

**IN THE MATTER OF** the Resource Management Act 1991

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF** a resource consent application by Sanderson Group Limited to the Waikato District Council to develop land at 56 and 70 Tamahere Drive, and 82 and 92 Tamahere Drive, for retirement village (Tamahere Country Club southern and eastern extensions)

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF JOANNA LOUISE SOANES**

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**Introduction**

1. My full name is Joanna Louise Soanes. I am a Senior Principal Landscape Architect at Boffa Miskell Limited (**BML**), a position I have held since April 2018. Previously, I worked at WSP Opus for nine years. I have a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture with Honours from Lincoln University.
2. I have 19 years' experience working as a Landscape Architect. I have a broad skills base with experience spanning landscape planning, assessment, and design for a diverse range of projects in both urban and rural contexts. I have practised as a Landscape Architect in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, and Christchurch, undertaking work for a wide range of clients, ranging from local and regional councils, central government, educational institutions to private companies and developers.
3. I have previous experience in providing expert evidence on landscape and visual effects at council hearings for resource consent applications and notices

of requirement. I have provided masterplanning, design and landscape and visual effects advice in relation to a wide range of development proposals including:

- (i) Plan Change 12 rezoning of land outside the Te Awamutu township, which involved designing the layout for the structure plan and preparing the Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment. Additionally, I assisted with the design and consenting process of Te Awamutu Country Club (now Whai Mauri Ora by Arvida) on the same land.
  - (ii) Matamata Country Club, also for Sanderson Group Ltd.
  - (iii) Avenue North Industrial Plan Change which involved preparation of the LVEA to support the plan change and providing evidence at Council hearing.
4. These projects are relevant to this application due to their location in rural zones or influenced by rural character. They required effects assessment on rural character and specific design of interfaces to ensure appropriate project outcomes.

### **Code of Conduct**

5. While this is not an Environment Court proceeding, I have read and am familiar with the Environment Court's Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses, as contained in section 9 of the Environment Court's Practice Note 2023, and I agree to comply with it. My qualifications as an expert are set out above. The data, information, facts and assumptions that I have considered in forming my opinions are set out in my evidence that follows. The reasons for the opinions expressed are also set out in the evidence that follows.
6. I confirm that the matters addressed in this brief of evidence are within my area of expertise, with the exception of where I confirm that I am relying on the evidence of another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts

known to me that might alter or detract from my opinions expressed in this brief of evidence. I have specified where my opinion is based on limited or partial information and I have identified any assumptions I have made in forming my opinions.

### **Scope of evidence**

7. This evidence has been prepared on behalf of the applicant, Sanderson Group Ltd (**Sanderson**) and relates to landscape and visual effects associated with the Tamahere Country Club village (**TCC**) Eastern and Southern extension proposal.
8. My evidence should be read in conjunction with the Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment (**LVEA**) prepared by BML, dated 11 August 2023, and is structured as follows:
  - (i) Methodology
  - (ii) Project Background
  - (iii) The Site and Landscape Context
  - (iv) The proposal and relevant landscape design matters
  - (v) Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects
  - (vi) Response to matters raised in the submission received
  - (vii) Response to matters raised in the s42A Report
  - (viii) Conclusion
9. I have visited the site on numerous occasions since 2018 and will visit the site again prior to the hearing.
10. This evidence has been informed by my visits to the site and the surrounding area, the relevant provisions of the Waikato District Plan (i.e. the Operative and Proposed District Plans) and Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines (Published by Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022).

