

**LA4**

**Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects**  
Gleeson Quarries Huntly Limited  
**Riverview Road – Huntly**



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**Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects  
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# **Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects**

## **Gleeson Quarries Huntly Limited**

### **Riverview Road – Huntly**

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**Viewpoint 3:** State Highway 1 layby

**Viewpoint 4:** Hillside Resort

**Viewpoint 5:** Hillside Heights Road

# **Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects**

## **Gleeson Quarries Huntly Limited**

### **Riverview Road – Huntly**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 LA4 Landscape Architects have been engaged by Gleeson Quarries Limited to undertake an Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects ('ALVE')—for the proposal to develop a new overburden area and managed fill sites within the existing quarry in Riverview Road, Huntly.
- 1.2 The existing consented overburden fill site (located to the west of the main quarry) has reached its capacity and therefore a new overburden fill site is required. Resource consents (regional and district) under the Resource Management Act ('RMA') are required to provide for the placement of overburden on the site.
- 1.3 Gleeson Quarries Huntly Limited is also investigating the feasibility to establish and operate a managed / clean fill site at the Huntly Quarry. It is anticipated that the same fill areas will be used for both overburden and managed fill. The proposed fill sites are located on farmland around the north and western sides of Huntly Quarry on Riverview Road, Huntly.
- 1.4 This assessment investigates the existing character of the site and locality, identifies the key landscape features of the area, describes those elements of the proposal that will be visible from outside the site and assesses their landscape and visual effects on the locality.
- 1.5 Investigations of the site and surrounding Huntly environment were carried out during July 2019.
- 1.6 The assessment is structured as follows:
  - i). Description of the landscape context and existing visual environment;
  - ii). Description of the proposed works;
  - iii). Outline of the assessment process / methodology adopted for the assessment of landscape and visual effects;
  - iv). Evaluation of the landscape and visual effects;
  - v). Statutory context; and
  - vi). Conclusions.

#### **2. The Site and Surrounding Landscape Context**

##### **The Application Site**

- 2.1 The quarry site is located at 310 Riverview Road, Huntly, approximately 2.8 kilometres south of Tainui Bridge Road, on the western side of the road. The quarry is excavated into the hillside on the western side of the Waikato River. The quarry pit is accessed directly off Riverview Road through a narrow gut flanked on both sides by the enclosing and vegetated hill slopes. The quarry then opens out to the excavated benches and faces extending up to a height of approximately 50m on the northern side and up to 100m on the western face.

- 2.2 The land rises from the quarry pit to the east-west running ridge along the northern edge of the quarry area up to a height of approximately 125m ASL. A number of spurs radiate from the ridge with two immediately to the north-east of the quarry pit providing a high of screening. Spurs also extend in a south-west direction to the west of the pit and beyond the ridge in north-east and north-west directions. An ephemeral stream and an area of indigenous vegetation are located on the eastern side of the pit.
- 2.3 The site contains a mix of different activities and infrastructure in support of the main mining (quarry) activities including offices, maintenance workshop, decanting earth bund, wheel wash, crushing plant, weighbridge, pug mill, haul roads and sump and sedimentation pond.
- 2.4 High voltage electricity transmission line (110kV and over as indicated in the Waikato Operative District Plan) runs across the front portion of the site and along the eastern boundary of the quarry property.
- 2.5 A mixed pine / eucalypt plantation extends around the eastern and northern sides of the pit and a pine plantation extends along the southern slopes beyond the haul road. The enclosing landform and vegetated slopes provide good screening into the quarry from the surrounding area.

#### **The Wider Landscape Context**

- 2.6 There are a variety land uses within the surrounding environment. Entering Riverview Road from the north the area comprises educational, recreational, semi-rural and residential land uses. Adjacent to the site to the north is the original O'Reilly's opencast coalmine (now closed) and has completed rehabilitation works. Large buildings associated with the Coal Screening Plant are still in existence on the southern side of Western Road. A scattering of residential dwellings are situated along Riverview Road on the western banks of the river to the north of the site. Lake Waahi and Lake Puketirini are located to the north.
- 2.7 The undulating land to the west is predominantly grazed pasture interspersed with pockets of regenerating vegetation and some tracts of exotic forestry with dispersed settlement patterns. The Waikato River is immediately to the east of the site with willows flanking the banks. Beyond the river to the east is a narrow strip of residential zoned land with several dwellings with road frontages onto State Highway 1. Further to the north is a ribbon of light industrial activities on the western side of SH1 at the southern entry to Huntly.
- 2.8 Huntly South is characterised by a number of light industrial activities including manufacturing and servicing. Huntly Quarries occupies a large site in the foothills and Huntly Clay's clay brick manufacturing plant is located in close proximity.
- 2.9 The North Island Main Trunk ('NIMT') railway flanks State Highway 1 to the east. Beyond here the grazed river terraces of Hillside Station extend into the foothills of the Taupiri Range. A disused quarry is nestled into the hill and the Hillside Resort is located on an elevated ridge to the east of the site with panoramic views in all directions. To the south of the site accessed off Parker Road is a countryside living zone at the foot of the Hakarimata Ranges with a number of dwellings and accessory buildings.
- 2.10 Solid Energy's large Rotowaro Open Cast Mine is located approximately 5.5km to the west, beyond which is the Puke Coal mine. The iconic Huntly Power Station is located 5.5km to the north of the site.

