

## **BEFORE THE ENVIRONMENT COURT**

**UNDER** the Local Government (Auckland Transitional Provisions) Act 2010 (LGATPA) and the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of appeals under section 156(1) of the LGATPA

**BETWEEN** **Weli Yang, Zhi Lu and Jing Ni**  
**ENV-2016-AKL-000196**  
**Okura Holdings Limited**  
**ENV-2016-AKL-000211**  
Appellants

**AND** **AUCKLAND COUNCIL**  
Respondent

**AND** **Weiti Development Limited Partnership**  
Section 274 Party

**AND** **Long Bay - Okura Great Park Society**  
Section 274 Party

**AND** **Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society**  
**Incorporated**  
Section 274 Party

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF BRIDGET MARY GILBERT (LANDSCAPE,  
NATURAL CHARACTER AND VISUAL EFFECTS) ON BEHALF OF LONG BAY -  
OKURA GREAT PARK SOCIETY**

**Date: 8 August 2017**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. I am a Landscape Architect and Director of Bridget Gilbert Landscape Architecture Ltd, Auckland. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Horticulture from Massey University and a postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln College. I am an associate of the Landscape Institute (UK) and a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects.
2. I have practised as a Landscape Architect for twenty-five years in both New Zealand and England. Upon my return to New Zealand, I worked with Boffa Miskell Ltd in their Auckland office for seven years. I have been operating my own practice for the last twelve years, also in Auckland.
3. During the course of my career I have been involved in a wide range of work in expert landscape evaluation, assessment and advice throughout New Zealand including:
  - (a) landscape assessment in relation to Regional and District Plan policy;
  - (b) preparation of structure plans for rural and coastal developments;
  - (c) conceptual design and landscape assessment of infrastructure, rural, coastal and urban development; and
  - (d) detailed design and implementation supervision of infrastructure, rural, coastal and urban projects.
4. Of more particular relevance, I have been involved in the conceptual design and landscape and visual effects assessment of a range of developments within a coastal rural context that are in close proximity to Outstanding Natural Landscapes (ONLs) and Regional Parks. I have been involved in the review of landscape policy for District Plans which has included the consideration of landscape policy in relation to more sensitive coastal rural locations and high value landscapes. I have also been involved in plan changes that seek to relocate urban growth boundaries, including consideration of the Auckland Rural Urban Boundary as part of the recent Unitary Plan hearings.
5. I am currently a panel member of the Auckland Urban Design Panel and an Independent Hearing Commissioner for Auckland Council.

## CODE OF CONDUCT

6. I am familiar with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014 and I agree to comply with it. My qualifications as an expert are set out above. Except where I state that I am relying on the evidence of another person, I confirm that the matters on which I will give evidence to the Court are within my area of expertise. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed in my evidence.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

7. The site is located within a high value landscape setting that is largely independent of the urban development of Long Bay to the south and the coastal settlement of Wēiti to the north, and forms part of the greenbelt separating the city from Whangaparaoa. These characteristics coupled with the relatively unchanged character of the site over the last twenty years mean that it does not read as a 'landscape in transition'.
8. In my view, the approved Countryside Living (CSL) development on the OHL land will result in a distinctly non-urban pattern largely as a consequence of the generous lot sizes and various setback and yard controls. In my opinion, it is reasonable to expect that planting in gullies and around dwellings will contribute a mitigating effect in places. The recent three (additional) lot subdivision adjacent the regional park boundary provides certainty of mitigation planting outcomes in this part of the site through consent conditions imposed.
9. The aggregation of the outstanding and high value landscape features at Okura, in combination with the general absence of overtly urban development in their vicinity, their close proximity to the city and their accessibility, culminates in a landscape that has a distinctive 'sense of place' as a relatively tranquil and peaceful area where one can 'escape the city' and enjoy a landscape in which more natural landscape features, patterns and processes are to the fore. The spatial and/or visual connection of the site to these high value features places it at the higher end of the spectrum in terms of landscape sensitivity to urban change.
10. The proposed RUB relocation relies on a minor ridgeline or small tributary to define its western edge. Neither of these landscape features are considered to comprise a robust and defensible edge and, from a landscape perspective, it

would be difficult to resist further urban expansion throughout the catchment to the west. Such an outcome would destroy the impression of Okura as a low key coastal village, significantly undermine the greenbelt pattern envisaged throughout this portion of the region, and would exacerbate the adverse 'landscape' effects associated with urban development in this high value landscape setting. In my opinion, the strong natural boundary of the Vaughans Road ridgeline is to be preferred.

11. Urban development<sup>1</sup> on the site would, in my view, result in **Very High** (significant) adverse visual effects, **Moderate-High** natural character effects and **High-Very High** (significant) adverse landscape effects (and taking into consideration adverse effects associated with the approved CSL on the OHL land) on the HNC and ONL areas mapped under the Auckland Unitary Plan: Operative in Part (AUP:OiP). Urban development would not 'protect' those areas, as I understand to be required for any RUB extension.
12. In contrast, I consider that whilst the approved CSL development on the OHL land may generate some adverse 'landscape' effects, I do not regard those effects to be of the same magnitude as urban development. I am of the view that the relatively spacious pattern and non-urban character of the approved CSL development is a considerably more sympathetic outcome within a high value landscape context such as Okura.

## BACKGROUND

13. I have been engaged by the Long Bay - Okura Great Park Society (LBOGPS) to assess the visual amenity, natural character and landscape effects of the relocation of the Rural Urban Boundary (RUB) and associated live zoning of land at Okura estuary recommended by the Independent Hearing Panel (IHP).
14. I have visited the Okura Bush Walkway and Long Bay Regional Park on several occasions over the years. I have also undertaken several site visits to assist the preparation of my evidence, including:

- (a) kayaking the estuary during daylight and twilight hours on 30 October 2017;

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<sup>1</sup> As summarised at my paragraph 20 below.

- (b) walking the length of the Long Bay Regional Park (Long Bay Te Araroa) walkway on 11 June 2017;
  - (c) walking the Okura Bush walkway on 25 June 2017;
  - (d) visiting the OHL land, local area and northern end of the Regional Park on 16 June 2017. This visit also included a boat trip throughout the estuary, river channel and Karepiro Bay environs; and visiting the area on 3 August.
15. I attended the landscape expert conferencing on 31 May 2017. As Ms Absolum explains, that conferencing was necessarily 'high level' given that, at the time, neither I nor Ms Absolum had conducted a full site visit as part of our evidence preparation.
16. I have read the evidence in chief of the lay and expert witnesses on behalf of the LBOGPS. I have also read the evidence in chief of the following experts on behalf of Auckland Council:
- (a) Ms Melean Absolum (landscape);
  - (b) Mr David Mead (planning);
  - (c) Dr Tim Lovegrove (ecology);
  - (d) Dr Martin Neale (freshwater);
  - (e) Professor Simon Thrush (marine ecology);
  - (f) Mr Michael Parsonson (erosion and sediment control); and
  - (g) Mr Ezra Barwell (public open space).
17. In preparing my evidence I rely on the evidence of Messrs Reaburn and Mead with respect to the relevant planning context associated with the changes sought by Okura Holdings Limited and Weli Yang, Zhi Lu and Jing Ni (collectively referred to hereafter as OHL).
18. Like Ms Absolum, I have relied on the information produced by Okura Holdings Limited to the IHP to guide my understanding of the character of urban development anticipated by the IHP recommendation. I adopt Ms Absolum's

references<sup>2</sup> for each of these documents as the 'Design Report'<sup>3</sup> and 'BML Assessment'<sup>4</sup> (and note that both of these reports are included in the Agreed Bundle).

