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Henderson Valley

Landscape Assessment

Prepared for: **Waitakere City Council**

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Introduction

This report has been prepared to assist with Waitakere City Council's review of development issues within the Henderson Valley visual catchment. It addresses the landscape values and sensitivities of the catchment and includes identification and analysis of the Valley's:

- Landscape Features (see **Figure 1**);
- Topographic Features (**Figure 2**); and
- Landscape Character and Land Use Distribution (**Figure 3**).

These contribute to two maps, which outline a range of Landscape Sensitivity Ratings across the entire valley catchment (**Figure 4**) and the more localised and Specific Landscape Sensitivities that apply to particular parts of it (**Figure 5**).

The report is also accompanied by **Figures 6A – 6I** which contain photos depicting different parts of Henderson Valley and its immediate periphery.

The initial analysis of Landscape Features and Topographic Features is largely self-explanatory and involves broad delineation of both based on observations in the field, together with the use of aerial photography. Defining features within Henderson Valley are its:

- primary (central) and secondary valley systems, contained by ridges and ridge spurs that feed back into the main slopes and hill country of the Waitakere Ranges;
- the permeation of bush down from the Ranges and through the valley corridors, following local stream courses and escarpments; and
- the Opanuku, Anamata, Driving and Stony Creek Streams, together with smaller tributaries.

These key 'structuring elements' of the natural landscape, together with the distribution of man-made structures and activities across the Valley – from the local primary school, Superb Herbs enterprise, and Kiwi Valley to vineyards, rural-residential development and more conventional suburban pockets – all contribute to its visible Landscape / Land Use Character. Moreover, these elements contribute to the character, identity / sense of place and perceived value of Henderson Valley, which is the main focus of this report.

Assessment of Landscape Sensitivity

Turning therefore to the relative Sensitivity of different parts of the valley system to landscape change, potentially including new development, subdivision and residential intensification, other factors also have to be taken into account. These relate to how landscapes are perceived and how the community attaches values to them; they are also bound up in the amenity associated with different parts of the valley catchment. Consequently, while Figure 4, in particular, summarises the 'on-the-ground' evaluation of values that give rise to different levels of sensitivity, it is underpinned by a much more complex matrix of factors associated with Landscape and Amenity.

Landscape Values

Section 6(b) of the Resource Management Act identifies "*The protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development*" as a matter of national importance. The so called 'modified Pigeon Bay' factors, that emerged in the findings of the Environment Court in the *Pigeon Bay Aquaculture Limited v Canterbury Regional Council* case and subsequent *Wakatipu Environmental Society Inc v Queenstown Lakes District Council* cases, are now largely accepted as a starting point for the identification of such landscapes:

- a) *natural science factors: the geological, topographical, ecological and dynamic components of the landscape;*
- b) *aesthetic values including memorability and naturalness;*
- c) *expressiveness (legibility): how obviously the landscape demonstrates the formative processes leading to it;*
- d) *transient values: occasional presence of wildlife; or its values at certain times of the day or of the year;*
- e) *whether values are shared and recognised;*
- f) *the landscape's value to tangata whenua;*

(g) *its historical associations.*

At the very least they provide a comprehensive check list of landscape 'layers' that may or should be addressed in making determinations about the relative values to be attributed particular landscapes.

Adopting a somewhat different tack in relation to the identification of highly valued landscapes, Prof. Simon Swaffield and John Fairweather (of Lincoln University) have also undertaken extensive research into New Zealanders attitudes towards different landscapes in various parts of New Zealand (from 1997 onwards). This included participation in the 2002 – 2004 assessment of the Auckland Region's landscape. An analysis of those studies, ranging from Kaikoura in 1998 through to the Auckland Region in 2004¹ reveals a remarkable degree of consistency in the appreciation of, and attachment of values to, New Zealand's landscapes, based on repeated "Q Sort" testing of public attitudes to a wide range of landscapes and landscape types. As a result, Swaffield and Fairweather have identified two main paradigms that help to explain most New Zealanders' responses to landscape and their assignment of values to different types of landscape. The '*wild nature*' paradigm, repeatedly identified in their research, is strongly correlated with the native endemic character of landscape scenes and the predominance of natural elements and patterns within them. The second, '*cultured nature*' paradigm, is more accepting of exotic vegetation and productive rural uses, but again shows a strong aversion to obvious signs of development and buildings in the landscape.