- 2.11 The existing quarrying activities are largely screened from the north, south, west and east by the surrounding landform and vegetation patterns. The narrow entrance into the site with vegetation extending down the slopes largely restricts views to immediately in front of the quarry. Elevated views are gained from the slopes of the foothills to the east of the Waikato River in the immediate vicinity of the site.

### 3. The Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal has been described in full in the AEE. The key visual and landscape attributes of the proposal include:
- Four proposed fill sites – 3 combined fill sites which includes overburden, clean fill and managed fill, and 1 overburden only site; and
  - Construction of an access road to the overburden and fill sites.
- 3.2 **Fill 2** is located immediately northwest of the current quarry in a natural closed valley with an opening to the west. The fill area is approximately 3.8ha in surface area with a fill volume of 632,600m<sup>3</sup>. A silt pond is to be located at the bottom of the fill and outside the Significant Natural Area ('SNA').
- 3.3 **Fill 3** is located immediately north of Fill 2 at the northwest corner of the quarry site in a flat area bounded by spurs to the south and west and open to the north. The fill area is approximately 4.35ha in surface area with a fill volume of 576,600m<sup>3</sup>. A silt pond is to be located downslope to the east near Fill 4 area.
- 3.4 **Fill 4** is located immediately east of Fill 3 and north of the current quarry in a natural closed gully exiting to the north. The fill area is approximately 5.24ha in surface area with a fill volume of 800,000m<sup>3</sup>. A silt pond is to be located to the north of the fill.
- 3.5 **Fill 5** is located immediately east-northeast of the existing quarry in a steep narrow natural closed gully exiting to the south-southeast. The fill area is approximately 2.64ha in surface area with a fill volume of 182,600m<sup>3</sup>. A silt pond is to be located to the south of the fill.