19. The BML Assessment considered the effects of urban development on the OHL land only. The IHP recommendation allows for the Future Urban zoning (FUZ) of additional land to the west as described in Ms Absolum's evidence in chief.<sup>5</sup> My evidence assumes that the 'site' includes both the OHL land and the FUZ land to the west.
20. It is my understanding that the BML Assessment assumed the development of approximately 750-1,000 dwellings on the OHL land. The planning witnesses consider that between approximately 1,215 and 1,903 dwellings could be developed on the site.<sup>6</sup> My evidence is based on the lower development level referenced by the planning witnesses. I refer to this extent and nature of development as proposed by OHL as 'urban development' for the purpose of this evidence.
21. I generally agree with the landscape assessment methodology applied in the BML Assessment<sup>7</sup>, and I have visited each of the photograph viewpoints relied on in that assessment. As a consequence, my evidence does not provide a full landscape assessment as such; rather, it focuses on the areas of disagreement.

## **SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

22. My evidence seeks to build on the BML Assessment and Ms Absolum's evidence in chief, rather than repeat it; and focuses on matters that I consider are worthy of additional comment, together with points of disagreement.

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<sup>2</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: paragraph 8.2

<sup>3</sup> R de Lambert IHP Evidence Appendix 1: Design Statement-Okura Structure Plan Design Report by Studio Pacific Architecture, November 2015

<sup>4</sup> R de Lambert IHP Evidence Appendix 3: Okura RUB-Assessment of Landscape, Natural Character and Visual Effects by Boffa Miskell Ltd, November 2015

<sup>5</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: paragraph 7.4

<sup>6</sup> Refer Planning Expert Joint Conference Statement dated 15 June 2017.

<sup>7</sup> But not with respect to the assessment the existing landscape values or potential effects of either CSL or urban development resulting from application of that methodology, as addressed in the evidence to follow.

23. My evidence generally follows the structure adopted by Ms Absolum; however, it varies in terms of my discussion of landscape related effects, as I consider visual effects and natural character effects to each be a component of landscape character effects, whereas Ms Absolum addresses natural character effects following her discussion of visual impacts, but not in combination.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, I address each of these 'components' before moving onto a discussion of landscape character effects.
24. My evidence addresses the following matters:
- (a) Existing Environment
    - i. 'Landscape in a state of transition' context
    - ii. CSL development on the OHL land - Landscape Outcome
    - iii. Landscape Values and Sense of Place
  - (b) Landscape issues associated with the proposed RUB relocation
  - (c) Visual Effects
  - (d) Natural Character Effects<sup>9</sup>
  - (e) Landscape Effects
  - (f) Statutory Context

## **EXISTING ENVIRONMENT**

25. To enable an assessment of the landscape character effects of a proposed development, it is necessary to commence with a clear understanding of the landscape values of the existing environment, i.e. the values of the landscape 'as it is'.

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<sup>8</sup> Although it is acknowledged that natural character and landscape effects are identified separately in the RMA and NZCPS. The structure of my evidence is intended to enable a clear evaluation of each.

<sup>9</sup> My discussion of natural character values is confined to the scope of my expertise as a landscape architect and addresses 'perceived' naturalness as opposed to 'indigenous' naturalness. Natural character is different to landscape character. In summary, landscape forms an 'umbrella' that embraces the biophysical, perceptual, and associative aspects of the environment. Natural character sits within the landscape 'umbrella' and is focussed on the biophysical aspects and experiential (or sensory) component of the perceptual aspects of landscape.

26. Over the years there has been a body of case law developed around how both landscape experts and the Environment Court should seek to understand the values of a landscape. This sees a landscape described in terms of the following three components:
- (a) the biogeographical (or biophysical) elements, patterns and processes;
  - (b) the associative or relationship contributions; and
  - (c) the perceptual aspects.
27. Such an approach to describing the landscape is widely accepted by the landscape profession and endorsed in the NZILA Best Practice Note Landscape Assessment and Sustainable Management 10.1 2010.
28. I have attached a full list of the sort of matters that may be considered under each component as **Appendix A**. The list derives from the *Upper Clutha Tracks* decision<sup>10</sup> (and also the *Lammermoor* case<sup>11</sup>) and essentially expands on the modified *Pigeon Bay* (or WESI) factors. Clearly the range of matters to be considered will vary with the specific context and the nature of the proposed development, and the list may need to be shortened or extended in some circumstances. There is also often a degree of overlap between many of the descriptors; for example, the memorability and aesthetic values of a landscape will frequently influence its perceptual values.
29. Ms Absolum's evidence in chief expands on the description of the existing environment contained in the BML Assessment<sup>12</sup>. I agree with the comments made by Ms Absolum (including in relation to the relevant statutory policy context), and consider the following matters to also be noteworthy in understanding the values of the landscape at Okura.

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<sup>10</sup> Decision No [2010] NZEnvC 432.

<sup>11</sup> Decision No C103/2009.

<sup>12</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Section 7 in particular, and as also referenced in the Landscape Expert Conferencing Statement dated 31 May 2017.

### **Landscape in a State of Transition?**

30. A theme underpinning the BML Assessment is that of the site being located within a context of urban transition.<sup>13</sup> I note that such a condition is not uncommon on the edges of cities. This context of urban transition is important, as it creates the impression of a landscape setting in which ‘the horse has effectively bolted’.
31. I disagree with this analysis and consider that in focussing on a two-dimensional or ‘plan’ view of the site and surrounds, the BML Assessment fails to address its “three-dimensional”, spatial context.
32. Whilst urban development is most definitely underway in the Wēiti catchment to the north and throughout the Long Bay Precinct to the south, the site is located within a discrete catchment (or ‘landscape’) that is, for the most part, visually separated from these ‘urban’ areas.
33. Substantial ridgelines and, in the case of Wēiti, bush areas serve to spatially separate the Okura landscape (and the site) from these new developments. As explained by Mr Mead and Ms Absolum, in the case of the Long Bay development, particular care has been taken to limit the extent that urban development is visible in the Okura area.<sup>14</sup>
34. Whilst I accept that the urban lighting columns of the Long Bay development (at the far eastern end of Vaughans Road on Piripiri Point Drive) and a scattering of dwellings throughout Wēiti<sup>15</sup> are likely to be seen on the ridgeline behind the site (and at the eastern end of the Okura catchment), I do not consider that this level of development corresponds to the impression of the site as part of a landscape that is transitioning from rural to urban uses.
35. Rather, it is my view that despite the extensive urban development to the south and the coastal settlement to the north of the eastern end of the Okura catchment, very little about this specific landscape has changed in the last twenty years or so; and the area within which the site is located ‘currently’ reads as a distinctly rural area. (I discuss the influence of the approved CSL

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<sup>13</sup> BML Assessment: Paragraphs 4.2, 5.17.

<sup>14</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: paragraph 13.28. D Mead Evidence in Chief: paragraph 191.

<sup>15</sup> Noting that 8 dwellings are likely to be seen from the site along the crest of the ridgeline framing the south side of Wēiti.

development on the OHL land shortly.) The historic aerial photography attached to Ms Absolum's evidence in chief illustrates this point.<sup>16</sup>

36. In addition, the idea of the site being located within a context of urban transition overlooks the quite different 'urban' pattern associated with Wēiti in comparison to Long Bay. Wēiti will be developed as a standalone coastal settlement encircled by a substantial buffer of Rural Conservation Land, rather than as part of the city 'proper'.
37. Further, the AUP:OiP provisions explain that the Wēiti Precinct is intended as an important landscape area that contributes to the maintenance of a greenbelt between the North Shore and the urban extent of the Hibiscus Coast.<sup>17</sup>
38. As explained by Ms Absolum, the site, and the Okura catchment more generally, also form a part of this greenbelt.<sup>18</sup>

#### **CSL Development: Landscape Outcome**

39. I am less confident than Ms Absolum that the character of the Countryside Living (CSL) development enabled by the existing 29 lot subdivision that applies to the OHL land will retain rural character as such.
40. In my opinion, a restricted discretionary activity status for building platforms (and/or buildings), in combination with assessment criteria that address such matters as the extent to which the development protects visual amenity and rural character, and integrates riparian restoration and enhancement/mitigation plantings, is typically required to secure a favourable landscape outcome for CSL development within such a context. Examples in the region where such an approach has been (generally) successful include the western end of Waiheke Island (Owhanake, Church Bay environs) and Whitford. Mr Reaburn notes the provisions targeted at minimising landscape impacts set by the Court under the Legacy North Shore City District Plan, that were not carried over into the AUP:OiP.<sup>19</sup> I expect that were such provisions still in place, the maintenance of rural character throughout the area would be more certain.

