

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991 ("RMA" or "the Act")

AND

IN THE MATTER of an application under section 88 of the Act to **WAIKATO REGIONAL COUNCIL** and **WAIKATIO DISTRICT COUNCIL** (ref LUC0488/22) BY **GLEESON MANAGED FILL LIMITED** to establish and operate a managed fill disposal activity at 310 Riverview Road, Huntly.

STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF ROBERT JAMES PRYOR

VISUAL AND LANDSCAPE

21 November 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My full name is Robert James Pryor. I am a registered landscape architect and a Director of LA4 Landscape Architects ("LA4"), a position I have held since 1996.
- 1.2 This evidence is given in respect of resource consent application LUC0488/22 by Gleeson Managed Fill Limited ("GMF") to Waikato Regional Council ("WRC") and ("Waikato District Council") ("WDC") to establish and operate a managed fill disposal activity at 310 Riverview Road, Huntly ("Site").

Qualifications and experience

- 1.3 I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Otago University (1980) and a post-graduate Diploma of Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University (1984). I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute

of Landscape Architects, a member of the Resource Management Law Association and a member of The Urban Design Forum NZ.

1.4 I have over 30 years' experience undertaking landscape assessments for clients in both the public and private sectors on a wide variety of major projects within a range of landscape settings. I specialise in the preparation of landscape assessments and have undertaken numerous assessments. I have undertaken landscape and visual effects assessments and provided advice for the following relevant projects:

- (a) Wood Valley Managed Fill;
- (b) Waiteitei Managed Fill;
- (c) Paerata Managed Fill
- (d) Drury Quarry Expansion;
- (e) Huntly Quarry Expansion;
- (f) Emerald Downs Gravel Extraction Plant;
- (g) Brookby Road Managed Fill;
- (h) Petersons Road Cleanfill;
- (i) Twilight Road Managed Fill;
- (j) Brookby Cleanfill; and
- (k) Clevedon-Kawakawa Bay Road Managed Fill.

Involvement in the project

1.5 In July 2019 I was engaged by GMF 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.

1.6 I was responsible for the preparation of the Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects, dated August 2019. I am familiar with the subject site and wider receiving environment.

1.7 In preparing this evidence, I have:

- (a) Read the AEE and associated technical reports and plans, as relevant to my area of expertise.
- (b) Reviewed the submissions lodged, as relevant to my area of expertise.

- (c) Reviewed the Council Officers' section 42A report dated 13 November 2022.

Site visits and background material

- 1.8 I undertook site visits and investigations of the site and surrounding Huntly environment during July 2019.

Purpose of scope and evidence

- 1.9 The purpose of my evidence is to outline the findings of my Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects.

- 1.10 My evidence is structured as follows:

- (a) Site context and characteristics (Section 3).
- (b) Key policy matters (Section 4).
- (c) Outline the assessment methodology (Section 5).
- (d) Addresses the relevant visual and landscape character effects arising (Section 6).
- (e) Comment on issues raised by the Officer's Report relevant to my area of expertise (Section 7).
- (f) Comment on the issues raised by Submitters relevant to my area of expertise (Section 8).
- (g) Comment on the conditions (Section 9).
- (h) Provide a brief conclusion (Section 10).

- 1.11 A summary of my evidence is contained in Section 2.

Expert Witness Code of Conduct

- 1.12 I have been provided a copy of the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court's 2014 Practice Note. I have read and agree to comply with that Code. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying upon the specified evidence of another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts know to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

1.13 I understand and accept that it is my overriding duty to assist the Independent Commissioner in matters which are within my expertise as a landscape architect.

