

Comment on the Ashbourne substantive application

Contact Details

Organisation Name: Peakedale Drive Residents Group (informal organisation formed in response to Ashbourne proposal)

(Note that names, addresses and emails of all 9 members are entered at the end of the submission - all are affected parties as per Appendix 3)

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Comments

Submission to Ashbourne Development Expert Panel from Peakedale Drive Residents Group

We the undersigned are all home owners who live at the end of Peakedale Drive where the early residential stages of the Ashbourne Development are proposed. Our exposure to the proposed development is therefore greater than any other existing neighbours in terms of construction traffic and excavation/earthmoving etc near our property boundaries.

We understand the Fast-Track approval process and the role of the Expert Panel in approving or declining the project and imposing conditions on the developers if approval is granted. **This submission is strongly opposed to the development proceeding. However, if approval is given despite the many arguments against that outcome, we would like certain conditions imposed to diminish the effect on our properties.**

A general comment we would make is that most of us have built or purchased our homes within the past 18 months (some have moved in less than 6 months ago). Many of us researched the Council website, and other sources, for information about zoning of adjacent land (Rural Residential 1 and 2) and what the District Plan indicated as the probable limited future for development in this area. This was reassuring in terms of retention of rural outlook (for those properties on the Western side of Peakedale Drive) and maintenance of a peaceful living environment for the reasonably foreseeable future.

The arrival of a letter from the development company (dated 30th May, 2025) was an unexpected shock, but the element of surprise was explained when we learnt about the strict confidentiality that surrounded the whole process. The land purchase agreements and consultations with Council and other parties had been going on in secret since early 2024. We all would have made different decisions about building or buying here if we had had this information in time. It is galling to think that so much was being negotiated behind closed doors while we were making decisions of such importance to our financial futures and our living comfort. It is fair to assume that our home values and resale prospects will be significantly reduced for many years.

We have important specific concerns about the effect of this proposal on our properties and lives, but we also have major general concerns as Matamata residents. Matamata is a small town so a bad effect on the community as a whole is also a bad effect on every individual in that community. We therefore present these general concerns as reasons for the development to be declined before detailing the specific concerns we have that affect only ourselves or our immediate neighbourhood.

The general concerns we have are as follows:

1. Absence of an economic case for development

We concur with the opinion of the Honourable Nicola Willis that the Ashbourne development “might be best considered in terms of providing additional housing supply rather than providing significant economic benefits” (letter to Honourable Chris Bishop 26th March 2025). Ms Willis identified initial construction jobs and some ongoing employment related to aged care and retail, but felt that there was insufficient information to assess any other economic benefit. We feel that there is **no** information to sustain an argument in favour of the Ashbourne development adding **long term** economic benefit to Matamata or the wider area given the absence of housing demand or local employment and the significant risk of the project failing (see below).

2. Failure of development to meet test of National or Regional significance

We feel that the Ashbourne development does not meet any sensible criteria for National or even Regional significance. This is a massive housing and aged care development in a small rural town with ample existing and planned development already in place. There is modest demand for new housing, based on the limited employment opportunities in Matamata and the 45 minute commute times to Hamilton or Tauranga.

If there is 'significance' attached to this development, it is entirely negative, with the provision of unnecessary extra build plots which will act to suppress other development in more suitable areas of Matamata (including the Council's preferred 'in-fill' type development which limits town sprawl onto valuable rural land).

3. Effect of development on character of town

Matamata is a small rural town servicing the surrounding farmland devoted to horse studs, dairying and cropping. The residents of Matamata love its rural character and chose to live here as a result of the beauty of the surrounding countryside and the 'small-town' feel including a genuine sense of community. This choice was in preference to the urban character of the adjacent cities. The Ashbourne development seems more suited to North Hamilton or parts of Auckland in its scale and the more intensive housing proposed. It is not suited to Matamata in its size or its urban feel.

