



FTAA-2604-1216: Application received for referral of the project under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Stage 2 decisions

Project Name: Awanui Links

Date submitted:	23 July 2026	Tracking #: 26-BRF-01840	
Security level:	In-Confidence	MfE priority:	Urgent

	Action sought:	Response by:
To Hon Chris Bishop, Minister for Infrastructure	Decision on recommendations	30 July 2026

Actions for Minister's Office staff	Return the signed briefing to: FTAreferrals@mfe.govt.nz Approve the attached notice of decisions letter.
Number of appendices: 6	Appendices: 1. Statutory framework for making decisions 2. Application documents for Awanui Links 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. Draft Notice of Decisions

Ministry for the Environment contacts

Position	Name	Cell phone	1 st contact
Principal Author	Max Gander-Cooper		
Manager	Stephanie Frame	027 257 3197	✓
General Manager	Ilana Miller	022 054 0469	



Project location

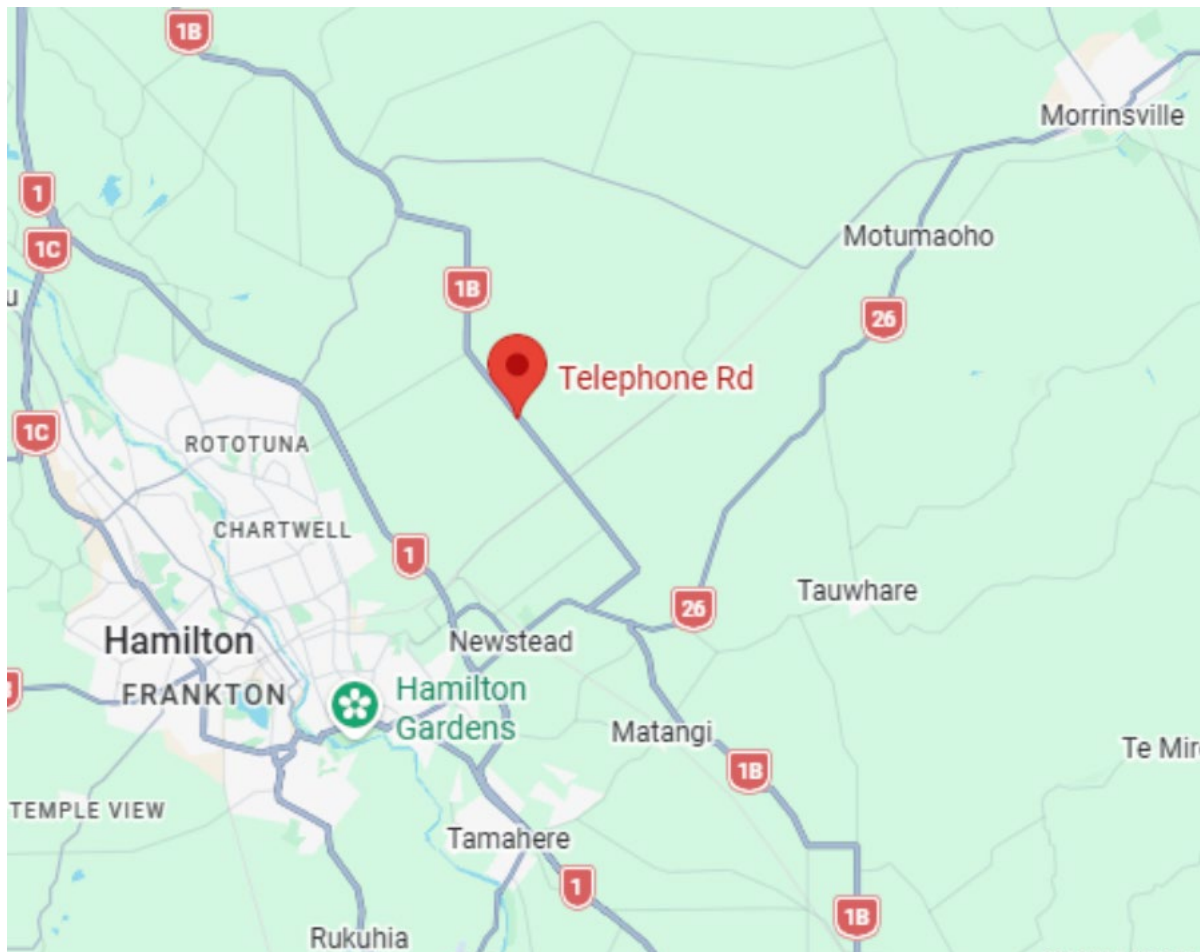


Figure 1: General location of the project (illustrated by red point).

