



FTAA-2512-1154: Application received for referral of the project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Stage 1 decisions

Project Name: Orchard Grove

Date submitted:	15 January 2026	Tracking #: BRF-00069	
Security level:	In-Confidence	MfE priority:	Urgent

	Action sought:	Response by:
To Hon Chris Bishop, Minister for Infrastructure	Decisions on recommendations in Table A	22 January 2026

Actions for Minister's Office staff	Return the signed briefing to: FTAreferrals@mfe.govt.nz Send email to Ministers to invite written comments
Number of appendices: 3	Appendices: 1. Statutory framework summary 2. Application documents for the Orchard Grove project 3. List of the Māori groups referred to in section 18(2)

Ministry for the Environment contacts:

Position	Name	Cell phone	1 st contact
Principal Author	Rebecca Burton		
Acting Manager	Ben Bunting	s 9(2)(a)	
Acting General Manager	Stephanie Frame	s 9(2)(a)	✓

Project location

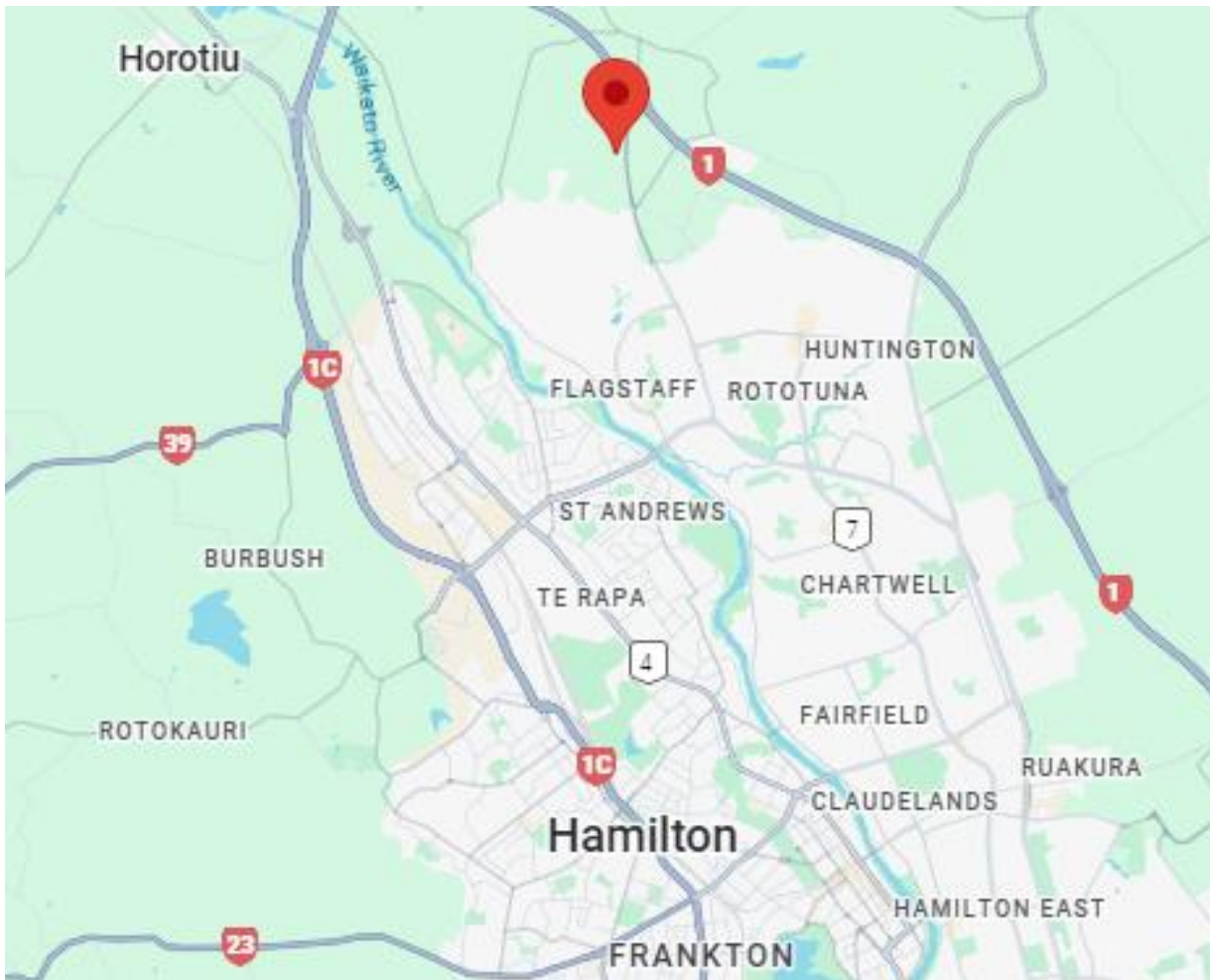


Figure 1: General location of the project (illustrated by red point).

Key messages

1. This briefing seeks your initial decisions on an application from Gordon Litt Farms Limited (the applicant) to refer the Orchard Grove project (the project) under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) to the fast-track approvals process.
2. At this stage you can either decline an application for the reasons set out section 21, or provide the application to, and invite comments from, the parties identified in section 17. If you do not decline the application, you will receive a further briefing following receipt of comments, to support your final decision on whether to refer the project.
3. The project is to establish a new residential development over approximately 73 hectares of rural land located in Horsham Downs within the Waikato District.
4. The project involves:
 - a. approximately 815 residential lots
 - b. a new neighbourhood centre of approximately 4,000 square metres
 - c. stormwater management features, pedestrian and cycle paths, landscaped areas, and new reserves and open spaces within a connected greenspace network

- d. associated roading and three waters infrastructure; and
 - e. provision for a future arterial road along the existing Reynolds Road corridor.
5. The applicant seeks the following approvals under the fast-track approvals process to authorise the project:
 - a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)
 - b. wildlife authority under the Wildlife Act 1953.
6. While the project area is located within Waikato District Council's boundaries, the project area adjoins the territorial boundary of Hamilton City Council (HCC), and the applicant proposes to utilise HCC's existing infrastructure to service the project.
