



# Oxford Street Tree Removal

## Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment

Prepared for Horowhenua District Council  
Prepared by Beca Limited

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on behalf of	Beca Limited		

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# 1 Introduction

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This landscape and visual effects assessment has been prepared by Beca on behalf of Horowhenua District Council. The site is situated along Oxford Street, between Bath Street and Devon Street, in central Levin.

The Council wishes to remove twenty-seven (27) of the thirty – eight (38) *Platanus x acerfolia* (Plane trees) from the city's main street. The trees have Notable Tree status under the Horowhenua District Plan.

## 1.1 Scope

The preparation of this assessment included:

- A desktop review of Regional and District GIS mapped overlays and site characteristics, district policy considerations and assessment criteria.
- Review of relevant project proposal documentation and existing reporting, including the Assessment of Environmental Effects.
- An initial site walkover and appraisal of the site surroundings on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2022.
- Preliminary discussions with the project team on technical and operational constraints, opportunities, and risks in the context of intended planning and project outcomes.
- Site option and management discussions based on preliminary landscape and visual work.

This assessment has been prepared in response to an s92 request for further information. The scope of the report includes:

- An assessment of the Existing Environment – Landscape and visual character, road views
- Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects- Landscape and visual effects of the removal of the trees, landscape plan
- Consideration of Relevant Horowhenua District Planning Matters – Rules and objectives and policies
- Recommendations and Conclusions.

## 1.2 Methodology

The methodology for this assessment is based on the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA), Te Tangi a te Manu \_Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines 2021. This document is recognized within the landscape architectural profession as providing 'good practice guidance' in the assessment of landscape and visual effects under the Resource Management Act 1991.

This methodology uses a three – point landscape sensitivity scale and seven – point effects ranking scale, with both further described in **Appendix A**.

## 1.3 Statutory Context

In 1999 the Horowhenua District Council undertook a project to record and examine the Plane trees. Through this process they became recognised as 'notable trees' under Plan Change 7, becoming operative in 2000. Their notable tree status has continued to be recognised in subsequent District Plans. During the period since their recognition, some trees within the avenue have been removed on what is understood to be a case – by -case basis.

The trees are within the Commercial Zone on Levin's main street, Oxford Street, and have Notable Tree status under the Horowhenua District Plan. The identified trees for removal according to the district plan references are NT23 – NT34 and NT47 – NT6. The notable trees are included within Schedule 3 of the Horowhenua District Plan 2015 and are identified on District Plan Map 28A attached in **Appendix B**.

All trees are within the road reserve. Removal of the trees is a non – complying activity and is subject to the assessment criteria attached in **Appendix B**, which covers 25.7.15 Notable Trees and 25.7.16 Historic Heritage.

The Oxford Street footpaths adjacent to the notable trees are subject to a Pedestrian Area Overlay. This is noted for contextual reference rather than as a specific landscape assessment matter.

## 2 Proposal Description

A Plane tree avenue intermittently lines towns Levin’s main street and CBD along Oxford Street/State Highway 1. The current avenue extends a distance of 600 metres along Oxford Street from Bath street to Devon Street.

The Council wishes to remove twenty-seven (27) of the thirty – eight (38) *Platanus x acerfolia* (Plane trees) from the city’s main street between Queen Street and Devon Street, across a distance of 300 metres.

The proposal to remove the trees is due to poor health resulting from inconsistent pollarding practices which have generated structural and fungal issues in the trees. Over the years, this has caused decline in some specimens within the wider avenue, which has required their removal. These issues have given rise to visual and physical inconsistencies in both the individual trees and the cohesiveness of the wider avenue. The trees are also causing issues with adjoining retail awnings and Council are currently spending around \$30,000 per year to maintain them<sup>1</sup>.

The reason for proposing removal of the northern portion of the avenue only, is that these trees cause more issues and complaints and are associated with less – dense retail and commercial built forms, when compared with the southernmost block. The difference in density makes these blocks secondary to the heart of the CBD, which extends between Bath Street and Queen Street. This ‘heart’ block is where the existing avenue is proposed for retention, until such time as the State Highway 1 status of Oxford Street is revoked.

### 2.1.1 Removal Process

Removal of the trees would consist of cutting off at the base and grinding the stumps to sit below the adjoining asphalt level. As all trees are within the road reserve, their former locations would then be re – sealed in asphalt, and where practicable, converted back into parking spaces.

### 2.1.2 Proposed Replacement

The Council intends to replant the main street with trees as part of their wider ‘Transforming Taitoko’ Strategy once the Otaki to Northern Levin Expressway is completed, which will result in Oxford Street’s State Highway status being revoked.

This currently means that the trees would not be replaced until year six at the earliest, as indicated in the 2021 – 2031 Long Term Plan. By year 6, the Transforming Taitoko (Levin) Strategy would have been detailed to a level in which the street could be confidently replanted in a more appropriate street tree and at the same time, the street scape upgraded to a more pedestrian and user – friendly environment reflective of its new status as a local road.

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by Horowhenua District Council



### 3 Existing Environment

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#### 3.1 Regional Location and Local Context<sup>2</sup>

Levin is situated within the western Lower North Island. It sits 50 kilometres south – west of Palmerston North and 95 kilometres north of Wellington and sits on the main trunk line, State Highway 1, and State Highway 57. Its relative geographic position makes it an important stopover point for visitors to and through the region, with all those heading north or south between Central North Island and Wellington passing through. The traffic to the nearest town centre of Palmerston North, also skirts inland around the eastern side of the town and avoids the town centre through its SH57 connection. It is noted that this regional relationship to neighbouring cities will change once the ON2L expressway becomes live, and north or south bound traffic no longer needs to pass through.

In terms of landscape features, Levin sits between the Manawatū River to the north, and the Ohau River to the south and is surrounded by a predominantly flat agricultural landscape extending north, south, and west from the town. This includes to the west the significant Lake Horowhenua, and south west Lake Papaitonga. Extending some nine kilometres west of the township lies the west coast, and five kilometres east the prominent Tararua Ranges. These natural features shape the climate of the region, with the ranges providing a prominent and parallel landmark to the town's main street.

#### 3.2 Local Setting

The township is defined by a grid formation that falls roughly north to south off the central main street (Oxford Street/SH1). Off this central spine the town centre (or CBD) comprises four blocks that run along opposite sides of Oxford Street, between Bath Street in the south, to Devon Street in the north, including the central intersection of Oxford and Queen Streets. This central business area is predominantly characterised by a wide central roading corridor of approximately 22 metres, including angled parking on either side. The parking abuts wide asphalt footpaths that serve shop fronts, cafes, and commercial business at a mix of 1 – 2 story heights, which face onto the street.

The built form includes a mix of architectural styles and includes intermittent heritage buildings amongst newer architectural styles and materials. The built form between Bath Street and Queen Street corresponds with contiguous building and shop fronts lining the entire block, and higher rates of retention of heritage buildings and facades. North of Queen Street, this pattern continues to Stanley Street, and then starts to break form, with business along the western side of the road including fast food chains and supermarkets, whose carparking fronts Oxford Street. The quality and character of buildings style generally diminishes in quality the further north of Queen Street.

The streetscape environment, as a state highway, is busy, cluttered and dominated by vehicles. All intersections are controlled by traffic lights, and at times small central island plantings are within the street environment. The pedestrian elements of the streetscape are limited to the asphalt footpaths adjoining shopfronts, occasional outdoor dining options, street trees, and public seating, as well as controlled traffic light crossings.

