

PEER REVIEW

Project: Proposed Ayrburn Screen Hub
Subject: Peer Review of Landscape Assessment Report
Prepared By: Shannon Bray
Date: 19 August 2025

Introduction

This document sets out my peer review of the Landscape Assessment Report (LAR) of the proposed Ayrburn Screen Hub that has been prepared by Tony Milne of Rough Milne Mitchell (RMM), dated 15 August 2025.

I find that the report has been appropriately prepared in accordance with best practice guidance and that the conclusions reached are credible. I consider that the conclusions of the report can be relied on for the purposes of considering granting resource consent for the proposal.

Peer Review Methodology

This technical peer review has been prepared in accordance with s6.57 to s6.63 of Te Tangi a te Manu, the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA) published best practice guidance for landscape assessment¹. This guidance notes that:

"A peer review is an evaluation of an assessment by someone with similar competencies. Its weight relies upon the reviewer being impartial and having sufficient expertise and experience with respect to the subject of the principal assessment." (s6.57)

Like the author of the LAR, I am a Fellow and Registered Member of NZILA. I have over 20 years' experience in undertaking landscape assessments across Aotearoa New Zealand, primarily in regard to land development and infrastructure projects. I have prepared numerous peer reviews of this nature, and have provided both primary evidence and peer review evidence through Council Hearings, Environment Court, Boards of Inquiry and Fast Track processes. I have a current Making Good Decisions certificate and have acted as both a Commissioner and expert advisor to decision making panels. I have also worked on a film studio project in Hawke's Bay that is of a similar nature to that proposed, but confirm that my involvement with that project has ended and I have no conflict of interest in considering the Ayrburn proposal. I have provided a more detailed outline of my experience in Appendix 1.

¹ https://nzila.co.nz/media/uploads/2022_09/Te_Tangi_a_te_Manu_Version_01_2022_.pdf



I have been engaged directly by the applicant to provide an independent peer review, and as such in the preparation of this peer review, I have not had any communications with the author of the LAR in respect to this project. After I had undertaken an initial review of the report (and associated documents) and undertaken a site and locality visit (2nd July 2025), I provided some initial feedback on the LAR directly to my client. This feedback included requests to provide further information on various aspects of the proposal both within the report and within the supporting graphical information. I received an updated report and associated material on 16th July 2025, and then a final report and associated material on 15th August 2025. Although I had iteratively prepared this report prior to receiving the final versions, I undertook one final review of all the associated material and finalised this report on 19th August 2025.

I note that whilst I am primarily based in Hawke's Bay, I have undertaken professional work in the Queenstown and Arrowtown area in recent years. This has primarily been associated with telecommunications infrastructure, but I have also visited Ayrburn, Millbrook and some surrounding developments on a study tour to inform a project I am working on near Hastings. I have also visited Ayrburn socially on a couple of occasions. However, I have had no involvement with the design of Ayrburn or the current proposal. I am also not connected with Rough Milne Mitchell.

Although this report is not evidence, for the sake of transparency I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024: Panel Conveners' Practice and Procedure Guidance 2025 (with particular reference to sections 14.11 and 14.12 in regard to the role of a peer reviewer). This assessment has been prepared in compliance with the Code and Guidance, as if it were evidence being given in Environment Court proceedings. In particular, unless I state otherwise, this assessment is within my area of expertise and I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I express.

LAR Methodology

Section 1.2 of the LAR sets out the methodology that has been followed in its preparation and outlines the experience of the author. I am aware of Mr Milne's work over many years, and his description of his experience tallies with my own understanding. I consider he is suitably qualified and experienced to have prepared the LAR.

I note that RMM have been involved in the design of the proposal, in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team. The LAR notes that the consideration of landscape and visual effects of the proposal was a consideration from the outset, and the potential for effects on public places and neighbouring properties has informed the approach of the overall development layout.

I consider such involvement prior to formally preparing a landscape assessment is relatively common. Whilst it could be seen that the author is biased towards the proposal that they were involved in design phases, I consider that the author is professionally experienced to the degree that their input would likely have been beneficial at avoiding potential effects. Indeed, the LAR notes that landscape mitigation to address potential effects has been designed to be integral to the project and part of the overall landscape design response. As such, I do not consider there to be any issues with Mr Milne or RMM having been involved with both the design and the assessment of the proposal.

The LAR notes that it follows the same guidance as my review, Te Tangi a te Manu. It appropriately references the now widely used seven-point rating scale for effects, including the comparative to the RMA s104D scale.

The LAR methodology also sets out the site and location visits that have been undertaken to inform the assessment. I note that not all of these were visited specifically for the assessment of the current proposal but understanding that Mr Milne has been involved with six other proposals at Ayrburn I am comfortable that he has used his prior knowledge and



professional judgement to determine the necessary locations needing revisiting for this proposal. I also note that he had available to him various graphical information, including a Zone of Theoretical Visibility Map (ZTV) and 3D digital modelling.