Whereas the range of landscape factors or variables identified in the Pigeon Bay and WESI cases establish a platform for more detailed 'expert based' examination of biophysical and perceptual landscape values, the 'Swaffield studies' focus upon landscape perception and evaluation in a holistic sense. Notwithstanding this, the public preference testing has led to the identification of a number of key landscape 'traits' that consistently correlate with high preference, including those found in most outstanding landscapes:

- Naturalness - correlated with apparent levels of development or lack of development
- Endemic Values / 'NZness' (related to sense of place)
- Strong Landscape Structure - related to landform & the interaction of land with sea / water
- Strong Landscape Patterns - typically related to vegetation and land uses
- Visual Drama (memorability)
- Visual Diversity

Many of the modified Pigeon Bay factors appear to substantially correlate with these 'criteria', especially in terms of *Natural Science Factors, Aesthetic Values, Expressiveness, and Shared and Recognised Values.*

Amenity Values

Section 7(c) of the Resource Management Act states that those exercising power under the Act shall have regard to (among other matters) "*The maintenance and enhancement of amenity values*". Such values are defined as being "*those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes*".

¹ *Public Perceptions of Outstanding natural Landscapes In The Auckland Region, Research Report No. 273, John R Fairweather, Simon R Swaffield, David G Simmons. 2004*

Understanding Visitors' Experiences In Kaikoura Using Photographs Of Landscapes & Q Sort. Report No. 5. John R Fairweather, Simon R Swaffield, David G Simmons. 1998

Understanding Visitors' And Locals' Experiences Of Rotorua Using Photographs Of Landscapes & Q Sort. Report No. 13. John R Fairweather, Simon R Swaffield, David G Simmons. 2000

Visitors' And Locals' Experiences Of Westland, New Zealand. Report No.23. John Fairweather, Bronwyn Newton, Simon R Swaffield, David G Simmons. 2001

Public Perceptions Of Natural And Modified Landscapes Of The Coromandel Peninsula, New Zealand. Research Report No. 241. John R Fairweather, Simon R Swaffield. October 1999

Whereas landscape is often associated with the sort of parameters already described and a sense of spectacle or memorable expression, the concept of “amenity” is associated with a certain cohesion of expression and unity of elements that gives rise to a locality or landscape being considered ‘pleasant’, ‘aesthetically cohesive’ and having cultural or recreational appeal. For example, rural amenity has more to do with an area’s unity and consistency of character than how natural, endemic or structured and patterned it is (although legible, repeated patterns – such as those of stands of trees or repeated landforms – may, of course, contribute to visual continuity).

More pragmatically, and with particular reference to domestic / residential activities and values, amenity also relates to the appreciation of privacy and the protection of private space, avoidance of over-dominance by other activities and buildings, and the avoidance of excessive over-shadowing.

Local Landscape Values In this Context

Henderson Valley has been evaluated with regard to these various factors. This results in a very clear demarcation or ‘subdivision’ of the catchment into five broad subsidiary landscapes that display different levels of sensitivity to modification and further development (Figure 4). The following section contains more detailed description of the landscapes that relate to each sensitivity level, the factors that contribute to their ratings and discussion of the potential for future development within each:

Very High Sensitivity

Description:

This classification covers the predominantly bush covered slopes of the Waitakere Ranges that merge relatively seamlessly with Centennial Memorial Park, and which are so important because they are part of a much wider repository of natural features, elements, processes and patterns. This area is largely defined by the continuity and cohesion of that cover, together with the steeply contoured and incised nature of its terrain; however, it also captures pockets of pasture and residential activity that remain within the ‘bush’ margins of the Ranges, including most of the Welsh Hills through to the main valley west of Grassmere Rd, and more elevated parts of the forest landscape around Forest Hill Rd. It extends to the edge of the historic pocket of suburban residential development on Grassmere Rd, at the foot of Mountain Rd and around lower Opanuku Rd, but does not include that residential area. It does, however, encompass the bush blocks up Opanuku Rd itself and Mountain Rd.

