



## **INTRODUCTION**

1. My name is Lauren White.
2. I am an Urban Designer and have the following academic qualifications:
  - (a) Bachelor of Architectural Studies
  - (b) Master of City Planning and Urban Design
3. I am Director of Urban Acumen Ltd, which I established in 2020 to provide urban design services to a range of public and private sector clients. Prior to this, I worked in a number of large multi-disciplinary consultancies, including GHD and Harrison Grierson.
4. I have approximately 25 years' experience, the last 17 of which have been in New Zealand. I have had experience in numerous medium density housing developments, private plan changes and design review and advice processes. My current workload is almost exclusively made up of design for new residential growth in Auckland, Christchurch and the Wellington region, in both greenfield and brownfield locations, and includes masterplanning, large residential subdivision design as well as smaller residential infill projects.
5. I am also currently engaged by the Auckland Council and Waikato District Council to provide design advice during the processing of resource consents, and through the Auckland Urban Design Panel, on which I hold a position as chair.

## **Code of conduct**

6. I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014. This assessment has been prepared in compliance with that Code, as if it were evidence being given in Environment Court proceedings. Unless I state otherwise, this assessment is within my area of expertise and I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I express.

## **Background and role**

7. I have been involved in the Project since September 2021 when the applicant engaged me to provide design advice on the initial design concept prepared

by DGSE. Since that time, I have continued to contribute to the evolution of the design to ensure good urban design outcomes are achieved.

8. I have visited the proposed site of the Project on two occasions, initially early in the design development stage (late 2021) and again in September 2022. I am familiar with the general area and have recently worked on other residential projects in Paraparaumu, Plimmerton and Porirua.
9. I prepared the Urban Design Assessment report, dated February 2022, which accompanied the application for Resource Consent. Since lodgement of the application, and in response to feedback from Council officers (Peer Review of Urban Design Considerations by Boffa Miskell dated 9 June 2022) and submissions from neighbours, I collaborated with project designers at DGSE to amend the proposal.
10. I subsequently prepared a supplementary report, Interface Assessment and Proposed Design Amendments, dated September 2022, which details the conditions along the interface with adjacent dwellings, the proposed design amendments and consequential urban design outcomes.
11. In preparing my evidence I have:
  - (a) reviewed the current plans by DGSE, dated 5 October 2022;
  - (b) (re)read the submissions received from neighbours; and
  - (c) read the Council's Section 42A report, including the statement of evidence by Miriam Moore, urban designer at Boffa Miskell.

### **Purpose and scope of the evidence**

12. The purpose of my evidence is to:
  - (a) summarise the key urban design outcomes of the proposal (both as lodged and as amended following Council feedback and submissions);
  - (b) Respond to urban design matters raised in submissions, namely potential effects on wider context/character as well as adjacent properties and the amenity and functionality of the proposed dwellings; and
  - (c) Respond to Council's Section 42A report which includes a statement of evidence by Emma McRae and Miriam Moore addressing urban design matters.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

13. The site presents an opportunity to establish a new medium density neighbourhood with a strong identity and sense of community focussed around a shared central open space. It promotes sustainability through its overall density, encourages active travel modes and contributes positively to the streetscape of Kapiti Road.
14. The proposal is the result of an integrated multi-disciplinary design process during which urban design advice has been sought and adopted. Potential negative effects associated with visual character, dominance and privacy are limited, namely to immediate/adjoining properties and these informed the overall layout, massing and architectural design and detailing.
15. Following lodgement of the resource consent application, and in response to peer review and submissions, subsequent design iterations have further minimised potential negative effects on the surrounding residents.
16. In my opinion, the proposal provides housing in a convenient and accessible location, balances density and amenity and successfully manages the interface with the adjacent residential environment. It has a scale and mass appropriate for its context and exhibits good urban design outcomes associated with contemporary medium density housing.