Key messages

1. This briefing seeks your decisions under section 21 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) on the application from Swordfish Projects Limited (the applicant) to refer the Awanui Links (the project) to the fast-track approvals process.
2. A copy of the application is in Appendix 2. This is the second briefing on this application. The first (Stage 1) briefing (BRF-01375) with your initial decisions annotated is in Appendix 3.
3. The project is to establish a new concurrent land and subdivision mixed-use development over approximately 123 hectares of rural land located at Telephone Road, Puketaha, within the Waikato District.
4. The project involves:
 - a. high-end tourism involving an 18-hole-golf course, which will be centred around a contemporary clubhouse, pro-shop, driving range, wellness centre, fine dining restaurant, and boutique hotel with associated event and conference facilities
 - b. 70 rural-residential lots each of approximately 3,000 square metres



- c. a retirement facility including approximately 137 retirement living units, a mix of independent living villas, a central care facility (up to 50 beds), healthcare and community facilities
 - d. Industrial subdivision for supporting rural industry land use activities ranging from 2300 – 5700 square metres with an approximate to total area of 405 hectares
 - e. an approximately 3,000 square metre solar farm
 - f. planting, ecological restoration, and integrated water features
 - g. supporting three waters infrastructure and roading.
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. We recommend you **accept** the referral application as the project meets the criteria set out in section 22 and does not appear to involve an ineligible activity.
7. We seek your decisions on this recommendation and on the proposed directions to the applicants, the expert panel and notification of your decisions.

Assessment against statutory framework

8. 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.
9. Before accepting the project, you must consider:
 - a. the application (in Appendix 2)
 - b. the section 18 Treaty settlements report (in Appendix 4)
 - c. any comments from invited parties (in Appendix 5),
 - d. any document that requires your consideration under section 16 and comply with any procedural requirements under section 16.
10. Following that, you may accept the application if you are satisfied that it meets the criteria in section 22 of the Act and if there are no reasons meaning you must decline the application. We provide our advice on these matters below.

Section 18 Treaty settlements and other obligations report

11. The Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport has prepared a Treaty settlements and other obligations report in accordance with section 18 of the Act.
12. The report identifies Te Whakakitenga o Waikato, Ngāti Hauā Iwi Trust, Waikato Raupatu River Trust, the Waikato River Authority (a statutory body established by a settlement), Ngāti Wairere, and Te Haa o te Whenua o Kirikiriroa as relevant Māori groups in relation to the project area.



13. The report identifies the following Treaty settlements that are relevant to the project area: Waikato Raupatu Claims Settlement Act 1995, Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, and the Ngāti Hauā Claims Settlement Act 2014.
14. The report identifies that several 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.
15. The report considers you have complied with some of the relevant procedural requirements in the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, as they relate to providing notice to the Waikato River Authority and providing information about the application to the Waikato Raupatu River Trust (under the joint management agreement provisions). However, there is also a need to ensure that these, and other, procedural requirements are complied with throughout the process. Accordingly, should you decide to accept this referral application, we propose you direct any panel considering a substantive application for the project to comply with the applicable requirements identified at paragraph 76 of the report.
16. In response to the invitation for Māori groups to comment under section 17(1)(d) of the Act, you received comments on the application from Te Whakakitenga o Waikato on behalf of Waikato-Tainui. Waikato-Tainui reserved their position on the application, but expressed concern about effects on freshwater systems, indigenous biodiversity, cultural and archaeological values, loss of highly productive land, and compliance with Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato and the Waikato River Settlement statutory framework.
17. Nothing in the report suggests it may be more appropriate to deal with the matters that would be authorised by the proposed approvals under another Act or Acts.

Section 16 Effects of Treaty settlements and other obligations on decision-making

18. As identified in the section 18 report, we recommend you direct any panel appointed to consider a substantive application for the project 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 with Waikato-Tainui (as a consistent theme running through the plan); and
 - e. consider the detailed information-sharing provisions of the JMAs, as they may be applied to the fast-track process.



