

**BEFORE A HEARING COMMISSIONER**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of hearing submissions and further submissions in respect  
of Matamata-Piako District Council - Plan Change 58 -  
Avenue Business Park

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**STATEMENT OF JOANNA LOUSIE SOANES ON BEHALF OF WARWICK  
AND MARION STEFFERT**

**LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL**

**14 FEBRUARY 2024**

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## Introduction

- 1 My full name is Joanna Louise Soanes. I am a Senior Principal Landscape Architect at Boffa Miskell Limited, a position I have held since April 2018. Previously, I worked at WSP Opus for nine years. I have a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture with Honours from Lincoln University.
- 2 I have 19 years' experience working as a Landscape Architect. I have a broad skills base with experience spanning landscape planning, assessment and design for a diverse range of projects in both urban and rural contexts. I have practised as a Landscape Architect in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch, undertaking work for a wide range of clients, ranging from local and regional councils, central government, educational institutions to private companies and developers.
- 3 I have previous experience in providing expert evidence on landscape and visual effects at council hearings for resource consent applications and notices of requirement.
- 4 In relation to this hearing, I am authorised to give evidence on behalf of Warwick and Marion Steffert (**Steffert**).

## Code of Conduct

- 5 I have read the Environment Court's 'Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses' as contained in the Environment Court's Consolidated Practice Note 2023 and agree to comply with it. I have complied with it when preparing my written statement of evidence and I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed.

## Executive Summary

- 6 The proposed Private Plan Change 58 to the Operative Matamata-Piako District Plan (**PC58**) would rezone 13.4 hectares of land near the western edge of Morrinsville from Rural to General Industrial. It provides for approximately 10.1 hectares of developable land to the industrial land supply for Morrinsville, excluding anticipated non-developable sections like roads, stormwater and wastewater infrastructure.
- 7 Below is a summary of the position reached in this evidence on the significant matters:

- (a) The site is located to the western edge of an existing industrial area in the vicinity of Avenue Road North, including Stage 1 of the Avenue Business Park and Bowers Concrete. To the north and west the site interfaces with rural land and to the south the site interfaces with rural-residential properties.
- (b) The proposed PC58 will have Low-Moderate adverse effects on the existing landscape (within the PC58 site), particularly related to removal of pasture, earthworks required across the site to establish roading, building platforms and associated retaining walls.
- (c) The PC58 provisions (including the Avenue Development Area Plan) require establishment of 5m wide buffer planting at the interface with the adjacent Rural Zone to assist with screening for adjacent properties. The stormwater management reserve which is proposed to be located in the southern area of the site will also provide a planting buffer and amenity for adjacent neighbours. The planting is to be implemented at subdivision stage.
- (d) Two cross sections scenarios were prepared as part of consultation to illustrate buffer planting interface treatment options for the rural boundaries of the PC58 site. Option 1 provides a mixed planting approach that includes a variety of native and exotic trees and shrubs. It is anticipated this planting will achieve approximately 3-5m height after 5 years of planting. Option 2 provides for Cryptomeria hedge, a faster growing option than Option 1 reaching approximately 6m height after 5 years of planting. Having considered both options and discussed them with neighbours to the west and south of the PC58 site, it is my opinion that Option 1 is the better option. In reaching this view I have considered feedback received from one of the neighbours, screening outcomes, maintenance requirements and the preference in the Cultural Values Assessment for native plant species and outcomes which support native flora. The cross section for Option 1 is proposed to be included in the District Plan and a detailed Landscape Plan will be required to be prepared at the future resource consent stage.
- (e) Views of the site from public roads are varied due to intervening vegetation and buildings (dwellings and existing commercial along SH26 and existing and planned industrial development along

Avenue Road North). From these public roads, the visual effects associated with development of the site will be Low.

- (f) The site is located within a reasonably discrete and visually well enclosed area relative to private viewpoints. Some dwellings on surrounding properties will have views of the site. The extent of those views varies due to intervening landform and vegetation.
- (g) For the eight private locations that I have identified, the visual effects associated with development of the site will range from Very Low to Moderate. The proposed landscape mitigation planting will assist in reducing the visual effects once it has established and reducing effects to Very Low to Low Moderate.
- (h) Two of the 14 submissions received raised landscape and visual concerns. Site visits to both properties were undertaken to assist in preparation of this evidence. Cross sections illustrating buffer planting scenarios were presented and discussed with both submitters. The site visit allowed for further visual assessment from both properties and modifications were made to both the assessment and cross sections.
- (i) Overall, with the proposed mitigation measures in place, the rural characteristics of the surrounding area and the industrial interface with the Rural Zone to the north, west and south of the site can be appropriately managed.

