FTAA–2502-1005: Application received for referral of the project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Stage 2 decisions

Project Name: Gordonton Country Estate Development

Date submitted:	24 June 2025	Tracking #: BRF–6104	
Security level:	In-Confidence	MfE priority:	Urgent

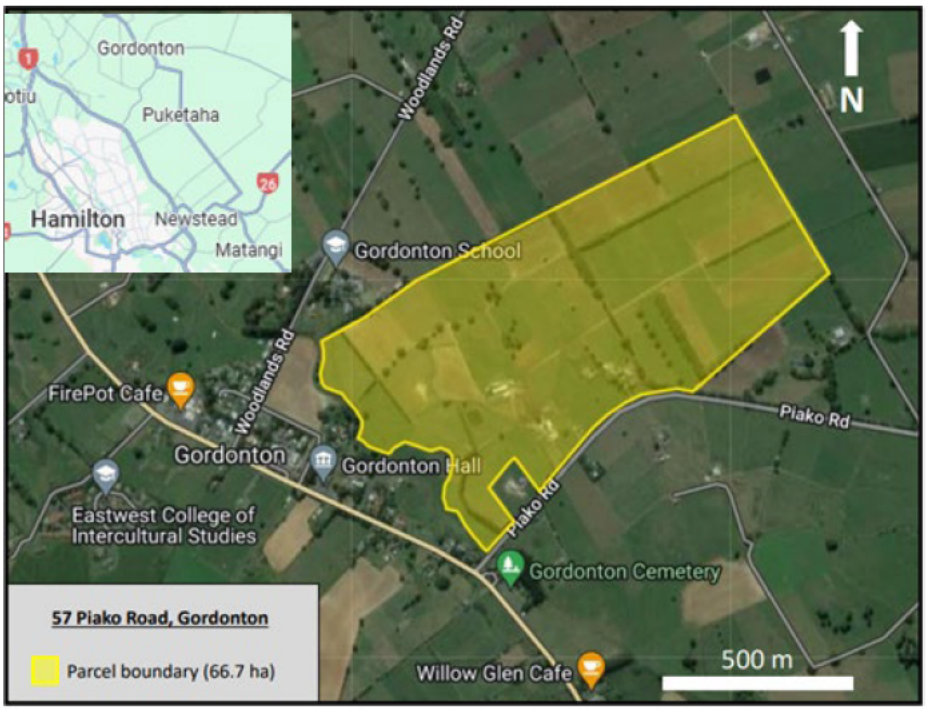
	Action sought:	**Response by:**
To Hon Chris Bishop, Minister for Infrastructure	Decision on recommendations	27 June 2025

Actions for Minister's Office staff	**Return** the signed briefing to MfE *FTAreferrals@mfe.govt.nz*. **Approved** the attached notice of decisions letter (if signed).
Number of appendices: 7	Appendices: (see File Exchange for appendices 2-6) 1. Statutory framework for making decisions 2. Application documents for the Gordonton Country Estate Development project 3. Stage 1 Briefing Note and decisions 4. Section 18 Report on Treaty settlements and other obligations 5. Comments received from invited parties 6. Further information received 7. Draft Notice of Decisions (letter attached)

Ministry for the Environment contacts

Position	Name	Cell phone	1st contact
Principal Author(s)	Helen Willis, Stephen Church		
Manager	Stephanie Frame	s 9(2)(a)	✓
General Manager	Ilana Miller	s 9(2)(a)	