2. **SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE**

2.1 In summary, I conclude that:

- (a) The application site is suited for the managed fills in that it contains a number of natural landscape elements that would assist in integrating and/or screening the activities from the surrounding environment. The containing ridgelines and off-site vegetation patterns mean that views towards the fill sites are screened from a number of public and private areas.
- (b) The proposed managed fill activity would not be out of character with the surrounding rural environment and the potential adverse effects from the managed fill on the character and amenity of the rural environment are considered to be low.
- (c) Managed fill activities by their nature are large in scale and occur over medium to long-term 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.
- (d) Any adverse effects on landscape values, rural character and amenity would be temporary and overall low. In the long-term there would be positive effects on amenity and amenity values through the improvements to the site, proposed works and planting of forestry species within the site.
- (e) While there would be short-term visual effects these would be entirely acceptable in the context of the site and surrounding working rural environment. In the long-term, once filling is completed, the potential adverse visual and landscape effects of the changed landscape would be low as the modified landform is planted in forestry and becomes integrated into the rural landscape.
- (f) In light of the above, I consider that any adverse effects on rural character and amenity would be temporary and low. Long term there would be positive effects on visual amenity and amenity values through the proposed works and forestry planting within the site.

3. **SITE CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS**

- 3.1 The quarry 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 **Fill Area 2** is located immediately northwest of the current quarry in a natural closed valley with a west facing gully exit. The face of the hill slopes starts at a gradient of 1:2 and reduce to 1:4 at the ridgeline, and the elevation of the gully rises from 49m RL to 110.5m RL. The gully has a steep amphitheatre which rises to the east and lowers towards the western side where the toe of the fill area will be. There is an existing small ponding area at the base of the gully which eventually flows into an existing stream catchment. The fill area is approximately 3.8ha in surface area with a fill volume of 632,600m³.

- 3.7 Vegetation within the Fill Area 2 generally comprises of a mixture invasive weed species including gorse and some native species including toetoe. A few older pine trees are also present in this area. A silt pond is to be located at the bottom of the fill and outside the Significant Natural Area ("SNA").
- 3.8 **Fill Area 3** is located further northwest of Fill area 2 towards the northern boundary of the quarry in a flat area bounded by spurs to the south and west and open to the north. Fill Area 3 is mostly flat with some natural topographical buffers. The natural hill slope on the southern side buffers it from Fill Area 2 and the hill slope on the western side buffers it from the SNA as identified in the Proposed Waikato District Plan. The fill area is approximately 4.35ha in surface area with a fill volume of 576,600m³. A silt pond is to be located downslope to the east near Fill 4 area.
- 3.9 **Fill Area 4** is located immediately east of Fill Area 3 and north of the existing quarry operations in a natural closed gully exiting to the north. Fill Area 4 is a natural gully that runs south towards the north. The area is predominantly exotic species and covered with a pine trees and gorse. The pine trees provide a good buffer to the east. The fill area is steep on the south-eastern side and lowers towards the north-west where the sedimentation pond is proposed. The fill area is approximately 5.24ha in surface area with a fill volume of 800,000m³. A silt pond is to be located to the north of the fill.

The wider landscape context

- 3.10 There are a variety of 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.
- 3.11 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.

- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 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. 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.
- 3.14 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.

4. **KEY POLICY MATTERS**

- 4.1 The proposal has been assessed against the key relevant landscape and visual objectives and policies in the Waikato District Plan ("WDP") and Proposed Waikato District Plan – Decisions Version ("PWDP-DV"). The following objectives and policies applying to the Rural zone have been taken into consideration:

Objective 3.4 Issue – Landscape and Visual Amenity Values

Objective 3.4.1

Policies 3.4.2 – 3.4.4

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

The Waikato Regional Policy Statement

GRUZ – General rural zone

Objectives GRUZ-01, GRUZ-03, GRUZ-04

Policies GRUZ-P3, GRUZ-P6, GRUZ-P17

NATC – Natural character

Objective NATC-01 Natural character

Policy NATC-P3

NFL – Natural features and landscapes

NFL-01 Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes

Policy NFL-P1

4.2 With respect to the matters addressed in these objectives and policies, I note as follows:

- (a) The proposed activity has a functional need to locate in the zone and the proposal provides for rural industry and extractive activities.
- (b) The rural character and amenity values of the site are not high as a result of the natural and physical resources present and the scale and extent of current and historic land use activities.
- (c) 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.
- (d) The proposed activity would be consolidated within, and around, existing developments where the natural character and landscape values have already been compromised and would avoid development sprawling.
- (e) The site and its surrounding rural landscape (other than the Waikato River) are not high in landscape value or natural character. It is a distinctly modified environment through past and present land use

including quarrying, mining, farming, forestry, and rural residential lifestyle activities. The landscape values, natural character values and visual amenity of the Waikato River would not be adversely affected by the proposal.