*The Fill Area sites are illustrated on **Figures 1 and 2.***

*Photographs of the Fill Areas are illustrated on **Figures 3-6.***

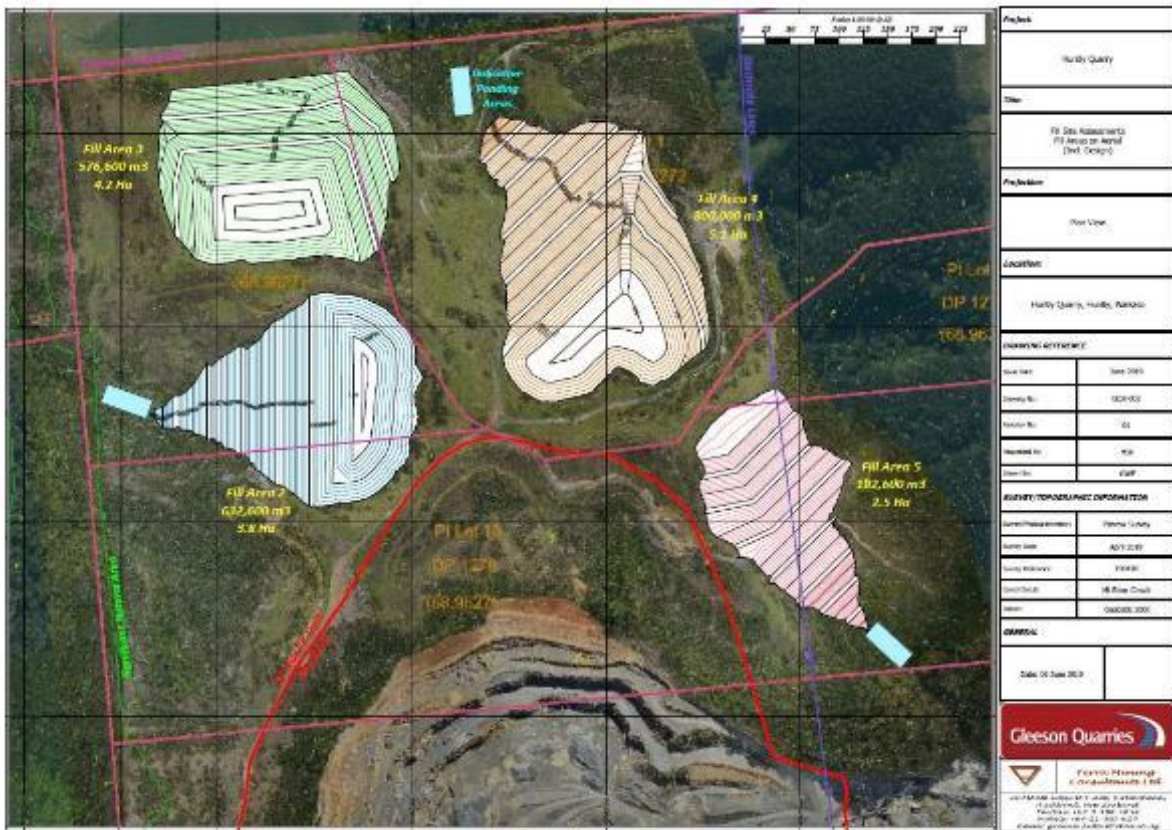


Figure 1 – Proposed Fill Area Sites Aerial

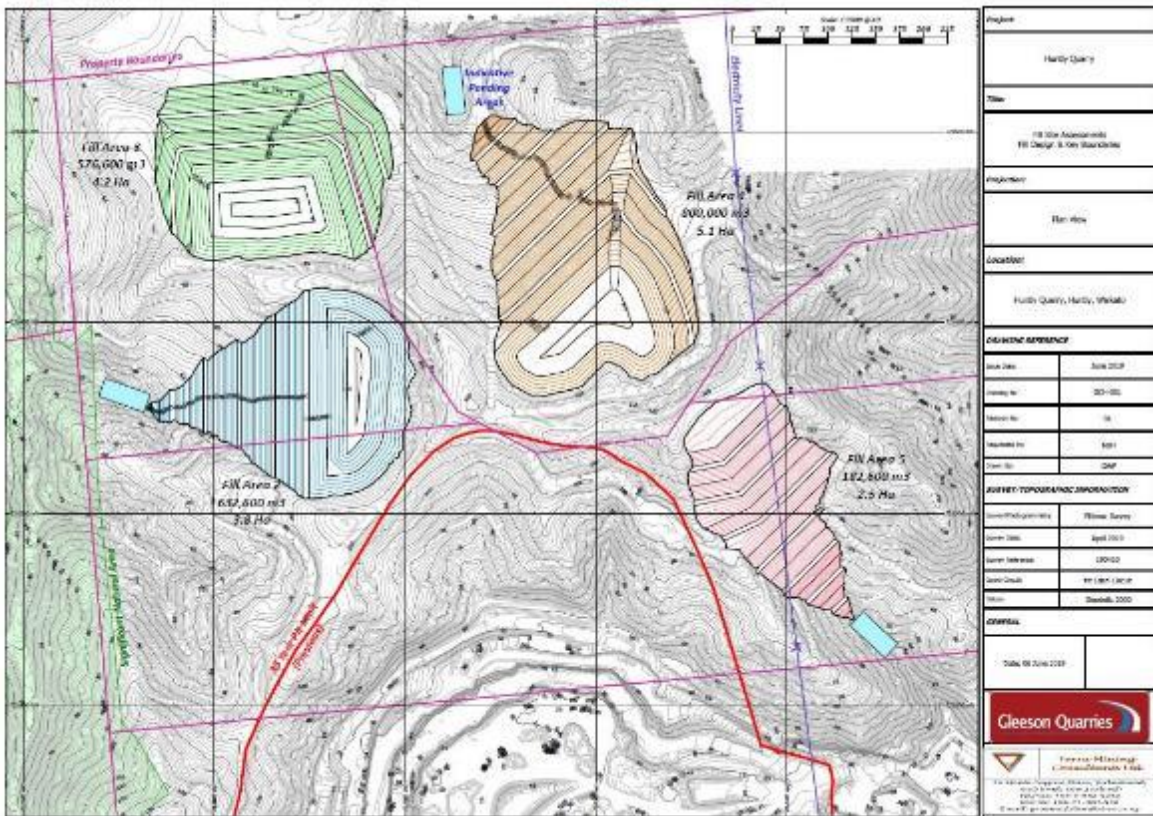


Figure 2 – Proposed Fill Area Sites Contours



**Figure 3** – Proposed Fill Area 2



**Figure 4** – Proposed Fill Area 3





**Figure 5** – Proposed Fill Area 4



**Figure 6** – Proposed Fill Area 5

## 4. Evaluation of the Proposal

- 4.1 The key to assessing the visual and landscape effects of the proposal is first to establish the existing characteristics and values of the landscape and then to assess the effects of the proposal on them. In accordance with the Resource Management Act (1991) this includes an assessment of the cumulative effects of the development combined with existing developments in the surrounding area.

### **Landscape Effects Methodology**

- 4.2 Landscape effects take into consideration physical effects to the land resource. Assessments of landscape effects therefore investigate the likely nature and scale of change to landscape elements and characteristics. Landscape effects are primarily dependent on the landscape sensitivity of a site and its surrounds to accommodate change and development.
- 4.3 Landscape sensitivity is influenced by landscape quality and vulnerability, or the extent to which landscape character, elements/features and values are at risk to change. Landscape character results from a combination of physical elements together with aesthetic and perceptual aspects that combine to make an area distinct.

### **Landscape Effects Analysis**

- 4.4 The wider environment has been subjected to various degrees of modification and is not high in landscape character values. This is as a result of the removal of natural cover, farming activities, a relative abundance of exotic tree species, as well as the dwellings and other structures associated with the rural environment. Consequently, the project will have a negligible effect on the existing landscape character values of the surrounding landscape setting.
- 4.5 While the surrounding area displays a reasonable level of visual amenity that is influenced by the Waikato River, landform and surrounding vegetation patterns, the landscape values associated with the area are only moderate due to the rural land use activities, quarrying activities and lack of significant natural landscape features in the area.
- 4.6 While the area retains a distinctly rural, rural residential and urban residential settlement character with existing settlement integrated into the landscape, it is nonetheless a highly modified and working rural environment that assists in reducing sensitivity to change associated with the proposal.
- 4.7 In terms of landscape effects, the proposed fill areas would permanently alter the landform of the gully areas and lower flat and remove the areas of mixed exotic, native and weedy vegetation on the gully slopes. The gully slopes would be filled, resulting in more gentle and even slopes than currently exist. Earthworks would be contoured to marry into the existing landform at the extent of the fill areas.
- 4.8 The modified landform, once filling was complete, would be relatively consistent with the surrounding topography and landscape patterns with the final contour varied to approximate natural variations in slope and drainage patterns. It is expected that the gentler finished contour on completion would allow this area to be used for pastoral farming.
- 4.9 The proposed changes to the landform and vegetation patterns in the site could be absorbed within the rural landscape without adversely affecting the landscape

values. On completion of the works, the fill sites would remain pastoral and the legibility of ridge, slope and valley landforms would be maintained.

