

# Sunfield Fast-track

Auckland Council Specialist Memo

**Annexure 19:**

**Landscape**

**Sally Peake**

**4 August 2025**

# Landscape Memo

**Prepared by:** Sally Peake, Consultant Landscape Specialist, Auckland Council

**Dated:** 4 August 2025

1. This memorandum addresses the landscape aspects of the Sunfield proposal.

## **Qualifications and Experience**

2. My full name is Sally Barbara Peake and I have qualifications in Landscape Architecture (Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Leeds, UK) and Urban Design (Diploma in Urban Design from Oxford, UK) and a Master of Architecture Degree from Unitec, NZ. I have been in private practice since 2002 and prior to that was employed as a landscape architect by Auckland Council and City Design Ltd.
3. I am a Fellow and Registered Landscape Architect of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and a former President of the Institute. I am also a member of the Urban Design Forum. I have undertaken the MfE Commissioner Training, Making Better Decisions (lapsed).
4. I have prepared expert evidence and technical assessments for resource consent applications, plan changes and notices of requirement for designation and have appeared as an expert witness before consent authorities and the Environment Court on multiple occasions.

## **Code of Conduct**

5. I confirm that I have read the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 – Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses (**Code**), and have complied with it in the preparation of this memorandum. I also agree to follow the Code when participating in any subsequent processes, such as expert conferencing, directed by the Panel. I confirm that the opinions I have expressed are within my area of expertise and are my own, except where I have stated that I am relying on the work or evidence of others, which I have specified.

## **Scope**

6. The following matters have been considered in this peer review of the landscape and visual effects from the proposed Sunfield development, reflecting accepted current NZILA practice<sup>1</sup> and Council's information requirements for the assessment:
  - Methodology statement and terms of reference including identification of any assumptions made.
  - Description of the landscape character and attributes of the locality and site.
  - Identification of statutory matters relevant to the assessment including shared landscape value.
  - Complete description of the proposed development.

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<sup>1</sup> Te Tangi A Te Manu Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines, July 2022

- Identification of the viewing catchment and viewing audience.
- Assessment of landscape change and consequential effects.
- Assessment of visual effects, possibly including analysis of representative viewpoints.
- Assessment of landscape and natural character effects.
- Assessment of the proposal against relevant statutory criteria.
- Any mitigation measures and/or recommendations.

7. The review also evaluates the specificity of the proposal with particular regard to:

- a) Whether sufficient information is provided to enable a clear understanding of the landscape and visual effects in relation to the project and environment.
- b) Any issues or considerations that may have been overlooked.
- c) Whether the effects have been accurately scoped and evaluated (for example using a robust and consistent rating scale).
- d) Whether recommended mitigation measures are appropriate and likely to be effective and enforceable.
- e) Whether the conclusions are credible and justified.
- f) Whether the proposed conditions are appropriate and enforceable.

#### **Matters for review**

8. The proposal is for a non-complying activity under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024.
9. The site is within the Rural - Mixed Rural Zone and Future Urban Zone where rural activity is envisaged. Land within the Future Urban Zone is identified as suitable for urbanisation but may not be used for urban activities until the site is re- zoned for urban purposes. Development within the area is therefore expected to maintain and complement rural character and amenity.
10. Given the proposal is for an urban master-planned development, this review is focused on the quality and amenity of the landscape provisions, rather than consistency with the objectives and policies of the AUP.
11. It is noted that there are no landscape overlays that apply to the site.

#### **Assessment**

12. The following information has been reviewed for this assessment:

- Planning Report prepared by Tattico dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2-025
- Concept masterplan prepared by Studio Pacific Architecture dated February 2025
- Urban Design Assessment prepared by Studio Pacific Architecture dated 11 February 2025

- Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment prepared by Reset dated 24/04/2025
- Open Space Strategy Landscape Design Report prepared by Studio Pacific Architecture dated February 2025
- Wai Mauri Stream Park Landscape Design Report prepared by Studio Pacific Architecture dated February 2025
- Design Controls & Design Guidelines prepared by Studio Pacific Architecture dated February 2025

#### Location and key features

13. The site location is described in the Urban Design Assessment (UDA) including the interface with adjacent areas. While landscape buffers are provided and intended to mitigate any adverse impacts, it is clear that the scale and urban nature of the proposed development will impact on the adjacent rural character (but not necessarily adverse effects on land use/neighbours).
14. The low-lying flood-prone land is identified as a key challenge to development, although the impacts of this is outside the scope of this assessment. There are several stands of Kahikatea trees within the site and Totara trees are located in shelterbelts and riparian areas, but ecological values are rated low in the application and have not been mapped (although they are identified as providing important linkages or stepping stone habitat within the local or wider landscape context).
15. The streams and trees together with an area of elevated land in the southwest corner of the site, are identified as the key landscape features. It is noted that the Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) states that a locally important stand of Kahikatea trees in the north of the site is proposed to be protected, while the Planning report says “The stand of Kahikatea trees is located within the Employment Precinct, and will not be protected or retained as part of this proposal.” It is recommended that existing native trees to be removed and retained be mapped (refer also to comments on conditions).

