

16 October 2024

Attn: Wayne Bishop and Cameron Smith

Cc: Rebecca Shaw, B&A Urban and Environmental

RE: Gordonton Retirement Village Fast Track Application – Ecology Assessment

Introduction

Gordonton Country Estate Limited is seeking consent to develop a retirement village at 57 Piako Road, Gordonton (the Site) via the fast-track application process. The Site is located north-east of Hamilton and is bound by Piako Road to the south and the Komakorau Stream to the west (Figure 1).

The purpose of this project is to establish a retirement village/estate which reflects the rural values and attributes of the surrounding area and to provide much needed aged care living for the Waikato District. The proposed project will create a village/estate style layout with 'clusters' of housing and a communal facility offering typical village amenities, cafe, apartment style accommodation and further health care provision. Each cluster is proposed to be approximately 6 ha with a density of approximately 15–20 units per ha (approximately 120 housings/units per cluster).

This proposal for a referred project will give effect to the purpose of the Fast track Approvals Bill (the Bill) as an omnibus Bill introduced in accordance with Standing Order 267(1)(a).

The purpose of the Fast-track Approvals Bill is to provide a streamlined decision-making process to facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits.

This assessment provides a high-level review of the ecological values within the Site and surrounding area, following desktop and site survey work and includes a:

- Site description;
- High level ecological assessment of the Site; and,
- Overview of ecological considerations.

Site Description

The proposed Site is approximately 67 ha comprising one title (676234) legally described as Lot 3-4 Deposited Plan 328606 and Lot 2 Deposited Plan 481700. The Site is flat to undulating and currently has buildings associated with farm operations and residential dwellings.

The Site is zoned as 'Rural' under the Waikato Operative District Plan (ODP) and 'General Rural Zone' under the Waikato Proposed District Plan – Appeals Version (PDP-AV). The Site adjoins Gordonton Primary School to the north, also identified as Designation C31 under the ODP and Designation MEDU-29 under the PDP-AV.

Overall, the ecological values and sensitivities of the Site are low and typical of rural areas in the Waikato area. The streams, artificial drains and wetland areas within the Site are highly

modified and support very limited ecological values. Shelterbelts within the Site are mainly exotic tree species, but there are two small kahikatea stands just north of the existing dwellings on the Site.

Background Analysis

The ecological values of the Site have been identified and quantified using existing ecological databases (New Zealand Freshwater Fish database, Department of Conservation Bioweb and eBird), relevant historical reports and a Site survey in June 2024. The Site has been surveyed for natural inland wetlands which have been delineated following Ministry for the Environment guidance¹ and mapped. Both freshwater and terrestrial ecological values have been described throughout the Site and watercourses were classified in accordance with the Waikato Regional Council (WRC) classification system.

The ecological features of the Site have also been reviewed against the framework of the National Environmental Standards for Freshwater Regulations (NES-F), the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) and the draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB).

Ecological Assessment

The existing land use within the Site is agricultural, with an extensive artificial drainage network to enable these farming activities. The low representation of indigenous vegetation and the modified and degraded nature of watercourses and wetlands reflect this history.

Terrestrial Ecological Values

Vegetation

Vegetation across most of the Site comprised exotic pasture grasses and herbs and shelterbelts (Figure 1). Native vegetation within the Site comprised two small stands of kahikatea which included one rimu tree and occasional lemonwood, tī kōuka and pōhuehue (Figure 2). The small area of native vegetation within the Site is not marked as a Significant Natural Area (SNA) on current operative plan maps but would likely qualify based on the vegetation present.

Vegetation and habitat for native fauna (i.e., birds, lizards and bats) is limited to fenced weedy areas adjacent to drains, exotic shelterbelts comprising mainly pine and macrocarpa, isolated individual (exclusively exotic) trees and the previously mentioned native vegetation.