4. Lack of housing demand in Matamata

Matamata has a moderately large area of developed land awaiting section sales and a much larger quantity of land scheduled for future development in locations consistent with Council planning. There is no proven need for an **additional** supply of land for housing on the scale of the Ashbourne development (which would add almost 25% of the existing total housing stock in Matamata). There is no conceivable growth forecast for Matamata which could justify this additional housing supply which will only depress existing property values and threaten the viability of other developments.

5. Lack of employment prospects in Matamata

Matamata is a service town for the rural hinterland and is not a base for industry. It is hard to conceive of this changing significantly in the future and any such change would be against the wishes of most local residents who chose Matamata for its rural character. There are many more suitable locations for industry in the Waikato and these already have the benefits of infrastructure, proximity to transport links etc which Matamata lacks.

6. Stress on infrastructure of town

Matamata is at the limits of its wastewater and fresh water capacity. Planned increases in this capacity are suited to the existing Council preferences for the scale and location of services and housing consistent with the District Plan. Social infrastructure (education, medical services) in Matamata is already under stress and manifestly unable to cope with a large unplanned increase in residents.

7. Loss of productive land and rural landscape

Matamata is surrounded by high quality farmland and an established attractive rural landscape. Elsewhere in New Zealand, sprawling housing developments have affected the supply of good farmland and this is not a desired outcome for Matamata especially in areas of outstanding natural beauty and excellent soil quality such as the land where Ashbourne is planned. Other parts of Matamata, where housing development is already occurring under Council planning, are of lesser landscape and farming value partly as a result of existing development.

A signal failure of previous green-field development in Matamata was the Ballina project which failed in 2018 and has ruined a large attractive rural area on the other side of Matamata leaving it with much reduced economic and landscape value. If Ashbourne fails at any stage due to its fragile economic justification, Matamata will again suffer the loss of rural landscape but this time with even greater consequences given the outstanding quality of the existing farm landscape in this area.

8. Contravention of Council planning process

The Fast Track planning process has value in some circumstances where need is proven and immediate, and an overly complex approval regime would frustrate the delivery of a significant project. Even in these circumstances it seems inappropriate to ignore Council planning and the local democracy which is implicit in that planning. This is even more true where a need is **not proven** and there is **no problem** to address.

Where Matamata residents commit their life savings to buy or build based on Council planning then find that an outside developer can ignore those Council deliberations with impunity, it undermines any sense of fairness and any regard for local democracy. This applies equally to us residents at the end of Peakedale Drive as well as residents of Eldonwood and Highgrove who built homes consistent with Council zoning only to find that the adjacent land might no longer be developed consistent with this vision.

This undermining and ignoring of Council planning casts doubt on the sense of ever relying on this information and even casts doubt on the sense of Council doing the planning in the first place if it is so easily ignored by developers with the means to access the Fast Track process and with profit as their sole motivation.

9. Poor performance of the developer in engaging with neighbours

A consistent feature of our attempts to have meaningful dialogue with the developer has been a reluctance to engage with our concerns. A strict limitation on how many residents could attend the one meeting with the developer (no more than 2 people) and then long delays in email responses to our concerns (over 4 weeks on

consecutive occasions) have been typical of the process. This tardy performance, while there is a strong vested interest in consulting with us, does not bode well for a future where no such motivation exists. We therefore have major reservations about the willingness of the developer to deliver this massive and complex project in a way which respects the rights of neighbours.

We also have reservations about the financing of the project in the absence of any detailed information about the source of the money. What is clear is that neither the developer or the financiers have any connection to Matamata and would have no compunction in walking away from the project if it looks like the profits are threatened (which we predict will be the case for many of the above reasons). In addition, there is a good chance that individual components of the development, such as the retirement complex and the solar farms, become tradable assets that are then on-sold to other buyers at a profit but with a further loss of accountability.

The specific concerns that we have are as follows:

1. Traffic on Peakedale Drive.

Having read carefully through the application documents, it seems that Peakedale Drive is planned as the sole access for earthmoving equipment, trucks etc. for at least Stage 1 of the Earthworks and Stages 1 and 2 of the residential development Civil Works (up to 4 years).

