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Executive summary

Context for this report

This landscape report is an outcome of the Ministry's work on promoting excellence in Resource Management Act practice. This work stream seeks to support improvements in practice through the provision of information about current practice and discussion both through written reports such as this (both in hard copy and on the Ministry's website), and through seminars and workshops.

The landscape report can be read alongside the report, *Managing Rural Amenity Conflicts*, which was the focus of workshops throughout the country in May- June 2000, and which is to be published later this year. The latter report takes a broad approach to rural amenity issues in contrast to this report with its specific focus on landscape, which can be seen as one component of rural amenity. This report is written to assist planning staff in councils and others who are working on the development of district plans to deal with the landscape implications of rural subdivisions and associated developments. It may also be of assistance to those involved with resource consent applications where there are landscape issues.

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) sets out the framework of environmental management in New Zealand. Section 5 states the purpose of the Act. Section 6 includes a number of matters of national importance which are to be recognised and provided for, including "the protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development". Landscape is also covered in section 7 (c) and (f) through amenity values and quality of the environment. However, it is left up to councils and their communities to decide what value they place on rural landscapes and features in their areas that are not 'outstanding'. These may be considered to be regionally significant or important locally, or may be degraded but capable of enhancement with appropriate development.

This report focuses on some of the technical issues associated with landscape assessment and examines a variety of approaches to dealing with landscape issues in district plans. It does not cover the important role the community has to play in assisting the council to work through issues and the kinds of landscape outcomes that are desired for a district.

Dealing with the effects of rural subdivision is a significant issue for many councils, given the pressure for rural development in many parts of New Zealand and the community concerns about various aspects of this. Understanding the process of landscape change, and the community's reactions to it, is crucial when deciding the most appropriate management approach. Preservation of the status quo in rural environments is often not an option. But the process of subdivision and/or development can be used creatively to encourage change in a way that provides environmental benefits while enabling positive economic outcomes. To achieve this, the focus should be on *managing the effects of change*.

The report provides advice and examples of understanding and assessing landscapes. It briefly outlines general principles for councils to consider when developing district plans or considering resource consent applications. These include:

- the expression of the natural pattern of landform
- protection of the natural drainage patterns
- retention of remnant indigenous vegetation and other areas of ecological significance
- reinforcement of the natural pattern of the landscape through appropriate planting
- avoidance of dominant or discordant types of human modification
- the use of a 'rural vernacular'.

As this list indicates, landscape values interact with other values (for example, significant natural areas) that councils will want to consider when developing their plans.

The effects on landscape from development associated with rural subdivision are discussed, as are the implications for resource management if the effects are negative. The report then provides a toolbox of techniques used in district plans throughout the country, and looks at the advantages and disadvantages of each in turn. These techniques include making provision for:

- the activity status of subdivision
- minimum allotment areas for subdivision and associated minimum site areas for dwellings
- minimum average allotment areas for subdivision
- allotment dimensions, shape requirements, minimum frontages, and minimum distances between entrances
- controls over buildings rather than allotments
- ridgeline and view-shaft protection
- rationing methods
- identification of special areas
- structure plans

- clustering techniques
- residential farm or forest park development requirements
- natural feature protection requirements
- transferable development rights

as well as a range of non-statutory techniques.

There is no one 'right' way of valuing landscapes, or of dealing with landscape issues in district plans. However, it is hoped that an understanding of some of the things that can undermine or support landscape values, and the planning techniques that are available in developing district plans, will help to achieve positive landscape outcomes into the future.



1. INTRODUCTION

What this report covers

This report is intended to assist planning staff in councils and others who are dealing with the landscape implications of rural subdivisions and associated development. In particular, it seeks to support those who are working with landscape values, and with issues affecting these that arise in district plans.

The first section briefly introduces the subject by providing information on the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), what it says about landscape, and the options councils and communities have when considering landscape issues and their district plans. It also comments on the rural economy and managing change in the rural sector.

Section 2 sets out a landscape assessment process, comments on differences in context and scale, and outlines examples of two assessments. Section 3 briefly sets out some landscape guidelines which those developing district plans might consider, and then provides examples of how development can contribute to or undermine landscape values. When the latter occurs, the concerns may give rise to issues in district plans. Section 4 provides a toolbox of planning techniques that can be used to deal with landscape (and sometimes other) issues.

A number of technical terms are used throughout the report. The glossary sets out the definitions adopted. It is recommended that readers familiarise themselves with these at the outset.

The RMA, the community and landscape

The RMA's purpose, stated in section 5(1), is 'to promote the sustainable management of natural and physical resources'. Section 5 (2) states that sustainable management:

means managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural well being and for their health and safety while -

- (a) Sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and*
- (b) Safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and*
- (c) Avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.*

Section 6 of the RMA sets out matters of 'national importance' that are to be recognised and provided for in achieving the purpose of the Act. Landscape values are included in the matters of national importance, both directly and indirectly:

- (a) The preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (including the coastal marine area), wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development:*
- (b) The protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.*

In addition, Section 7 includes a number of matters relating to landscape concerns, and requires “particular regard” to be had to:

- (c) The maintenance and enhancement of amenity values:
- (f) Maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment:

Thus the RMA explicitly includes landscape matters. The Act’s requirement that outstanding natural features and landscapes be protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development is a matter for councils and their communities to grapple with when they are developing their district plans. However, it should be noted that while such protection is required by section 6 for landscapes, it is up to councils to decide how this is best achieved.

Dealing with the effects of rural subdivision and/or development is a significant issue for many councils when preparing district plans and processing resource consents. It is worth remembering that in addition to avoiding adverse effects, rural subdivision can also provide opportunities for improving the landscape and other values of our typical rural working landscapes. It can be a means of diversifying rural land uses and enabling productive land development. If well designed, subdivisions can enhance some landscapes. However, the demand for rural subdivision in many parts of the country has raised community concerns that the adverse effects of development on some rural landscapes may be significant.

Many councils have made provision for the protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes under section 6(b) of the Act. However, this covers only a relatively small proportion of New Zealand’s rural landscapes. The majority are considered as a resource that falls under the mandate of section 5 (sustainable management), section 7(c) (amenity values) and section 7(f) (quality of the environment).

The relationship that people and communities have with rural landscapes is a very personal one and may be based on many things, including historical associations and specific experiences (good and bad). Therefore the value we place on rural landscape is highly subjective and will undoubtedly change over time. For example, the community living and working in a rural area is likely to view and value their landscape quite differently from local visitors or overseas tourists. Landscape change for the local community is something they are dealing with on a day-to-day basis. The visitor/tourist only sees the landscape at one point in time and is likely to be unaware of its constantly changing nature. These differences in community perceptions and attitudes may result in conflicting responses to change: whether it is appropriate or inappropriate, too fast or too slow, and what weighting should be placed on individual and collective aspirations.

Clearly, councils and communities need to decide what features and landscapes in their area are ‘outstanding’ in terms of section 6. For a district plan this should be assessed on a district-wide basis (although our perception of landscape will inevitably be coloured by a wider perception). Councils and communities also need to decide what value they place on rural landscapes and features in their area that are not considered to be ‘outstanding’. Some such landscapes may still be judged to be significant either to the whole of the city (and some cities have substantial rural

areas) or district, or to a particular locality. Some councils and communities may consider that, while they value their rural landscapes, these landscapes are not under pressure so formal planning protection is unnecessary. Others, having considered the range of landscapes and community views, may decide that they do not wish to formally protect the landscapes in their district.

Those communities and councils who are concerned at the rate and extent of change to the features and landscapes in their districts face the challenge of working through what landscape values they will seek to protect, and how. Some landscapes may have high existing amenity values and visual quality which may be particularly sensitive to the effects of rural subdivision and development. Remnants of native forest or wetlands may be important, not only for their landscape value but also for their significant natural values and the indigenous flora and fauna they contain. Other landscapes may be degraded, and appropriate development - such as vegetation cover on eroded hill country slopes - may not only assist with landscape enhancement but also with protection from further soil erosion.

Understanding the options for protecting and enhancing the rural landscape is a prerequisite for proactive planning. Councils and communities may choose to achieve protection through specific issues, objectives, policies and methods that focus explicitly on landscape matters. Alternatively, they may cover landscape issues under the umbrella of 'amenity values'. Either way, there are a range of methods available to help achieve the outcomes they are seeking. These methods include providing information about how to avoid landscape damage and to enhance landscape values, as well as rules to manage impacts on landscape.

This report focuses on some of the technical issues associated with landscape assessment and the approaches to dealing with landscape issues in district plans. One significant matter not covered in any depth by the report is the importance of the community, and the role the community plays in assisting the council to work through landscape and other issues, and landscape outcomes for the district. Clearly, consultation with the community to find out what people value now and what they want for their city or district in the future is crucial. This is not necessarily an easy task. There are often diverging views and interests, particularly on issues such as landscape. Working through the issues takes time and effort, but it has the advantage of helping to ensure the community is on side, and that people know what is being valued and why. Having access to technical information on landscape issues, and the options for dealing with these in district plans, can help to ensure that the council makes informed decisions on behalf of its community.

The rural economy

The physical, biological and cultural processes that comprise any landscape are dynamic. Planning and management of the landscape need to recognise and manage this change rather than adopt a strict preservation approach. Well-directed landscape management can enhance the rural environment, but the issue of rural character and amenity cannot be separated from the economics of land management in New Zealand. The rural economy is significant to the balance of trade, and the rural landscape needs to be flexible to respond to the changing requirements of production and investment in land.

Some rural landscapes with high existing amenity are valued by the local people and by visitors and tourists, and other areas may have been identified as outstanding landscapes within the context of section 6(b) of the RMA. Many other areas are valued for their agricultural productivity, or their aesthetic attractiveness. But some of this country's rural landscapes are both visually and ecologically degraded; for example, ecological systems have been disrupted, vegetative cover has been removed, leaving the land prone to erosion, and some areas are weed-infested. The amenity and environmental quality of these landscapes can be enhanced through sustainable development. Rural subdivision can contribute to this, enabling a more sustainable and perhaps more diversified productive land use, which also protects and enhances rural amenity values.

Rural subdivision and development can help achieve multiple beneficial outcomes. Take, for example, a landowner who is unable to finance removal of noxious weeds from an area of marginal grazing land on the property. A suitable part of the property is subdivided and developed for tree crops or other activities. The landowner may then choose to fund weed removal, convert the marginal land to a sustainable productive use (a timber wood lot, for example), and introduce riparian planting into an eroding gully. District plans can assist sustainable rural management and encourage appropriate development through effective subdivision policies aimed at providing opportunities for innovative rural change which maximise beneficial environmental and aesthetic outcomes, while enabling productive outcomes for the rural landscape.

High amenity landscapes are well managed landscapes

There is often a strong relationship between good aesthetic landscape outcomes and good land management practices. Sound land management is responsive to the varying soils, aspects, slope and drainage patterns in a given landscape. Where land uses reflect these underlying natural elements, the resulting landscape patterns generally have high amenity (Figure 1). One example is riparian planting, which improves water quality, conserves soil, and visually emphasises the drainage pattern in the landscape. Another example is retiring marginal steep grazing land prone to erosion, and planting or allowing revegetation which visually emphasises the contrast between steep and gentler land while improving soil conservation.

Managing the effects of change

Subdivision in itself may bring about very few physical or visual changes to a rural landscape. It is, however, the catalyst for a range of potential effects. It is the effects of subsequent development that have the potential to impact on landscape values. When processing subdivision applications it is therefore helpful to consider how the layout of the lots may eventually be transformed into an actual landscape. It is not just the boundaries that may need to be managed but also the effects of access tracks, roads, structures, utilities, planting and patterns of land management.

Combining land-use controls with a subdivision consent is a means of helping to maintain and enhance landscape values. For example, building locations and envelopes can be identified, roads and accessways delineated, other servicing defined, riparian zones identified for protection and enhancement, and a planting framework designed.

It is important to note that standard recipe design and/or control techniques are generally unsuitable because of the diversity of both landscapes and subdivision/development proposals. An approach that considers the effects of rural subdivision on the specific values of a particular landscape may have greater potential for a satisfactory outcome.



Figure 1: Forested steplands, clustered settlement, riparian vegetation, and intensive productive land use combine into a rural landscape of high amenity.



2. UNDERSTANDING LANDSCAPES AND THEIR VALUES

A diversity of landscapes

New Zealand has been described as a country of ‘little landscapes’¹ because of the great diversity that occurs over relatively short distances. This diversity is an enormous asset, providing regions and localities with a very recognisable identity. It also presents a challenge to the people and communities living in the rural landscape and those responsible for administering district plans, because every district is likely to have a variety of landscape types within which each proposed development site will have different features and landscape settings.

District plan provisions need to respond to this diversity. While some general principles about rural landscape management are appropriate, standard rules should only be applied with caution. For instance, a lot size of four hectares might be found to be an appropriate minimum threshold in a typical flat-plains landscape with an established pattern of shelter belts. In these circumstances, the lot distribution and boundary treatment of a rural residential subdivision can integrate with the existing pattern of shelter planting, maintaining rural amenity and landscape values. But in a pastoral landscape of highly visible rolling hills with extensive paddocks and comparatively few shelter belts, a 4-hectare subdivision might detract from the simple large-scale pattern of open farmland. Here, either a larger minimum lot size or clustered subdivision (see Section 4) might be more effective in retaining the predominantly large-scale character.

If plan provisions are to be responsive to landscape diversity it is important to understand and assess the landscape. As well as technical assessments, it is helpful to include consultation with the local community to gain an understanding of how their landscape ‘works’ and what values and outcomes they consider important.

A landscape assessment process

When considering the potential effects of subdivision, use and development on rural landscape values, the existing landscape needs to be used as a basis for assessing the likely impact and effect of any proposed change. There are two distinct parts of this assessment process:

- describing the landscape character²
- evaluating the visual or landscape quality³.

¹ New Zealand Where Are You?

² See Appendix 1 for an explanation of landscape character.

³ See Appendix 1 for an explanation of landscape quality.

The approach to describing landscape character is essentially objective, in that it describes the interrelationship of landscape elements; whereas the assessment of visual quality is largely subjective. It is helpful to complete the descriptive component first, before evaluating qualities. The impact and effect of any potential change can then be evaluated against both character and quality. Clearly an important factor will be the value the community places on its landscapes.