### **Scope of Evidence**

- 8 This evidence has been prepared on behalf of the applicants, the Stefferts, who have requested a private plan change to the Matamata-Piako District Plan to rezone approximately 13.4 hectares of rural land from Rural Zone to General Industrial Zone on the western side of Morrinsville, between Avenue Road North and SH26.
- 9 My evidence addresses landscape and visual effects matters and responds to submissions made on the PC58 application and relevant parts of the s42A Report.
- 10 My evidence covers:
  - (a) Methodology
  - (b) Project Background

- (c) The Site and Landscape Context
  - (d) An overview of PC 58 relevant to landscape matters.
  - (e) Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects
  - (f) Response to matters raised in Submissions
  - (g) Response to matters raised in s42A Report
  - (h) Conclusion
- 11 In the course of preparing this evidence I have considered:
- (a) The application lodged with Council on 22 December 2022 and further information provided on 1 May 2023 and 30 November 2023;
  - (b) Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment dated 20 October 2022;
  - (c) The 14 submissions and 1 further submission; and
  - (d) The s42A Report dated 7 February 2024.
- 12 My evidence is to be read in conjunction with the PC58 application and further information referred to above, and the evidence presented by the other experts on behalf of the Stefferts.

### **Methodology**

- 13 This evidence has been informed by my visits to the site and the surrounding area, the Matamata-Piako District-Plan (Accessed Online) and Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines [Published by Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022].
- 14 My evidence relates to the landscape and visual effects as a result of PC58 on the immediate and surrounding environment.

### **Background**

- 15 I was commissioned by the Applicant (Warwick and Marion Steffert) to provide expert landscape and visual assessment and evidence in relation to PC58.
- 16 Following a site visit within the consultant team, a master plan for the PC58 site was prepared by Tektus. I was involved in providing inputs to the landscape buffer planting and rural interface treatment. The landscape buffer planting has been incorporated into the plan change provisions and

is shown on the Avenue Business Park Development Area Plan (**ADAP**). (Refer to Graphics Supplement Figure 2).

- 17 I prepared a Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment (**LVA**) for PC58, dated 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022. I visited the site and viewed it from the surrounding area prior to preparing the LVA.
- 18 Following the close of submissions, I met with and visited the properties of two submitters who own land adjacent to the PC58 site (Peter Hexter (2559 SH26) to the west and Warren and Sandra Davenport (2579 SH26) to the southwest). The site visits allowed me to further explain the intent of the proposed buffer planting and I showed two cross section options to the submitters. Outcomes from these meetings are included in the Response to Submissions section of my evidence.

### **The Site and Landscape Context**

- 19 The landscape characteristics of the site and surrounding area are described in detail in the LVA. I summarise the key characteristics as follows:
- (a) the site is approximately 13.4ha in area, is zoned Rural and is located on the western side of Morrinsville;
  - (b) the site has no direct frontage to SH26 being positioned to the rear of an existing house at 2581 SH26 which is owned by the Stefferts;
  - (c) the site is currently used as a small dry-stock beef farm and is typical of a rural farm currently in pasture. A central race, network of farm drains and post and wire fencing compartmentalises the site into multiple paddocks;
  - (d) the site is exclusively utilised for grazing purposes with ancillary sheds and stockyards;
  - (e) as a result of its use for grazing, the site lacks mature vegetation and is devoid of visible natural features;
  - (f) although not within the site, a large mature shelterbelt of trees is located along the western boundary of the site and a hedgerow is located along the northern site boundary;
  - (g) the topography of the southern and central parts of the site is generally flat while the northern part of the site slopes up towards the north-western corner.

- 20 A combination of geological factors and human activities have influenced the existing patterns of development throughout the wider area. Agricultural activities to the north, and to a lesser extent to the west, are predominantly wide-open pastoral paddocks for dairy farming and fat-lamb production.
- 21 The site is part of the Central Hill Country as classified in the Waikato Regional Landscape Assessment.<sup>1</sup> The key features and characteristics identified in the landscape character description of this wider area are:
- the Hunua Range, the Hapuakohe Range, Mangakawa and Hangawera, and the hills around Te Miro and Maungatautari;
  - rolling and steep landforms;
  - pasture and some mature bush in gullies and along higher ridges;
  - high intensity farmland (dairy farming and fat-lamb production); and
  - significant population growth in many of the small rural towns.
- 22 The landform and topographical character of the District's rural landscape is relatively flat to undulating in nature with steep knolls located throughout. Pakaroa Range to the south and Hangawera hills to the north, provide a distant backdrop that can be viewed from Morrinsville.
- 23 Agricultural fields are defined by exotic deciduous hedgerow species and infrequent bands of mature trees along post and wire fences. Shelterbelt planting is more common towards Morrinsville and surrounding rural-residential lots and farmsteads. Clusters of mature native vegetation can be found in the riparian edges of stream corridors.
- 24 The Morrinsville township generally sits between the Piako River (to the east) and the Morrinsville Stream (to the west) on relatively flat land. Morrinsville is defined by low density housing within the northern and eastern areas of the township. Industrial, commercial, and business land uses are located to the south-west of the town, either side of the main street (Thames Street) and SH26. The industrial area around Avenue Road North, which is immediately east of the site, is the largest area for industrial activities in Morrinsville.