Factors Affecting Sensitivity:

The physical continuity of the bush cover and the relative absence of obvious development – buildings and structures. Although in some locations, especially near the Welsh Hills, lower Opanuku Rd and Forest Hill Rd, the bush cover becomes fragmented in places and sporadic residential development is visible, the native forest retains its coherence and overall primacy. The landscape has a prevailing feeling of being natural and dominated by elements that lend it a distinctively New Zealand / Waitakere feeling.

Development Potential:

Very limited: any development has the potential to incrementally erode the essential character and values of part of the Ranges’ forest apron. Although the use of micro-siting, careful design, natural materials and other mitigation measures can limit the direct effects of new development, the construction of new housing, driveways and domestic curtelage – together with residential

activities and longer term, 'edge effects' – still contributes to an incremental erosion of those characteristics that are central to the appeal of Centennial Memorial Park and the Waitakere Ranges.

High Sensitivity

Description:

Areas of high sensitivity are focused upon two key types of landscape and feature:

- Those stream corridors, escarpments, steeply sloping land and areas of remnant bush that imbue the valley system and its flanking ridges with a strong feeling naturalness and endemic character – linking the middle and lower reaches of the Valley with the nearby Waitakeres. Locations and features displaying such characteristics include most of the Opanuku, Anamata, Driving and Stony Creek Stream corridors, the Opanuku Stream escarpment and the bush covered slopes near Isabel Drive. The Opanuku Stream escarpment is particularly notable, as it's bush cover extends from the Waitakere Ranges proper to the Metropolitan Urban Limit at Henderson Valley Rd and Sturges Rd.
- A broad ridge located north of Forest Hill Rd, bisecting Henderson Valley south-east of Gum Rd and the local primary school. This ridge currently reveals a reasonably appealing mixture of pasture and forest remnants spread across its broad rural, mantle. Moreover, it effectively subdivides the main valley system into two sub-catchments – to the west and east of it – and is visually prominent in relation to both.

Factors Affecting Sensitivity:

The continuity of bush cover down the stream corridors, down the Opanuku Stream escarpment and below Isabel Drive. The last two features are also elevated, affording focal-points for the valley catchments and local communities that are located in their vicinity and look toward them. The residual bands of bush following the stream corridors are also important as they highlight the presence of these courses and act as points of linkage for other remnant pockets of bush, and even amenity planting, up and down the wider valley system. Consequently, they are important linking features that contribute to the perception of a wider landscape that is still natural to an appreciable extent. This sensitivity level is also attributed to the elevated, bush-clad slopes that afford a relatively natural backdrop to Lake Panorama next to Lake Panorama Drive.

The broad mantle of elevated rural land between the primary school and Forest Hill Rd displays significant sensitivity in quite a different manner, however: its elevated form acts as a point of visual focus when looking up and down the main valley system – from the valley sub-catchment framed by Gum, Grassmere and Forest Hill Roads west of the ridge, and from another sub-catchment delimited by Henderson Valley Rd, Pine Ave and Forest Hill Rd to the east. The rounded, convex topography of this land tends to reinforce the likely exposure and impact of any development on it in relation to both of these sub-catchments. Although development in some locations might be partially screened or visually recessed by careful placement in the 'nooks and crannies' of its slopes, the potential for approximately 30 new houses on this major feature (at present under the current DP provisions) would

inevitably affect perception of the wider valley landscape to a significant degree.

Development
Potential:

Development potential in relation to the various stream corridors, escarpments and bush remnants identified is very limited, if only because of the physically constrained, often tenuous nature of these strands of bush and landforms. Even below Isabel Drive, where the mantle of remnant and re-emergent bush broadens out very appreciably, care needs to be taken with the siting, design and finishing of any new development. Again, the primacy of the forest / shrubland cover in this sector needs to be preserved.