Written comments received

19. Comments were received from Waikato District Council (WDC), Waikato Regional Council (WRC), the Minister for Economic Growth, Te Whakakitenga o Waikato (Waikato-Tainui) and the Department of Conservation (DOC). Comments were received from the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality 3 working days late and you can consider these at your discretion. The key points of relevance to your decisions are summarised in Table A.
20. The key points from the comments are:
- a. WDC and WRC did not oppose project referral but raised concerns, particularly about the project being out of phase with zoning, planned infrastructure provision, and resulting in the loss of highly productive land
 - b. the Minister for Economic Growth considered the project could deliver significant economic benefits and may deliver regionally significant housing supply
 - c. the Minister for Tourism and Hospitality noted the project has the potential to boost regional tourism activity in the Waikato district, and supports the Government's priorities to grow tourism exports and employment in tourism and hospitality
 - d. DOC did not oppose project referral and recommended the applicant consider potential effects on long-tailed bats
 - e. Waikato-Tainui's comments are discussed above at paragraph 16.

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

21. You did not request any further information from the applicant, relevant local authorities or relevant administering agencies under section 20 of the Act.

Reasons to decline

22. The statutory framework in Appendix 1 sets out the situations where you must decline the application for referral under section 21(3).
23. We do not consider you must decline this application.
24. You may also decline the application for any other reason under section 21(4). The Act gives some guidance on matters you could consider when deciding whether to decline an application and these are set out in Appendix 1.
25. We note the project includes a prohibited activity under the Operative and Proposed Waikato District Plan for the loss of high-class soils, and you may decline a referral application if it includes a prohibited activity.
26. We note that some expert panels are giving significant weight in their decision-making to the directive policies in the National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL) to avoid inappropriate subdivision of highly productive land, with the panel for the Ashbourne project declining part of that project¹.

¹ <https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/projects/ashbourne/the-decision>



27. We consider that the directive policies in the NPS-HPL and the prohibited activity status relating to high class soils increase the risk the project may be declined by an expert panel. However, we do not consider that an increased risk of decline is a reason you should decline referral.
28. We note the Act does not require you to decline an application if it includes a prohibited activity, and we also note that other expert panels have approved projects despite effects related to loss of highly productive land². We consider this is a matter which can appropriately be addressed by an expert panel.
29. We have considered the matter above and this is discussed in Table A, and we do not consider you should decline the project for any of these reasons.

Reasons to accept

30. The statutory framework in Appendix 1 sets out the reasons you can accept a project for referral.
31. Our assessment of these matters is summarised in Table A. We consider the project meets the requirements of section 22, as it:
 - a. is an infrastructure or development project because it involves the construction of mixed-use development
 - b. it would have significant regional or national benefits because it:
 - i. would increase housing supply and address housing needs (section 22(2)(a)(iii))
 - ii. would deliver significant economic benefits (section 22(2)(a)(iv))
 - 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 the project does not have a consenting pathway as a prohibited activity under the RMA
 - d. Is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process because it is not novel in the New Zealand context or out of step with similar projects under the RMA.

Other matters

32. We have identified an issue further to the matters identified above and our analysis of these is in Table A.
33. WDC and WRC raised concerns that the project is not currently able to be serviced by existing or planned water supply or wastewater services, and will operate at a scale not anticipated for the surrounding road network.
34. We consider adequacy of infrastructure is a matter which can be addressed by an expert panel, but recommend if the project is referred, you direct the applicant to provide three waters and transport infrastructure servicing assessments with their substantive application.

² <https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/projects/sunfield/the-decision>



35. We note that other potential infrastructure providers for the project are Hamilton City Council and NZ Transport Agency, and recommend if the project is referred you direct a panel to invite comments from those parties.

Conclusions

36. We consider the project meets the section 22 criteria and you could accept the referral application under section 21 of the Act and refer the project to the fast-track approvals process with the specifications outlined below.
37. We consider that if you decide to refer the project, you should specify under section 27 of the Act the following requirements that should apply to the project:
- a. a deadline for lodging the substantive application of two years from the date of your notice of decisions
 - b. three waters and transport infrastructure servicing assessments as information that must be submitted with the substantive application
 - c. Hamilton City Council and NZ Transport Agency as persons or groups from whom a panel must invite comments from in addition to those specified in section 53
38. The above restrictions are required for the following reasons:
- a. to assist a panel in assessing the infrastructure required to service the project and effects on local infrastructure networks.

