

Hamilton City Council Ruakura Variation to Proposed District Plan

Parks and Open Spaces Evidence – Jamie Sirl, Senior Planner

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Jamie Sirl. I hold the qualifications of Master of Planning Practice, and Bachelor of Arts majoring in Geography and am a member of the New Zealand Planning Institute and New Zealand Recreation Association. I have had over 4 years' experience in planning and compliance roles in Local Government which has related to regulatory and policy development roles under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) as well as under Reserves Act 1977.
- 1.2 At present I hold the position of Senior Planner, Parks and Open Spaces Unit for the Hamilton City Council.
- 1.3 Although this is a Council Hearing, I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court's Practice Note dated 2014. I have complied with that Code when preparing my written statement of evidence.
- 1.4 The scope of my evidence relates to comments on submissions received in relation to the Land Development Plan (LDP) mechanism and relevant open spaces' information required as part of an LDP application; and also the Ruakura Open Space Zone.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 I have been involved in providing input from a Parks and Open Spaces' perspective around the approaches taken in the Ruakura Variation to the Hamilton City Council Proposed District Plan as notified 11 November 2015.

3.0 Key Issues

3.1 Ruakura Open Space – Fixed v Indicative

- 3.1.1 In general, the Parks and Open Spaces Unit support the approach taken in the Variation to identify whether open space is fixed or indicative. The approach is based on identifying the greenway, the corridor that runs from the north west along Greenhill Link Road and down adjacent to the Spine Road to link to open space along Silverdale and the Mangaonua Gully to the south, as fixed open space. Widths are clearly identified in Figure 2-14 which align with the BOI Decision and this approach is supported.
- 3.1.2 Indicative open space is identified within Figure 2-14 where neighbourhood reserves indicate the expectation of reserves within residential zoned land. It is not appropriate to fix the location of the indicative reserves and the best process to confirm the location of the neighbourhood reserves in through a Land Development Plan application.
- 3.1.3 The Indicative Ecological Link identified on Figure 2-14 is also supported. The final location and function of the ecological link is best undertaken as part of a Land Development Plan application, but the inclusion of the indicative ecological link within Figure 2-14 and as part of the Information Requirements for Land Development Plan provides clarity to what the expectation is for open space at Ruakura.

3.2 **Land Development Plan Mechanism and Figure 2-16**

- 3.2.1 In general, the Parks and Open Spaces Unit support the Land Development Plan mechanism and the retention of LDP Figure 2-16 to achieve the integrated growth within the structure plan.
- 3.2.2 With particular regard to the provision of open space land as spaces for leisure and recreational activities, the LDP mechanism enables a strategic and integrated approach to ensuring the future open space network will provide useable recreational spaces while providing for the other anticipated functions of the wider open space network.

3.3 **Ruakura Open Space Zone**

- 3.3.1 I support the approach taken in establishing an open space zone that reflects the various functions that the open space network within Ruakura is required to accommodate. The Ruakura Open Space Zone is considered the most appropriate mechanism to ensure that the multifunctional purpose of the open space network is achieved with an appropriate balance between the various functions.
- 3.3.2 The open space area established through the Board of Inquiry decision is inherently multifunctional which differs to both the general function of open spaces within the rest of the city, and the zoning categories applied to these open spaces. The application of existing open space zoning approach within the Ruakura Structure Plan is not considered appropriate, with the exception of the Natural Open Space zoning for the Mangaonua Gully, as it would not provide for the multifunctional purpose as determined by the Board of Inquiry.

3.4 **Appendix 1.2.2.25 Land Development Plan**

- 3.4.1 Two submitters (Tainui Group Holdings, and Chedworth Properties Limited) seek amendments to Appendix 1.2.2.25 to delete new text included as part of the variation to 1.2.2.25g) to delete *'and the total area provided for each open space purpose consistent with the purpose of the Ruakura Open Space Zone and Ruakura Structure Plan'* and 1.2.2.25y) deletion of *'each neighbourhood reserve shall be an area of approximately 0.5ha and serve a catchment area of approximately 500m radius'*.
- 3.4.2 The requirement that the area provided for each open space function is part of any LDP application ensures that any impact of accommodating various functions with open space areas is clearly illustrated and understood.
- 3.4.3 The indicative approach taken regarding the location of neighbourhood reserves is consistent with that applied within the other structure plan areas for Hamilton. This avoids zoning land as open space, and defers fixing the location of neighbourhood reserves until the LDP application stage.
- 3.4.4 A neighbourhood park primarily provides for the informal and passive recreation needs of local residents and contributes to the amenity of the local environment.
- 3.4.5 The New Zealand Recreation Association Parks Categories and Levels of Service Guideline June 2011 (NZRA) specifies with regard to neighbourhood

parks; the 'average useful size is considered to be from 3,000 to 5,000m² and optimal distribution is within reasonable walking distance '(500 metres radius or ten minutes walk) from urban residential properties'. This approximate size and distribution is intended for neighbourhood parks within Hamilton's future residential area, and enable the space to accommodate informal recreation facilities including playground facilities, kick around areas, and ancillary buildings such as toilets.

- 3.4.6 An approximate area of 5000m² for each neighbourhood park is proposed for Ruakura, supported by the NZRA Guidelines and benchmarking against Hamilton's park network. An 'approximate' area provides a level of discretion and variation in the area of land required that responds appropriately to the context of each stage of development.
- 3.4.7 The proposed variation to the PDP will provide for 6 neighbourhood parks at approximately 0.5ha per park, being approximately 3ha of neighbourhood parks with the residential zoned areas of the Ruakura Structure Plan.
- 3.4.8 The indicative locations (shown as triangles on Figure 2-14) have been determined based on proximity to residential properties, applying an approximate 500 metre radius. Although there is some overlap in 500m catchments, the anticipated density of the future residential neighbourhoods supports the required level of provision of 6 neighbourhood reserves. While also acknowledging that at the time of assessing LDP and subdivision applications, in requiring neighbourhood park provision, consideration is given to whether there is existing open space that satisfies the recreational open space needs within 500m.
- 3.4.9 The level of detail required by Rule 1.2.2.25 ensures that neighbourhood reserves are provided as part of the establishment of new residential communities, and that these reserves are sufficient in size to provide for the local recreational requirements for future neighbourhoods - *providing a range of informal recreation facilities including children's play areas, kick around area, and spaces for passive recreation*, that are appropriately distributed to ensure a level of service generally consistent across the city.
- 3.4.10 Area J of the Ruakura Structure Plan, which has been granted resource consent, illustrates the challenges in relying on BoI decision provisions to ensure quality neighbourhood reserve provision for the future Ruakura residential community. The lack of detail around neighbourhood reserve provision has resulted in a suboptimal open space outcome, particularly from an active recreation perspective. In terms of neighbourhood reserve provision, although Area J provides open space for amenity and stormwater management, the open space areas are not considered to be of an optimal size to accommodate the activities and facilities provided at a neighbourhood park level e.g. play facilities, kick around areas, and ancillary buildings such as toilets.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 That only minor amendments as outlined in the S42A Reports are made to the open space related provisions within the Ruakura Variation, in particular:

That;

- a. The fixed and indicative approach to Ruakura open space is retained;
- b. The Land Development Plan mechanism is retained, with only amendments identified in the S42A Reports supported;
- c. The Ruakura Open Space Zone is retained, with only amendments identified in the S42A Reports supported; and
- d. The open space information required as part of a Land Development Plan application is retained, with only amendments identified in the S42A Reports supported.

Jamie Sirl

8th July 2016