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<sup>16</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Paragraph 9.7 and Figures 3-8 inclusive

<sup>17</sup> Refer AUP:OiP 1547 Wēiti Precinct 1547.1 Precinct Description

<sup>18</sup> Ibid paragraphs 7.8 and 7.9

<sup>19</sup> P Reaburn Evidence in Chief: paragraph 5.5.

41. Applying the various permitted activity development controls set out in the planner's conferencing statement, and bearing in mind the highly attractive coastal setting of the site, it is, in my view, plausible that 29 substantial high value dwellings could be established throughout the area, albeit with a 30m setback from the coastline, a 20m setback from watercourses, and a minimum of 24 metres between each dwelling as explained by Ms Absolum. The sloping landform means that retaining structures, around dwellings in particular, may also be required.
42. Whilst I would not go so far as BML Assessment's supposition that each of the 29 dwellings would be likely to take on the form of the two-storey, light coloured, 'mansion' type dwelling at 181 Vaughans Road,<sup>20</sup> the absence of the need for a resource consent to construct a dwelling means that a proportion of these dwellings could be of a scale and character that does not sit comfortably within the rural coastal context.
43. Similarly, whilst some future landowners may elect to retire and plant watercourses and plant around their dwellings, this is not necessarily a 'given'; and a proportion of the future dwellings enabled by the approved CSL development could be relatively exposed and/or watercourses subjected to stock grazing.
44. In my opinion, these potential negative landscape outcomes within the context of a high value coastal landscape setting suggest the possibility for some adverse visual, natural character and landscape effects.
45. Despite such potential adverse effects, I am, however, of the opinion that the character of development anticipated by the approved CSL subdivision would result in a distinctly non-urban pattern, largely as a consequence of the various setback and yard controls, together with the relatively generous scale of the lot sizes (i.e. 4ha or greater). It is also reasonable to expect that, by and large, CSL development at this scale would retain the basic landform patterning throughout the area, given that roading is in place and the generous scale of the lot sizes.
46. I also note the mitigation planting associated with the recent three (additional) lot subdivision throughout the eastern part of the site (described in more detail

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<sup>20</sup> BML Assessment: Page 11, Paragraph 6.2.

shortly under my discussion of visual effects, and with the plans and landscape related conditions produced in Ms Absolum's evidence in chief<sup>21</sup>).

47. For these reasons, I consider that the development character that is likely to occur under the existing CSL zoning would continue to read as markedly different to the neighbouring urban pattern associated with Long Bay to the south, or the coastal settlement patterning envisaged by the Wēiti Precinct to the north.

### **Landscape Values and Sense of Place**

48. The BML Assessment identifies the various landscape notations and features of the local area<sup>22</sup>; however, in my opinion, fails to evaluate the way that these various attributes come together to create a distinctive 'sense of place' in this part of the Auckland region.
49. In my opinion, the site is nested within a landscape setting that displays landscape values that rate at the higher end of the spectrum as a consequence of:
- (a) The **high biophysical, associative and perceptual values** associated with the estuary, coastal waters and their cliff, bush-clad and pastoral margins, as evidenced in the identification of much of these areas as an **Outstanding Natural Landscape** in the AUP:OiP.<sup>23</sup>
  - (b) The **high biophysical characteristics and perceptual values** associated with the central and northern side of the estuary and bush-clad slopes, parts of the coastal waters, the Piripiri Point headland, the eastern coastline of the regional park and the catchments within the regional park dominated by substantial stands of regenerating bush, as evidenced by the identification of these areas to be of **High Natural Character** in the AUP:OiP.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Attachment 1 (consent conditions) and Figure 17 (landscape plans).

<sup>22</sup> Refer BML Assessment: Section 5.0 Landscape Context.

<sup>23</sup> Refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Figure 9, and noting that the extent of the ONL Area 54 in the BML Assessment mapping is out of date i.e. the extent of ONL Area 54 was amended during the AUP hearings and now extends westwards almost to Piripiri Point Drive in the vicinity of Grannys Bay (for the location of Grannys Bay, see my Appendix D).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

- (c) The **high ecological<sup>25</sup> and natural character values** associated with the **Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve** throughout the estuary, river and the coastal waters to the north and south, in which all marine life is protected from disturbance or harm.<sup>26</sup> The reserve was established in 1995, totals an area of some 980ha and is identified as a **Marine 1 Significant Ecological Area (SEA)** in the AUP:OiP. As the Department of Conservation (DoC) brochure for the Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve explains: *“Marine reserves... are the national parks of the marine world”*.
- (d) The **high ecological values** associated with the **Okura Bush Scenic Reserve** on the north side of the estuary and river, administered by DoC and which coincides with a **Terrestrial SEA** identified in the AUP:OiP.<sup>27</sup>
- (e) The **very high recreation and scenic values** associated with the **Okura Bush Walkway** on the north side of the estuary and river extending between Haigh Access Road and Duck Creek Road and comprising a three-hour return walk through coastal forest via Karepiro Bay and the historic Dacre Cottage. It is my understanding that the use of the walkway has grown from 8,000 walkers per year to 70,000 in the last five years, demonstrating the popularity of the walkway.
- (f) The **very high recreation and scenic values** associated with the **Okura Estuary** itself, which is popular as a location for kayaking and snorkelling where people can experience a relatively ‘wilderness’ feel despite their proximity to the city. The photographs attached in **Appendix B** illustrate this landscape experience.
- (g) The **high shared and recognised values** of the **Okura Estuary** and **Okura Bush Scenic Reserve** as demonstrated by the wide range of community groups and users that enjoy the area, including: tramping clubs, schools, universities, commercial groups, families, informal groups, tourists (including Te Araroa users), Duke of Edinburgh award programme participants, William Pike Challenge classes, horse riders (low tide) and bird watchers. The photographs attached in **Appendix C**

<sup>25</sup> Refer Professor Thrush Evidence in Chief (for Auckland Council): paragraph 7.2.

<sup>26</sup> Refer R de Lambert IHP Evidence Appendix 1: Site Context, Page 13 Marine Reserve Location plan.

<sup>27</sup> Refer D Mead Evidence in Chief: Attachment DM04 Okura East Zonings and Overlays.

show such groups using the area. Referencing the evidence of Ms Lezette Reid, Mr Geoff Reid and Mr Townend, the sustained efforts of the local community in managing weeds and pests in the area, organising tree planting days and coordinating the restoration and ongoing management of Dacre Cottage are testament to the extent to which the area is valued and cherished by the community.

- (h) The **very high recreation, scenic, and shared and recognised values** associated with the **Long Bay Regional Park** that extends from Long Bay northwards to Piripiri Point and rolls over into the Okura catchment at its northern end. The Regional Park runs alongside the Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve and includes a range of sandy beaches, rock shoals, pohutukawa-clad cliffs, and remnant and regenerating bush slopes and gullies, interspersed with pastoral areas. The park is approximately 30km from the Auckland CBD and some 6km from the nearest motorway off-ramp, with a regular bus service to and from the Auckland CBD, making it one of the most easily accessible Regional Parks in the Auckland Region (and arguably the most easily accessed Regional Park on the east coast of the region).