Project location



Key Messages

1. This briefing seeks your decisions on the application from Gordonton Country Estate Limited to refer the Gordonton Country Estate Development project (the project) under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) to the fast-track approvals process for consideration by a panel.
2. A copy of the application is in Appendix 2. This is the second briefing on this application. The first (Stage 1) briefing (BRF–5882) with your initial decisions annotated is in Appendix 3.
3. The project is to construct and operate a retirement village and associated infrastructure on approximately 67 hectares near Gordonton, 5 kilometres northeast of Hamilton, comprising:
    a. approximately 659 residential units
    b. a cafe, apartment style accommodation and health care provisions for residents
    c. roading, pedestrian, and cycling infrastructure associated with the retirement village
    d. water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure associated with the retirement village
    e. all earthworks required within the site, and vegetation removal.
4. The project will require the proposed approvals:
    a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991.
5. We recommend you **accept** the referral application as the project meets the criteria set out in section 22, as:
    a. It is an infrastructure or development project because it involves land development for the construction and operation of a retirement village and associated infrastructure; and
    b. It would have significant regional or national benefits because it would:

i. increase regional housing supply by providing approximately 659 new retirement residential units; and

ii. provide regional economic benefits including: a one-time boost in regional GDP of approximately $235 million, 1,650 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs during the 10-year construction period and additional household incomes of approximately $137 million; and once operational, an annual GDP contribution of approximately $5.5 million, 58 FTE jobs and approximately $4.1 million paid annually in salaries/wages.

6. We seek your decisions on this recommendation and on the recommendation for directions to the applicant and notification of your decisions.

Assessment against statutory framework

7. The statutory framework for your decision-making is set out in Appendix 1. You must apply this framework when you are deciding whether to accept or decline the referral application and when deciding on any further requirements or directions associated with referral of the project.

8. Before accepting the project, you must consider:

   a. the application (in Appendix 2)

   b. the section 18 report on Treaty settlements and other obligations (in Appendix 4)

   c. any further information requested from the applicant, the relevant administering agencies (in Appendix 5); and

   d. any document that requires your consideration under section 16 and comply with any procedural requirements under section 16.

9. Following that, you may accept the application if you are satisfied that it meets the criteria in section 22 of the Act and that there are no reasons requiring you to decline the application. We provide our advice on these matters below.

Section 18 Treaty settlements and other obligations report

10. From the Treaty Settlements and other obligations report (section 18 report) report we have prepared, we consider that a number of provisions of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 apply to the project area. In accordance with section 7 and section 16 of the Act, we recommend that in considering this application, you have particular regard to Te Ture Whaimana (Vision and Strategy) and have regard to the Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan, as relevant documents that must be given the same or equivalent effect as under the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010.

11. Should you decide to accept this referral application, pursuant to section 16(2)(c) we propose you direct any panel considering a substantive application for the project (in a notice of your decision) to comply with the applicable requirements identified in the section 18 report with regard to the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, namely to:

   a. have particular regard to Te Ture Whaimana;

   b. give notice to the Waikato River Authority of the application (which may be fulfilled by an invitation to comment under section 53 of the Act)

   c. consider the provisions for appointing hearing commissioners from the register maintained by the Waikato River Authority as they may be applied to the fast-track process

d. have regard to the Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan, including how to provide for continued partnership between the applicant and Waikato-Tainui (as a consistent theme running through the plan); and

e. consider the detailed information-sharing provisions of the joint management agreements, as they may be applied to the fast-track process.

12. Te Whakakitenga o Waikato provided comments on the application. They acknowledge the potential benefits of the project, but also raised concerns regarding environmental, cultural and social effects. They expect that the emphasis on partnership and mana whakahaere (authority of Waikato-Tainui) in Tai Tumu, Tai Pari, Tai Ao (the Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan) will be given effect through continued engagement with Waikato-Tainui iwi and hapū (including Ngāti Hāua and Ngāti Wairere) on the project, and by incorporating mana whenua perspectives into the development.

13. The Minister for Māori Development and the Minister for Māori Crown Relations support the application, subject to addressing the concerns raised by Waikato-Tainui, continuing to uphold Treaty settlement arrangements, maintaining engagement with iwi, and consultation with adjacent Māori landowners.

14. We do not consider there are any matters raised in this report which make it more appropriate for the proposed approvals to be authorised under another Act or Acts.

Written comments received

15. Comments were received from Waikato Regional Council (WRC), Waikato District Council (WDC), the Minister for Seniors, New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Incorporated (Waikato-Tainui). The key points of relevance to your decisions are summarised in Table A.