7. The project involves a prohibited activity under both the *Operative* and *Operative in Part* versions of the Waikato District Plan – specifically, the subdivision of high class soil and land located within an Urban Expansion Policy Area.
8. If you agree to progress the project to our Stage 2 analysis, the next briefing will require you to consider whether to decline the referral application on the basis that it involves a prohibited activity. This is a potential reason you may decline a referral application under section 21(5) of the Act. However, we note section 21(7) of the Act explicitly states that the presence of a prohibited activity does not, in itself, prevent you from accepting a referral application.
9. We have undertaken initial analysis of the referral application, and this is presented along with our considerations and recommendations in Table A.
10. We have decided the application is complete and complies with section 14 of the Act, as the application complies with section 13 requirements, may be capable of satisfying the criteria in section 22 and does not appear to involve an ineligible activity. The applicable fee and levy have been paid.
11. We recommend you progress consideration of the referral application to the next stage of analysis (Stage 2) and invite written comments from the parties prescribed in section 17(1) of the Act being:
 - a. Waikato District Council and Waikato Regional Council
 - b. the Minister for the Environment
 - c. the Minister of Conservation and the Associate Minister of Housing as the relevant portfolio Ministers
 - d. the Department of Conservation as the relevant administering agency
 - e. the identified Māori groups as listed in Appendix 3.
12. We recommend that you invite written comments from the following parties as additional persons under section 17(5) of the Act:
 - a. the Chief Executive of Hamilton City Council, as the project area adjoins the territorial boundary of Hamilton City Council (HCC), and the applicant proposes to utilise HCC's existing infrastructure to service the project.
 - b. the Chief Executive of NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA), as an NZTA designation (J17/NZTA-8) is located adjacent to the eastern boundary and partially over the southeastern corner of the project area.
 - c. Minister for Regional Development

d. Minister for Economic Growth

Action sought

13. Please indicate your decisions on the recommendations in Table A.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Frame', is written on a light blue grid background.