Next steps

39. The Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) must give notice of your decisions on the referral application, and the reasons for them, to the applicant(s) and anyone invited to comment under section 17 and publish the notice on the Fast-track website.
40. In your notice of decisions you must direct a panel to comply with any requirements identified in section 16. The following directions are required:
- 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 with Waikato-Tainui (as a consistent theme running through the plan); and
 - e. consider the detailed information-sharing provisions of the JMAs, as they may be applied to the fast-track process.



41. If you decide to refer the project, the Ministry 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.
42. You must also provide all of the information you received that relates to this application to the EPA and the panel convener, including:
 - a. the referral application
 - b. any comments received under section 17
 - c. the report obtained under section 18
 - d. if a report was obtained under section 19, that report.
43. We will undertake this action on your behalf.
44. We have attached a notice of decisions letter to the applicant(s) based on our recommendations (refer Appendix 6) and we will provide it to all relevant parties. We will provide you with an amended letter if required.
45. Our recommendations for your decisions follow.



Recommendations

46. 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 Swordfish Projects Limited (the applicant) 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 Awanui Links project (the project) meets the referral criteria in section 22 of the Act.

Noted

- b. **Agree** that before deciding 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 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 Appendix 5.

Yes / No

- c. **Note** the application under section 16 of the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010

Noted

- d. **Note** that this provides for the consideration of:

- i. Te Ture Whaimana.

Noted

- e. **Agree** you are satisfied the project will meet the referral criteria in section 22 of the Act as:
- i. it is a development project that would have significant regional or national benefits because
 - ii. it would increase the supply of housing and address housing needs by providing 70 rural-residential lots and a 137-unit and 50-bed retirement facility
 - iii. it would deliver significant economic benefits by providing:
 - iv. a onetime boost in GDP of approximately \$189 million
 - (a) full time employment (FTE) for 260 people over a 5-year period during design, consenting and construction
 - (b) operational employment of 228 FTE with an annual GDP of \$29 million and more than \$17 million in income
 - v. referring the project would enable it to be processed in a more timely and cost-effective way than under normal processes because it is unable to progress under the RMA due to a prohibited activity status.



- vi. referring the project would not materially impact the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process, as the project is not novel in the New Zealand context, nor is it out of step with the type of projects expert panels would be required to consider under the RMA.

Yes / No

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

Yes / No

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

Yes / No

- h. **Agree** to specify Swordfish Projects Limited as the person who is authorised to lodge a substantive application for the project

- i. **Agree** to direct a panel to comply with the following matters under section 16:

- 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 with Waikato-Tainui (as a consistent theme running through the plan); and
- v. consider the detailed information-sharing provisions of the JMAs, as they may be applied to the fast-track process.

- j. **Agree** to specify under section 27(3)(b) of the Act:

- i. the deadline for lodging the application is two years from the date of your notice of decisions
- ii. the following information that the applicant must submit with the substantive application:
 - (a) an assessment of the relevant infrastructure for transport and three waters services that—
 - (b) identifies the existing condition and capacity of that infrastructure; and
 - (c) identifies any upgrades to that infrastructure that are required in connection with the subdivision and the proposed development; and
 - (d) identifies any funding required to carry out those upgrades (including who will provide that funding);
 - (e) contains information on any discussions held, and any agreements made, between the authorised person and the relevant infrastructure provider about the relevant infrastructure (including discussions and agreements about the matters referred to in subparagraphs (1) to (3)).



iii. The following persons or groups from whom a panel must invite comments in addition to those specified in section 53:

- (a) Hamilton City Council
- (b) NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

Yes / No

k. **Agree** that the Ministry for the Environment will provide your notice of decisions 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:
 - (a) Department of Conservation

Yes / No

Signatures

Stephanie Frame
Manager – Fast-track Operations

Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure

Date:

