

**LAND USE CONSENT APPLICATION LUC18/47378
AND SUBDIVISION CONSENT APPLICATION
SUB18/47165 – PROPOSED FONTERRA FARM
SOURCE STORE AND 2 LOT SUBDIVISION AT 2475
SOUTH ROAD, OKATO**

**EVIDENCE OF LYNDON DEVANTIER, CATHERINE CHEUNG AND KIM
DEVANTIER
(Giving evidence for J Dinnis)**

28 March 2019

1. We are long-term residents of Kaihihi Road Upper and live at number 62.
2. We were not notified of this proposal, however I understand that is not an issue that we can pursue at this hearing.
3. We have been asked by the Dinnis's to speak to the character of Kaihihi Road and of Okato generally.
4. As I explain, we, and many in our community, value the local amenity greatly.

Character of Kaihihi Road

5. Our road is used by many Okato residents on a daily basis for recreational purposes.
6. Many residents walk from the village along South Rd, across the swing bridge, through the Okato Domain and continue on to the corner with SH45, for exercise and/or walking their dogs. Some then complete the loop back to Okato via SH45 (although this is considered dangerous by others, who retrace their steps). This walk also takes in the local swimming pool entrance.
7. Our road is also used by parents and children, as a relatively safe walkway to access the Stepping Stones childcare centre and/or Stony River Hotel from the village.

8. This pedestrian use has grown over the time we've lived on the road, and will continue to do so as more young families settle in Okato.
9. Vehicular traffic flow ranges widely, depending on the many activities that occur at the Okato Domain (rugby, squash, lawn bowls, swimming etc.), along with access to the Stony River Walkway for trout fishing and swimming.
10. There are, unfortunately, episodic accidents in the vicinity already, and the crossroads where Kaihihi Rd intersects with SH45 is deceptively dangerous, as the speed limit on both Kaihihi Road Upper and SH45 is 100 km per hour and sight-lines are restricted both to the north and south. The service station on the corner is an additional concern, as the petrol and diesel pumps are extremely vulnerable to any accidents on the corner. Putting more cars and trucks in the vicinity, if this development was to be permitted, is in our experience, a 'recipe for disaster'.

Relevance of District Plan

11. The District Plan states that Rural Character is comprised of the elements identified, and people's appreciation of rural character.
12. As a professional ecologist I have experience in the design and application of zoning plans in both marine and land management. It has been my experience that, to be most successful from both the planning and community perspectives, zoning plans need to be carefully developed, include significant public input and consultation, and generally be adhered to, such that the public can have trust in the process and outcomes. In the present case, NPDC did attempt to meet these requirements in their Operative District Plan, which was developed following widespread consultation. However, those requirements are not being met in the present application.
13. As stated in Issue 4 of the District Plan:

"The threats to RURAL CHARACTER are the use of land for intensive rural-residential development for intensive commercial or industrial use and for activities that have not always located in the rural environment. Such development could result in a loss of "spaciousness", alter the built environment, reduce pleasantness through, for example, increased noise levels and have implications for infrastructure and servicing. Traditional 'rural' practices such as pastoral farming, horticulture, and other rural industries have required large areas of land compared with 'non-rural' residential, business or small industrial SITES (for example). As these rural practices have been the predominant land uses in the past, the large ALLOTMENTS have created a dominance of open space over built form, and it is this feeling of 'spaciousness' that provides the basis for rural amenity."
14. it is clear that the proposal precisely fits the NPDC definition of threat, as stated in the Operative District Plan.

15. Mr Dinnis and his parents therefore question why this site, which is presently used for dairying, was selected?

Wider evidence of the Character of this Area

16. Okato is a 'down to earth' community. It has not seen the extent of gentrification as has Oakura. Its proximity to local surf beaches and (previously at least) more reasonable real estate prices, and its distance from New Plymouth town, has attracted a community greatly values the tranquillity of environment, even with the State Highway proximity. The particular amenity valued by locals is articulated in the prepared by a local Focus Group and Kaitake Community Board 2016/2017.
17. The Okato Engagement Project was an 8 month long study within the community to establish Okato issues and aspirations. The resulting document 'Okato – A Connected Community' Report is **attached to my evidence**. It states:¹

“What Okato Means to its Residents”