A Plane tree avenue intermittently lines the streetscape along the CBD blocks, from Bath street to Devon Street, a distance of 600 metres. The portion considered for removal extend 300 metres north of Queen Street. The relevant setting considered in this assessment includes the full extent of the avenue.

### 3.2.1 Development Context

The Otaki to Northern Levin (O2NL) expressway is currently under construction. It is the northernmost extension of expressway works being undertaken over the last decade to improve safety, efficiency, and connectivity south to Kapiti and Wellington. O2NL will essentially bypass the township to the east, connecting northwards of the town centre along State Highway 1, and is due for completion in 2027. Once the expressway becomes live, the existing highway (Oxford Street) will be decommissioned and converted to a local road. This future context is considered in the context of this assessment due to the impending degree of change it will influence on Levin's urban landscape in terms of a baseline environment.

## 3.3 Heritage Context and Values

Levin's inception was sparked in the late 1880's as a result of the completion of the Manawatu – Wellington railway line. The Pākehā purchasing of Levin was in the context of the financial pressures on the Muaūpoko iwi who owned the land at the time. As such, Māori conditions for the land purchase were removed from the contract and are reflected today through a lack of Māori ownership and representation in the main street's architecture, businesses, and place names along the main street. Conversely, the resulting English/European town planning style remains dominant in the characteristics of Levin's town centre today.

It is noted within 10 – 15 years of the Wellington – Manawatu railway being built, Levin's formative years as a township were further solidified by a commemorative planting of an avenue of Plane trees along the central Oxford Street, celebrating the then Queen, Queen Victoria's 1897 Diamond Jubilee. At the time, Plane trees were widespread in London as a form of urban greening, gentrification, and air – cleaning measures being used to ameliorate the condition of their streets both visually and physically. The planting of an avenue of Plane trees was central to the evolving execution of the town's aesthetic and function. Although not the original Queen's Jubilee planting, the current street trees maintain the use of London Plane's within the streetscape and were obviously planted to uphold the intent, look, and feel of this original avenue.

The original planting significantly predated the town's boom through the 1940's – 1960's. A subsequent avenue replanting is estimated by arborists to have been undertaken approximately 80 years ago (reasons unknown), which suggests its replanting towards the end of this 60's boom.

The importance of the avenue to that time was:

- To frame and indicate the main street/main thoroughfare/town or city centre, providing a sense of prominence and importance.
- To provide a pleasant street environment through visual amenity, shade, cooling and cleaning of the air.
- To reference and celebrate the familiarity of an English aesthetic in the progression and development of these small towns on the other side of the world from the British monarchy.

Other aspects of Levin town centre that reference this period include:

- The street names intersecting Oxford Street in vicinity of the town centre; all being after English cities and rivers, or the Queen herself: Queen Street, Oxford Street, Bath Street, Durham Street, Stanley Street, Exeter Street, Devon Street.
- Heritage buildings within the main street and adjacent blocks which include period – style facades, building stamping of original uses, as well as materials, size and design originating from the late 1800's.

The avenue has suffered removals since its replacement. It is estimated that in the northern blocks (proposed for removal) that around 10 - 15 trees could have been removed, with 27 remaining. For the southern block (Bath to Queen) it is also estimated that around or up to 10 - 15 trees have been removed, with 17 remaining. Given this total an original avenue number in the 50's or 60's it could be reasonable to

assume that sixty trees could have been planted to directly represent the Diamond Jubilee (marking 60 years). The remaining trees represent about 60% of the of the estimated intended avenue.

### 3.4 Existing Landscape Character & Values

**Physical:** Highly modified urban landscape bearing little or no evidence of former land form, land cover, or natural processes. Likely the only remaining original natural characteristic expressed through the Levin streetscape albeit in highly modified form is the flatness of the land in connection with the wider plains landscape.

The key physical characteristics of the setting are noted as:

- The wide central street lined by 1 – 2 story buildings emphasising two of the four core blocks of the town centre.
- The change in patterning of built form density and avenue consistency across the four blocks, with the two northernmost blocks breaking this pattern through expansive carparking along the western side between Stanley and Devon Streets.
- The mix of architectural styles and building ages.
- The avenue of trees providing green scale, amenity value, physical and visual linking elements across the four central blocks.
- The gaps in the avenue through its central part, where a mix of secondary vegetation types; including small central road strip gardens, cabbage trees, native gardens with stone worked edges (centered on Oxford/Queen intersection) and occasional infill pin oaks.
- The curved overhead street lights and proliferation of signage, hoardings, moveable boards and their colours, poor fitting or placement and visual complexity they contribute to the streetscape.
- At a pedestrian scale, the street furniture, parking meters, small gardens, shade, colour, and amenity provided by the trees, and specifically the sense of separation this provides from the traffic,

**Perceptual:** Streetscape ambience and amenity values are dominated by the vehicular environment and associated noise generated by heavy traffic and congestion. Values are enhanced where gardens, street furniture and trees provide human scale elements and contrast with adjacent built environment. Where present, the street trees specifically provide a physical and visual separation of the vehicle and pedestrian environments, providing for community – centric qualities and increasing the perception of distance and safety from moving vehicles. Sense of openness and space created by open backdrop to buildings and trees, with views east of the Tararua Ranges from the Queen/Oxford intersection providing a prominent backdrop and anchoring point for the town.

**Associative – heritage values, history, identity, narratives, laws and activities, sense of place**

Values enhanced by retention of heritage buildings, the names of streets referencing English rivers, towns, or the Queen herself, central 1 – 2 storey CBD blocks and framing with a Plane tree avenue. The gridded city formation, nature and style of heritage buildings, wide central road and replication of the avenue speak to the formative evolution of Levin. The Plane trees contribute to the sense of place, the prominence of these four central blocks of the CBD

The township's identity has been formed through the interaction of European town planning style elements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and are a binding concept in its character. Its origins as a central stopover town connected by major transport are still represented in the heavily trafficked town centre today.

The remaining heritage buildings, in combination with the intermittent plane tree avenue and English street names, provide connections to the origins and earlier design intent and aesthetic of the main street. The integrating nature of these aspects and importance in expressing European culture for its sense of familiarity was likely of importance to a new settlement. By replicating the familiar, notions of their former homeland are



served in an everyday public way. Their heritage value is therefore not assigned exclusively to the trees or the avenue itself, but to the broader integrated Victorian concept central to the town's original execution.

In addition to their historical derivations, the trees provide a physical and visual separation between vehicular traffic and the finer grained and more pleasant pedestrian footpath environment. The greenness of the trees themselves enhances the pleasantness of the setting by contrasting against the built environment, adding a sense of 'nature' or natural elements. Their organic forms, rustling leaves, green colour, shade they provide, deciduous nature and mottled bark add sensory elements to a streetscape otherwise dominated by traffic noises, smells and sounds. Their added ability to clean the air whilst growing in such poor conditions further adds to their virtue and role in the streetscape. Their form and juxtaposition within the streetscape provide elements of the pedestrian scale and natural world that help to humanise the street. They also create a sense of the road carriage being more enclosed, helping to passively slow vehicle traffic.