Table A: Stage 2 analysis

Recommendation	<u>Accept</u> the referral application and refer the project to the fast-track approvals process		
Project details	Project Name	Applicant	Project Location
	Awanui Links	Swordfish Projects Limited	An area of approximately 123 hectares at Telephone Road, Puketaha, within the Waikato District, in the Waikato Region. The project area encompasses of 27 Record of Titles. An overview of the restrictions present on each is provided under section 1.3 of the Planning Memorandum submitted with the application.
Project description	The project is to establish a new residential development over approximately 123 hectares of rural land located in Puketaha within the Waikato District. The project involves: - high-end tourism involving an 18-hole-golf course, which will be centred around a contemporary clubhouse, pro-shop, driving range, wellness centre, fine dining restaurant, and boutique hotel with associated event and conference facilities. - lifestyle living, 70 rural-residential lots of approximately 3,000 square metres. - Retirement facilities - 137 retirement living units, a mix of independent living villas, a central care facility (50 beds), healthcare and community facilities. - light-industrial activity –nine lots ranging from 2300 – 5700 square metres. - A 3,000 sqm solar farm is proposed adjacent to the industrial area. - extensive planting, ecological restoration, and integrated water features. The applicant seeks the following approvals under the fast-track approvals process to authorise the project: - 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 of high class soil - wildlife authority under the Wildlife Act 1953.		
Minister invites comments / requests information	Comments from invited parties		
	Local authorities <i>Waikato District Council (WDC)</i> WDC did not identify any competing applications relevant to the project. The key points from WDC’s comments are: - the project is located in a rural zone, and consideration is required of the potential transport effects on Telephone Road and the Waikato Expressway, connectivity of retirement residents to amenities, and effects related to loss of Highly Productive Land - the potential presence of peat soils and acid sulphate soils will require investigation and management, as these have significant impacts on construction - there is currently no wastewater servicing available to service the site, and the applicant will need to address this in their substantive application - the existing water supply network is not designed to service developments of this scale, and the applicant will need to address this in their substantive application - consideration should be given to effects on the Waikato Drainage Scheme, and the implications for WDC of any stormwater assets vested in them. <i>Waikato Regional Council (WRC)</i> WRC did not identify any competing applications or applications under sections 124C(1)(c) or 165ZI of the RMA relevant to the project. While WRC did not outright oppose project referral, it raised several concerns. WRC considered that the economic benefits of the project need to be considered in light of the fact the project is located in a rural zone without adequate water or transport servicing and results in the loss of highly productive land. However, WRC did not specifically state that the project would not have significant economic benefits. WRC considered the project does not meet section 22(2)(a)(i) as it does not align with the Future Proof Strategy. WRC noted that there is projected insufficiency of serviced residential land in the 1-10 year timeframe, however notes that the project is not serviced by current or planned infrastructure, and identifies that listed and referred projects in the Hamilton area will already provide approximately 394.5 hectares of residential land. It is WRC’s view that the project may not contribute to housing supply, and instead redistribute housing demand. WRC also identified the following effects which would need to be addressed as part of a substantive application: - presence of peat soils and acid sulphate soils on site - effects on ecological values - effects on the Waikato Central Land Drainage Scheme, including provision of flood modelling - effects on local roads, and reliance on private vehicle movements, including provision of an integrated transport assessment - stormwater effects - water and wastewater servicing effects - geotechnical, earthworks and contaminated land effects.		