- (f) The proposal would not result in a loss of dominant vegetation cover or significant clearance of indigenous bush cover contributing to the overall aesthetic coherence of the area.
- (g) 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.
- (h) 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.
- (i) 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'.
- (j) The scale, intensity, and duration of effects of the filling activities would be compatible with the amenity and character of the locality.

4.3 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.

5. **ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**

5.1 The key to assessing the landscape and visual 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 RMA this includes an assessment of the cumulative effects of the proposal combined with existing activities.

5.2 The assessment of landscape effects takes into consideration physical changes to the landscape as a resource which may give rise to changes to its character and quality and perceived landscape values. Landscape character results from a combination of physical elements together with aesthetic and perceptual aspects that combine to make an area distinct. Landscape character is influenced by natural and built elements as well as

types, patterns and intensity of land use, historic, cultural, and other intangible qualities.

- 5.3 Visual effects are a consequence of landscape effects, as this is how we mainly perceive effects on landscape values. Landscape and visual effects are therefore inextricably linked and are influenced by the sensitivity of the receiving environment combined with the type and magnitude of change associated with the proposal.
- 5.4 Sensitivity to change considers not only the receiving environment but also the nature and characteristics of the proposal. The ability of a landscape to accommodate change is dependent on a variety of considerations such as the:
- (a) existing land use and resultant landscape patterns;
 - (b) physical characteristics of the landscape;
 - (c) scale of the landscape, the quality and values placed on a landscape; and
 - (d) the ability to mitigate any effects.
- 5.5 A landscape effect is a consequence of change in a landscape's physical attributes on that landscape's values. Change itself is not an effect – landscapes change constantly. It is the implications of change on landscape values that is relevant. 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. 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.
- 5.6 Landscape assessments are based on the links between landscape character and values. Character is an expression of the landscape's collective attributes. Values are the reasons a landscape is valued but are embodied in attributes. Effects are consequences for a landscape's values of changes to the attributes on which the values depend. Landscape character results from a combination of physical elements together with aesthetic and perceptual aspects that combine to make an area distinct. Landscape values relate to people's aesthetic perception of the biophysical environment,

including considerations such as naturalness, vividness, coherence, memorability, and rarity.

- 5.7 Effects on landscape values are assessed against the existing environment, and the outcomes sought in the relevant statutory provisions. Whether effects on landscape values are appropriate would therefore depend both on the nature and magnitude of effect on the existing landscape values and what is anticipated by the provisions. Landscape effects take into consideration the physical effects on 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. 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.
- 5.8 Visual effects are a subset of landscape effects. They are consequences of change on landscape values as experienced in views and are one technique to understand landscape effects. 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 any changes within the landscape setting, where applicable.
- 5.9 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.
- 5.10 The methodology used in this assessment is designed to assess whether the proposal would have adverse visual effects on the landscape values of the surrounding rural environment.

6. **VISUAL AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER EFFECTS**

Effects on landscape values

- 6.1 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 would have a low effect on the existing landscape character values of the surrounding landscape setting.

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 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.
- 6.4 In terms of effects on landscape values, 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 assimilate into the existing landform at the extent of the fill areas.
- 6.5 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.
- 6.6 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 be planted in forestry (pines) and the legibility of ridge, slope and valley landforms would be maintained.
- 6.7 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.