Fauna

Bird species observed during the Site survey included Australian magpie, song thrush, house sparrow, European goldfinch and common myna. Birds recorded in the eBird database at the Site include exotic and common native species of rural and semi-rural areas. Native species records include fantail, grey warbler, silvereye, pūkeko and swamp harrier. No threatened or at-risk species have been recorded within the Site.

The eBird database holds records of four threatened and at-risk bird species within 5 km of the Site including the New Zealand falcon, North Island kākā, South Island pied oystercatcher and little shag. There is little if any suitable habitat within the Site for these species.

Copper skinks have been recorded historically at the Site (DOC bioweb database) but, if still present, are likely to be restricted to isolated areas of suitable habitat such as weedy vegetation/rank grass. The high level of modification in the Site and its surrounds and the

¹ Ministry for the Environment. 2020. Wetland delineation protocols. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.

small amount of suitable vegetation in the Site makes it highly unlikely that native lizards would be present in high numbers.

The Site is near known bat populations (e.g., Pukemokemoke). Potential roosting habitat for long-tailed bats (Threatened – Nationally Critical) was identified within the Site and comprised shelterbelts and the several large kahikatea trees (see Figure 2 **Error! Reference source not found.**). Komakorau Stream, located immediately to the west of the Site, provides foraging opportunities for bats. It is possible the shelterbelts within the Site may be utilised as foraging pathways by bats.

Freshwater Ecological Values

Wetlands

Seven small natural inland wetland areas (fragments) totalling approximately 2,300 m² were identified on the Site. These areas are shown in green in . All natural wetland areas have been heavily affected by historic drainage and livestock access, are highly modified and degraded and comprise mostly exotic species. Wetland vegetation was dominated by introduced pasture, rushes and herbs.

Watercourses

Watercourses within the Site include seven artificial drains with a combined length of approximately 2.6 km and five highly modified watercourses with a total length of approximately 1.2 km (Figure 3).

A fish trapping and eDNA survey was carried out at drains and watercourses within the Site on 11 and 12 June 2024 targeting black mudfish which are of conservation interest. No black mudfish were recorded within any watercourses at the Site.

Komakorau Stream is outside the Site, but within the catchment, and is the receiving environment for most watercourses within the Site. Komakorau Stream provides habitat for native fish species including giant kōkopu and longfin eel which are of conservation interest.

Ecological Considerations

There are limited ecological values within the Site due to historic modification and current farming landuse. The potential adverse effects on native fauna (birds, lizards, bats) during habitat removal can be managed through the preparation and implementation of fauna management plans.

Despite the highly modified nature of the watercourses and wetlands within the Site and limited ecological values, the proposed development has the potential to cause adverse ecological effects if appropriate management is not implemented. The concept plan, shown in Figure 3, has been designed to avoid or minimise potential adverse effects where possible.

It is Ecological Solutions understanding that under the current NPS-FM and associated NES-F that effects on the qualifying wetland areas at the time of development will need to be avoided. The development would result in the need to reclaim the farm drains and sections of highly modified streams with low ecological value. The effects of the unavoidable loss of sections highly modified stream will need to be managed by applying the usual effects management hierarchy, which would likely include offsetting via stream restoration.

The project has the potential to deliver positive water quality and ecological outcomes through the removal of farm animals from the Site, removing exotic vegetation and restoring riparian margins around the remaining wetlands and streams.

Conclusion

The ecological values of the Site are assessed as low to very low. The proposed lots, road alignments and stormwater management system has been designed to minimise ecological effects through retaining shelter belts and the remnant kahikatea and rimu and by retaining and restoring highly modified streams and areas of wetland where possible. With the proposed design and application of suitable mitigations, adverse effects should be able to be minimised and the potential positive ecological effects maximised.

A more detailed ecological assessment will be included in the resource consent application, should the application be accepted as a referred project under the Act.



Figure 1: Ecological features within the Site.