Context and scale

Landscape assessment often involves classifying areas with similar characteristics. There is a logical progression from broad to more localised or site-specific scales of assessment as outlined below.

Regional level

At a regional level, *landscape types* are generally based on geomorphological characteristics, such as mountains, ranges, inland plains, coastal floodplains, hill country and the like. These broad landscape types are useful to:

- assist regional councils to identify landscape issues in Regional Policy Statements
- provide a broad-scale landscape context for local authorities within a region
- develop broad principles for managing landscapes of a similar type and scale.

District level

At the district level, *landscape units* can be identified within the broad landscape types, based on the combination of landform, vegetation and land-use patterns. These can be used to:

- assist councils to evaluate the existing effects of rural subdivision and associated development, and identify any issues arising from these
- determine whether cumulative effects are having a detrimental or beneficial effect on landscape character
- identify areas within the district where rural subdivision can be more readily integrated into the existing landscape, or where the effects are likely to bring about beneficial or adverse change
- develop objectives and policies for managing homogenous landscape areas.

Localised level

At the local level, distinct *character areas* within landscape units might be identified where particular features are concentrated, such as a gorge within a landscape unit of dissected hill country. These areas can be used to:

- evaluate potential significant natural features and landscapes, some of which might be outstanding
- respond in detail to known issues (for example, demand for rural subdivision around the shores of a lake)
- develop specific methods for protecting and enhancing landscape elements.

Site-specific level

At the site-specific level the description and identification of *identity areas* provide a further refinement by combining features of landform, vegetation and land use within the site, as well as its relationship to the surrounding landscape. This assessment can be used to:

- provide the information required to prepare a subdivision proposal that is responsive to landscape values
- assess the effects of a subdivision or development proposal.

Case study: Two examples of landscape assessment.

Broad-scale landscape assessment: Western Bay of Plenty District Visual Landscape Evaluation⁴

This district-wide landscape evaluation was commissioned to assist with the preparation of the revised Western Bay of Plenty District Plan. Landscape types and units were identified and evaluated as described above, and the visual sensitivity to change assessed for each landscape unit (see Figures 2 and 3). Areas with high landscape values were identified for protection; areas of low landscape values were identified for specific enhancement measures; other areas were identified as being most able to integrate change. Specific recommendations about managing that change were geared to the particular landscape, based on the assessment results (for example, set-backs of rural residential subdivision from roads in the plains landscape). Eventually the council opted only to manage outstanding landscapes and view shafts.

Localised scale landscape assessment: Tutukaka Block, Northland⁵

This assessment was prompted by pressure for residential subdivision in the fast-growing Tutukaka coastal settlement. The potential for development on an adjacent peninsula had been noted, but various constraints, including the potential effects on landscape character, prompted an assessment to find the most suitable land. A range of assessment criteria were applied, including land-use capability, archaeological, biological and landscape components. Character areas were described and constraints/opportunities identified as part of the evaluation. By combining all the physical resource and landscape analysis information, land-use areas were mapped (Figure 4) and recommendations for an appropriate density and type of development in different areas of the peninsula were made; for example:

- some cluster housing to avoid coastal ribbon development
- limited development on areas of moderate slope
- some conservation areas
- areas where enhancement through revegetation was needed.

Recent subdivision proposals have developed these earlier recommendations further, with a range of lot sizes, house locations and proposals for strict site-sensitive conditions (Figure 5).

⁴Boffa Miskell Limited. *Western Bay of Plenty District Visual Landscape Evaluation*. Prepared for Western Bay of Plenty District Council, 1993.

⁵Murray-North Limited & Boffa Miskell Partners. *Tutukaka Block Study: Northland*. Prepared for Whangarei District Council, 1991.



Figure 2: Western Bay of Plenty - Landscape types and units.



Figure 3: Western Bay of Plenty - Visual sensitivity.

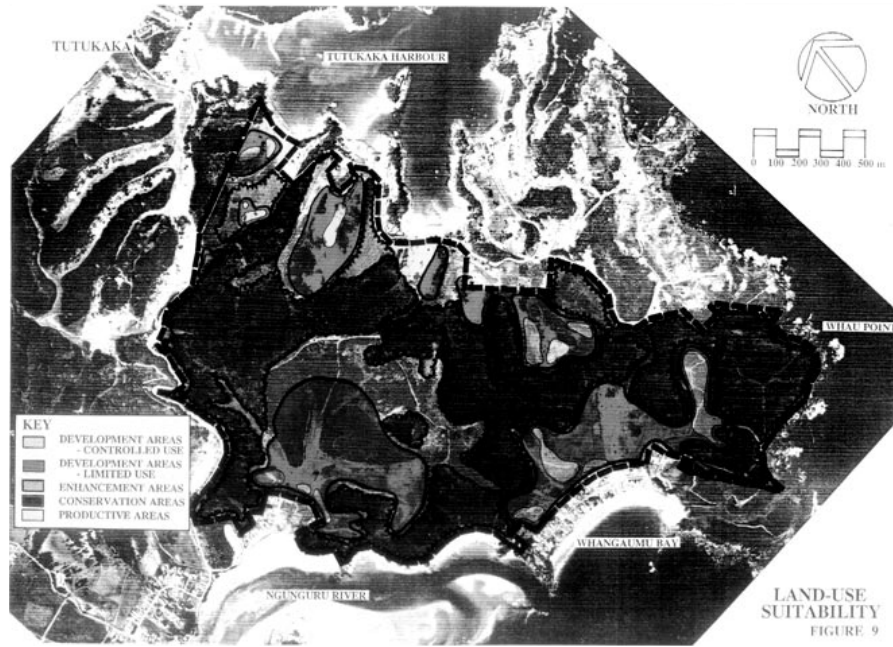


Figure 4: Tutukaka - Suitability for different land uses was determined from physical resources and landscape assessment.

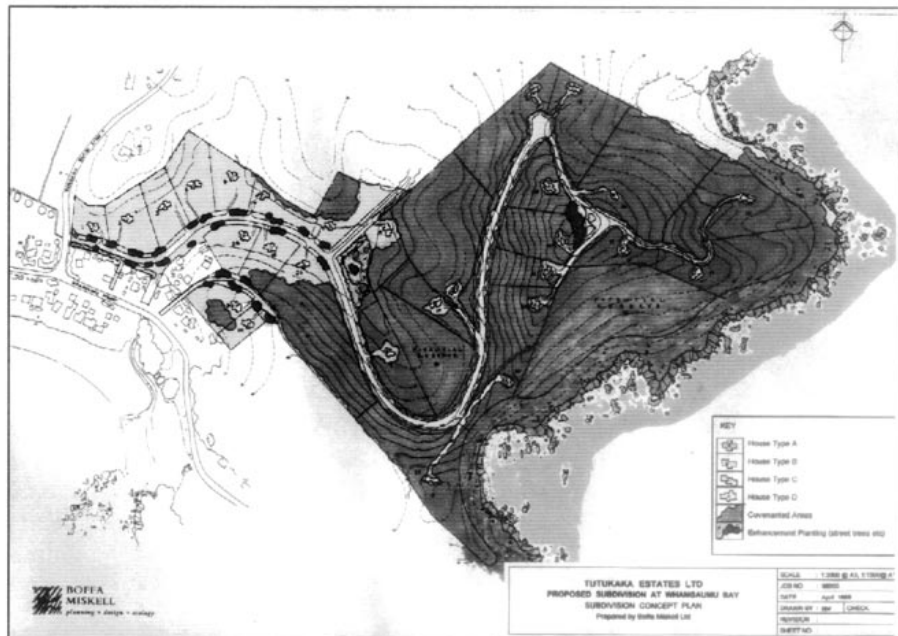


Figure 5: Tutukaka - Subdivision concept plan.



3. LANDSCAPE PRINCIPLES AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DEVELOPING DISTRICT PLANS

This section briefly sets out some broad landscape principles for districts to consider when formulating district plan provisions that relate to managing landscape change and visual amenity. These principles may also provide guidance to potential applicants when they consider lodging land-use and subdivision consent applications. The section then gives examples of some of the changes or effects that can impact either positively or negatively on the values identified in the principles. Where the effects are adverse, they can give rise to issues in district plans.

General landscape principles

The following is not so much an exhaustive check list as an indication of the broad kind of provisions that could be considered and tailored to each district's landscape setting and the rural subdivision issues facing the community.

- *Expression of the natural pattern of landform* - may be incorporated into the layout of subdivision lots; the placement of tracks, drives and roads; and the structure of plantings.
- *Protection of natural drainage patterns* - can be incorporated into requirements for riparian planting; provisions for protection from the adverse effects of grazing; and the disposal of additional run-off within subdivisions.
- *Retention of remnant native vegetation and other areas of ecological significance such as wetlands* - can contribute to visual landscape values as well as ecological values.
- *Reinforcement of the natural pattern of the landscape through planting of native and/or exotic species* - the relationship between vegetation distribution and underlying landform.
- *Avoidance of dominant or discordant types of human modification* - which means managing earthworks for roading or building platforms; and the alignment and location of utilities and roads.
- *Use of a rural vernacular* - involves using appropriate building forms and materials (as opposed to those with urban vernacular and materials) to reflect rural landscape character.

Consent applications

Applicants and their advisers can be encouraged to avoid standard subdivision layouts and design details and instead consider the character of the site and the surrounding area as a basis for design. This could involve an initial landscape assessment and preliminary discussion with council officers about the landscape values and potential effects (both beneficial and adverse) of the proposal. This approach is more likely to result in subdivision proposals that are responsive to landscape values and that minimise potential adverse effects (see Figure 6). Appendix 1 outlines a case study of the Martinborough Estate, which incorporated landscape principles into its design.

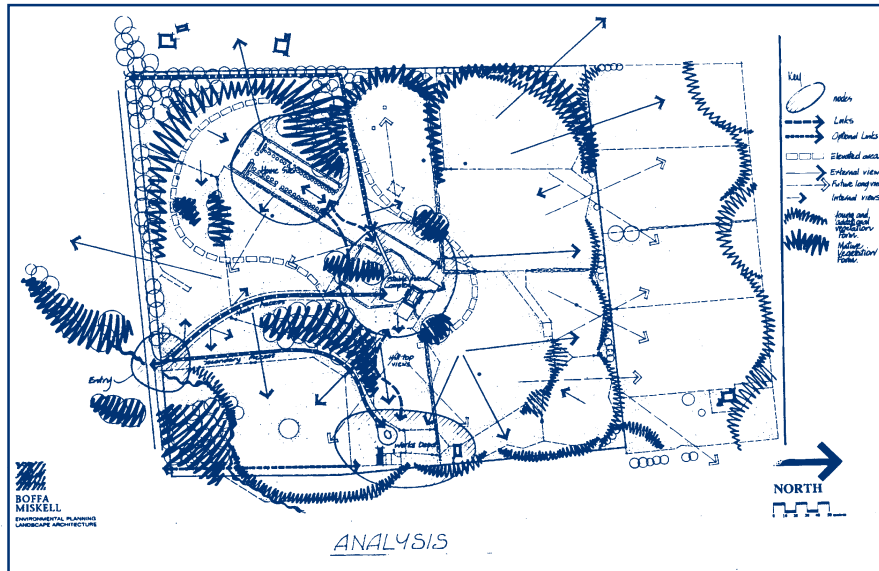


Figure 6: An example of a simple site context plan - ie wider landscape setting/ character, and site analysis plan with important features and patterns recorded.

Issues in district plans

It is important for district plans to state the relevant resource management problems or issues so that it is clear what the concern is and why intervention is needed⁶. In the case of rural subdivision and associated development, landscape issues broadly relate to the potential change in landscape character and/or visual quality that may result. (These terms are defined in the Glossary.) Some of this change may be seen as positive. It is only where such change is considered to create a problem that the District Plan will seek to deal with it. At times communities cite adverse effects on amenity values and the quality of the rural environment in stating their opposition to rural subdivision and development and the landscape change these can induce. Examples of the changes and perceived effects that are often the focus of concern (and which give rise to resource management issues) with rural subdivision and associated development are discussed below.

While the potential for adverse effects is often the justification for plan provisions, it is important to note that the effects of rural subdivision need not necessarily be adverse, but can be positive.

Intensification

Most rural landscapes are working landscapes, in which buildings, accessways, utilities and other cultural elements are integral. Many highly valued rural landscapes are valued for the heritage and aesthetic qualities of this traditional New Zealand work place. In a planning context it is the siting, layout and design of these elements which contributes to or detracts from the visual amenity.

⁶See *Issues, Objectives, Policies, Methods and Results under the Resource Management Act*. Working Paper 1, July 1994. Ministry for the Environment.

Rural subdivision and its consequent development generally introduces smaller-scale landscape patterns. There are smaller properties, with additional planting, buildings and associated infrastructure (such as roading), and a greater range of land uses. This intensification can conflict with a common expectation that our rural landscapes are sparsely populated, with large-scale land use patterns and a sense of 'wide open spaces.' This is particularly evident where smaller land units are developed for rural 'lifestyle' purposes rather than for primary production. As a result there are concerns that some rural areas are becoming too 'suburbanised' - too cluttered and overly populated.

However, intensified land use can result in landscapes of high rural amenity, provided that the patterns of land use are sensitive to the underlying characteristics of the landscape, such as landform, and are responsive to expectations of rural amenity, such as the appropriate siting of buildings within a productive or more natural landscape setting (Figures 7 and 8). A horticultural landscape of small land units enclosed by shelter belts with intimate and varied views, for instance, can be valued as much as a traditional pastoral landscape dominated by grassland and appreciated for its wide-open vistas.