- 4.10 While the natural landform of parts of the site would be substantially altered in a confined geographical area, I consider that any adverse effects on the character, quality and aesthetic values of the wider rural production landscape would be small in magnitude once the fill areas were completed and remediated. The surrounding Waikato landscape has been modified by drainage, roading, forestry, quarrying, open cast mining and farming activities and has a low to moderate level of naturalness and landscape quality and has a low susceptibility to change of the type proposed.
- 4.11 Overall the project will have low landscape effects, particularly in relation to the rural character and quality of the site and the surrounds, given that:
- i) It will not constitute significant change to the existing landscape character or quality as the project, on completion, will be consistent with the established character, including land use patterning and landscape character.
  - ii) Any potential landscape effects will be localised due to the type and scale of change and existing landform and vegetation patterns.
  - iii) The project will not impact on any key landscape features nor alter the distinctive patterns found within the surrounding landscape.
  - iv) The site's moderate landscape values means it has a low sensitivity to change associated with a proposal such as the project.
- 4.12 Following completion of the earthworks and reinstatement of the pasture, the finished landform will fit well into the surrounding landscape and improve the existing degraded amenity values of the gully areas and lower flat.

#### **Natural Character Effects**

- 4.13 Natural character relates to the degree of 'naturalness' of a landscape. It is primarily determined by the nature and extent of modification to a landscape and can be expressed in relation to natural processes, patterns and elements in the landscape.
- 4.14 The highest levels of natural character are where there is the least modification. Natural character effects relate to the degree to which a proposal alters the biophysical and / or perceived naturalness of a landscape.

#### **Natural Character Effects Analysis**

- 4.15 The site itself is not high in natural character values and has been highly modified through past vegetation removal, quarrying and grazing activities. Once completed, the proposal would not adversely affect the natural character of the site or wider landscape as the resulting pastoral and vegetated landform would become part of the surrounding landscape.

#### **Visual Effects Methodology**

- 4.16 The assessment of visual effects analyses the perceptual (visual) response that any of the identified changes to the landscape may evoke, including effects relating to views and visual amenity. Visual sensitivity is influenced by a number of factors including the visibility of a proposal, the nature and extent of the viewing

audience, the visual qualities of the proposal, and the ability to integrate subsequent changes within the landscape setting, where applicable.

- 4.17 The nature and extent of visual effects are determined by a systematic analysis of the visual intrusion and qualitative change that a proposal may bring, specifically in relation to aesthetic considerations and visual character and amenity.
- 4.18 The methodology used in this assessment is designed to assess whether or not the proposal would have adverse visual effects on the nature and quality of the surrounding environment.

The process of analysing such effects involves:

- *Identification of the physical area or catchment from which the proposal would be visible;*
- *Identification of the different viewing audiences that would be affected by the proposal; and*
- *Evaluations of the visual amenity effects taking into account the preceding analysis.*

#### **Visual Catchment and Viewing Audience**

- 4.19 The visual catchment is the physical area that would be exposed to the visual changes associated with the proposed expansion and filling activities. The quarry has a very restricted visual catchment due to the screening provided by the existing landform and vegetation surrounding the pit. The quarry's main visual catchment is largely restricted to the immediate vicinity in front of the site – from Riverview Road, the Waikato River and State Highway 1. Views from the river will be largely screened by the dense willow plantings along the banks.
- 4.20 Views towards Fill Area 3 and part of Fill Area 4 would be gained from properties to the north and northwest of the site accessed off Rotowaro Road and Hillside Heights Road.
- 4.21 Views would also be gained from the foothills to the eastern side of the Waikato River and in particular elevated views are gained from the Hillside Resort set on the ridgeline. The elevated railway embankment largely screens views from Tregoweth Lane on the eastern side of the railway line.
- 4.22 Based on the above, the main viewing audiences for the proposed fill sites are:
- i) motorists and pedestrians on Riverview Road immediately in front of the site;
  - ii) motorists travelling along SH1 opposite the site;
  - iii) recreational users of the Waikato River;
  - iv) residents on the eastern banks of the river opposite the site;
  - v) residents on the foothills to the east and visitors to the Hillside Resort;
  - vi) residents within the properties to the north and west of the fill sites accessed off Rotowaro Road and Hillside Heights Road; and
  - vii) travellers in trains on the NIMT railway.

#### **Visual Amenity Effects Analysis**

- 4.23 The visual effects of the proposal have been assessed from viewpoints within the visual catchment area that have potential for landscape and visual effects. Five

viewpoints have been identified and the visual effects from each of these have been assessed.