In my review of the proposal, I considered requesting a copy of the ZTV to help me confirm that the LAR captures the full extent potential visibility. However, I am myself aware of the limitations of a ZTV, so instead requested 360° drone footage to be taken from a location approximately 2-3m lower than the height of the tallest buildings. This drone footage, which has now been supplied, provides a very clear visual representation of the viewshed. I will refer back to this drone footage later in my review.

Also supporting the application are a series of photographs and visualisations that confirm views from key locations in the surrounding landscape. These have been prepared by One to One Hundred Ltd (OTOH). I have reviewed the methodology provided by OTOH and find that it is aligned with NZILA Best Practice², and the viewing distance stated appears to be correct based on the use of a 50mm lens printed at A3. The photographs are clear and show the proposal as it has been described. I do note, however, that the visualisations show reasonably mature planting, which I would anticipate would take 8-10 years to achieve in this location.

Based on the above, I am of the opinion that an appropriate methodology has been adopted for the assessment provided by the LAR, and that the author has appropriately considered the receiving environment.

Review of the Proposal

The LAR provides a comprehensive overview of the proposal, and in particular captures the key elements of the proposal that are likely to result in potential landscape effects.

I have reviewed this section of the LAR against the various other materials that are identified, in particular the *Ayrburn Screen Hub Design Report*³, and confirm that the provided description is accurate. As outlined above, I note the inherent inclusion of various landscape mitigation measures within the design, such as the proposed earthworks spur extension to Christine's Hill to provide screening of the proposal from the Countryside Trail.

In addition, I note the specifics regarding building cladding and colour, and the inclusion of night lighting information.

Together with the graphical information provided by both RMM and Winton, I am of the opinion that there is enough information provided regarding the design of the proposal for the potential landscape effects to be appropriately assessed.

Policy Provisions

The LAR notes that it has been considered under *Proposed District Plan* (PDP) policies because all relevant provisions are now beyond challenge.

I understand that this is generally the case, however, there remain active appeals in regard to the boundary and some descriptions of the underlying *Speargrass Flats Landscape Character Unit* (LCU8). The outcome of the appeals of these

² NZILA Best Practice Guidelines for Visual Simulations, BPG10.2, dated 2 November 2011.

³ Ayrburn Screen Hub Design Report, prepared by Winton dated 3 June 2025.



may affect the baseline policy against which potential effects are assessed as appropriate. Nevertheless, the broad outcome of these appeals will, in my opinion, have little bearing on the overall assessment of effects. In this regard, I am of the opinion that the PDP is the appropriate focus.

As identified, I concur that the site is located *LCU8* of the Wakatipu Basin landscape, as outlined by s24.8 of Chapter 24 of the PDP. In the vicinity of the site, this unit is immediately bordered to the north by *The Hills* (LCU22), to the east by *Hogans Gully* (LCU15), and to the south by *Lake Hayes Rural Residential* (LCU12). Whilst each of these have been individually mapped and described, I note that there are similarities in terms of land-use, as follows:

	Speargrass Flats LCU8	Lake Hayes RR LCU12	Hogans Gully LCU15	The Hills LCU22
ONL/ONF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Does not adjoin. ▶ Open long-range views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Adjoins Lake Hayes ONF. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Does not adjoin. ▶ Open long-range views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Does not adjoin. ▶ Mid to long range views.
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Pastoral with Rural Residential lots – subject to appeal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Rural Residential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Mix of Rural Residential and Rural. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Golf course and Rural Residential.
Settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Well separated and sparsely scattered rural residential – subject to appeal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Intensively clustered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sparse Scattering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Scattered dwellings. ▶ Resort development.
Amenity Values to be Maintained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Integration of built form. ▶ Maintenance of open outlook from Queenstown Trail descending from Christine's Hill. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Integration with planting. ▶ Maintain views to ONL where they are existing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Integration of built form. ▶ Retention of landform pattern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Visually discrete ▶ Integration of built form. ▶ Sympathetic mounding and planting.
Landscape Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Moderate within the Residential Area shown on the Structure Plan, otherwise Low – subject to appeal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ High. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Moderate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Moderate.

In particular, the similarities of both land use and amenity values to be maintained is, in my opinion, an important point to return to later in the assessment of effects.

I concur that the site is located within the *Ayrburn Structure Plan* (s27.13.22 of the PDP) and is located in both the *Residential* and *Open Space Activity Areas*. As such, the proposal is subject to the provisions under s27.3.27 of the PDP,



a matter overlooked by the LAR. From a landscape perspective, I consider the following policies are particularly relevant to the proposal:

27.3.27.2 Protect the open space values of Christine's Hill and Ayrburn, including when viewed from the Countryside Trail where it is a public place...

27.3.27.3 Avoid buildings within the Activity Area OS ... and provide for the consistent and integrated management of Activity Area OS.