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<sup>1</sup> Waikato Regional Landscape Assessment, February 2010. Technical Report # 1636162, page 25

- 25 The northern and western boundaries of the site interface with rural land (2469 and 2559 SH26 respectively). These boundaries are predominately defined by vegetation, including a low hedgerow on the northern boundary and established tall-stature planting within the neighbouring property to the west. The eastern boundary of the site abuts the developing Industrial zoned land in the consented Avenue Business Park Stage 1 and a recent expansion of Bowers Concrete's operations. The southern boundary of the site interfaces with rural-residential properties<sup>2</sup> along SH26, one of which includes a builder's depot (2579 SH26). There is also some Business zoned land along SH26 to the south-east of the site. This provides a buffer between the road users and residential development to the south and existing/developing industrial businesses to the north. (Refer to Graphic Supplement Figure 3).
- 26 The visual catchment of the site is limited to the immediate surrounding area. This is due, in part, to the level of existing/emerging industrial and business development to the east and south-east of the site. Views from the west of the site are generally well contained by the undulating landform and intervening vegetation.
- 27 Distant views are available from a distance of approximately 1-2.5km from elevated rural properties and rural-residential properties on Sunridge Park Road, Broad Oaks Road and Oakridge Place to the north of the site. I have determined that distant views from southern, eastern and western aspects will not be possible due to a combination of intervening landform and built form.
- 28 I have determined the primary viewing audiences for public and private locations to be:
- Public locations
- Users of existing surrounding roads, including SH26 and Avenue Road North; and
  - Users of new roads within the Avenue North Business Park – Stage 1, including Magistrate Avenue (road has been constructed and due to open shortly).
- Private locations

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<sup>2</sup> 2579 and 2581 SH26



- Viewers from private properties surrounding the site<sup>3</sup>;
- Rural farm workers to the north and west of the site;
- Viewers from private industrial properties to the east; and
- Future tenants and visitors of the Avenue North Business Park – Stage 1 to the east.

29 There are no outstanding natural landscapes (“ONL”), features (“ONF”) or areas of outstanding / high natural character (“ONC” / “HNC”) within the site or in close proximity.

### **Overview of Plan Change Proposal**

30 The proposal is to rezone the site from Rural Zone to General Industrial Zone (**GIZ**) to enable predominantly industrial development. Development of the site will also include local roads and a stormwater management area for a communal stormwater device, such as a wetland.

31 The ADAP has been prepared to guide future development of the site and is proposed to be included in the District Plan. The ADAP is based on the master plan which I had early input into. Objectives, policies and rules are also proposed for the GIZ. Key elements of the proposal include:

- (i) Building height – maximum 12m.
- (ii) Building setbacks from boundaries – minimum 5m front yards and minimum 10m yards adjoining any zone other than the GIZ.
- (iii) Height in relation to boundary – 3m plus 45 degrees for any boundary with an adjoining Residential or Rural Zone and some reserves.
- (iv) Fencing and retaining walls – maximum boundary fence height of 1.8m, maximum retaining wall heights of 0.6m along front boundaries and reserve boundaries and 1.5m along other boundaries and maximum combined heights of fences and retaining walls of 1.8m along front boundaries and reserve boundaries and 3m along other boundaries.

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<sup>3</sup> Identified private properties; 2587 SH26, 2581 SH 26, 2579 SH 26, 2561 SH26, 2559 SH26, 2469D SH26, 2469 A, B & C, 2491 A & B SH26 and 2597A SH26.

- (v) Service and outdoor storage areas – controls over location and screening, including avoidance of service and outdoor storage areas within any required front yard.
- (vi) A 5m deep landscape buffer is required along all Rural zone boundaries with the site.

### **Landscape Effects**

- 32 Landscape effects can result from changes in the physical landscape which may in turn give rise to changes in the character of the landscape and how this is experienced. Factors that can be taken into account include landform, land cover and land use.
- 33 Change within a landscape does not, of itself, necessarily constitute an adverse landscape or visual effect. The landscape is dynamic and is constantly changing over time in both subtle and more dramatic ways. These changes are both natural and human induced. What is important in managing landscape change is that adverse effects are avoided or appropriately mitigated to ameliorate the effects of the change in land use.
- 34 In combination with assessing the level of effects, the landscape and visual effects assessment also considers the nature of effects in terms of whether this will be positive (beneficial) or negative (adverse) in the context within which it occurs. Neutral effects can also occur where landscape or visual change is benign.