#### Primary masterplan elements

16. Primary elements in the planning of the site layout are the stream network and Sunfield Loop, with the car-less strategy being a defining characteristic. Homes with cars are located on the village loop roads. Parking for residents would occur in the Local Hubs. The site is divided into a number of precincts that are described in the UDA. With regard to staging, the UDA states: “Staging needs to be carefully considered to ensure that, as the development is implemented, each residential neighbourhood and precinct has the appropriate level of support services and transport infrastructure to sustain it”. Reference is also made to a back-up plan for the critical elements that support the car-less mode, although no details are provided.
17. In this regard, it is noted that the early stages of the proposed development would appear not to have support services in place e.g. the Sunfield Loop and transport to compensate for lack of cars.

#### Landscape assessment

18. The landscape assessment describes the existing landscape character and values of the site and area, and its cultural values, as well as the “highly modified rural landscape” and “poor streetscape interface” of adjacent housing areas. It describes the adjacent Ardmore Airport as having a more ‘urban’ character, due to its buildings and activity, although I do not entirely agree.
19. The assessment of landscape effects assumes that earthworks will work with the existing contours and topography to minimise cut/fill requirements, although the infrastructure report shows that there will be a total of 244ha ground disturbance and maximum 1m cut and 6m fill.
20. The assessment also states that some of the mature trees within the green connections and reserves will be retained, although no detail is provided.
21. The assessment accepts that the conversion of the FUZ land from a rural land use to an urban form of development will lead to a significant change in landscape character, but “when considered in the wider landscape context, the development is in keeping with the scale and intensity of development in the rapidly expanding neighbourhoods directly adjacent the site to the west and south. “As noted in Section 3.2 above, I do not consider that this, nor the additional assessment with regard to the adjacent Rural zoned land, is correct in its assessment.
22. In summary, the assessment notes that the development would result in significant change but that the innovative nature of the proposal and response to the site, including the highlighting and enhancement of the natural features, will create a new identity, and that the proposed planting buffers along the site’s rural edges will help to physically and visually contain and soften the overall extent of the Proposal.
23. I agree with this summary and agree that some of the masterplan features would result in positive effects on landscape values, but overall effects on rural landscape values will be high.
24. I do not consider that these effects can be aggregated to result in low-moderate (adverse) effects as stated in paragraph 6.29 of the assessment.

#### Visual assessment

25. The assessment describes the viewing catchment and viewing audiences and analyses views of the site and development from a good number of representative viewpoints.
26. While I generally agree with the descriptive analysis of the more distant viewpoints, the assessment makes various inferences, including that “proposed urban form would be contiguous with the existing surrounding environment “ and “would form a logical extension of the existing urban fabric surrounding the site [sic]” even when the development would result in a change from a rural land use to urban land use.
27. In addition, some of the ratings rely on proposed planting to mitigate effects, while recognising that there would be “a moderate degree of change from the current environment”. Best practice would rate both initial and residual effects.
28. The analysis and effects ratings from closer viewpoints acknowledge the fundamental change of outlook and landscape, and loss of views, but still relies on planting to mitigate

adverse effects and rates effects as low-moderate or low. Only Viewpoint 14 where proposed development would be seen either side of the road, and Viewpoints 17 & 18 that have an overtly rural and natural landscape view are rated with moderate adverse visual effects.

29. Accordingly, as for my comments in Section 3.2 and my landscape assessment, I disagree with the ratings.

#### Landscape design

30. Concept designs are provided for the open spaces and guidelines are provided for the design of precincts. Proposed design concepts for streets and lanes appear to be limited, especially with regard to landscape treatment. Confirmation will be required as to which roads will be adopted by Auckland Transport as they will not accept planting other than street trees in road reserves. The planting palette provided for public areas is acceptable.
31. Design controls and guidelines for the precincts are provided, including landscaped areas. Some of these are problematic e.g for Residential Precincts a tree with a minimum size of 80L is required in the front yard but some yards are as narrow as 1.2m where a tree may be unsuitable. The native planting buffer width adjacent to secondary roads is not defined and it is unclear how this relates to the 5% minimum planted area requirement in the Employment Precinct.
32. The standards refer to the approved Sunfield Planting Schedules Document, which I have not seen.

#### Conditions

33. A landscape condition is provided by the applicant (Condition 31) that requires detailed design drawings “at least 20 working days prior to the commencement of any landscaping works...” It is considered that detailed design drawings should be provided at the time of lodgement for each stage of development.

**Sally Peake**

Principal / Specialist Urban Design, FNZILA Registered Landscape Architect