4.24 The viewpoints were selected as locations that capture and fairly represent the range of public and private views towards the proposed development. The analysis from the viewpoints is representative of the potential views from the most affected surrounding properties and roads.

4.25 The assessment is from each of the following viewpoints:

**Viewpoint 1:** Properties on the eastern banks of the Waikato River

**Viewpoint 2:** State Highway 1

**Viewpoint 3:** State Highway 1 layby

**Viewpoint 4:** Hillside Resort

**Viewpoint 5:** Hillside Heights Road

*Refer to: The Site and Viewpoint Location Map  
Viewpoint Photographs*

4.26 Photographs have been taken with a 35mm SLR camera with a fixed 50mm lens from the viewpoints and a detailed assessment and analysis of potential effects have been carried out using a Visual Effects Matrix, which ensures that each view and changes within each view are evaluated thoroughly and consistently.

4.27 The key factors contained in that matrix are given in detail in **Appendix A**. It covers aspects such as the sensitivity of the view to change, the size of the viewing audience that would be affected, the legibility of the proposal, how well the proposal integrates with its surroundings and whether or not the proposal intrudes into any existing views.

4.28 The following seven-point scale has been used to rate effects, based on the guidelines contained within the NZILA Best Practice Guide – Landscape Assessment and Sustainable Management 2010:

**Negligible | Very Low | Low | Moderate | High | Very High | Extreme**

Negligible Effect

*The proposal would have no effect on the receiving environment.*

Very Low Effect

*The proposal has discernible effects but too small to adversely affect other persons.*

Low Effect

*The proposal constitutes only a minor component of the wider view. Awareness of the proposal would not have a marked effect on the overall quality of the scene or create any significant adverse effects.*

Moderate Effect

*The proposal may form a visible and recognisable new element within the overall scene and may be readily noticed by the viewer. The proposal may cause an adverse impact but could potentially be mitigated or remedied.*

High Effect

*The proposal forms a significant and immediately apparent part of the scene that affects and changes its overall character. The proposal may cause a*

*serious adverse impact on the environment but could potentially be mitigated or remedied.*

#### Very High Effect

*The proposal becomes the dominant feature of the scene to which other elements become subordinate and it significantly affects and changes its character. The proposal causes extensive adverse effects that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated.*

#### Extreme Effect

*The proposal is completely at odds with the surrounding area and dominates the scene to an extreme degree. The proposal very significantly affects and entirely changes the character of the surrounding area. The proposal causes extreme adverse effects that cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated.*

4.29 The proposal raises a number of visual issues, including the potential effects on visual amenity to the following key areas:

- Adjoining land holdings
- Surrounding road network
- Wider area

4.30 The assessment has been undertaken in terms of the following criteria:

- a). **Quality of the view** – the relative quality of views into the site, including landscape character and visual amenity values.
- b). **Viewpoint | perceptual factors** – the type and size of population exposed to views into the site, the viewing distance to the site, and other factors which indicate its sensitivity in terms of both viewing audience and the inherent exposure of the view towards the site due to its physical character.
- c). **Rural / urban amenity** – the impact of future development on the wider surrounding rural and urban amenity.
- d). **Visual intrusion | contrast** – the intrusion into or obstruction of views to landscape features in the locality and beyond and the impact upon key landscape elements and patterns.
- e). **Mitigation potential** – the extent to which any potential adverse effects of the development could be mitigated through integration into its surrounds by specific measures.

#### **Viewpoint 1: Properties on the eastern side of the Waikato River**

4.31 Viewpoint 1 is taken from beside the property on the eastern banks of the Waikato River immediately opposite the site looking in a westerly direction. This view is representative of the views gained from several of the properties in the vicinity. Again, from here the existing quarry pit is largely screened from view by the landform and vegetation on either side of the quarry entrance as well as vegetation within the properties.

4.32 This landscape has typically rural characteristics with the undulating pastoral slopes, vegetation within the gullies, remnant pine and macrocarpa stands, forestry stands, poplars and willows beside the river, post and wire fences and dwellings associated with the surrounding settlement pattern. The view is characteristic of the surrounding rural and urban fringe environment.

- 4.33 From this viewpoint the anticipated level of audience exposure would be low and restricted to a handful of properties on the eastern side of the river. This view is taken immediately opposite the opening into the quarry and represents the most unobstructed view into the site. Either side of here, views are increasingly screened by the landform and vegetation flanking the quarry entrance. The sensitivity of the view and viewer is therefore likely to be low.
- 4.34 The local viewing audience is therefore relatively small, consisting of a small number of rural lifestyle dwellings. In addition, some of these have limited, partial and glimpsed views because of the screening by intervening vegetation.
- 4.35 From here the visual changes associated with the proposed fill sites will not be highly apparent due to the screening effects of the vegetation and hill slopes in the foreground. The vegetation flanking the quarry entrance is to be retained and will provide ongoing screening of the fill sites.
- 4.36 From this viewing direction Fill Area 5 will be screened from view behind the eastern containing spur and the vegetation within the site. Overall, from this viewpoint the visual effects will be negligible and there will be minimal change to the existing scene.

