

## Chapter 3: Natural Features and Landscapes

### 3.1 Introduction

The topography of the district includes the Waikato basin, lowland peat areas, lakes and hill country. The district has an exposed cliff coastline for much of its west coast. The coastal cliffs, and the cones of Karioi and Pirongia dominate the southern landscape, while the Hakarimata, Taupiri and Hapuakohe ranges run through the district from the south-west to the north-east. Protection of these large features retains the underlying landforms and natural features that make up the district.

Outstanding natural features and landscapes are identified in Schedule 3A and on the District Plan maps as Landscape Policy Areas. The plan identifies and manages outstanding natural features and landscapes, and also addresses effects of subdivision and development on general landscape values throughout the district.

### 3.2 Issue – Outstanding Features and Landscapes

Outstanding natural features and landscapes can be irreversibly changed or degraded by subdivision, land use, development, roads, tracks and extractive industry.

OBJECTIVE	POLICIES
3.2.1 Outstanding natural features and landscapes are recognised and protected.	3.2.2 Outstanding natural features and landscapes, identified in Schedule 3A and on the planning maps as Landscape Policy Areas, should be recognised and protected from the adverse effects of inappropriate subdivision, use and development. 3.2.3 Cultural and spiritual relationships of Maori with outstanding natural features and landscapes should be recognised and provided for in the course of subdivision, use and development. 3.2.4 Subdivision, use, and development (including roads and tracks) should avoid adverse effects on outstanding natural features and landscapes (including ridgelines within those landscapes). 3.2.5 Deleted 3.2.6 Views of outstanding natural features and landscapes from public places should be protected from the adverse effects of inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

### 3.3 Reasons and Explanations

#### 3.3.1 Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes

Waikato District contains a number of outstanding natural features, including volcanic cones, ranges, coastal cliffs, dunes, limestone bluffs, lakes, river basins and valleys and their associated soils. These features determine the shape and form of the land, and are the natural, as opposed to human, components of the landscape character of the district. Earthworks, extractive industries, vegetation clearance, buildings, structures and infrastructure associated with subdivision, use and development can have a major impact on outstanding natural features and landscapes. These areas are identified in Schedule 3A and on the District Plan maps as Landscape Policy Areas. The objective seeks to recognise and protect outstanding natural features and landscapes, consistent with section 6(b) of the Resource Management Act.

### **3.3.2 Landscape Policy Areas**

Outstanding natural features and landscapes are shown on the planning maps as Landscape Policy Areas. They have been delineated based on interpretation of the Waikato Landscape Study (1992, revised 2003 and 2006) by Boffa Miskell Ltd. The study describes the visual qualities and sensitivities of 31 separate landscape units within the district. See Schedule 3A. Additional landscape policy areas may be considered and added to the schedule by plan change, after consultation with key stakeholders.

### **3.3.3 Maori Significance**

Particular landforms have cultural and traditional significance to Maori. The policy seeks to recognise and provide for the relationship of Maori with these features (under section 6(e) of the Resource Management Act). The main method will be to protect landforms from destruction or significant modification during subdivision and development.

### **3.3.4 Roads, Tracks and Ridgelines**

This policy addresses specific issues for landscape protection and ensures that effects on ridgelines within Landscape Policy Areas are assessed. Ridgelines can be especially sensitive to development such as roads, and tracks and building, because the effects can be highly visible.

### **3.3.5 Deleted**

### **3.3.6 Views**

Views of outstanding natural features and landscapes, particularly from public places, make a contribution to the overall setting and context of a place.

### 3.4 Issue – Landscape and Visual Amenity Values

Poorly designed and located subdivision, use and development can have adverse effects on landscape and visual amenity values.

OBJECTIVE	POLICY
<p><b>3.4.1 [0067]</b> Landscapes and visual amenity values, as viewed from public places, are retained and enhanced.</p>	<p><b>3.4.2 [0067]</b> 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: <b>[0051]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) avoiding or mitigating adverse effects on natural features such as indigenous vegetation, lakes, rivers and mountains</li> <li>(b) ensuring that the visual effects of buildings can be absorbed without significant adverse effects on the landscape</li> <li>(c) locating buildings and development so as to integrate them with the surrounding landscape and backdrops, to avoid dominating the landscape</li> <li>(d) designing subdivision so that potential development, including building platforms, fences and vehicle accesses, are located sympathetically in the landscape</li> <li>(e) avoiding, remedying or mitigating as soon as practicable, the adverse visual effects of earthworks and vegetation clearance, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ retaining vegetation, and</li> <li>▪ restoring natural contours and replanting with appropriate species, and</li> <li>▪ limiting the area of soil exposed by earthworks and the length of time it is exposed, and</li> <li>▪ locating and constructing roads, tracks and vehicle accesses to minimise their visual impacts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>(f) avoiding or mitigating the adverse effects on visual amenity from noxious, dangerous, offensive or objectionable materials.</li> <li>(fa) considering the effects of activities on the relationship of Maori with their ancestral lands and waahi tapu.</li> <li>(g) locating national grid transmission lines in ways that avoid or minimise adverse effects on visual amenity.</li> </ul>