16. The key points from the comments are summarised as:

    a. WRC and WDC consider the project inconsistent with local and regional planning documents and do not consider the benefits of the project would be regionally or nationally significant.

    b. WRC considered the project would be more appropriately considered by way of a plan change under the RMA (and providing for public consultation).

    c. The Minister for Seniors commented positively on the project's provision of housing for seniors but did not comment on whether the benefits of the project would be regionally or nationally significant.

    d. NZTA commented that it has no concerns with the project being referred and, if so, would welcome the opportunity to provide comments on any substantive application.

Further information provided by applicant, relevant local authorities, relevant administering agencies

17. In response to requests for further information under section 20 of the Act, the applicant further qualified the significance of the project's benefits in the regional context:

    a. The applicant considered the housing, economic and employment benefits of the project to be regionally significant as the project will deliver approximately 659 retirement living units and the project will positively contribute to regional GDP and job creation (detailed further below in paragraph 25).

18. You must consider all information received within the specified timeframe. We have considered this information in our analysis and advice in Table A.

Reasons to decline

19. You must decline the application for referral under section 21(3) if:
    a. You are not satisfied the project meets the criteria in section 22; or
    b. You are satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity; or
    c. You consider you do not have adequate information to inform your referral decision.
20. We do not consider you must decline this application for any of these reasons, as outlined in Table A.
21. You may also decline the application for any other reason under section 21(4). The Act sets out the following matters you may consider when deciding whether to decline an application:
    a. the project would be inconsistent with any of the following:
        i. a Treaty settlement
        ii. the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019
        iii. the Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011
        iv. a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe
        v. a joint management agreement
    b. it would be more appropriate to deal with the matters that would be authorised by the proposed approvals under another Act or Acts
    c. the project may have significant adverse effects on the environment
    d. the applicant has a poor compliance history under a specified Act that relates to any of the proposed approvals
    e. the project area includes land that the Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations considers necessary for Treaty settlement purposes
    f. the project includes an activity that is a prohibited activity under the Resource Management Act 1991
    g. a substantive application for the project would have 1 or more competing applications
    h. in relation to any proposed approval of the kind described in section 42(4)(a) (resource consent), there are 1 or more existing resource consents of the kind referred to in section 30(3)(a).
22. We do not consider you should decline the application for any of these reasons, as outlined in Table A.

Reasons to accept

23. You may accept a referral application if you are satisfied that the whole project meets the criteria in section 22 (s 21(1)(c)).
24. The section 22 criteria you must be satisfied of are:
    a. The project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits (section 22(1)(a)); and
    b. Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process:
        i. Would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes (section 22(1)(b)(i)); and

ii. Is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process (section 22(1)(b)(ii)).

25. Our assessment of these matters is summarised in Table A. We consider the project meets the requirements of section 22, as:

    a. It is an infrastructure or development project because it involves land development for the construction and operation of a retirement village and associated infrastructure; and

    b. It would have significant regional or national benefits because it would:

        i. increase regional housing supply by providing approximately 659 new retirement residential units; and

        ii. provide regional economic benefits including: a one-time boost in regional GDP of approximately $235 million, 1,650 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs during the 10-year construction period and additional household incomes of approximately $137 million; and once operational, an annual GDP contribution of approximately $5.5 million, 58 FTE jobs and approximately $4.1 million paid annually in salaries/wages.

    c. Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes because:

        i. The timeframes under the Act are significantly shorter than under the RMA; and

        ii. The Act precludes public and limited notification; and

        iii. Appeals under the Act are only to the High Court rather than the Environment Court and are limited to points of law.

    d. It is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process because the project is not novel in the New Zealand context and is similar to the type of applications that expert panel members are experienced in dealing with under the RMA.

Other matters

26. While comments received from both relevant local authorities challenged the applicant's assertions on the project's significant benefits including its contribution to housing supply and alignment with strategic planning documents, on balance we have considered that the project would deliver significant housing, economic and employment benefits intended under the purpose of the Act.

27. Both local authorities noted the project would have impacts on highly productive land in the rural zone, and that the project site is not serviced by public transport.

