

UNDER

the Resource Management Act 1991

IN THE MATTER

of a request to Kaipara District Council for
Private Plan Change 81: Dargaville
Racecourse by the Dargaville Racing Club Inc

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF SIMON COCKER ON BEHALF OF THE APPLICANT

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

10 MARCH 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My full name is Simon John Cocker. I am a Landscape Architect and principal of Simon Cocker Landscape Architecture Ltd., based in Whangarei.
- 1.2 I hold a BA(Hons) Geography and an MPhil Landscape Design, both from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne in the United Kingdom.
- 1.3 I am a Registered member of Tuia Pita Ora – the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architecture.
- 1.4 I have 34 years' experience as a Landscape Architect, practising for the last 28 years in New Zealand. In New Zealand I was employed from 1994 to 2002 as a landscape architect by Boffa Miskell Ltd., within both their Auckland and Whangarei offices. From 2002 to 2004 I was a Parks Landscape Officer within the Whangarei District Council. Until August 2009 I was employed as a Senior Landscape Architect by Littoralis Landscape Architecture Ltd., and since that date I have practising as Simon Cocker Landscape Architecture (SCLA).
- 1.5 With Boffa Miskell, Littoralis and SCLA, the primary focus of my practise has been in landscape planning. Over this time I have worked for private individuals, infrastructure providers and organisations such as Waka Kotahi, and Kāinga Ora, and local authorities including Auckland Council, Whangarei District Council, Far North District Council, and Kaipara District Council.
- 1.6 My experience includes the provision of landscape architectural input to resource consent applications, and plan changes, both for applicant teams and on behalf of local authorities. A common area of my practice is providing landscape architectural input to medium to larger scale master planning, structure planning and integrated mixed use / residential development projects.

- 1.7 I have previously given evidence in Council hearings and before the Environment Court, most recently in support of a Plan Change in Waiuku.
- 1.8 This evidence is in respect of an application by Dargaville Racing Club Inc for Private Plan Change 81: Dargaville Racecourse.
- 1.9 My evidence will:
- (a) Summarise my involvement with the development of PC81;
 - (b) Describe the Site and its context;
 - (c) Summarise the key recommendations of my report;
 - (d) Comment on issues raised by submitters relevant to my area of expertise, and;
 - (e) Comment on the Council Officer's report.
- 1.10 I have read and agree to abide by the Environment Court's Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses as specified in the Environment Court's practice Note 2023. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I rely upon the evidence of another expert witness as presented to this hearing or a report that formed part of PC81. I have not omitted to consider any material facts known to me that might alter or detract from any opinions expressed. I have no conflict of interest to declare.

2. INVOLVEMENT WITH PC81

- 2.1 My involvement in PC81 began after I was requested by the Applicant to provide reporting input to scoping and preparation of the plan change in June 2021.
- 2.2 I visited the site and surrounding area on 25th June 2021.
- 2.3 I prepared a report entitled Tripartite Group - Dargaville Racecourse Redevelopment Private Plan Change - Assessment of landscape effects dated 9 February 2022 which was submitted as Appendix 10 to PC81.
- 2.4 The PC81 provisions respond to the recommendations in my report.

3. THE SITE AND ITS CONTEXT

4. The Site is situated some 2.0km to the north east of Dargaville and is bounded on its south eastern side by Awakino Point North Road, and on its south western side by State Highway 14.
5. It has an area of approximately 46 ha. and occupies a flat and low-lying landscape that reflects its riverine formative processes. Underlain by Holocene River Deposits (unconsolidated to poorly

consolidated mud, sand, gravel and peat deposits of alluvial, colluvial and lacustrine origins)¹, the Site is located within a wide meander of the Wairoa River, and within the flood plain of the Wairoa and Awakino Rivers. The Wairoa River drains an extensive catchment which extends to the east and north east as far as the Hikurangi Swamp, and outfalls to the Kaipara Harbour, approximately 30km to the south of the Site.

