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Boffa Miskell



Dear Victoria,

McPhersons Quarry Expansion Proposal Landscape and Visual Assessment: Peer Review

Waikato District Council has engaged Boffa Miskell Ltd to undertake a peer review of the landscape and visual assessment (LVA) prepared by Opus for the proposed McPhersons Quarry expansion.

The following provides a request for further information to understand the proposal and level of effects assessment in full.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This review provides an analysis of the adequacy of the assessment method and its reporting, alongside a consideration of the outcomes of the assessment against the provisions of the Waikato District Landscape Study, Operational Waikato District Plan and the Proposed Waikato District Plan.
- 1.2 The purpose of this peer review is to confirm whether the assessment can be relied upon and identify issues that require further consideration or are in disagreement with. Where issues or disagreement arise the peer review identifies additional considerations to be taken into account.
- 1.3 The peer review does not provide direction on notification other than providing guidance on the level of landscape and visual effect anticipated by the proposal. The Peer Review Report has considered the following:
1. *Whether the methodology used represents best practice as well as identifying any 'gaps'.*
 2. *That the description of the existing environment, natural character, landscape and visual amenity values is adequately described.*
 3. *That the proposal is adequately described, and the components of the project are accurately and clearly articulated in a way that enables others to visualise the project and judge the significance of the effects.*
 4. *That the illustrative material supporting the proposal and accompanying text are appropriate and clear to understand.*

5. *That the identification, nature of any natural character, landscape and visual amenity effects have all been considered and their significance interpreted correctly.*
6. *That all relevant statutory matters and relevant documents have been identified and considered.*
7. *That appropriate mitigation measures, options and recommendations are clear.*
8. *That any cumulative effects are covered.*
9. *That the conclusions and recommendations reflect the findings of the assessment.*

1.5 The documents reviewed comprised:

- *McPhersons Quarry Expansion Proposal Landscape and Visual Assessment – 2018*
- *Resource Consent Application & Assessment of Environmental Effects*
- *Waikato District Landscape Study (2017)*
- *Operational Waikato District Plan*
- *Proposed Waikato District Plan*

2.0 Review of Report Content

Overall Assessment

- 2.1 The Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment (LVEA) would benefit from referring to specific project details. In particular further detail is required in terms of the volumes, areas and heights of clearance works and proposed land, earthworks and the design of the proposed development require greater clarity.
- 2.2 Several residential audiences within proximity to the proposed extension have not been included in the assessment or justified why they have been discounted.
- 2.3 The inclusion of further detail regarding the methodology used to determine the visual catchment and the existing landscape character information that informed the baseline.
- 2.4 At least one visual simulation should be provided to demonstrate the visual impact of the proposed extension. The Mount William Summit is the most obvious location for one of these visual simulations.

3.0 Proposal Description

- 3.1 The proposal description under the sub-heading “The Proposal” would benefit from being more prescriptive regarding the areas of clearance, the maximum height of spoil storage and volumes of spoil. Although time scales for the works are not necessarily known at this stage, it would be preferable to establish an assumed time period that the assessment is being judged against.

3.2 It is understood that the proposed activity could be “up to 30 years”, however it should be detailed within the assessment what the expected time frame is for each of the identified stage and what the changes associated with these will be.

3.3 The description of mining plant and machinery are not included in this description, it would be useful to establish which of these will be used as in Stage 3 these may be introduced as new element to viewing audiences.

4.0 Assessment Methodology

4.1 Although it is noted that the assessment is based on the NZILA Best Practice Note, further information should be provided on how the assessment has been undertaken and what specific process were used. Under 3.4 “Describing the Existing Environment” it is not made clear what the process was for determining the visual catchment, the process should be described to an extent that it would be replicable by another practitioner. Further detail on the attributes of the landscape character being assessed should be describe in particular the “biophysical features, patterns and processes; sensory qualities; and spiritual, cultural and social associations” as described in the NZILA Best Practice Notes.

4.2 Regarding the evaluation of the magnitude of change under 3.7 Effects of magnitude of Change it would be useful to refer to Appendix B or 5.1 Visual Absorption Capability. The opportunity could also be taken here to outline the definition of “minor” within the RMA and how this relates to the “Significance Threshold of Visual Impact” shown in Table 1. This table does not make it clear that the magnitude of change combined with the sensitivity to change gives an indication of the effect rating, if that is what this table is intending to show.