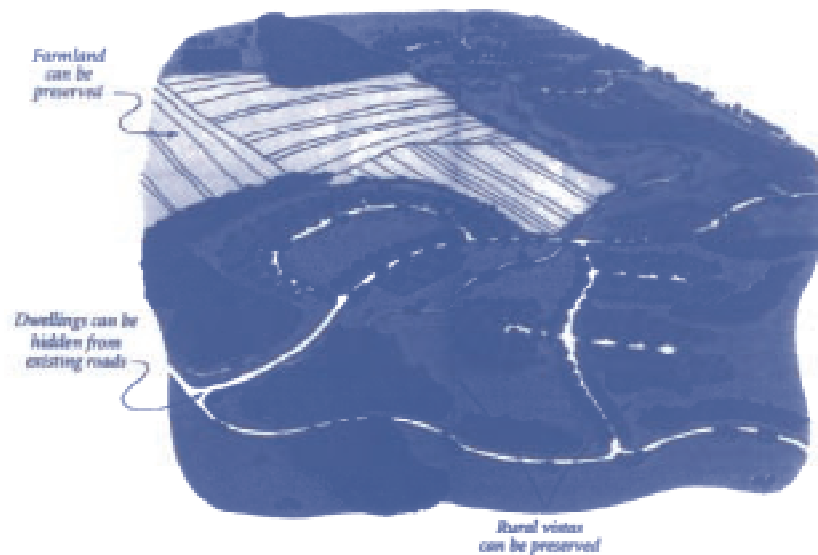


Figure 7: Rural subdivisions can be planned to accommodate more intensive land uses, whether rural residential and/or productive, while still retaining essential elements of rural character (productive land use and undeveloped open space), protecting or enhancing rural amenity (views of farmland or natural features such as forest remnants), and protecting or enhancing natural values (riparian planting, forest remnants).



Figure 8: Photo of high quality horticultural landscape - Bethlehem area near Tauranga, or vineyards.

Property boundaries

Property boundaries often become highly visible landscape elements, either demarcated by fencing and/or planting or following different land-use boundaries, such as pasture adjacent to a wood lot. In some flat or gently sloping landscapes, such as the Canterbury Plains, the artificial grid pattern of paddocks and property boundaries is an established part of the landscape's character. It is less visible than in rolling or steeper hill country, where boundary lines can be highly visible and considered obtrusive by some people. This potential adverse visual effect can be avoided or manipulated to positively reinforce the shape of the land if boundaries are laid out to fit the natural patterns of landform and vegetation (Figures 9 and 10).

In some cases bold patterns within the landscape may be perceived as appropriate; for example, vineyards cutting across a rolling hillside. (The positive response to this is likely to have more to do with the link between vineyards and wine than any conscious analysis of landscape character.)

Buildings and structures

In contrast to urban settings, rural environments are generally expected to have a low population density and a predominance of natural elements. A proliferation of buildings, structures and infrastructure can compromise both of these expectations. This urbanising effect is more pronounced where buildings and/or structures are sited in highly visible locations (such as on hilltops or in road corridors), or are of a scale, style and range of construction materials and colours that stand out noticeably in the rural setting.

⁷Note: 'Natural' in this context does not mean untouched by human influence but refers to the natural elements, processes and patterns that, together, comprise natural character. In a spectrum of modification, a highly built-up urban environment would have less natural character than a relatively unbuilt rural environment.

There are a variety of ways of reducing these effects, including:

- clustering buildings, to retain a sense of unbuilt spaciousness in intervening areas (Figure 11)
- avoiding highly visible locations, such as significant view lines or hilltops where buildings or structures are likely to be seen prominently and/or on the skyline (Figure 12)
- ensuring that buildings and structures are adequately screened from roads and neighbours (Figure 13)
- using a 'rural vernacular' in building design that positively reinforces the rural setting. This doesn't mean that all rural buildings should be designed in the style of traditional farmhouses, or must be painted in browns or greens. To visually integrate buildings into a rural landscape their design needs to be site-sensitive, relating the scale of the building to the setting, avoiding a style that is designed to make an urban or dominant statement, and selecting materials that will ensure the building or structure is integrated visually with the rural landscape in which it is located (Figures 14 and 15).

This is not to say that a well-designed, prominent and contrasting building or structure cannot be seen in a positive light. It has a lot to do with individual perceptions, which may change: a building or structure disliked when first built may, with time, become a valued feature in the landscape.

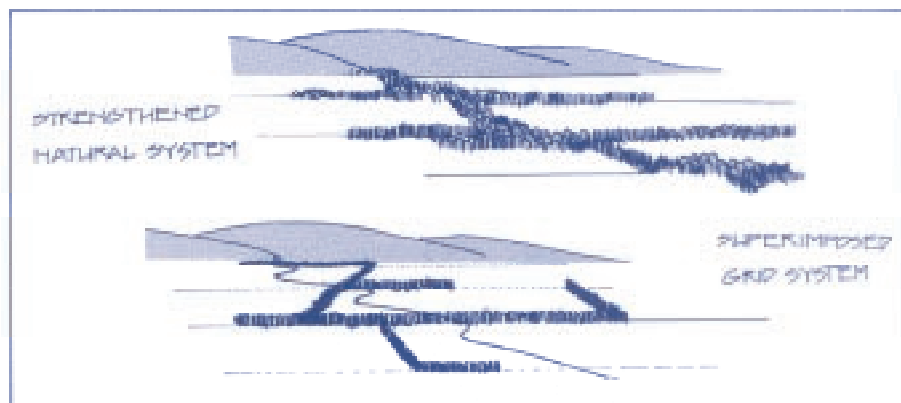


Figure 9: Even in a plains landscape, where landform variations are subtle, the traditional grid pattern (bottom) can be designed to strengthen the natural character by visually emphasising natural drainage systems (top).

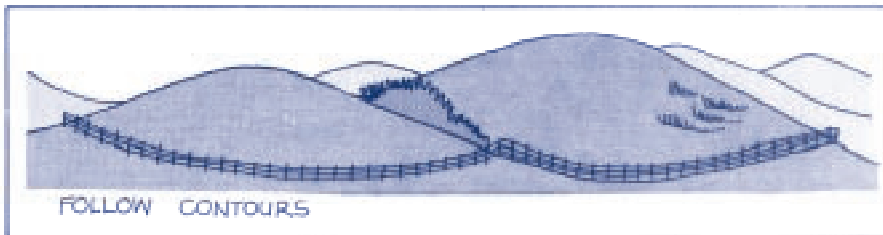
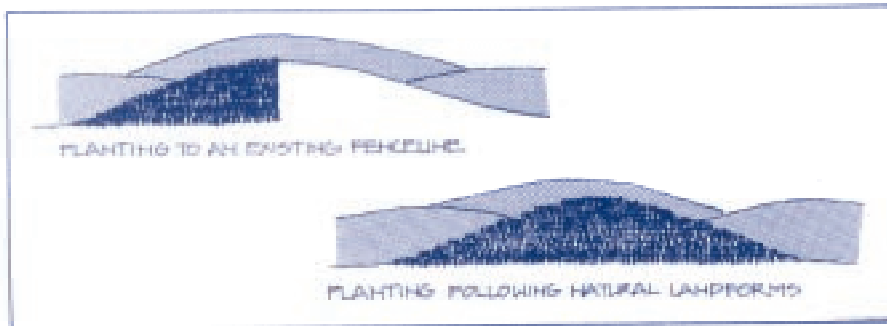


Figure 10: Boundary lines can be particularly obtrusive when cutting across the landform (top) but can ‘fit’ less noticeably into the landscape if aligned to reinforce the natural landform (middle, bottom).

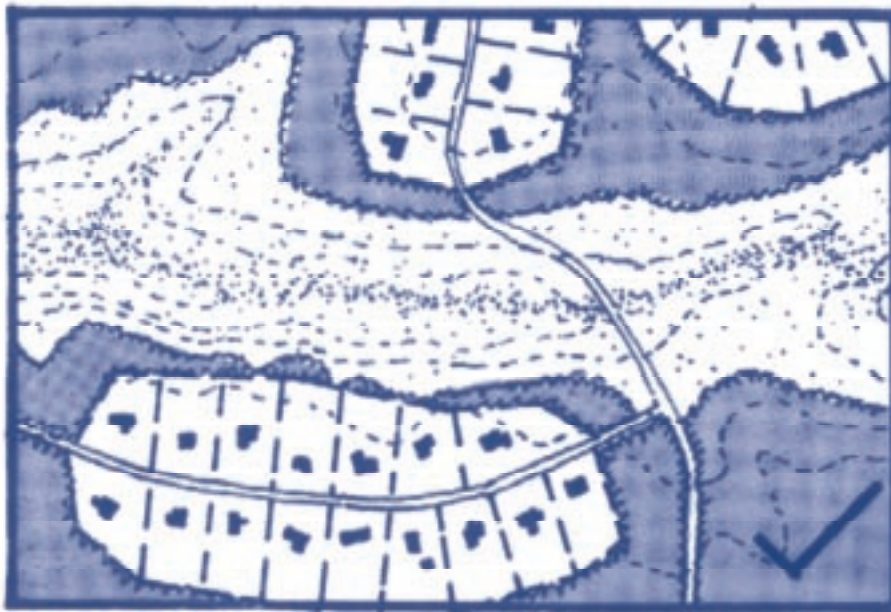


Figure 11: Buildings can be clustered so as to retain a sense of unbuilt spaciousness in intervening areas.

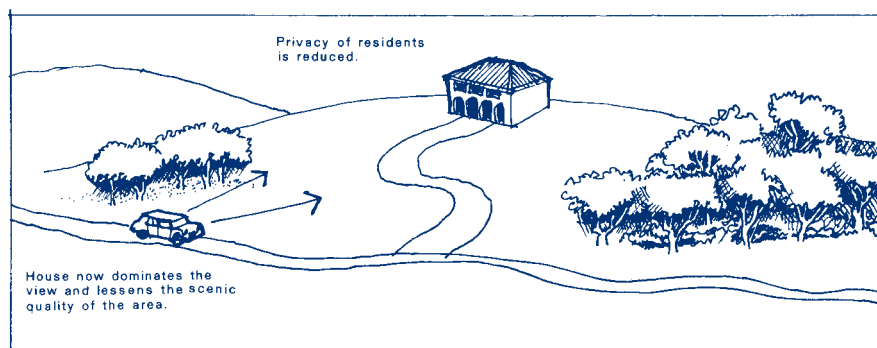


Figure 12: Buildings or structures are likely to be seen prominently and/or on the skyline if located in highly visible locations such as significant view lines or hilltops.

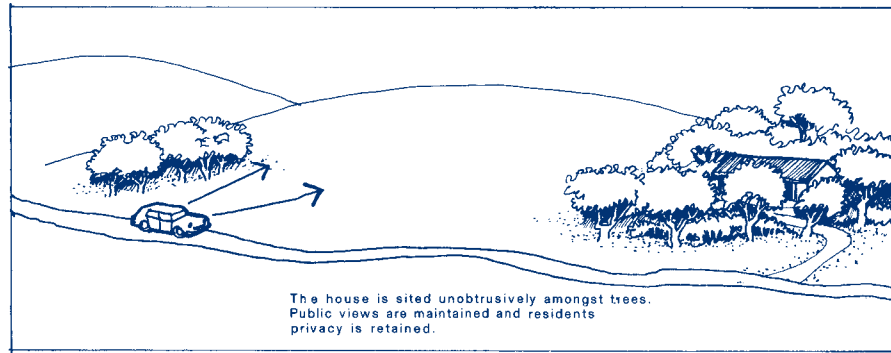


Figure 13: Buildings and structures can be screened from roads and neighbours to provide privacy and reduce the visibility of development.

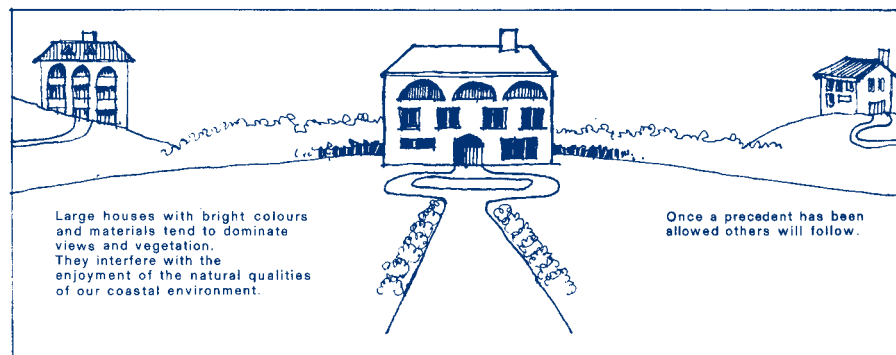


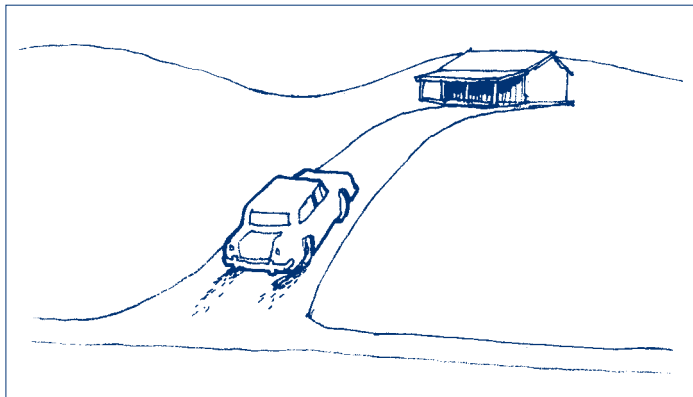
Figure 14: Buildings that dominate their sites and are of bright, contrasting materials detract from the rural character by attracting undue attention in the rural landscape.



Figure 15: Buildings that are designed to fit with their setting in terms of scale, form, natural colours and yard treatment are less obtrusive in the rural landscape.



Figure 16: Roads and driveways can be particularly obtrusive where they cut across the natural patterns of the land (above), require large cuts which remain as visible 'scars', or...



...accentuate buildings by leading the eye straight to them.

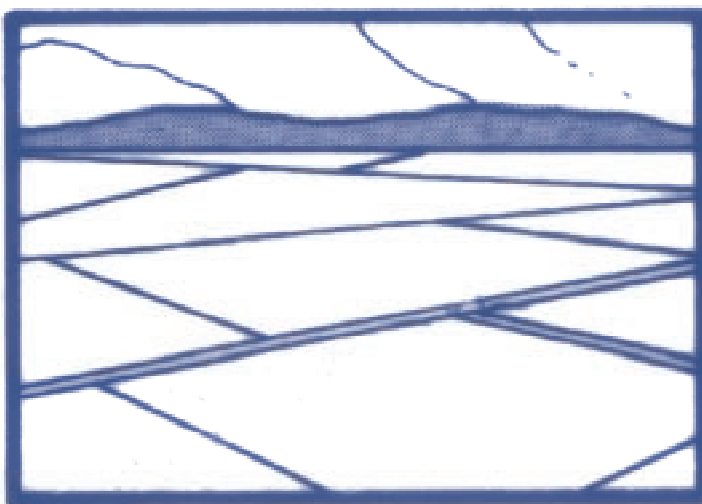


Figure 17: Straight roads are appropriate within the existing grid patterns that are typical of flat rural landscapes.



