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Ohinewai Hearing Notes

Dormitory Town/Affordable housing

My position, grounded in an analysis of the APL material and in the recent local experience of Te Kauwhata, is that there is a high risk that Ohinewai will at least primarily become a dormitory town

Mr Quigley's SIA refers to interviewees he engaged with that identified Te Kauwhata as a dormitory town because residents travel to Auckland and Hamilton not only to work but to school their children, to socialise and to shop with the flow on effects being that residents do not participate in the local community.

Dormitory towns create a number of social risks associated with lack of community cohesion, car dependent lifestyles and can lead to reduced opportunities and social isolation

Without affordable housing those working at Ohinewai will not be able to afford to live there and the majority of housing will go to residents who work elsewhere.

The affordability of the housing is uncertain.

According to the APL material - the majority of the housing will be sold on the open market and will be at a price point that is not affordable to the employees of the industrial component.

Dr Fairgray's (Market Economics) analysis of housing affordability suggests that for 60% of employees of Sleepyhead with incomes of 45 -46 000 after tax, the maximum affordable price is around 350, 000. He concludes that for the OSP to contribute to affordable housing there would need to be significant number of dwellings in that lower range.

It is not established in Q&W SIA or elsewhere that the minority portion of housing subject to a rent to own scheme will be affordable. Given the proposal makes much of this social benefit it is unclear why there is not more content about this crucial dimension of the live work and play concept.

According to Dr Fairgray “Given the lack of specificity about the affordable housing provisions and how they will be implemented,... the numbers of dwellings which will be released to the open market rather than be affordable dwellings dedicated to the Comfort Group workforce, it is difficult to be confident about the likelihood of the whole new town development proceeding even if approval is achieved” (p.32)

On the one hand there is an expressed commitment to affordable housing and yet the majority of the housing will be sold on the open market at a price point of 480 -550, 000. This makes only a minority portion of the housing potentially affordable to employees of the industrial component. I say potentially because there is no information provided about how affordability is to be achieved for that minority portion. Apart from an unspecified rent to own scheme in Mr Quigley’s SIA and staircasing in Mr Gaze’s.

The lack of specificity about the affordable housing provisions so far makes it very difficult to be confident that the housing planned for Ohinewai will be affordable for employees of the industrial component. Without the affordable housing the risk of a dormitory town is high.

There is no question that the employment offered by the industrial component will have substantial benefits however, the social benefits of employment can be amplified or degraded by the affordability of the housing and the quality of social infrastructure that supports the community. It is important to recognise that employment is only one aspect of a person’s most important life priorities

Understanding the requirements of the workforce and their families would be critical to establishing whether the residential component would be attractive and affordable to employees. This is also why the decision to exclude the perspectives of current Sleepyhead employees is questioned by me.

The reasons given for that exclusion by Mr Gaze in his rebuttal evidence are: "It is too early to canvas the proposals with employees" and "there is plenty of time to ascertain the interest of existing employees in moving to Ohinewai once we have consent".

The proposal is being debated in the news media and the employees of Sleepyhead would be aware of their employer's intentions. Understanding their interest, concerns and requirements would be an important source of information for the SIA.

The exclusions of current Sleepyhead employees considering moving to Ohinewai, the parents of children at the primary school as well as the under representation of current residents' in the SIA obscures potential negative social effects because these are the groups we might expect to have both greater personal interest and greater concerns about what is being proposed.

Lack of amenities/social infrastructure

The proposal includes a minimal level of social infrastructure and Mr Quigley is clear that the development is not intended to be self-sufficient but rather Ohinewai will be part of the social context of Huntly and Te Kauwhata.

Given the distances between Ohinewai, Huntly and Te Kauwhata, there would need to be enabling social infrastructure to ensure that residents can easily access opportunities to be part of the social context of Huntly and Te Kauwhata. The proposed walkway/cycleway is positive in this regard however, the land is not owned by APL making that proposal uncertain and the long distance makes it less likely that it will be well used.

In my view more would need to be done to enable Ohinewai to be part of the social context of Huntly and Te Kauwhata including PT that responds to the needs of the whole community for access to the social context of Huntly and Te Kauwhata.

Bearing in mind that lower income residents have fewer leisure opportunities and rely more heavily on local social infrastructure such as community meeting places, libraries, public transport, local clubs.

The plan lacks consideration of the social infrastructure needed to create a sense of community in a new town that is not designed to be self-sufficient. I agree with Matthew Jones's view that the proposal lacks a central community meeting place.

Car dependency/Social cohesion

While workers who live at Ohinewai may not have to travel to work if they work onsite, other members of their households will, and because Ohinewai will have limited social infrastructure and is not self-contained, access to shopping, schools, health and other services and entertainment requires car journeys and imposes travel costs on residents that will impact negatively on their cost of living.

Dr Fairgray's analysis of the retail service node (based on Mr Heaths estimates) indicates that onsite retail would service one-fifth of Ohinewai's household's demand. Ohinewai households would need to access 80% of their goods and services from Huntly or Hamilton. Meaning that Ohinewai residents will need to travel outside of Ohinewai to access the majority of their basic needs.

This creates a car dependent lifestyle that has negative social impacts including poor health; restrictions on the mobility for children, teenagers, older persons and those who do not have access to a car and can contribute to the exclusion of these groups from access to opportunities for full participation in social and economic life.

- According to Mr Kuo, not just the relatively remote location but also the layout incentivises car journeys.

In terms of social connection within the proposed residential development itself the likelihood of a car dependent lifestyle would restrict casual interactions among residents.

Casual social interactions are an important ingredient for connected communities who enjoy many social health benefits increasingly recognized in public health literatures

The disconnection from the existing Ohinewai settlement will also contribute to a lack of community cohesion.

The car dependency of the residential development means that there is no pathway available to reduce GHG emissions. This is an important consideration given climate change mitigation is now urgent.

Partial completion of the plan

With so little information about the affordability of the housing or how it is to be achieved there is a risk that the Masterplan will be only partially completed because the affordability component may not be affordable for the employees or for the developers.

There is reasonable potential for the partial development of the plan change area and this has the potential for adverse social outcomes I agree with Ms Healy that this makes the findings of the SIA limited in respect of the potential outcomes of the plan change.

Without the full completion of proposed social infrastructure, the places that make healthy living possible and meeting areas needed to facilitate community connections the risk of social isolation and associated social harms increases.