**Viewpoint 2:** State Highway 1

**Viewpoint 3:** State Highway 1 layby

- 4.37 These viewpoints are taken from beside State Highway 1 looking in south-westerly directions towards the site. Viewpoint 2 would be a fleeting view experienced by those travelling south at speeds up to 100km/hr along the road, as there is no berm or roadside pullovers along this busy stretch of motorway. Viewpoint 3 is more static being viewed from the SH1 layby. Similar views, albeit more distant, may be gained from some of the residential properties to the north of here.
- 4.38 The existing quarry pit is largely screened from view by the vegetated slopes on either side of the quarry entrance extending down to the quarry floor. The potential viewing audience to the site is large due to the volume of traffic using the road, however the speed of the viewing audience and the brief exposure to the site will lessen the potential adverse visual effects.
- 4.39 From this viewpoint the working characteristics of the quarry are evident with the cut benches and rock faces with the haul road winding up the side of the pit. These characteristics are further emphasised by the surrounding rural activities with forestry and grazing prevailing in the area. The State Highway and NIMT railway line add to the highly modified nature of this part of Huntly South. The natural characteristics of the Waikato River are not evident from here except for the riverside vegetation pattern of willows along the banks.
- 4.40 As illustrated in the photograph, the landform and vegetation largely screens views into the site. The northern quarry face is not visible behind the eucalypt tree plantation. The existing exotic forestry plantation on the southern slopes is to be retained as well as the eucalypts on the northern slope which will screen the fill sites from view
- 4.41 Again, from here, Fill Area 5 will be screened from view by the eastern spur and the existing vegetation which is to be retained. Overall, from this viewpoint the visual effects will be very negligible.

**Viewpoint 4:** Hillside Resort

- 4.42 This more distant and elevated view is taken from the Hillside Resort on the eastern foothills of the Taupiri Range looking in a north-westerly direction towards the quarry. This panoramic view is diverse, comprising a number of landscape elements within which human activities prevail. The vegetated and grazed slopes, river terraces, State Highway 1, NIMT railway, forestry activities and the quarry itself are dominant characteristics. The Waikato River is a dominant natural feature beside which these activities occur.
- 4.43 The 1.5 kilometre distance from the quarry and the small potential viewing audience would combine to give a low sensitivity rating for this viewpoint. The complexity of any existing views would render any intrusive characteristics the proposed fill areas might have as low.
- 4.44 From this elevated viewpoint the visual and landscape changes of the proposed fill sites will be difficult to view. The forestry plantation to the south and the majority of the pine and eucalypt plantations to the northeast are to be retained which will provide full or filtered screening towards the fill sites. The filling activities would not be visible from here, being visually contained within the gullies and screened by landform and vegetation.
- 4.45 The visual effects of the filling activities would be very low from here due to the screening effects of the foreground landform and vegetative screening which is to be retained.

**Viewpoint 5: Hillside Heights Road**

- 4.46 Viewpoint 5 is taken from Hillside Heights Road in the vicinity of number 76, approximately 900m to the west of the quarry boundary. The view is representative of views gained from the properties to the west and northwest of the site.
- 4.47 From here parts of Fill Area 3 and 4 will be visible to varying degrees. The managed filling activities will be visible, although incremental, as work proceeds gradually over a number of years. The landform will be altered through removal of the sparsely vegetated gully and lower lying flat, filling and eventual construction of the final fill area.
- 4.48 The proposal will initially have a noticeable impact on the existing rural amenity from here through the removal of the existing vegetation within the gully and infilling. In visual and physical terms, the proposed fill areas will form a more consistent and gently sloping profile within the gully and lower flat. The visual contrast between the exposed fill and surrounding pastoral and vegetated landscape will visually highlight the presence of the managed fill. The site landform will progressively change over a long period of time as successive areas of the gully and lower flat are filled.
- 4.49 During operation, views of exposed areas of land and the operation of machinery will appear visible against the eastern and northern quarry ridge, progressively moving forward.
- 4.50 During the construction stages, the fill material will appear more prominent in its surroundings due to the colour and texture of the fill contrasting with the vegetated and pastoral surroundings. However, the site will be reinstated incrementally with pasture and at the completion of the filling activity to ensure that the potential for visual effects is reduced.



- 4.51 On completion, the proposed fill areas will extend an existing rolling rural landform as a component of the surrounding Waikato environment. Once revegetated, the new landform would be assimilated within this rural landscape and result in a low effect.