Although the integrity of the avenue has been compromised over time (with an estimated 63% remaining) the trees still provide shade and reduce the heat island effect of the otherwise entirely paved or covered city street surfaces. When in full leaf they provide habitat for birds and insects. Long – lived tree, providing the ability to last across the rates of urban renewal/change that most urban cities and townships are subject to.

### 3.5 Interrelation of character elements

There are essentially three portions of the considered town centre setting relevant to the understanding of its urban form, character and the role and relationship it has with the plane tree avenue. These three blocks are illustrated on the landscape character analysis map attached in **Appendix C**.

These are:

1. This block is the most contrasting to blocks (2) and (3) above. It has the weakest urban form created by removal of 1 – 2 story buildings fronting the main street along its western side and subsequent conversion to larger format retail and fast food premises with carparking fronting Oxford Street. These modern built form changes dissipates the strength and detract from the cohesiveness and continuity of the town's central business district. They are however, contrasted with the strongest section of the Plane tree avenue, which maintains a lush green mirroring and strong repetitive form through this section. Conversely, the pedestrian environment in this section feels less inviting. The form and integrity of the avenue is at its strongest in this northernmost block. The sense of enclosure is increased by the trees, shop frontages are not easily viewed (in summer), reducing visibility and, while the gaps in continuity of building frontages make it feel less ordered and safe. There is less passive surveillance and foot traffic, and correspondingly more peripheral car movements. The colours, treatments and tones of the buildings and shop frontages are more muted and recessive. This portion of the avenue maintains strong visual links and a sense of cohesiveness across the weaker mid section, described in (2) below.
2. The Queen Street to Stanley street block, the key differences to (3) below being they are predominantly comprised of food outlets and restaurants, have larger building size frontages and the articulation of heritage buildings is less noticeable. The Plane tree avenue is all but omitted along this stretch, aside from two remaining specimens on the street's eastern side. This gives a streetscape that is open but wide dominant road and carparking elements in combination with eclectic mix of architecture and signage create a bland roading environment tired facades and unattractive shop frontages. It changes the perceived hierarchy of the street and sense of separation that the contiguous avenue formerly offered.
3. The 'heart' block between Bath Street and Queen Street of 'every day – use' businesses, characterised by strong contiguous urban form of 1 – 2 story buildings with awnings, some heritage

facades, mid-block raised stonework garden and sculpture with pavement treatments and street furniture. Eclectic mix of architectural styles and facades with a competing mix of signage sizes, colours, and shop front treatments. Weakness in avenue density and repetition along eastern side towards Queen Street creating a sense of openness and more visible shop fronts which includes a reasonable proportion of heritage buildings.

**In summary:**

- The avenue is part of an integrating concept that includes cultural, historical and amenity values.
- The streetscape has mixed urban form that is generally of a low quality. Building materiality is mixed. The expression of the remaining heritage buildings and their facades is typically lost through the prolific hoardings, shop display frontages and footpath signage of adjoining businesses, which are often in bright commercial and conflicting colours.
- The trees are important because they add a human scale, separate pedestrians from the traffic, provide shade, amenity and offer a sense of cohesion and prominence to the CBD.
- It is acknowledged that between Queen Street and Stanley Streets this central part of the avenue has mostly been removed. There is still strength to the avenue in creating visual and physical links and cohesiveness between the start and end of the central CBD. The perception of continuity is created even though the avenue's frequency and form are not consistent.

## 4 Visual Catchment and Viewing Audience

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The key considerations within this assessment are the potential adverse visual, landscape, heritage, and amenity effects of the proposed street tree removals with regard to:

- Urban form, function, and aesthetic.
- Heritage and cultural aspects.
- Identity, cohesion, and distinctiveness.

### 4.1 Visual Catchment

The visual catchment is comprised of:

- Footpath users (shoppers, workers, commuters)
- Vehicle users (north – south along Oxford street, and also at the intersections with Devon, Exeter, Stanley, and Queen streets)
- Building users and business operators

**Notes:**

- Photography has been taken from public land with conclusions and assessment based upon these public viewpoints.
- Photos were taken from the road shoulder at the specified locations.
- This photography was collected in March and therefore represents the trees in full leaf. It is noted these trees are deciduous and that their visual changes during winter are significant. In the absence of comparable winter viewpoint photography for the purposes of this assessment the 'winter visual baseline' has had to be assumed.

## 4.2 Viewpoint Descriptions

### Viewpoint 1

Flat wide urban intersection with key vertical elements of traffic lights and larger overhead street lights. Awnings, hoardings, and variety of colours used add visual complexity to the built environment extending into the middle ground. Vegetative character changes from small centre - strip grasses with corner plantings of mature cabbage trees specimens in the middle ground, marking the main intersection of Queen Street and Oxford Street (centre of Levin). Progresses to larger avenue effect created by the *Platanus x acerifolia* create a lush green bushy effect dominant in the background and received against the skyline, extending the linearity of the road.

### Viewpoint 2

Wide road environment with angle carparking combined with eclectic continuous shop frontages and mix of hoarding colours and sizes. Built form lines either side of the roading environment, focusing the eye along the framed road. Sense of openness provided by the irregularity of street tree plantings, allowing sunlight to flood in. Irregularly scattered specimen tree plantings – of cabbage trees and plane trees independent of each other provides variability in streetscape plantings and some softening of the otherwise hard urban setting. Visual links provided by remnant Plane tree to more dense and mirrored trees towards the rear of image. Viewpoint is dominated by the clock tower and red roof of the ANZ bank building.

### Viewpoint 3

Urban streetscape with visual complexity created by overhanging irregular awnings, their hoardings, signage below, as well as road signs and parking meters. Wide paved footpath with sense of enclosure created by overhanging one story awnings. The edge of the awnings and tops of visible plane trees out towards the road edge reinforce a parallel relationship. Parked cars obscure almost all of the shop frontages on the opposite side of the street. This pattern is slightly broken up by a lone mature cabbage tree towards the left, mid way down the avenue. Silhouette of the Tararua Ranges just visible in the right background.

### Viewpoint 4

Wide open road frontage created by adjoining intersection and drawing of the eye northwards along Oxford Street, framed by the plane trees, more dominant on the right-hand side. Vehicle movements, and parking, predominantly visible on the right-hand side edges built form screened and softened behind a row of plane trees. View terminating along the road where a cluster of mature trees and vegetation are visible. This is the strongest part of the former avenue, where continuity and repetition of tree forms are most consistent.

### Viewpoint 5

A street view that appears more intimate, with shop frontages peeking through on the opposite side of the street, and along the right-hand side, are barely visible in the shade created by the awnings, time of day, and the plane trees. The pedestrian scale is given through rubbish bins, and a small, retained garden within the carpark zone. A sense of enclosure and segregation of the footpath and the road is further strengthened by the plane tree avenue in this location. In this image the avenue creates a strong uniting visual element, reinforcing the parallel arrangement of footpaths, street frontages and the central road.

### Viewpoint 6

Broad bland street created through adjoining angle carparks and use of wide central median strip. Avenue framing effect marks the edge of the road and is reinforced by angled parked cars. From this angle, the lush green foliage of the plane trees sits against the skyline, drawing the eye along to the road end where it appears to terminate in a large covering of trees and vegetation. In this image the trees provide a softening



of the street frontages, awnings that line the buildings along each side, while at the same time creating an impression of narrowing of the road span.