## **SUMMARY OF URBAN DESIGN OUTCOMES**

### **General**

17. The site presents a rare and good opportunity to accommodate a masterplanned residential development. Its large size, regular shape and relatively limited interface with adjoining properties provides the ability to establish an efficient new “micro – community” with a strong identity.
18. The proposed design offers the following positive high level urban design outcomes:
  - (a) it provides for a more sustainable use of a significant land resource in close proximity/walkable distance of cycle and public transport infrastructure, a supermarket and community services;
  - (b) it extends the range of living options in the wider neighbourhood, includes a variety of housing designs and promotes housing affordability;

- (c) the overall layout of the development is logical and legible, and all units have a clear sense of address from a functional and safe internal movement network for vehicles and pedestrians;
  - (d) the development promotes walking and cycling and prioritises housing over garaging by utilising car parks;
  - (e) the development makes a positive contribution to Kapiti Road through strong built form and active frontages which contribute to visual interest and real and perceived safety along the road;
  - (f) the inclusion of a functional central open space provides a new focus/heart for the community, encourages social interaction, and provides additional recreation opportunities for residents with compact private outdoor spaces; and
  - (g) a balance between residential density/yield and potential visual dominance, loss of privacy and sunlight access on adjacent properties.
19. The development utilises house designs which are compact, efficient and typical of many medium density developments being planned and delivered in cities and towns across New Zealand. They offer an opportunity for a variety of people to be part of the Paraparaumu community.
20. The architecture is contemporary and visually interesting while maintaining a limited and coherent material and colour palette. It uses design features such as cantilevers, screens and colour to provide visual interest. All front doors are clearly visible from the street and front facades have large windows at first floor level which provide passive surveillance of the circulation and recreation spaces.
21. Landscaping softens the parking areas and adds amenity to pedestrian routes and the central park area.

## **RESPONSE TO SUBMISSIONS**

22. I have reviewed all seven submissions received in opposition to the proposal. With respect to urban design matters, these submissions address:
- (a) Appropriate contextual response;
  - (b) Potential effects on adjoining properties; and
  - (c) Internal amenity of proposed units.

## Contextual Response

23. Six of the seven submissions oppose the development on the grounds that it is inconsistent with, and therefore inappropriate for, the existing context.
24. The New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (Ministry for the Environment, 2015) <sup>1</sup> identifies context and character as two key urban design qualities which contribute to high quality urban design. While it recommends that development *“recognises and builds on landscape context and character”* and *“ensures each development fits in and enhances its surroundings”* it also recognises that *“towns and cities are part of a constantly evolving relationship between people, land, culture and the wider environment”* and that quality urban design *“takes a long term view”, “understands the social, cultural, and economic context as well as physical elements and relationships”* and that *“character is dynamic and evolving, not static”*.
25. I acknowledge that the proposed development utilises a two storey terraced house typology that is not typical in the immediate context. This typology does, however, contribute to greater choice of living options, which is also a key quality identified by the NZ Urban Design Protocol which promotes *“diversity and choice in urban form....and choice in densities and building types.....to ensure urban environments provide opportunities for all”*.
26. The immediate context of the site is described in detail in the Interface Assessment and Design Amendments Report (September 2022). The site’s context is comprised of both the wider environment as well as the immediate adjoining properties. With respect to the wider surrounding environment, the site is relatively contained as the Kapiti Road frontage is the only frontage which will be perceived by the wider community. The context and character of Kapiti Road is shown to be varied and includes several different non-residential uses as well as higher density developments such as apartments. As such, and in my opinion, the proposal cannot be deemed to be “out of character” with its wider context.
27. Indeed, from an urban design perspective, I consider the proposal to make a positive long term change to Kapiti Road and the wider context due to:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/urban-design/protocol/>

- (a) its scale and form which is appropriate for this wide busy road which has a variety of built form associated with a variety of land uses, including an airport, big box retail, and commercial activity;
  - (b) the spatial definition of the road it provides given the open space on the western/airport side;
  - (c) the active frontage provided by many front doors and habitable room windows which provide passive surveillance (and real and perceived safety);
  - (d) the visual interest it delivers through architectural and landscaping design;
  - (e) the retention of the pohutukawa trees along the road berm which assist with visual integration and reflect the proposed building height; and
  - (f) the absence of car parking and driveway crossings which promote pedestrian and cycle safety and comfort and allow for on-street car parking.
28. The immediate/adjacent residential context is characterised by single and double storey detached dwellings, generally on 600 to 700sqm sites. To the north of the site, the sites are smaller (around 350sqm excluding access space) and include a number of “rear lots” which increase the density of the original subdivision/block. No.’s 2E and 2F Cedar Drive are a duplex typology. No 4 Cedar Drive (approximate area 2700sqm) contains seven dwellings with an approximate gross density of one unit per 400sqm.
29. Dwellings vary in size/scale with single storey houses often reaching lengths of over 25m (e.g. 2 Halsey Grove). No 8 Regent Drive is double storey and 14 Regent Drive is currently adding a second storey.
30. The Seven Oaks Retirement Village to the north of Cedar Drive has a variety of built forms, including some that measure over 140m in length.
31. The proposed terraced blocks are all double storey and the longest block measures approximately 25m. I do not consider their bulk and mass to be significantly different from adjacent residential development, the residents of which will only perceive two or three blocks at a time. All proposed dwellings easily comply with maximum permitted building height.