In addition to its proximity to the City and accessibility, ample carparking, public barbeque, picnic table, playground, camping, restroom and 'private site' facilities, in combination with the network of well-formed walking and mountain bike tracks, safe water conditions for swimming, snorkelling, kayaking and the like, the historic Vaughan Homestead and museum, and the well-maintained, highly attractive coastal setting, make it highly popular. As the Regional Park brochure explains (refer **Appendix D**), the quieter and more secluded northern portion of the park adjacent the site offers a chance to 'get away from the crowd'. The Auckland Design Manual showcases the park, describing it as: *"[a] busy seaside park [that] treasures and celebrates its special features for the enjoyment of current and future generations"* and advises that approximately 1.3 million people visit annually *"making it a regionally and nationally significant recreation and tourist destination"*. The popularity of the park is borne out by the warning on the Auckland Council website of traffic queues on public holidays and fine weekend days of 1km or more, tailing back to the Torbay shops.

The importance of the Regional Park as a peaceful refuge away from the city is reflected in the Wēiti and Long Bay Precinct provisions. The Wēiti provisions require that the landscape, skyline and coast are protected from development when viewed from the Long Bay Regional Park.<sup>28</sup> At Long Bay, a series of devices have been introduced to ensure that urban development is not visible from the central and northern portion of the park. These include the Ridgeline Height Control and the Park Interface Protection Area (that together seek to limit the visibility of urban development from the Grannys Bay catchment, Piripiri Point and identified Park Interface Viewpoints within the regional park<sup>29</sup>), and the Piripiri Point Protection Area (which restricts development in this area to one dwelling on a nominated platform that is outside of the precinct and encourages a rural style of development<sup>30</sup>). The very long history of community involvement in the protection and long-term management of the Regional Park,<sup>31</sup> together with the design of surrounding urban areas, speaks to the high value placed on this landscape feature by the community.

- (i) The **high recreation, scenic and shared and recognised values** associated with the stretch of **Te Araroa**<sup>32</sup>, where it passes across the mouth of the Okura Estuary, linking the Okura Bush Walkway with the Long Bay Regional Park walkway.<sup>33</sup> I am advised that the route across the estuary is only available at low tide and, reasonably frequently, southbound trampers walk westwards along the Okura Bush Walkway to the spit (approximately midway along the track on the north side of the Okura River) and are often ferried across the river by private boat to Okura village and then walk up Okura River Road to Long Bay. When the northern entrance to the park is completed, a more direct route to the Park will be available via Vaughans Road and Piripiri Point Drive.

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<sup>28</sup> Refer AUP:OiP Wēiti Precinct 1547.2 Objective (2) (attached to Mr P Reaburn's Evidence in Chief).

<sup>29</sup> Refer AUP:OiP 1519 Long Bay 1519.3 Policies (47) – (51) and 1519.6.2 Building Height (2) (a) (i)-(iii) (attached to Mr P Reaburn's Evidence in Chief).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid Policies (69)-(74).

<sup>31</sup> See the Evidence in Chief of Ms Christina Bettany which provides an overview of the involvement of the LBOGPS and Okura Environmental Group in relation to urban development at Long Bay and the extent of the regional park.

<sup>32</sup> The national walkway stretching along the length of the country's two main islands from Cape Reinga to Bluff.

<sup>33</sup> For a map of Te Araroa in the vicinity of the site, refer Design Report: Page 14, Walking Tracks and Public Access.

- (j) The **spatial and/or visual separation of the majority of these landscape features from urban development**, noting that (as explained by Ms Absolum and Mr Mead) the Long Bay urban development has been specifically controlled to ensure that it is not visible from ONL 54 (Long Bay), nor visible in close to mid-range views from walkways throughout the central and northern end of the Regional Park. Further, the Wēiti development has been set well back from the coastal edge with a substantial buffer (approximately 400m) along its seaward frontage.
  - (k) The **modest scale and sympathetic character of the existing Okura settlement**, described in the BML Assessment as a “small, well defined village along the banks of the Okura River”.<sup>34</sup>
  - (l) The **relatively well-integrated, rural residential** development throughout the varied terrain at the **western end of the Okura catchment**.
50. All of these landscape features are connected spatially and/or visually to each other, and to the site itself. By contrast, as I explained earlier, existing and anticipated urban development to the north and south is separated spatially from this setting by topography, landscape features, and planning controls in force under AUP:OiP.
51. In my opinion, the landscape values arising from the aggregation of these various outstanding and high value landscape features (including recreational features), in combination with the general absence of overtly urban development in their vicinity, their close proximity to the city and their accessibility, culminates in a landscape that has a distinctive ‘sense of place’ as a relatively tranquil and peaceful area where one can ‘escape the city’ and enjoy a landscape in which more natural landscape features, patterns and processes are to the fore.
52. As outlined earlier, it is my opinion that the approved CSL development on the site has the potential to detract from the landscape values of the local area. However, the distinctly non-urban character of the CSL development (for the reasons set out earlier), together with the collective scale, character and quality of the high value landscape features in the local area, means that the approved

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<sup>34</sup> BML Assessment: Page 9, second paragraph.

CSL development will not, in my view, significantly diminish those landscape values.

## **PROPOSED RUB RELOCATION**

53. The proposal will see the relocation of the RUB from the Vaughans Road ridgeline to the estuary edge, with a minor ridgeline used to define its western edge. I accept that the estuary edge comprises a strong natural boundary (subject to the reservations I express shortly in relation to effects on the ONL adjacent).
54. I agree with Ms Absolum that, from a landscape management perspective, the Vaughans Road ridgeline comprises a strong natural boundary<sup>35</sup> and is to be preferred over the arrangement recommended by OHL which relies on a minor ridgeline to define the western portion of the RUB.
55. The cross sections attached to Mr Reaburn's evidence demonstrate the relative scale of the Vaughans Road ridgeline in comparison to the minor ridgeline along which it is proposed to locate the RUB. The elevation plan in the BML Assessment<sup>36</sup> also assists in understanding the primacy of the Vaughans Road ridgeline.
56. Like Ms Absolum, I am of the view that the minor ridgeline does not comprise a robust and defensible edge. I consider that from a landscape perspective, it would be very difficult to resist urban expansion throughout the western Okura catchment, were the RUB moved to this location.
57. In my opinion, such an outcome would destroy the impression of Okura village as a low-key and well-defined coastal settlement, would significantly undermine the greenbelt pattern envisaged throughout this portion of the region, and would exacerbate the adverse 'landscape' effects discussed shortly.
58. Given that the IHP recommended that the RUB line should run along the small tributary and gully to the west of OHL's minor ridgeline, I confirm that in my opinion, such a location would be equally indefensible as an urban growth limit as a consequence of the minor scale of the waterbody and gully.

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<sup>35</sup> In the sense referred to in Policy B2.2.2 (2)(m) of AUP:OiP, refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief, paragraph 10.3.

<sup>36</sup> BML Assessment: Figure LV9 Elevation.

59. For the reasons I address now in more detail, relocating the RUB in the manner recommended by the IHP would also not (in my opinion) 'protect' the scheduled natural heritage areas (ONLs 51, 54 and HNC Areas 94 and 95) present in the catchment.<sup>37</sup>

## VISUAL EFFECTS

60. I agree with the introductory comments with respect to Visual Effects set out in the BML Assessment (paragraph 9.5) and add that the various viewpoint photographs are a useful tool in understanding potential visual effects; however, they must be supplemented by analysis 'on the ground'.
61. Further, it should be noted that we experience the visual landscape as a sequence of views rather than the single 'frame' of view depicted in each of the viewpoint photographs. This means that for many of the viewpoint photographs, 'other' visual components outside the field of view captured by the photograph inevitably contribute to the character and quality of the outlook experienced.
62. With respect to the potential visual character of the proposed urban development, **Appendix E** Photograph 1 depicts the typical character of two-storey standalone housing within the neighbouring Long Bay development.