### *Landscape and Rural Character*

- 35 The development that will be enabled by PC58 will result in a fundamental change from rural to predominantly industrial land uses. There are no previous structure plans or growth plans that have signalled this change.
- 36 Earthworks will be required across the entirety of the site to establish the internal road network, building platforms, and associated retaining walls. Preliminary earthworks modelling by Tektus indicates retaining walls are typically expected to be between 2-3m in height within the northern end of the Site, with a maximum height of 3.5m<sup>4</sup>. The earthworks will predominantly be in cut in this area. Retaining walls can be stepped in increments where they would otherwise be over 1.5m in height, in line with the standards of the proposed GIZ. At the southern end of the site, the

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Refer to the Infrastructure Report by Tektus.

landform characteristics will be generally retained, apart from the construction of the stormwater wetland and recontouring cut soil removed from the northern end of the site which is likely to involve raising of the ground levels by up to 1-1.5m in some places. Retaining walls are not anticipated to be required in the southern part of the site.

- 37 As discussed earlier, there is no significant vegetation that will be removed within the site other than exotic pastoral grassland.
- 38 I note that, due to the site's location, on the fringe of Morrinsville and adjacent to an existing Industrial zone, the landscape character of the site and immediate surroundings has already been changed and influenced by the existing development of industrial and business activities. This change will continue with the ongoing development of Stage 1 of the Avenue Business Park.
- 39 With consideration of the above, I anticipate that the earthworks required to achieve suitable gradients for roads and building platforms will result in a Low-Moderate adverse effect on the physical landscape, particularly the existing topography and 'natural' contours of the site. The changes will have Low-Moderate effects on the rural character of the landscape surrounding the site.
- 40 I have made recommendations as part of the LVA to ensure that the built development outcome of PC58 does not unduly detract from the character of the surrounding landscape. These recommendations have been incorporated into the proposed provisions for PC58, including the provisions which I have identified in paragraph 31. I consider this will lead to the creation of an industrial area that provides appropriate mitigation for the interface between proposed industrial and existing rural land.

### **Visual Effects**

- 41 Visual effects will result from the degree of visibility of the changes to the landscape that will arise from the development that will be enabled by PC58. The visual effects will primarily be from:
- Temporary effects related to construction, including bulk earthworks, roading and individual buildings; and
  - Permanent effects related to the introduction of industrial buildings and activities.

- 42 The specific nature of visual effects will depend on the design of specific development proposals. However, the standards which are proposed for the GIZ will ensure that developments which do not comply would require resource consent and be subject to a range of assessment criteria including the extent of non-compliance, the scale and nature of the proposal and visual effects.
- 43 I have considered visual effects from a number of public and private locations, north, west and south of the site. I have assigned a degree of effects, based on visibility, proximity to the site, the apparent orientation of the surrounding houses and the nature of the view, including any existing or proposed vegetation that might provide full or partial screening of views. The assessment is based on observations from the site itself, publicly accessible land, site visits I have undertaken to adjacent properties and aerial photos.

#### *Public Roads*

- 44 Views from public roads (Refer to Viewpoints 1, 6, 8 and 9), including SH26 and Avenue Road North, are representative of transient viewers (users travelling in vehicles and pedestrians).
- 45 Existing views of the site from SH26 are intermittently screened by existing dwellings, ancillary buildings and mature vegetation. Industrial development within the site is anticipated to be discernible from SH26. However, I anticipate that the industrial development will not be prominent due to the GIZ being setback between 100-300m from SH26, the proposal for a stormwater management reserve to be positioned at the southern end of the site (as shown on the ADAP) and intervening dwellings and vegetation which are present within the foreground of views. I expect the sloping higher area on the site to be more visible from SH26, but it will be viewed at a greater distance with the highest part of the site near the northern boundary being over 700m from the SH26 frontage.
- 46 From Avenue Road North, open views are currently available into the site, although the extent of these views will change (reduce) as development of lots within Avenue Business Park – Stage 1 occurs. The views from Avenue Road North feature existing industrial development to the north (Bowers Concrete) and the recent earthworks and civil construction works associated with Avenue Business Park – Stage 1, including Magistrate Avenue (constructed and due to open shortly). The current state of the

construction includes completing of roads and infrastructure prior to commencement of building and lot development. These already provide a utilitarian foreground context of the view toward the site from Avenue Road North.

