

Submission by Maria Townsend for the Proposed Private Plan Change Hearing

Proposal = Proposed Private Plan Change 48 to the New Plymouth District
Plan requested by Oakura Farm Park Limited for the proposed rezoning of land (Lot 29) at Wairau Road, Oākura.

Applicant = Oākura Farm Park Limited

I was lucky enough to move to NZ 10 years ago after meeting my husband overseas and we decided to move back to his homeland as he wanted to raise our children Kiwi style. And I can understand why. New Zealanders are very privileged to have many options on how to create the lifestyle they desire – move to a city or town to be close to amenities, jobs and enjoy the hustle bustle, or move to the middle of nowhere to enjoy the tranquillity of isolation. What I think is really special about this country, is what lies in between these options which is the small rural villages. They may be small with maybe only a school, pub and a shop, but the heart of them is the strong community that binds the residents together. This is what I love about Oakura. A village where every teacher at the school knows the name of every pupil, where you can't pop into the 4Square without bumping in to someone you know and where every trip to the beach turns into an impromptu playdate.

Living in any community, it is necessary to grapple with change. When change is considered, it is important to understand what is driving the change and look at what is gained versus what is lost.

Small changes are usually made for the benefit of the community – recent examples that come to mind are more trapping in the Kaitake Ranges to make it predator free by 2050, a restaurant which provides financial support to NPOB Surf Life Saving club and a skatepark for the local children. All of these changes were driven by very proactive community members who have a vision for improving the character of Oakura.

However, it is the large-scale changes where what is lost over what is gained can become skewed. This Private Plan Change is a good example of that. The development will provide a lot of money to one person, the developer. However, on the flip side, the benefit to the local community is hard to find. There will be pressure on the local environment, on roading and the local school. In addition, as the population increases, the sense of community and the character and uniqueness of the village will be lost.

The Kaitake Ranges is such an important test piece for making the mountain predator free. In the summer, I head up the Ranges on at least a weekly basis. Since the trapping has increased, there has been a noticeable increase in birdlife. I feel that the huge effort that has gone in to the trapping of this area will be negatively impacted by having a high density housing development in close proximity where rodents will be able to thrive. The view from Goat Rock won't be quite the same, looking down at a huge building site for the next 30 years. I am also concerned about the stormwater run-off increasing the risk of flooding to houses at lower levels in the village and the impact to water quality of the Wairau stream.

Oakura Primary is a true gem of the village. The majority of kids walk or bike to school, they have big playing fields on which to burn off energy and it extends to Year 8 with the older years developing their leadership skills through organising events for the younger years. I cannot see how the school can manage the needed expansion from the increased demand caused by this development. The school already states that they are at capacity. Further classrooms would take away areas for outside play and traffic safety around the vicinity of the school would be compromised. I disagree with the applicants traffic advisor who suggests that the paper road to Butlers Lane could be used as a further exit if congestion becomes an issue. The crossing between SH4, Butlers Lane and Dixon Street is already considered dangerous with a number of people already within the community trying to address this with NZTA. This in my mind is an example where the applicant has suggested an alternative to address a concern, but has given the alternative little consideration.

I feel very fortunate that our kids are being raised as true Kiwi kids. They go for weeks at a time without putting a pair of shoes on. They are free to roam the village and spend a lot of time outdoors. And the reason they can do that is that the village is small and safe and because everyone knows each other, we look out for one another kids. It is hard to imagine that will continue if this development goes ahead and the population nearly doubles.

I am a firm believer in honesty and integrity and unfortunately I feel let down. The Paddocks was granted a subdivision consent on condition to limit further subdivision of Lot 29, with the applicant expressing the intention to retain this lot with a protected farm status. Time has moved on since that consent condition was put in place, but my feelings have not – I feel betrayed. I also feel personally aggrieved when I read in the developer's submission that the McKie Family recognises the importance of good relationships and that they have listened to and have a very good understanding of the Oakura community's concerns. I think community engagement has been poor at best. In addition, there looks to be lack of ownership by the developer to support the needed change to infrastructure in the future. An example of this is the lack of detail from the applicant on impact to waste water, water reticulation and stormwater capacity. I feel like that is being left to others to sort out in the future.

Currently there are 549 houses within the Oakura area. In the next 30 years, it is expected that a growth of an additional 210 to 250 households will occur. Infill is expected to provide 127 sections which covers growth for the next 20 years. Between Infill and undeveloped residential land, there is sufficient capacity to meet projected demand for housing for decades to come. It is clearly stated that the rezoning for this development is not required to meet the NPS-UDC* requirements.

I oppose the proposal in its entirety. Reducing the number of lots for sale by way of a compromise should also be declined because of all the reasons I have stated above. We all need to be proud of the decisions we make and what changes we back. It is so important when considering change to consider all the facts in the here and now, but also to think about the future and how a change like this links to our legacy.

*NPS-UDC = National Policy Statement Urban Development Capacity