

10 September 2020

To the Chairman of the Waikato District Plan Hearings Panel
C/o Waikato District Plan Administrator

Dear Sir,

Proposed District Plan: Ohinewai Rezoning – hearing topic 19

I thought it was an appropriate time for me, as Mayor of the Waikato District Council, to write to you to inform the hearings panel of the views and aspirations of the elected members of Council in relation to The Comfort Group's proposal for a \$1 billion industrial and residential development on approximately 178 ha of land at Ohinewai ("the Proposal"). This letter has the unanimous support of myself as Mayor and of our Councillors.

Integrating two district plans into one consolidated plan has been a journey that my Councillors and I have been on for nearly 5 years. At every step, the decisions that sit within the Proposed District Plan have been made and endorsed by our district's elected members, as we are the ultimate owners of - and accountable to the community for - the decisions associated with our district plan.

Council as the proponent of the Proposed District Plan has, in its regulatory function, properly appointed an independent planning consultant to assess the Proposal against the relevant statutory criteria. The section 42A report author recommends that The Comfort Group's submission on the Proposed District Plan in relation to the Proposal be rejected. Whilst that is the professional opinion of the report author, it is not shared by the elected members of Council. Hence, it is important that the hearings panel is made aware of the views of the elected members.

Despite the Proposal being put on the table late in the district plan review process, via a submission, it has unanimous support at a political level. The Proposal is of significant benefit to the river communities of the North Waikato, but more importantly to the close communities of both Huntly and Ohinewai. It is strongly endorsed by residents who see the opportunity for large scale employment and the opportunity to potentially buy their first home, either as an employee of The Comfort Group or on the open market.

The Proposal will also have significant social and economic benefits for the entire Waikato district. Importantly, it presents a significant opportunity to stimulate the district in the post- Covid-19 era. It will create jobs, increase the stock of good quality housing supply and stimulate much needed financial investment

Significantly, the Proposal also sits within the Hamilton to Auckland corridor, which has been identified by central government as one of the most strategic growth corridors in New Zealand. The residential and industrial components of the Proposal also form an integral part of Council's recently adopted Growth and Economic Development Strategy, Waikato 2070, a process initiated by Council utilising the special consultative process under the Local Government Act 2002. The Proposal is also consistent with the Waikato District Blueprint which addresses Council's vision and high level master

planning over the next 30 years. The Local Area Blueprint for Ohinewai identifies the site of the Ohinewai Structure Plan developed by The Comfort Group. This is why it is so important that we can provide much needed employment and housing in a location that is ideally suited to what The Comfort Group are trying to achieve.

In closing, can I say that from time to time issues arise around good planning that do not always fit the typical box. In my experience, it is not uncommon for developments to present themselves in circumstances where they were not anticipated in planning documents that pre-date the development, often by many years. Planning is a dynamic process that must be responsive and flexible to change, particularly where the development has the potential to be a game changer for the district and the communities it serves. This is where we as community leaders need to look outside the box, and not be as prescriptive as what traditional planning processes might suggest.

Council considers the Proposal is of such importance to the district in terms of its scale and significance, that the sustainable management of the natural and physical resources of the district and its communities would not be met if the planning documents are interpreted in an overly narrow and restrictive way. This opportunity may not come along again for decades. The elected members urge the hearings panel to consider the Proposal favourably for the benefit of the entire district and to give the necessary weight to Council's strategic documents that fully support the Proposal.

Regards,



Mayor Allan Sanson
Waikato District Council