### 3.5 Reasons and Explanations

#### 3.5.1 Landscape and Visual Amenity

The objective seeks to retain and enhance landscape and visual amenity values viewed from public places. The policy applies to landscape and visual amenity values throughout the district, including to outstanding landscapes and features shown on the planning maps. As described in the Boffa Miskell Waikato Landscape Study (1992, revised 2003 and 2006) every part of the district has some landscape and visual amenity value, and some valued natural features. The attributes and relative importance of these vary from place to place. The design and management of subdivision, use and development needs to respond to the visual amenity requirements of the locality, consistent with the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values required under section 7(c) of the Resource Management Act. The objectives of retention and enhancement of landscape values may not necessarily both be attained by the same development or in the same place. Adverse visual effects of signs and development on old pa sites are of particular concern to Tangata Whenua.

### 3.5.1A Ridgelines

Prominent ridgelines that have been identified as having particular landscape and amenity value due to their visibility from public places have been identified as Ridgeline Policy Areas on the planning maps. This is consistent with the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values under section 7(c) of the Resource Management Act. Effects on other ridgelines should not be ignored. Ridgelines which have been identified as outstanding natural landscapes or features in terms of section 6(b) of the Resource Management Act are located within a Landscape Policy Area. Identification of a ridgeline as a Ridgeline Policy Area assists the maintenance and enhancement of landscape and amenity values of that ridgeline through additional rules relating to earthworks, formation of tracks and accesses, and height of buildings in relation to the ridgeline.

The objective and policy aim to ensure that amenity values are not compromised by inappropriate building and activities on locally distinctive landforms and ridgelines. Buildings and other developments that are silhouetted against the sky or a distant landform can detract from amenity values, both by visual discordance and through the effect of dominating the landscape. Often, these effects can be avoided by siting the building or development down the slope to ensure that the hill provides the backdrop, or mitigated by methods such as using natural screening and appropriate choice of building form and finish.

For renewable energy developments, particular regard shall be had to the benefits to be derived from the development and use of renewable energy as required by section 7(j) when considering whether the proposed development is appropriate in the context of the potential impacts on the landscape and amenity values of all ridgelines, including ridgelines within the Ridgeline Policy Areas.

### 3.5.2 Buildings

The siting, bulk and location of buildings needs to be sympathetic to the landscape to ensure that they do not have an obtrusive effect. Provision of visible open space is particularly important in rural areas, where extensive open space is a defining aspect of the landscape. Buildings and development may appear more dominating in a landscape, the closer they are together and to the viewing point. Setbacks from roads, and backdrops of land, not sky, help to merge buildings into their surroundings. Other factors that affect the obtrusiveness of a building include apparent height, size, form, colour, and materials. The Boffa Miskell study assessed the absorption capacity of landscapes in the district.

### 3.5.3 Subdivision

Subdivision design often determines the location of eventual building platforms, driveways, roads, fence lines and earthworks. Adverse impacts on landscape values that result from subdivision design are extremely difficult to rectify later.

### 3.5.4 Earthworks and Vegetation Clearance

Earthworks and vegetation clearance that are not promptly reinstated can impact on visual amenity values, by disrupting natural ground contours and landscape patterns and by secondary effects such as erosion and sedimentation. Where contours will not be reinstated, such as in cuttings or fill for roads, the policies call for a design that reshapes the land to resemble natural contours where possible, minimises batter faces and revegetates those that remain.

**3.5.5 Roads, Tracks and Accesses**

Roads, tracks and driveways can be visually obtrusive. Choosing a route that avoids conspicuous hillsides and minimises cut and fill batter faces can help to conceal them. Multiple parallel driveways also have high visual impact that can be avoided by shared accesses on unobtrusive alignments.

**3.5.6 Rehabilitation**

Landscape rehabilitation could include planting and earthworks to reshape land that has previously been the subject of obtrusive earthworks. Appropriate plant species would be those that are adapted to the site (excluding pests) and that would best integrate the site into the landscape. Indigenous vegetation makes an important contribution to natural character, and it should be retained where possible and used to revegetate cleared land in preference to exotic plants.