Stephanie Frame
Acting General Manager, Investment Strategy and Operations

Table A: Stage 1 analysis

Project details	Project Name	Applicant	Project Location			
	Orchard Grove (the project)	Gordon Litt Farms Limited (the applicant)	An area of approximately 73 hectares at 40B & C, 66 and 126 Reynolds Road, and 78 Osbourne Road located in Horsham Downs with the Waikato District. The project area is legally described as Lot 15 DP 327052, Lot 2 DP 353756, Lot 3 DP 353756, Lot 4 DP 440812, Lot 2 DP 537963, Lot 2 DP 356758 and Lot 1 DPS 73950.			
Project description	<p>The project is to establish a new residential development over approximately 73 hectares of rural land located in Horsham Downs within the Waikato District.</p> <p>The project involves:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> approximately 815 residential lots a new neighbourhood centre of approximately 4,000 square metres stormwater management features, pedestrian and cycle paths, landscaped areas, and new reserves and open spaces within a connected greenspace network associated roading and three waters infrastructure; and provision for a future arterial road along the existing Reynolds Road corridor. <p>The applicant seeks the following approvals under the fast-track approvals process to authorise the project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), including prohibited activities under the <i>Operative</i> and <i>Operative in Part</i> versions of the Waikato District Plan for the subdivision high class soil and land located within an Urban Expansion Policy Area wildlife authority under the Wildlife Act 1953. 					
Consultation undertaken	As required by section 11, the applicant has consulted with:					
	<i>Relevant local authorities</i>	<i>Relevant iwi authorities, hapū and Treaty settlement entities</i>	<i>Relevant MACA groups</i>	<i>Ngā hapū o Ngāti Porou</i>	<i>Relevant administering agencies</i>	<i>Holder of land to be exchanged</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waikato District Council Waikato Regional Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ngāti Haua Ngāti Wairere Waikato Tainui 	Not applicable to the project area	Not applicable to the project area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Conservation 	Not applicable
Section 22 assessment criteria						
The project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits [section 22(1)(a)]	<p>The applicant considers the project, being the establishment of approximately 815 residential lots in the Waikato region, is a project that will have significant regional benefits for the reasons outlined below.</p> <p><i>The project has been identified as a priority project in a central or local government, or sector plan or strategy or a central government infrastructure priority list [s22(2)(a)(i)]</i> The applicant states that the project area forms part of a larger growth cell identified in both the Future Proof 2024 and the Hamilton Waikato Metropolitan Spatial Plan 2020. The applicant notes this area is intended to be transferred from the Waikato District to the Hamilton City Council territory in 2045 and is required to support the long-term growth needs of Hamilton City.</p> <p><i>Will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure or enable the continued functioning of existing regionally or nationally significant infrastructure [s22(2)(a)(ii)]</i> The applicant states that the project will deliver publicly vested infrastructure that will generate wider benefits, including new reserves and open spaces, walking and cycling links, and local roading upgrades available to use by future residents and the wider community.</p> <p><i>Will increase the supply of housing, address housing needs, or contribute to a well-functioning urban environment (within the meaning of policy 1 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020) [s22(2)(a)(iii)]</i> The applicant states that the project will increase the supply of housing and address current housing shortages within both the Waikato District and Hamilton City through the provision of approximately 815 new houses. The applicant considers approximately 50 percent of Waikato's short-term shortfall is concentrated in the north-east catchment of the city, which is in close proximity to the project area.</p> <p><i>Will deliver significant economic benefits [s22(2)(a)(iv)]</i> The economic analysis commissioned by the applicant concludes that the project will help to foster competition in the local land market and encourage increased efficiencies and more affordable housing. The applicant considers that on completion of the project, the annual spend per household is estimated to be over \$74,000, which equates to an annual spend of approximately \$60.6 million. The analysis provided by the applicant also states that the project will provide a one-time boost in GDP of around \$290 million and generate of up to 2,160 FTE-years over a ten-year period, or full-time employment for 257 people.</p> <p><i>Will support climate change mitigation, including the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions [s22(2)(a)(vii)]</i> The applicant states they intend to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the management of heavy vehicle movements during construction. They note the project has been designed to include multi-modal transport corridors to prioritise cyclist and pedestrians and promote the use of alternative transport. The applicant also considers the provision of a commercial neighbourhood centre to support the needs of residents will assist with reducing the need for travel and reduce potential greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p><i>Will address significant environmental issues [s22(2)(a)(ix)]</i> The applicant states that the project will assist with addressing the significant housing shortage and housing affordability issues seen within the Hamilton and Waikato Districts. The applicant considers the provision of 815 houses within a well-designed and functioning urban environment will have positive flow on effects to the social, economic, aesthetic and cultural environments of the Hamilton and Waikato community.</p> <p><i>Is consistent with local or regional planning documents, including spatial strategies [s22(2)(a)(x)]</i></p>					