28. These are matters that an expert panel may consider when assessing a substantive application for the project and have been included in our recommendation and analysis.

Conclusions

29. We consider the project meets the section 22 criteria and you could accept the application under section 21 of the Act and refer the project to a panel with the specifications outlined below.

30. We consider that if you decide to refer the project, you should specify the person or persons who lodged the referral application as the person who is, or the persons who are, authorised to lodge a substantive application for the project.

31. We consider that if you decide to refer the project, you should specify under section

27(3)(b)(ii) of the Act that the following information must be submitted with the substantive application:

a. That an expert panel invite comments on a substantive application from the Minister for Seniors and New Zealand Transport Agency in addition to those specified in section 53.

Next steps

32. MfE must give notice of your decisions on the referral application, and the reasons for them, to the applicant and anyone invited to comment under section 17 and publish the notice on the Fast-Track website.
33. If you decide to refer the project, MfE must also give notice of your decision to:
    a. The panel convener
    b. Any additional iwi authorities or Treaty settlement entities that you consider have an interest in the matter other than those invited to comment under section 17
    c. The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)
    d. The relevant administering agencies
34. You must also provide all of the information you received that relates to this application to the EPA and the panel convener.We will undertake this on your behalf, including providing:
    a. The referral application
    b. Any comments received under section 17
    c. The report obtained under section 18
35. We have attached a notice of decisions letter to the applicant(s) based on our recommendations (refer Appendix 7). If you agree and sign the letter, we will provide it to all relevant parties. We can also provide you with an amended letter if required.

Recommendations

36. We recommend that you:
    a. **Note** section 21(3) of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) requires you to decline the referral application from Gordonton Country Estate Limited if you are satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity, or you consider that you do not have adequate information to inform the decision under this section or if you are not satisfied that the Gordonton Country Estate Development (project) meets the referral criteria in section 22 of the Act.
    b. **Agree** that before deciding to make a decision on the application for project referral under section 21(1) of the Act you have considered:
        i. the application in Appendix 2
        ii. the report obtained under section 18 of the Act in Appendix 4
        iii. any comments and further information sought under sections 17 and 20 and provided within the required timeframe (if you have received any comments or further information after the required timeframe you are not required to consider them but may do so at your discretion) in Appendices 5 and 6.

        Yes / No
    c. **Note** that in considering this application, you must have particular regard to Te Ture Whaimana (Vision and Strategy) and have regard to the Waikato-Tainui

Environmental Plan, in accordance with sections 7 and 16.

d. **Agree** you are satisfied the project will meet the referral criteria in section 22 of the FTAA as:

    i. it is a development project that would have significant regional or national benefits because it would:

    i. increase housing supply by providing approximately 659 new retirement residential units

    ii. Provide economic benefits including:

        a. a one-time boost in regional GDP of approximately $235 million, 1,650 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs during the 10-year construction period and additional household incomes of approximately $137 million; and

        b. once operational, an annual GDP contribution of approximately $5.5 million, 58 FTE jobs and approximately $4.1 million paid annually in salaries/wages.

    ii. Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process would facilitate the project, including by enabling it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes because:

        1. the timeframes under the Act are significantly shorter than under the RMA; and

        2. the Act precludes public and limited notification; and

        3. appeals under the Act are only to the High Court rather than the Environment Court and are limited to points of law.

    iii. Referral is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process because the project is not novel in the New Zealand context and is similar to the type of applications that expert panel members are experienced in dealing with under the RMA.

Yes / No

e. **Agree** there is no reason the project must be declined under section 21(3) because

    i. The project meets the criteria in section 22 as explained at recommendation d; and

    ii. The project does not include an ineligible activity as explained in Table A; and

    iii. The application includes sufficient information to inform your decision.

