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HGI PROPOSED PLAN

LANDSCAPE REPORT

RURAL 2

13 June 2008

INTRODUCTION

1. The land covered by the Rural 2 classification includes the three distinct areas of Thompson's Point, Te Whau and Western Waiheke. The latter can be broken into five contiguous parts, being Owhanake, Matiatia, Church Bay, Cable Bay and Park Point.
2. These landscapes have evolved to varying degrees from original native bush cover through to pastoral cover and then to a rural/natural landscape. The extent of each type of land cover varies between each area:
 - Thompson's Point remains almost entirely pastoral, but with small stands of pine plantation and some wetland areas. The point has significant potential for a comprehensive development, but development is currently limited to several existing buildings and recently issued land use consent for four dwellings. In my opinion there is considerable potential for a fully integrated design that is not well catered for by the existing planning framework. Further landscape analysis will be required.
 - Western Waiheke is a rural/residential landscape, with large areas of native vegetation that has been re-established as part of the comprehensive development of the area. The resulting cultural landscape retains rural amenity values and a developing level of natural character, although this is limited by the presence of houses throughout.
 - Te Whau has also evolved as a comprehensive development, with houses integrated amongst the extensive areas of regenerating native vegetation that characterise the peninsula.
3. The historical planning framework that facilitated the development of Te Whau and Western Waiheke are similar, in so much that both were dealt with as comprehensive developments. Te Whau had a larger minimum lot size and average lot size than Western Waiheke, and also capped the number of lots at 55. The following lots size provisions were in place for the development of Western Waiheke:
 - Average lot size 5ha
 - Minimum lot size 1.5ha
 - Bonus provision of max density of 1 lot per 3.5ha per gross land area

4. Both Te Whau and Western Waiheke aimed to protect the natural environment or enhance landscape qualities while allowing subdivision for low density housing and rural residential activities. The landscape that has evolved in both areas has many similarities, despite the fact that much of the extensive native revegetation on Western Waiheke is derived from mitigation planting undertaken as part of the comprehensive development, while Te Whau benefits from much natural regeneration.
5. It is relevant to note that both Te Whau and Western Waiheke have reached their capacity in terms of their subdivision potential. Any large areas of land that remain within these areas, and this is more prevalent in Western Waiheke, are a result of the comprehensive development design that was initially undertaken across the area. These larger lots were included as a means of achieving the required average lot size of 3.5ha, offsetting the many smaller lots of 1.5 - 2ha within the comprehensive design.
6. The resulting landscape was designed to achieve a development that is sympathetic to and protective of the intrinsic values of the natural environment, incorporating the following four key elements:
 - The openness and productivity of a rural landscape
 - The natural character of a re-generating landscape
 - The amenity of a low density residential landscape
 - The visual prominence of a coastal landscape
7. The subdivision pattern that has been put in place through comprehensive development is one where these values have been incorporated. Both areas are characterised by an extensive indented coastline made up of small sheltered bays and cliffs. They contain many areas of high amenity value within the coastal environment. Western Waiheke has a stronger rural-residential development pattern than Te Whau, which is slightly more oriented towards viticultural and agricultural production. Both areas include rural-residential housing and extensive areas of regenerating native vegetation.
8. Both areas reflect the cultural values that characterise their development, with residential dwellings being incorporated as an intrinsic element in the landscape. The varied lot shape and size that were incorporated into the original design have had time to be softened by the thriving regeneration of native vegetation and the healing of earthworks scars. The varied placement of houses and the growth of amenity planting in their vicinity have softened the pastoral areas that remained open after subdivision and the mass revegetation planting was completed. The resulting landscape has high amenity values reflective of a cultural landscape that integrates naturalness, openness and low density living.

KEY ELEMENTS

Openness

9. The openness of the rural landscape has been significantly reduced in comparison to the pre-development pastoral landscape, particularly in Western Waiheke. This is less so in Te Whau, due to the extent of existing native vegetation that covered the slopes. Considering the Western Waiheke situation, it would not be feasible to maintain complete openness and also have extensive revegetation and residential development. The openness needs to be seen in the context of the comprehensive development, which was purposefully undertaken to establish a low density residential environment.