- 47 Much of the view of the lower part of the site will be substantially screened from view from Avenue Road North once the Avenue Business Park – Stage 1 land is fully developed. To the extent that views remain available, they will be in the context of other industrial buildings between Avenue Road North and the site. The development of the higher area of the site is expected to be more visible from Avenue Road North, but it will still be viewed in the context of other industrial development in the foreground and at a distance of approximately 250m from Avenue Road North at the nearest point.
- 48 Temporary visual effects from public roads associated with construction will be low due to the relatively short duration, limited visibility of the site, and industrial context that the adjacent sites provide.
- 49 The change from rural to predominantly industrial land use will inevitably change the character of the site when viewed from public roads. I consider that PC58 will result in a Low level of visual effects from viewpoints on SH26 and Avenue Road North.

#### *Private Locations*

- 50 I have considered visual effects from eight private properties where the site will be most visible. The properties and anticipated visual effects rating are summarised in Table 1 (below). *Refer to Graphic Supplement Figure 5.* for a plan illustrating address and viewpoint locations.

Table 1: Summary of visibility Analysis from Private Locations			
House ID	Address	Distance from Site*	Description and assessment of potential visual effects prior to and after mitigation has established.
1.	2579 SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 70m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Moderate</b> from this private property and then reducing to Low-Moderate once vegetation has established.
2.	2581 SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 30m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Moderate</b> from this private property and then reducing to Low-Moderate once vegetation has established.
3.	2587 SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 50m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Low - Moderate</b> from this private property.
4.	2561 SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 160m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Low</b> from this private property.
5.	2559 SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 170m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Low-Moderate</b> from this private property.
6.	2469D SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 230m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Low</b> from this private property.
7.	2469 A, B & C, 2491 A & B SH26, Morrinsville	Dwellings are located 600m-950m from the site.	Due to distance and the limited ability to view the site the visual effects will be <b>Very Low</b> from this private property.
8.	2597A SH26, Morrinsville	Dwelling is located 130m from the site.	Visual Effects will be <b>Very Low</b> from this private property.

51 From my observations and descriptions above, the site is located within a reasonably discrete and visually well enclosed area relative to private viewpoints. For the eight private locations that I have identified, the visual effects associated with development of the site will range from Very Low to Moderate. The properties that will experience Moderate visual effects are 2579 SH26 (the Davenport property) and 2581 SH26 which is owned by the Stefferts. I have assessed that there will be Low-Moderate visual effects on the properties at 2587 SH26 and 2559 SH26 (the Hexter property). All of these properties are located to the south or west of the

site and have dwellings which are located between approximately 30-170m from the site boundary.

- 52 While industrial development that will be enabled by the proposed rezoning of the site will inevitably read as a significant visual change, the associated visual effects will be mitigated through the proposed PC58 provisions. In particular, the 5m wide landscape buffer that is required along the Rural zone boundaries will assist in visually integrating the future development into the surrounding wider landscape. Visual effects experienced from properties to the south will also be mitigated by the proposed location of the stormwater management reserve within the southern part of the site, as shown on the ADAP. The stormwater management reserve is likely to contain a wetland which can be densely planted.
- 53 Overall, I consider a Very Low to Moderate level of visual effects to be acceptable in the context of the surrounding environment. I comment on specific visual effects matters which have been raised in submissions from two adjacent landowners in the following part of my evidence.

#### **Response to matters raised in Submissions**

- 54 In this section, I address the key landscape and visual issues raised in the submissions. 14 submissions were received and of those two raised landscape and visual concerns.

#### **Peter Hexter (Submission 10)**

- 55 The submission by Peter Hexter raises the concern that PC58 will have a severe landscape and visual impact on the submitter's property at 2559 SH26, where existing rural views will be replaced with views of industrial and commercial development. Other concerns raised are light pollution, the assumption in the LVA that existing trees on the submitter's property will remain and that the proposed 5m landscape buffer will be insufficient.
- 56 I visited Mr Hexter at his property on 18 October 2023 together with Mr Ben Inger (planner) and Mr Chris Steffert (project manager). The site visit to Mr Hexter's property enabled further visual assessment from the dwelling and surrounds of the property. A number of photographs were taken from key viewpoints within Mr Hexter's property to illustrate views towards the site and existing vegetation. Mr Hexter has asked that

photographs taken from his property not be used without his permission. I can provide these at the hearing to assist the Panel.