27.3.27.4 Ensure retention of replacement of trees within the TPA areas...

The remaining general references in the LAR to Chapters 3, 24 and 25 of the PDP are accurately captured, however in my opinion the LAR misses some important distinctions in the individual objectives identified.

In particular, I note that Chapter 24 of the PDP is heavily based on the concept of *landscape capacity* in regard to absorbing the effects of development. It notes in s24.1 that “*proposals in areas rated to have very-low, low, or moderate-low development capacity are to be assessed against the landscape character and amenity values of the landscape character unit they are located within, as well as the Wakatipu Basin as a whole.*” I also note that s3.1B.5b of the PDP provides a useful interpretation of landscape capacity.

In this regard, the map contained within the *Design Report* titled *Masterplan with Ayrburn Structure Plan Overlaid* (also reproduced in s5.3.1 of the LAR) is of particular importance. This map identifies the location of all the residential components of the proposal to be within the Residential Activity Area (noted as having a Moderate landscape capacity), and the Filming Studios, Workshops, part of the Offices and the Ayrburn Depot to be within the Open Space Activity Area (noted as having a Low landscape capacity).

The relevance to the proposal is that only specific objectives within Chapter 24 are relevant to specific areas of the proposal, and not necessarily those identified in the LAR. I identify these as follows (with a strikethrough those policies I consider are not relevant to the proposal but are identified in the LAR):

24.2.1.2 This policy is not directly relevant as the proposal does not involve either subdivision or residential development within the Open Space Activity Area marked as having a Low landscape capacity. However, although it specifically indicates subdivision or residential activity, the broader consideration is that it suggests an intent to control development within the Open Space Activity Area such that the landscape character and visual amenity values identified for LCU8 and Wakatipu Basin as a whole are maintained or enhanced.

~~24.2.1.3~~ *This policy is not relevant as the proposal is within the LCU8 Precinct.*

24.2.1.4 This policy is relevant to the Residential Activity Area (Moderate landscape capacity), and seeks that development will:

- ▶ *Avoid sprawl along roads.*
- ▶ *Maintain a defensible edge and not encroach into any area having a low rating (eg Open Space Activity Area).*
- ▶ *Minimise incremental changes to landform and vegetation patterns.*
- ▶ *Not degrade openness when viewed from public places.*



- 24.2.1.6 *This policy is relevant and seeks to control inappropriate modification to the natural landform.*
- 24.2.1.7 *This policy is relevant and seeks to maintain or enhance landscape character and visual amenity values of the various LCU's. It does not specify that it is only relevant to proposals within a specific LCU.*
- 24.2.1.8 *This policy is relevant and seeks to maintain or enhance landscape character and visual amenity values of the wider Rural Amenity Zone, including the Precinct, through various design responses. It does not specify that it is only relevant to proposals within the Rural Amenity Zone.*
- 24.2.1.13 *This policy is relevant and seeks to minimise effects of earthworks and vegetation clearance on landscape character and amenity values.*
- 24.2.1.15 *This policy is relevant and seeks to maintain a sense of spaciousness in which buildings are subservient to natural landscape elements.*
- 24.2.1.16 *This policy is relevant and seeks to manage the effects of night lighting.*
- 24.2.1.17 *This policy is relevant and seeks to manage effects on cultural values, including tāngata whenua.*
- ~~24.2.1.18~~ *This policy is not relevant as the proposal is not directly adjacent the Rural Amenity Zone.*
- 24.2.1.19 *This policy is relevant and seeks to protect existing views to ONFs and ONLs.*

As a final note in regard to the consideration of landscape capacity (or similarly, the sensitivity of a landscape to development), I refer to the following sections of Te Tangi a te Manu which provide some guidance into the consideration of the landscape capacity policies:

- s5.49 *Generic attributes such as sensitivity and capacity are necessarily imprecise because they estimate a future. They can be useful and necessary in policy-based assessments, or in comparing alternative routes/localities, but they become redundant once the actual effects of a specific proposal can be assessed directly.*
- 6.43 *Landscape values are too complex and varied to reduce to a single parameter such as 'sensitivity'.*
- 6.44 *Instead, it is more direct and transparent to describe the actual nature and degree of effect on the landscape's actual values (and attributes) and explain with reasons.*

I concur with the reference to policies contained in s25.8.3 of the PDP in regard to the effect of earthworks on landscape and visual amenity values.

To summarise the above in respect of the assessment of potential effects, I reach the conclusion that the policy provisions in the PDP seek to:

- Avoid buildings within the Open Space Activity Zone (s27.3.27.3), avoid sprawl and encroachment of residential areas into non-residential areas (s24.2.1.4), and protect the open space values of Christine's Hill when viewed from the public walkway (s27.3.27.2).