### **Viewpoint 1: Long range view from Vaughans Road<sup>38</sup>**

63. For the reasons stated earlier with respect to the potential landscape and visual outcome associated with the approved CSL development on the site, I do not consider the 'existing visual environment' to be quite as described by Ms Absolum, but certainly do not accept the BML Assessment's assertion that it will read as "urbanised land use"<sup>39</sup> in this outlook.
64. Whilst it is possible that some of the CSL buildings may be visually intrusive in this outlook, the relatively limited number of buildings visible (given the approximately 4ha lot size of the CSL lots seen in this view) and reasonably spacious patterning (bearing in mind the various yard and landscape feature setback controls), combined with the moderating influence of distance (viewer

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<sup>37</sup> Refer D Mead Evidence in Chief, paragraph 124, as to Policy B2.2.2 (2)(g) of AUP:OiP.

<sup>38</sup> BML Assessment: Figure LV11.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid paragraph 9.8.

is approximately 1km away from the western edge of the site), will ensure that the CSL development will not read as urban. At this distance, it is my expectation that, at worst, it will read as poorly executed rural residential development.

65. The presence of scattered dwellings and buildings in the foreground of view means that despite this potentially negative impression, the approved CSL development will generally read as a logical extension of the closer-range, relatively spacious rural residential patterning.
66. I note that the diminishing effects of distance means that the urban development throughout the Whangaparaoa Peninsula in the background of the view is relatively indiscernible from this vantage point.<sup>40</sup>
67. I agree with Ms Absolum<sup>41</sup> that the introduction of urban development into the midground of the outlook will form a marked contrast with the more natural aspects of the outlook, including the estuarine and coastal waters, the dense bush-clad slopes along the north side of Okura River, and the relatively spacious and green rural residential patterning in the foreground.
68. Applying the same effects rating scale to that used in the BML RUB Report,<sup>42</sup> I consider that adverse visual effects in relation to this audience rate as **Moderate**.
69. Whilst not specifically referenced, it is presumed that the BML Assessment's impression of the approved CSL development as "urbanised landuse" in relation to Viewpoint 1 has also informed the evaluation of visual effects for the remaining viewpoints.

#### **Viewpoint 2: Residential audiences to the west<sup>43</sup>**

70. I agree with the BML Assessment that intervening vegetation and the orientation of dwellings will play a mitigating role in some of the relatively close-range residential viewpoints discussed in relation to Viewpoint 2; however, I

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<sup>40</sup> Although I acknowledge that in some light conditions it is more prominent.

<sup>41</sup> Refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief: paragraph 13.9.

<sup>42</sup> And noting that the BML Assessment effects rating scale is applied consistently throughout my visual, natural character and landscape effects analysis.

<sup>43</sup> BML Assessment: Figure LV12.

expect that a number of dwellings are likely to have views of the site; for example, 76 and 78 Okura River Road.

71. With respect to dwellings within Okura village, the majority of these houses are oriented away from the site and/or screened by intervening vegetation.
72. For those residential properties with views of the site, it is my expectation that the proposed urban development will comprise a significant change in the outlook that contrasts markedly with the outcome likely, were the site developed to its full potential under the CSL regime.
73. Despite the potential for large dwellings and uncertainty around plantings explained earlier, I consider that the latter (CSL scenario) will read as a relatively spacious and, consequently, sympathetic rural residential pattern flanking an overtly natural estuarine landscape. Overall, the visual impression of a 'green' dominated outlook will remain.
74. By contrast, the former will appear as a distinctly urban pattern that forms an incongruous and discordant contrast to the relatively spacious and green landscape context. The lie of the land and orientation of the viewer is such that the proposed coastal reserve will not read as a meaningful buffer in these views.
75. On balancing these considerations, it is my opinion that adverse visual amenity effects in relation to the residential audiences to the west with views of the site are likely to range from **Moderate** to **Moderate-Low**, depending on the proximity and orientation of the dwelling, and the filtering or grounding effect of intervening vegetation.

#### **Viewpoints 3 and 4: Boat Ramp and Okura Bush Walkway<sup>44</sup>**

76. Viewpoints 3 and 4 address the visual effects from the Okura boat ramp and the Okura Bush Walkway (southern and northern sides of the Okura Estuary respectively).
77. I concur with the comments made by Ms Absolum with respect to each of these viewpoints. In addition, it is my opinion that the BML Assessment has underestimated the viewing audience associated with the Okura Bush

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid Figure LV12.

Walkway in limiting its discussion to the view from the spit and the snapshot views from the bush track.<sup>45</sup>

78. Low tide access is available (and shown on the map at the Haigh Access Road entrance to the walkway) from the spit around Dacre Point to Karepiro Bay.<sup>46</sup> The extremely tidal nature of the estuary means that this route is accessible over a reasonably long period each day. In my experience, the low tide access is popular with walkers as it provides a quite different walking experience over the rock ledges and mudflats that line the north side of the estuary, and offers an alternative to walking back the same way over part of the track. The route is also popular with horse riders at low tide.
79. In contrast to the enclosed bush character of the stretch of track between the Haigh Access Road and Karepiro Bay, the low tide access offers expansive and uninterrupted views across the estuary to the grassed slopes on the south side of the estuary (i.e. the site and northern slopes of the regional park), the cliff edges of the regional park and the open waters of the gulf. In my experience, the close proximity of the viewer to the estuary also affords a keen awareness of the prolific birdlife throughout the area.
80. Okura village is visible from all of these vantage points (although not shown in the Viewpoint 3 and 4 photographs) and reads as a relatively discreet cluster of dwellings nestled into a well-vegetated setting.
81. From this portion of the track (approximately 1km in length), the entire site is visible. The proposed development will read as four reasonably large expanses of urban development, separated by bands of planting and open space areas along gullies, with a swathe of planting and open space along the foreshore.
82. It is reasonable to expect that planting throughout the coastal reserve may provide a grounding and filtering effect to at least some of the proposed urban development throughout the lower slopes; however (and like Ms Absolum<sup>47</sup>), the numerous archaeological sites throughout the area, together with the quite reasonable expectation for gaps in planting to allow coastal views, along with the fact that development would extend above throughout large areas of the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid: paragraph 9.19.

<sup>46</sup> Refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Figure 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid: paragraph 12.5.

more elevated parts of the site to the ridgeline, leads me to place limited weight on the mitigation benefits of the coastal reserve plantings in these views.

83. In my opinion, the visibility of large tracts of urban development will significantly undermine the visual amenity values enjoyed from each of these locations.
84. Rather than the site potentially reading in the outlook as a relatively spacious patterning of rural residential dwellings dotted throughout the hill slopes on the south side of the estuary, the proposed development will introduce a dense urban patterning that forms a jarring contrast with the predominantly 'green' setting, comprising the low-key and well-vegetated Okura settlement, the open and spacious regional park (where visible), and the seemingly 'untouched' visual character of the estuary itself.
85. On balancing these considerations (including Ms Absolum's comments and my previous comments with respect to the character of the approved CSL development), it is my opinion that adverse visual effects in relation to these audiences rate as **Moderate-High**.

**Viewpoint 5: Views from the Vaughans Road ridgeline adjacent site<sup>48</sup>**

86. I agree with the description and analysis of visual effects provided by Ms Absolum for this viewpoint.
87. In not considering effects in relation to the future users of the Vaughan's Road extension (Piripiri Point Road) now accessing the northern end of the regional park, I consider the BML Assessment has underestimated the sensitivity of this viewing audience.
88. In my opinion, this ridgeline vantage point offers an appreciation of the striking contrast between the urban development to the south (outside the field of view depicted in the photograph) and the open and spacious pattern to the north in which more natural landscape elements dominate. There is a keen perception of being at the very edge of the city and the 10m building setback on the Long Bay side of the ridgeline road (described by Ms Absolum<sup>49</sup>) would appear to be designed to reinforce this perception.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid Figure LV13.

<sup>49</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Paragraph 13.15.