The extent of openness appropriate for such a development therefore needs to be considered in relation to the other key elements, which include a productive rural landscape, natural character, low density residential landscape and visual prominence of a coastal landscape.

10. With all these key elements in mind, it is my opinion that the degree of openness attained within the Western Waiheke environment is generally appropriate for its setting. When viewed from the sea, the setbacks from the coastal edge, the backdrop provided by the hills, the design of the buildings and the spatial arrangement of the development all contribute to a retained sense of openness which offers a recessiveness and privacy for individual dwellings and a dominance of the rural/natural environment. When viewed from public viewpoints, the same generally applies, although factors such as hill backdrops can sometimes be less easy to discern. When viewed from the air, which was also done as one means of assessing the effects, the spatial arrangement and landscape patterns became far more apparent. The aerial views confirmed the ground and sea assessment that the openness outlined as a key element of the development has, in fact, been achieved.
11. The extent of openness varies across the Western Waiheke landscape, as the comprehensive development utilised provisions that allowed smaller lots and larger lots to give a 3.5ha average. This has resulted in a number of large lots in the Church Bay – Te Wharau Bay vicinity, with lot areas of 41, 12, 13, 16, 26 and 31ha. While these are larger lots in a cadastral sense, they do not take on an appearance of being substantially larger than other allotments, as their hectarage would suggest. This is due to the diversity of pattern, being contributed to by the elements of topography and land cover within these units and their neighbours. The one allotment that does stand out as larger than the others is the 41ha DP 154784 in Church Bay. This is due to the simplicity of land cover, which is generally pastoral, although the varied topography does reduce its apparent size.
12. This then leads to the question of what the minimum lot size could be whilst still retaining the landscape character that Western Waiheke has deliberately developed. This will be addressed later in my assessment.

Productivity

13. The productivity of a rural landscape is apparent to varying degrees, with some properties embracing activities such as olive growing and viticulture, while others appear to concentrate on developing their properties for purely amenity values. It is not strongly apparent that the aim of achieving the productivity of a rural landscape has been widely upheld on properties throughout Western Waiheke in particular, with many appearing to favour the extensive garden and unused landholding as an amenity feature rather than for serious rural productivity. This is not universally the case, with viticulture apparent in many areas, but rural productivity does not appear to be universally undertaken. Another factor contributing to this is the extent of native vegetation preserved or planted on many of the sites. In some cases, this takes up a significant portion of a property, leaving little open land for rural productivity. This native vegetation makes an essential contribution to the natural character of the comprehensive development, which illustrates the balancing that must be undertaken when assessing the four key elements outlined above.

Natural Character

14. The natural character of the regenerating landscape anticipated in the comprehensive development process is being achieved in terms of revegetation of native bush. At Te Whau, extensive areas of existing native regeneration were covenanted as part of the comprehensive development. This vegetation is extensive and vigorous, contributing positively to achieving the aim of protecting the natural character of the re-generating landscape. At Western Waiheke, this aim is partly being achieved through the maturation of the initial mass planting that was undertaken as part of satisfying the bonus provisions of the comprehensive development. It is also being achieved through the preservation and ongoing growth of extensive areas of existing native vegetation that were set aside as part of the development's design.

Density

15. The amenity of a low density residential landscape has been achieved, with houses being well integrated in terms of their design and generally well located in terms of their setting. Two exceptions to this are apparent:
 - Several houses on the lower slopes of Te Whau that are in an open pastoral setting with the buildings and access drives clearly visible and not integrated with their setting.
 - Houses located on ridgelines in positions that are highly visible from lower viewing angles, such as from Matiatia wharf. I understand that these houses were, however, constructed on house sites that were determined at the time of the comprehensive development and embedded in the design of the subdivision. Several of the resulting houses are on the skyline when viewed from the wharf. Their prominence appears contradictory to the amenity goals of the development.
16. While these two exceptions reduce the amenity for particular and very limited views, a very high standard of residential amenity has been achieved for the entire low density residential landscape throughout both Te Whau and Western Waiheke. The location of buildings, design of houses, integration with landform and land cover, and spatial development of the entire areas has led to an outcome which is sympathetic to and protective of the intrinsic values of the natural environment.