#### ***Visual Amenity Effects Conclusions***

- 4.52 While the appearance of the site will change continually through sequences of filling activities and pasture reinstatement, it will still retain a distinctive rural character both during and on completion of the project. During earthworks activities, the movement of large machinery and earthworks will be evident and atypical of the normal day-to-day farming and rural lifestyle activities that currently prevail.
- 4.53 It should also be noted that managed fills are increasingly becoming part of the character of rural environments based on the fact that rural areas are the only practical recipients of fill originating from urban growth related activity. Given that there are already a number of quarries and mines operating in the area means that these activities already form part of the rural character of the area.
- 4.54 Given the relative containment of the site from a number of directions and the intermittent nature of the filling and earthworks activity, the effects of the proposed managed fill on rural character would be limited. Once works are completed, the form and scale of the landform itself and the pattern of proposed vegetation would result in a rural landscape very similar to the existing rural landscape.
- 4.55 The most noticeable change will be resultant from the earthworks associated with the filling activities. There will be noticeable visual effects during the earthworking activities due to the exposed nature of the earthworks which will be visible from parts of the surrounding area. While there will be obvious changes associated with the earthworking activities for the fill areas, the works will not appear out of place within the context of the surrounding working and productive rural area which is now recognised as an appropriate environment for a range of activities more suited to rural land, such as proposed with this application.
- 4.56 Land disturbance and areas of exposed earth are a common sight within the surrounding rural environment with associated agricultural activities – grazing, cropping, quarrying, mining and cultivated fields.
- 4.57 On-site truck and plant movements are current activities entering into and exiting the site and this is considered to be of minimal visual impact. Trucks are also a very familiar sight in this rural environment with frequent stock movements and the site's proximity to the surrounding quarries and open cast mines.
- 4.58 While there will be visible activities during the managed fill operations, following their completion and pasture reinstatement, the fill areas will blend into and integrate well with the surrounding land with positive visual attributes.
- 4.59 Overall, there will be low adverse visual effects. While the proposed managed fill areas will be discernible they will not adversely affect other persons. The fill areas will be reinstated incrementally with pasture to ensure that the potential for visual effects is reduced.
- 4.60 Overall, the visual effects of the proposal will initially be noticeable during filling operations. At completion, the final landform will have a less complex topography than existing with the existing gully landforms filled to form a broader flatter slope and re-established in pasture. Where visible, this change will appear sympathetic

with that of the surrounding Waikato rural landscape and is not considered to be adverse in terms of visual effects.

## 5. Statutory Context

5.1 The statutory context is covered fully in the application. The majority of the site is zoned Aggregate Expansion Area and Aggregate Resource Area although the northern part of the site subject to Fill Areas 2, 3 and is zoned Rural in the Waikato District Plan ('WDP') and is subject to the Rural provisions under the Plan.

5.2 The proposal has been assessed against the key relevant landscape and visual objectives and policies in the WDP. The following objectives and policies applying to the Rural zone are relevant to this assessment.

### **Objective 3.4 Issue – Landscape and Visual Amenity Values**

#### **Objective 3.4.1**

*Landscapes and visual amenity values, as viewed from public places, are retained and enhanced.*

#### **Policy 3.4.2**

*Natural features and landscapes, including locally distinctive landforms and prominent ridgelines, and general visual amenity values should be protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development, in particular by:*

- a. *avoiding or mitigating adverse effects on natural features such as indigenous vegetation, lakes, rivers and mountains*
- b. *ensuring that the visual effects of buildings can be absorbed without significant adverse effects on the landscape*
- c. *locating buildings and development so as to integrate them with the surrounding landscape and backdrops, to avoid dominating the landscape*
- d. *designing subdivision so that potential development, including building platforms, fences and vehicle accesses, are located sympathetically in the landscape*
- e. *avoiding, remedying or mitigating as soon as practicable, the adverse visual effects of earthworks and vegetation clearance, by:*
  - *retaining vegetation, and*
  - *restoring natural contours and replanting with appropriate species, and*
  - *limiting the area of soil exposed by earthworks and the length of time it is exposed, and*
  - *locating and constructing roads, tracks and vehicle accesses to minimise their visual impacts.*
- f. *avoiding or mitigating the adverse effects on visual amenity from noxious, dangerous, offensive or objectionable materials.*
  - (fa) *considering the effects of activities on the relationship of Maaori with their ancestral lands and waahi tapu*
  - (fb) *avoiding, remedying or mitigating any adverse effects in accordance with the landscape and visual amenity values of the zone in which the activity is located.*

#### **Policy 3.4.3**

*Rural land uses, including productive rural activities, should predominate in the Rural and Coastal Zones.*

**Policy 3.4.4**

*Rural landscapes and amenity values should be maintained by avoiding cumulative adverse effects of subdivision use, and development.*

**13 – Amenity Values**

**Objective 13.2.1**

*Adverse effects of activities on amenity values are managed so that the qualities and character of the surrounding environment are not unreasonably compromised.*

**Objective 13.2.6**

*Amenity values of localities are maintained and enhanced.*

**Policy 13.2.7**

*Scale, intensity, timing and duration of effects of activities should be managed to be compatible with the amenity and character of the locality.*

**Rural Zone Objectives and Policies – Rural Amenity and Character**

**17C.3.2 Objective**

3. *To maintain and/or enhance the character of rural and coastal zones*

**17C.3.2.3 Policies**

1. *New activities, subdivision or development should have regard to the way the proposed use, subdivision or development relates to the rural or coastal character of the locality so as to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on the rural or coastal character.*
2. *New activities locating in the rural and coastal zones shall be of a nature, scale, intensity and location that maintains and/or enhances rural and coastal character.*
3. *Recognition shall be given to the type of amenity, rural nuisance effects and rural visual form that are typical and exhibited by primary production activities.*

**The Waikato Regional Policy Statement**

- 5.3 The Regional Policy Statement ('RPS') sets the region's strategic direction for the management of natural and physical resources. The RPS specifies the overarching policies for the management of soils and freshwater resources. Section 3.20 of the RPS, and specifically Policy 12.14, anticipates that the identified values and characteristic of outstanding natural features are protected from adverse effects, including cumulative effects, arising from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. The Outstanding Natural Feature identified in the WDP is defined as the 'Waikato River and Wetlands'.