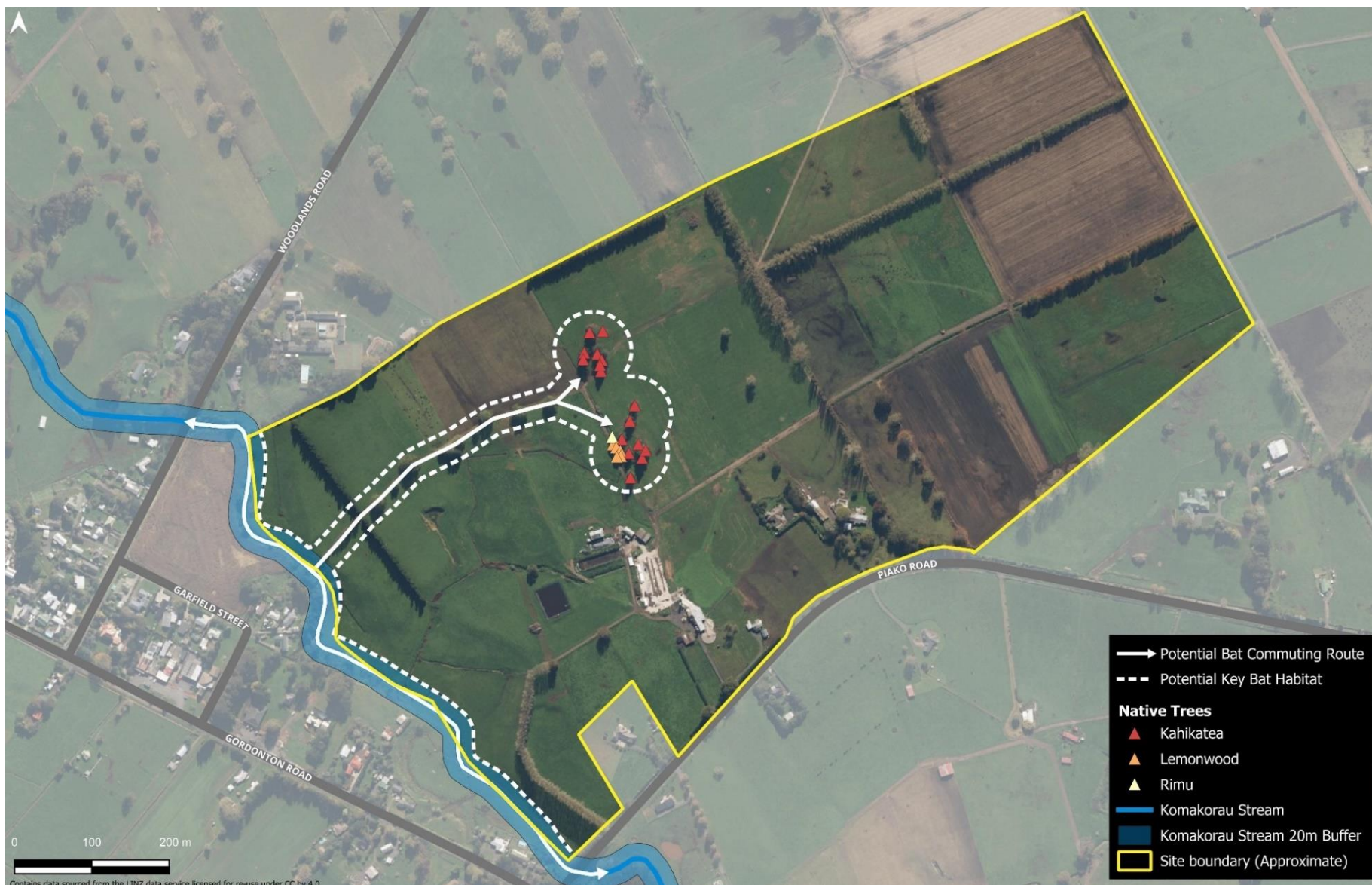


Figure 2: Native trees and potential bat habitat within the Site.



Figure 3: Concept plan (Barkers and Associates August 2024).