32. In summary, it is my opinion that the proposal presents a positive change to the wider context and character of Paraparaumu, providing greater choice and promoting more efficient use of land and existing infrastructure (including public transport).

### **Interface with Adjacent Properties – General**

33. The development adjoins existing dwellings on three sides, namely on the north-west, north-east and south-east boundaries. A detailed assessment of the existing and future conditions along these boundaries is included in the Interface Assessment and Design Amendments report (September 2022).
34. I note that the proposal does not infringe maximum permitted building height and has only minor height recession plane infringements along these boundaries (Units 20 and 23).
35. There are a number of conditions along these interfaces that are advantageous for the development with respect to limiting potential negative effects of visual dominance, privacy and sunlight access on adjoining residents, namely:
- (a) With the potential exception of 2 Halsey Grove, adjacent dwellings do not have primary entries or exits which adjoin the boundaries of the site and therefore retain the same general sense of address and identity;
  - (b) Existing dwellings along the north-western boundary generally orientate primary internal and external living spaces away from the boundary towards the north to maximise sunlight and this minimises any potential overlooking of living spaces from upper floors of new dwellings in the proposed development;
  - (c) The number of dwellings along the north-east boundary which have private open spaces with views towards the development is limited (five) and these outdoor spaces also generally orientate towards the north;
  - (d) Dwellings along the north-western and north-eastern boundaries are not shaded by the development between (at least) 9am and 3pm all year round; and
  - (e) The three existing dwellings along the south-eastern boundary are located at a higher level (varies between 1 and 3m adjacent to 5 and 5a



Langdale Ave) than the future dwellings and this reduces potential visual dominance and shading on those outdoor spaces.

36. Given the above conditions, it is my opinion that the site is well suited to medium density development and the potential impacts on adjacent neighbours can be managed (see further detail below) and are generally anticipated within suburban residential environments such as this.

### **Interface with Adjacent Properties – Bulk and Visual Dominance**

37. With respect to potential visual impact of the development on adjacent neighbours, the architectural design employs a number of features which assist in reducing perceived bulk and mass including:
- (a) Using different unit types in each terrace block (at least three in each block) which creates some visual interest and reduces repetitive pattern;
  - (b) Cantilevered upper floors which create further variation and shadows on the facades;
  - (c) Protruding window screens which also add interest and dimension; and
  - (d) Colour variation which visually divides the terraced blocks and visually reduces bulk/mass.
38. However, in response to recommendations raised by the Boffa Miskell peer review and some of the submitters with respect to the visual impact of the bulk and mass of the development and the potential visual dominance, a number of design amendments have been made which further assist in mitigating the potential visual impact, namely:
- (a) Adding in four more breaks in the perimeter blocks, thereby reducing the maximum length of any terrace block and reducing perceived bulk; and
  - (b) Changing the direction of roof fall on some blocks in order to vary the roof line/building height on adjacent blocks and create more variation.
39. In my opinion, the proposed design has successfully managed the potential for visual dominance on adjacent properties. Given the limited outlook towards the development of primary living areas on adjacent properties on north-west and north-east boundaries, the level change on the southern

boundary which reduces perceived building height and the design measures proposed to mitigate any potential perceived visual dominance, I support the proposal.

