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Waimakariri District — Proposed District Plan Hearings

Stream 10A: Future Development Areas

ŌHOKA Residents Association (ORA) submitting in opposition to Rolleston Industrial Development Limited (RIDL) submissions 160 (PPC31) and 237 (rezoning existing village strip) [specifically in relation to the proposed rezoning of the 155ha land parcel bounded by Whites, Mill and Bradleys Roads]

I stand before you today, not as a town planner and nor as a lawyer intending to argue specific clauses in the RMA or the NPS-UD — as the RIDL team would have us all do... to become so consumed in the detail, so tightly focused on the minutia, that we lose sight of the bigger issue that is at stake here. I stand before you as just an ordinary person, a proud member of the Ōhoka community who has taken the time, like so many others, to read through the legislation and who, as a layperson, can see that this proposal does not stack up on many, many points.

I believe that I speak for the vast, vast majority of the Ōhoka community in what I am about to say. My message to the panel is this...

We live in a democracy. The fundamental principle of the democratic process is that the **will of the majority** prevails over the **whims of the minority**. We elect our representatives and, by extension, we appoint our public servants on faith that they will carry out their duties in accordance with these principles.

The panel will be aware that this hearing today, is running in parallel to the Request for Plan Change RPC31, where the will of the majority have already expressed their unequivocal and emphatic opposition to this proposal, with a total of 619 submissions who were outright opposed compared with a paltry 7 submissions in favour. The Council too, opposed RPC31 but chose to divulge their decision-making responsibilities to a panel of independent commissioners who also ruled emphatically against this proposal.

There is a recurring theme here and yet RIDL are determined to drag this through the Environment Court. The Ōhoka community, through the Ōhoka Residents Association (ORA), have lodged a section 274 and intend to be a Party to Proceedings, and are confident that once again, sanity will prevail and, the Environment Court will also reject this preposterous proposal outright. In expressing its opposition, the Ōhoka Residents Association is just one voice in a chorus of opposition along with Waimakariri District Council, ECan, Christchurch City Council, Ōhoka Rural Drainage Advisory Group, Ministry of Education, Ōhoka-Oxford Community Board, Waka Kotahi, Kaiapoi-Tuahiwi Community Board, Vodafone NZ... to name just the major players.

We do not stand here before you to argue that North Canterbury does not need any further housing development, nor that Ōhoka should be frozen in time, forever more. Rather, we stand before the panel to argue, as any reasonable person would, that any future development, **anywhere**, should be both appropriate and proportional. And on these points RPC31 fails demonstrably.

If this development, or anything close to the scale suggested by RPC31, were to go ahead, it would irrevocably destroy the character of Ōhoka and by extension, the amenity value enjoyed by those who call Ōhoka home and have invested their livelihoods in it. That is not how you build a community — it is how you divide a community.

I have no doubt that the RIDL team will argue in their submission tomorrow, that their proposal is the solution to an alleged housing supply-demand imbalance. They will no doubt argue that by approving RPC31 that any medium-term shortfall in the housing supply in North Canterbury (real or fabricated) will be solved. And when RIDL do make that case, it is worth remembering that housing supply and housing demand [locally, regionally, and nationally] are in constant flux; it has been for the past 150 years and will continue to be so for the next 150 years and beyond, which why it is so important that planners take a long term strategic view to regional planning and to not be distracted by false promises and short sighted solutions.

The RIDL team will no doubt argue that there is no other land available to meet the medium housing supply needs of the Waimakariri District. What they really mean is that there is no other land available that they, RIDL, have an option on and, that offers the potential profits as the land cited in RPC31.

Through this application, RIDL are looking to hi-jack the planning process by fabricating a housing crisis and simultaneously proposing a solution to a non-existent problem.

Thankfully, we have a robust planning process, underpinned by legislation that provides Territorial Authorities with the necessary guardrails so as not to be held to ransom by the whims of individual developers.

The National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) sets out very clear guidelines on how Territorial Authorities should plan for population growth into the future. It recognises the need for a paradigm shift in the way NZ urban environments evolve, moving away from the traditional urban sprawl (i.e., low hanging fruit) and moving more toward high-density urban centres. The NPS-UD recognises that infrastructure, in all its many forms, is more cost effective and efficient when delivered around a concentrated population base. Towns and cities thrive when their inhabitants live and work in close proximity to the services they offer. Public transport only works when the population it services reaches a considerable critical mass.

In June 2019, after extensive community consultation, the Waimakariri District Council published the Waimakariri Rural Residential Development Strategy. In the foreword of that strategy document, the then Mayor, David Ayers, states: “This document provides an important decision-making framework that drives the future of our rural residential zones...”

He goes on to say... “It is important we carefully and appropriately plan for the growth of further rural residential development in our role as a planning authority and key service/infrastructure provider, and to ensure we continue to meet the community’s needs”.

An important point made by David Ayers in 2019 is that planning for growth is not just about providing additional housing capacity but that the Waimakariri District Council has an obligation to provide the right mix of housing opportunities to meet the needs [of those that want to live in a semi-rural setting].

RIDL argues in their proposal that this development offers greater housing choice in the Waimakariri District. In fact, it removes choice by destroying one of the very few semi-rural environments that is within easy commuting distant to Christchurch city anywhere in the Canterbury region.

The conclusion of the 2019 consultation process was to identify four areas for future rural resident expansion. These include:

- Swannanoa
- Oxford
- Ashley / Loburn
- Gressons Road (north of Woodend)

If Ōhoka wasn't one of the four areas nominated for rural residential expansion as recently as 2019 after extensive analysis and consultation, how on earth could it now, less than 5 years later be appropriate for massive intensive residential expansion. It makes a complete mockery of the planning process.

It took nearly 200 years for New Zealand's population to reach 5million. As the population grows toward the next 5 million, the burden of obligation sits with planners of today to ensure that the towns and cities of tomorrow are indeed, well-functioning urban environments.

Territorial Authorities need to resist the urge for short term solutions to long term problems and stay the course to delivering strategic planning solutions that will stand the test of time and continue to meet the needs of an ever-increasing population, both tomorrow and well into the future.

I want to make one last, but very important point on the proposed plan change RPC31. This is not about one new subdivision in a small community. If this development were to be approved, it would set the wheels in motion for further expansion north of Bradleys Road and it transform Ōhoka into yet another urban centre rivalling Kaiapoi, Oxford, Pegasus, Woodend and perhaps even Rangiora.

If the Territorial Authority planners have a vision to establish another urban centre in Waimakariri District and by extension, the wider Canterbury region, then such a decision should be made in conjunction with ALL the affected regional authorities and only after extensive public consultation. Such a decision should not be made in response to the whims of a single, opportunistic developer seeking to line his, already bulging, pockets.