**Viewpoint 7**

Similar environment to viewpoint 6. The wide and extensive roading environment is framed and separated from the footpath and pedestrian environments both visually and physically by the avenue of plane trees. The avenue effect in this direction is still noticeable enough to be recognised as a deliberate pattern, however it has suffered from gaps and is therefore not as contiguous or strong as the avenue north of this viewpoint. These additional gaps allow greater visual permeability into the business and shops, increasing the relationship of shop fronts to the main street in an intermittent fashion.

## 5 Landscape and Visual Effects

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### 5.1 Effects periods

For the purposes of undertaking and contextualising this assessment the following time periods are considered:

- Short term: 0 – 3 years removal of the trees and remediating (re - sealing into asphalt).
- Medium term: 3 – 8 years; the time period of which the overall effects ranking is based on. Typically this is the time period for which any mitigation measures are to have been implemented and successfully achieved the intended effect, e.g. mitigation planting.

As replanting is not detailed or specified yet but *intended* to be undertaken somewhere in the vicinity of 2027 this falls into the ‘medium term’ time period post tree removal. There is currently no baseline strategy or parameters around the replacement trees, including type, size, location, frequency and intent and role within the streetscape.

Given this current scope, its timing and lack of detail around replacement trees the effects rankings given do not change across the short and medium term, as would sometimes be the case for other development proposals requiring a landscape and visual effects assessment.

### 5.2 Landscape Effects

As contextualised within **Section 3 Landscape Character**, the considered setting is a highly modified urban environment.

**Effects on the landscape character of the local setting**

In terms of urban form, the avenue plays a vertical and therefore architectural role in the composition and legibility of the streetscape. The removal of the trees will accentuate the nature of the street’s urban form. The urban form is a mix of architectural styles, materials, and signage where heritage building identity, celebration and continuity are secondary to the more modern building additions, lower quality materials used to construct and ways in which they are decorated. In removing the trees, the town’s mediocre built form and associated signage will be exposed. The built form in conjunction with the perceived widening of the road corridor will become the dominant components of its character. The sense of unity and cohesiveness between the four main blocks considered to form the CBD will be lost, affecting the street’s distinctiveness and a key quality in its existing character.

It is acknowledged that between Queen Street and Stanley Streets this central part of the avenue has mostly been removed. There is still strength to the avenue in creating visual and physical links and cohesiveness

between the start and end of the central CBD. This continuity is provided even though the mirroring and frequency of trees along the street is inconsistent.

Their organic and vertical forms, in contrast and separate to the hard lines of the architecture and road are distinctive and give natural and uniting qualities to the setting, regardless of them being exotic and introduced. Further removal of the remaining trees north of Queen Street will significantly reduce visual and physical links along the main street and will undermine the extent and intent of the original avenue as a whole. This will compromise the integrity and distinctiveness of the streetscape. It is acknowledged that arboricultural studies undertaken to date show the trees are generally of average to poor health. As such, they are not prominent or high – quality examples of a Plane tree avenue within a New Zealand context, however they are distinguishable at a localised level.

The trees contribute amenity value to the streetscape. They are important because they add a human scale, separate from the traffic, provide shade, amenity and offer a sense of cohesion and prominence to the CBD. The removal of the Plane trees will omit greenery from the township and reduce the amenity and pleasantness of the environment, particularly for pedestrians. Over winter when the trees lose their leaves, they become less distinctive, and their attractiveness is reduced. In this state they do however continue to provide an organic natural and vertical architectural element to the streetscape. This helps to maintain the separation between pedestrian and roading components of the streetscape.

Their removal will further change the sense of place to one that is dominated by and primarily for vehicles. In combination with the wide road corridor and perception of its width increasing with the tree's removal the sense of enclosure of the streetscape is reduced. The potential flow – on consequences from this are that the street becomes or appears as a place to 'go through' rather than 'be in' thus removing perceptions of a low-speed environment and potentially leading to greater vehicle speeds. The combination and interrelation of these elements reduce the human scale of the streetscape, prioritise vehicles and contribute to a reduction in pedestrian safety and enjoyment of the footpath and road shoulder areas.

The removal of the trees will however provide more light in summer into the shops and under shop awnings which could offer some benefit to footpath users at different times of the day dependant on temperatures. The removal of trees will also increase the visibility of shop fronts and businesses along this portion of the main street. These benefits are minor and are not able to mitigate the loss to the street's character that these trees sustain.

The avenue is part of an integrating concept that includes cultural, historical and amenity values. The intent of planting the trees to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the prominence of the avenue concept and the amenity they provide will be lost and primarily restricted to the 'heart' block between Bath and Queen Streets. To a lesser extent the legibility and distinctiveness of the main street from other suburbs and streets east of Oxford Street will also be impacted, with the tops of trees no longer forming a linear delineation of tree tops above the main street's buildings. The trees are a key component of Levin's urban character and provide a sense of life through seasonal changes and natural qualities against a backdrop of built form, hard surfaces, and constant vehicle movements. The most intact remaining portion of the avenue, the northernmost block, will be removed, disintegrating the strongest part of its remnant form.

In summary the removal of the trees will:

- Significantly reduce the organic and natural qualities remaining in the setting
- Increase the dominance of the built form, road environment and vehicle use as the new core components of its character
- Reduce the amenity of the streetscape for vehicle users and particularly pedestrians
- Reduce the integrity, legibility, and distinctiveness of the town's central business district.

- Lesson the links to the town's historic setting.

The potential benefits to their removal include increased light within the footpath environment, and improved visibility of shop frontages. These benefits do not however offset the detrimental effects that their removal will have to landscape character examined across urban form, cohesiveness and integrity of the streetscape, amenity, and heritage values. These also ignore the corresponding increase in heat island effect from reduced shading of the street's paved surfaces. Overall landscape character effects are considered to be **high**.

### 5.3 Visual Effects

Refer to the viewpoint photography and photomontage of Viewpoint 7 attached in **Appendix D**.

#### Public viewpoints and locations

##### 5.3.1 Vehicular

The omission of the trees will be noticeable to this audience, particularly those who travel through often. The buildings and carparking will become more visually dominant within this audience's view. Viewers travelling at speed have a reduced sensitivity to peripheral landscape changes, however the nature and length of the avenue across the three blocks means that the trees are viewed continuously for a longer period of time whilst travelling north and south along the main street. With these linear and uniting elements of the streetscape removed, the road will appear less defined for these users. Visual effects for this audience are **moderate - high**.

##### 5.3.2 Pedestrian

Viewpoints 3, 5,6 and 7.

The shop fronts on the opposing side from the viewer will become consistently visible to this audience, and the absence of lush green vegetation (in summer) and the organic vertical limbs (in winter) will reduce the amenity and visual attractiveness of the setting for these users. Conversely it will increase the visibility and the prominence of the traffic flows to these users. It will increase the amount of light within the footpath environment at certain times of the day providing more ambience and visual connections to shop front displays. For users on the western side of the street, the trees removal will open up wider views to the backdrop of the Tararua Ranges beyond.

Overall, the loss of attractiveness and visual amenity provided by the trees will be most noticeable to this audience. Visual effects for this audience are **high**.

##### 5.3.3 Commercial and Retail

Individual premises at ground level have a limited range of view out onto the street and are therefore not viewing the avenue in its entirety. Changes to the streetscape will be noticed by this audience with greater visibility across the street to the opposing side. For those premises with second stories and windows facing the street, the removal of the trees will be more noticeable. Their previously green backdrop (in summer) and visual separation from the street will be gone, with views of other buildings, rooftops and the street becoming more dominant. Visual amenity and attractiveness are reduced.

