

To: Listed Projects Team – Ministry for the Environment

From: s 9(2)(a) – Barker & Associates Limited

Date: 3 November 2025

Re: Landscape and Visual Effects Memorandum for the Houchens Road Block, Hamilton.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Description

The SL1 Houchens Development is a combined residential and industrial development that comprises circa 141 hectares, which will be split into a mix of residential densities and industrial development. The residential component comprises circa 55ha of net residential, including 1,300 residential units of varying typologies (including single detached, duplex, terraced apartment), a 400-unit retirement village, along with two supporting mixed-use neighbourhood centres, open spaces, waterbodies, and infrastructure devices including wetlands. The SL1 Houchens Development includes a net 25ha of industrial, generating between 24 – 47 industrial sized lots for industrial activities.

The residential development is underpinned by a series of design principles, which focus on creating a well-connected, legible, and diverse community on Hamilton City's urban fringe. The proposed transport network, with a 30-metre-wide spine road running north-to-south, is supported by existing and proposed local roads, cycle connections, and pedestrian pathways to create an accessible and legible development. As aforementioned, a range of housing typologies and densities are proposed to meet the growing and changing needs of the housing market to ensure there are options for future residents. Each typology has been thoughtfully located, based on opportunities and constraints, with density ranging from terraced, duplex, and detached dwellings to ensure integration with the adjoining urban footprint.



Figure 1: SL1 Houchens Site (B&A)

Located on the eastern and central portions of the Houchens Development are neighbourhood centres that will provide a range of amenities and services to support the residential and industrial developments. This neighbourhood centre will likely include commercial properties, childcares, cafés, and a local superette.

Sitting at the lower, southern point of the Site is a retirement village that comprises approximately 15 hectares and provides 400 units of varying typologies, including traditional villa and apartment typologies. This will be serviced by its own private transport network, infrastructure, and high amenity open spaces.

On the north-western edge is strategic industrial land that provides key connectivity to the potential Southern Links Houchens interchange, a Road of National Significance (RONs).

The wider SL1 Houchens Development integrates throughout several open spaces, waterbodies and wetlands that are well distributed to create a high amenity community that will be a pleasant and enjoyable place to live for future residents. These open spaces, waterbodies and wetlands support ecological restoration through the retention of several natural species and riparian revegetation and support broader cultural biodiversity outcomes within SL1 Houchens Development.

The SL1 Houchens Development includes a proposed Water Reservoir, to provide the ability for a long-term strategic water asset for Hamilton City Council to be designated.

The development will be appropriately serviced via a robust infrastructure strategy, which includes the addition of a water reservoir to accompany the one already existing, utilisation of existing services and stormwater artificial wetlands.