89. For visitors to the new entrance at the northern end of the park, this visual contrast effectively sets the scene for what is to come – a relatively secluded and peaceful regional park experience, set apart from the city.
90. For the reasons stated earlier, were the OHL land developed as CSL, I consider that this visual (and landscape) contrast would remain.
91. The introduction of urban development throughout the site would create the impression of urban development sprawling northwards over the ridgeline from Long Bay to the Okura Estuary. Whilst it is possible that the configuration of open spaces and plantings along gullies could retain some views from the ridgeline down to the water, I expect that from the majority of the ridgeline road (including the eastern end of Vaughans Road and Piripiri Point Drive), urban built development would serve to obscure views of the estuary waters and potentially the Okura Bush on the northern side, depending on the proximity and height of buildings adjacent the road.
92. For visitors to the regional park, the visual impression of the park ‘approach’ enclosed on either side by urban development will undermine the design intention of the northern end of the regional park as a more remote and tranquil part of the park.
93. On balancing these considerations, it is my opinion that adverse visual effects in relation to these audiences rate as **High**.

#### **Viewpoint 6: Long Bay-Te Araroa Walkway (Long Bay Regional Park)<sup>50</sup>**

94. Again, I agree with Ms Absolum’s comments with respect to this viewpoint.
95. I would also note that the BML Assessment draws attention to the screening and filtering effect of the cliff edge vegetation in obscuring views of the Okura Estuary context, and the focus of views from the walkway out over the Hauraki Gulf.<sup>51</sup> It is presumed that each of these factors contributes a moderating influence in the analysis of visual effects for this audience.
96. Whilst I accept that cliffside vegetation serves to screen views of much of the estuary in this particular location on the walkway, it is my experience that in other places along the walkway in the northern portion of the park, the lie of the

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<sup>50</sup> BML Assessment: Figure LV14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid: paragraphs 9.28 to 9.29.

land and character of (or gaps in) the cliff edge vegetation ‘opens up’ the view of the estuary and river. The sequential nature of views from the walkway means that walkers are undoubtedly aware of the highly scenic landscape context of the estuary and Okura Bush to the north. Further, the dense coastal vegetation along the eastern side of the path means that views out over the gulf are, in fact, quite limited from this stretch of the walkway network, and views tend to be directed westwards out over the grasslands of the park toward to the site. For these reasons, I do not consider that these factors contribute a meaningful moderating influence.

97. I acknowledge that from some locations along this stretch of the walkway, the coastal settlement development at Wēiti will be visible. Distance (approximately 1.5km), together with the relatively limited extent of development visible (as a consequence of the relatively small scale ‘pods’ of development envisaged in the Wēiti coastal settlement), and the proposed bush context are such that I do not consider that the Wēiti Precinct will read as an urban expanse in the manner proposed on the OHL land, nor have the same negative influence on the visual amenity enjoyed in the northern portion of the regional park.
98. I have also factored into my analysis of this viewpoint the mitigating effects of the planting proposals associated with the approved four-lot subdivision along the eastern side of the site.<sup>52</sup> Although these plans are very difficult to read, it would appear that tree and shrub plantings are proposed around buildings, portions of the eastern site boundary, along Piripiri Point Drive (already undertaken) and throughout gullies.
99. In addition, the BML Assessment has failed to consider the adverse visual effects on users of the walkway in the central portion of the Regional Park on the hillsides at either end of Grannys Bay.
100. I also note that the Regional Park walkway from which the photographs in **Appendix F** were taken is not mapped on the Landscape Conferencing Map 1 prepared by Boffa Miskell and attached to Ms Absolum’s statement as Figure 10. **Appendix D** attached to my statement shows the full walkway and cycleway network throughout the regional park (and the location of Grannys Bay).

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<sup>52</sup> Refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Figure 17.

101. The photographs in **Appendix F** illustrate the view from the hillsides around Grannys Bay (including views from the walkway itself - see Photographs 1 and 2). The Grannys Bay photograph viewpoints also very roughly correspond to the Park Interface Viewpoints in the Long Bay Precinct provisions from which it is intended that close range urban development is screened from view.<sup>53</sup> Whilst these photographs are not intended to be representative of the human field of view, field survey revealed that the lighting columns along Piripiri Point Drive are visible at relatively close range. This suggests that the proposed urban development abutting Piripiri Point Drive, and likely comprising two-storey dwellings, will also be visible at close range. In my opinion, this will not only detract from the visual amenity enjoyed throughout this part of the Regional Park/Te Araroa walkway, but is also at odds with the policy intentions of limiting the visibility of urban development in close to mid-range views from the Grannys Bay catchment.
102. On balancing these considerations (including Ms Absolum's comments and my previous comments with respect to the character of the approved CSL development), it is my opinion that adverse visual effects in relation to this audience rate as **High**.

**Additional Viewpoints: Photographs 1-7<sup>54</sup>**

103. I agree with Ms Absolum's description and analysis of visual effects in relation to each of these additional viewpoints.
104. With respect to **Photograph 1**, I would add that it is my expectation that at least part of the coastal settlement development at Wēiti is likely to be visible in the outlook. For the reasons set out in my discussion of Viewpoint 6, I do not consider that this will detract from the visual amenity enjoyed in this location.
105. With respect to **Photograph 2**, I note the streetscape context in the foreground (kerb and channel, light coloured footpath and lighting columns associated with the new Piripiri Point Road). Whilst these elements introduce what I consider to be a somewhat unfortunate urban character into the foreground of the view, I consider that the overwhelming impression is that of a distinctly non-urban context. I also note that Ms Absolum describes the adverse visual effects as

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<sup>53</sup> See Mr Reaburn's Evidence in Chief for the Long Bay Precinct provisions.

<sup>54</sup> Refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Figures 12-16 inclusive.

'high' within her discussion<sup>55</sup> and applies a rating of 'very high' in her visual effects summary table. I confirm that in my opinion, adverse visual effects in relation to this audience rate as **Very High**.

106. In reaching my conclusions with respect to the adverse visual effects associated with each of these additional viewpoints, I have considered the effects of the approved CSL development on the OHL land.
107. As explained earlier, whilst I am not necessarily as confident with respect to the potential visual character of that development as Ms Absolum, in the case of **Photographs 1 and 2**, I agree that it will have a considerably reduced screening effect in terms of views of the estuary and bush context in comparison to the proposed urban development. Further, the mitigation planting associated with the approved three (additional) lot subdivision in this part of the site<sup>56</sup> is likely to filter views of some of the buildings on other CSL lots within the OHL land, and I have factored this benefit into my analysis of effects.
108. For **Photographs 3-7**, the considerably more spacious patterning associated with the approved CSL development (as a consequence of the lot sizes and setback controls) will result in a development character that is considerably more sympathetic to the high quality and 'green' dominated visual setting.

### **Visual Effects associated with Construction**

109. The proposed urban development will require the movement of 1.8 million cubic metres of earth. Whilst development is likely to be staged and such effects are, strictly speaking, 'temporary' in nature, the sheer scale of disturbance required means that the adverse visual effects of large expanses of exposed ground and earthworking machinery are likely to be experienced for a considerable period of time. The prolonged visibility of earthworks in the Long Bay catchment demonstrates this effect.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid paragraph 13.34.

<sup>56</sup> Refer M Absolum Evidence in Chief: Attachment 1 and Figure 17.

### Summary

110. On balancing these considerations, it is my opinion that the proposed urban development will generate significant adverse visual effects in relation to users of the Regional Park, users of the Okura Bush Walkway, users of Te Araroa in the vicinity of the site and users of the Okura Estuary.
111. The significant recreational use of the viewing locations addressed in Photographs 1, 5, 6 and 7, and Viewpoints 4 and 6 and the importance of these areas in providing a sense of relief from the urban experience as described in the lay evidence on behalf of the Society, plays an important role in my evaluation of adverse visual effects.