- *“109 respondents named the sense of community as important to them.*
 - *100 respondents named the lifestyle.*
 - *90 replies indicated the clean, green environment.*
 - *84 said the people living there was important.”*
18. Interestingly, under the heading “Growth/Industry/Talent”, the document states that there was very little support in this community for oil or gas exploration (or sand mining). There was support for developments to enhance the sense of community and:
- *The opportunity to act as an example in developing self-reliance;*
 - *Developing a solar or wind turbine car charging station*
 - *More promotion for Okato as a thriving family-oriented residential community.*
19. This illustrates the 'green' sentiment that many in the Okato community have, also acknowledging the farming community, of course.
20. Under “Community/Citizens”:
- *A safe environment for residents and children*
 - *A sustainable farmers market for local, organic growers and craft makers*
 - *Making the three dangerous bridges of Tataraimaka, Kaihihi and Hangatatau wider and safer for pedestrians, cyclists and horses.*
21. In fact, there is reference throughout the document to increasing traffic safety. Clearly this proposed development is not in accordance with this aspiration.

¹ Survey with 123 responses.

Indeed it would preclude its achievement through the increase in vehicular traffic, both of cars and of trucks.

22. I acknowledge that under “Centres” there was also support for “*Attracting new businesses*” but in the very same context: “*Maintaining the village atmosphere*”.

23. The summary states:

“Okato has its own unique characteristics and potential for development. ...

The main highway and rural road links make the town accessible from surrounding areas, as well as from further afield. There are tourist attractions related to the environmental assets in the district, such as coastal surfing, fishing and hiking opportunities, Pukeiti Gardens, and Mount Taranaki hiking trails. An appealing clean, green ethos pervades the community and it is home to a number of well known and nationally recognised artists, potters and other crafts people. ...

Many new residents choose to live here because they value the lifestyle Okato offers and recognise the affirmative community values embedded in it. The wide ranging feedback we received during this project confirms that is something the community wishes to retain.”

24. Subsequent to the initial report, the Kaitake Community Board Plan summarised the Oakura, Okato and Omata community plans “*Kaitake Community Board Plan: A thirty year vision*” (<http://www.newplymouthnz.com/-/media/018F99C51CD648A0B5EB3051745669D9.ashx>). This brings through many of the above including (only relevant items are listed here):²

Destination:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“*Upgrade and extend existing walkways and cycleways and provide for future walkway and cycleway development including access to Mount Taranaki National Park and reinstate the Stony River walkway and track”</i>
Traffic and Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Develop traffic calming initiatives to make the township centre safer.</i> • <i>*Provide safer pedestrian movement opportunities and upgrade and extent the footpath network.</i> • <i>*Improving the safety and access of the Tataraimaka, Kaihihi and Hangatahua bridges (for pedestrians, cyclists and horses)”</i>
<p><i>“* Note – items denoted with an Asterix relate to the Kaitake Community Board area priorities above. They provide more detail about the issues within each township.”</i></p>	

² Page 22.

25. On page 40, “*What Okato means to the Respondents*” includes:
- *The village atmosphere.*
 - *The sense of peace you get.*
 - *The potential for walking tracks.*
 - *Lots of fields and domains.*
 - *Safety for residents and children, friendliness, community engagement.*
26. This was accepted by NPDC in Sept 2017.
27. These amenities are enjoyed in Kaihihi Road no less than in the rest of Okato.
28. Although it will service the farming sector, the proposed development is *not* rural in nature, and is not compatible with these aspirations. The proposed development will not (through some paint work and planting of a shrubbery), blend into the landscape or into the existing character of the area.
29. It is a significant commercial activity, comprising an over-size building and signage on an under-size allotment, with a large expanse of asphalt and requirement for supply of increasingly scarce reticulated water. If permitted, it will permanently destroy the rural character and amenity of that area.

Possible precedent

30. We are also deeply concerned that the significant precedent effects of this proposal have not been addressed by the applicant or NPDC.
31. If permitted, this non-complying development ‘creep’ could be the ‘thin edge of the wedge’ of further such non-complying activities in the area, precisely what is supposed not to happen under the Operative District Plan, or under the community’s aspirations.
32. I would be happy to answer any questions about the character and amenity enjoyed in Kaihihi Road.

Lyndon De Vantier, Catherine Cheung and Kim DeVantier