- 6.8 Overall, the project would have low landscape effects, particularly in relation to the rural character and quality of the site and the surrounds, given that:
- (a) It would not constitute significant change to the existing landscape character or quality as the project, on completion, would be consistent with the established character, including land use patterning and landscape character.
 - (b) Any potential landscape effects would be localised due to the type and scale of change and existing landform and vegetation patterns.
 - (c) The project would not impact on any key landscape features nor alter the distinctive patterns found within the surrounding landscape.
 - (d) The site's moderate landscape values means it has a low sensitivity to change associated with a proposal such as the project.
- 6.9 Following completion of the earthworks and plantation of forestry, the finished landform would fit well into the surrounding landscape and improve the existing degraded amenity values of the gully areas and lower flat.

Visual amenity effects

- 6.10 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 would be largely screened by the dense willow plantings along the banks.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 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.
- 6.13 The proposal raises a number of visual issues, including the potential effects on visual amenity to the following key areas:
- (a) Adjoining land-holdings;
 - (b) Surrounding road network; and

(c) Wider area.

Refer to **Appendix 1** – Viewpoint Photographs

Adjoining land-holdings

- 6.14 **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.
- 6.15 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.
- 6.16 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.
- 6.17 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.
- 6.18 From here the visual changes associated with the proposed fill sites would 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 would provide ongoing screening of the fill sites.
- 6.19 Overall, from this viewpoint the visual effects would be very low and there would be minimal change to the existing scene.
- 6.20 **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.

- 6.21 From here parts of Fill Area 3 and 4 would be visible to varying degrees. The managed filling activities would be visible, although incremental, as work proceeds gradually over a number of years. The landform would be altered through removal of the sparsely vegetated gully and lower lying flat, filling and eventual construction of the final fill area.
- 6.22 The proposal would 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 would 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 would visually highlight the presence of the managed fill. The site landform would progressively change over a long period of time as successive areas of the gully and lower flat are filled.
- 6.23 During operation, views of exposed areas of land and the operation of machinery would appear visible against the eastern and northern quarry ridge, progressively moving forward.
- 6.24 During the construction stages, the fill material would 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 would be planted in forestry at the completion of the filling activity to ensure that the potential for visual effects is reduced.
- 6.25 On completion, the proposed fill areas would 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.

Surrounding road network

- 6.26 **Viewpoints 2 and 3** 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.
- 6.27 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 would lessen the potential adverse visual effects.

- 6.28 From these viewpoints 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.
- 6.29 As illustrated in the photographs, 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 would screen the fill sites from view.
- 6.30 I note that the Te Araroa Trail extends along Riverview Road in the vicinity of the quarry. The fill areas would not be visible from the road, being screened by the existing quarry landform and exotic forestry plantation on the southern slopes.
- 6.31 Overall, from these viewpoints the visual effects would be very low.

Wider area

- 6.32 **Viewpoint 4** is a 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.
- 6.33 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.
- 6.34 From this elevated viewpoint the visual and landscape changes of the proposed fill sites would 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 would 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.

- 6.35 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.
- 6.36 **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. From here parts of Fill Area 3 and 4 would be visible to varying degrees. The managed filling activities would be visible, although incremental, as work proceeds gradually over a number of years. The landform would be altered through removal of the sparsely vegetated gully and lower lying flat, filling and eventual construction of the final fill area.
- 6.37 The proposal would 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 would 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 would visually highlight the presence of the managed fill. The site landform would progressively change over a long period of time as successive areas of the gully and lower flat are filled.
- 6.38 During operation, views of exposed areas of land and the operation of machinery would appear visible against the eastern and northern quarry ridge, progressively moving forward. During the construction stages, the fill material would 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 would be reinstated incrementally and at the completion of the filling activity planted in forestry to ensure that the potential for visual effects is reduced.
- 6.39 On completion, the proposed fill areas would 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 adverse visual effect.