- 57 There are a number of mature trees (predominantly deciduous) within the property, including a row of trees along the eastern boundary adjacent to the PC58 site (illustrated in Viewpoints 4 and 9), several clusters and rows of trees in the vicinity of the existing dwelling and pine blocks to the north and west of the property. Despite the elevated position of the dwelling, the existing mature trees mean that views from the dwelling and outdoor living areas are mostly contained within the property. Some longer distance views are obtained from the dwelling toward the south of the site in the direction of SH26 but there is very little visibility of the PC58 site.
- 58 As shown in Table 1, I assessed the visual effects from the dwelling on Mr Hexter's property as Low-Moderate. Having visited the site, I would now assess this as Moderate with effects reducing to Low-Moderate over a period of 3-5 years following mitigation planting being established. The assessment takes into account the existing environment, including the mature trees that provide effective visual screening of the PC58 site.
- 59 During the site visit, Mr Hexter advised me that he intends to remove all the mature trees within the foreseeable future. I understand he is concerned that the trees are a maintenance burden. The removal of all the mature trees within the Hexter property would inevitably change the views from the dwelling so that the PC58 site, the Avenue Business Park – Stage 1 and other industrial land beyond that would be visible. I consider the visual effects of PC58 on the Hexter property would be Moderate-High in this scenario. The effects would reduce over time as the proposed 5m landscape buffer establishes to provide effective replacement screening within 3-5 years. I consider the visual effects at that point would be Moderate. The buffer planting is likely to reach a similar height as the existing planting once it has reached maturity after approximately 10-15 years.
- 60 It is clearly Mr Hexter's choice whether he wishes to remove existing mature trees within his property, weighing up the benefits that retention of the existing trees will provide in very effectively screening the PC58 site with the maintenance burden that the trees cause.
- 61 At the meeting with Mr Hexter, I provided and explained two draft cross section options for the 5m wide landscape buffer. Mr Hexter did not



express any preference between the two options. I have subsequently considered the two options further and I now recommend that Option 1 is the cross section that should be included in the District Plan. Option 1 provides a mixed planting approach that includes a variety of native and exotic trees and shrubs. I discuss this further below in relation to the Davenport submission and in response to the s42A Report.

Warren and Sandra Davenport (Submission 12)

- 62 The submission by Warren and Sandra Davenport (2579 SH26) states that the proposed 5m landscape buffer along the Rural Zone boundaries is inadequate. The submitter is concerned about the effects on visual amenity due to loss of rural farmland vistas and replacement “*with building structures with a potential maximum height of 35 metres above the current ground level*”. I note that the maximum building height is 12m. The submission may be referring to the northern part of the site being elevated.
- 63 I visited Mr and Mrs Davenport at their property on 18 October 2023 together with Mr Ben Inger (planner) and Mr Chris Steffert (project manager). The site visit to Mr and Mrs Davenport’s property enabled further visual assessment from the dwelling and surrounds of the property. (Refer to Graphic Supplement, Viewpoint 3A / 3B).
- 64 From the site visit I was able to view the site from the northern living areas, wider garden and second storey of the main dwelling. Views from the northern outdoor living areas are relatively contained by the outdoor courtyard, walled fencing and pool house. From the northern garden area wider views are obtained north to the site. From the northern side of the dwelling the boundary between the Davenport property and the PC58 site is located approximately 129m away. Areas of lawn, grazing paddocks and 2 clusters of mature trees are located between the dwelling and the PC58 site in this direction. The second storey of the dwelling provides panoramic views to the Kaimai Range, surrounding farmland, Morrinsville urban areas and existing industrial development including Bowers Concrete and Stage 1 of the Avenue Business Park.
- 65 As shown in Table 1, I assessed the visual effects from Mr and Mrs Davenport’s dwelling as Moderate and reducing to Low – Moderate once the mitigation has established in the LVA. Having visited the site, I am satisfied that this is an appropriate classification of the visual effects. The effects would reduce over time as the proposed 5m landscape buffer

establishes. I consider the visual effects at that point will generally be Low – Moderate except for viewpoints from living areas of the second storey of the dwelling where the visual effects will remain Moderate and will be viewed in the context of existing industrial development.

- 66 At the meeting with Mr and Mrs Davenport, I provided and explained two draft cross section options for the 5m landscape buffer (see explanation above in relation to Mr Hexter’s submission). Mrs Davenport expressed a clear preference for Option 1 which provides a mixed planting approach that includes a variety of native and exotic trees and shrubs. I have subsequently made minor amendments to the Option 1 cross section in response to feedback from Mrs Davenport. As I have previously explained, the cross-section for Option 1 is proposed to be included in the District Plan.

### **Response to matters raised in s42A Report**

- 67 I have reviewed the s42A Report in relation to landscape and visual effects, in particular Section 6.4.2 Built Form and Landscape Buffer which outlines several matters that Mr Whittaker has sought clarification on.

### **Bulk Earthworks**

- 68 The s42A Report requests further information in relation to the bulk earthworks and the landscape buffer planting. It states *“If 3m of fill is proposed to provide level building sites, this may establish additional building profile above any effective landscaping buffer and these effects should be addressed and assessed further”*<sup>5</sup>.
- 69 I have discussed this matter with Mr Suljic who prepared the Infrastructure Report for PC58. Paragraph 54 of Mr Suljic’s evidence explains that the preliminary earthworks model which he has prepared illustrates that *“areas in fill are expected to be generally limited to a maximum depth of approximately 1.5m and will predominantly be over the low-lying portion of the site. Areas in cut will predominantly be over the high-lying portion of the site with a cut depth of up to approximately 3m. This is to create flat terraced platforms suitable for industrial lot development”*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Para 97 s42A Report.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Mr Suljic’s evidence, Figure 1 – Preliminary earthworks model excerpt showing likely cut and fill depths of bulk earthwork operations.