6. The low-lying flood plain landscape has been historically drained to facilitate the establishment of pasture, and – as is evident in Figures 1, 3 and 4 of my report – the patterning of drains has imposed an artificial linear and rectilinear structure on the landscape. This patterning is emphasised where property boundaries, field boundaries and shelterbelt plantings reflect the patterning established by the drainage system.
7. To the north, and south west of the Site, slight variations in the terrain reflect differences in the underlying geology where Early Pleistocene – Middle Pleistocene estuary, river and swamp deposits are manifest in low rounded hills of up to 30m in height. These hills allow elevated views across the Site to the south and south west.
8. This landform is visible in photo 2 of my report and it provides containment for the Site on its northern side, as well as precluding views of the Site from locations to the north and north west.
9. Due to the prevailing low-lying character of the landscape, subtle changes in landform, or groups of individual trees have the potential to influence the spatial character of the landscape. This is demonstrated in photo 6 of my report, where a low hill encroaches on, and forces a slight deviation in the alignment of the western edge of the State Highway close to the south western corner of the Site. In conjunction with the trees on the western and eastern sides of the road corridor, views to the Site along the State Highway corridor are constrained and ‘focused’, thereby creating the impression of a gateway when approaching from the south west.
10. Generally however, there is a paucity of vegetation of any scale. Where larger trees occur, they tend to be exotic specimens, or shelterbelt trees. Often these are planted along property, or field boundaries and the resulting pattern accentuates the linear structuring of the landscape.
11. Whilst the low-lying flood plain landscape dominates the landscape character of the environs of the Site, more elevated terrain is evident within the wider landscape and tends to draw the eye to these distant backdrop features. Across the Wairoa River to the north east, east, south east and south, dissected hills, underlain by mudstone (Undifferentiated Mangakahia Complex in Northland

¹ Information derived from GNS NZ Geology web map - <https://data.gns.cri.nz/geology/>

Allohthon), rise to a height of some 120m (refer to photos 3, and 4 of my report). The distant shadow of the Tutamoe Range is a feature of views to the north (refer to photos 1 and 2 of my report).

12. The predominant land use in the area is pastoral grazing. The Northland Field Days site is located approximately 500m to the south on Awakino Point East Road. This property is visually separated from the subject Site by vegetation, although glimpse views of the Site are possible from the road to the east of the showgrounds property (refer to photo 8 of my report).
13. A number of rural residential properties occupy the elevated land on the north western boundary of the Site, identified as Pt Lot 36 DP 11719, Lot 2 DP 388838 and Lot 1 DP 388838, these lots, along with Lot 1 DP 365819 immediately to the north, form a small cluster of settlement which range in area between 9,000 m² and 1.3ha.
14. Awakino Point North Road defines the south eastern boundary of the Site. A number of rural residential properties are accessed from this road and range in area between 809m² and 13.16ha. Dwellings within Lot 1 DP 65922 (4.25ha), Lot 1 DP 37054 (809m²), Pt Lot 30 DP 11537 (13.1609ha), Pt Lot 30 DP 15269 (13.162ha), and Lot 1 DP 70219 (4.12ha) offer relatively proximate views across the road to the Site
15. At the north eastern end of Awakino Point North Road dwellings within a number of small lots – being Lot 1 DP 158696, Lot 3 DP 396182, Lot 1 DP 396182, Lot 1 DP 61368, and Lot 1 DP 377245 are clustered close to the road. Between these dwellings, and also close to the road frontage, a number of dwellings are located on more expansive holdings. These are identified as Pt Lot 32S DP 11125 Pt Lot 35 DP 11124. A dwelling within Pt Lot 34 DP 7811 is located to the east of the Site, is located on a large land holding and is accessed from the end of Awakino Point North Road via a long driveway
16. The south western, and mid sections of Awakino Point North Road reflect the open and exposed character of the flood plain landscape. Unsealed, and with only occasional dwellings located close to the road, the corridor displays a strongly rural character. The character of the north eastern end of the road is influenced by the presence of a cluster of dwellings, including a number within

smaller properties. A number of these have established gardens and this lends the road corridor a rural residential character.

17. A similar pattern of sporadic small residential lots are accessed from Awakino Point East Road.
18. To the west of the Site, and on the western side of State Highway 14 a dwelling is located close to the road, and some 50m from the north western corner of the Site within a large lot identified as Pt Lot 3 DP 27234.
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20. Similarly, some 50m to the west of the south western corner of the Site, a dwelling within a large lot identified as Pt Lot 1 DP 11126 is elevated slightly above the Site. The dwelling is located at the eastern end of a subtle ridge which is aligned west – east.
21. Within the wider landscape, land holdings tend to be more extensive, but to the south west along the State Highway corridor, a ribbon of lots ranging in size between 1,012m² and 9.31ha extend to the south west to link with the eastern end of the Dargaville conurbation.

22. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF MY REPORT

- 22.1 The key recommendations of my report were detailed in Section 3 of my landscape assessment. In summary, they were as follows:
 - (a) Visual softening of built form within the Light Industrial Area and General Residential Area (using bunds, planting, and setbacks for buildings and structures) so that the dominance of buildings, structures, storage areas, security fencing and vehicle parking (when experienced from adjoining areas) is appreciably reduced. This included buffering along the State Highway corridor.
 - (b) Softening / buffering of site entrances using landscape planting around entrances and along the road corridors.
 - (c) Controls on development within the Large Lot Residential Area including controls on maximum building heights, controls on the external colour of buildings, structures, infrastructure and surfaces, controls on the character of fencing and services, and the use of landscape planting to assist with the integration of buildings and structures where these occupy prominent locations.

22.2 Section 3 also included design guidelines for built form and associated infrastructure.

23. SUBMISSIONS

23.1 18 submissions and 7 further submissions were received in total. Those relevant to my area of expertise referenced the following matters:

- Retain as rural
- Retain as green space
- Reverse sensitivity
- Landscaping

23.2 I respond to submissions relevant to my expertise below.

Retain as Rural [3.1, 10.1, 14.1, 15.1, 17.1, and 18.1]

23.3 A number of submissions have requested that the site be retained as Rural. Generally, these submissions raise concerns in relation to the density of development, and activity associated with that. In addition, a number make reference to the loss of rural productive land, a matter which is outside the scope of my expertise.

23.4 In terms of section 7(c) of the Act, it is my view that rural character is a subset of landscape character, and that rural character and “amenity” are intertwined: it is impossible to have the latter without the former. Rural character is derived from:

- An inherent sense of spaciousness; of a landscape dominated (usually) by open spaces and pasture;
- The presence of domesticated animals, crops, shelterbelts and functionally related buildings and structures (such as fencing and accessways);
- Limited buildings and residential development in general (with a very high ratio of open space to such development) with considerable separation between houses and buildings relative to those found on neighbouring properties;
- A generally high degree of visual permeability and openness, and;
- Awareness of the landforms and terrain that underpin individual land units.

23.5 In turn, rural amenity relates to:

- The visual coherence and continuity of the landscape in which such attributes are visible;
- Aesthetic value associated with these attributes;
- The individual rural area’s sense of place and identity; and
- Other related values, such as any recreational appeal.

- 23.6 I concluded in my landscape assessment that the potential adverse landscape effect of the proposal will be moderate, given the change in the character of the landscape as a consequence of the land use change.
- 23.7 I am of the opinion that the land use change, and the shift in character that will occur with regard to the lower-lying portion of the Site will also result in a moderate change in rural character.
- 23.8 With regard to rural amenity, my assessment determined that the Plan Change would facilitate changes that will result in a low level of experiential, and consequential adverse effects (including visual amenity effects) for the majority of individuals, but initially elevated (more than minor) during the construction period, and or in the short term for the occupants of a limited number of proximate dwellings.
- 23.9 I stated in my report, and retain, the opinion that these effects can be mitigated to a minor, or less than minor level within the medium to long term.

Reverse Sensitivity [10.2, 12.4, 12.5, 17.3]

- 23.10 Submissions have been made in relation to the potential for reverse sensitivity effects. For the most part, reverse sensitivity is a planning matter and will be addressed in the statement of evidence of Ms Anich.
- 23.11 Where this matter overlaps with my area of expertise is when mitigation measures such as planting, bund or fencing seeks to mitigate the adverse effect of future development facilitated by the Plan Change, and whether that will adequately address reverse sensitivity concerns.
- 23.12 I have recommended that a suite of mitigation measures including setbacks of development, fencing, planting and / or bunding is employed to buffer the development from neighbouring residential and rural land uses. To this end mitigation 'strips' are proposed along the southern part of the eastern boundary, along the southern boundary (with Awakino North Point Road), along the western boundary (with the State Highway), and along the western half of the northern boundary.
- 23.13 In my opinion, these measures can be targeted and have been addressed through the proposed PPC81 provisions in the TDA chapter including rules relating to screening, landscaping and setbacks along with maximum height and height in relation to boundary requirements.
- 23.14 The Trifecta Development Area chapter states:

The boundary interface and the internal interface have the potential for reverse sensitivity and compatibility effects. These potential effects have been managed through a variety of methods including landscaping, setbacks for buildings and structures, acoustic controls, and spatial placement of different activities.