Visual amenity effects conclusions

- 6.40 While the appearance of the site would change continually through sequences of filling activities and forestry plantation, it would still retain a distinctive rural character both during and on completion of the project. During earthworks activities, the movement of large machinery and earthworks would be evident and typical of the existing quarrying activities.
- 6.41 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.
- 6.42 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.
- 6.43 The most noticeable change would be resultant from the earthworks associated with the filling activities. There would be noticeable visual effects during the earth working activities due to the exposed nature of the earthworks which would be visible from parts of the surrounding area. While there would be obvious changes associated with the earth working activities for the fill areas, the works would 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. 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.
- 6.44 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.
- 6.45 While there would be visible activities during the managed fill operations, following their completion and planting in forestry, the fill areas would blend into and integrate well with the surrounding land with positive visual attributes.

6.46 Overall, there would be low adverse visual effects. While the proposed managed fill areas would be discernible they would not adversely affect other persons. The fill areas would be reinstated incrementally and planted in forestry on completion to ensure that the potential for visual effects is reduced.

6.47 Overall, the visual effects of the proposal would initially be noticeable during filling operations. At completion, the final landforms would have a less complex topography than existing with the existing gully landforms filled to form a broader flatter slope and planted in forestry. Where visible, this change would appear sympathetic with that of the surrounding Waikato rural landscape and is not considered to be adverse in terms of visual effects.

7. **ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCIL OFFICER'S REPORT**

7.1 I have read the report prepared by Ms Emma Cohen, the Council's reporting planner, dated 13 November 2022. Ms Cohen considers that the landscape and visual amenity effects of the proposal will be acceptable on the basis of the LA4 assessment and MGLA peer review, subject to compliance with conditions outlined in Appendix M.

7.2 I concur with her findings.

8. **ISSUES RAISED BY SUBMITTERS**

8.1 Several submissions have been received in relation to effects on landscape values and visual amenity. The topics raised in submissions that I can comment are as follows:

(a) Impacts on existing visual features and landscape.¹

Impacts on existing visual features and landscape

8.2 While there would be short-term visual effects these would 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 planted in forestry.

8.3 Any adverse effects on landscape values, rural character and amenity would be temporary and overall low. In the long-term there would be positive

1 Submissions of: Kate Thomas (#6), Norm Hill (#7) and Emily Joy Thomas (#25).

effects on landscape and amenity values through the improvements to the site, proposed works and carbon farming within the site.

9. **COMMENTS ON CONDITIONS**

9.1 I have reviewed the draft conditions and would make the following comments. Condition 21 – Landscape and Visual Mitigation requires the preparation of a Landscape and Visual Mitigation Strategy (“LVMMMS”). The LVMMMS is to include

- (a) A plan which identifies the existing vegetation (predominately pine and eucalyptus) to the north east of the Fill Areas;
- (b) Details to ensure that the existing vegetation identified on the plan above is retained until after all filling is completed;
- (c) Details to demonstrate that upon completion of each lift, the Fill Area landform is shaped to visually integrate with the adjacent natural landform; and
- (d) Details to demonstrate that the landform and all associated disturbed areas are progressively re-grassed and returned to pasture.

9.2 I consider that these are appropriate conditions to to avoid, remedy and mitigate the potential adverse landscape and visual effects of the proposal and ensure that the final landform of the fill areas would integrate sympathetically into the surrounding Waikato rural landscape. 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 anticipated that the gentler finished contour on completion would allow the area to be used for carbon farming.