11. I have read and am familiar with the submissions received, the s 42A report and the proposed conditions.

### **Executive summary**

12. The proposal involves two extensions to the existing TCC village encompassing a total area of 7.15ha. The extension to the south at 82 and 92 Tamahere Drive, is approximately 5.25 hectares and the extension to the east at 56 and 70 Tamahere Drive, covers approximately 1.9 hectares.
13. The proposed Southern extension includes 42 standalone villas, an internal road network, a new Health Spa facility, 32 carparks and an extension to the shared walking / cycling path around the perimeter of the site. The proposed Eastern extension includes 25 standalone villas, an internal road network and a small arts and crafts facility.
14. As part of the proposal, BML has prepared a comprehensive landscape design that encompasses the extension sites and seamlessly connects them with the existing TCC village (refer to Landscape Package prepared by BML<sup>1</sup>).
15. Below is a summary of the position reached in this evidence on the significant matters:
  - (i) The current landscape character in and around the site influences how the proposed extensions will impact the surrounding landscape character and visual amenity values.
  - (ii) Within the context of the surrounding rural landscape the proposed extensions will have low adverse effects on existing landscape character values. There will be a change in existing characteristics at the local level (within the proposed extension site), particularly related to building density.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix G of the AEE prepared by BBO dated November 2023

- (iii) The southern interface has been designed to ensure appropriate integration and interface between the proposed retirement village extension and existing rural land, including: implementing 25-metre building setbacks, hedging, tree and native plantings, a shared path encircling the site, the establishment of a native screening planted area (in the southern corner), a planted bund along the western boundary and rural-style post and rail fencing.
- (iv) In visual terms, from the public perspective of adjacent roads, the proposed extensions will have minimal impact. Any visual effects on identified private viewing audiences will be viewed in the context of the existing development and the design treatment will be similar to, and an extension of the previously consented design. Visual effects have been assessed as up to low (adverse), likely reducing to very low.
- (v) Overall, the proposed extensions will read as a logical addition to the TCC village. With the proposed design and mitigation measures the diverse rural characteristics of the surrounding areas and the retirement village interface within the rural zone to the south of the site can be maintained.

## Background

16. I was commissioned by Sanderson to provide expert landscape and visual evidence in relation to the proposed extension at the TCC village. A Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment (**LVEA**) for the proposed extension at TCC was prepared by Julia Wick (Principal Landscape Architect), as I was on leave at the time (refer Tamahere Country Club Extension, Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment – Addendum Report, prepared by Sanderson Group, dated 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023).

17. I have been involved in the TCC since 2018 when BML led the initial master planning and site layout for the original consent application. This work was undertaken with planners BBO, architects Edwards White and transport planners Stantec.
  
18. The original TCC Landscape, Urban and Visual Amenity Assessment (**LUVAA**) prepared in July 2018 concluded:
  - (i) The master planning exercise has established the site layout including landscape elements, open space, roading, building platforms, building features and heights. The masterplanning has been undertaken in an integrated manner to ensure the planning rules and good urban design principles are achieved and that the development will achieve a good fit for its Tamahere site context. The site's planning guidelines and setbacks have provided the basis for the siting of the proposed different building types and their massing.
  - (ii) A retirement village is, in and of itself, urban in nature due to the residential density and number of people living within the development. Tamahere has for some time been changing in nature from a more rural to rural residential due to its proximity to Hamilton. This transition is further exemplified by the development of the nearby Tamahere Town Centre and Piazza.
  - (iii) Overall, it is considered that the development responds positively to the surrounding landscape context and development. The external interface of the Country Club development will maintain a high degree of treed amenity and open space character contributing to the rural character and amenity of the locality and maintains some of the key characteristics of the site. The proposed architecture will also respond to the rural attributes of the site, creating a distinctly rural vernacular and identity as part of the Country Club amenity.

- (iv) While the housing density is obviously greater than the adjacent rural environment the careful design and planning of the proposed development layout and inclusion of rural – related characteristics, has enabled the creation of an integrated development capable of accommodating the increased density without off site effects.
  - (v) The varied building setback, from 12 m to 25 m, along the southern boundary, the meandering laneway, park-like tree planting, and productive allotment gardens all reflect the rural character and context. The large-scale existing Oak trees retained along with further specimen tree planting will, once established, provide an attractive and sensitive rural interface with significant open space amenity.
19. Subsequent to the completion of the LUVAA I have been involved in the following stages of the development:
- (i) Stage 2 - Additional development of properties 30, 32 and 36 Tamahere Drive. An LVEA Addendum assessment was prepared in October 2019.
  - (ii) Stage 4 – Extension at 70 Tamahere Drive, approximately 12.5 ha to the southern end of the existing TCC – known as Stage 2. A LVEA was prepared in June 2021
20. The LVEA prepared as part of this application for extension does not replace the 2018 LUVAA or the 2021 LVEA but essentially builds on both documents.