### **Interface with Adjacent Properties – Privacy/overlooking**

40. All proposed units have primary indoor and outdoor living spaces located at ground level which prevents any overlooking from those spaces of adjacent neighbours and potential overlooking can only be generated from bedrooms at first floor level.
41. As described above, many adjacent properties have primary internal and external living spaces which are orientated away from, or parallel to, the development.
42. In response to submissions and as recommended by the Boffa Miskell peer review, in order to reduce real and perceived overlooking and potential loss of privacy, louvres have been added to alternating rear elevations of a number of perimeter blocks on the north-east and north-west boundaries. These louvres still allow sightlines directly out from bedrooms (and light and sun in) but restrict the extent to which oblique views can be achieved, thereby reducing the number of potential sightlines towards adjacent properties and thereafter real and perceived overlooking.
43. Louvres are not proposed on rear elevations along the southern boundary as the level change and boundary fencing restricts any potential overlooking from bedroom windows.

### **Proposed Residential Amenity**

44. A number of submitters oppose the proposed housing design due to lack of storage and private outdoor space as well as the lack of provision for universal access.
45. In my experience, the proposed house designs are consistent with many recent successful medium density developments and those currently being planned and delivered. The open plan living areas and compact outdoor spaces directly accessible from the internal open plan living space offer a practical and functional lifestyle for a variety of residents.
46. Under-stair storage provides opportunity for bike storage as well as the secure rear garden space.

47. The shared outdoor space provides additional options for recreation and encourages social interaction. Disabled car parks and bike parking are also provided.

## **RESPONSE TO COUNCIL OFFICER'S SECTION 42A REPORT**

48. I note in the Section 42A report, the opinion that the visual, character and amenity effects of the proposal will be minor and acceptable and recommends the proposal is approved.
49. The expert evidence prepared by Ms Moore acknowledges that the revised design addresses a number of recommendations contained within the peer review and concludes that the proposed design amendments reduce perceived building bulk, and loss of privacy for neighbours. Overall, Ms Moore considers the proposal appropriate for the site (Page 12).
50. Ms Moore does however make a number of further recommendations with respect to:
- (a) Privacy along the north western and north eastern boundary (notably, 2 Regent Drive, 12 Regent Drive, 2 Halsey Grove and 10 Cedar Drive);
  - (b) Provision of safe and sheltered bike parking; and
  - (c) The stepping of the retaining wall along the southern boundary to improve the outlook for those dwellings.

### **Privacy along north-eastern boundary**

51. It is agreed that the proposed louvres assist with limiting real and perceived overlooking of indoor and outdoor living spaces on adjacent properties.
52. The proposed windows to bedrooms on rear elevations are relatively large and have low sill heights. I agree with Ms Moore that additional treatment to the lower half of some windows would further reduce potential effects on properties on the northern eastern boundary which have living spaces with outlook towards the development.
53. As such, a condition of consent that an opaque treatment be applied to the lower half of first floor windows (without louvres) along the north-eastern units is proposed by the applicant, namely Units 23, 25, 26, 28, 30, 35, 37 and 39. It is recommended that in order to meet the requirement for natural light,

the treatment is applied only to glazing below a height of 900mm above the internal floor level.

54. In order to achieve visual consistency and symmetry on the rear facades of blocks along the north-eastern boundary (which have upper floors visible when you drive into the development from Halsey Grove), the opaque window treatment has also been applied to Units 32 and 34.
55. As a result, all units which adjoin 10 Cedar Drive, 2 Regent Drive, 2 Halsey Grove and the outdoor space of 12 Regent Drive have either louvres or the opaque window treatment on the rear bedroom windows which limits real and perceived overlooking.
56. I do not consider this treatment necessary for Units 15 and 17 (as suggested by Ms Moore) as No. 4C Cedar Drive has a garage located along the boundary and internal living spaces are orientated away from the boundary.

### **Bike Storage**

57. The applicant has agreed to provide shared secure bike parking in the development to offer an alternative to private storage either inside dwellings or in private courtyards.

### **Southern Boundary – Outlook**

58. I note that the height of the retaining wall varies along this boundary and only a small number of units have outlook onto a wall which is over 2m high. A level change has been employed along the front boundary to raise the dwellings above the street to avoid or reduce the height of the retaining wall at the rear. This level change increases the privacy of private outdoor spaces located on the front of these dwellings which enjoy good sunlight and outlook over the shared space or loop road.
59. With respect to the outlook from the internal living space of the proposed dwellings along this boundary, I do not consider a step in the wall to make any material improvement to the internal amenity of these dwellings. These spaces are indicated as service areas and relatively shaded. Residents can use planter boxes/pots, paint or artificial green screens in front of the wall to improve outlook, if desired.

**Lauren White**