Given this audience views the avenue and street at oblique angles their awareness and perception of change across the entire avenue is reduced. Overall visual effects for this audience are **moderate**.

##### 5.3.4 Wider landscape and environs

The visual effects for audiences within the wider landscape are predominantly limited to changes for views east along Devon, Exeter, and Stanley Streets. This is where avenue trees are visible due to the 'opening' of



the corners through carparking fronting Oxford Street, allowing wider visibility to the nearest trees. From this angle, when in full leaf the tops of the trees will be silhouetted against the Tatarua Ranges. Some views across/over blocks of buildings will enable the tops of trees to be viewed as more of a continuous line, however these would be truncated glimpsed views tangential to the direction of travel (e.g. along Bristol Street). Their removal will slightly reduce the visual amenity but will be relatively well absorbed within the receiving context, given the complex visual setting, distance from the avenue, angle, or limited range of views. Visual effects on the wider landscape are **moderate – low**.

5.4 Summary of Effects

Landscape and Visual Effects	Effects Ranking
<i>Effects on landscape character</i>	High
<i>Public viewpoints and locations</i>	
- Vehicular	Moderate - high
- Pedestrian	High
- Commercial & Retail	Moderate
<i>Wider landscape and environs</i>	Moderate - low

5.5 Options for Mitigation and Effects Reduction

No mitigation is proposed however the Council has indicated that they will replant at a later time (indicated at around 2027) as part of the Transforming Taitoko Strategy.

It is strongly recommended that given the high level of landscape and visual effect caused by the trees' removal the trees are retained until a confirmed replacement date is within 1-2 years of the trees' removal. Without this information and certainty on the timing of this process, no mitigation can be considered to reduce the effects described.

If certainty were given to the nature and intent of proposed replacement to the Oxford Street CBD streetscape, along with financial and timing commitments by council to achieve the redesign then the findings of this assessment could be revised. It would take some time for replacement trees to reach the size, effectiveness, and amenity of the current Plane trees. However there is still some confidence that in combination with a new and improved streetscape design, the Transforming Taitoko Strategy would have net positive effects on the quality of Levin's town centre.

6 Statutory Context Evaluation

The notable tree assessment criteria relative to this landscape and visual effects assessment are responded to below.

25.7.15 Notable Trees

a) The existing condition of the Notable Tree.

The condition and quality of the existing avenue is average, with the prime examples of its strength and intent being at the northernmost end (proposed for removal). In terms of form the trees themselves are in average condition and are accordingly a sub – prime example of Plane tree avenue within a New Zealand streetscape. It is understood that their poor form is primarily due to the deviation from yearly pollarding practice. From a visual perspective there are no immediate identifiers signifying that the trees are in poor

condition to a layman's eye, rather that the tree perhaps look 'stunted' or not as full in form as might be reasonably anticipated from a larger street tree.

At the time of the notable tree project (assumed to be 2000) and subsequent status of the trees becoming operative, their STEM analysis scores as individual trees, and also across the avenue are the highest amongst the entire scheduled list of notable trees for the district, ranging between 184 – 202. Other scheduled notable trees had scores ranging from 150 – 186 with one outlier at 198. The original STEM assessment sheets are not attached to the District Plan Schedule, however the STEM method criteria used indicate that the trees were likely of improved form (due to continuous pollarding practices) at the time of assessment, and therefore do not accurately reflect the degrading of form over the last twenty years due to a hiatus in the standard maintenance of them.

The arboricultural assessment of their condition from a structural and health perspective is covered in Arborlab's report appended to this resource consent application.

*b) The value of the tree(s) including their ecological, cultural, or historic significance.*

The high ratings of the avenue using the STEM method indicate that their heritage values (age, association, commemoration, and remnant) are likely the reasons that the resulting scores of the entire avenue were consistently so high across the avenue.

These trees have cultural and historical values ascribed from the original planting of Plane trees in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the town's formative years. Although not the original Jubilee plantings, the present avenue withholds the intent of the original plantings: to frame the main street, provide cohesion and signify the importance of the CBD, and provide amenity.

*h) The need for the removal and the practicality of alternatives to its removal or damage including possible relocation.*

The need for removal is primarily for nuisance, form - structural, maintenance, and cost reasons. No alternatives to their removal or ways of mitigating their current state have been proposed. Relocation is not a practical or viable option.

*k) The impact to the integrity of a group of trees that by removing one or more specimens.*

The visual integrity of the avenue is partially compromised through the mid-section's loss of trees from Queen Street to Stanley Street. In the remaining three blocks the avenue has suffered individual tree losses that create a more intermittent effect, particularly in the block (proposed for retention) from Bath Street north to Queen Street. The avenue manages to maintain strong visual links and a sense of cohesiveness across the weaker mid-section of the avenue due to the straight wide nature of the road, and size of trees, allowing long linear views to be obtained north and south along Oxford Street (as was likely the design intent). By eliminating the main remaining representation of the avenue (strongest in the northernmost blocks between Stanley and Devon Streets). The visual connections and breadth of the avenue along Oxford Street will be lost. The remaining block of trees lacks the frequency of Plane trees, particularly along its eastern side to definitively place them as part of an intentional avenue. Without their extended counterparts north of this 'heart' block they become a feature isolated to this specific area.

*m) Whether a replacement tree, of appropriate size and suitability, can be established and maintained on the site.*

Trees of appropriate size and suitability can be established in the streetscape in future. The combination of factors (revoking of state highway status, conversion to local road) mean that any immediate replanting would only be an interim measure until Transforming Taitoko Strategy was completed and installed.

Choosing the right permanent replacement species will need to consider mature size, height, maintenance requirements, leaf fall, heritage, and proximity to businesses to avoid current issues created by the conflict between business owners/shop fronts.

The avenue concept is part of Levin’s origins and history, with the current 80 – year old trees having heritage links to a much earlier Jubilee commemoration planting. While not suggesting that exact tree locations are where the replacements should go, the avenue is a binding concept and part of Levin’s identity and character. Maintaining this intent throughout the ages would be a way of acknowledging the town’s origins, heritage and cultural values and could be executed with native species that are more reflective of New Zealand culture today.

## 7 Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

---

The removal of 27 *Platanus x acerifolia* (Plane trees) along the northern section of Levin’s Oxford Street Central Business District would have detrimental impacts across the assessed landscape and visual qualities of the current streetscape.

The trees form part of a larger avenue, that while compromised in form and integrity, are a binding element that contribute architectural merits, amenity improvements and provide a separation between pedestrian and vehicular components of the streetscape. They reference a period in the town’s history and formative years, and as such have ascribed heritage and cultural value reflected by their notable tree status. Overall, the trees do not exhibit prime form or condition, however their removal will compromise the integrity, heritage and cultural values associated with the trees as an avenue.

The trees are central to the street’s character and qualities, and as such their removal will generate **high** landscape character effects. The visual effects of their removal were found to range from **moderate – low** to **high**, with the greatest level of effect being on pedestrians (**high**).

### 7.1 Recommendations

1. It is strongly recommended that the trees should not be removed until a replacement date is confirmed within 1- 2 years from removal of the existing trees.