Figure 18: Roads that follow contours are responsive to the shape of the land and are less obtrusive.

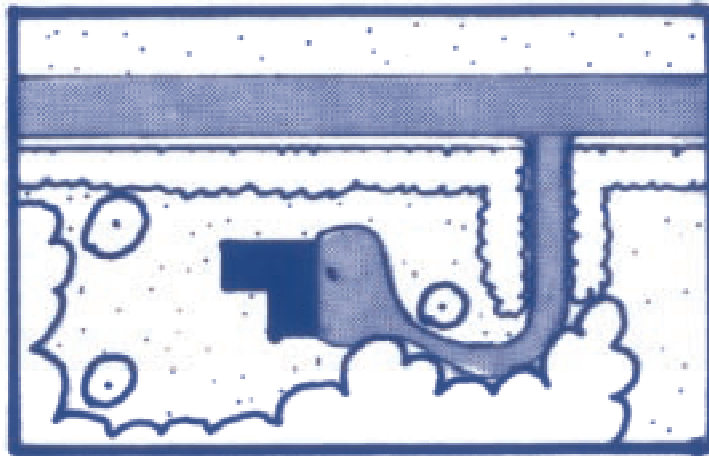


Figure 19: Indirect alignment of driveways allows houses to be more readily screened from view.

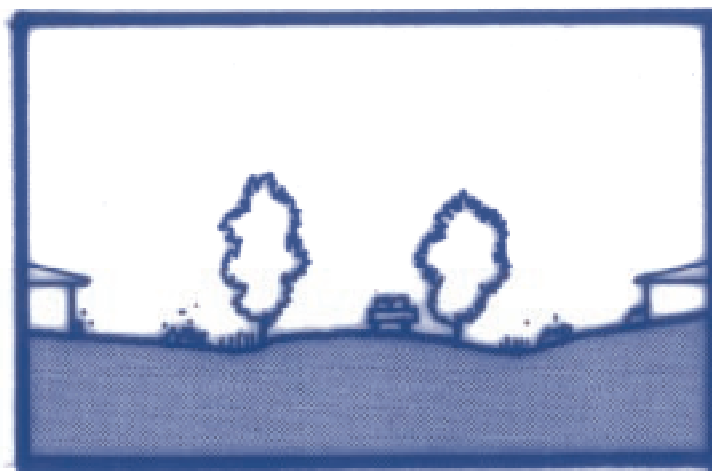


Figure 20: A grass-edged road, flanked by drainage swales, with adjacent houses screened by vegetation and no evidence of utility services is in keeping with our expectations of rural character at the closer scale.

Utilities

A proliferation of structures such as water tanks, overhead power lines, private receiver masts or dishes, driveways and roads often follows rural subdivision. These structures have the potential to significantly affect landscape character and detract from visual quality by bringing visual clutter into relatively undeveloped environments. The siting, scale and design of utilities can obscure or detract from the natural patterns that frequently make up 'good' rural landscapes. It is, therefore, important to manage the introduction of such utilities.

Roads and driveways can be particularly obtrusive if they cut across the natural patterns of the land, require large cuts which remain as visible 'scars,' or accentuate buildings by leading the eye to them (Figure 16). With care, roads and driveways can be designed to fit with, and reinforce, the character of the landscape (Figures 17-19).

Overhead services (poles, lines receiver masts) can bring visual clutter into rural subdivisions, emphasising the higher density of settlement and obstructing rural vistas. Careful siting, design and screening can again reduce these impacts. New power and phone lines servicing new rural subdivisions can be placed underground.

Design elements

Perhaps less significant, but nevertheless important to the perception and overall impact of rural subdivisions, is the extent to which site details reinforce rural character. Typical urban details such as lighting of roads and driveways, kerb and channel edges, highly detailed fencing and masonry walls, elaborate entrance gates, and dominant and illuminated signs contrast with the simplicity of the rural environment.

These visual effects can be avoided or minimised, and the sense of being in a rural environment reinforced, by using design which consciously adopts a rural vernacular. This involves promoting concepts such as:

- keeping design simple and functional
- selecting materials and colours that reflect the character of the local landscape
- using materials in typical rural construction forms
- using traditional farm features and details, such as unpainted post-and-wire or post-and-rail fences
- planting vegetation rather than using fences and walls for screening and privacy
- avoiding hard road edges by using grass swales to drain road run-off (Figure 20). (Where kerb and channel is required for traffic/engineering reasons, using tinted concrete and low-profile kerbs minimises their impact)
- using or manipulating natural drainage systems to deal with run-off; for example, direct run-off via swales to a wetland/pond area.

Vegetation and planting

Rural subdivision and its associated development can have significant effects on vegetation (land cover⁸). Manipulating existing vegetation patterns and introducing new vegetation are often key elements in maintaining and enhancing visual quality.

Existing vegetation cover can give instant maturity to a subdivision. Conversely, if removed it cannot be replaced quickly. New planting will help to integrate rural subdivisions into the landscape but it takes time to mature. For this reason alone, it is helpful to assess the existing vegetation cover to determine what should be protected, enhanced or manipulated as the basis for a vegetation framework within a subdivision.

For instance, the existing pattern of shelter belts and wood lots typical of a flat plains landscape can be extended to integrate subdivision boundaries and soften or screen built features (Figure 21). Alternatively, native forest remnants can reinforce the landform patterns and contribute to a sense of local identity (Figure 22). Existing vegetation may give a cue for lot boundaries to follow remnant edges, or for a more 'natural' distribution of internal planting within a new subdivision.

Planting can be used not only to mitigate the adverse effects of development, but to positively enhance the visual landscape. It can be utilised to emphasise the natural landform and associated drainage patterns (Figure 23), thus providing a visual context for new subdivision and development. After selective protection and clearance of existing vegetation, additional planting can be designed to complement the remaining vegetation framework and landform patterns (Figure 24).

Careful selection of plant species is crucial. Planting may result in adverse visual effects if the species used:

- do not reflect the typical vegetation character of the area
- are unsuitable for the site conditions, as when species are used that are of inappropriate scale and form (commonly, too small and/or planted too far apart to provide the vegetation structure required).

Use of species indigenous to an area and likely to flourish in a particular location can reinforce local natural character. Alternatively, exotic vegetation typical of a particular place can be used to emphasise the area's cultural identity with links back to early settlement. In general, larger tree species planted in groups will be more appropriate than individual small trees typical of suburbia.



Figure 21: Existing shelterbelts and woodlots can be extended to integrate the boundaries and screen the built features of new subdivision.

⁸ See Glossary, Landscape character.



Figure 22: Native forest remnants can be important elements that reinforce the pattern of landform and/or the sense of local identity.



Figure 23: Vegetation in gullies can enhance amenity values by emphasising the landform while also improving soil and water quality values.



Figure 24: Naturalistic patterns of clearings amongst woodlots.

Vegetation is a key landscape element that can be manipulated to *mitigate adverse visual effects*, particularly from buildings and utilities. For example:

- The visibility of inappropriate structures can be screened or softened by vegetation (Figure 25).
- Planting and existing vegetation around a building or structure can provide a backdrop and/or setting of an appropriate scale to help the building fit into its landscape context, reducing its visual dominance (Figure 26).

Vegetation can be used to provide visual buffers along roads or to direct view lines, thereby reducing the visibility of a subdivision or other change in the rural setting (Figure 27).

Natural features and edges

Natural features such as escarpments, wetlands, waterways and bush remnants are important elements of the rural landscape and contribute considerably to the identity of an area. This is also the case at a site scale; for example, mature trees, a small watercourse, or a rock outcrop (Figure 28). At all scales, landscape values can be adversely affected if natural features are removed (such as by draining a wetland), obscured (siting a building on a rock outcrop), or modified (piping a water course).

Edges give important cues for integrating rural subdivision into the landscape. Examples include the edge between pasture and bush, the edge between a sloping and flat landform, and the edge defined by rivers and watercourses. Using lot boundaries located along existing edges in the landscape can be preferable to creating new ones. Another visual edge, the line between land and sky, can be very sensitive because of the flat texture and light colour of the sky, which draws attention to skyline buildings or other structures (Figures 29 and 30).

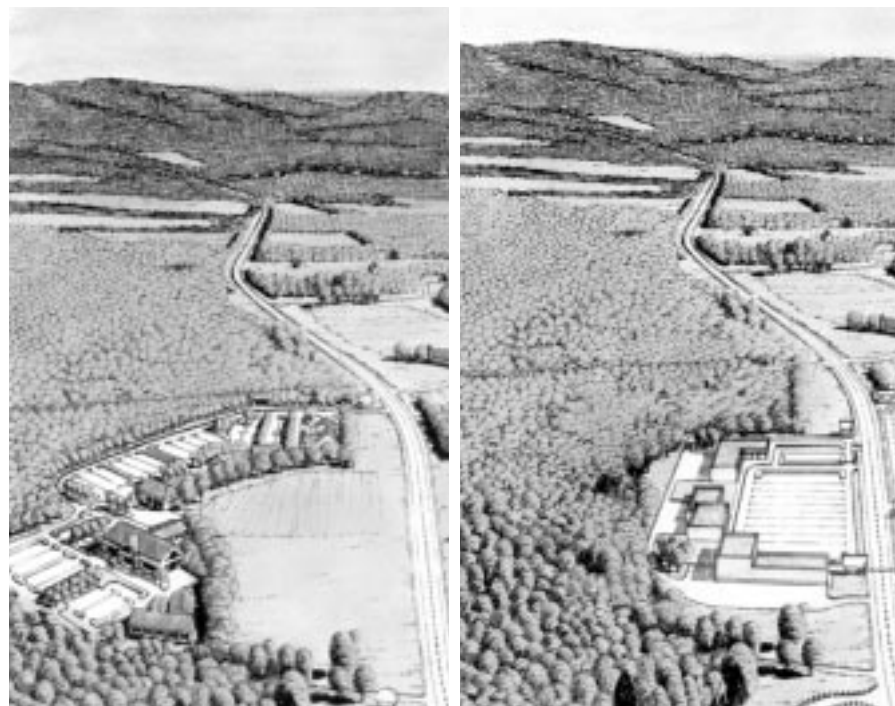


Figure 25: The style and scale of structures can be designed to be less obtrusive and can be set back and screened by vegetation to protect rural character within important viewing corridors.

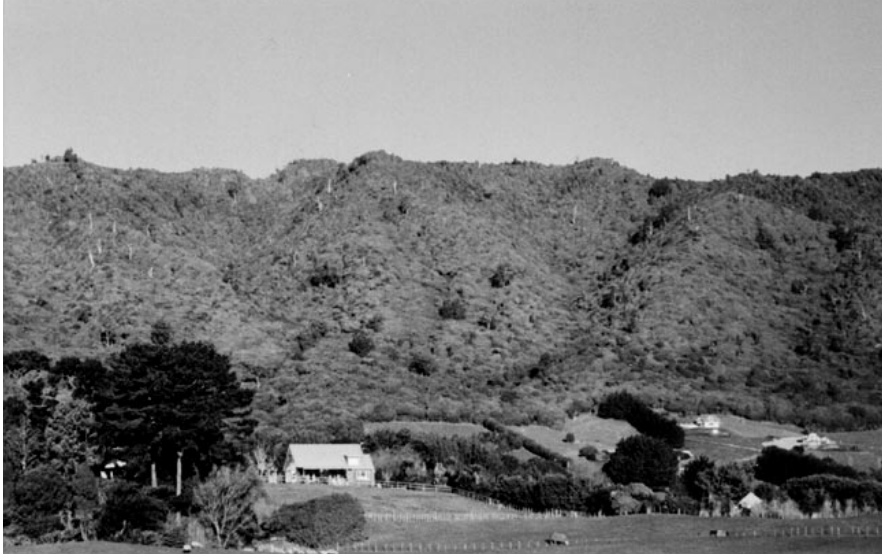


Figure 26: Planting or retaining existing vegetation around a building or structure can provide a backdrop and/or immediate setting of an appropriate scale to give it a landscape context and reduce its visual dominance.

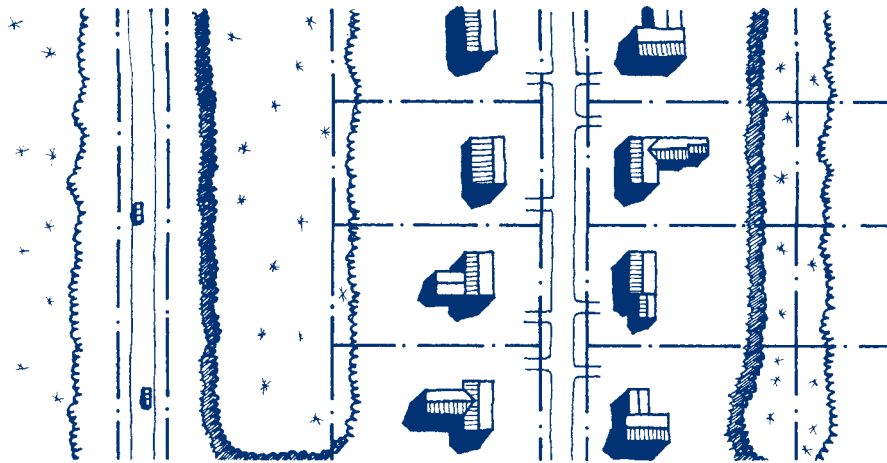


Figure 27: Vegetation can be used to provide buffers along roads or to direct view lines, thereby reducing public awareness of the subdivision in the rural setting.