- ▶ Avoid removal of trees that are within a Tree Protection Area (s27.3.27.4).
- ▶ Avoid inappropriate changes to landform (s24.2.1.6) and minimise effects of earthworks (s24.2.1.13).
- ▶ Maintain or enhance landscape character and amenity values across the LCU, Rural Amenity Zone and wider Wakatipu Basin and maintain existing views to ONFs/ONLs (s24.2.1.2, 24.2.1.7, 24.2.1.8 and 24.2.1.19).
- ▶ Manage effects of night lighting (s24.2.1.16).
- ▶ Manage effects on cultural values (24.2.1.17).

In my opinion, these points set out the specific requirements that the LAR needs to assess. These are to be considered alongside more generic, district wide landscape policies identified in Chapter 3 that include particular focus on maintaining the values and views to ONLs and ONFs, maintaining rural character, and maintaining the landscape character and visual amenity values of the Wakatipu Basin.

Existing Landscape

Section 4 of the LAR provides a comprehensive overview of the receiving landscape.

The definition of Landscape Character provided at s4.1.1 is somewhat generic, but it loosely aligns with the more detailed description provided in s5 of Te Tangi a te Manu. Although the LAR refers to the aesthetic, perceptual and experiential aspects of landscape (in addition to physical elements and features), the more commonly considered definition indicates that “*character encompasses everything about a landscape – its physical, associative and perceptual dimensions.*”⁴ In this regard, the LAR deviates slightly from the best practice guidance in both its description of the existing landscape and its effects on it, a point I will return to later in this review.

Having said this, the description provided of the surrounding area corresponds to my own understanding and experiences of it during my specific visit for this review and previous visits to the area.

I think it is useful at this point to put to one side the various policies and LCU’s that I outlined in the previous section and focus particularly on the landscape context as a whole, from broadscale to site-level.

Initially, this is set out in the *Landform & Geology* section (s4.1.3) of the LAR. This identifies the wider context of the Wakatipu Basin as being “*formed by several growing and retreating glaciers that carved out a wide U-shaped valley out of the schist bedrock, and left behind a varied landscape of moraine deposits, glacial till and outwash, roche moutonnees, depressions (lakes) and terrace formations.*” This description accurately captures the bold contrast between the basin and the surrounding bold mountain forms, as well as the more refined features experienced at the more detailed scale.

⁴ Te Tangi a te Manu, s5.05



1983 (Source: Retrolens)



2001 (Source: Retrolens)



2025 (Source: Google Earth)

Overlaying this geology is landcover and land-use (s4.1.4 and s4.1.5) of the LAR that describes the broad clearance of native vegetation to make way for agricultural activity, and then the more recent (past few decades) development of residential and other activity (such as Millbrook). Indeed, Wakatipu Basin has long been subject to ongoing pressure to change land-use from somewhat low-quality farmland to residential and recreational use (as outlined by the series of aerial images). Such development is evident not just at Ayrburn, but also across other parts of the basin including Centennial Avenue, Lower Shotover Road, Lake Hayes and Shotover Country. This is noted in the LAR, describing how *“built form and domestication spreads out from Speargrass Flat Road and extends south towards Lake Hayes”*, and how *“Arrowtown has grown with the likes of Arrowsouth and the Arrowtown lifestyle village”*. Other change includes the Hogans Gully Resort Zone identified in the LAR, and the continued development of residential living around Lake Hayes.

In this regard, I concur with the conclusion that *“rezoning and development within this wider landscape setting is resulting (and will result) in a broadly changing and developing landscape that isn’t rural (despite its zoning) but is the place for development and human activity.”* This statement, to me, appropriately sums up the changing landscape of the Wakatipu Basin as it is slowly and inevitably developed for human activities. It is how I have experienced this landscape in the many times I have visited, and what I observed when I specifically visited to undertake this peer review.

At the site level, this is immediately evident through the development of Ayrburn in recent years, and how it is already envisaged to be developed through the Structure Plan in the PDP. The LAR captures this through s4.2, including identifying its historical context and the newly established amenity landscape. If anything, I consider the LAR potentially under-represents the evidential quality of the development to date which I observed on my site visit – particularly through the protection of natural features such as the creek, the retention of bold pockets of vegetation, and the responsiveness of the building forms to the landform and surrounding character. Within the context of the changing landscape of the Wakatipu Basin, I found the development to date to be very responsive to its location – indeed much more so than other developments I observed in the surrounding area.

I therefore return to the policy detailed by the PDP, and in particular the Strategic Objectives that are set out in Chapter 3. From a landscape perspective, I am drawn to the effects that might result from the development of a *“prosperous, resilient and equitable economy”* (s3.2.1), and the *“diversification of the District’s economical base and creation of employment opportunities through the development of innovative and sustainable enterprises”* (s3.2.1.6). It is apparent that the focus on achieving such outcomes (amongst others) is through *“a quality built environment taking into the character of individual communities”* (s3.2.3), the protection of *“the distinctive natural environments and ecosystems”* (s3.2.4), and the protection of *Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes* (s3.2.5.2 and others).