Yes / No

f. **Agree** to **accept** the referral application under section 21(1) and refer the whole project to the fast-track approvals process under section 26(2)

Yes / No

g. **Agree** to specify Gordonton Country Estate Limited as the persons who are authorised to lodge a substantive application for the project

Yes / No

h. **Agree** to specify under section 27(3)(b) of the Act the following persons or groups from whom a panel must invite comments in addition to those specified in section 53:

    i. The Minister for Seniors

    ii. New Zealand Transport Agency

Yes / No

i. **Agree,** pursuant to section 16(2)(c), to direct any panel considering a substantive application for the project (in a notice of your decision) to comply with the applicable requirements identified in the section 18 report with regard to the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, namely to:

    i. have particular regard to Te Ture Whaimana;

    ii. give notice to the Waikato River Authority of the application (which may be fulfilled by an invitation to comment under section 53 of the Act);

    iii. consider the provisions for appointing hearing commissioners from the register maintained by the Waikato River Authority as they may be applied to the fast-track process;

    iv. have regard to the Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan, including how to provide for continued partnership between the applicant and Waikato-Tainui (as a consistent theme running through the plan); and

    v. consider the detailed information-sharing provisions of the joint management agreements, as they may be applied to the fast-track process.

Yes / No

j. **Note** that MfE will provide notice of your decisions (attached at Appendix 7) to:

    i. Anyone invited to comment on the application including local authorities and relevant Māori groups

    ii. The panel convener

    iii. The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)

    iv. The following relevant administering agencies:

        1. Ministry for the Environment.

Signatures

Ilana Miller
General Manager, Delivery and Operations

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure

Date:

Table A: Stage 2 analysis

<table>
<tr><td>Recommendation</td><td colspan="3">Accept to refer</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Project details</td><td>Project Name</td><td>Applicant</td><td>Project Location</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gordonton Country Estate Development</td><td>Gordonton Country Estate Limited

c/- Barker and Associates

The applicant is a legal person and is eligible to apply for resource consents.</td><td>57 Piako Road, Gordonton, Waikato

Lots 3-4 DP 328606 and Lot 2 DP 481700, containing an area of 66.55 hectares, 5 kilometres northeast of Hamilton</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project description</td><td colspan="3">The project is to construct a retirement village and associated ancillary infrastructure on approximately 67 hectares near Gordonton, 5 kilometers northeast of Hamilton, comprising:
a. approximately 659 residential units
b. a cafe, apartment style accommodation and health care provisions
c. roading, pedestrian, cycling infrastructure associated with the retirement village
d. water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure associated with the retirement village
e. all earthworks required within the site, and vegetation removal.

The project will require the proposed approvals:
a. resource consents under the Resource Management Act 1991.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Comments from invited parties</td><td>Additional information from applicant, relevant local authorities, relevant administering agencies</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Local authorities
Waikato Regional Council (WRC) commented:

- it did not consider the project would provide regionally significant benefits in terms of housing based on the most recent Housing Capacity Assessment (HCA) showing sufficient housing supply available in the Waikato Region in the medium to long-term (2026 – 2052).
- it considered that the project would be best addressed through a plan change to the Waikato District Plan under the RMA, noting aspects of the project are inconsistent with some planning documents including the Waikato Regional Policy Statement (WRPS), the Future Proof Strategy (Spatial Plan) and the Regional Land Transport Strategy.
- the project site contains land with high class soils, with the WRPS seeking to avoid a decline in the availability of high-class soils for primary production due to inappropriate subdivision, use or development.

Specific to section 17(3)(a), WRC advised of one potentially competing application lodged on 16 December 2024 for consents associated with a large-scale sand extraction and clean filling facility immediately adjacent to the project site. There may be competing interests for water resources and overlapping cumulative effects that require consideration.

Specific to section 17(3)(b) WRC advised of a groundwater take consent granted for potable water supply.

Waikato District Council (WDC) commented:

- it did not consider the project would significantly contribute to overall housing supply, given there is an appropriate supply for the next 30 years (at a district level).
- it considered the project inconsistent with local planning documents, and unlikely to deliver regionally significant housing.
- Gordonton is not serviced with appropriate three waters infrastructure and public transport services to support the project.
- the project site includes streams, remnant forests, and a Site of Significance to Māori (Otaahua Paa) requiring environmental and cultural impact assessments.

