

Before the Independent Hearings Panel
at Waimakariri District Council

under: the Resource Management Act 1991

in the matter of: Proposed private plan change RCP31 to the Operative
Waimakariri District Plan

and: **Rolleston Industrial Developments Limited**
Applicant

Summary of evidence of Garth Falconer

Dated: 3 August 2023

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SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE OF GARTH FALCONER

- 1 My full name is Garth James Falconer.
- 2 I am an urban designer and landscape architect and am the founder and director of Reset Urban Design Limited (*Reset*), a specialist urban design and landscape architecture practise. I hold a Bachelor of Arts from Auckland University, a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University and a Master's Degree in Urban Design from Oxford Brookes (UK).
- 3 I am a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects Tuia Pito Ora and a member of the Urban Design Forum.
- 4 I have been practising for 34 years and have worked on a wide range of settlements and award winning masterplanned residential and commercial developments such as Hobsonville Point, Addison Papakura and Matakana. I am also the author of two published books on the history of urban design and landscape architecture in New Zealand.

SUMMARY

- 5 The proposal responds to demand for increased levels of housing in the Waimakariri District in an established well serviced centre. Building on the strategic location, historic foundations and destination draw of the very successful farmers' market, the proposal for residential housing adds retail, service and work facilities to satisfy the daily needs of a growing population and thereby reducing travel and enhancing the overall local community.
- 6 The capability of the site to accommodate the proposed development has been well researched, with the retention and enhancement of the existing waterways being the basis for the structure of the discrete residential neighbourhoods.
- 7 The site planning is also based on a walkable catchment. The network of paths provide for both walking and cycling, together with a series of generous open spaces which provide for regeneration of indigenous planting together with spaces for recreation and stormwater control.
- 8 The additions of retail and work units in the centrally located commercial area providing for local jobs, the substantial park and ride facility encouraging public transport, and the polo field providing for a regional sporting activity, further strengthens the benefits of the proposed development.

- 9 Ōhoka is a very attractive place to live for a broad range of people from couples, families to retirees, and the staged development over an up to 10-year period can be phased with market demand.
- 10 Concerns expressed about the scale of the proposal being too large and going against the village character can be successfully addressed by the carefully composed and comprehensive design features of the proposal. Ōhoka is shown to have the historical basis and current character and form to accommodate the proposal in a positive way.

RESPONSE TO SUBMITTER EVIDENCE

- 11 Responding to the urban design evidence of Richard Knott on behalf of the Waimakariri District Council, I believe it is fundamentally important to have a solid understanding of the definitions of key terms such as “urban” and “village” to avoid the discussion being one of varying opinions.
- 12 I note that subsequent to Mr Knott’s visit to the site and his earlier concerns (2 August 2022) for certain information, in particular an illustrative masterplan and scaled cross sections etc, this has now been supplied to his satisfaction. However, Mr Knott does not then comment on the detailed street pattern and layout but instead focuses on the “overarching features” which in his view “does not reflect the character or form of the existing Ōhoka area” (paragraph 18). In doing so Mr Knott’s urban design review is limited in the level of detail that it assesses and tends therefore towards a planning assessment.
- 13 Mr Knott in his summary stresses the “urban” nature of the proposed plan change and suggests that Ōhoka is not an urban environment and not planned to be, and therefore the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (*NPS-UD*) is not relevant to the plan change. I defer to the planning and legal analysis provided for the applicant on this matter, however reiterate my evidence in chief which provides an assessment of the consistency of the proposal with the relevant parts of the NPS-UD.
- 14 In regards to the definition of village, Mr Knott has not discussed what determines village character in preference to the suggestion that what maintains a village is what currently exists (paragraph 32). He appears to suggest it is not possible to design to retain or enhance rural village character. As I have outlined above, and in detail in my evidence in chief, in my view the carefully composed and comprehensive design features of the proposal will both maintain and enhance the current Ōhoka village character. That indeed is the essence of urban design; the ability to create by carefully considered design positive urban environments from small centres through to cities .

- 15 Mr Knott also relies heavily on Policy 18.1.1.9 in the Operative Waimakariri District Plan when considering rural village character, specifically with reference to a "low-density living environment". I understand that **Mr Walsh** will address this matter from a planning perspective. From an urban design perspective, my response is that density and lot size does not determine rural village character, the assessment is necessarily broader and contextual. Further, the proposal incorporates comprehensive landscape treatment to address the interface of the site with the surrounding area, consistent with the landscape treatment of existing residential activity. In my view, this is also an important contributing factor to maintaining the current character.
- 16 Under his section on whether there are 'fundamental flaws with the existing village such that the development proposed by PC31 is critical', Mr Knott suggests that poor connectivity, a lack of a core and incohesive layout are in fact positive factors that "offer an alternative to urban living" (paragraph 41). He also believes that the success of the Ōhoka Farmers market is not its regional centrality and local facilities but his opinion that it is "more likely illustrative of the success of local enterprise and current desire of consumers to purchase locally produced goods" (paragraph 43). This suggests that the Ōhoka Farmers Market could be located anywhere and be just as successful. In my view, the farmers market is a specifically located embryonic activity which maintains and grows a diversity of commercial suppliers and services for Ōhoka. I consider that improved connectivity, a central core and a more cohesive layout are well-accepted factors that will contribute positive urban design outcomes for Ōhoka.
- 17 In his final point, Mr Knott also believes that "PC31 is not a natural extension to Ōhoka: it is essentially a new town within the rural area". However, in my view Mr Knott's review is limited to that of population numbers rather than the concentric urban form of Ōhoka that is mapped and described in my evidence in chief. Mr Knott also suggests the garage/diary on Mill Street is sufficient for daily needs, which I do not consider to be the case for existing or future Ōhoka residents.
- 18 As a final comment, I note that I consider Mr Knott's dismissal of my comparison of the proposal to Matakana village is flawed. There has been actually a fourfold increase in the population of Matakana (not threefold), only limited by wastewater capacity. Further, Matakana prior to the creation of the 'village' had only two shops fronting the 'mainstreet' (a general store and a hardware). I maintain the position in my evidence in chief that it is a useful and illuminating comparison.

CONCLUSION

- 19 I appreciate PC31 requires somewhat of a stretch in terms of a vision against many of the earlier planning strategies but altogether the urban design merits of the proposal are strong and compelling,

providing for much needed diverse residential growth in an attractive historic rural centre while developing the opportunities for environmental enhancement. The proposal provides for the efficient utilisation of infrastructure to achieve a sustainable urban centre and a growth outcome that supports existing towns in the broader Waimakariri District and contributes to a well-functioning urban area.

- 20 Overall, I believe the proposal is highly supportable from an urban design perspective.

Dated: 3 August 2023

Garth James Falconer