10. **CONCLUSIONS**

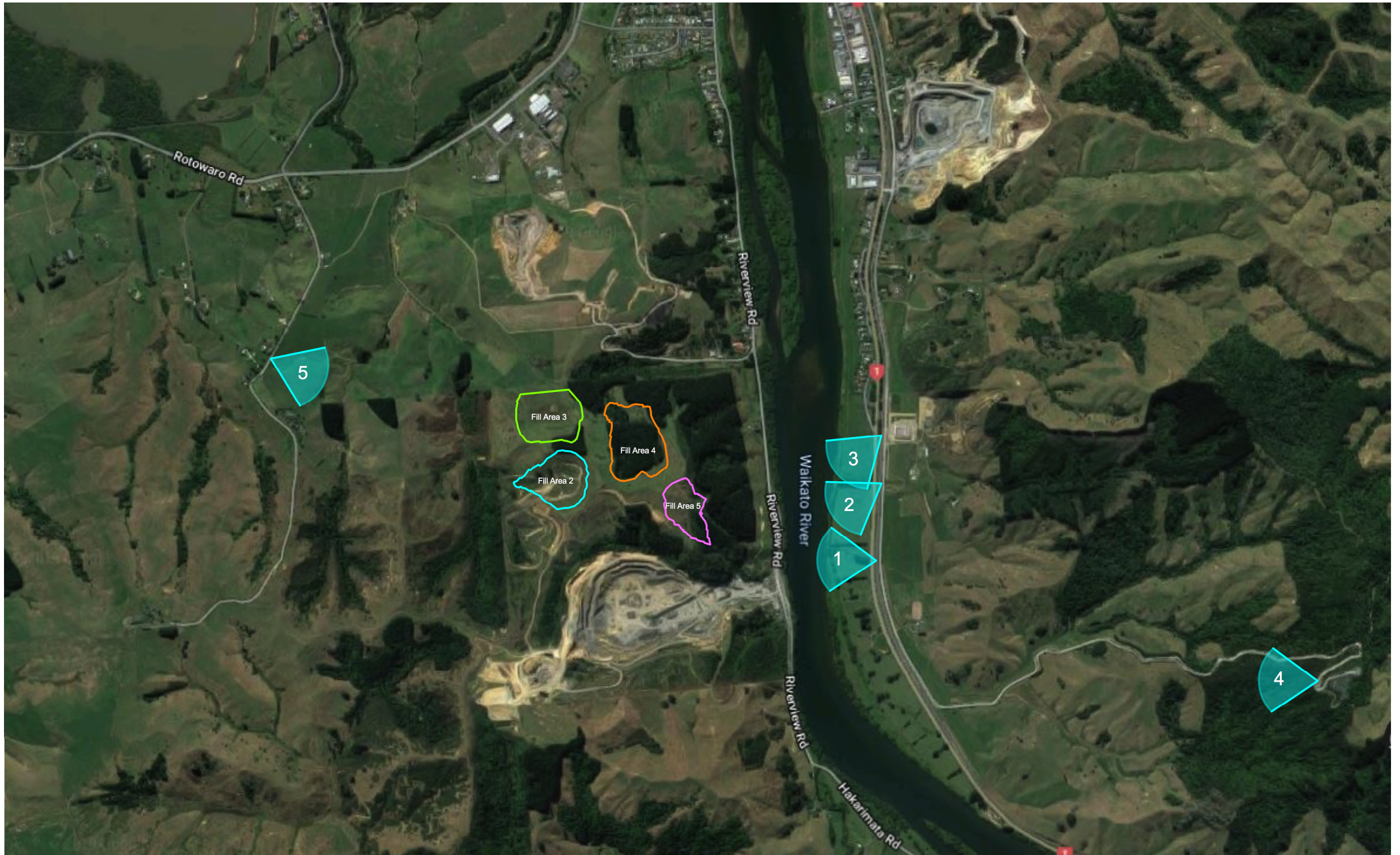
10.1 The quarry site is suited for the managed fill activities in that it contains a number of natural landscape elements that would assist in integrating and/or screening the activities from the surrounding environment. The containing ridgelines and on and off-site vegetation patterns mean that views towards the site are screened from a number of public and private areas.

10.2 The proposed fill activities would 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.

- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 Any adverse effects on rural character and amenity would be temporary and overall low. Long term there would be positive effects on amenity and amenity values through the improvements to the site, proposed works and conversion to forestry plantation within the site.
- 10.5 While there would be short-term visual effects these would 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 converted to forestry.

Robert James Pryor
LA4 Landscape Architects
21 November 2022

APPENDIX 1 - Viewpoint photographs





LA4 Huntly Quarry - Viewpoint 1



LA4 Huntly Quarry - Viewpoint 2



LA4 Huntly Quarry - Viewpoint 3



LA4 Huntly Quarry - Viewpoint 4



LA4 Huntly Quarry - Viewpoint 5