### **Site Description**

21. The landscape characteristics of the site and surrounding area are described in detail in the LVEA<sup>2</sup>. I summarise the key characteristics as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Refer Tamahere Country Club Extension, Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment – Addendum Report, Prepared for Sanderson Group, dated 11th August 2023

- (i) The southern extension site directly adjoins the southern boundary of the existing TCC retirement village with Tamahere Drive to the eastern boundary.
- (ii) The wider landscape surrounding the sites is characterised by rural lifestyle and large lot residential developments, despite the rural zoning of the area.
- (iii) There are no identified high value landscapes or features (ONFL) within the extension sites or within their immediate context.
- (iv) Five rural lifestyle properties adjoin the immediate boundary of the Southern extension site. There are also two properties to the east of the Southern extension site, across Tamahere Drive.
- (v) The Southern extension site is relatively flat in nature. 82 Tamahere Drive (1.7 ha) is currently used as the site yard for Sanderson's construction activities. 92 Tamahere Drive (3.54 ha) is a former Christmas tree business, with a single dwelling and associated sheds on site. There are a number of well-established exotic trees on the eastern edge of the site including a Horsetail (being a notable tree in the Operative District Plan).
- (vi) The Eastern extension site also has flat topography. 56 Tamahere Drive (1.10 ha) has a single storey dwelling located to the northern edge of the site, with a number of established tree species surrounding it and a driveway connecting to Tamahere Drive. The remainder of the site is open pasture. 70 Tamahere Drive, known as 'The Compound', is understood to be the 'Red Lid Garden Bins & Bags' company premises. The site features a gravel parking area to the Tamahere Drive eastern edge, two single storey residential dwellings to the south and paddock in the northwestern corner.
- (vii) Due to the flat topography of both extension sites, the visual catchment is generally restricted and contained. The sites are both located adjacent to the existing TCC development.

- (viii) Based on this viewing catchment analysis, and noting the written approvals obtained for several properties, the primary viewing audience comprises these groups:
- Users of Tamahere Drive, including those using the Te Awa River walking/cycling path. This viewing audience will typically experience transient views of both extension sites from close proximity to the north and south.
  - For the Southern extension site the residential property to the immediate south of the site, at 25 Pencarrow Road, that did not provide their written approval.

## Proposal

22. The proposal involves two extensions to the existing TCC. The first is the Southern extension located at 82 and 92 Tamahere Drive to the south, encompassing an area of approximately 5.25 hectares. The second is the Eastern extension, situated at 56 and 70 Tamahere Drive to the east, covering an area of approximately 1.9 hectares. The total extension will be 7.15 ha.
23. The proposed Southern extension includes:
- (i) 42 standalone villas.
  - (ii) Internal road network.
  - (iii) A new Health Spa facility to the northeast corner of the extension site.
  - (iv) Approximately 32 carparks located within one parking area adjacent to the health spa.
  - (v) Extension of the shared walking / cycling path around the perimeter of the site.
24. The proposed Eastern extension:
- (i) 25 standalone villas.
  - (ii) Internal road network.
  - (iii) Small arts and crafts facility