### NATURAL CHARACTER EFFECTS

112. Natural character effects relate to the degree to which a proposal alters the biophysical and/or perceived natural character of a landscape.
113. Generally speaking, areas with a lower level of built modification tend to have a higher level of natural character; and, conversely, areas with a higher level of built modification tend to display a lower level of natural character.
114. It is widely accepted that natural character values occur across a continuum from pristine to modified. Broadly speaking, the perceptual aspects of natural character include aesthetics, aromas, sounds, and the sense of wildness, darkness, remoteness and/or isolation. All of these dimensions of natural character are given significant emphasis in the lay evidence produced by the Society, which I have read. Biophysical aspects include the geomorphological, ecological, hydrological and 'built' characteristics of an area.
115. Change within the immediate context of an area can alter its perceptual (or sensory) values and I note that this relationship is recognised in the AUP:OiP city wide provisions set out in E18 as described more fully by Ms Absolum.<sup>57</sup>
116. With respect to the site itself, the spacious and relatively undeveloped character of the OHL land, together with its coherent and relatively unmodified landform pattern, are noteworthy aspects of natural character. The approved CSL development on the OHL land will alter the perception of modification. On

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<sup>57</sup> M Absolum Evidence in Chief: paragraphs 9.18, 9.20 and 9.21.

balance, and taking into account the approved CSL development, I consider that the site itself currently rates at the lower end of the spectrum for natural character values.

117. The proposed protection of coastal vegetation, restoration of stream corridors, and enhancement plantings (including along the coastal edge) will enhance the natural character values of the site.
118. Conversely, the substantial scale of the proposed earthworks (noting that the majority of the OHL land will be modified as evidenced by the Earthworks Plan attached to Ms Absolum's evidence as Figure 11) and the introduction of 1,215 homes will significantly alter the perception of naturalness associated with the site.
119. Turning to the wider context, the site is nested within a landscape that displays high natural character values as described by Ms Absolum.<sup>58</sup>

#### **HNC Area 94 Okura River**

120. As demonstrated in the preceding discussion of visual effects, the site is visible from the waters on the northern side of the Okura Estuary, Dacre Point, the spit, the waters of the estuary, and the Okura Bush Walkway low tide access, each of which form part of HNC Area 94.<sup>59</sup>
121. In my opinion, the sheer expanse of urban development visible on the hill slopes that frame the area will destroy the existing impression of the estuary as a tranquil and peaceful haven 'away from the city'. In terms of Policy E18.3 of AUP:OiP, urban development would have significant adverse effects on HNC Area 94, which clearly has a 'visual linkage' with the site.
122. In considering these effects, I am aware that the existing lighting columns along the eastern end of Piripiri Point Drive are visible from the estuary and introduce urban infrastructure within an otherwise relatively 'undeveloped' context. As mentioned previously, these are an unfortunate oversight in the planning of the Long Bay development and whilst they do not impact on natural character values during the day (due to their colouration and the diminishing effects of distance), it is my expectation that they detract from the natural

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid: paragraph 9.16 and 9.17.

<sup>59</sup> Refer Viewpoint 4 and Photographs 4, 5 and 6.

character values of the estuary area at night, albeit at a much lesser scale in comparison to urban development.

123. For the reasons outlined earlier, I do not consider that the proposed coastal treatment under the proposed urban development scenario will create a meaningful buffer to the urban development such that it will read as distinctly separate from the estuary.
124. Further, the lie of the land and aspect of the site will see urban development configured throughout the mid and upper slopes, directly overlooking the estuary, spit and bush areas, resulting in a strong visual connection between the two.

### **HNC Area 95 Long Bay**

125. The site is also visible from portions of HNC Area 95 that coincide with the northern end of the Regional Park<sup>60</sup> and from the elevated lengths of the walkway (and park more generally) at the north and south ends of Grannys Bay as discussed earlier.<sup>61</sup>
126. In my opinion, the BML Assessment's failure to recognise the visibility of the proposed urban development from the central portion of the park (outlined in my discussion of visual effects in relation to Viewpoint 6), together with the underestimation of visual effects in relation to users of the northern portion of the park, has led to an underrating of effects on the perceived naturalness of HNC Area 95.
127. Visible urban development will, in my opinion, significantly detract from the naturalness associated with these parts of the park, and in so doing, undermine the impression of the central and northern end of the park as a relatively secluded 'escape from the crowds'. As for HNC Area 94, in terms of Policy E18.3 of AUP:OiP, urban development would have significant adverse effects on these parts of HNC Area 95, which clearly has a 'visual linkage' with the site.
128. Also of consideration in the evaluation of perceptual effects for this area are the very deliberate measures that have been incorporated into the planning

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<sup>60</sup> Refer Viewpoint 6 and Photograph 1.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix F Photographs.

provisions for the Long Bay and Wēiti Precincts that seek to avoid visibility of urban (and coastal settlement) development from these portions of the Regional Park. On this basis, it is reasonable to expect that the perceptual aspects of natural character values within HNC 95 and its immediate context would otherwise remain intact. In my opinion, this statutory context confers a heightened sensitivity to change of the type envisaged on the OHL land.

129. I acknowledge that the approved CSL development on the OHL land will alter the level of modification associated with the wider area, and therefore has the potential to detract from the perceptual aspects of natural character associated with each of these HNC areas. I also note that many of the natural character 'benefits' of the urban proposal may not be realised by the CSL development (for example, the coastal and riparian plantings).
130. However, in my opinion, the significantly reduced number of dwellings visible (i.e. 30 new dwellings compared to 1,215 new dwellings), together with their spacious patterning, would result in a considerably lesser adverse effect in relation to HNC 94 (Okura River) in comparison to the OHL proposition. Importantly, the perception of the site as non-urban, and therefore 'a contrast to the city', will remain under the approved CSL regime.
131. Although the extent of CSL and urban development which would be visible is smaller from HNC 95 (Long Bay), the same relative variances apply within a context in which it is intended that urban development is not visible.
132. On balancing these considerations, it is my opinion that the proposed development will generate adverse natural character effects in relation to HNC 94 (Okura River) and HNC 95 (Long Bay) that rate as **Moderate-High**, and including some significant adverse effects, for the purpose of AUP:OiP Policy E18.3.

## LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

### Landscape Benefits

133. In considering the landscape effects of the proposal, I acknowledge the following benefits associated with the proposed urban development:
  - (a) the retention of existing native vegetation features;

- (b) the introduction of a network of publicly accessible open spaces and walkways throughout gullies and along the coastal frontage that link with the regional park and Te Araroa;
  - (c) the establishment of a native riparian and coastal planting framework throughout the open space network; and
  - (d) the enhancement of the landscape legibility of the site as a consequence of the gully plantings (and noting that gully restoration may not occur as of right as part of the approved CSL development).
134. As alluded to earlier, I note that such benefits are less certain under the approved CSL regime.
135. On the face of it, the network of publicly accessible open spaces and walkways along the coastline linking with the Regional Park and Te Araroa would appear to comprise appreciable landscape enhancements. However, having read the evidence of Dr Tim Lovegrove, Mr Graham Don, and Mr Ezra Barwell, I am more ambivalent as a consequence of the potential disturbance effects to birdlife, and reservations expressed with respect to the utility and appropriateness of the open spaces proposed and the uncertainty of their design and long-term management.
136. Currently the recreational features in the area are relatively low key, with the estuary only accessible by small marine craft or on foot, mountain bike, or horseback, and the northern end of the Regional Park only accessible on foot or bike. The urban development immediately adjacent the proposed coastal reserve is likely to result in a quite different level of use in this part of the estuary, and, relying on the evidence of Dr Lovegrove and Mr Don, may adversely impact one of the features of the area for which it is valued (i.e. its ecological values).

## **Biophysical Characteristics**

### *Landform*

137. As alluded to earlier, the proposed urban development will see earthworks over almost the entire area of the OHL land, with ridgelines reduced and minor streams filled in. Overall, there will be a transformation from a relatively

complex landform pattern to one which is far simpler, involving the movement of 1.8 million cubic metres of earth.

