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Te Putahi Ladies Mile Variation

The Threepwood Farm Residents Association (TFRA) have asked me to prepare a lay witness submission that summarises current farming operations at Threepwood, which includes the Outstanding Natural Feature of Slopehill (ONF), and to discuss the effects of and mitigations to the 2 proposed active travel links from the Ladies Mile subdivision to Lake Hayes, which cut across the farm.

My name is Jonathan George Newson. After three years at Lincoln College, I graduated in 1967 with a Diploma in Valuation and Farm Management and started employment as the first adviser to the newly formed Western Southland Farm Improvement Club. I was based in Otautau, and the 35 club members were mainly large-scale sheep and beef hill country farmers on the foothills of the Takatimu Mountains. I was registered as a Public Valuer in 1973 and was the 49th person in New Zealand to become registered as a Farm Management Consultant in 1979. I became a Fellow of the NZ Institute of Primary Industry Management in 1995. I have always operated on my own account, and demand for my services has always exceeded my ability to supply. In 2007 I sold my client list to Baker and Associates (A Wairarapa based farm consulting group) and our intensive Otautau sheep farm and moved to Arrowtown. In recent years I have maintained contact with a small group of interested clients, including the TFRA. My first involvement with Threepwood Farm began in 2011.

The land area currently being farmed at Threepwood is approximately 150ha, which also encompasses the Outstanding Natural Feature of Slopehill. This was the remaining land area following a residential subdivision of the wider area into c 50 individual lots in 2005. From the outset, because the farm was part of a residential subdivision and included the ONF, it was emphasised to the farm lessee, Jared Hutton, that the land must be managed and maintained to a high standard and grazed by non-threatening stock, predominantly sheep. The lessee is required to control rabbits and weeds, apply minimum fertiliser annual maintenance, limit cash cropping, and fully maintain the asset. Today there are 8 separate blocks of improved tussock, and 9 other paddocks ranging from heavy soil with irrigation potential to higher rolling land in pasture, capable of growing feed crops. A new two stand woolshed was constructed in the yard area that also contains a small cattle yard, a sheep yard, a large storage shed, all centrally located and linked to the farm by double fenced tracks. A major effort has gone into rabbit fencing and control, while the control of gorse is on-going. The farm is capable of running around 700 stock units that including 600 mixed age breeding ewes and a small number of cattle to utilise the higher tussock areas. For a farm to provide fulltime employment for one person and to be economically viable, it usually requires around 3,000 stock units. The low annual rental lease charged, coupled with the hours put into the farm by the farmer, reflect the its moderate scale. Whatever the farm programme being utilised, this farm is not an economic unit, which usually requires around 3,000 stock units. The annual rental and the work required to manage this area recognises its moderate scale.

The proposal to develop 2,400 residential units on the land neighbouring Threepwood, and to utilise a paper road that runs along the base of Slopehill, connecting to Marshall Avenue, as an active travel link, will cut through the farm, separate the farm from the farm buildings and require major changes to the farm management plan at Threepwood.

The major consideration is that the planned walking/cycling track cuts through the Threepwood farm leaving the heaviest flat land and the farm buildings on the South side, and the greater area with most of the stock on the North side. To manage the farm successfully, the walking/cycling track would need to be crossed numerous times a day, either with a utility truck, a quad bike, or a tractor, probably towing an implement. Gates on either side of the track would need to be opened and closed each time. Cattle stops, as proposed in the s42A report, can easily be jumped across by dogs, and if sheep try to jump across them they will invariably become stuck, requiring assistance to be removed hopefully with no broken bones.

The walking/cycling track would need to be fenced to prevent dogs roaming on to neighbouring paddocks. The fence would need to be the height of deer fencing to prevent large dogs leaping over and the stay gaps much narrower than the smallest regular deer netting to prevent small dogs wriggling through. The swinging gates across the walking/cycling track to connect the farm to the farm buildings would need to have similar material and height. It is worth highlighting that the farm has had issues in the past with wandering dogs mauling stock, up to 20 alone in one season. Also that over the 2 month spring lambing period, residents are advised to keep their dogs well away from the paddocks because of the risk of ewes being becoming mismothered from their lambs. Lastly, more dogs will result in more dog faeces, which is one of the causes of Sheep Measles (Cystic Ovis), as the parasite can live in the faeces if the dog has eaten raw or untreated meat. Many urban people are unaware of this issue and don't realise that their pet dogs can transfer the disease to sheep by defecating on or near farm pasture.

With most of the stock on the north side of the track, and all stock handling facilities including the woolshed on the south side, the challenge to bring stock across would be frequent and stressful, requiring two persons instead of the present, one. The need to make these crossings with man, machines and farm stock could be at anytime including times of low daylight.

My practical experience when walking well used tracks locally, like the Arrowtown Millennium Trail, is that large numbers of people, whether cycling or walking, are wearing ear pods, and are therefore unaware of their surroundings, and that very few dogs are restrained by leashes. With the proposed 2,400 residential units and c. 10,000 residents, plus the 1,500 residential units and 6,000 residents from Lake Hayes Estate and Shotover Country, this will likely be one of the most travelled tracks in the district, and cannot be compared to Central Otago Rail Trail and other country tracks that have very low volumes of traffic that pass through less developed and less intensively managed farmland.

The long-standing present lessee, Jared Hutton, has indicated they wish to negotiate an early termination of their present lease, aiming for 31st March 2024. I would expect that the prospect of extra day to day complication of farming next to increase urban intensification and continual crossing the travel link below Slopehill will have influenced their decision as would new interest that will be considering the leasing opportunity.

Conclude

Developing the Paper Road along the base of Slopehill will essentially create a double fenced access track that cuts through the present unimpeded access to all the farmed land on Threepwood, including the yard area that contains the woolshed, storage shed and stock handling facilities. The threat from wandering dogs will be greatly enhanced due to increased numbers, and even though the need to keep gates closed will be signalled, the Public generally are very unreliable in responding to such requests. To have the extra need of crossing the double fenced access lane will greatly inconvenience a lessee on this small barely viable farm. The value of a fair rental or the return from farming will also be affected. Finally, farming is the most economical way of maintaining the Outstanding Natural Feature of Slopehill, and any risk to the viability of the farm is also a risk to the ONF.

Jon G Newson