Specific to section 17(3)(a), WDC advised of one potentially competing application for a retirement village approximately 8.8km away from the project site and has been on hold under the RMA since March 2019.

Specific to section 17(3)(b), WDC advised it has not issued any consents in relation to the project site where sections 124C(1)(c) or 165ZI of the RMA could apply. WDC also provided a list of granted land use consents for retirement villages that it considers could be competing with the project.</td><td>Applicant

In response to a request for further information seeking clarification on the benefits of the project in the regional or national context the applicant advised:

Economic benefits:
- Over the next ten years, the project will support employment levels in the region, specifically in the planning, design and construction industries.
- The project will create a one-time boost in regional GDP of around $235 million, 1,650 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs for 10 years and additional household incomes of $137 million. The economic assessment reported this in the context of 20,600 regional construction jobs for 2024, meaning the project will represent nearly 1% of total regional construction employment over project development.
- Once operational, the economic assessment reported the project will create 58 FTE jobs, an annual GDP of nearly $5.5 million and $4.1 million paid annually in salaries/wages.

Housing benefits:
- The applicant considered the most recent HCA identifies significant shortfalls in dwelling capacity to meet expected demand in the short term. While the Waikato Region is considered to have sufficient capacity overall, the applicant provided an economic assessment which considered there to be a shortfall in the short-term in areas “near the project site”, thus demonstrating a need for additional housing.
- The provision of 659 retirement village units is over eight times the regional average retirement village size and will be the largest retirement village in the country.</td></tr>
</table>

	Ministers **The Minister for Seniors** did not comment on whether the project benefits would be regionally or nationally significant but indicated support for projects which increase the supply of housing, particularly in an aged residential care facility capacity. The Minister provided a list of matters which should be considered if the project is referred including provision of transport, accessibility and land use. **The Minister for the Environment** responded advising 'no comments' on the application. No comments were received from the **Minister for Climate Change** or the **Minister for Housing**. *Māori Groups* **Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Incorporated** (Waikato-Tainui) acknowledged the project's potential benefits but raised some concerns about the environmental, social and cultural effects of the project *Other persons or groups* **New Zealand Transport Agency** (NZTA) did not comment on whether the benefits of the project may be regionally or nationally significant but recommended that, if referred, the substantive application include an integrated transport assessment. We note this is already an information requirement for a substantive application. Regarding the information sought from NZTA on whether the project is likely to adversely affect the operation of the State Highway network, NZTA responded that this would need to be determined upon sight of the substantive application. Regarding the information sought from NZTA on whether there are any barriers to the applicant delivering the project, NZTA noted that it has had no prior experience with the applicant outside of the pre-application consultation for this project, and NZTA has no planned major upgrades for the adjacent section of the State Highway that would create a barrier for project delivery. Overall NZTA has no concerns with the project being referred and would welcome the opportunity to provide comments on any substantive application.	- The project will provide housing options that cater to the needs of an ageing local population, thereby freeing up existing housing availability. - The direct boost of housing supply provided by the project will help narrow the gap between future supply and demand, helping the market response to growth in demand and thereby reducing the rate at which house prices grow over time. - The project aligns with the Future Proof Strategy, the Waikato District Housing Strategy 2024 and Waikato 2070 by promoting housing options for the elderly in and around existing rural settlements. Environmental benefits: - Responding to the national risk of climate change and natural hazards through appropriate flood management and incorporation of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions - Incorporating cultural values in the project design will ensure regional narratives of mana whenua are reflected - providing necessary medical care to the region by providing assisted care apartments - Supporting environmental outcomes regionally through biodiversity reintroduction and contributing to a positive ecological outcome by creating wildlife corridors, improving air quality and moderating urban temperatures - Maintaining critical habitat by preserving natural wetlands and safeguarding natural water filtration processes to benefit the region.
The Minister must decline an application if the Minister is satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity [section 21(3)(b)]	Based on the information in the application, we consider the project is eligible for referral because: • it would not occur on identified Māori land, Māori customary land or a Māori reservation as confirmed by the relevant record of title • it would not occur in a customary marine title area or protected customary rights area as it is not in the coastal marine area • it is not an aquaculture activity or activity that is incompatible with aquaculture activities that would occur in an aquaculture settlement area and for which the applicant is not authorised to apply for a coastal permit because it will not occur in the coastal marine area • would not require an access arrangement which cannot be granted under the Crown Minerals Act (including s61(1A)) because it does not include an access arrangement and would not occur on Schedule 4 land • would not be prevented by section 165J, M, Q, ZC or ZDB of the RMA because it will not occur in the coastal marine area • would not occur on Schedule 4 land as confirmed by the records of title • would not occur on a national reserve as confirmed by the records of title • would not occur on a reserve held under the Reserves Act 1977 that is managed by or vested in someone other than the Crown or a local authority and that person has not consented in writing as confirmed by the records of title • is not a prohibited activity or decommissioning activity under the EEZA, 15B or 15C of the RMA as it would not occur in the coastal marine area or New Zealand's exclusive economic zone • is not for the purpose of an offshore renewable energy project. because it will not occur offshore No comments raised by parties invited to comment have indicated that the project would be ineligible for referral.	