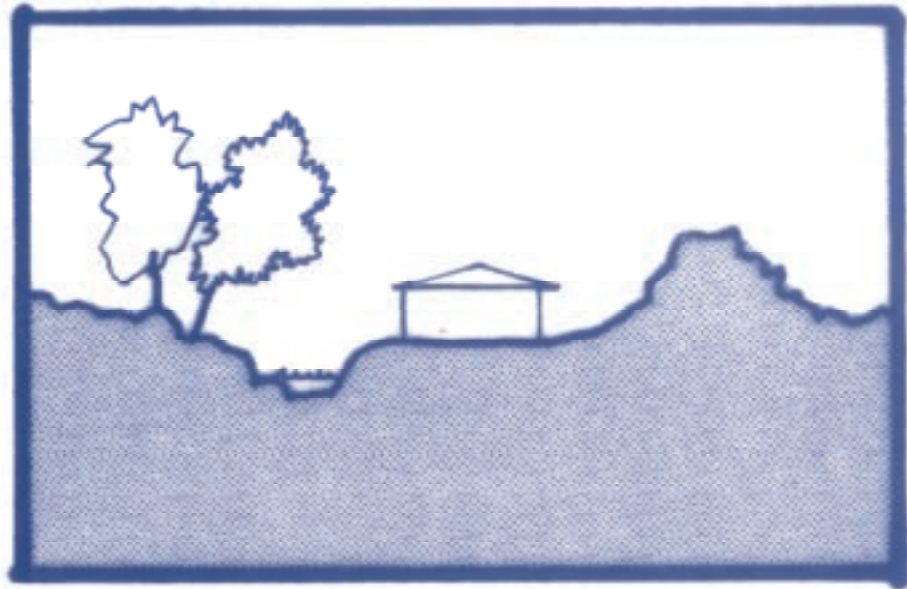


Figure 28: Existing features at the site-specific level can enhance individual properties and the immediate character of a subdivision by emphasising natural landscape elements.



Figure 29: Lot boundaries along watercourses have a visual logic by following a natural line in the landscape and also providing the opportunity to combine riparian planting and public access with boundary definition.



Figure 30: Buildings can be less noticeable when associated with the edge of vegetation because the vegetation provides a backdrop and, if it follows the natural landform, provides a context or structure for the location of the building which ‘fits’ the landscape.



4. TOOLBOX OF PLANNING TECHNIQUES

This section describes a ‘tool box’ or range of techniques that are being used in district plans throughout the country to address the impacts of rural subdivision and associated development on general landscape values, as well as on section 6 landscapes. The advantages and disadvantages of each of the techniques are discussed to help councils to assess their appropriateness when formulating plan provisions for their own circumstances. The toolbox of techniques and the discussion have been developed with the assistance of staff from district councils throughout the country.

Techniques for managing rural subdivision have not been separated from techniques for managing the effects of rural dwellings. This is because the rules in district plans relating to subdivision and dwellings are usually closely inter-related. Frequently the same minimum requirements are applied.

While theoretically subdivision is just a method of delineating ownership, and allotment boundaries are just lines on a plan, subdivision creates the potential for changes in land uses to occur. New Zealand has a long history of expectation that subdivision enables a change in and/or intensification of land uses. It is the changes in land use that occur after subdivision that result in the effects on landscape values. Because these subdivision and land development processes are so closely linked, they are considered together.

Statutory techniques

TECHNIQUE 1

SPECIFYING THE ACTIVITY STATUS FOR SUBDIVISION: CONTROLLED, DISCRETIONARY OR NONCOMPLYING

Controlled activity

Many district plans enable most rural subdivision to occur as controlled activities (usually with a minimum allotment area standard). The following provisions may be included in plans regarding controlled activity applications:

A list of matters over which the council has reserved control in considering any controlled activity application. These can be very general, such as ‘effects on landscape and visual amenity values’, or very specific, such as the design and location of allotments and their boundaries; design, location, construction and alignment of driveways; provision for landscape treatment; and protection of natural features (Waitakere City Plan).

Specification of the assessment criteria the council will consider when deciding what conditions it will impose on any subdivision. Again, these can be very general or be derived from the assessment of a particular area. (Tauranga district has included specific guidance for subdivision in the Wairoa River Valley in Proposed Variation No 1 to its Proposed District Plan). Assessment criteria are not required by the RMA, but are sometimes used to state matters that the council should bear in mind when deciding what conditions to impose. As such, they should relate only to the matters over which the council has reserved discretion.

Indication of the types of conditions that the Council is likely to apply, such as the identification of building platforms for subsequent dwellings, or restriction on the heights of buildings (Tauranga, Banks Peninsula and Queenstown-Lakes districts).

Requirements as to the level of analysis and information to be presented with any subdivision application. In some plans, this includes requirements for a landscape assessment of the area proposed to be subdivided (Tauranga District Plan Proposed Variation No 1).

Advantages

- There is some certainty regarding the level of subdivision and development that can, and is likely to, take place in any area.
- The consent process enables guidance to be given to landowners, applicants and the council in the interpretation of the district plan for any particular area. The more clearly any matters for control and the assessment criteria can be related to the landscape values of a particular area, the more useful they will be in providing specific guidance.
- The plan's provisions can be supported by non-regulatory information, guidelines, advocacy and other assistance. Council staff consider that the more information and guidance that is available to landowners and their professional advisers before subdivision commences, the more likely it is that people will take the landscape effects of their subdivisions into account in the initial design of the subdivision.
- Tauranga District's Variation No 1 to its Proposed District Plan requires, as a standard for controlled activity status, that a landscape assessment be undertaken and presented with the application for subdivision. The plan specifies the matters that should be assessed and included, as well as requiring a statement of how the subdivision has been designed to mitigate any adverse effects on the identified landscape values. If such an assessment is not undertaken and presented with the application, the subdivision is not considered as a controlled activity because the required standard has not been met. This puts the onus on the applicant to undertake the assessment and prescribe the mitigation, rather than council staff having to try to make amendments to the subdivision after the application has been lodged.

Disadvantages

- Controlled activity subdivisions cause concerns among some council staff over how far councils can go in applying conditions that seek amendments to boundaries, changes to the design and layout of a subdivision, or the setting aside of areas of bush, waterways, or other natural features. At what point is the imposition of a condition effectively the same thing as declining the original subdivision applied for? Council staff in different areas have had different experiences with imposing conditions on controlled activity applications. In some areas a significant degree of amendment to a subdivision proposal, either through negotiation during the initial stages of an application being processed or as conditions of consent, is expected and tolerated. In other areas council

staff take a more cautious approach and consider that controlled activity status is limited in its effectiveness in requiring subdivision design to take heed of landscape effects.

- A controlled activity consent cannot require the deletion of certain lots, or a reduction in the total number of lots below that permitted in accordance with the minimum requirements, even where this is necessary to avoid adverse effects on landscape values. Avoidance of adverse effects is limited to matters of detail, such as alterations to boundary lines between allotments, location of buildings, protection of natural features, and the way that activities such as earthworks are carried out. If a greater level of discretion or control is required to ensure that landscape values are not adversely affected, controlled activity status is not likely to be sufficient.
- Unless good information is available about the landscape of the district, and clear guidance provided in the Plan, applicants have little idea what might be sought by the council. Plan provisions often need to be interpreted by council staff, councillors and applicants without the benefit of professional landscape architectural assistance. Council staff may have little background in landscape assessment and have little backup in the form of advice or information when advising applicants. The result may be inconsistent and arbitrary decisions which impose unnecessary restrictions on consents.

Discretionary activity

Some plans include discretionary activity status for subdivisions under different circumstances. The most common circumstances are:

- subdivision of allotments less than the minimum area specified for controlled activity status (for example, Queenstown-Lakes District)
- subdivision of all allotments beyond a specified threshold (Franklin District)
- all subdivision, with no minimum allotment area (Southland District)
- all subdivision of more than three (or another threshold number) allotments (Hurunui District).

Both full and restricted discretionary status are used for subdivision applications in different plans, although council staff are tending to favour restricted discretionary status for applications relating to the landscape impacts of subdivisions.

Plans vary markedly in the level of guidance given on policy or assessment criteria to assist councils and applicants in considering controlled or discretionary activity subdivision applications. Plans also vary in their requirements for applicants to assess the landscape effects of subdivisions before preparing their applications. Strong and clear policies in the plan, along with the details listed above for controlled activities subdivisions, enable interpretation of the plan's requirements and clear and consistent application of the provisions to specific proposals. For example, Hurunui District Plan includes specific policies and assessment criteria, and the council has developed and promoted an easily understandable guideline for the information of applicants.

Advantages

- In addition to the advantages outlined above for controlled activity status, the council retains full control to decline any subdivision or parts of a subdivision that will result in adverse effects on landscape values and that cannot be adequately mitigated by the imposition of conditions.
- With full discretionary status, the council can consider the wider effects of a proposal and/or impose conditions without being restricted by the matters identified in the plan. This is useful because not all likely adverse effects may have been anticipated at the time of drafting the plan.
- There is the flexibility to consider a range of allotment sizes without being arbitrarily limited by a minimum allotment area. The subdivision pattern can therefore be aligned with the complexity and opportunities provided by the landscape.
- There are opportunities for public involvement through public notification and submissions.
- Restricted discretionary status can be used to clearly define the matters to be considered, and applications can be specified as non-notified without the written approval of affected persons being obtained.

Disadvantages

- Discretionary activity status introduces uncertainty for landowners, who have no idea if their application is going to be approved, or even how their application is going to be considered. This may discourage investment in subdivision and development in areas where the returns from subdivision are not great.
- There are the same disadvantages as for controlled activities above regarding the level of information that is available about the landscape of the district, and the level of guidance provided in the plan.
- Full discretionary status allows the consideration of other matters beyond the principal reasons for the status in the plan. For example, the plan may require a discretionary activity application so that the impact of the subdivision and development on landscape values can be assessed. However, either the council or submitters may try to bring in other considerations, such as productivity from the land, reverse sensitivity, traffic generation, and the need for adequate servicing to avoid environmental impacts. These issues may or may not be of resource management concern, or an issue in the particular community, but full discretionary status may allow such matters to be raised in opposition to any subdivision proposal.
- Public involvement through public notification and submissions can act as a significant disincentive to landowners to go through the process of subdivision.

Non-complying activity

Many plans specify as non-complying activities all subdivisions that do not comply with the standards for controlled activity status, such as the minimum area standards. It should be noted that the Resource Management Act Amendment Bill 1999 is proposing the removal of non-complying status for resource consent applications.

Advantages

- There is a clear and certain application of the rules, which gives a clear signal that the minimum area - or other standards - must be complied with, and that it is going to be difficult to obtain consent below these standards in most circumstances.
- The council avoids being faced with a constant stream of applications to go below the minimum standards, which could occur with discretionary activity status.

Disadvantages

- This approach can be arbitrary and unreasonable, and not allow sufficient flexibility to consider a range of approaches where the landscape can accommodate subdivision and development without adversely affecting its landscape values.
- It can also be used as a default position by councils, instead of trying to develop clear sets of policies, criteria, and/or assessment matters for considering discretionary activity applications to subdivide below the minimum standards.
- It is a significant disincentive to a landowner to embark on any subdivision.
- Creative approaches to subdivision may be stifled.

TECHNIQUE 2

MINIMUM ALLOTMENT AREAS FOR SUBDIVISION (CONTROLLED ACTIVITY) AND ASSOCIATED MINIMUM SITE AREAS FOR DWELLINGS (PERMITTED OR CONTROLLED ACTIVITY), DEFINED ACCORDING TO ZONES OR MANAGEMENT AREAS

Most district plans define minimum areas for the subdivision of allotments as controlled activities and often the same, or similar, minimum site areas for the erection of dwellings as permitted or controlled activities. In rural zones, the minimum areas chosen can range between 1 hectare and 150 hectares, although in a few plans the minimum area specified is as low as 2000 square metres.

The minimum areas are usually based on a range of environmental outcomes sought for different zones in the district. The most common of these are:

- level of spaciousness or open rural character anticipated in the zone
- avoidance of a level of development that could adversely affect the values of outstanding landscapes and natural features
- retention of a rural outlook from each dwelling, or from public roads
- level of privacy (aural and visual) anticipated between dwellings
- avoidance of reverse sensitivity impacts between dwellings and farming or other rural activities on adjoining properties
- ability to dispose of sewage effluent without contaminating groundwater
- capacity of roads to carry associated traffic
- retention of the ability for primary production-based activities to continue in rural areas
- enabling land to be available for a range of purposes.

Only some of these outcomes refer to landscape values, but in many district plans the landscape concerns are principal reasons for choosing the particular minimum area.

Advantages

- There is certainty regarding the level of subdivision and development that can, or is likely to, take place in any area so that investment and lifestyle decisions can be made with some security.
- Enforcement and administration of subdivision provisions are relatively straightforward.
- The overall density of dwellings in any area will be precisely achieved, whether this is at one dwelling per 4 hectares or per 20 hectares. Where the topography is flat or uncomplicated, spreading dwellings and associated development out at an even density across the countryside may be all that is required to ensure the level of spaciousness or rural character desired.
- Specifying a small minimum area provides landowners with the flexibility to subdivide whatever size of allotment suits their particular needs or the environment. Where there is no great pressure for subdivision of small allotments, this flexibility can allow the creation of a range of allotments without unnecessary or arbitrary size restrictions.

Disadvantages

- Allotment sizes chosen are often arbitrary and not based on any clear research into the effects of subdivision on the environmental values being sought by the community. This is particularly so where the minimum allotment areas are supposedly based on values of openness and rural character.
- The minimum area approach does not take into account variability in topography and existing development, or the abilities of different areas to accommodate development without adversely affecting environmental values. Development within the new allotments, such as earthworks and buildings, can still be located in positions which result in adverse effects on landscape values, although conditions on consent can assist in mitigating these effects.
- A specific minimum area is inflexible and can be unnecessarily restrictive, preventing the subdivision of allotments with a range of different areas, as suited to the particular circumstances and topography of any site.
- ‘Wall-to-wall’ subdivision of allotments of the same minimum area can result in cumulative effects that were not previously anticipated, particularly if the minimum area is small (such as 1 to 4 hectares). Cumulative loss of openness, rural character and outlook can result from blanket subdivision to the minimum area across large parts of the countryside, which would not be apparent from the occasional allotment subdivided to the same area.
- Unless there are associated controls over the location of dwellings on the allotments, the spacing of allotments does not ensure that the dwellings will be located well apart. Typically, set-back requirements of only 10-30 metres from internal boundaries are required for dwellings, even where large minimum allotment areas of 20 hectares or more are required. Dwellings can still be located in positions which adversely affect each other’s rural outlook or privacy, irrespective of the size of the allotments. This can be avoided where building platforms are identified at the time of subdivision.