Appendix A – Assessment Methodology



## Assessment Methodology

### Degree of Effect

The seven-point assessment scale below combines the guidance provided in the NZILA and NZTA documents referenced above and have been applied in assessing the degree of landscape and visual effects that have been identified. The scale is used to determine negative effects of the proposal. Positive effects of the proposal, where they occur, are simply described as positive effects.

Very Low	Low	Low – Moderate	Moderate	High – Moderate	High	Very High
----------	-----	----------------	----------	-----------------	------	-----------

### ‘Minor’ Test

For the purposes of notification determination, an adverse effects rating of Moderate - Low corresponds to a ‘minor’ adverse effects rating.

An adverse effects rating of ‘Low’ or ‘Very Low’ corresponds to a ‘less than minor’ adverse effects rating.



# B

## Appendix B – Statutory Context

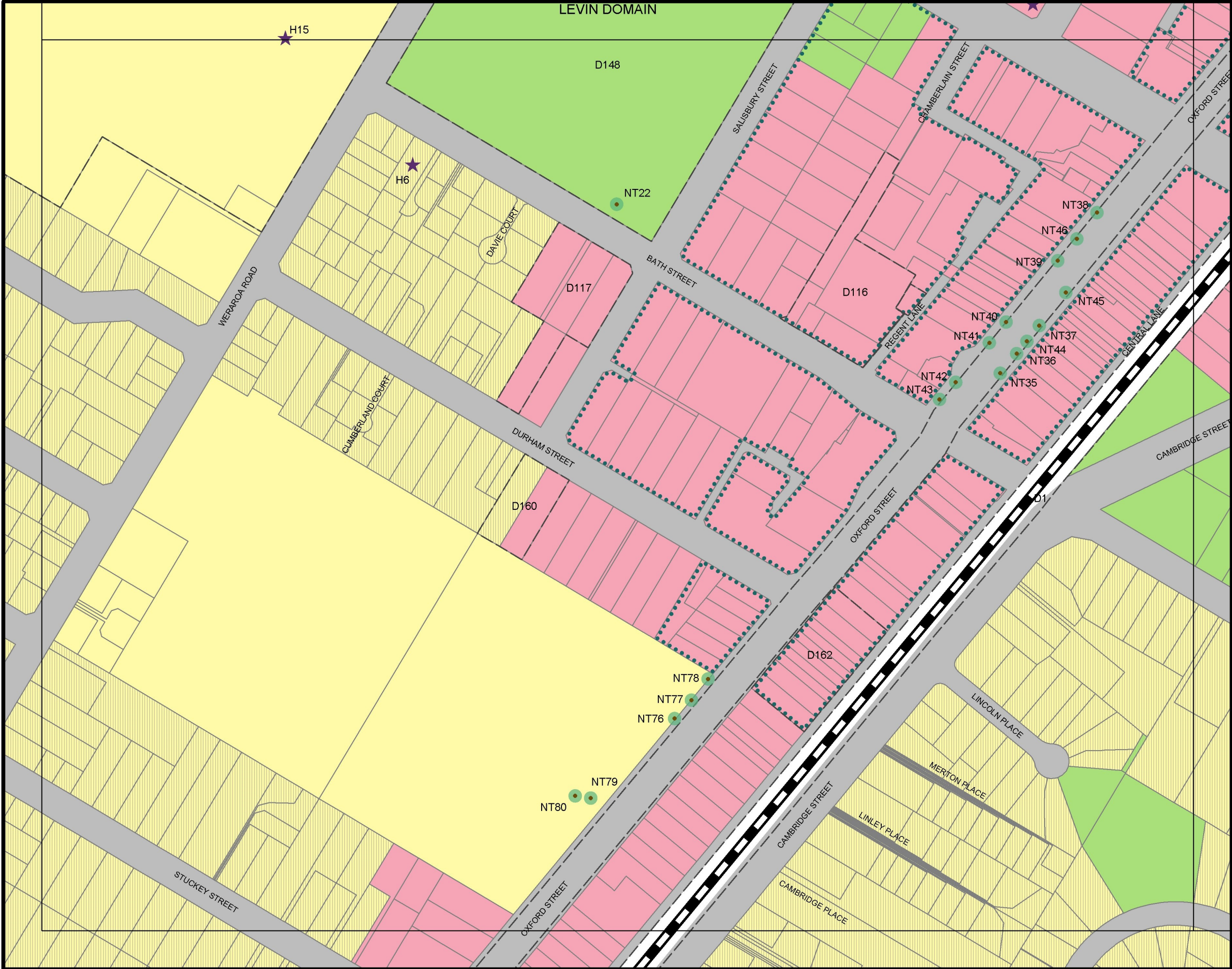
# Horowhenua District Plan

## Chapter 25 Assessment Criteria

### 25.7.15 Notable Trees

- a) The existing condition of the Notable Tree.
- b) The value of the tree(s) including their ecological, cultural, or historic significance.
- c) Whether a qualified arborist has confirmed the tree to be dead or diseased.
- d) The likely threat to nearby residents, including potential for falling branches, the possibility of high winds destabilising the tree, or actual or potential damage to residential buildings done to root growth.
- e) The extent to which work on or near a Notable Tree is necessary to preserve or maintain the efficiency or safety of any public work, network utility or road or railway.
- f) The extent to which the tree has grown to the point of causing nuisance including significant loss of sunlight or daylight to nearby residences.
- g) Whether the Notable Tree inhibits the growth of a more desirable specimen nearby.
- h) The need for the removal and the practicality of alternatives to its removal or damage including possible relocation.
- i) The extent of adverse effect on the values of the Notable Tree (or group of trees) as a result of activities within the dripline, confirmed by a qualified arborist.
- j) The extent of adverse effects on the health of a Notable Tree (or group of trees) as the result of activities involving trimming and maintenance of the tree(s), confirmed by a qualified arborist.
- k) The impact to the integrity of a group of trees that by removing one or more specimens.
- l) The ability to carry out the activity using methods and management that would result in the works not adversely affecting the health of the tree, and these methods and management being confirmed by a qualified arborist.
- m) Whether a replacement tree, of appropriate size and suitability, can be established and maintained on the site.





**LEGEND**

**ZONES**

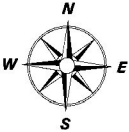
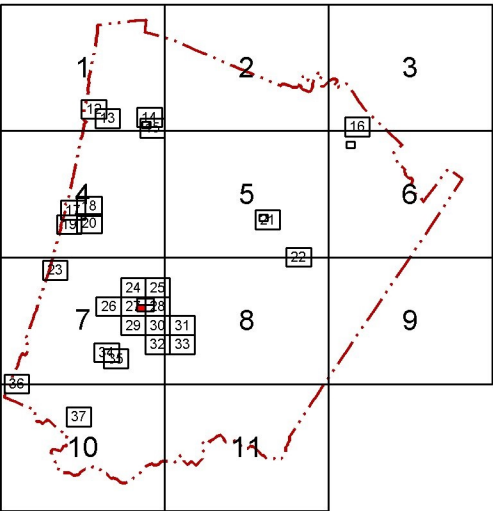
- |                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Residential                    | Residential Deferred |
| Commercial                     | Commercial Deferred  |
| Industrial                     |                      |
| Open Space                     |                      |
| Rural                          |                      |
| Greenbelt Residential          |                      |
| Greenbelt Residential Deferred |                      |