4.3 The definitions criteria should be expanded upon to further describe what would constitute each level of magnitude. This has been addressed in Appendix B for Visual Absorption Capability and would be useful to refer to at this stage address the landscape character magnitude of change.

5.0 Statutory and Non-Statutory documents

5.1 Although reference is made to the Waikato [Regional] Landscape Assessment 2010 it does not refer to the more recent Waikato District Landscape Study 2017.

6.0 Landscape Character

6.1 Further analysis of the landscape studies listed above, and assessment of the landscape character would support this section the report would be useful in establishing a strong baseline of key characteristics. A supporting graphic to accompany the landscape character section of this report would help to orientate the reader to where identified character types are. The Local Character Plan would also benefit from a legend and further symbology to identify the “key landscape features”.

6.2 The supporting photographs are very useful for conveying the landscape features present and would be best displayed interspersed with the descriptive text and with a summary of the key features.

7.0 Natural Character Assessment

7.1 Further assessment of the Natural character features, physical and biological processes and values would aid to build up a picture of the natural character. This

should cover from undeveloped, mainly natural, environments (which have high natural character) to highly developed and built environments which have little natural character. Although the Visual Absorption Capability is well described in section 5.1, it should be linked to Appendix B and made clear that it is related to the visual assessment and not the landscape assessment.

8.0 Visual Amenity

- 8.1 Instances within this section strays away from establishing the audiences and their relative sensitivity there are instances where this covers the analysis and commentary on visual effects. This should be separated out and moved to the Assessment of effects analysis.

Visual Catchment

- 8.2 A definition or methodology of how the Visual Catchment was defined and its limitations this would enable the reader to understand what is being represented. It is understood there is not currently any LIDAR data available for this area, however, there are well defined methodologies for manual production of visual envelopes. It should be clear what assumptions have been made about landform, vegetation and structures regarding screening and visual obstruction.

Viewing Audience

- 8.3 It is not clear why recreational users on the Mount William Track, identified are considered to have “transient views”. Considering the users intentions for undertaking such an exercise it should be assumed that taking in the view would be a primary objective.

From houses and farm buildings

- 8.4 This section neglects a small number of properties within proximity to the proposed extension, most notably 215 and 231 Pinnacle Hill Road. Although these properties are not publicly accessible and obtaining a representative may not be possible. An assumed or expected view from these properties should be provided, particularly as these are the audiences most likely to experience the highest magnitude of impact.
- 8.5 It is described that “the visual effect level from dwellings is considered to be low”, this is out of place for this section which should be discussing the sensitivity of the audience.

From Roads

- 8.6 This section also discusses visual effects and magnitude of change, which should be discussed in the effects section of the report. This section should be focussed on describing the audience, location and setting to establish the sensitivity of the audience.

From public places

- 8.7 This user group is described as having “low” sensitivity. This does reflect the intentions of this activity, which is likely to be motivated by the want to experience a unique view. This user group is generally considered to be highly sensitive for such an activity.
- 8.8 Although the analysis states that “views from the summit may be available, although the subject site is not likely to be the centre of focus” in 6.5 “From public places”, desktop analysis shows that there are views into the site. Considering that the summit and a considerable amount of the walkway is in the visual catchment area, this should have been visited and photographed during the site visit.

- 8.9 As part of this peer review the Mt William summit and walkway were visited and it is clear that the parts of the proposed quarry extension will be visible. During and after the proposed expansion it may be possible to see further into the quarry floor than currently possible. The section of the walkway closest to the proposed quarry extension and within the Visual Catchment is within thick native bush and does not allow views out. This is misleading in the Visual Catchment Plan without a clear methodology.



View from south east from the Mt William walkway towards the quarry.

9.0 Assessment of effects

- 9.1 This section should break down the culmination of effects experienced by different visual audiences and within the landscape to discuss an overall magnitude of change. This should then be considered against the sensitivity and visual absorption capability and any mitigation to determine the overall level of effects. These assessments from the Visual Amenity section should be relocated to this section.

Landscape Effects

- 9.2 This analysis should focus on the changes in the landscape features, elements and processes in the established baseline, how these will be impacted and what the resultant effect will be. The visibility of ponds to be removed are mentioned, for example, however the visibility is not the only contribution to the landscape character and should be considered in the context of their contribution as a landscape character feature. Furthermore, some of these ponds are visible, specifically from the Mt William walkway so should not be dismissed due to visibility.
- 9.3 It should be made clear in this section that this is an assessment and justification of the expected effects, however in the landform effects analyses the “level of effects and the sensitivity are discussed but not what the expected effects are.