TECHNIQUE 3

MINIMUM AVERAGE ALLOTMENT AREAS FOR SUBDIVISION (CONTROLLED ACTIVITY)

Some district plans include a requirement for a minimum average allotment area over any subdivision application, either in addition to or instead of a minimum allotment area standard. The average requirement may be applied to all subdivision applications, or only to those involving more than a specified number of allotments (such as three or more).

For example, a plan may include a requirement that any subdivision cannot have any allotments smaller than 2 hectares in area, but the average area of all the allotments in the subdivision cannot be less than 4 hectares. Alternatively, a plan may not include any minimum allotment area standard and rely solely on a minimum average allotment area standard over the whole subdivision.

Advantages

- Where a minimum average allotment area standard is imposed which is greater than and in addition to a requirement for a minimum allotment area, a larger variety in allotment sizes can be encouraged. Some allotments can be allowed down to the minimum area so long as the overall density of subdivision exceeds the minimum average allotment area.
- Having a minimum average instead of a set minimum area gives greater flexibility to the subdividing applicant. A wide range of allotment sizes can be developed, as suited to the particular circumstances and topography of any site, while ensuring that the density of allotments in the overall area remains at the level sought for that environment.

Disadvantages

- This provision does not assure either a range of allotment areas or the integration of the subdivision pattern within the landscape, because subdivision of all allotments at the average area can still occur. Some plans include complex formulas which endeavour to require that proportions of the allotments are above and/or below the average allotment area. However, these types of formula have their own problems of inflexibility and arbitrariness: for example, they can force outcomes in terms of the range of allotment areas within any one subdivision which are less suited to the landscape than a subdivision of allotments all to the minimum or average areas.
- Averaging provisions can only be applied to the particular subdivision being considered at the time. Difficulties can arise in ensuring that the larger allotments, which are required to achieve the average allotment area, are not further subdivided at a later date. Some plans include provisions indicating that covenants or consent notices will be placed on titles to the allotments preventing any further subdivision. This can create difficulties for title owners in the future, when the plan's subdivision provisions are changed and yet the title is still encumbered. Other plans include complex provisions requiring the averaging provisions to continue to be applied over titles that existed at the time the plan was proposed, or at the time of the first subdivision, but this can be difficult to administer and inflexible in its application.
- Application of averaging provisions, in addition to a minimum area, when a subdivision only has two lots can prevent a reasonable subdivision of a property. However, application only at three lots or greater can encourage cumulative two-lot subdivisions to the minimum area standard, thus preventing any of the advantages of the use of an average area being achieved.

TECHNIQUE 4

ALLOTMENT DIMENSIONS, SHAPE REQUIREMENTS, MINIMUM FRONTAGES, AND MINIMUM DISTANCES BETWEEN ENTRANCES

All these types of requirements are used as alternatives to minimum allotment areas in an attempt to space allotments out across the countryside or along roads. The minimum frontage or distances between entrances may be required for traffic safety reasons, but in some plans they are also used as a method of retaining open space between allotments.

The Proposed Waimakariri District Plan, for example, requires each allotment in the rural areas to contain an internal square with the dimensions of 200 metres by 200 metres. Depending on the shape of the existing titles and the existing topography, this can result in allotments varying between 4 hectares and 6 hectares. A minimum road frontage of 200 metres is also generally required. Lower Hutt District Plan includes a requirement for a 150-metre road frontage for rural allotments. The Proposed Whangarei District Plan has a requirement for a 75-metre frontage for lots in its general countryside environment, and 100 metres in outstanding or notable landscape areas.

Advantages

- Allotment dimensions and shape requirements can assist in ensuring that allotments are of such a shape that the subsequent development can be well spaced from development on adjoining allotments. Irregular or awkward shapes can be avoided, and a sense of spaciousness can be achieved between allotments. This particularly applies on flat land, where it is simple to obtain regular allotment dimensions.
- Minimum frontage requirements or spacing between entrances can assist in ensuring that the perception of rural development from roads is as spacious as possible. The view of driveways, gates and letterboxes and the perception of development is usually obtained from public roads, and these types of controls address these effects directly.

Disadvantages

- Although an alternative to the arbitrary minimum allotment area standards, these types of standard are also arbitrary and have no better relationship to the variability of the landscape. Where topography is complex and varied, allotment dimension or shape requirements can be more inflexible and difficult to apply than a minimum area requirement. While endeavouring to obtain spacing and privacy between developments on adjoining lots, these requirements take no account of existing natural features such as shelter plantings, roads or gullies, which may define subdivision boundaries or provide natural separation and screening between allotments.

- The use of standards relating to road frontages and entrances would need to be based on sound evidence that the perception of a property from its road frontage is an important landscape value for road users. When running through varied topography, the changing alignment of a road may provide a sufficient sense of separation between property entrances without inflexible and arbitrary separation standards.
- A frontage requirement has no influence over where a person will build their dwelling on the allotment or construct their driveway, and these are often the most obvious visual effects of a new allotment.
- Requirements for lengthy road frontages for allotments can result in allotments being strung-out along roads, whereas concentrating allotments in an area may well reduce the potential for adverse effects on landscape values.

TECHNIQUE 5

CONTROLS OVER BUILDINGS RATHER THAN ALLOTMENTS

Plans have traditionally included a range of controls over buildings in rural areas, such as set-back from allotment boundaries (internal and road boundaries) and separation distances between dwellings. These standards are used for different reasons, some of which relate to landscape values such as the retention of spaciousness, rural outlooks and privacy. Set-back distances from boundaries typically range from 6 to 100 metres, and separation distances between dwellings typically range from 100 to 500 metres.

Advantages

- There is certainty regarding the location of dwellings and other buildings on any property, both for the people seeking to erect the building and for adjoining landowners.
- Enforcement and administration of building requirements are relatively straightforward.
- Where the landscape issue is the effect of buildings on visual amenity values as viewed from roads, a definite separation distance from roads can ensure that buildings do not dominate the outlook from adjoining roads.

Disadvantages

- As with all specific standards, these set-back or separation distance standards are often imposed with little research or sound understanding of their effects, or whether or not they will achieve the environmental results sought.
- Often the effectiveness of separation distances is overestimated. For example, a 20-metre set-back for dwellings from boundaries is at the upper end of standards applied in most district plans. Yet it is unlikely that two dwellings 40 metres apart each side of a common boundary will achieve the level of privacy and separation that residents are anticipating in a rural area. Similarly, a 20-metre set-back from the road frontage may not seem particularly well set back in a flat rural context and may not achieve the sense of openness and spaciousness from rural roads that is sought by a particular community.

- All such standards suffer from the perceptions of arbitrariness and inflexibility that has been discussed for other numerical standards. They do not take into account the varied nature of the landscape: dwellings can seem well separated, even when in relatively close proximity, if they are located and oriented carefully making full use of the local topography. Alternatively, dwellings that are located well apart can still look straight at each other, or overlook one another, if the sites and the orientation of the buildings are not chosen carefully.
- A separation distance between dwellings has been tried in many districts over many years. It has often failed because of the inherent unfairness of the first-in first-served nature of the rule. One dwelling may be located close to a neighbour's boundary in a location that fully overlooks the adjoining property, and is not subject to any controls if there is no house located on the adjoining property. The proximity and location of the first dwelling can then severely constrain the choice of sites for locating the subsequent house on the second property and can make the desirable house sites on that property unusable.

TECHNIQUE 6

RIDGELINE AND VIEW-SHAFT PROTECTION

Several district plans (Waikato, Manukau, Waitakere and Tasman) have identified particular ridges which are considered by the community to have special landscape values, and which may be adversely affected by earthworks, utilities, vegetation clearance, or buildings immediately along or close to the line of the ridge. Similarly, a few plans (Tasman and Western Bay of Plenty) have identified view shafts from important or popular public viewing points, which could be blocked or detracted from by tree planting or buildings in close proximity to the viewing point. These types of rules are very specific in their application and are in contrast to plan provisions that include more general references to avoiding building on ridgelines, such as the Whangarei, Kapiti Coast and Hurunui plans.

Advantages

- The adverse effects of activities such as earthworks, utilities, vegetation clearance or buildings immediately along or close to the line of a ridge that has been assessed by the community as having special landscape values can be avoided, remedied or mitigated.
- Similarly, blocking or detracting of view shafts from important or popular public viewing points by tree planting or buildings in close proximity to the viewing point can be avoided or mitigated.

Disadvantages

- The main concern with applying ridgeline and view-shaft rules is that they need to be very clear about how the location of any activity is measured in relation to the ridgeline or viewing point. The standards need to specify where any measurements are taken from, whether in distance or in height. Measurements from a ridgeline must be specified as being vertical or horizontal. This can potentially result in arbitrary lines that bear little relationship to the character of the landform, and may be expressed in the actual landscape as a noticeable demarcation between land uses.
- If there is a requirement to ensure that no building is able to be seen against the sky when viewed from a road, for example, the method of assessment needs to be very clear. Waitakere City has a method of putting poles at the height of any proposed building near a valued ridgeline or skyline and driving around the local roads to check if the building will be able to be viewed against the sky. However, sometimes unexpected views can be obtained from further away, or from roads not considered relevant at the time of assessment.
- Ridgeline and view-shaft standards can also be crude or limited in the landscape issues they address. For example, some standards only limit the height of a building located on an identified ridgeline or within a view shaft, when the bulk, design and colour of the building may have just as great an influence on its visual impact. More comprehensive assessments may be needed so that the standards imposed can more effectively address the landscape impacts of buildings in these areas.
- Where general ridgeline avoidance rules have been used without identifying specific ridgelines on the planning maps, most councils have found the rules vague and difficult to interpret. There is a problem of definition: what constitutes a ridgeline? Does it include side spurs? These rules also act as catch-alls that are not necessarily responsive to the specific character, significance or ability of particular ridges to absorb change. Several councils are now looking to replace the general rules with specific identification on the planning maps of those ridgelines over which any rules will apply. This gives far greater certainty to potential applicants, but there is still the problem of deciding where to draw the line around the identified ridgelines. This has to be based on thorough landscape assessment, but will inevitably be subject to debate by landowners who wish to avoid additional restrictions on their land.
- These rules are very specific in the landscape effects being addressed and need to be based on a good understanding of precisely what effects the standards are seeking to avoid or mitigate, otherwise council staff won't be able to give clear advice to applicants or be consistent in justifying any controls imposed.

- Assessment provisions for rural subdivision and associated development frequently include general statements about avoiding development on ridgelines, skylines and hill tops. Again, these are often not backed up with any landscape assessment to show that this form of development is any more detrimental to landscape values than development on hill slopes, in gullies, or in flat paddocks. Although the effect of locating development on ridgelines, say, may well be a matter to consider at the time of subdivision, such development should not be arbitrarily precluded without adequate assessment. Ridgelines may be able to accommodate development in a way that avoids adverse effects on landscape values through good siting and design.

TECHNIQUE 7

RATIONING METHODS

While some plans are moving away from such techniques, several district councils still find that rationing methods are a fair and workable way of ensuring a low density of residential development throughout the countryside. The subdivision of additional allotments can be rationed over both time and space.

The Transitional Whangarei District Plan includes a rationing method over time. One new allotment is allowed to be subdivided from a balance allotment every two years, provided that the balance area remains at least 4 hectares.

Franklin, Manukau, Timaru, New Plymouth, Waikato and Western Bay of Plenty plans are typical examples of the use of a rationing technique over space. In these rules, formulas are used to enable one or more small rural lots to be subdivided from a balance title, depending on how large the balance title is. For example, in Western Bay of Plenty one allotment for a house site (no minimum area) may be subdivided from any existing title of up to 30 hectares in area (as at a specified date), and two allotments may be subdivided from titles of greater than 30 hectares. Much more complicated formulas have been used in other plans.

Advantages

- These types of rules are seen as being fair between landowners, in that every property owner at a specified date has the ability to subdivide at least one house site from their existing title.
- Because the number and location of new dwelling sites is rationed across the existing ownership pattern, the effects of the new allotments (and their associated development) are spread across the countryside. The number of existing properties acts as a limitation on the number of additional small allotments that can be subdivided in any one area.

Disadvantages

- There is no relationship between the location of the additional allotments and the ability of the landscape to absorb development without adverse effects on landscape values. In areas where there are already numerous existing allotments, there is likely to be greater ability to create more allotments, with the potential for cumulative adverse effects on the rural character, outlook and spaciousness of the area and the privacy of existing dwellings.

- There may be no control over the location and layout of the new allotments. New allotments and their associated development are likely to be located in the position most suited to the owner of the balance allotment, rather than in terms of avoiding adverse effects on the landscape of the general area and the neighbours.
- In areas where the landscape can accommodate greater levels of development without adverse effects on landscape values, these techniques can be inflexible and arbitrarily restrict more development.
- As the rationing techniques are entirely unrelated to landscape effects, plans usually lack any guidance on how to consider applications to go beyond the standard, or how to consider conditions on controlled activity applications.

TECHNIQUE 8

IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIAL AREAS

Many plans identify parts of their rural areas where the community has made a judgement that:

- development to more intensive levels can be absorbed readily without adverse effects on the environment, including adverse effects on landscape and visual amenity values (these are variously known as ‘country-side living areas’, ‘rural-lifestyle zones’, ‘intensive farming zones’, ‘rural-residential areas’, etc.); or
- development needs to be carried out in an especially sensitive way because of the vulnerability of the landscape values of the area to detract from the impacts of development (these are variously known as ‘outstanding natural features or landscapes’ (section 6(b)), ‘significant landscapes’, ‘scenic protection areas’, ‘coastal protection areas’, etc.).

Advantages

- Identification of these different types of areas is an important technique in guiding development into suitable areas and away from areas where the adverse effects from development can be more severe or obvious. The subdivision rules can then be targeted at enabling small allotments to get consent readily in the appropriate areas, and applying more stringent rules in the sensitive areas.

Disadvantages

- Whatever rules and standards are applied, the areas must be identified through a rigorous landscape assessment process carried out for this express purpose (see earlier section on landscape assessment). Any assessment provisions or criteria included in plans for guidance when considering subdivision and development in the more sensitive areas should be specifically linked to the reasons for the identification of the area (for example, Waikato District Plan’s Coastal Policy Area).

TECHNIQUE 9

STRUCTURE PLANS

Structure plans can be included in district plans to define the allotment pattern and overall layout of roads, open-space and protection areas for any future development of specific areas. Structure plans are usually developed for areas that are likely to be under pressure for development in the immediate future. The council may be trying to influence the way that development occurs to avoid adverse effects on the environment and ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development.

