [6.11] where adverse visual effects will be lower, if the audience is smaller. In my opinion this is not quite correct. The level of effect will be no different, it will just affect fewer people.

A point is made where 319 Sharlands Road is omitted from the visual effects assessment as the site is screened from this property by shelterbelts. While the coniferous shelterbelt (which may or may not be on the shared boundary with 319 Sharlands Road) is evergreen and dense, the adjacent shelterbelt within the site is deciduous (LAR, Figure 8 and Appendix 3.1). As such, if the occupants of No. 319 decided to remove the coniferous shelterbelt, should it be 'theirs', the proposal would come into view, especially when the shelterbelt trees on site were not in leaf. It may well be unlikely that this occurs, however the coniferous shelterbelt cannot be relied upon as mitigation without further confirmation of its ownership.

At paragraph [6.19] a statement is made where the effects findings are weighted towards a final outcome when the perimeter shelterbelts have matured. The rationale in the LAR is that this is how the proposal will look for longer. However, the effects at 'day one' or in a worst case scenario are what must be clearly articulated in any landscape assessment. And while temporary, these are the relevant effects that will contribute to the level of notification (if the application is notified), not how the develop ends up looking like.

Views from Sharlands Road when travelling south are described. In Mr Campbell's opinion, the sheds 5, 6, 7 and 8, set back 50 m from the road boundary will be 'mitigated' by the existing backdrop shelterbelt midway across the site where the new sheds will avoid having a sky backdrop. In my opinion, and based on a quick cross section, as the sheds are 4.1 m high and 50 m from the road, their upper parts will have a sky backdrop as the shelterbelt being relied upon is approximately 330 m to the west and not high enough to provide a fully vegetated backdrop (an approximately 16 m high shelterbelt would be required). In addition, the neighbouring shed at 375 Sharlands Road implied as providing a level of 'precedent' for the new buildings covers approximately 22 m x 7 m in area (154 m<sup>2</sup>) and as such would be dwarfed by the four 126 m long buildings proposed nearby.

Findings are made in the LAR at paragraph [6.23] and Table 6 that the visual effects will be '**Very low**' at 'day one' and also '**Very low**' after maturity of the new shelterbelts (on the RMA scale 'Very low' adverse is synonymous with a less than minor effect). In my view the visual effects at 'day one' would

be higher than 'Very low' and lower than 'Very low' at 'negligible' or 'nil' after the shelterbelts had matured which will presumably fully screen the buildings from public view. Shelterbelts such as what are proposed are a permitted activity, subject to plan standards.

The LAR then turns to the effects on private residents limited to the properties at 179 Hunters Road and 375 Sharlands Road. I accept that these two properties include dwellings where any occupants will be the most potentially affected by the visual changes arising from the proposal. Mr Campbell finds that as above, any potentially adverse effects will be '**Very Low**' on both parties at 'day one' and also 'Very low' after maturity of the proposed screen planting. I take 'Very low' to be akin to 'almost no discernible change'. After time I would expect that the visual effects on these two neighbours would fall to 'negligible or 'nil' when the proposed buildings and over-built nature of the site were screened from view. However, it is of my opinion that the occupants at 375 Sharlands Road will be most adversely affected. In my view there will be short term adverse effects on this party at levels that are '**Low-moderate**' (minor adverse). This dwelling (where fixed long-term views will be available) is approximately 250 m from the proposed sheds and approximately 330 m from a proposed dwelling. Given that the screening currently in place between this two-storey dwelling and the site is largely deciduous (LAR Figure 12) the changes to the eastern view will be obvious. It is of my opinion that this neighbour be limited notified.

As mentioned above, the neighbour at 319 Sharlands Road has been 'discounted' as a potentially affected party by Mr Campbell. In my view, despite the generous planting within No.319, including along the shared boundaries with the site, this neighbour's dwelling will be closest to the proposal. Further, occupants will be most aware of site-based traffic movements and be exposed to most of the temporary effects associated with the construction process than other nearby residents do. No.319 Sharlands Road sits between the site and SH1 regardless of whether traffic passes by via Sharlands Road or Hunters Road. As such it is of my opinion that this neighbour also be directly notified.

In addition to the above parties discussed, the occupants at 391 and 394 Sharlands Road will pass by the site on a regular basis as they come and go via Sharlands Road. While direct views to the site and proposal from these peoples' dwellings are not possible due to intervening vegetation, there will be a level of adverse landscape effect, as a nearby change in rural character will be initially obvious. A similar but lesser adverse effect will be felt by others living further away, but who will also pass by the site. For these people living further away, any potentially adverse effect arising from the change in rural character as proposed will be less than on the occupants at Nos. 391 and 394 as the proposal won't be perceived as so proximate / outside their 'patch'. In my opinion, the landscape effects on the parties discussed in this paragraph will be at worst '**Very low**' and acceptable when the permitted baseline is considered coupled with any adverse effects being transient and temporary. Over time, as the boundary planting establishes, any landscape effects perceived by these parties will become 'negligible' or 'nil'.

## Conclusion

An overall conclusion is reached in the LAR that the Proposal will generate at worst '**Very low**' adverse landscape effects as the proposal is currently presented. Of note Mr Campbell does not list any recommended conditions of consent, should consent be granted.

In my opinion, the landscape effects or effects on rural character regardless of whether the changes are visible or not, will be slightly higher at '**Low**' but still less than minor, given what is permitted

including much taller buildings with no colour controls covering an area approximately 1000 m<sup>2</sup> smaller than what is proposed. While the two extra dwellings exceed the number of permitted dwellings by two, which alone has non-complying status under both iterations of the district plan, the actual landscape effects of these will be small given the size of the dwellings and their physical separation on either side of an existing shelterbelt. However, I understand that the additional dwellings may trigger broader council concerns such as district plan integrity issues.

For the most part I agree with Mr Campbell's findings on the visual effects arising from the Proposal, although have made some comments where I disagree and why.

The staged construction process coupled with the existing and proposed coniferous shelterbelts implemented at 'day one' will screen the proposal from public and private view and will change the site from a largely open site to a fully enclosed one.

To conclude, written approval from the owner/occupier of 375 Sharlands Road should be sought who are most visually exposed to the site changes and the owner/occupier of 319 Sharlands Road who are closest to the site.



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23 October 2024