1.2 Project Summary

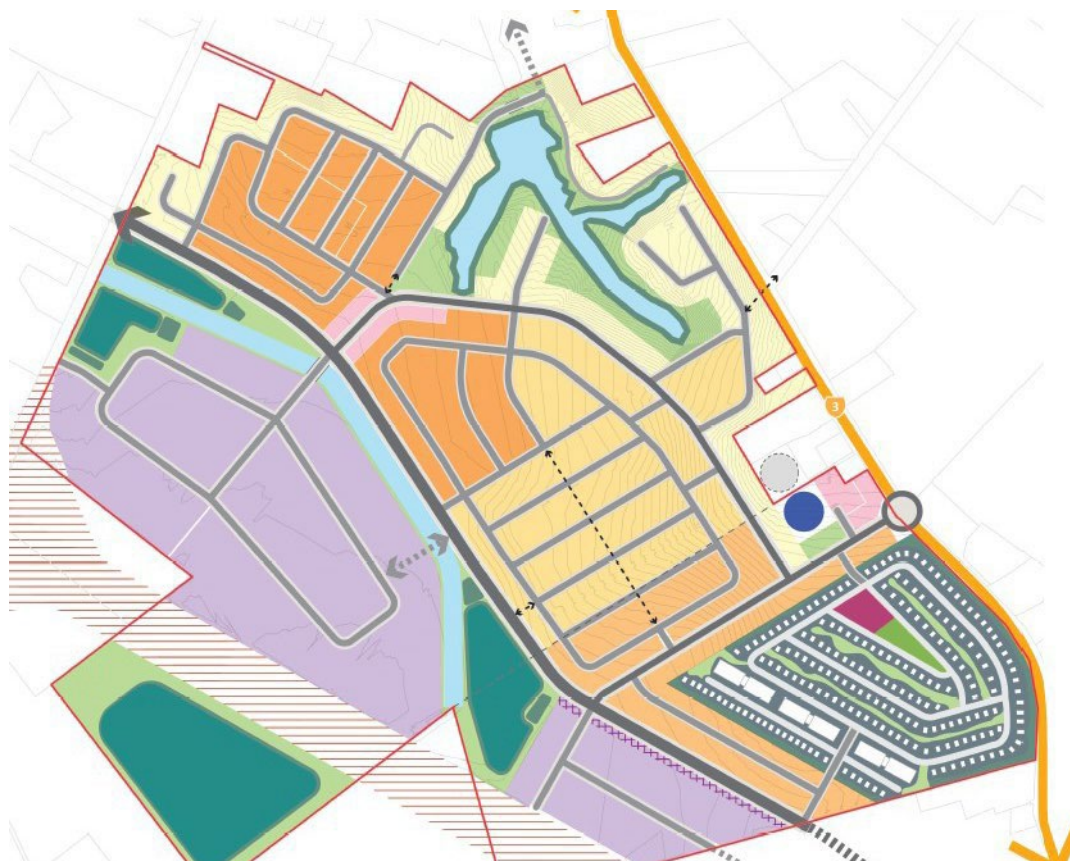


Figure 2: Houchens Development Masterplan (B&A)

The SL1 Houchens Development establishes a mixed residential, industrial, and community precinct over approximately 141 hectares, supported by integrated open space and transport networks. Key elements include:

1.2.1 Residential Neighbourhoods:

- ~55 ha net residential land
- ~1,300 dwellings across detached, duplex, terraced, and apartment typologies
- Arranged around a 30m spine road, collector routes, and local streets
- Connected by cycleways, pedestrian links, and communal green space

1.2.2 Retirement Village:

- 15 ha, ~400 units (villas and apartments)
- Includes aged-care facilities and a community centre
- High-amenity internal open spaces and supporting infrastructure

1.2.3 Neighbourhood Centres:

- Two mixed-use hubs in eastern and central areas
- Provide childcare, cafés, retail, and local services

1.2.4 Industrial Land:

- ~25 ha, 24–47 lots (5,000–9,000m²)
- Located on north-west edge with strategic access to Southern Links interchange
- Designed for efficient access, stormwater integration, and buffer planting

1.2.5 Landscape & Open Space Framework:

- Riparian buffers, wetlands, waterbodies, and reserves
- Greenways for recreation and ecological restoration
- Supports cultural and biodiversity outcomes

1.2.6 Infrastructure & Connectivity:

- New water reservoir alongside existing asset
- Artificial wetlands for stormwater treatment
- North–south 30m spine road with collector/local roads
- Staged connections to Southern Links and wider networks

The development balances housing supply, industrial land, and community services while enhancing landscape values through green infrastructure, ecological restoration, and integrated design.

2.0 Receiving Environment

The proposed development is guided by the landscape and visual amenity provisions of both the Waipa District Plan and the Hamilton City District Plan. Across both planning frameworks, the objectives and policies consistently emphasise the need to recognise and protect the character and values of landscapes, to avoid, remedy, or mitigate adverse effects on amenity, and to ensure that new subdivision and development is integrated with its surrounding context. This includes maintaining the openness and coherence of rural and peri-urban landscapes, providing sensitive transitions at the urban edge, protecting riparian corridors and ecological linkages, and embedding cultural and mana whenua values into landscape outcomes. Both councils also require that urban expansion is supported by high-quality urban design and green infrastructure, with public realm, open space, and planting networks that sustain visual amenity and enhance ecological resilience. Collectively, these provisions establish a clear direction that new development must balance growth and economic needs with the protection and enhancement of landscape character, cultural values, and the quality of the visual environment.

2.1 Broader Landscape Description

The Site at Houchens Road is located within the southern extent of the Hamilton basin, forming part of the transitional peri-urban landscape on the city's edge. The broader setting is defined by flat to gently undulating landforms typical of the basin floor, with open paddocks, rectilinear field patterns, and drainage channels reflecting long-standing agricultural use. Shelterbelts, hedgerows, and intermittent tree plantings introduce vertical structure into what is otherwise an expansive and modified rural environment.

To the north and west, the surrounding landscape maintains a predominantly productive rural character, with grazing, small-scale cropping, and scattered rural-residential dwellings. Built form remains sparse, generally limited to farmhouses and sheds, with exotic vegetation providing screening and enclosure. Ecological values are primarily confined to riparian corridors and modified waterways, with limited remnants of indigenous vegetation.