**OVERLAYS**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Greenbelt Residential Waitare Rise                                 |  |
| Greenbelt Residential Foxton Beach North                           |  |
| Strathnaver Coastal Natural Character Area                         |  |
| Strathnaver Coastal Hazard Area                                    |  |
| Muhunua West Forest Park   |  |
| Muhunua West Forest Park Coastal Natural Character and Hazard Area |  |
| Low Density Area   |  |
| Medium Density Area  |  |
| Large Format Retail Area   |  |
| Town Centre Heritage/Character Area                                |  |
| Foxton Tourism Area  |  |
| Pedestrian Area  |  |
| Coastal Natural Character and Hazard Area                          |  |
| Flood Hazard Area (1:50,000 Rural Maps Only)                       |  |
| Moutoa Floodway (1:50,000 Rural Maps Only)                         |  |
| Versatile Land (LUC Class I & II Soil)                             |  |

**FEATURES**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Notable Tree  |  |
| Historic Heritage Building, Structure or Site           |  |
| Gas Transmission Pipeline                               |  |
| National Grid Corridor (High Voltage Transmission Line) |  |
| Designation   |  |
| Road  |  |



Scale 1 : 2,500










**HOROWHENUA DISTRICT PLAN**  
**LEVIN CBD**

**Planning Map 27B**

















## LEGEND







### ZONES

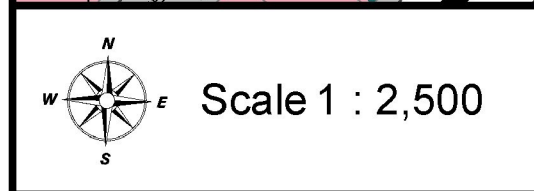
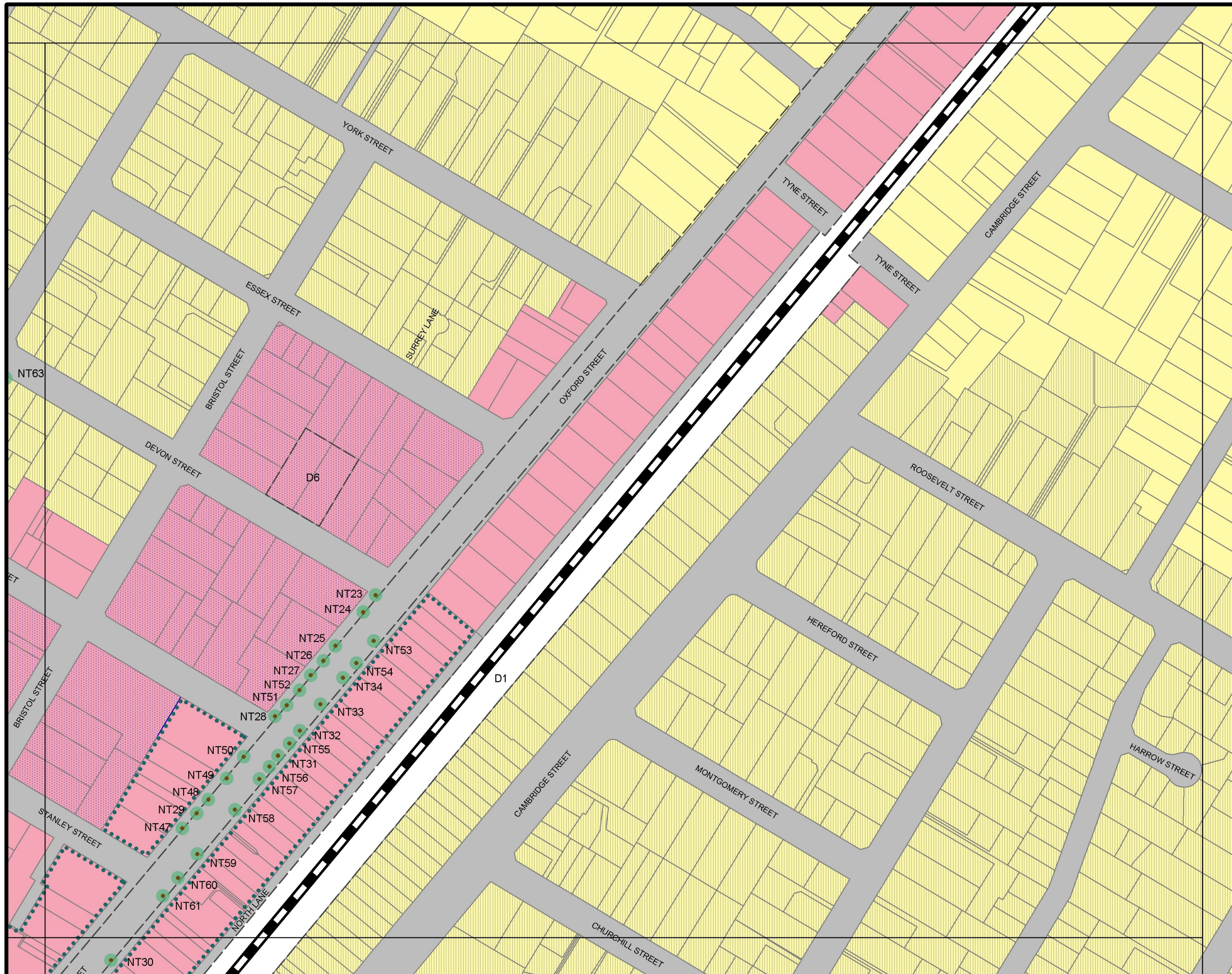
	Residential		Residential Deferred
	Commercial		Commercial Deferred
	Industrial		
	Open Space		
	Rural		
	Greenbelt Residential		
	Greenbelt Residential Deferred		

### OVERLAYS

	Greenbelt Residential Waitere Rise
	Greenbelt Residential Foxton Beach North
	Strathnaver Coastal Natural Character Area
	Strathnaver Coastal Hazard Area
	Muhunua West Forest Park
	Muhunua West Forest Park Coastal Natural Character and Hazard Area
	Low Density Area
	Medium Density Area
	Large Format Retail Area
	Town Centre Heritage/Character Area
	Foxton Tourism Area
	Pedestrian Area
	Coastal Natural Character and Hazard Area
	Flood Hazard Area (1:50,000 Rural Maps Only)
	Moutoa Floodway (1:50,000 Rural Maps Only)
	Versatile Land (LUC Class I & II Soil)

### FEATURES

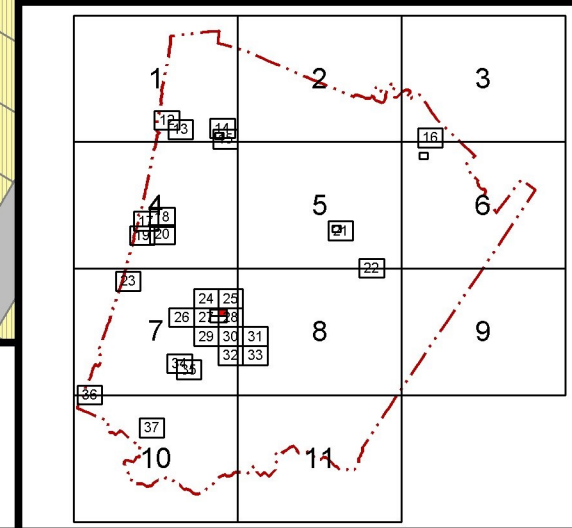
	Notable Tree
	Historic Heritage Building, Structure or Site
	Gas Transmission Pipeline
	National Grid Corridor (High Voltage Transmission Line)
	Designation
	Road