	<p>The applicant states the project is consistent with the Future Proof 2024 and the Hamilton Waikato Metropolitan Spatial Plan 2020 with the project area being located within an area identified for urban growth. The applicant considers the project aligns with the Waikato 2070 Growth and Economic Development Strategy and Waikato District Houses Strategy 2024. The project upholds these through the provision of diverse housing supply and delivery, compact urban growth, and supporting infrastructure. The applicant has completed an assessment of the project against the Vision and Strategy for Waikato River (Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato), which concludes that the stormwater management methods will be constructed and implemented in a manner that will protect the health and wellbeing of the Waikato River.</p> <p>The applicant has also assessed the project against the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS). Whilst the applicant notes inconsistencies are present within the policies relating to high class soils, overall, they consider the project upholds the intent of the WRPS through contributing to the housing bottom lines being met and created social and economic benefits through the provision of increased housing supply.</p>		
Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process [section 22(1)(b)]	<p><i>Would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes [s22(1)(b)(i)]</i></p> <p>The applicant considers the fast-track approvals process would facilitate the project as the ability to apply for a comprehensive range of consenting requirements within one application, to be considered by one panel, offers significant efficiencies in planning and specialist inputs. The applicant also states that the project is only able to progress through the fast-track approvals process as it involves prohibited activities for the subdivision of high-class soils and land under the RMA. They note other aspects of the project would be subject to a challenging and complex consenting requirement that would test the current Waikato District Plan provisions.</p> <p><i>Is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process [s22(1)(b)(ii)]</i></p> <p>The applicant states that referring the project is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process, as this process is considered the right instrument for the scale of the project. The applicant further notes that referral would reinforce the value and opportunity that the fast-track approvals process presents for regionally and nationally significant projects.</p>		
Minister invites comments	<p><i>You must copy the application to, and invite written comments from [s17(1)]:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant local authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waikato District Council Waikato Regional Council Minister for the Environment Other relevant portfolio Ministers (and their relevance to the project): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister of Conservation – as the project requires wildlife approval under the Wildlife Act 1953 Associate Minister of Housing – The project involves a housing development resulting in approximately 815 units in the Waikato District. Relevant administering agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Conservation The Māori groups identified in Appendix 3 	<p><i>You may copy the application to, and invite written comments from, any other person [s17(5)]:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chief Executive of Hamilton City Council (HCC) - the project area adjoins the territorial boundary of HCC, and the applicant proposes to utilise HCC's existing infrastructure to service the project. The Chief Executive of New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) - an NZTA designation (J17/NZTA-8) is located adjacent to the eastern boundary and partially over the southeastern corner of the project area. The Minister for Regional Development The Minister for Economic Growth 	<p><i>The Minister may request further information about a referral application from the applicant, the relevant local authorities, or the relevant administering agencies to be provided within the time frame specified in the request.</i></p> <p>We have not identified any further information to be sought, at this stage.</p>
Recommendations		Minister's decision	
a. Note that section 25 of the Act permits you to decline the referral application without inviting comments from the relevant local authorities, the Minister for the Environment, any relevant Ministers, any relevant administering agencies and the Māori groups identified in the list provided.		Noted	
b. Note that you have not yet provided the application to, nor sought any written comments on it from, the parties listed in section 17(1) but that you are required to do so if you do not decline the application under section 21 of the Act.		Noted	
c. Note that section 17(5) of the Act permits you to forward an application to, and invite written comments from, any other person.		Noted	
d. Note that if comments have been sought and provided within the required time frame you are required to consider it, along with the referral application, before deciding to decline the application.		Noted	
e. Note that section 20 of the Act permits you to request further information from the applicant or relevant local authorities or relevant administering agencies at any time before you decide whether to accept or decline an application.		Noted	
f. Agree to progress the Orchard Grove project to our Stage 2 analysis (invite written comments and request section 18 Treaty report).		Yes / No	
g. Agree to provide the application to, and invite written comments from:			
i. Waikato District Council and Waikato Regional Council as the relevant local authorities under section 17(1)(a)		Yes / No	
ii. The Minister for the Environment under section 17(1)(b)		Yes / No	
iii. The Minister of Conservation and the Associate Minister of Housing as the relevant portfolio Ministers under section 17(1)(b)		Yes / No	
iv. The Department of Conservation as the relevant administering agency under section 17(1)(c)		Yes / No	
v. The parties in Appendix 3 as the Māori groups under section 17(1)(d)		Yes / No	
vi. Any parties you are required to invite comments from under section 17(1)(d) and (e) who may be subsequently identified		Yes / No	