The development of a structure plan requires a detailed understanding of the area's environment and its values, the land ownership pattern, and a vision of the way the area should be developed. A detailed landscape assessment of the area and an understanding of the effects of subdivision and development patterns on its landscape values would need to be part of developing the process. Community input and involvement is important for a successful outcome.

Rodney District has prepared several structure plans associated with the growth of its urban areas. Waitakere City has included a structure plan for the Oratia Valley in its proposed plan. Privately requested plan change procedures can also be anticipated in a plan, whereby landowners are encouraged to come forward with new structure plan proposals for their land.

Advantages

- The process and the results can be easily understood through the preparation of a detailed development plan.
- Where there has been community input, there can be considerable community buy-in to the concept.
- The use of structure plans enables co-ordinated consideration of an area, with an integrated vision being put forward for its development.
- They can be an effective and efficient means of achieving specific development outcomes for an area, including avoiding adverse effects on landscape values and requiring landscape enhancement measures.
- Structure plans provide certainty for landowners and the wider community as to what is likely to happen on any particular piece of land.

Disadvantages

- Unless the structure plan is included in the district plan, it will have no legal status, and therefore the outcomes are not assured.
- A structure plan is inherently inflexible. Any variation from its layout or provisions requires either a specific resource consent approval or a change to the plan.

- Some councils are concerned that development rights identified in structure plans (such as the subdivision potential) will not necessarily be spread evenly between landowners. Where land parcels are more sensitive to development impacts, whether in terms of effects on landscape values or for other reasons, those areas may be identified as having less potential for subdivision or may carry requirements for protection of substantial areas of bush, riparian margins, etc. However, this is an inevitable result of basing the structure plan on the variable characteristics of the landscape.
- The flexibility of a structure plan may be improved if it omits to show required allotment boundaries. Adequate direction for the development of an area should be able to be given through the definition of the road layout, open space, and protection areas, and possibly areas where dwellings should not be located, while still giving the opportunity for imaginative subdivision design by the subdividing landowner.

TECHNIQUE 10

CLUSTERING TECHNIQUES

Subdivision rules to encourage clustering of residential allotments within a countryside environment are being developed in a few plans. Kapiti Coast Operative District Plan provides for clustering as a discretionary activity for up to 12 ‘rural hamlet’ lots as clusters within a larger balance property. The Proposed Whangarei District Plan enables ‘close subdivision’ in clusters of at least five residential allotments as a controlled activity within its countryside environments. Each plan includes lists of specific standards to define the cluster, the proximity of the residential allotments, the nature of the enclosing larger allotment, and distances from other clusters or other development.

Advantages

- This is an innovative new technique, which will mature with further adaptation and development.
- Clustering residential allotments within the rural environment means that large rural open-space areas are retained while still accommodating residential activities. The blanket character of general rural subdivision can thus be avoided, and subdivision can yield income for investment in farming activities on the remainder of the land.
- Hamlets are a recognised feature of many rural landscapes and are therefore an option for meeting the demand for rural lifestyle subdivisions, provided a rural character is maintained.

Disadvantages

- Clustering of residential allotments will not always be the most suitable pattern of subdivision in terms of the ability of the landscape to absorb development without adverse effects. Specific placement of allotment boundaries and dwelling sites throughout an underlying property may avoid or mitigate adverse effects on landscape values more effectively.
- In some situations clustering may compromise the rural qualities of separation and privacy that rural residents frequently seek.
- The rules developed to date have included complex sets of standards to prescribe the clustering of the residential allotments. These standards may need to evolve with experience in their application to ensure that they do not place unnecessary impediments in the way of achieving the desired results.
- Adequate mechanisms need to be put in place to enable the long-term management of the balance of undeveloped allotment and to prevent its further subdivision in the future (Rodney and Kapiti Coast district plans).

TECHNIQUE 11

RESIDENTIAL FARM (OR FOREST) PARK DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS

Waikato District Plan includes a typical example of provisions enabling the development of residential allotments as a 'farm park' development within the rural area. Residential allotments and their dwellings are each individually located to ensure the least impact on landscape character. In the Waikato situation, 'residential farm park' areas are to be identified on the planning maps, with a structure plan included within the plan rules outlining the development pattern for the area. The plan includes assessment criteria, which are used for considering plan changes introducing new residential farm park areas, and in considering controlled activity consents for subsequent dwellings, access, landscape protection, etc.

Although the Waikato example uses a plan change / structure plan technique, similar provisions could be included in plans to enable the consideration of specifically designed farm or forest park developments by way of resource consent approval. Specific assessment criteria and possibly some fundamental standards would be important in clearly guiding any proposal and the council's decision on the resource consent.

Advantages

- These are innovative new techniques, which will mature with further adaptation and development.
- Specifically designed farm or forest park developments can achieve comprehensive land diversification and management while managing any adverse effects from subdivision and development.

Disadvantages

- Plan change procedures can appear unduly onerous and time-consuming to potential subdividing landowners, especially when the outcome of any plan change request is uncertain.
- Clear guidance would be needed in the plan, to both applicants and the council, on the environmental outcomes sought through these procedures, to provide certainty to landowners and neighbours as to how any application is going to be considered.
- The rules and standards for these types of applications may need to evolve with experience to ensure that they do not place unnecessary impediments in the way of achieving the desired results.
- Adequate mechanisms need to be put in place to enable the long-term management of any balance farm or forest areas, and to prevent their further subdivision in the future (Waikato District Plan).

TECHNIQUE 12

NATURAL FEATURE PROTECTION LOTS

Several plans include provisions enabling the subdivision of residential allotments in rural areas where the long-term legal protection of a natural feature - such as an area of bush or wetland is being achieved at the same time. Typical examples are found in the plans for Rodney, Western Bay of Plenty, Tauranga, Franklin, Manukau and Banks Peninsula districts.

Most plans require the residential allotment to be subdivided from the same property as that containing the natural feature. A few plans, such as those for Rodney and Western Bay of Plenty, enable the transfer of the subdivision right to another location (see discussion below). Western Bay of Plenty and Franklin plans allow the subdivision of more than one residential lot depending on the size of the natural feature to be protected.

Advantages

- Natural feature protection lots provide an effective incentive for legal, long-term protection of natural features throughout the landscape.
- Landowners receive some financial gain from having a natural feature on their property.
- Opportunities are made available for people to live in rural areas, but dispersed according to the location of the natural features.
- The techniques have been used for some time and are well accepted and understood in the areas where they have been applied.

- This provision enables active management and enhancement of the natural feature to be implemented. Conditions can include fencing and long-term management measures. Some councils have expressed concerns about whether the natural feature should be included in the title of the balance rural property or the new residential allotment. Most plans are flexible in this regard, allowing the natural feature to be incorporated into the title that would best facilitate its long-term management and enhancement. The topography and hydrology of the area needs to be taken into account to ensure that the integrity of the natural feature and its surrounding catchment, for example, remain intact.

Disadvantages

- Residential allotments can become located in an ad hoc manner across the countryside, based on the location of the natural features rather than on the most suitable location in terms of avoiding or mitigating adverse effects on more general landscape values.
- If rules are not carefully prescribed and appropriate assessment required, very small areas of low-quality bush can be used as the basis for obtaining additional residential development rights, without there being much advantage in terms of the protection of the natural feature. To avoid this, several of the above mentioned plans (Western Bay of Plenty and Franklin) include specific standards and/or criteria for the assessment of the natural feature, to determine if it is worthy of long-term protection. A requirement for specialist assessment of the condition of the bush remnant or wetland and any enhancement requirements, prior to any subdivision application being approved, is standard procedure in some districts (Western Bay of Plenty and Franklin).
- New owners of residential allotments containing nature features may have little experience of, and be unaware of, the active management that is needed to ensure long-term protection of the feature itself. Weed and pest control, for example, can be costly and time-consuming and may need to be undertaken vigilantly on a continuing basis. These types of activities may be beyond the resources, abilities or expectations of the new owners.

TECHNIQUE 13

TRANSFERABLE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

A few district plans, such as those for Rodney and Western Bay of Plenty districts, enable the transfer of subdivision rights from one location to another. This usually applies where protection of natural features is being achieved. The right to subdivide and erect an associated house is transferred from the property containing the natural feature to another location, provided that long-term legal protection is given to the natural feature. Appropriate recipient areas may or may not be specifically identified in the plans. Incentives to transfer the subdivision right, such as the right to subdivide two residential lots in the recipient area for the protection of one area of bush, are also being tried.

Transferable development right approaches are also starting to be used in a wider range of situations beyond the protection of natural features. Rodney District's Plan Change 55 enables the transfer of titles into its countryside living town zones, in exchange for forfeiting the right to develop existing 'loose' titles in the general rural areas. This enables existing reasonable expectations of development to be realised by landowners, but directed into locations where the effects on landscape values can be more readily avoided or mitigated.

There are other possibilities for widening the use of transferable subdivision and development rights, including enabling the transfer of current rights to subdivide from areas where it is considered that the adverse effects of subdivision and development cannot be avoided, remedied or mitigated, into a wider range of recipient areas.

Advantages

- The following advantages are in addition to those listed above relating to the protection of natural features.
- Residential development can be directed to locations where the environmental effects are not as significant or can be managed more effectively.
- Transferring subdivision rights from the site of the natural feature (the donor area) to another area (the recipient area) allows landowners to gain an advantage through having a natural feature on their property, and ensures the protection of the natural feature while the development occurs in a more suitable area.

Disadvantages

- Recipient areas, or criteria for recipient areas, for any transferred allotments must be carefully chosen. The nature of the development permitted within these areas must be carefully managed to ensure that any adverse effects on landscape values are not simply being transferred from one location to another. In some districts this is achieved by only permitting transfer of subdivision rights to already zoned and identified areas. In other cases, a resource consent process addresses the suitability of both the donor site and the recipient area.
- It can be argued that if development in the recipient area is appropriate following the transfer of subdivision rights from another location, why is it not appropriate without relying on such a transfer?
- There needs to be demand for residential allotments within the recipient area for there to be any incentive to transfer the subdivision right there from the donor site.
- Where the owners of donor sites do not own land in the recipient area, there can be delays and costs involved in achieving suitable arrangements between separate landowners.
- Adequate mechanisms need to be put in place to prevent the further subdivision of the donor site in the future.
- These techniques are still new and evolving and will need to be used more widely before the implications are fully understood.

NON-STATUTORY TECHNIQUES

The above methods are statutory, or regulatory, techniques that are being used in district plans to address the impacts of rural subdivision and associated development on general landscape values. In addition, many councils are developing a range of non-statutory techniques to achieve the same results.

TECHNIQUE 14

PROVISION OF INFORMATION

Many councils are developing landscape guidelines or design guidelines to provide information about the landscape, create an awareness of its qualities and values, and provide advice and guidance about how landscape can be protected and enhanced. This information can be made available to the community in a variety of formats, such as:

- brief, easily readable brochures
- more detailed booklets
- videos and audio-visual presentations
- web sites
- databases and libraries of relevant literature.

Guidelines can be developed and made available entirely outside the statutory plan process. Alternatively, they can be integrated with a district plan through the incorporation of policies and assessment criteria in the plan which relate closely to the information contained in the guidelines.

Councils can facilitate the understanding and use of this information through making qualified and experienced staff available to assist property owners in achieving the results identified. This can be very successful where the advisers have the expertise and people skills to develop the trust of, and a rapport with, property owners, and to encourage close liaison at an early stage in the subdivision project. However, to be successful, councils would need to budget for the cost of this service on an on-going basis over a substantial period.

Along similar lines, councils could work with particular property owners, or use their own land, to develop on-the-ground examples of subdivisions which protect and enhance the landscape qualities identified in the guidelines as being important for the district.

TECHNIQUE 15

EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

This is closely linked to the provision of information. Information can be disseminated, ideas stimulated and a positive approach to landscape enhancement fostered in a variety of ways, in addition to those discussed above.

- *Field days and discussion groups* can provide on-the-ground experience, where good working examples can be seen and discussed with people who have the background expertise.
- *Workshops*, like field days, bring people together but have a less hands-on focus. A greater level of discussion and exchange of ideas can often be achieved than is possible in the field.
- *Seminars and lectures*, although often regarded as too remote, can be effective at reaching groups that do not have the time or specific interest to attend more practical workshops or field days.
- *Effective publicity* can convey simple messages about the issues and the availability of further information.
- *Identified people* can be employed to work with landowners and subdividers to develop relationships, convey information and ideas, and take responsibility for landscape enhancement advocacy.

TECHNIQUE 16

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

As has been discussed throughout this document, close community involvement in assessing the landscape's significant qualities and values is important before the council puts forward any statutory provisions or non-statutory initiatives. Community involvement can occur at numerous stages and levels, including:

- district plan development consultation
- landscape guidelines development
- resource consent application consultation and processes
- community development of structure plans for specific areas, whether these are formally included in the district plan or used informally by general agreement between landowners
- charettes or other consultative techniques to address wider issues for the longer-term development of an area.

TECHNIQUE 17

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial incentives to encourage landscape enhancement and good practice subdivision can be effective, and the incentives do not need to be significant to get results. Often the fact that some form of incentive is being made available is sufficient to gain support. Such incentives can include assistance with:

- fencing costs, such as for setting aside natural features or riparian margins
- weed and pest management costs
- covenanting costs
- rating relief for covenanted land
- planting costs or provision of plant stock
- resource consent fees waivers
- land purchase for areas of particular significance to the community.

There can be significant public relations value in promoting incentives as a means of encouraging good practice. Landowners are likely to be more receptive to following good practice ideas if they are receiving something in return, rather than being expected to meet any additional costs alone. However, both the type and level of incentives need to be considered carefully. If incentives are seen as mean or poorly targeted then there is likely to be low uptake or outright rejection.



5. CONCLUSION

There is pressure for rural subdivision in many parts of New Zealand. The diversity of landscapes and different subdivision types makes simple recipe approaches difficult. It is important to understand the process of landscape change, and the community's reaction to it, before deciding the most appropriate management approach. Preservation of the status quo in rural environments is often not an option. However, the process of subdivision can be used creatively to encourage change in a way that provides environmental benefits while enabling positive economic outcomes. To achieve this, the focus should be on managing the effects of change.