25. Overall, the building coverage on the extension sites is 19.5%. This is generally consistent with the condition on existing consents, which implements a maximum of 28% site coverage for the original site and 18.5% for the southern extension consented in 2021. The new extensions are consistent with the more restrictive boundary setback requirements of the Operative District Plan<sup>3</sup> and consistent with the existing TCC development<sup>4</sup>.
26. Access to the development is from the existing consented entrance points on Tamahere Drive.
27. As part of the proposal, BML prepared a comprehensive landscape design that encompasses the extension sites and seamlessly connects them with the existing TCC village. The proposed landscape design for the extension sites includes the following key features:
- (i) The incorporation of a landscape that enhances the onsite amenity and fosters a seamless connection with the previous stages of the TCC development.
  - (ii) Extensive landscape treatment surrounding the external boundaries of the site, with particular emphasis on the southern and western boundaries adjoining the Rural zoned properties. This treatment entails implementing 25-metre building setbacks, hedging, tree plantings, a shared path encircling the entire site, the establishment of a native screening planted area (in the southern corner) and planted bund along the western boundary.
  - (iii) Extension of the landscape treatment to Tamahere Drive, ensuring a consistent and high-quality aesthetic along this edge.
  - (iv) Open rural-style post and rail fencing along all external site boundaries.

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<sup>3</sup> The Proposed District Plan setbacks are less than the Operative District Plan, being 12m when adjoining properties are less than 6ha (Rule GRUZ-S12), whereas the Operative District Plan setbacks are 25m for titles more than 1.6ha (Rule 25.54).

<sup>4</sup> It is noted that the proposed district plan reduces the setback from 25m to 12m. 25m is adopted for TCC.

- (v) Generously sized specimen tree and public amenity planting throughout.
- (vi) Retention and protection of scheduled tree at 92 Tamahere Drive.
- (vii) Screening of the campervan parking area from adjacent villas.

## **Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment**

### *Landscape Effects*

28. In terms of landscape effects, the development of the sites, including the landscape elements, open space, roading, building locations and heights, has been undertaken in an integrated manner to ensure best practice landscape and urban design principles are achieved.
29. The proposed development has also been carefully planned in response to the landscape context, taking into consideration the adjacent TCC development and the wider rural residential area. Whilst the intensity of the development is greater than envisaged for the setting, its intensity is consistent with the neighbouring TCC. The single storey nature of the proposed buildings, together with the architectural design of the buildings aims to create a residential look and feel, seamlessly blending with the existing retirement village and maintaining the overall character of the TCC and Tamahere area.
30. The comprehensive nature of the proposed landscape design serves both the residents' amenity and the preservation of a rural interface with the surrounding streets and residential neighbours. It includes a combination of native and exotic plant species that offer cover and seasonal interest and creates a well vegetated character to the village. The Horsetail to the eastern edge of 92 Tamahere Drive will also be retained and incorporated into the proposed landscape design.

31. The proposed extensions will, by their very nature, alter the existing function and character of those sites, with more intensive housing, however, the development responds positively to the surrounding landscape context and existing TCC development. The external interface of the extensions will maintain a high degree of amenity and open space character, particularly along rural and road boundaries and will appear similar to the current 'look' of the TCC boundary.
32. Landscape effects are therefore considered to be, **low** (adverse) as a result of the proposed extension.

### **Visual Effects**

33. I address the visual effects in respect of the different public and private viewing audiences in my evidence below, with a focus on 25 Pencarrow Road, as written approval from this party was not obtained.
34. Members of the public on the short section of Tamahere Drive and the Te Awa Cycleway will only have the ability to view the proposed extension sites for a short amount of time. Views will be obtainable of the proposed Health spa, carpark, and some of the villas on the eastern edge of the site. Although the extension is of a greater density than what currently exists on site, the proposed design, architectural treatment and carefully considered landscape interface of trees, hedges and rural style fencing, the buildings will appear of a suitable residential scale. The extensions will create a natural continuation of the existing TCC retirement village. Visual effects for this public viewing audience will be up to low (adverse).
35. The proposed southern extension adjoins the property at 25 Pencarrow Road along an approximately 45m length of its southern boundary. 25 Pencarrow Road is a large 4.6ha rural residential property that is roughly rectangle shape. There is a large single storey residential dwelling located within the centre of

the property approximately 90m from the site boundary. There are several established exotic trees around the dwelling and the remainder of the site is largely in open paddocks. The proposed development along this site boundary sets back the built form by 25m. There is also a minimum 20m landscape native planting strip to the southern boundary that features substantial screen planting. This planting consists of native species, both shrub and specimen trees that reach a maximum height of 8-10m. To the western boundary, the landscape interface continues the substantial screen planting but also introduces a 3m high planted bund, planted with *Phormium tenax* and *Sophora microphylla*. These boundary interface treatments will screen the southern extension from the adjacent rural landscape and provide an appropriate integration between the two land uses. Specimen trees have also been located within the masterplan, on the spine roads, boundary and between the buildings to provide specific screening of the proposal.