This heavy traffic down Jellicoe Road and Peakedale Drive would be a major issue for residents and clearly outside what we would expect on quiet residential streets.

We accept that transporting earthmoving machinery etc onto site is a short term issue, but have much greater concern about the heavy trucks that will be needed to transport gravel, stormwater infrastructure and then all the underground service pipes etc followed by road building materials etc. This will require many hundreds of truck movements over many years with attendant noise, road surface damage, dirt, inconvenience to residents and even risk to children etc.

The other issue is the current road end of Peakedale Drive which will become the entry point into the development. A gated entry point is proposed and all traffic will presumably have to stop here right outside the fronts of homes at the end of the road. A buildup of noisy truck traffic is easy to imagine which would be an added nuisance for residents together with impeding normal access to driveways.

We are aware (from correspondence with the developers) that a road connection through to Firth Street may occur at a later stage. This would be part of the 'spine' road that could eventually link Firth Street and Station Road. The Commute Integrated Transport Assessment report (9 July 2025), commissioned by the

developers, ignores this possibility despite it being a 'performance standard' under the Council Eldonwood South Structure Plan (2015). This omission is inappropriate and can only be explained because the developers don't own the land required for this connection. Despite this report, we feel that an early connection to Firth Street would be a much more appropriate and direct route for construction traffic to access the State Highway system and would affect only two existing residents. This seems a much more suitable access point for the development to at least spread the load of traffic away from Jellicoe Road and Peakedale Drive.

We attach a petition signed by the vast majority of residents in the Jellicoe Road/Peakedale Drive area (168 residents) expressing concern about the traffic implications of earthworks and civil works during the construction phase of the Ashbourne development. We decided to extend the petition to other adjacent streets as the demand for signing was high and residents felt they would also be affected. The petition supports an early road connection to Firth Street.

2. Construction effects of Earthworks and Civil Works across the early stages of the development.

The major excavation associated with the stormwater basin, within a few metres of properties on the western side of Peakedale Drive, and the more general Earthworks and Civil Works across the site would create an extraordinary loss of property enjoyment due to noise, vibration and dust. This would render outdoor living impossible over the earthmoving seasons. It must be highly unusual to embark on this type of project (especially the stormwater basin) so close to existing newly built houses in an adjacent subdivision. The effects for some properties would be exacerbated by the low (often pool-style) fences chosen by residents to take advantage of the outstanding rural outlook to the west. For these houses the loss of this outlook would also be a painful consequence of the development given the previous belief that this area was zoned Rural Residential rather than the medium density housing that is proposed. The initial effect from Peakedale Drive looking west would be to replace a beautiful rural outlook, featuring established trees and hedgerows, with a denuded wasteland of clay, topsoil piles and stormwater trenching. This is the prospect faced by residents for many years.

In summary, we oppose the Ashbourne project as there is no economic case for its development, it fails to meet the criteria of national or regional significance, it is out-of-proportion in size and character to what is a quiet rural town with only modest demand for new housing and modest job opportunities, it puts stress on existing physical and social infrastructure, it occupies a large amount of productive rural land with outstanding landscape value, and rides rough-shod over Council

planning processes which have designated housing development to occur in more suitable locations in Matamata.

If, despite these factors, the development was approved, we propose the following Conditions:

- **That a road connection to Firth Street be considered a priority and constructed before Civil Works commence**
- **That the developers provide reimbursement of expenses (material and labour) associated with the alteration or replacement of rear boundary fences of affected properties without restriction on design. This would include addition of a hedge if desired.**

Kind Regards

Paul and Angela Thomasen

Humz and Gabby Brooky

Cheri and Ian Hayes

Kelvin and Joanna Forsman

Ken and Chris Johnson

Loren Molloy

Brett and Raewyn Armstrong

Graeme and Jenny Purches

Chris and Katrina Pearce