<p>h. Agree to provide the application to and invite written comments from the following additional persons under section 17(5):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The Chief Executive of Hamilton City Council ii. The Chief Executive of NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi iii. Minister for Regional Development iv. Minister for Economic Growth 	<p>Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No</p>
<p>i. Note that you have agreed to delegate to the Secretary for the Environment your responsibility to send all correspondence, other than to Ministers.</p>	<p>Noted</p>
<p>j. Agree to send the email to invite written comments from Ministers.</p>	<p>Yes / No</p>

Signed:

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure

Date:

Appendix 1: Statutory framework summary

1. You are the sole decision maker for referral applications. If you accept a referral application, then the whole or part of the project will be referred to the fast-track approvals process.
2. If a Treaty settlement, the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019, a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe or a joint management agreement provides for consideration of any document or procedural requirements, you must, where relevant:
 - a. give the document the same or equivalent effect through this process as it would have under any specified Act; and
 - b. comply with any applicable procedural requirements.
3. You must decline a referral application if:
 - a. you are satisfied the project does not meet the referral criteria in s22
 - b. you are satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity (s5)
 - c. you consider you do not have adequate information to inform your decision.
4. You may decline an application for any other reason, including those set out in s21(5) and even if the application meets the s22 referral criteria.
5. You can decline an application before or after inviting comments under s17(1). However, if comments have been sought and provided within the required time frame, you must consider them, along with the referral application, before deciding to decline the application.
6. If you do not decline a referral application at this initial stage you must copy the application to, and invite written comments from:
 - a. the relevant local authorities,
 - b. the Minister for the Environment and relevant portfolio Ministers
 - c. the relevant administering agencies
 - d. the Māori groups identified by the responsible agency
 - e. the owners of Māori land in the project area:
 - f. you may provide the application to and invite comments from any other person.
7. You can request further information from an applicant, any relevant local authority or any relevant administering agency at any time before you decide to decline or accept a referral application (see section 20 of the Act).
8. However, if further information has been sought and provided within the required time frame you must consider it, along with the referral application, before deciding to decline the application.

Appendix 2: Application documents for the Orchard Grove project

Appendix 3: List of the Māori groups referred to in section 18(2)

Name of group	Type of group (section of Act)
Te Whakakitenga o Waikato	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)); Treaty settlement entity – Waikato Raupatu Claims Settlement Act 1995 and the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 (s18(2)(a)); negotiating mandate (s18(2)(d))
Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust	Iwi authority (s18(2)(a)); Treaty settlement entity – Ngāti Hauā Claims Settlement Act 2014 (s18(2)(a))
Waikato Raupatu River Trust	Treaty settlement entity – Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 (s18(2)(a)); representing tangata whenua for customary fisheries regulations (s18(2)(h)); iwi authorities and groups that represent hapū that are parties to any relevant Mana Whakahono ā Rohe or joint management agreements (s18(2)(j))
Waikato River Authority	Treaty settlement entity – Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 (s18(2)(a))
Ngāti Wairere	Any other Māori groups with relevant interests (s18(2)(k))
Te Haa o te Whenua o Kirikiriroa (THaWK)	Any other Māori groups with relevant interests (s18(2)(k))