36. Due to the distance from the 25 Pencarrow Road dwelling on the site boundary, the flat topography of the site together with the proposed planting and bunding to the boundary and the offset of the built form there will be limited views of the southern extension.
37. Effects are considered to temporarily be low (adverse) for 25 Pencarrow Road due to the change in rural character, however, once the vegetation becomes established and the modest single storey scale of development becomes well integrated, the visual effects will likely reduce to very low.

#### **Matters raised by submissions**

38. One submission was received as part of the notification period. A response to this submission is provided in other evidence briefs. The submission did not raise concerns in relation to landscape or visual effects.

**Council Section 42A Report**

39. I have read the relevant parts of the reporting officer section 42A report prepared by Ms Carmine (Element Planning), specifically Section 6.4.2 addressing Visual Effects and Landscape Character. Ms Carmine has determined that both the Eastern and Southern extensions are inconsistent with the objectives and policies outlined in the PDP and RPS growth policies. However, she recommends granting consent for the Eastern extension, deeming the effects to be minor. In contrast, she recommends the Southern extension be declined, concluding that effects on rural character and settlement patterns (in the context of the PDP provisions) to be more than minor. I will therefore focus my response on the landscape and visual effect issues raised for the Southern Extension.
40. Ms Carmine has raised concerns that the LVEA does not place sufficient regard to the context of zoning and policies. She also concludes that the south is more 'rural' and the Southern Extension does not maintain this rural character, instead displaying more urban character. Furthermore, she has highlighted concerns that the proposed development will give rise to potential adverse cumulative effects. I respond to each of these matters sequentially in my evidence below.

*Sufficient regard to the context of zoning and policies*

41. Ms Carmine holds the opinion that the LVEA fails to adequately consider the context provided by zoning provisions and policies. She is concerned that the conclusions drawn in the LVEA do not appropriately take into account the surrounding zoning regulations and the policies outlined for the Rural Zone.
42. It is the role of a LVEA to assess effects against the relevant planning provisions. This includes what the objectives and policies say with respect to landscape values and what type and magnitude of development or change in the

landscape is anticipated. It is then for the LVEA to reach an opinion, supported by rationale, on whether the proposal achieves these outcomes in landscape terms. Conducting a comprehensive assessment of the proposal against relevant statutory provisions is generally considered the domain of planners rather than in the LVEAs. In the context of this application, the policies in the PDP for the General Rural Zone (**GRUZ**) reference the maintenance of the rural character, with spatial rural character and amenity to be achieved by a low density of built form (i.e. dwellings).

43. I remain of the opinion that the LVEA assessment and this evidence sufficiently evaluates the impact on rural character from a landscape perspective. This is detailed in paragraphs 28 – 32 above and below in paragraphs 46 - 49. In addition to this a full planning assessment of the proposal against the relevant statutory provisions is undertaken in the Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE) and in the evidence provided by Ms Drew.

#### *Impacts on Rural Character*

44. Ms Carmine considers *“there is still value to the rural character within the subject site and surrounding sites and that the existing village due to the existing setbacks and landscape treatments consented along the southern boundary of LUC0597/21 does not erode the value of rural character and amenity within the southern extension area to a point that justifies the introduction of urbanised character. For these reasons I find the southern extension proposal is inconsistent with GRUZ- P3”*. Ms Carmine also goes on to say that the change is an adverse effect and will not maintain character as the site cannot absorb this change.
45. In addition to the above, Ms Carmine holds concern that character to the south is more rural and states *“The adjoining rural land beyond the subject sites to the south, whilst in relatively small sized land holdings for the General Rural Zone, do in my view represent a rural environment with rural character and*