In this context, and the points I raised at the end of the last section in regard to landscape capacity, I consider it wholly appropriate that the LAR concludes its assessment of the existing landscape by narrowing the focus to the key landscape values of the site and surrounding environment (s4.3 of the LAR). These are presented in a manner that is consistent with Te Tangi a te Manu, providing an overview of physical, perceptual and associative values and attributes. In my opinion, these collectively and accurately capture those values that contribute to the landscape character and amenity values that are sought to be protected or enhanced by the PDP policies.

Assessment of Effects

The assessment of landscape and visual effects begins at s5 of the LAR, with a brief overview of the potential issues.

In my opinion, these capture the broad issues, but as I have set out above, I consider the PDP policy provides a more comprehensive list of the key potential issues. These issues are to be considered in the context of the existing landscape values that define character and amenity, as I have just outlined. Nevertheless, I will provide a review of the broader assessment contained in the LAR before I return to address these points.

The LAR then goes on to provide an assessment of visibility and visual effects, noting that visual effects are defined in Te Tangi a te Manu as a subset of landscape effects. I would typically, therefore, include an assessment of visual effects within the body of a broader assessment, contained within my consideration of effects on *perceptual* values (this point is alluded to in the LAR). However, what is key is how such effects have been assessed and incorporated into the broader assessment against landscape values.

To start, I will consider the consideration of visibility of the proposal from the surrounding landscape. In doing so, I refer to the LAR, the visual material provided by OTOH, and the drone photography that has been provided in determining whether the selected assessment viewpoints are an accurate reflection of where the proposal might be seen from.

Most of the visual material focusses on the potential visibility of the proposal from the Countryside Trail, which I consider appropriate given that in its current state this is where the proposal is most openly visible. The visualisations, however, demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed landform spur in screening a lot of the proposed activity – as well as screening some of the existing built forms in Ayrburn. Together with the proposed planting, the visualisations demonstrate that this mitigation proposal will be remarkably effective, and considering VP5, VP6 and VP7 in particular the spur appears to be well integrated into the overall context.

The visualisations also show the potential visibility of the proposal from the two nearby roads, Arrowtown-Lake Hayes Road and Speargrass Flat Road. These show that the tops of the film hub buildings will be visible from some point locations (VP1 and VP4), set against the backdrop of planting, however any outside activity around these buildings will be screened by existing vegetation in Ayrburn and the proposed buildings on the lower terrace.

Turning to the consideration of landscape effects, I will undertake my review within the context of the *physical, perceptual and associative dimensions* that are broadly defined in Te Tangi a te Manu. As such, I will pull together the various threads of the assessment contained in s5 of the LAR into this framework, and then provide a review of the overall conclusions drawn in s5.5.

Effects on Physical Landscape Values

The key aspects of the proposal related to physical landscape effects are the land-use changes associated with the proposal, and the associated earthworks that are required to enable them (including the extension of a landform spur as an inherent mitigation of potential effects on perceptual landscape values). I note that the LAR identifies (at s2.1.10)



that existing mature exotic vegetation surrounding the site is to be retained, otherwise the only loss to vegetation is pastoral grasses and amenity plantings.

Considering the proposed mitigation earthworks, as identified in s2.1.7 of the LAR, this is proposed *“to mitigate the visual effects of the proposed development as viewed from the Countryside Trail as it traverses Christine’s Hill.”* I will return to the effectiveness of this proposal when I consider effects on perceptual landscape values, below, and for now focus on the specific physical landscape effects of this specific aspect of the proposal. I note that such effects of the proposed spur have not been assessed in the LAR, although broader conclusions of its form and overall landscape effect are provided in s6.1.3.

A full understanding of the earthworks proposal is detailed in the engineering drawings⁵, in particular Sheet 210. These also detail various retaining walls that will vary in height from 0.5m to 7.5m, and the subsequent recontouring of the land above these walls. The drawings are overlaid on a recent aerial photograph which show existing modifications to the landform in the form of tracks and surface clearance. These images also show historical landform changes to the west of the site (in the location of the existing vineyard), and the formation of other tracks across the landscape (including the Countryside Trail). I also observed on my site visit extensive landform changes through the Millbrook development and surrounding residential sites.

It is evident from the proposed works that the earthworks have been designed in a manner to replicate natural patterns and contours, particularly in regard to the spur. Although there is a uniformity to the slope, this does reflect the existing pattern of contours that extends upward across Christine’s Hill. In addition, the steeper, more fettered slope immediately behind the proposed film studio buildings is largely avoided (it largely sits outside the site boundary), allowing legibility of the geological form in this location to be retained. The shape of the spur is consistent with the variable topography that is found around the site and landscape.

I understand that the spur is to be planted with native margin planting on the film studio side and grapevines on the other side. I consider such planting will further help to integrate the landform change into the existing.