**3.5.7 Offensive Material**

This policy deals with storage of things that detract from the visual amenity of an area. Examples include derelict cars and car parts. Screening and locating out of sight of public places can address the visual impacts of these materials. Recycling and removal are preferred options. (Compare section 17(3) of the Resource Management Act.)

**3.5.8 Relationship of Maori**

In accordance with section 6(e) of the Resource Management Act 1991, this policy recognises and provides for the relationship of Maori with those natural features and landforms that are significant to them.

## 3.6 Issue – Natural Character

Inappropriate subdivision, use and development can adversely affect the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins.

OBJECTIVE	POLICY
<p>3.6.1 The natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins is preserved.</p>	<p>3.6.2 Subdivision, use and development should be of a density, scale, intensity and location that preserves the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins and should retain or enhance the relevant components of that character, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) geology, landform, indigenous vegetation and wildlife, and</li> <li>(b) natural processes, elements and patterns, and</li> <li>(c) intrinsic values of ecosystems, and</li> <li>(d) restoration potential, including potential vegetation cover, and</li> <li>(e) aesthetic, visual, cultural and heritage values attached to places and features including the cultural and spiritual relationship of Maori with their ancestral lands, and</li> <li>(f) unique or typical characteristics, and</li> <li>(g) the scale and context of modifications, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the ratio of open space to areas covered by buildings and other development</li> <li>▪ land use</li> <li>▪ open space areas in pasture, trees, crops or indigenous vegetation</li> <li>▪ water quality and flows</li> <li>▪ views of natural features, the coast, indigenous vegetation and water bodies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>3.6.2A Subdivision, use or development in the coastal environment should be located in areas where the natural character has already been compromised, and should not be sprawling or sporadic.</p> <p>3.6.2B The unique natural character of the Whaanga Coast should be specially recognised and protected including characteristics of special spiritual, historical or cultural significance to Maori identified in accordance with Tikanga Maori, and significant places or areas of historic or cultural significance.</p>

## 3.7 Reasons and Explanations

### 3.7.1 Natural Character

The natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins needs has to be assessed by reference to a range of natural, social and cultural values. The objective and policy address section 6(a) of the Resource Management Act. Natural character does not exist only in unmodified or pristine environments. Arguably there are no pristine environments left in the district. Natural character is found throughout the district in environments that are highly modified or unnatural. To identify and assess these areas requires consideration of the matters stated in the policy.

Geology, landform, indigenous vegetation and wildlife: these are primary components of natural character. The extent to which these are readily identifiable at a location will provide the most immediate indication of issues in relation to natural character.

Natural processes, elements and patterns: the viable functioning of natural processes and systems is essential to the survival of many species and habitats. These processes may not be readily visible.

Intrinsic values of ecosystems: while these are expressly referred to in section 7 of the Resource Management Act, they also provide a valid indicator of the existence of natural character.

Restoration potential, including potential vegetation cover: restoration potential may be assessed by reference to natural science and ecosystems (including the potential for ecological succession), or by the potential for human intervention by way of land management, planting or pest management.

Aesthetic, visual, cultural and heritage values attached to places and features: these are all aspects of the human dimension in identifying natural character. Tangata whenua considerations and values are included. Differences of opinion about natural character often arise from differences about what is aesthetically pleasing or picturesque. In this context, “aesthetics has a tendency to highlight some aspects of nature, and to downplay and overlook others.” (Swaffield, 1996) The other considerations referred to in the policy are included to balance this tendency.

Unique or typical characteristics: these considerations are not in themselves decisive of the existence or value of natural character. The fact that a place provides a typical example of an aspect of natural character may be a reason to retain it.

The scale and context of modifications: this includes consideration of the modification proposed by a development and past modifications. Where earthworks proceed, they should ensure that the land is left with a shape that appears natural in its context.

### **3.7.1A Coastal Environment**

Preference is given to subdivision, use and development in coastal areas that have already been compromised, rather than in areas with more natural character. Sprawling and sporadic development on the coast is also discouraged. This reflects the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement. Refer also to the Natural Character section above.

### **3.7.1B Whaanga Coast**

The coast south of Raglan between Calvert Rd and Papanui Point (Whaanga Coast Policy Area) is identified and protected as a landscape with scenic, recreational and cultural significance, important to the district, as referred to in New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 3.1.2. It is under intensive development pressure because of easy accessibility.