*rural landscapes. The adjoining sites to the south of the proposal are characterised by low built form to open space ratio, pasture, rural wire fencing, and stock grazing. The subject site was, prior to the establishment of the unconsented depot a small rural residentially sized greenfield site and in my view would be categorised as rural in character rather than urban in character.”*

46. I agree with Miss Carmine that the proposed extension does introduce a more urban character to the site. However, I do not agree that the Proposal will generate adverse effects on rural character that are more than minor. It is important to consider that a landscape change is not in itself an effect, instead, it is whether when a landscape changes, and whether that change can be absorbed by the environment.
47. I disagree with Ms Carmine and it is my opinion that she is focusing on the site in an isolated context, not looking in the wider context and taking a policy/planning approach to this assessment of character. It is important when assessing character to not just focus on generic attributes (such as ruralness or naturalness). In that narrowing of the focus to one site, it can inadvertently divert attention from i) the whole landscape, ii) the specific landscape, and iii) the overarching concepts and principles that apply to all landscapes. This in turn leads to the overlooking of specific character<sup>5</sup>. As outlined in section 29 – 32 of this evidence it is important to consider the wider context, and its combination of characteristics and qualities when assessing effects on this rural landscape.
48. As set out in the application LVEA, and this evidence, the character of the surrounding landscape comprises of rural lifestyle blocks, large lot residential developments, SH1, SH21, Tamahere village including town centre, piazza and recreation reserve and the existing TCC development. The proposed development and the primary perception of the proposal will be that of an

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<sup>5</sup> Section 4.0 of Te Tangi a te Manu Section. 4.40

extension to the existing TCC. While I acknowledged (as noted in the LVEA) that the proposed development will result in an increase in development and intensity of the site, the continuation of design, the proposed trees, provision of open space to the site and boundary landscape (offsets etc) will mean that the level of change will be appropriate to (and assimilate with) the surrounding context and character. This, together with the landscape treatment to the boundaries that unifies that overall design and ties the new development into the existing TCC, means that overall, I remain of the opinion that the proposed development can be absorbed into the site and surrounding context and landscape effects on character will be **low** (adverse) (less than minor).

49. A Rural Zone is a broad concept and defined by the various elements that make up the rural environment. Therefore, the site planning and treatment of interfaces between different land uses within the rural zone are required. This has been achieved through design responses that respond to rural character, such as setbacks, specimen tree planting and post and rail fencing, which have been outlined in detail in paragraph 27 of this evidence and within the landscape design. These design elements have been successfully implemented in the previous stages of the TCC.

#### *Cumulative effects*

50. The LVEA presents an assessment of the anticipated effects of the proposed extension on the character of the landscape. The proposed extension would contribute to an extension along the existing southern boundary of the built-up area of TCC and will extend the overall retirement village footprint into the rural landscape to the south. The landscape effects would largely be contained within a short distance from the existing TCC development (i.e. directly to the south). The proposed extension will not result in a piecemeal or fragmented development pattern which erodes the character of the rural landscape over a wide area. In my opinion, the landscape has the capacity to accommodate the

proposed expansion without undue consequences on its underlying values and characteristics.

### **Conditions**

51. I have reviewed the reporting officer's proposed conditions of consent in respect of landscaping provided as part of the section 42A report and agree with the relevant landscape conditions proposed and that they will adequately address landscape and visual effects.

### **Conclusion**

52. It remains my opinion that both the Southern and Eastern extensions are appropriate in context of the receiving environment and will result in a quality development outcome for the site and surrounding area. In my opinion adverse landscape and visual effects will be, at most, low (less than minor), with the overall broader rural landscape character maintained. Overall, it is my opinion that the extensions will have a high level of amenity, are a good fit with the local area from a landscape and visual effects perspective and will not give rise to rural character effects that are more than minor, regardless of the density of development proposed.

**Jo Soanes**  
**16 April 2024**