23.15 Proposed TDA.1.2.11 seeks to:

Manage potential reverse sensitivity and compatibility effects internally and externally to the Development Area by ensuring that:

- *Screening is established and maintained*
- *Buildings and structures are appropriately located and scaled*
- *Acoustic controls are targeted at the source rather than the receiver*
- *Activities are spatially located relative to their effects and sensitivities*

23.16 In addition, TDA-SUB-S13 includes the following matter of control and discretion:

The location of proposed allotment boundaries and building areas so as to avoid potential conflicts between incompatible land use activities, including reverse sensitivity effects, and any measures proposed to avoid remedy or mitigate those effects.

23.17 TDA-LU-S2 Landscape and Fencing (Standards for the entire development area) requires that:

1. *Prior to establishment of any activity other than Farming on the site, a Landscape and Fencing Plan is prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced landscape architect detailing landscaping and fencing of:*
 - a. *The perimeter of the Trifecta Development Area.*
 - b. *The interface between the Light Industrial Area and the General Residential Area.*
2. *The resource consent proposing the Landscape and Fencing Plan may be submitted in advance of or together with any subdivision or land use consent application.*
3. *If development is staged, the Landscape and Fencing Plan:*
 - a. *May be staged.*
 - b. *Must deal with the entire land area for the particular stage.*

23.18 The matters for discretion are listed as follows:

1. *Shading and visual dominance on adjoining properties.*
2. *Streetscape character and amenity and visual effects.*
3. *Screening, planting, and landscaping.*

4. *Traffic safety.*
5. *Health and safety.*
6. *Reverse sensitivity and compatibility.*
7. *Implementation of the Landscape and Fencing Plan.*

23.19 The measures listed above for the mitigation of adverse effects are primarily directed at the mitigation of visual amenity effects within the subject Site, and conversely will be equally effective in mitigating potential adverse external effects which may be experienced by future residents within the Plan Change area.

23.20 Turning to the mitigation of noise effects, I understand, planting alone can be effective when of a sufficient width.

23.21 Whilst noting that the Acoustic Assessment lodged with the Plan Change application states *“In our view the reverse sensitivity risk posed by the plan change to existing rural activity is not likely to be significant given the existing rule framework”*, and whilst acknowledging that I am not an expert in acoustics, I refer to research undertaken by Forest Research in the UK which concludes that planting ‘noise buffers’ composed of trees and shrubs can reduce noise by five to ten decibels for every 30m width of woodland, especially sharp tones, and this reduces noise to the human ear by approximately 50%².

23.22 Similarly, research indicates that windbreaks can reduce odours from livestock, sewage facilities and other odour-producing sources and recommends that buffers comprising a mixture of tall trees and shrubs, particularly conifers, are close to the odour source³.

23.23 In stating the above, it is not my intention to prescribe measures to mitigate reverse sensitivity effects, rather I wish to state that, in my opinion some comfort can be gained in the fact that these matters may be addressed by the measures proposed.

Landscaping [5.10, 5.11]

23.24 Two submissions received from Waka Kotahi seek that any landscaping undertaken should be installed within private property boundaries and should not restrict vehicle or pedestrian

² <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/urban-regeneration-and-greenspace-partnership/greenspace-in-practice/benefits-of-greenspace/noise-abatement/>

³ https://www.fs.usda.gov/nac/buffers/guidelines/6_aesthetics/2.html

sightlines, and any landscaping and front boundary treatments along the SH corridor should mitigate any potential effects generated from headlight glare and driver distraction.

23.25 I understand that the applicant accepts these submissions.

24. COUNCIL OFFICER'S REPORT

24.1 I respond to relevant aspects of the Council Officer's report below.

24.2 Paragraphs 213 – 223 address landscape quality, character and visual amenity and concludes:

Based on the assessment and recommendations provided within the ALE, and with no technical evidence to the contrary, it is considered that the potential landscape, visual, amenity and character effects from the development enabled by PPC81 can be mitigated over time to a minor effect.

24.3 I confirm that my view has not changed since I prepared my report and I therefore concur with the Council Officer's report.

Simon Cocker



10 March 2023