The Southern Links designation forms a significant infrastructural feature within the wider context, providing for future arterial road connections that will reshape movement and accessibility. Houchens Road itself, along with adjoining local routes, reinforces the Site's role as a rural edge environment influenced by planned urban expansion. To the north, Hamilton's suburban growth, including Peacocke, establishes a clear urban interface where residential development is advancing toward the rural fringe.

In perceptual terms, the broader landscape conveys a sense of openness, order, and productivity, with wide views framed by hedgerows, shelter planting, and the alignment of local roads. The landscape reads as part of a peri-urban transition zone, where rural land uses remain dominant but are increasingly overlaid with the infrastructure and growth pressures associated with Hamilton's expansion.

In associative terms, the whenua is located within the rohe of Waikato-Tainui and carries cultural significance through whakapapa and histories of occupation, food production, and guardianship of the land and waterways. While the current land use is highly modified and pastoral, these deeper cultural connections remain an integral part of the landscape's identity.

Overall, the broader Houchens Road landscape is best understood as a rural productive fringe environment in transition, where pastoral qualities, infrastructural planning, and the advancing influence of Hamilton's urban form converge to shape its evolving character.



Figure 3: Wider context (Waipa DC Online maps)

2.2 Site Description

The Site at Houchens Road comprises land identified for future urbanisation within Hamilton's southern growth area, situated adjacent to the Southern Links transport corridor. The whenua is currently in rural use and accessed from Houchens Road, with future arterial connections provided for through the Southern Links designation.

The landholding is predominantly flat to gently undulating, consistent with the wider Hamilton basin floor. Existing paddocks are laid out in rectilinear patterns defined by fence lines, shelterbelts, and hedgerows, reflecting long-standing pastoral use and producing a geometric rural structure.

The predominant land use is pastoral farming, with open pasture used for grazing. Scattered rural dwellings and accessory farm buildings are limited in scale and dispersed across the Site. Vegetation is mainly exotic, comprising shelter plantings, hedgerows, and occasional specimen trees. Indigenous vegetation is largely absent, with ecological values confined to modified drains and riparian margins.

The Site reads as part of Hamilton's peri-urban fringe. To the north, the Peacocke growth area and other planned suburban expansions establish a clear transition toward urban form. To the west and south, the Site adjoins productive farmland and rural-residential properties, while the Southern Links designation introduces a major infrastructural element that will define future access and movement patterns.

Perceptually, the Site retains an open and modified rural character, with expansive views framed by shelterbelts, road corridors, and scattered farm structures. The presence of infrastructure planning,

including the Southern Links designation, overlays this openness with a transitional quality, reinforcing its role as a future urban edge.

Culturally, the land is situated within the rohe of Waikato-Tainui and holds enduring significance through whakapapa, mana whenua associations, and kaitiakitanga responsibilities. Although the whenua is highly modified by rural use, it remains part of the wider cultural landscape connected to the Waikato basin and river catchment.



Figure 4: The Site (Google Maps)

2.3 Landscape Values

As per Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines, all landscapes express values through their physical, associative, and perceptual dimensions. The values of the Site at Houchens Road, and its broader setting, are summarised below.

2.3.1 Associative Dimension

The Site is part of the rohe of Waikato-Tainui, with whakapapa ties to the Waikato basin and surrounding whenua. These associations encompass identity, belonging, and responsibilities of kaitiakitanga, even where the land has been highly modified by pastoral farming and drainage. The Hamilton basin floor has enduring cultural narratives, including taonga tuku iho and mātauranga relating to productive land use, waterways, and occupation.

For the wider community, the Site and its setting represent a rural buffer on Hamilton's southern edge. Its pastoral function, openness, and productive qualities contribute to perceptions of rural identity and reinforce the transitional character between countryside and the expanding urban form.

2.3.2 Mana Whenua Values

Waikato-Tainui maintain cultural and spiritual relationships with the whenua. The land is linked to whakapapa, ahi kā (occupation), and kaitiakitanga responsibilities. Although the Site is now extensively modified, these values endure through recognition of the land as ancestral whenua connected to the wider Waikato catchment. Opportunities exist to restore mauri and ecological integrity through riparian enhancement, wetland development, and integration of green infrastructure into the proposed masterplan.