The Minister must decline an application if the Minister considers they do not have adequate information to inform the decision [section 21(3)(c)]	We consider you have adequate information to inform your referral decision.
Relevant considerations and procedural requirements in Treaty settlement, Mana Whakahono ā Rohe, joint management agreement, or the Marine and Coast Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 or the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019 [section 16]	N/A
Section 22 assessment criteria	
The project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits [section 22(1)(a)]	The Minister may consider any of the following matters, or any other matters the Minister considers relevant. *Will deliver new regionally or nationally significant infrastructure or enable the continued functioning of existing regionally or nationally significant infrastructure [s22(2)(a)(ii)]* Yes – the quantum and scale of housing infrastructure, specifically for retirement and aged care living, can be considered regionally significant. *Will increase the supply of housing, address housing needs, or contribute to a well-functioning urban environment [s22(2)(a)(iii)]* Yes - The project will provide an additional 659 residential dwellings and free up existing housing availability as a result of residents from elsewhere relocating to the retirement village. *Will deliver significant economic benefits [s22(2)(a)(iv)]* Yes - The applicant considers the project will deliver significant economic benefits including: a one-time boost in regional GDP of approximately $235 million, 1,650 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs during the 10-year construction period and additional household incomes of approximately $137 million; and once operational, an annual GDP contribution of approximately $5.5 million, 58 FTE jobs and approximately $4.1 million paid annually in salaries/wages. *Will support climate change adaptation, reduce risks arising from natural hazards, or support recovery from events caused by natural hazards [s22(2)(a)(viii)]* Marginally - The applicant considers the project will support climate change adaptation, reduce risks arising from natural hazards through flood hazard and stormwater management. Although good design, we do not consider flood hazard and stormwater management in the context of a single development of this scale likely to be a regional or nationally significant benefit. *Is consistent with local or regional planning documents, including spatial strategies [s22(2)(a)(x)]* As detailed in the comments above, there is some divergence between applicant and council assertions on some aspects of the project's consistency with current local and regional planning documents. However, we do not view those inconsistencies as a reason to not refer the project.
Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process [section 22(1)(b)	*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)]* The applicant considers the project would be processed more effectively by a single authority than by submitting separate applications to the district and regional councils, further noting the fast-track process has shorter timeframes than standard RMA processes, has limited public participation (including precluding limited and public notification) and limited rights of appeal. Particularly given the scale and complexity of the project, the applicants anticipate that the fast-track process will allow the development timeframe to accelerate by as much as 30 years. The applicants did not provide any information on the cost-effectiveness comparison of the two processes aside from to say, "the fast-track process offers a number of advantages in terms of time and cost". We note that WRC considers the project would be best addressed through a plan change to the Waikato District Plan, which suggests the Act would enable the project to be considered more quickly than under standard process. We consider the applicant's assertion to be reasonable. We consider that the project would not be reliant on the Act to be facilitated because it could be facilitated by way of a plan change under the RMA but we consider the application's assertions on timing to be reasonable. *Is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process [s22(1)(b)(ii)*] The applicant considers the project would be required to undergo individual processes for differing consenting matters for different matters if the project were to proceed under normal circumstances. We note this doesn't make it clear whether the project would materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track process, however we can interpret it to mean that the speed at which the applicant anticipates consents under the fast-track to be timelier. Based on the documentation provided with the application, it is apparent that there technical and readiness work to prepare a substantive application is well progressed. We consider that while the project is a large development and may be inconsistent with current planning documents it is not novel in the New Zealand context or outside the scope of applications that could be expected to consider under the RMA and is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approval process.
Reasons to decline	