- 70 The landscape buffer design can accommodate these changes in the landform to provide sufficient screening of future buildings and associated infrastructure. The intent of the landscape buffer is not to fully screen all future development so that it is not visible, but rather to make industrial development less prominent in views from surrounding rural areas than it otherwise would be without the buffer planting. Specific planting details will be developed at resource consent stage following final earthwork models. This may include taller plant species to accommodate increased ground level changes within the lower area of the site and within key view shafts from neighbouring properties.

#### Landscape Buffer Planting within Road Reserve and Stormwater Management Reserve

- 71 The landscape buffer is proposed immediately adjacent to the road over a distance of approximately 100m in the southern part of the site. The landscape buffer also extends along the western side of the proposed indicative stormwater management reserve for a further distance of approximately 70m. Refer to **Figure 1** below.
- 72 It is anticipated the buffer planting in these locations will sit within the road reserve and stormwater management reserve respectively. The road reserve may need to be wider in this location to accommodate the landscape buffer, as well as the pavement and services.
- 73 It is usual for a consent holder to be required to establish and maintain plants within vested roads and reserves for a period after planting (often 24 months) prior to ongoing maintenance responsibilities being handed over to the local authority. This reduces the maintenance burden on the local authority and ensures that plants are in an established and healthy state. I expect that the maintenance details and obligations, as well as details around the design of the landscaping and other aspects of the road, will be addressed at subdivision design stage.



*Figure 1: Landscape Buffer within Road and Stormwater Management Reserve*

#### Landscape Buffer Planting Cross Section

- 74 Having two landscape buffer planting cross section options seems to have caused some confusion over which cross section will be implemented. The two cross sections were initially prepared for consultation purposes so that I could discuss the potential options and consider any feedback with the adjacent landowners (Mr Hexter and Mr and Mrs Davenport). As I have previously explained, Mrs Davenport has let me know that she prefers Option 1 rather than Option 2, while Mr Hexter has not provided any feedback on a preferred option.
- 75 The mixed planting approach provided by Option 1 is the better option in my opinion, for the following reasons:
- (a) The more naturalised planting outcome will fit well into the surrounding landscape and will provide an effective visual screen;
  - (b) A mix of plant species can be used to balance short-term (fast-growth) and long term outcomes;
  - (c) It includes use of native species and is likely to provide better habitat for native fauna, which is consistent with the recommendations in

the Cultural Values Assessment. The landscaping rule 9.6.3(a) also requires preference to be given to native plant species; and

- (d) There will be less maintenance compared to the Cryptomeria hedge.

76 Therefore, I have removed the Cryptomeria buffer planting option. Refer to updated cross section, Graphic Supplement Figure 4. Detailed planting and maintenance specifications can be provided at the future resource consent stage.

#### Landscape Buffer Width

77 The proposed landscape buffer is 5m wide and includes plant species with the ability to grow to at least 9m in height. 5m width allows for at least three rows of trees and shrub planting, providing sufficient depth of planting for visual screening. In my opinion, there is no landscaping need for a wider buffer than this as the intended outcome can be achieved with a 5m width.

78 The Infrastructure Report identifies that a swale is likely to be required along a substantial part of the western boundary adjacent to Mr Hexter's property and along the southern boundary adjacent to the Davenport's property (see **Figure 2**). The swale will be located on the inside edge of the landscape buffer, is likely to be approximately 5m wide and will include planting. Although planting within the swale is unlikely to be visible from the Hexter and Davenport properties (due to the proposed planting within the intervening landscape buffer), it will nevertheless provide some additional separation to future industrial activities on the adjoining lots.

79 I am comfortable that with careful design, the planting within the landscape buffer will provide visual screening within approximately 3-5 years with its effectiveness increasing as the planting reaches maturity after (cross section shown at approximately 10-15 years). The swale will provide additional separation to industrial activities in the locations where it is required for drainage. The landscape buffer cross section includes indicative plant species and heights at approximately 5 years. It has also now been updated to show plant heights at maturity. Refer to Graphic Supplement Figure 4.