Across the broad ridge stretching from Forest Hill Rd to Henderson Valley Rd traditional large-lot, 'checkerboard' subdivision, and/or even more sporadic rural-residential development, has the potential to create the feeling of a large tract of low density suburbia intruding into Henderson Valley. Whereas much of the existing development within Henderson Valley is located in relatively discreet, low lying, pockets that are enclosed by the surrounding terrain and vegetation, any new development across this ridge would be much more exposed and might well visually concertina together when viewed from other parts of the valley system. This would detract from the naturalness and rural character / amenity of the sub-catchments that it bisects and the valley as a whole. Consequently, while the mitigation measures described above might well help to reduce such effects to a degree, the fundamental openness of much of this ridge feature appears likely to result in a high level of change and impact in relation to much of the main valley (viewed both from 'within' and Forest Hill Rd on its southern edge). The only realistic means of addressing such effects is via a Large Property Management Area plan, or similar, that might well involve:

- location of all development off all ridge edges that are clearly exposed to the catchments either side of the feature
- careful consolidation / clustering and micro-siting of development
- integration of development with existing remnant bush and other existing planting
- creation of a new spine of planting along the main ridge to create a new skyline backdrop to development and compartmentalise it
- linkage of driveway access to that spine and minimisation of lateral driveways running across exposed slopes
- adoption of the sort of 'design and appearance' mitigation already described

Elevated Sensitivity

Description:

This sensitivity category captures most of Henderson Valley and relates to those parts of it that retain a predominantly rural to rural-residential character. Within the areas identified as displaying this level of sensitivity development and structures remain generally subordinate to the wider array of natural landforms and vegetation that 'glue' the Valley together. These elements – mostly bush remnants – continue to lend the landscape strong feelings of naturalness and endemic character, but also contribute to the rural nature of

much of the catchment (even allowing for the presence of more historic suburban 'pockets' in some locations). This description generally applies to most of the central and lower parts of the main valley catchment, together with the subsidiary / side valleys west of Candia Rd and north of the lower 'half' of Forest Hill Rd (west of Pine Ave).

As such, it also relates to areas that provide important counterbalance and counterpoint to existing residential pockets; for example, in the vicinity of Grassmere Rd and lower Opanuku Rd. Just as important, however, it affords contrast with, and respite from, Henderson's metropolitan urban area ending at Henderson Valley Rd and Sturges Rd.

In other words, although this sector is important in its own right because of its internal rural / rural-residential ambience and connection with the nearby Waitakere Ranges, it is also an area of transition between metropolitan Auckland and the Ranges. Presently, that transition is quite hard and, in places – such as around Henderson Valley Rd – seemingly rather arbitrary.

Factors Affecting
Sensitivity:

Its integrity is reliant upon a consistency and continuity of pastoral areas, bush pockets, stream courses and shelterbelts that, together, ensure a fundamentally different environment from that found within adjoining suburban areas. Other qualities, such as spaciousness and openness – within and between residential properties in conjunction with (generally) limited intensity of development – reinforce the fundamentally rural to rural-residential, as opposed to suburban, nature of the Valley. Consequently, any new / additional development is likely to contribute to a gradual, even insidious erosion of such values.

This includes fringe areas around the historic suburban pocket within and near Grassmere Rd, as well as some areas close to Henderson Valley, Sturges and Forest Hill Road. At each of these locations, views to areas of pastoral open space and bush are significant, eg. such as the grassed ridgeline at the end of the visual axis down Henderson Valley Rd when approaching the Pine Ave intersection from the east, and the combination of pasture and bush that directly encloses Grassmere Rd.

Development
Potential:

Ultimately, any further development will erode the rural character and residual naturalness of the valley catchment. Having said this, it is clear that the valley floors, lower lying valley side-slopes and parts of the catchment that are more heavily vegetated offer the potential for some additional intensification and development whilst protecting / retaining the intrinsic character of most of Henderson Valley. However, this potential drops off rapidly as the terrain climbs towards the more elevated margins of Forest Hill Rd, Coulter Rd, Candia Rd and Sturges Rd. It also diminishes as one approaches the primary school, leaving behind the more modified and commercialised landscape of Kiwi Valley, Pleasant Valley Winery, plant nursery and other activities that line the upper reaches of Henderson Valley Rd. Indeed, the potential for a ribbon of commercial development to follow that road corridor into the heart of the Valley, and to start changing it 'from within', is significant.

