

**BEFORE THE WAIMAKARIRI DISTRICT COUNCIL
HEARINGS PANEL**

IN THE MATTER Of the Proposed Waimakariri District Plan

AND

IN THE MATTER of a submission by Survus Consultants Ltd (# 250)
Oxford LLRZ Rezoning Hearing Stream 12C

**Statement of Ben O'Grady
23 July 2024**

BACKGROUND

- 1 My name is Ben O'Grady.
- 2 I am a director and shareholder of Morgan McIntosh Limited (MML), the owner of 25 Ashley Gorge Road, Oxford.
- 3 I have a strong commercial background as Chief Financial Officer over the last 20 years including Chief Accountant to the Institute of Chartered Accountants, and CFO for Perpetual Trust/Torchlight Investment Fund, founding CFO for Enable Networks, and CFO roles for Jade Software, Optimal Workshop and Link Engine Management.
- 4 I have been involved as Trustee on a number of Charitable Trusts for over 20 years with direct impacts on our community and, among current positions, am on the Board of the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra.
- 5 I have 25 years of property development experience with a number of developments that have achieved valuable public outcomes, including:
 - (a) Otaki Gorge subdivision on the Kapiti Coast (North Island) – a 9 lot rural/residential subdivision undertaken in consultation with Department of Conservation (DOC) that resulted in a historical section of stone walls being gifted to DOC, and sympathetic covenants to protect native wildlife and preserve the feel of the area.
 - (b) Takapu Valley East, Horowhenua (North Island) – a 13 lot subdivision in the Tararua Ranges that opened up public recreational access to the area including granting Te Araroa Walkway access rights, and work with DOC on possible kiwi sightings and pest control.
 - (c) A five-lot subdivision of 4 hectare lifestyle blocks on Burnt Hill Road, Oxford (Waimakariri District Council)
 - (d) A seven-lot subdivision of 4 hectare lifestyle blocks on Ashworth Bush Road, Balcairn (Hurunui District Council)
- 6 I have the capability, experience and connections to undertake a sympathetic and value creating subdivision at 25 Ashley Gorge Road for the long-term benefit of the Oxford township.

25 ASHLEY GORGE ROAD

- 7 MML purchased 25 Ashley Gorge Road in October 2022 with a strong view on the superior positioning of the land to the Oxford township and the clear intention to enable Large Lot

Residential subdivision taking into account the RRDS and the LLRZ Overlay designation in the Proposed District Plan.

8 In our view, and the extensive research we undertook at the time the property's highest and best use was as a Large Lot Residential subdivision.

9 We were and remain strongly of the view that the property can provide a sympathetic transition from the intensive residential/urban environment on the Southern boundary of the property and the 4 hectare lifestyle properties to the North. We note that residential blocks butt into the property, and line the East side of Main Street/Ashley Gorge Road contiguous with the property.

FARM ISSUES

10 The inferior quality of the current farming operation has been covered by expert advice and agreed upon by expert peer review.

11 I would like to highlight a few anecdotal elements to support this:

(a) My first meeting of the previous owners of the farm made quite an impression when they personally thanked me for taking this farm off their hands.

(b) It is clear that the farm is run down, with infrastructure in a sorry state and quite some work to do to tidy up the place as a visible point on the entry into Oxford township from the North.

(c) I have had to re-fence the perimeter of the property after an early issue with cattle wandering into the retirement home on Queen Street, and other escapees. Many of the Queen Street neighbours have expressed appreciation for the new stock fence now on their boundaries. There is no way that this or other infrastructural investment is repaid by the current rural use of the land.

(d) I am willing to share that current income from the block will max out at approx. \$100K pa and in light years such as this last one is well below that. Costs including rates of \$15K and the holding cost on a \$2.5M value, let alone infrastructural replacement and fertiliser costs mean the farm is not an economic operation

12 In addition, the positioning of the land as surrounded with urban and lifestyle blocks means that already there is a tension between farm use and the urban environment. I am often receiving requests for people making housing or land changes that note the council requires my approval for their changes given the effluent spreading rights I have on this land with an overlap over a significant number of urban properties. There has been some tension as I have had to delay some requests while seeking clarity on what approval would mean to my ability to farm the land.

THE VISION – WHAT IT CAN BECOME

- 13 As noted, I see this land as being able to provide a sympathetic large lot residential development that will be a real long term asset to the township.
- 14 I have instructed my advisors to create areas of public access throughout the proposed development including working with the landowner subdividing land on the boundary at Queen Street to allow a public pathway joining Queen Street to this development and linking into a public walkway through the waterways. It is the intention to plant these in a way that enhances native vegetation and creates birdlife tunnels from the hills.
- 15 If the panel have not been to recent Large Lot Residential subdivisions such as at Mandeville and Ohoka, I recommend the experience. These have created areas which engender a real sense of peace and community atmosphere.
- 16 My point in all of this is that this land is exceptionally well suited to act as a transition between the urban environment to the South and the Lifestyle blocks to the North. True rural use only commences well outside of town, and well away from the bounds of this property.

DEMAND FOR THIS TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT

- 17 My research prior to purchase and subsequently has highlighted a strong demand for these type of blocks and this type of subdivision not currently available in the Oxford area.
- 18 I note that council studies suggest a demand in the broader district for 30-40 of these type of properties per year, which of itself is not met in the proposed large lot residential zones. However this demand calculation is based on current sales levels that are strongly limited by supply constraints.
- 19 I am frequently told by Real Estate agents that they are selling 2 hectare or 4 hectare properties to purchasers who only want a bit of space and a paddock for a sheep or two. These purchasers would prefer large lot residential style places but they are unavailable.
- 20 The Large Lot Residential subdivisions that have occurred in the district have sold very quickly and at prices nearing or on par with those for lifestyle blocks. This highlights the lack of supply and unsatiated demand.
- 21 The Oxford demographic includes a growing number of retired farmers, North Islanders and a number of British ex-pats (no doubt encouraged by the Oxford address) among others. Many of these are people who I have spoken to, and who would be interested in living in a Large Lot Residential subdivision in the Oxford area.
- 22 I am happy to provide deeper insights on this if helpful.

23 Thank you for providing this opportunity to address the Panel.

Ben O'Grady

23 July 2024