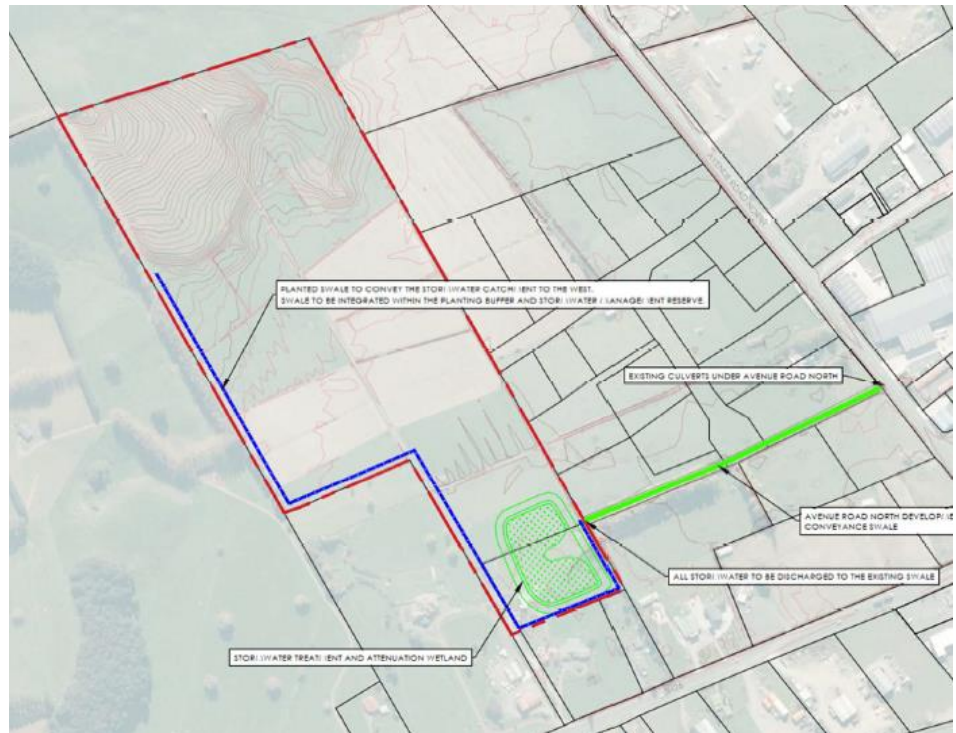


Figure 2: Conceptual Swale Location – Blue Line (source: Infrastructure Report by Tektus)

#### Landscape Buffer Planting Detail Design

- 80 It is my opinion that sufficient detail is provided for a plan change stage on the ADAP, within the landscape buffer cross section (including plant species and planting heights at 5 years and at maturity) and in the landscape rule for PC58 (9.6.3). In my experience, detailed planting plans are not normally produced at plan change stage, but the intent and outcomes of mitigation planting are often defined. As the landscape buffer planting is a critical method to manage the interface between the proposed GIZ and the Rural Zone, this detail will need careful design and consideration at resource consent stage to ensure the intended mitigation outcomes are achieved.
- 81 I am satisfied that the landscaping rule for PC58 (9.6.3) appropriately describes the intended outcome for the landscape buffer and I support the requirement for a Landscape Plan to be prepared at resource consent stage. I recommend that a maintenance and management plan should also be prepared in conjunction with the Landscape Plan.
- 82 It is my understanding that the landscaping rule requires the landscape buffer planting to be implemented at subdivision stage prior to Section 224 approval. I support early planting establishment to ensure effective

mitigation can be achieved as early in the development process as possible. I understand that development of the industrial lots is likely to occur over several years.

### **Conclusion**

- 83 The predominantly industrial development enabled by PC58 will change the current open rural landscape character of the site and immediate surroundings. Although the site is largely open pasture and rural in character, the site is located on the western side of the township where the overall landscape character is also contributed to by the existing land use to the south and east of the site, including existing industrial and business development, SH26 and urban development within Morrinsville in general.
- 84 The site lacks mature vegetation and is devoid of visible natural features. The site is not itself nor is it part of an identified (regional or district level or assessment) outstanding natural feature or landscape.
- 85 I have assessed the landscape and visual effects of the proposed plan change from surrounding public roads and private properties. The visual catchment of the site is generally well contained. I have concluded that landscape effects will be Low - Moderate. Visual effects will be Low in relation to public roads (including SH26 and Avenue Road North) and will range from Very Low to Moderate in relation to dwellings on surrounding properties.
- 86 If Mr Hexter decides to remove the existing mature trees that are within his property, then the PC58 site (and other industrial development) would be visible from the dwelling on his property. In that scenario, the visual effects of PC58 would be Moderate, reducing to Low - Moderate once the 5m landscape buffer that is required to be planted within the PC58 site has established.
- 87 I am satisfied that the proposed PC58 provisions adequately address the recommendations that I made in the LVA. With the recommended mitigation, the rural characteristics of the surrounding area and the industrial interface with the Rural Zone to the north, west and south of the site can be appropriately managed, and the subsequent development can be integrated successfully so that the development is not a dominant feature within most views from surrounding locations.