There are a range of landscape assessment methods and planning approaches that can be used in district plans to assist local authorities and communities in managing change in their rural landscapes to avoid or mitigate adverse effects on landscape values. Each of these planning techniques has advantages and disadvantages associated with its implementation and use. It is up to each community, with the assistance of its council and their advisors, to determine the best approach in line with the outcomes desired for their landscapes.

Glossary

Landscape

The landscapes we see are the visible expression of the physical, biological and cultural processes occurring in a particular place. The paper focuses on the visual effects that subdivision and associated development has on rural landscapes. This does not mean that ‘landscape’ is purely a matter of aesthetics: there is a very close relationship between good visual landscape and good land management. A healthy environment (in terms of ecology, soil conservation, hydrological function etc.) is very often also a highly regarded landscape.

In addition to what we see, our experience of landscape is also influenced by factors like smell and noise. These non-visual stimuli are not covered in this paper.

Landscape character

Landscape character refers to the combination of traits that distinguish any particular area of land. It is determined by the inter-relationship of three components:

- landform - which reflects the geology, topography and attendant natural processes such as erosion, hydrology and weathering
- land cover - which includes vegetation and water bodies, and reflects the biological processes such as plant succession and soil formation
- land use - which reflects cultural and social processes such as farming, tourism and transport needs, and can also include spiritual and historical associations that give added meaning to places.

Natural character

Under the RMA, ‘natural character’ is a phrase specific to section 6(a), which has not been defined in the legislation but has been interpreted in case law over the years⁹. Although s.6(a) applies specifically to the coastal, lake and river environment, the term is also used and accepted in terms of landscapes generally.

Natural character differs from rural character. Natural character is the expression of natural processes, and covers the full range from pristine natural landscapes to highly modified landscapes that still contain some natural features and processes. The preservation of natural character requires the maintenance of natural processes and systems as well as the visual attributes of ‘naturalness.’ For a landscape to have a high degree of natural character, natural elements and patterns must predominate. Key elements of natural character in rural areas often include waterways, lakes, wetlands, landforms (plains, hills, valleys, mountains) and vegetation.

⁹ Environment Waikato plans to publish a report about the interpretation of natural character in terms of s.6(a), entitled *Natural Character, Concept Development in New Zealand Planning Law and Policy*.

Rural amenity

The sorts of things that are commonly understood as rural amenity values include:

- a sense of spaciousness (wide open spaces)
- privacy, quietness and absence of traffic and bustle
- an environment relatively uncluttered by structures and artificial features
- a clean environment, characterised by fresh air, clean water, etc.

Rural character

Rural landscapes are, by their nature, strongly influenced by the type of rural activity and the intensity of associated settlement. Natural elements generally remain strongly evident but are overlaid by patterns and processes of human activity. Natural systems, such as hydrological patterns, still operate but, in places, are manipulated to enhance productivity. Human-induced patterns and processes are related predominantly to productive land uses such as agriculture, horticulture and forestry, typically including paddocks, shelter belts, wood lot and forest blocks, cropping regimes and settlement. The patterns of human activity are generally large scale (by comparison with urban areas), reflected in generally low-density settlement, few structures and often a sense of spaciousness.

Rural landscapes are *inhabited landscapes* - not to be confused with 'wilderness' or 'natural' landscapes where human presence is minimally present or absent.

Visual quality

Visual quality means there is a harmonious relationship between landscape elements. There are a number of ways of assessing this, but in general the aim is to identify the combination of factors that make a landscape stand out as of special visual value¹⁰.

¹⁰ Most methods for assessing visual quality are based upon research into the kind of visual environments and/or elements that people respond to positively.



APPENDIX 1 CASE STUDY:
MARTINBOROUGH ESTATE

This is a rural residential development located on the edge of Martinborough township in the Wairarapa, immediately adjacent to the Martinborough golf course. The 35-hectare site, held in four separate titles, was zoned rural under the South Wairarapa District Plan, which requires that any rural subdivision into proposed allotments of less than 5 hectares be considered as a discretionary activity. In this instance, the 55 lot sizes are all less than 5 hectares, so a proposal that clearly demonstrated the benefits of such an approach had to be put forward.

Assessment of setting and site

The subdivision development was based on an assessment of the landscape setting and the site.

South Wairarapa is a rural plains landscape which has been diversified by viticulture in recent years. The site, although located on the edge of Martinborough township, has an expansive rural outlook across adjacent farmland and the golf course. The site was gently undulating and bisected by a farm drain. Mature oak, eucalyptus and macrocarpa shelterbelts and amenity plantings growing on the golf course boundary with Martinborough Estate provided significant existing vegetation.

The site assessment included consideration of soils, drainage, important views in and out of the site, and the subtle but nevertheless significant ground form of swales and high points. These factors were a major determination on the design and layout of the subdivision and the siting of buildings, roads and other elements.

It was concluded that, taking into consideration the rural/urban interface of the setting and the demand for rural lifestyle property in the area, a vision of houses in a strong treed framework with extensive areas of open land was appropriate to the landscape setting (Figures 31-33). Some of the key components of the subdivision proposal are outlined below.

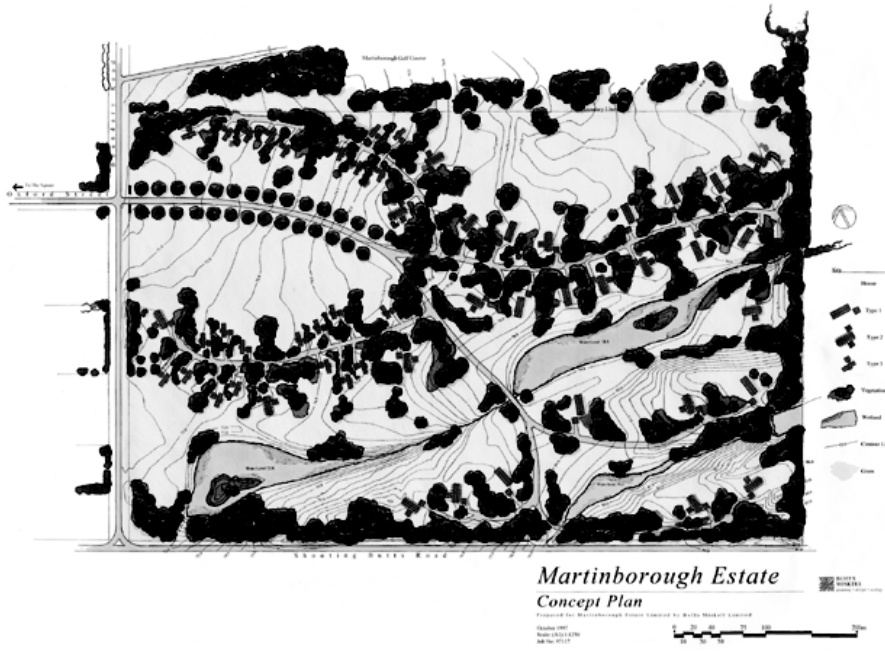


Figure 31: Martinborough Estate concept plan.



Figure 32: Martinborough Estate aerial oblique sketch of proposed subdivision.

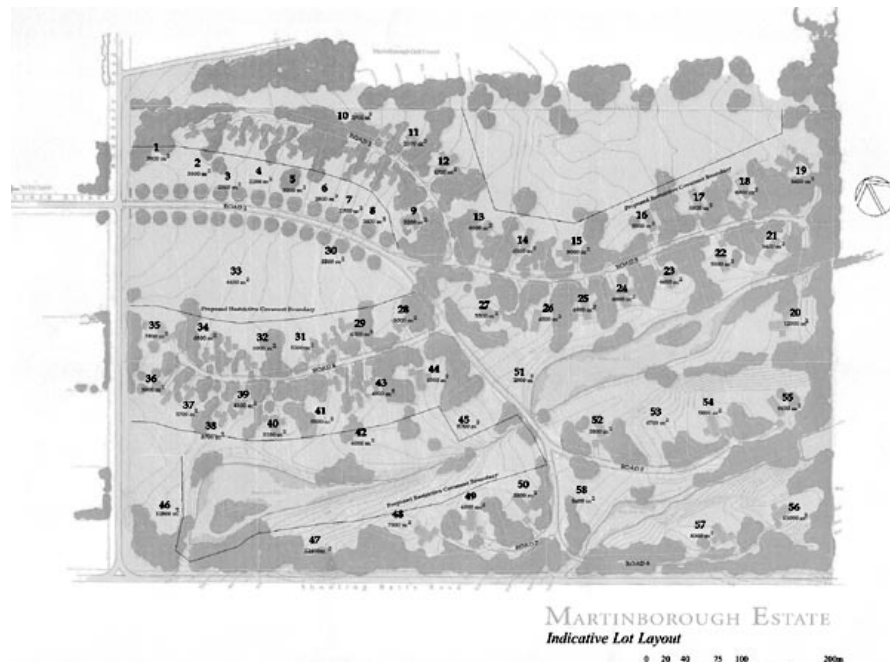


Figure 33: Martinborough Estate lot layout.

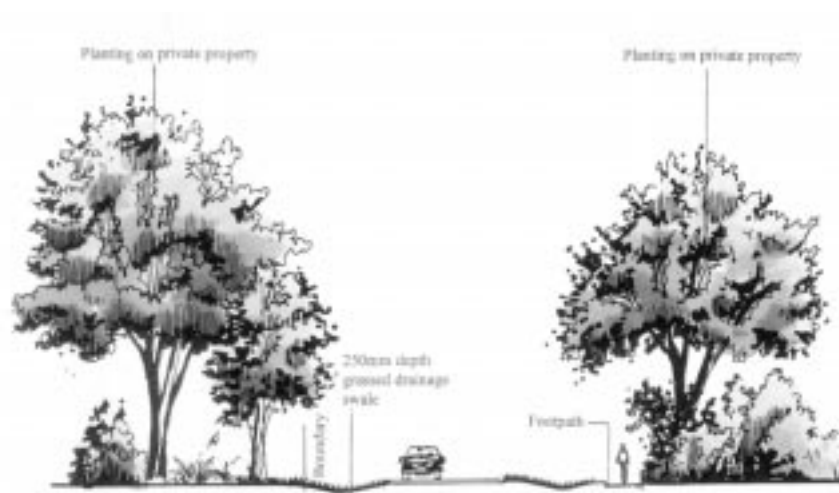


Figure 34: Martinborough Estate typical road design.

Landscape character

Retaining the rural landscape character was a fundamental concept. This was to be achieved by:

- utilising the existing landform in the design of roads and siting of buildings
- an extensive framework of tree planting, utilising the existing shelter belts and extending these with typical farm species such as pine and macrocarpa, as well as selected deciduous tree species also typical of the Wairarapa area
- creating two large water bodies
- retaining large areas of pastoral open space.

Lot sizes and layout

The size, shape and location of the lots, which vary from 2,800 to 11,000 square metres, were determined by considering the landform and important views, with the aim of ensuring that every house could be located with adequate privacy and a rural or open-space outlook. Every dwelling was specifically located within the lots with these objectives in mind. Other factors taken into account included minimising earthworks for foundations, assessing visibility from outside as well inside the site, and the potential screening function of framework planting.

Restrictive covenants

All the lots are privately owned, but within each lot are two zones, stipulated under restrictive covenants: house zones in the immediate area around the dwelling, and private open-space zones over the remainder of the lot. Within the house zones owners can undertake their own planting and landscape development (within certain guidelines). The open-space zones, which contain the structure planting for the site and areas of open grassland, are managed collectively with restrictions on activities.

Tree framework

The tree framework is designed to define the large open spaces, provide screening and privacy for dwellings, and give substantial buffer planting in selected parts of the site boundaries to visually contain the residential use from external view without obscuring views out over the wider rural landscape.

Earthworks

The subtle existing ground form of swales, knolls and high points was utilised in the location of houses to maximise privacy and variation in the individual character of lots, and in the layout of roads to minimise earthworks and site disturbance. The water bodies were based on the farm drain that crossed the site, and emphasise the existing drainage pattern.

Roads

Roads were designed to reflect the rural setting in a way appropriate to the parkland concept: sealed with a hard edge but with run-off draining into grass swales (Figure 34). Some of these drain into soak pits but, where landform permits they drain into the water bodies. A hierarchy of progressively smaller roads branch off the central access road, to reduce the impact of a standard road development.

Design guidelines

Architectural and landscape guidelines have been prepared for prospective purchasers. These explain the broad principles of the landscape design and more specific guidance on appropriate materials, including plants.

Consultation

From the outset, immediate neighbours, such as the golf club and potentially affected agencies, were consulted. This consultation process continued throughout the planning and design of the subdivision and resulted in the few issues that were raised being dealt with by way of conditions in the consent application. The subdivision was notified, but by the hearings date all submissions had been resolved through sound planning and thorough consultation.

Regular consultation and discussion with neighbours as well as the various consent authorities has continued through the implementation stage, which is now well under way.

Approval process

The subdivision was approved without undue delay or major modification. It appears that the site-specific design, based on thorough landscape assessment and early discussion with the consent authorities, aided both the preparation of the assessment of effects on the part of the applicant and the assessment of the proposal by the consent authorities.

Response

Development of Stage 1, comprising 12 lots, is now well advanced. These lots went on sale with the highest prices in the district for sections of this size and half have sold already. Many of the purchasers had been seeking a quality site, which they had not found previously. They were prepared to pay for a subdivision development that enhanced the rural environment and for a comprehensive approach that removed much of the worry and responsibility of developing a new site themselves.

About the Ministry for the Environment

Making a difference through environmental leadership

The Ministry for the Environment advises the Government on policies, laws, regulations, and other means of improving environmental management in New Zealand. The significant areas of policy for which the Ministry is responsible are: management of natural resources; sustainable land management; air and water quality; management of hazardous substances, waste and contaminated sites; protection of the ozone layer; and responding to the threat of climate change. Advice is also provided on the environmental implications of other Government policies.

The Ministry monitors the state of the New Zealand environment and the operation of environmental legislation so that it can advise the Government on action necessary to protect the environment or improve environmental management.

The Ministry carries out many of the statutory functions of the Minister for the Environment under the Resource Management Act 1991. It also monitors the work of the Environmental Risk Management Authority on behalf of the Minister.

Besides the Environment Act 1986 under which it was set up, the Ministry is responsible for administering the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act 1941, the Resource Management Act 1991, the Ozone Layer Protection Act 1996 and the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996.

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