## **3.8 Methods of Implementation**

### **3.8.1 Regulatory Methods [0051]**

- (a) Identify outstanding natural features and landscapes, including representative geological examples on the planning maps as Landscape Policy Area.
- (b) Rules that control vegetation clearance, earthworks, location and visual effects of buildings and plantation forestry in outstanding natural features and landscapes, around the coast and water bodies.
- (c) Rules that control earthworks and formation of tracks on identified prominent ridgelines.
- (d) Esplanade reserves and other development setbacks created adjacent to the coast and significant water bodies.
- (e) Subdivision rules that provide incentives for protecting areas by covenant.
- (f) Rules that protect notable trees.
- (fa) Rules that control exotic forestry, extractive industries, commercial and industrial activities, wind energy facilities and landfills in the Whaanga Coast Policy Area.
- (fb) Rules that control development in a Coastal Zone to specifically address the effects of development in the coastal environment.

### 3.8.2 Deleted

### 3.8.3 Council Works and Services

- (a) Minimise land disturbance associated with council activities.

### 3.8.4 Information, Education and Advocacy

- (a) Support the promotion of voluntary protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes through protective covenants.
- (b) Support and promote appropriate voluntary codes of practice and guidelines relating to land disturbance.

## 3.9 Reasons for Methods

### 3.9.1 Regulatory Methods

Regulatory methods are necessary to protect natural character and the outstanding natural features and landscapes. Esplanade reserves ensure public ownership of the margins of water bodies and the coast, thus allowing the Council greater control over the activities that can occur in those areas. Subdivision incentives for protecting significant landforms and natural features encourage landowners to protect these. The Coastal Zone is a method to give effect to the requirements of section 6 of the Resource Management Act and coastal policy statements.

### 3.9.2 Deleted

### 3.9.3 Council Works and Services

It is important that the Council sets a good example by avoiding outstanding or locally distinctive landforms and natural features when undertaking land disturbance associated with activities such as roads and tracks.

### 3.9.4 Information, Education and Advocacy

Awareness of the importance of natural features and the impact that land disturbance has on them could reduce the likelihood of important features being damaged or destroyed.

## 3.10 Anticipated Environmental Results

ISSUES	ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS
<p>3.10.1</p> <p>Outstanding landforms, features and landscapes</p> <p>Landscape and visual amenity values</p> <p>Natural character</p>	<p>(a) Protection and enhancement of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ outstanding natural features and landscapes, including ridgelines within those areas</li> <li>▪ cultural and traditional relationships of Maori with particular landforms.</li> </ul> <p>(b) Avoidance or mitigation of effects of development that will result in irreversibly changing or destroying landforms and natural features especially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ significant ridgelines</li> <li>▪ the coastal environment</li> <li>▪ representative geological examples and</li> <li>▪ locally significant natural features.</li> </ul> <p>(c) Retention of notable trees.</p> <p>(d) Preservation of natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, including distinctive aspects of localities.</p>

## Schedule 3A Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes

### **3A.1 Mapping**

The land comprising outstanding natural features and landscapes is shown on the Planning Maps as Landscape Policy Areas. Features and landscapes are subject to the same rules.

### **3A.2 Outstanding Landscapes and Features**

Whangamarino Wetland, Hakarimata Range, Taupiri Range, Kokako Hills, Te Hoe, Mt Karioi, Papanui Point, Matakotako Area, Bridal Veil Falls, Mt Pirongia, Horea-Rangitoto Pt, Potaki Pt (Aotea Harbour north head), Waikato River, Lake Waikare, Lake Whangape,

### **3A.3 Criteria for Outstanding Landscapes**

The Waikato Landscape Study (1992, revised 2003 and 2006) by Boffa Miskell Ltd describes the visual qualities and sensitivities of 31 separate landscape units within the district. Within each unit a ranking was ascribed for visual quality, from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Each unit was also ascribed a ranking for visual absorption capability, i.e. the ability for the landscape to absorb change or development. These were ascribed from 1 (low) to 5 (high). The landscape units that scored high for visual quality and low for visual absorption capacity were then considered for “outstanding” status against criteria developed in case law. The above landscapes met the criteria.

### **3A.4 Criteria for Outstanding Natural Features**

This plan recognises outstanding natural features following wide criteria, including scientific, historic, archaeological, scenic, recreational, social and cultural factors. Documentation includes the Waikato Landscape Study and its revisions referred to above. As with the outstanding landscapes, features were considered for outstanding status against criteria developed in case law.

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