	Ministers <i>Minister for Economic Growth</i> The Minister noted the economic assessment provided by the applicant indicates that the proposal’s benefits are primarily regional in nature, with the assessment assuming that 85 per cent of the direct and indirect national one-time impacts would accrue to the Waikato region. The proposal could enhance the Waikato visitor economy, increase housing and retirement-living supply, provide additional aged-care capacity, and enable light-industrial activity. On this basis, the proposal may have significant regional economic benefits under section 22(2)(a)(iv) of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024. It may also be relevant to section 22(2)(a)(iii), given the proposed rural-residential lots, retirement-living units and aged-care facility, which would increase housing and accommodation in the Waikato District. <i>Minister for Tourism and Hospitality</i> The Minister stated that the project has the potential to boost regional tourism activity in the Waikato district through its high-end tourism developments, and encourages the dispersal of visitors across regions by increasing accommodation capacity outside a main urban centre. The Minister notes the application does not forecast the volume of visitors that the applicant expects the project to draw to the region, making it difficult to assess full GDP contribution. The Minister notes the project supports the Government’s priorities to grow tourism exports and employment in tourism and hospitality, and aligns with Tourism New Zealand’s international marketing themes including food and beverage, active escapes and wellness. Māori Groups <i>Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Incorporated (Waikato-Tainui)</i> The comments from Waikato-Tainui are dealt with primarily in the Section 18 report, but the key matters Waikato-Tainui consider would require particular consideration are: • effects on freshwater systems and alignment with Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato; • loss of highly productive land and cumulative land use change; • effects on indigenous biodiversity and effectiveness of proposed mitigation; • cultural and archaeological values within the project area; and • adequacy and enforceability of proposed management and mitigation measures. Administering agencies <i>Department of Conservation (DOC)</i> DOC stated it considers that it is likely that with the appropriate design and conditions, effects can be managed to appropriate levels and is not aware of any reason the Project should not be referred. DOC noted that while the project is not inconsistent with either the Conservation General Policy 2005 and Waikato Conservation Management Strategy 2014, the applicant should consider: • Maintaining and restoring the ecological integrity of relevant ecosystems and habitat types; • Conserving any threatened and at-risk species to ensure their persistence; • Protecting freshwater fish habitat, fish passage and the maintenance of habitat connectivity and water quality of any waterway. DOC also noted the potential presence of long-tailed bats, which the applicant should consider.
The Minister must decline an application if the Minister is satisfied that the project involves an ineligible activity [section 21(3)(b)]	We consider you can be satisfied that the project does not involve an ineligible activity because it: • would not occur on identified Māori land, Māori customary land or a Māori reservation as confirmed by the relevant records of title and consultation with iwi authorities. • would not occur in a customary marine title area or protected customary rights area as it is not in the coastal marine area (CMA). • 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 CMA. • 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. • would not be prevented by section 165J, M, Q, ZC or ZDB of the RMA because it will not occur in the CMA. • 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 record of title. • is not a prohibited activity or decommissioning activity under the EEZA, 15B or 15C of the RMA as it does not involve EEZA approvals. • 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 sufficient 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 Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 or the Ngā Rohe Moana o Ngā Hapū o Ngāti Porou Act 2019 [section 16]	The Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010 sets out that you must have particular regard to Te Ture Whaimana in considering this application, and that an expert panel must also do so.
Section 22 assessment criteria	
The project is an infrastructure or development project that would have significant regional or national benefits [section 22(1)(a)]	<i>The Minister <u>must</u> consider a relevant Government policy statement (GPS) [s22(1A)]</i> The only current GPS is the Government Policy Statement on Grocery Competition. As this project does not involve a supermarket development or grocery-related activities, there is no GPS relevant to your decision. The Minister <u>may</u> consider any of the following matters, or any other matters the Minister considers relevant: <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 while the project is not explicitly listed as a priority by central or local government or within a plan or strategy, the project aligns with the strategic intent of the need to increase housing supply. The applicant considered that the project therefore aligns with the Act's purpose of accelerating projects that deliver significant regional benefits. We consider the project has not been specifically identified in a central or local government or sector plan or strategy or a central government infrastructure priority list, and therefore consider you should <u>not</u> use this as a basis for referral. <i>Will increase the supply of housing, address housing needs, or contribute to a well-functioning urban environment [s22(2)(a)(iii)]</i> The applicant states that the project will deliver 70 houses and a 137-bed retirement facility this improving the housing market, particularly by enabling older residents to transition to purpose-built accommodation suited to their needs. The proposed contribution to housing supply is less than other referred and listed projects in the Auckland Region, with the lowest contribution being the 215 residential units provided by 188 Beaumont Street. We note that there are additional benefits associated with the provision of retirement facilities, and consider you could refer the project on this basis. <i>Will deliver significant economic benefits [s22(2)(a)(iv)]</i> The economic assessment provided by the applicant states that the project will provide the following economic benefits: • a onetime boost in GDP of approximately \$189 million • full time employment (FTE) for 260 people over a 5-year period during design, consenting and construction • the non-residential component of the project could sustain 228 FTE with an annual GDP of \$29 million and more than \$17 million in income. The applicant states that the provision of nine industrial lots enabling approximately 12,800sqm of industrial floor space will boost industrial land supply. The applicant considers that the golf course would add depth and variety to the established golf tourism network which supports more than 2,000 jobs nationwide and contributes more than \$1 billion per annum to GDP. Combining this with tourism accommodation, dining and a wellness facility will boost the attraction of Waikato to both domestic and international golfers. We consider that you can be satisfied the project will deliver significant regional benefits and <u>can</u> refer the project on this basis. <i>Will support climate change mitigation, including the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions [s22(2)(a)(vii)]</i> The applicant has stated that the project will be designed to minimise greenhouse gas emissions where possible through construction and within the masterplan design. During construction, greenhouse gas emissions are proposed to be reduced through the following measures: • minimising the number of truck movements required to manage earthworks material by retaining as much as possible within the site; and • a staged construction approach that allows for the appropriate management of effects on the environment. Following construction, the ongoing reduction of greenhouse gas emissions are intended to be supported by: • enabling mixed use development, including provision for services and amenities within the new rural residential development to reduce the need for vehicle travel connectivity to existing centres within the vicinity • the development of block and lot layouts which encourage energy efficiencies, including through optimising passive solar gain and natural light • the proposal includes the establishment of a small solar farm to enhance resilience by off-setting onsite energy demand. We do not consider you can be confident that these benefits are significant in the context of the Auckland Region, and do <u>not</u> recommend you use this as a basis for referral.