Coastal Landscape

17. In terms of visual prominence in a coastal landscape, the design and comprehensive approach of the developments have resulted in a landscape that is well integrated with the character of its coastal environment. Both areas are characterised by an extensive indented coastline made up of small sheltered bays and cliffs, with sloping landform behind that is typically pastoral, viticultural, regenerating native vegetation or amenity planting. Houses are part of this coastal landscape, but not a dominant part. It is the vegetation and openness that are the dominant landscape elements, with houses being a secondary feature within this coastal landscape.

Pattern

18. Western Waiheke is starting to take on a pattern of elements and features that help define its rural/residential amenity character. These elements and features include the extensive areas of native regeneration, the varied topography of the steeply rolling landscape, the coastal cliffs and indented coastline, the houses, the open space and the varying degrees of productive rural activities.
19. The pattern formed by these elements and features has taken on a consistency throughout Western Waiheke. This is not a pattern of uniformity, because allotments vary in size from under 1.5ha to over 10ha. This is more a pattern of colours, textures, land cover and openness. The pattern is well established north of Church Bay, and approved allotments from Park Point to Cable Bay give an indication that a similar pattern will be becoming established in this area. Although not subdivided into smaller allotments, the existing land cover, topography and land use patterns from Te Wharau Bay through to Church Bay are of a similar pattern to that already established in the wider area. One large lot of 41ha in Church Bay has less variety than surrounding lots due to its simple pastoral land cover, but the overall pattern through Western Waiheke retains a consistency in terms of elements and features, despite the varied lot sizes and presence of houses. With this pattern prevailing, there is little constraint in terms of landscape effects to additional subdivision within the Church Bay – Te Wharau area, while still retaining the desired outcomes of openness, natural character of regenerating slopes and rural amenity of low density residential development.

ANALYSIS

20. An analysis of the existing allotment sizes in Western Waiheke shows that 7% of the allotments are over 10ha, 18% are over 5ha and 23% are over 4ha. The average lot size available under the Operative District Plan is 3.5ha, with a minimum of 1.5ha. This potential has been fully exploited under the Plan's comprehensive management plan provisions.
21. A review of the location of the smaller allotments shows that they are concentrated on the coastal landforms to the west and east of Matiatia, and on the Park Point peninsula. Inland allotments tend to be larger, as are those located on ridgetops and valley heads. The landscape patterns that occur in the areas of greater density with smaller lots are of a finer grain than those in the less dense areas with larger lots. There is a perceivable difference in openness and landscape character between the denser (1.5 – 3ha) areas and the 4-6ha areas. This is not due so much to the houses, as one might expect, but due to the planting, some of which is revegetation and some of which is amenity planting. The areas with smaller allotments have a more intricate pattern of vegetation, which reduces landscape openness. The larger lots are more open, with vegetation being grouped more into larger areas that follow topographical features and with less emphasis on boundary definition.
22. If a reduction in the current proposed plan's minimum lot size of 25ha for Rural 2 is to take place, and I see no reason in terms of landscape effects why it shouldn't, the question that needs to be answered is what the new minimum lot size should be. An analysis of the recently deposited plans for Park Point shows an average lot size for the 32 allotments of 2.9ha. This compares to an average for the five larger allotments immediate north of Park Point of 25ha. These five larger lots comprise the following:

Lot	DP	Ha	# lots @ 6ha	# lots @ 5ha
Lot 2	DP 202513	31.2910	5	6
Lot 46*	DP 331964	26.05324	1	1
Lot 1	DP 329415	12.0313	2	2
Lot 2	DP 308341	13.9381	2	2
Lot 1	DP 154784	41.5841 + 2.2057	7	8
Lot 23**	DP 164483	(0.6247 included above)	0	0
Lot 17**	DP 159304	(1.581 included above)	0	0
Total		129.30914	17	19

(Lot 6 DP 146325 of 16.2886ha is excluded from the above area as it is a council Reserve)

*(Lot 46 DP 331964 of 26.05324ha has a QEII covenant, so subdivision may be unlikely. It is listed above as a large lot but excluded from the subdivision calculations)