2.3.3 Biophysical (Physical) Dimension

The Site is characterised by flat to gently rolling landforms, productive pasture, and a rectilinear structure of paddocks and shelterbelts. Ohaupo Road constitutes an infrastructural presence on the eastern edge. Vegetation is predominantly exotic and modified, with limited ecological values aside from drainage networks and potential riparian restoration. Overall, the biophysical values are moderate, reflecting productive capacity and functional land use, but with diminished naturalness and ecological integrity.

2.3.4 Sensory (Perceptual) Dimension

Perceptually, the Site is experienced as an open and modified rural landscape. Expansive horizontal views are framed by hedgerows, shelterbelts, and occasional rural structures. The Southern Links designation introduces an infrastructural presence that overlays the openness with a sense of transition and anticipated change. The proximity of Hamilton's southern growth areas reinforces the Site's identity as a peri-urban landscape, where amenity values lie in openness, coherence, and legibility, balanced against the influence of planned urban expansion.

2.4 Visual Catchment Description

2.4.1 Extent of the Visual Catchment

The Site at Houchens Road is located on the southern Hamilton basin floor and retains a generally open rural character, although shelterbelts, hedgerows, and drainage plantings provide intermittent localised screening. The Southern Links designation forms a prominent infrastructural feature that will significantly influence visibility and movement across the area in future, complementing existing local road corridors.

The visual catchment extends across adjoining rural-residential properties, farmland, and nearby road corridors, with views available from Houchens Road and local connecting routes. The flat to gently undulating landform, combined with shelter vegetation, constrains wider visibility. However, elevated viewpoints from the Peacocke growth area and southern transport corridors afford more extensive outlooks across the Site.

The catchment can be described as follows:

- Northern extent – Views towards the Peacocke urban expansion, where suburban development is advancing toward the rural edge. Visibility is partly filtered by intervening vegetation but remains generally open.
- Western extent – Encompasses adjoining farmland and rural-residential lots, with views filtered by hedgerows, shelter planting, and occasional farm structures.
- Eastern extent – Defined by the Southern Links designation and adjoining road corridors. Future arterial routes will create new vantage points, with intermittent visibility across open paddocks and stormwater corridors.

- Southern extent – Views from adjoining rural properties and lifestyle blocks, with the openness of the paddocks reinforcing the sense of rural edge and transition.

2.4.2 Primary Viewing Audiences

The following viewing audiences have been identified:

- Immediate road users – Motorists on Houchens Road and surrounding local roads experience transitory views across the open paddocks, with shelterbelts providing partial screening in places. Future road users of the Southern Links corridor will have highly visible views into the Site, particularly where vegetation is sparse.
- Adjoining rural-residential properties – Residents on Houchens Road and nearby local roads have regular and close-range views of the Site. Open pasture and paddocks dominate these outlooks, softened in places by hedgerows and tree planting.
- Urban edge residents – Dwellings within the Peacocke growth area, particularly those at higher elevations, experience more expansive views across the Site's open rural landscape. These views emphasise the transitional peri-urban character between existing suburbs and the rural fringe.
- Wider public realm – More distant, elevated views are possible from southern Hamilton vantage points, though these are fragmented by vegetation and low-lying landform. Where visible, the Site contributes to perceptions of Hamilton's southern rural edge.



Figure 5: Key Viewpoints (B&A).

2.4.3 Factors Influencing Visibility

- Topography – The flat to gently undulating basin floor reduces prominence but enables broad, open views at close range.

- Vegetation – Shelterbelts, hedgerows, and riparian corridors break up sightlines, producing a mosaic of enclosed and open outlooks.
- Built form and infrastructure – Existing rural dwellings are limited and visually recessive. The planned Southern Links corridor represents the most dominant future feature, with capacity to redefine visibility, coherence, and movement through the landscape.

2.4.4 Key Viewpoints

Viewpoint 1 – 3065 Ohaupo Road, Peacocke, Hamilton.

From 3065 Ohaupo Road, the Houchens Site is visible at medium range, with both residents and passing motorists along the arterial corridor forming the primary viewing audience. Viewer sensitivity is assessed as moderate to high, reflecting the permanent occupation of the dwelling and the frequent, transitory exposure of road users travelling this busy route.

Views are generally oblique to the Site, framed by the alignment of Ohaupo Road and intervening vegetation, though occasional direct outlooks are available across open paddocks. The middle-ground is characterised by flat rural pasture, with intermittent shelterbelts and hedgerows creating partial visual filtering. Where vegetation is sparse, the openness of the paddocks and the transitional rural fringe character are clearly legible.