In a related vein, while there may be some potential for some realignment of residential intensities near the MUL boundary, responding to the presence of features such as the Opanuku Stream escarpment, the sensitivity of the valley

catchment to urban creep over time, suggests that a hard edge should be maintained between town and country. This implies that features that help to visually define Henderson's urban edge (such as the ridge at the end of the Henderson Valley Rd viewshaft and the ridge 'end' to Sturges Rd) should be protected from further intensification. Similarly, the rural setting and surrounds that enclose the Grassmere Rd suburban enclave should be retained and delimited much as at present to conserve the present counterpoint between residential and rural areas.

Limited Sensitivity

Description:

This rating applies to a relatively small part of the central valley floor between the primary school and Grassmere Rd that is already significantly modified and developed, but which are so contained by existing landforms and vegetation. As a result, the present structures and activity in the general vicinity of the Superb Herb glasshouses have a very limited impact on the wider valley and do not adversely affect its predominantly rural to rural-residential character.

This small area is low lying and is flanked to the north by the Opanuku Stream corridor and escarpment. To the south it is enclosed by a gently rising ridge that climbs towards the end of Grassmere Rd, with a series of side-spurs reinforcing this enclosure. Bush around the Opanuku Stream and Driving Stream, together with a matrix of shelterbelts, reinforce this physical and visual containment – to the point where the Superb Herbs premises and old orchard blocks in its vicinity have very little presence or impact on their wider valley surrounds.

Factors Affecting Sensitivity:

The combination of the local landform, vegetation and low-lying valley floor suggests the potential to accommodate further development, although this area is rather elongated (following the valley's alignment) and quite constrained from north to south. It also needs to be recognised that any such development potential is substantially reliant on the retention of the existing bush and other vegetation, both within and around this part of the catchment: consequently, any removal or significant reduction in the extent of this cover would significantly affect the sensitivity to new or additional development.

Development Potential:

Although there remains some potential for development within this part of the valley catchment at present, any development that triggers removal or modification of the very vegetation, even landforms, that enclose it at present would significantly erode this potential. Consequently, development proposals need to be assessed carefully to ensure that they both maintain those elements and ensure their long term integrity. Moreover, it is essential that any such development is micro-sited and designed so as to ensure that it remains visually subservient to such elements and does not step outside this 'sphere of influence' and thus intrude into, or disrupt the wider rural / rural-residential character of its central valley setting.

Low Sensitivity

Description:

This area of lower sensitivity occupies those parts of the lower valley catchment closer to Henderson Valley Rd and Pine Avenue through to South Kensington Way and San Marino Drive off Sturges Rd. It directly abuts existing suburban residential development on the outer margins of Henderson, together with the Kiwi Valley development, Pleasant Valley Winery, Di's Plant World and other activities, have resulted in the natural values and rural character of the catchment being irreversibly compromised – to the extent that further development or intensification within these areas would have an incremental effect.

Presently, this area still retains a strong rural-residential character, even though it is exposed to, and visually interacts with, existing residential development around Pine Ave and part of Henderson Valley Rd (McLaren Park), together with development on the more elevated slopes around South Kensington Way and San Marino Drive. Although still sitting centrally within the lower valley corridor, this part of Henderson Valley does not exhibit the same degree of rural character and naturalness as the bulk of the catchment.

Factors Affecting Sensitivity:

In addition to being affected by a number of existing commercial operations and the interaction with adjoining suburban areas, this area lacks the spectacle and sense of connection with the Waitakere Ranges that is apparent further up the Valley. Moreover, the current MUL edge appears slightly arbitrary and fails to directly relate to, or reference, local landscape features, such as the Opanuku Stream corridor and escarpment, or area of bush climbing up the Sturges Rd ridge from that stream course.