** (Lot 23 and Lot 17 have been amalgamated with Lot1 DP 154784)

23. An analysis of the land use patterns shows that the larger lots provide for a more expansive continuation of consistent land use, be this native vegetation, or rural productivity such as pasture or viticulture. These more extensive land uses contribute to openness and rural amenity. The smaller lots closer to the coast, particularly on the headland south of Matiatia, give greater recognition to boundaries and to some extent a display of separate characteristics for individual lots. Based on this observation, plus an analysis of the potential subdivision that could result from the larger lots listed in the table above, it is my conclusion that a 5ha minimum is acceptable in terms of landscape effects.
24. If the minimum lot size was reduced to 5ha, the 7 existing lots above 10ha could potentially be subdivided into 24 lots of 5ha each, giving a total of 17 additional lots. Some neighbours may choose to combine to create a new lot from their pooled land. This can also occur when neighbours have lots smaller than 10ha, but when combined with their neighbour a total of 15ha can be made, thereby allowing three lots of 5ha each. Considering this situation, and the existing lots over 10ha, a total number of 31 new lots may be created from 11 existing parent titles, being 20 additional lots. This is, of course, speculative, as the number is entirely dependent on neighbours agreeing to combine and desiring to subdivide their existing properties.
25. It is also relevant to note that an assessment of the subdivision potential if the minimum lot size was reduced to 6ha rather than the recommended 5ha was undertaken. The findings are summarised in the table below, but the analysis showed that a 6ha minimum would allow the creation of 16 allotments from the 4 large lots that currently exist in the Church Bay – Te Wharau area. This excludes any subdivision possibility for the Reserve (Lot 6 DP 146325) and the QEII covenanted Lot 46 DP331964. A total of 12 new allotments could therefore be created from the existing 100ha area. Alternatively, if neighbours combined, approximately 25 lots may be created from a pool of 11 existing lots, giving an additional 14 lots on Western Waiheke. This number is, of course, speculative as it is dependent on neighbours all agreeing to work together and subdivision being approved. However, it does give an indication of the possible potential for additional lots if a 6ha minimum was approved.

26. This information can be summarised as follows:

# of existing Lots	# of additional lots at 6ha ea	# of additional lots @ 6ha when neighbours combine	# of additional lots at 5ha ea	# of additional lots @ 5ha when neighbours combine
4	12			
11		14		
7			17	
11				20

27. It is important to note that the 5ha minimum relies on the objectives and policies being of sufficient strength to maintain this area as a minimum. There may be a tendency for landholdings of say 9ha seeking to subdivide into two lots of 4.5ha. If this situation occurs, many additional lots over those assessed could be created, which is not supported by this assessment. In recommending a 5ha minimum, and having considered the effects of this versus a 6ha minimum, it is my opinion that the 5ha minimum can be adopted in the expectation that the objectives and policies will be sufficiently strong to maintain this 5ha level.

CONCLUSION

28. Having reviewed the landscape character throughout Western Waiheke, and having assessed it in terms of the key elements identified as intrinsic values of the area, it is my opinion that the density could be reduced from 25ha while still retaining these characteristics. I recommend that a minimum lot size of 5ha is appropriate for Western Waiheke, when the landscape constraints are considered. This minimum foresees the possible potential subdivision that could occur with neighbours combining their lots. While a total of 20 additional lots would not be inappropriate in terms of landscape effects, additional subdivision below the 5ha minimum is not supported as part of this assessment. The strength of the objectives and polices will be critical in limiting subdivision below the minimum lot size.

29. I also recommend that there be no provision for bonus density through Significant Natural Features, as these features have already been used to justify the extra density to date and reusing them would amount to double dipping.

30. There will be a need for significant new planting if some of the more open lots are subdivided, and this should be achieved through the rules 12.9.7.3 (2c) "Standards and Terms". This particularly relates to Lot 1 DP 154784 of 41ha, which is currently open pasture and if subdivided, would need substantial revegetation to integrate the houses into the landscape.

31. Te Whau also falls within the Rural 2 provisions. In terms of landscape effects, the single existing lot over 10ha (Lot 21 DP 160901) has the potential for subdivision under these recommended provisions. This subdivision has the potential to be acceptable in terms of landscape effects provided a well integrated house site with minimal disturbance to existing vegetation can be found.

John Hudson
13 June 2000