The potential visual change would involve the replacement of open rural landscape with urban-scaled residential, industrial, and community development, altering the scale, texture, and coherence of the outlook. The magnitude of change is assessed as moderate, increasing to moderate-high where direct views are available, due to the extent of visible modification across the open landform and the proximity of the Site to the viewing location.



Figure 6: VP1 (Google Streetview).

Viewpoint 2 – 3181 Ohaupo Road, Peacocke, Hamilton.

From 3181 Ohaupo Road, the Houchens Site is visible at close to medium range, with both residents and motorists along Ohaupo Road forming the primary viewing audience. Viewer sensitivity is moderate to high, reflecting the permanent occupation of the dwelling combined with the regular, transitory exposure of road users.

Views toward the Site are generally open and direct across flat pasture, with limited screening provided by hedgerows or intervening structures. The outlook is characterised by a broad rural foreground of paddocks, drains, and shelter plantings, reinforcing the Site’s current rural–productive identity.

The potential visual change would involve the introduction of residential neighbourhoods, industrial land, and supporting infrastructure into what is presently an open, pastoral outlook. This would alter both the scale and texture of the view, replacing pasture with built form, roading networks, and associated planting. The magnitude of change is assessed as moderate–high, reflecting the relative proximity of the viewpoint, the breadth of visibility, and the scale of transformation anticipated.



Figure 7: VP2 (Google Streetview).

Viewpoint 3 – 194 Houchens Road, Glenview, Hamilton.

From 194 Houchens Road, the Houchens Site is visible at very close range, with residents forming the primary viewing audience alongside motorists travelling past the property. Viewer sensitivity is high, reflecting the ongoing, direct exposure of residents to the Site as part of their everyday outlook, supplemented by repeated but transient views for road users.



Figure 8: VP3 (Google Streetview).

Views are largely direct and open across the adjoining paddocks, with minimal screening from shelterbelts or built form. The foreground and middle-ground are dominated by pastoral pasture and rectilinear paddocks, reinforcing the modified but open rural character. Intervening vegetation provides limited filtering, allowing clear sightlines into the Site from both the dwelling and the adjoining road corridor.

The potential visual change would involve the replacement of open farmland with urban-scaled residential, industrial, and community development, altering the coherence, scale, and rural qualities of the outlook. The magnitude of change is assessed as high, reflecting the immediacy of the viewpoint, the extent of direct visibility across open paddocks, and the sensitivity of residential receptors.

3.0 Key Effects & Approaches to Address Key Effects

3.1 Changes to Local Character

The proposed urban development at Houchens Road will transform the Site from an open, rural-productive landscape into a mixed-use urban environment incorporating residential neighbourhoods, industrial land, neighbourhood centres and community facilities. The current landscape pattern of pasture, paddocks, and shelterbelts will give way to compact blocks, roading networks, and built form, introducing an urbanised sense of place where rural openness previously dominated.

This represents a fundamental change in local character. For some, it will reflect the logical extension of Hamilton's southern growth area, consistent with long-term planning strategies. For others, it will signify the loss of familiar rural qualities, including tranquillity, openness, and the amenity values associated with productive farmland.

Key contributors to change include:

- Built form – Two-storey housing, retirement village buildings, and industrial structures will alter the current low-rise, dispersed pattern.
- Movement and activity – Urban rhythms of traffic, pedestrians, and community use will replace the slower pace of rural life.
- Lighting and servicing – Street lighting, stormwater devices, and utilities will overlay the area with urban sensory qualities.

The degree to which this transition integrates with its context depends on design quality. Sensitive use of scale, variation in form, and incorporation of local landscape patterns can soften contrasts, whereas uniformity or excessive scale risks an abrupt shift in character.

3.2 Impacts on Visual Amenity

For residents along Houchens Road and adjoining rural-residential properties, the development will replace open views of pasture and shelterbelts with built form, streets, and planting. This will constitute a permanent change, with moderate to high effects for those in proximity.

From Peacocke and Hamilton's southern suburbs, the Site will be perceived as a continuation of urban expansion, reducing the sense of rural separation presently provided by the open paddocks. For future road users of the Southern Links corridor, views will shift from open farmland to an urbanised frontage with planted buffers and stormwater features framing the edge of the new neighbourhood.

Amenity effects can be moderated through robust edge treatments, integration of green corridors, and layered planting that soften transitions and embed a coherent landscape structure.