Having undertaken this assessment, I can concur with the conclusion in the LAR that *“while the extension will involve a considerable volume of fill material, it will appear as a natural extension of the existing landform.”*

The modification to landform is further subject to the various proposed retaining walls, and the proposed activity that involves construction of built forms. The various proposed retaining walls are somewhat substantial – most appearing (based on Sheet 220) to be greater than 1.5m in height, in places extending up to 7.5m. However, it is evident that these are contained within the area of proposed activity, and as such will appear integrated with other built forms.

Ultimately, the changes to landform (outside of the spur) and the use of retaining walls are required to effectively accommodate the activity, and this will result in a permanent physical change to this part of the landscape. It is evident that the alternative to creating a flat site for the film studio would be to extend it across the Open Space Activity Area to the west (the current grapevine), but this would have more significant effects on how this area is appreciated, especially from the Countryside Trail.

⁵ Ayrburn Screen Hub Consent Drawings prepared by Patersons. Project P240664.



I will discuss in the next section how I concur with the LAR that the perceptual effects of the proposal will connect with the wider Ayrburn development. In this context, I am of the opinion that the landform changes and retaining walls are appropriate to contain the proposal. Also, in considering the overall extent of earthworks and activity proposed in the context of the broader landscape and landform that has already been modified, I consider the changes to be relatively insignificant.

There are also some relatively minor earthworks associated with the realignment of the Countryside Trail. These are in an area that already has been modified (to create the trail, and other historical tracks that are evident in the aerial photography), and provide a more landform responsive track. However, it is not evident that the old trail will be rehabilitated, and so I do recommend the addition of a consent condition that details such rehabilitation – to include reintegrating it into landform and reestablishing grass cover.

Overall, although the LAR has not specifically assessed the effects on physical landscape values of the retaining walls and other earthworks outside of the spur, I am of the opinion that such effects will be **low** and, after establishment of activity and planting, will be well integrated.

Effects on Perceptual Landscape Values

It is evident that the bulk of the LAR focussed on visual amenity effects, which I would typically deem part of the consideration of effects on perceptual landscape values. I understand the rationale for such an approach and concur that how the proposal is perceived will have the greatest influence on its overall effect on landscape character. I also recognise that much of the PDP policy focusses on effects on amenity, rather than the broader landscape dimensions promoted by Te Tangi a te Manu.

Whilst perceptual landscape effects can also include experiences such as smell and noise, I do not consider the proposed activity will result in a level of such effects that warrant consideration. It is more typical to consider these aspects when assessing a proposal near the coastline (considering the sound of the sea or salt spray), or other excessively noisy activity (such as quarrying). I consider it appropriate to focus effects on perceptual landscape values to be focussed solely on visual effects.

Given the extensiveness of the discussion on visual amenity effects in the LAR, I do not see the need to provide additional comment or analysis. Rather, I confirm that the assessment of the potential visual amenity effects of the proposal from different locations is well considered, detailed and – based on my own observations from my site and locality visit, review of the visualisations, and review of the drone photography – accurate.

However, I will provide some key observations, as follows:

- ▶ The proposal will have remarkably limited visibility from the surrounding area. Where parts of the proposed buildings will be seen, these are in the context of existing development or amenity modifications to the landscape. I note that both VP1 and VP4, which show the tops of the film hub buildings visible, are point locations on busy roads. As such, the view of the buildings will be a short glimpse only, tucked low below the more prominent planting.



- ▶ With the establishment of the landform spur extension, the proposal will be barely visible from the Countryside Trail. Additionally, as the LAR identifies, this section of the trail runs through Millbrook and past various other residential properties on Speargrass Flat Road. Other aspects of Ayrburn are also visible, and the proposed spur extension will be beneficial at ‘hugging’ the development and reducing its immediate prominence. This is part of the experience of this part of the trail (noting also that the longer Te Araroa Trail passes through numerous urban landscapes), this is the changing landscape of the Wakatipu Basin. I concur with the LAR (s5.2.2) that *“the potential views of the proposal will not change the viewers perception and appreciation of the mountains and surrounding landscape.”*
- ▶ There are no instances from neighbouring properties or public locations where the proposal will diminish views to the surrounding mountains.
- ▶ Night lighting will be intermittently visible from certain locations, including the Countryside Trail – but this is in the context of numerous other lighting in the locality, including from the wider Ayrburn estate, Millbrook, and numerous surrounding residential properties. The LAR notes (at s5.2.5) that *“all lighting will be specified to meet the QLDC Southern Light standards”*.

In the context of the above points, and in considering the development as part of the wider Ayrburn estate, my focus on perceptual landscape effects ultimately lands on whether the proposal will be considered a natural extension to the existing built forms of Ayrburn, whether it appears to be well contained, and to what extent it changes the perception of the surrounding landscape values. Although perhaps not stated specifically, the overall essence of the LAR is that the effects are contained to a small part of the Wakatipu Basin, and the amenity associated with the proposal will be an extension of that already experienced across Ayrburn. I concur with the various references throughout the LAR to its limited visibility and minimal impact on outward views across the Basin and to mountains.