**Section 3.20 Outstanding natural features and landscapes**

*The values of outstanding natural features and landscapes are identified and protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.*

### **Comment**

- 5.4 With respect to the matters addressed in these objectives and policies, I note as follows:
- i) The site does not contain, and the proposal would not visually compromise, any significant landscapes and features. The site and surrounding area, while containing a degree of rural character are not high in landscape quality at a district level. ii) The site and its surrounding rural landscape are not high in natural character. It is a distinctly modified environment through past and present land use including quarrying, mining, farming, forestry, and rural residential lifestyle activities.
  - iii) The proposal would not result in a loss of dominant vegetation cover or clearance of indigenous bush cover contributing to the overall aesthetic coherence of the area.
  - iv) The relatively restricted visual catchment, existing landform and vegetation patterns would mitigate any adverse effects on the existing rural character and ensure that the amenity values of the surrounding area would be maintained.
  - v) The completed state of the fill areas would be integrated into the surrounding landscape, in keeping with the appearance, form and location of existing rural character and amenity values.
  - vi) The proposal would not adversely affect the visual amenity values of the Outstanding Natural Feature identified in the WDP, defined as the 'Waikato River and Wetlands'.
  - viii) The Scale, intensity and duration of effects of the filling activities would be compatible with the amenity and character of the locality.
- 5.5 I therefore consider that the proposal is consistent with the intent of the landscape, visual, natural character and amenity objectives and policies of the relevant statutory documents and when considered in totality is entirely acceptable in landscape and visual terms.

## **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 Rural landscapes are a combination of the natural landform and human introduced elements. The type of rural activity and settlement patterns that overlay them are also factors that contribute to their character. In rural landscapes, natural patterns are evident and natural systems operate; however rural activities, such as pastoral farming, quarrying, cropping and horticultural activities prevail.
- 6.2 The quarry site is suited for the managed fill activities in that it contains a number of natural landscape elements that will assist in integrating and/or screening the activities from the surrounding environment. The containing ridgelines and on and off-site vegetation patterns mean that views towards the site are screened from a number of public and private areas.
- 6.3 The proposed fill activities will not be out of character with the surrounding rural environment and the potential effects from the activity on the character and amenity of the rural environment are considered to be low.

- 6.4 Managed fill activities by their nature are large in scale and occur over long time frames. The design of the final landform and other mitigation measures included in the proposal endeavours to avoid, remedy and mitigate the potential adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 6.5 Any adverse effects on rural character and amenity will be temporary and overall low. Long term there will be positive effects on amenity and amenity values through the improvements to the site, proposed works and reinstatement of productive pasture within the site.
- 6.6 While there will be short-term visual effects these will be entirely acceptable in the context of the site and surrounding working rural environment. In the long-term, once development is completed, the potential adverse visual and landscape effects of the changed landscape would be low as the modified landform is reinstated in pasture.

Rob J Pryor  
NZILA Registered Landscape Architect  
August 2019



## APPENDIX A: VISUAL EFFECTS MATRIX METHODOLOGY

Use of a matrix offers one way in which the various facets of visual change - qualitative change, visual contrast etc. - can be pulled together and evaluated in a way which gives due weight to each. This matrix was designed to measure the scale of no or low visual effects through to high visual effects.

The assessment matrix is broken into two stages. The first involves looking at the existing situation and assessing the visual quality and sensitivity of the present view to change. This is followed by an evaluation of the changes associated with the proposed development. Key issues or variables are addressed within each stage and ratings for these are eventually combined to provide a composite visual effects rating. Set out below is the basic structure, showing what these key variables are and how they are arranged:

### PART A - SENSITIVITY OF THE VIEW AND SITE TO CHANGE

- A1. Analysis of the view's **Visual Quality** is carried out on the basis that higher quality views are more sensitive to potential disruption and degradation than poorer quality views.
- A2. Analysis of the view's **Visual Absorption Capability** is an evaluation of the degree to which a view is predisposed, or otherwise, to change by virtue of its land uses and/or screening elements and will either accommodate change or make it stand out from its setting.
- A3. Analysis of **Perceptual Factors**. In this section the type and size of population represented by the viewpoint, the viewing distance to the development site and other factors which indicate its sensitivity in terms of both viewing audience and the inherent exposure of the viewpoint to the site because of its physical character is assessed.

### PART B - INTRUSION AND QUALITATIVE CHANGE

- B1. Analysis of **Intrusion | Contrast**: the degree to which a proposal's location and specific structural content and appearance make it either blend into its surroundings or be made to stand out from them in terms of form, linearity, mass, colour and physical factors. Whether or not the proposal would intrude into existing views.
- B2. Analysis of the proposal's **Aesthetic Characteristics**: exploring the degree to which it would relate aesthetically and in terms of general character to its surroundings.

Ratings are combined for each viewpoint via a system of averaging and multiplying of ratings to progressively indicate each viewpoint's **sensitivity**, followed by levels of **intrusion and qualitative change**, and culminate in an **overall visual effects rating**.