3.3 Approaches to Address Key Effects

3.3.1 Strengthen Green Infrastructure Framework

- Retain and enhance drainage lines, wetlands, and riparian margins as ecological spines.
- Use indigenous planting to restore mauri, provide habitat, and soften the urban edge.
- Create interconnected greenways and open space networks to maintain openness and amenity.

3.3.2 Sensitive Perimeter Design

- Provide larger lots and reduced building heights along Houchens Road and rural boundaries to create a sympathetic transition.
- Introduce structured planting and open space buffers to reduce visual dominance at the urban edge.

3.3.3 Integration with the Broader Landscape

- Reference existing rural shelterbelts and hedgerows through planting design, providing visual continuity while transitioning to urban character.
- Align roads and open spaces with natural drainage and topographic features.

3.3.4 Cultural Landscape Integration

- Embed mana whenua narratives into reserves, street naming, and public realm design to reflect whakapapa and strengthen identity.
- Provide opportunities for mana whenua involvement in ecological restoration and kaitiakitanga practices.

3.3.5 Manage Sensory Changes

- Position higher-activity areas, such as parks and centres, away from sensitive rural edges.
- Use planting, berms, and design controls to mitigate light spill, noise, and visual exposure.

3.3.6 Enhance Public Realm Quality

- Establish generous street trees, berms, and pedestrian-friendly environments.

4.0 Conclusion and Overall Effects

The proposed development at Houchens Road will result in a clear transformation from an open, productive rural landscape to a structured urban neighbourhood. This change is consistent with Hamilton's strategic growth direction for the southern corridor and aligns with the Future Proof Strategy and Metropolitan Spatial Plan.

From a landscape perspective, the key effects relate to:

- Local character – A shift from rural–productive openness to mixed-use urban form. This is a permanent change, anticipated in planning terms, with its success dependent on design quality and integration of green and cultural frameworks.
- Visual amenity – Adjoining residents along Houchens Road will experience the most direct change, with rural views replaced by built form. For urban edge residents in Peacocke, the development will consolidate the southern suburban boundary. For road users, the landscape will transition from open farmland to a managed, planted urban frontage.
- Associative and mana whenua values – The whenua remains culturally significant within the rohe of Waikato-Tainui. Opportunities exist to give effect to kaitiakitanga through ecological restoration, riparian enhancement, and cultural expression in the design.
- Biophysical and sensory qualities – While productive rural land will be lost, ecological gains can be realised through the integration of wetlands, riparian corridors, and indigenous planting. Sensory values will shift toward an urban condition, with increased activity, lighting, and movement offset by improved public realm and amenity outcomes.

Overall effects are assessed as moderate to high in magnitude at the local scale, particularly for adjoining residents and existing rural character. At the district scale, effects reduce to moderate, as the change represents a logical extension of urban form consistent with Hamilton’s strategic growth planning. With sensitive design, robust green infrastructure, and cultural integration, the development has the potential to deliver a well-integrated new neighbourhood that respects its transitional context and enhances long-term landscape outcomes.

5.0 Qualifications and Experience

- s 9(2)(a) is a registered landscape architect with more than 15 years of practice experience including as a team leader.
- He has worked for various firms including Beca, Jasmax, Auckland Council, Thomas Consultants Ltd and Barker & Associates. He has varied experience across a wide range of projects at various scales from large scale infrastructure to subdivisions and parks carrying out both landscape design and landscape and visual assessment roles.

5.1 Qualifications

- BCom, University of Auckland.
- BLA (hons), Unitec.
- NZILA Registered Landscape Architect.

5.2 Relevant Projects

- Drury East Residential Masterplan, Auckland, encompassing approximately 102 Ha and accommodating up to 1500 dwellings, a new school, small neighbourhood centre and parks (Fulton Hogan Land Development Ltd).
- Wellsford North Masterplan, Auckland, encompassing approximately 48 Ha and accommodating up to 1,000 dwellings, small neighbourhood centre and parks (Wellsford Welding Club Ltd).
- Rotokauri Masterplan, Hamilton, encompassing approximately 130 Ha and accommodating up to 3,100 dwellings and several neighbourhood parks and esplanade reserves (multiple clients).
- Frankton Ladies Mile Masterplan, Queenstown, encompassing 17 Ha and accommodating up to 750 dwellings in terraced housing and apartment typologies (Maryhill Ltd).

s 9(2)(a)



NZILA Registered Landscape Architect / Associate, Barker & Associates Limited