Ultimately, its effects on the perceptual landscape will only be experienced from very limited locations, including from within Ayrburn itself and for a short section along the Countryside Trail. The LAR recognises this, and it is evident that the proposal has been shaped to incorporate mitigation to reduce such effects (such creating the landform spur and integrating planting that matches the wider Ayrburn vegetation strategy). Notably, the area of Open Space is retained directly adjacent to the Countryside Trail, providing a buffer to the proposal, and development is avoided on Christine’s Hill.

Perhaps the only comment I have is that the planting, which is proposed to be largely evergreen⁶, does appear a little at odds with the generally surrounding deciduous trees in the winter scene. However, the planting proposed is native and of this region, and in this regard, I consider it highly appropriate. I also note how additional planting has been provided closer to the trail which contributes to a wider vegetation framework.

I therefore concur with the summary provided at s5.4 of the LAR, and in particular that the adverse impact of the proposal on visual amenity values will range from **very-low** to **low-moderate** – the higher rating being where the proposal is experienced from the elevated gradient on the Countryside Trail.

⁶ Based on the plans contained in the Ayrburn Screen Hub Design Report.



Effects on Associational Landscape Values

The LAR notes in several locations that the key associational landscape values relate to its farming heritage and its recreational value. I concur with such observations and note that these are specifically limited to specific locations that are not affected by the proposal.

The LAR notes (at s4.1.2) that *“there are no reported Māori artifacts or interest in the site”*. I understand from discussion with my clients that engagement with Kai Tahu and various hapu has been ongoing for several months, and that iwi are supportive of the proposal, especially in regard to the protections and improvements proposed around the waterways. I also understand that they have indicated there are no waahi tapu sites identified on the site.

In regard to recreational values and experiences from the Countryside Trail, I concur with the LAR that the *“experience moving through the landscape when cycling, walking or running ... is an interchange between a series of interconnected environments, openness and enclosure, built form and paddocks, managed and unconstrained landscape, where the characteristics of one often serves to emphasise the valued characteristics of another.”* I take this to mean that the experience is varied, and as detailed later in the LAR, it is unlikely to fundamentally change as a result of the proposal.

I therefore can concur with the LAR that the effects on associational landscape values will be **low**.

Overall Effects on Landscape Character

Combining all of the commentary above into the consideration of effects on landscape character, I consider the LAR succinctly captures such effects in s5.3.2, as follows:

“Amenity will be derived through existing treed landscape setting and variety of the wider views that are enjoyed.”

“The attributes that contribute to existing rural amenity – namely the open areas of the wider Ayrburn site, will remain and an additional vineyard and all its seasonal benefits will be established...”

“The proposal will add a series of buildings ... into a contained area of the rural landscape.”

“Due to the proposed containment of the development cluster, the new built form will quickly become integrated into this changed landscape.”

“Rural character values and amenity values will remain high and therefore the impact of the proposal of the values are considered to be very-low to low.”

My observations and assessment of the proposal, including the review of the various plans and graphical material provided, combined with my site and locality visit lead me to the same conclusion. From a landscape perspective, I concur with s5.5 of the LAR that *“the proposed Screen Hub facility will satisfactorily maintain landscape character and visual amenity values.”*

Assessment Against Policy

As I identified earlier, I do not quite align with the LAR in terms of the relevant policies against which the proposal needs to be assessed. However, in a broad sense, I agree that the fundamental assessment conclusions rest on whether the proposal is consistent with the effects that are already envisaged by the Ayrburn Structure Plan, and if not, to what degree.



To reach this conclusion, I return to the key policy points I raised above, and add additional commentary on whether I consider such effects have been credibly covered by the LAR:

- ▶ *Avoid buildings within the Open Space Activity Zone (s27.3.27.3), avoid sprawl and encroachment of residential areas into non-residential areas (s24.2.1.4), and protect the open space values of Christine’s Hill when viewed from the public walkway (s27.3.27.2).*

The LAR accepts that some development will occur in the Open Space Activity Zone, but it notes that the existing vineyard operation that separates the proposal from the Countryside Trail will be retained, as will the open space values of Christine’s Hill. I agree and consider the extent of loss of the open space values will be low. This is partially mitigated by the proposed earthworks spur, which will extend upwards when viewed from the Countryside Trail, and will include planting and an additional vineyard. This contains the potential for built activity sprawl and assists the development in connecting to the existing built areas of Ayrburn. I concur with the statement in the LAR (s7) that *“while the proposal does not strictly accord with the underlying Ayrburn Structure Plan and related provisions, it is considered the change in landscape character and visual amenity is in keeping with the adjoining Ayrburn Precinct...”*

- ▶ *Avoid removal of trees that are within a Tree Protection Area (s27.3.27.4).*

The proposal avoids the removal of trees in such areas.