Visual Effects

- 9.4 The structure of the visual effects analysis would work better with the “Viewing audience” by assessing and the effects of the identified audiences. It is unclear why the Mt William walkway and specifically the summits have not been included within the assessment, although Viewpoint 2 has been included which is shown as sitting outside of the visual catchment. Inference regarding the level of effects expected to be experienced in the view from Mt William walkway should not disqualify it from being visited, especially as it is within the visual catchment area.

- 9.5 As part of the analysis the following confusing statement is made, “the proposed expansion is on relatively flat contoured land which is currently not visible from within the visual catchment”. This should be clarified as it appears to infer that the proposal will not be visible in the visual catchment area.
- 9.6 A band of mitigation planting is described as providing mitigation for a residence on Irish Road, however it is not established what the height of the overburden stockpile is going to be or the expected height of the mitigation planting.

Visual Absorption Capability

- 9.7 This would be best shown combined within the analysis of the expected impacts on individual audiences and incorporated into the overall assessment.

Effects of magnitude of change

- 9.8 The information in this section would be better served if it was incorporated into the overall analysis of the effects. The magnitude of change as a heading is confusing within this context.

10.0 Conclusion

- 10.1 There is information in the conclusion including the visibility of machinery which should be reinforced and mentioned throughout the assessment. A statement regarding “no planned increase in the built form or stockpiling of material” is slightly misleading as the overburden area will represent an additional element in the site and is not addressed in the conclusion.

11.0 Appendix A Viewpoint Analysis

- 11.1 Viewpoint 2 refers to the VAC as “Good” which is not established rating, this also mentions Stage 4 potentially visible. It wasn’t established that Stage 4 was being assessed, or is this a typing error?

12.0 Plans and Graphics analysis

- 12.1 The Visual Catchment Plan appears to take the 1km and 2km perimeters from the centre of the proposed site rather than the perimeter, this can give a false impression of distance of the receptors from the site. Viewpoint 3 for example appears to be over a kilometre away when in Appendix A – Viewpoint Analysis it is listed as 590m away and in the Viewpoint 3 photograph as 650m away. The Visual Catchment within the assessment is also referred to at the “viewing catchment” and shown on the Visual Catchment Plan as the “Viewpoint Catchment”.
- 12.2 The Mitigation Plan is of limited use as it does not indicate the expected height or density of the planting. Additional mitigation measures could be utilised in order to reduce landscape and visual effects.
- 12.3 The viewpoint photographs should contain more information on the direction of view and field of view. An indication of the proposed staging locations is helpful, however for clarity unedited versions of these viewpoints should also be provided to show the raw information. Although, the demarcation does indicate the approximate location of proposals there is not methodology or explanation which can verify the accuracy of these additions. Any visual simulations should have a methodology and explanations of how these were created.

13.0 Recommendations

13.1 Further information is sought for the following matters.

- Overall the assessment needs to consider separately the sensitivity of the receptor (receiving audience) and the significance of visual effect separately for each viewpoint with a greater analysis of the magnitude of change experienced. These should be outlined clearly to describe the effect against the attributes and baseline and the significance of those effects.
- The baseline for the landscape character assessment needs to be clearly established in order for the proposed changes in the landscape to be given context. Reference should be made to the Waikato District Landscape Study and existing analysis of the landscape character and sensitive features.
- Specified links reference to heights, assumed time scales and areas regarding the overburden area, vegetation clearance, mitigation planting etc. would give a clearer impression in the scale of the proposals.
- Further explanation should be given to the exclusion of viewpoints from the Mt William walkway and sufficient weight to how significant this is in relation to the number of users, proximity to the proposal and scenic quality of the view.
- Visual simulations should be provided to demonstrate the expected level of impact or change in the view. This would help to confirm the changes described in the visual assessment and the level of effects.
- Further information regarding the proposed development is required to clearly outline all of the elements that will be introduced into the landscape including, vehicles plant and machinery required in the expansion areas.
- Refinement of illustrative material is required to support the report text including the Visual Catchment Plan and a landscape character area plan.

If you require any further clarification on the above, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully

BOFFA MISKELL LTD



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