	<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 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 Waikato community. Since housing supply is addressed in section 22(2)(a)(ii), we do not consider that addressing housing affordability is a significant environmental effect which is addressed by the project. <i>Is consistent with local or regional planning documents, including spatial strategies [s22(2)(a)(x)]</i> The applicant states the project is consistent with the key objectives and principles of Future Proof 2024 as it: • supports integrated planning by combining tourism, residential, retirement, and light industrial activities within a single master-planned development • has connection to SH1B (Telephone Road) and proximity to Hamilton City (10 km) thereby enhancing regional accessibility, linking visitors and residents to key transport routes and services • will complement existing nearby towns by attracting visitors, supporting local employment, and reinforcing a unique identity centered on recreation, wellness, and tourism • concentrates development rather than allowing ad hoc rural subdivision • caters to lifestyle, retirement, and tourism-related housing needs, supporting different life stages and preferences • actively enhances the natural environment. The applicant has provided an assessment of the following strategies, policies and plans. • <i>Waikato 2070 Growth & Economic Development Strategy (Waikato 2070)</i> This outlines a 50-year vision for sustainable and strategic growth across the Waikato district. The project is strongly aligned with the focus areas identified under Waikato 2070. It reflects the strategy's core vision of creating liveable, thriving, and connected communities and contributes to all four focus areas outlined in the strategy • <i>Waikato District Housing Strategy (2024)</i> Awanui Links is particularly aligned with the Strategy with respect to increasing housing supply and diversity and contributing to the provision of safe, healthy, and affordable homes to the community particularly providing for elderly. The project helps to address core issues such as housing supply, infrastructure integration, and community connectivity. • <i>Waikato Regional Policy Statement</i> The applicant considers that the application aligns with the majority of the objectives and policy framework, with the exception of the objectives and policies that manage and protect highly productive land. • <i>Hamilton & Waikato Tourism - Destination Management Plan 2022</i> The plan has the goal of ensuring the visitor economy positively contributes to thriving Waikato communities – people, culture and the environment. The applicant considers that the proposal is able to support and meets the principles of this statement. Given the project includes prohibited activities, we do not consider you can be confident that it is consistent with local or regional planning documents.
Referring the project to the fast-track approvals process [section 22(1)(b)]	<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> 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. We agree with the applicant's assessment, particularly given the prohibited activity status of the project preventing it progressing under the RMA without a plan change. <i>Is unlikely to materially affect the efficient operation of the fast-track approvals process [s22(1)(b)(ii)]</i> 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. We consider the project is not novel or unusually complex in the New Zealand context and is not out of step with the type of project that an expert panel would be expected to consider under the RMA.
Reasons to decline	
Minister <u>must</u> decline [section 21(3)]	<i>The Minister <u>must</u> decline a referral application if:</i> <i>The application may not be accepted under subsection 1 (meets referral criteria)</i> We consider the project meets the referral criteria in subsection 1, so you are <u>not</u> required to decline the application on this basis. <i>The Minister is satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity</i> We consider the project does not include an ineligible activity, so you are <u>not</u> required to decline the application on this basis. <i>The Minister considers that they do not have adequate information to inform the decision under this section</i> We consider you have sufficient information to inform your referral decision, so you are <u>not</u> required to decline the application on this basis. We do not consider that you must decline the application under this section.
Minister may decline [section 21(4) and 21(5)(a-h)]	<i>The Minister <u>may</u> decline a referral application for any other reason, whether or not it meets the criteria in section 22.</i> <i>Reasons to decline a referral application under subsection 4 include, without limitation:</i>