# HOROWHENUA DISTRICT PLAN

## LEVIN CBD

## Planning Map 28A



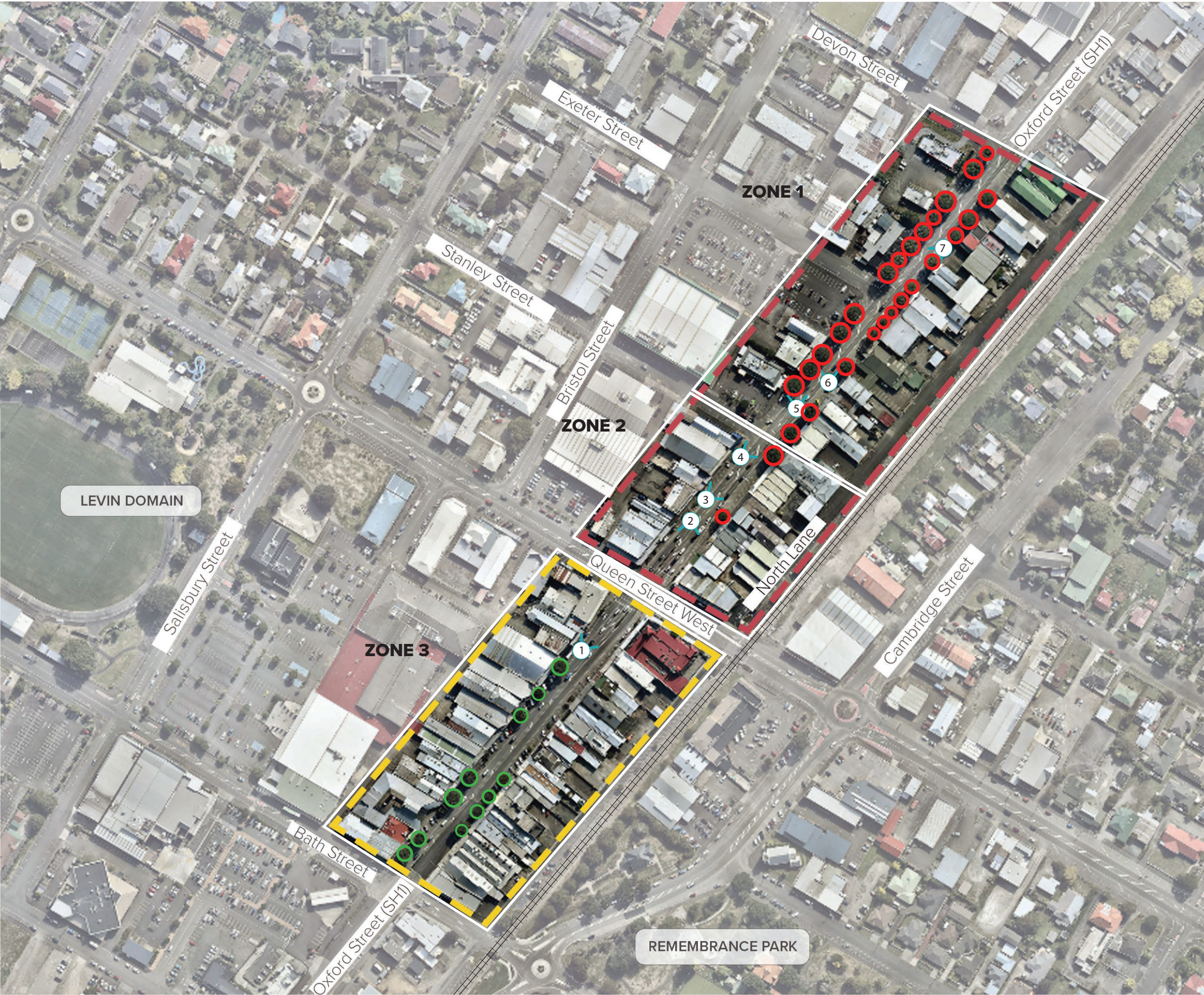




Appendix C – Landscape Character Map







CHARACTER ZONE DESCRIPTIONS

**Zone 1**  
Weakest urban form predominantly due to extent of carparking fronting the western side of Oxford Street. Avenue is the strongest and most consistent through this section.

**Zone 2**  
Strong urban form with eclectic mix of building ages and styles. The avenue is all but omitted along this section, aside from two remaining specimens on the street's eastern side.

**Zone 3**  
The 'heart' of the town centre. Strongest urban form of the four Central Business District blocks, supported by continuous building frontages. Weakness in the avenue's density and repetition along its eastern side towards Queen Street, creating greater shop front visibility which includes a reasonable proportion of heritage buildings.



KEY

- Proposed tree removal zone
- Retained CBD tree zone
- Trees proposed for removal (27)
- Trees to be retained (11)
- Railway
- Viewpoint







# D

## Appendix D – Viewpoints Map, Photography and Photomontage









**VIEWPOINTS MAP**  
Oxford Street/State Highway 1  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Date: 28 April 2022  
Prepared by: RC  
Checked: NP

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**KEY:**

-  Viewpoint
-  Tree removals proposed
-  CBD Trees to remain

 0 100m





**VIEWPOINT 1**  
Oxford Street and intersection with Queen Street  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.62223240680224, 175.2860412834176  
Horizontal Field of View: 40  
Vertical Field of View: 27  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC    Checked: NP

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**VIEWPOINT 2**  
Facing south towards main intersection with Queen Street  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.62123034047052, 175.28705979487063  
Horizontal Field of View: 40 degrees  
Vertical Field of View: 27 degrees  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC      Checked: NP





**VIEWPOINT 3**  
Outside Rangoli Indian Cuisine, facing north along footpath  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.62123034047052, 175.28705979487063  
Horizontal Field of View: 40  
Vertical Field of View: 27  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC    Checked: NP





**VIEWPOINT 4**  
Corner Stanley Street and Oxford Street, facing north  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.62099203117359, 175.28734945771325  
Horizontal Field of View: 40  
Vertical Field of View: 27  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC      Checked: NP

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**VIEWPOINT 5**  
East side of street facing north  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.62083462144852, 175.28787513930024  
Horizontal Field of View: 40  
Vertical Field of View: 27  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC    Checked: NP

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**VIEWPOINT 6**  
From road shoulder looking north along avenue  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.620731275477, 175.28784450456132  
Horizontal Field of View: 40  
Vertical Field of View: 27  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC    Checked: NP





**VIEWPOINT 7**  
Looking south along Oxford Street/State Highway 1  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Coordinates: -40.61983990981701, 175.28883162388493  
Horizontal Field of View: 40  
Vertical Field of View: 27  
Reading Distance: 550mm at A3  
Prepared by: RC      Checked: NP

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# PHOTOMONTAGE OF VIEWPOINT 7 - WITH TREES REMOVED

Looking south along Oxford Street/State Highway 1  
OXFORD STREET TREE REMOVALS, LEVIN

Note: This is an impression only. Artistic techniques have been utilised where needed to recreate items previously screened by trees.

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