Conversely, as already indicated, further commercial development straddling Henderson Valley Rd has the potential to create a ribbon of development that starts to 'roll back' the more overtly rural and rural-residential parts of Henderson Valley. Just as important, overly intensive residential occupation of the valley floor has the potential to diminish the relative spaciousness and inter-dwelling separation that remains a key amenity attribute of the existing rural-residential development within this part of the Valley.

Development Potential:

Consequently, while the area of lower sensitivity indicated would accommodate some intensification within part of the catchment that is defined by both existing commercial uses and local landscape features, care is required to ensure that such intensification retains a large lot ambience and avoids compromising the rural-residential character of the Valley overall. As a result, it is considered that any such intensification should still fall within the rural-residential range of 1.0ha to (preferably) 2.0ha lots. Furthermore, development may have to be subject to Large Property Management Area plans, or similar, to ensure that:

- the integrity of the Opanuku Stream and escarpment are maintained
- the Stream's flood plain is avoided
- development avoids the appearance of being suburban in character
- the current matrix of shelterbelts and small bush pockets is protected as much as possible.

In drawing these distinctions between areas subject to different Sensitivity and Development Potential levels, it is recognised that all parts of the valley system and Waitakere foothills have been modified to some degree. As such, the entire Valley comprises a cultural landscape to some extent. However, there is a very clear gradation of landscape character, values and sensitivities that broadly correlates with the transition from the edge of metropolitan Auckland and suburban Henderson into the margins, then forest, of the Waitakere Ranges.

In addition, some locations described and discussed display sensitivity because they are elevated and exposed to large parts of the surrounding valley catchment – to the point where any significant development on those key ridges / slopes would visually affect surrounding areas and permeate through the wider valley, potentially affecting public perception of Henderson Valley as a whole.

At a slightly more fine-grained level, local ridges define and interact with 'contained valleys' or sub-catchments within the larger valley system (see **Figure 6**). As a result, some ridges – such as that south-east of Gum Rd, as well as around Isabel Drive and parts of Forest Hill Rd – exhibit higher than 'average' sensitivity because they are clearly exposed to the 'contained valleys' that they face and surround. Other slopes and ridges, such as those that form the western backdrop to lake Panorama and that lie at the end of the main viewing axis down Henderson Valley Rd (approaching Pine Ave from Henderson) are also important as they clearly signal the transition from town into country.

In a slightly different vein, the lower valley slopes and valley floors within the sub-catchments just discussed often display significant sensitivity in their own right, simply because they have an intimate character and are overlooked from surrounding slopes, ridges and spurs.

Conclusions

Based on this assessment, any significant change within a large part of the Valley corridor would be clearly exposed to other local residents, motorists and visitors. Moreover, the fundamental importance of naturalness, endemic value and rural character to Henderson Valley's current identity means that, apart from within the spatially quite restricted areas of Limited and Low Sensitivity identified, there is little potential for significant development and residential intensification to occur without modification of the wider valley. Even careful management of residential location, extent, design and appearance, the infiltration of further development up Henderson Valley is still likely to erode its core values to some extent, simply because the very essence of its present natural / rural / rural-residential character is so reliant upon maintaining open space, vegetation, stream corridors and bush remnants between buildings, structures and residential (even commercial) activity. On the basis of this assessment, it would appear that most of the Valley is getting very close to the threshold at which such values will start to be seriously compromised by such change.

In the case of future development locations, such as the ridge between the primary school and Forest Hill Rd, careful and integrated management will be required to minimise such effects. This may mean that such development has to be subject to a Large Property Management Area plan.

Even within those areas that are identified as having limited to (relatively speaking) low sensitivity levels, it is important that the integrity of existing natural features and vegetation cover is maintained. From a residential perspective, it is also important that development intensity is restricted to ensure that the very spaciousness, which contributes critically to large lot amenity, is not lost. It is also important that development at such locations and elsewhere (such as in the vicinity of Grassmere Rd, Henderson Valley Rd generally and parts of Forest Hill Rd) does not compromise the clearly defined juxtaposition of 'town and country'. Ultimately, the maintenance of Henderson Valley's character and integrity – as a landscape and living environment – is highly dependant upon retention of this relatively 'hard' interface.

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