	<i>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</i> No comments received indicate the project would be inconsistent with any of these documents. <i>It would be more appropriate to deal with the matters that would be authorised by the proposed approvals under another Act or Acts</i> No comments have indicated it would be more appropriate to deal with the project under the RMA. We note that as the project includes a prohibited activity there is not a pathway to obtain consents under the RMA without a plan change, which is not guaranteed to be successful. <i>The project may have significant adverse effects on the environment</i> WDC and WRC have both raised concerns about the potential for adverse effects arising from the project. We consider the effects of the project can best be addressed by an expert panel with the benefit of a full application include assessment of environmental effects. We recommend you require the applicant to provide three waters and transport infrastructure assessments to support the expert panel. <i>The applicant(s) has a poor compliance history under a specified Act that relates to any of the proposed approvals</i> No parties have raised concerns about the applicant's compliance history. <i>The project area includes land that the Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations considers necessary for Treaty settlement purposes</i> The project will occur on private land which is not generally available for Treaty settlement purposes. <i>The project includes an activity that is a prohibited activity under the Resource Management Act 1991</i> 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. We also note that the expert panel for the Ashbourne project declined part of that project due to effects related to loss of highly productive land. While this matter may increase the likelihood that an expert panel may decline the project, the Act does not require that you decline an application where it includes a prohibited activity. We consider an expert panel is able to consider the effects of the loss of highly productive land, and you should not decline the application on this basis. <i>A substantive application for the project would have one or more competing applications.</i> We are not aware of any competing applications for the project. <i>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)</i> We are not aware of any existing consents of this type. We <u>do not</u> recommend you decline the application.
The Minister may specify any of the matters under section 27(3)	<i>The Minister <u>may</u> specify any or all of the following under section 27(3) in the notice of decisions letter for an accepted referral application.</i> <i>Restrictions that apply to the project (for example, on its geographical location, its duration, or the aspects of the project that may be carried out)</i> <i>We recommend the project description and project details at the beginning of this table are copied into the notice of decisions letter. We have not identified any other specific restrictions that we consider would apply to the project.</i> <i>In relation to a substantive application for the project:</i> <i>A deadline for lodging the application, unless section 27(3)(c) applies</i> We consider the standard deadline for lodging the substantive application under section 28(3)(d)(ii) is suitable, which would be the date that is two years after the notice is given to the applicant. <i>Information that must be submitted with the application</i> WDC identifies the requirement for assessments of effects on water, wastewater and transport infrastructure at the substantive stage. We recommend you direct the applicant to provide further information on necessary upgrades to three waters and transport infrastructure to service the project, including how they will be funded. <i>The persons or groups from whom a panel must invite comments in addition to those specified in section 53</i> We recommend you specify the Chief Executive of New Zealand Transport Agency, as the party responsible for the adjacent State Highway, and Hamilton City Council, as a potential provide of infrastructure and services for the project, as persons to be invited to comment on the substantive application if you refer the project.

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 section 22
 - b. you are satisfied the project involves an ineligible activity (section 5)
 - 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 section 21(5) and even if the application meets the section 22 referral criteria.
5. You can decline an application before or after inviting comments under section 17(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 the initial stage you must copy the application to, and invite written comments from:
 - a. the relevant local authorities
 - b. the Minister for the Environment, the Minister for Māori Crown Relations: Te Arawhiti, and the Minister for Māori Development
 - c. any other relevant portfolio Ministers
 - d. the relevant administering agencies
 - e. the Māori groups identified by the responsible agency
 - f. the owners of Māori land in the project area (if applicable)
 - g. 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.