Minister must decline [section 21(3)]	Minister may decline [section 21(4) and 21(5)(a-h)]
The Minister must decline a referral application if: *The application may not be accepted under subsection 1 (meets referral criteria)* We do not consider this applies based on our analysis that the project meets the criteria in section 22 *The Minister is satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity* We do not consider you must decline the project on this basis because no ineligible activities are identified *The Minister considers that they do not have adequate information to inform the decision under this section* We do not consider that you must decline on this basis. You have discretion to seek further information. We do not consider that you must decline the application under this section.	*The Minister may decline a referral application for any other reason, whether or not it meets the criteria in section 22.* *Reasons to decline a referral application under subsection 4 include, without limitation:* *The project would be inconsistent with a Treaty settlement, Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019, Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011, a Mana Whakahono ā Rohe, or a joint management agreement* We do not consider the project would be inconsistent with any of these matters. *It would be more appropriate to deal with the matters that would be authorised by the proposed approvals under another Act or Acts* WRC considered that, because the project is inconsistent with current planning documents, the project would be more appropriately considered under the RMA as it would be more appropriate for the project to be preceded by a plan change (to the Waikato District Plan) to rezone the project site and provide for public consultation through that process. We agree that the project may not be consistent with current planning documents and would be a non-complying activity as a retirement village in the rural zone, however this is not reason to decline. Should the project be referred and a substantive application lodged, planning matters will be considered by an expert panel. *The project may have significant adverse effects on the environment* Overall, we do not consider that the project will have significant adverse effects on the environment more than what is expected for a development of this scale. We note if the project is referred and a substantive application lodged, an expert panel will consider the potential adverse effects of the project with the benefit of full and informed assessments of environmental effects. *The applicant(s) has a poor compliance history under a specified Act that relates to any of the proposed approvals* The applicant does not appear to have been the subject of any compliance or enforcement action under the RMA. *The project area includes land that the Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations considers necessary for Treaty settlement purposes* N/A. *The project includes an activity that is a prohibited activity under the Resource Management Act 1991* The project does not appear to include any prohibited activities under the RMA. *A substantive application for the project would have one or more competing applications.* WRC advised that there has been an application lodged with WDC in December 2024 for consents on a site located immediately adjacent to the project, which may result in competing interests for water resources. We do not consider this as reason to decline as the applicant has identified water supply options including tank storage to ensure residential unit have self-sufficient supply of potable water. WDC advised there to be one application lodged with WDC to be competing with the project. As that application is for a retirement village some 8.8 kilometres from the project site and has been on hold since 2019, we do not consider that as reason to decline. *In relation to any proposed approval of the kind described in section 42(4)(a) (resource consents), there are one or more existing resource consents of the kind referred to in section 30(3)(a)* WDC noted that it had not issued any resource consents in relation to the site where sections 124(1)(c) or 165ZI of the RMA could apply. WRC noted, in relation to section 124(1)(c) RMA considerations, that a groundwater take consent granted for potable supply could potentially be fully utilised until the expiry of authorised takes in the catchment and bored drilled in this location will be within the Hamilton Basin-North aquifer, identified in the Waikato Regional Plan. We do not consider this as reason to decline as the applicant has identified water supply options including tank storage to ensure residential unit have self-sufficient supply of potable water. *Any other matter* N/A.