138. In my experience, in high value landscape settings such as Okura, it is usual to adopt a sensitive approach to landform modification whereby stream corridors are retained (and enhanced) and the underlying patterning and structure of the landform is preserved (subject to geotechnical constraints). This is generally considered to be a more sympathetic development approach and would optimise the enhancement of the landscape's legibility which is considered to be beneficial to landscape values. I note that such an approach also aligns with Mr Andres Roa's evidence in relation to stormwater management on the site.
139. I consider a development approach requiring the comprehensive earthworking of almost the entire OHL land to be inappropriate within this setting.

#### *Ecology*

140. Relying on the evidence of Dr Lovegrove, Dr Neale, Professor Thrush, and Messrs Don and West, it is my understanding that there is the potential for significant adverse effects on the ecological values associated with the estuary.

#### **Perceptual Values**

141. The preceding discussion of visual effects demonstrates that the proposed urban expansion on the site will adversely impact on the perceptual values of the Okura landscape.

#### **Effects on Associative Values**

142. The change to the perceptual and natural character values and qualities of the Okura landscape identified earlier will, in my opinion, adversely impact on a number of the associative values of the landscape. These include effects in relation to the naturalness of the wider area, the area's aesthetic or scenic values, and the shared and recognised values associated with the area, as now discussed.

143. I also consider the following types of effects fall within the scope of effects on the associative values of the landscape:

- (a) effects in relation to Mana Whenua
- (b) effects on the sense of place or identity of the area; and
- (c) effects on the two ONLs within the vicinity of the site.

#### *Naturalness*

144. The preceding discussion of natural character effects reveals that the proposal will adversely impact on the naturalness of the landscape within which the site is located, including some significant effects on existing natural character.

#### *Aesthetic or Scenic Values*

145. The earlier discussion of visual effects demonstrates that the proposal will significantly adversely impact on the aesthetic and scenic values associated with the central and northern portions of the Long Bay Regional Park, the Okura Estuary, the Okura Bush Walkway, and Te Araroa.

146. I also note that the development layout would appear to assume road access across the northwestern edge of the Regional Park.<sup>62</sup> In my opinion, roading in this area will further detract from the aesthetic and scenic values of the northern end of the park.

#### *Shared and Recognised Values / Community values*

147. In my opinion, the adverse visual and natural character effects identified earlier, together with the sense of place effects (outlined shortly), will significantly detract from the very high shared and recognised values associated with Long Bay Regional Park and the high shared and recognised values associated with the Okura Bush Walkway and the Okura Estuary, as given emphasis in the lay evidence produced by the Society.

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<sup>62</sup> Design Report: Proposed Structure Plan, page 37 and Development Areas plan, page 39.

*Mana Whenua*

148. Relying on the evidence of Mr Ashby, the area is considered to be of cultural importance to Te Kawerau a Maki. The proposed development will adversely impact on the value of the area to Mana Whenua.

*Sense of Place*

149. As explained earlier, the aggregation of the various landscape features in the vicinity of the site, together with the general absence of overtly urban development in their vicinity, their close proximity to the city and their accessibility, culminates in what I consider to be a high value landscape setting for the site that has a distinctive 'sense of place' as a relatively tranquil and peaceful area, where one can 'escape the city' and enjoy a more natural environment.
150. My visual and natural character effects analysis demonstrates that this sense of tranquillity and escape will be destroyed by the proposed urban development.
151. Further, in my opinion, the impression of Okura village as a low-key and well-defined coastal settlement will be blighted by the introduction of urban development on the neighbouring slopes.

*Effects on the ONLs*

152. I agree with the comments made by Ms Absolum in this regard.
153. My preceding discussion of visual effects and natural character effects (given that the HNC areas largely overlap with the ONL areas) reveals that the proposed urban development of this area will adversely impact on the perceptual and naturalness values of the ONLs, in some respects significantly.
154. I also consider that my previous comments in relation to the adverse effects of the proposed urban development on the sense of place of the local area equally apply to the ONLs, given their visual and, in the case of ONL 51 Okura Estuary Headlands, physical connection with the site.
155. Although I am not as confident that the approved CSL development will retain rural character per se, it is my expectation that it will definitely not read as urban, and, in so doing, will provide a considerably more sympathetic setting for both ONL 51 Okura Estuary Headlands and ONL 54 Long Bay. For the

reasons explained earlier, I also consider that mitigation planting associated with the three (additional) lot subdivision along the eastern side of the site will play a role in relation to effects of the CSL development on ONL 54.

### **Summary**

156. On balancing these considerations, I consider that the adverse landscape effects associated with the proposed urban development rate as **High-Very High**.
157. In particular, I consider that the proposal will:
- (a) destroy the relatively tranquil, 'escape from the city' sense of place associated with the Okura area;
  - (b) significantly detract from the high scenic, recreational and shared and recognised values of the Long Bay Regional Park, the Okura Bush Walkway, the estuary itself, and the stretch of Te Araroa in the vicinity of the site;
  - (c) significantly detract from the natural character values of the HNC areas and the Okura Estuary more generally; and
  - (d) significantly detract from the landscape values associated with the ONLs in the vicinity.

### **STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

158. Ms Absolum provides a comprehensive analysis of the proposal against the policy context relevant to an assessment of visual, natural character and landscape effects. I agree with Ms Absolum's conclusions.
159. On the basis of my preceding analysis of visual, natural character and landscape effects, the proposed urban development will not protect visual linkages between the site and ONL 51 Okura Estuary Headlands and ONL 54 Long Bay.
160. Taking into consideration the development associated with the Wēiti Precinct which was consented after the ONLs were identified, it is my view that the introduction of urban development throughout the OHL land will generate

significant adverse cumulative effects in relation to those portions of ONLs 93, 94 and 95, where views are available of both the Wēiti Precinct and the site.<sup>63</sup>

161. For these reasons, it is my opinion that the development is at odds with the policy intentions of AUP:OIP E19.3.
162. Further, based on my preceding analysis, it is my opinion that the proposed urban development will generate significant adverse landscape effects in relation to these high and outstanding value landscape areas, leading me to the conclusion that it is inappropriate.
163. The policy context for HNC areas requires management of the development of land adjoining HNC areas that have a visual linkage with the area to avoid significant adverse effects; and avoid, remedy or mitigate other adverse effects on the characteristics and qualities that contribute to the natural character values of the area. The description of HNC Area 95 references 'very little development within the coastal environment'. In my view, the proposed urban development will significantly alter this aspect of natural character by introducing distinctly urban development within the immediate visual (and spatial) context of HNC Area 95. Urban development would also have significant adverse effects on HNC Area 94, which clearly has a 'visual linkage' with the site as well.
164. For completeness, and to the extent relevant, for the reasons given in this evidence, in my opinion urban development would be in conflict with the requirements of Policies 13 and 15 of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (as to high natural character and outstanding natural landscapes) respectively.
165. As outlined earlier, I would also note that the visibility of the proposed urban development from Long Bay Regional Park would appear to be out of step with the Long Bay Precinct and Wēiti Precinct provisions, which both seek to limit the visibility of urban development from the park.
166. Whilst I acknowledge that the approved CSL development may generate some adverse 'landscape' effects, I do not consider those effects to be of the same magnitude as urban development. As explained in my effects discussion, I am of the view that the non-urban character of the approved CSL development is a

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<sup>63</sup> Refer BML Assessment Figure LV4 for the arrangement of the three ONL areas.

considerably more sympathetic outcome within a high value landscape context such as Okura.

167. Importantly, I do not consider that the approved CSL development will generate significant adverse effects on the ONLs or significantly alter the context of the HNC Area 95. I also consider that the approved CSL development character is more in keeping with the policy intentions of the Long Bay Precinct and Wēiti Precinct provisions.

**Bridget Gilbert**

Landscape Architect