- ▶ *Avoid inappropriate changes to landform (s24.2.1.6) and minimise effects of earthworks (s24.2.1.13).*

The LAR identifies the rationale behind the landform changes, and I agree that extending the spur as part of the proposal will result in beneficial landscape outcomes. The remaining changes to landform are well contained and will be integrated into the end use activity.

- ▶ *Maintain or enhance landscape character and amenity values across the LCU, Rural Amenity Zone and wider Wakatipu Basin and maintain existing views to ONFs/ONLs (s24.2.1.2, 24.2.1.7, 24.2.1.8 and 24.2.1.19).*

Section 6.1.2 of the LAR provides a summary of the potential effects on the LCU and wider Wakatipu Basin. I agree, and consider that the proposal is very well integrated into a landscape that has been, and continues to undergo extensive change with the growth of built form. I consider that the design responses that are inherent to the proposal (including building forms, colour, planting, etc) all contribute to the proposal aligning with the character of the Ayrburn development, which in itself is well integrated into the surrounding landscape. The LAR also identifies that existing views to the various ONFs/ONLs from surrounding public and private viewpoints will be maintained.

- ▶ *Manage effects of night lighting (s24.2.1.16).*

I concur with the LAR that “the anticipated difference between the effects currently experienced and the effect created by the application will be low”.



► *Manage effects on cultural values (24.2.1.17).*

The LAR is light on the consideration of cultural values, but I understand that Kai Tahu and associated hapu are supportive of the proposal.

Conclusion

This document has set out my peer review of the Landscape Assessment Report (LAR) of the proposed Ayrburn Screen Hub that has been prepared by Tony Milne of Rough Milne Mitchell (RMM), dated 15 August 2025. My review has used a methodology outlined in the NZILA best practice guidelines, Te Tangi a te Manu.

I find that the descriptions within the LAR in regard to the proposal and existing landscape are accurate and comprehensive, and that the methodology utilised is appropriate and in generally in accordance with Te Tangi a te Manu.

However, I consider the LAR doesn't quite accurately capture the appropriate planning provisions that are relevant to effects, and that the assessment tends to be somewhat focussed on visual amenity rather than the broader landscape dimensions set out in Te Tangi a te Manu. Having said this, the assessment is detailed, and throughout the body it addresses the key issues with robust arguments. In particular, I find that it focusses on the areas that are likely to be of key concern – namely the views from the Countryside Trail, and addresses how such effects are to be appropriately mitigated.

In this regard, based on my own review of the proposal, the various graphical materials provided to me, and my own observations of the site and locality, I find the final conclusions to be credible. I consider that these conclusions can be relied on for the purposes of considering granting resource consent for the proposal.

My only additional note is that I consider a condition of consent should be added that addresses the rehabilitation of the Countryside Trail after it has been relocated. The remediation should include reinstatement of natural landform contours and regrassing.

Shannon Bray
Registered Fellow Landscape Architect



Appendix 1: Experience of Author

Qualifications:

- ▶ B.For.Sc. – Bachelor of Forestry Science, Canterbury University, 1993
- ▶ B.L.A.(Hons) – Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (Honours), Lincoln University (1995)
- ▶ Registered Fellow and Past President New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects
- ▶ Making Good Decisions Current Certificate
- ▶ Current member of Tauranga Urban Design Panel (past member of Nelson UDP)

Key Assessment Projects (many of these also include master-planning and design phases):

- ▶ Hawke's Bay Film Studios (GripHQ)
- ▶ Waiaroha Water Treatment Plant & Discovery Centre, Hastings (Council)
- ▶ Frimley Water Storage, Hastings (Council)
- ▶ Te Awamutu Waste to Energy Plant (Private Client)
- ▶ Ravensdown Napier Plant Upgrade (Ravensdown)
- ▶ Hastings Golf Course Residential Masterplan and Rezoning, Hastings (Hastings Golf Developments)
- ▶ Cape Kidnappers Residential Masterplan, Hawke's Bay (Robertson)
- ▶ Mission Estate Winery Future Development Opportunities (Marist Holdings)
- ▶ Ara Hills Residential and Commercial Masterplan, Auckland (Ara Hills)
- ▶ 100+ other Residential subdivision proposals (Private Clients)
- ▶ Tararua Urban Growth Strategy and Development Guidelines (Council)
- ▶ 16 Solar Farm nationally (Private Clients, Council)
- ▶ 13 Wind Farms nationally (Private Clients, Council)
- ▶ 19 Transpower National Grid Projects nationally (Transpower)
- ▶ 50+ Telecommunication Masts nationally (Spark, OneNZ, Connexa, FortySouth)
- ▶ Taheke 8C Hydro Electricity Project, Rotorua (Taheke8C)
- ▶ Evendon Road Vehicle Energy Centre, Hastings (Private Client)
- ▶ Cameron Road, Tauranga (Council)
- ▶ Papakura to Drury SH1 Corridor, Auckland (NZTA)
- ▶ SH20B, Auckland (NZTA)