

# Memorandum

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Attention: Megan Barr

Company: Kapiti Coast District Council

Date: 24 October 2024

From: Alex Gardiner, Senior Landscape Architect, Boffa Miskell Ltd

Message Ref: Landscape Assessment Peer Review: 160 Mazengarb Road, Paraparaumu

Project No: BM240777

## 1. Introduction

- 1 Boffa Miskell (BML) has been engaged by Kapiti Coast District Council (KCDC) to peer review the landscape and visual effects assessment for the proposed development of residential allotments, and associated fee simple subdivision at 160 Mazengarb Road, Paraparaumu.
- 2 The proposal will establish 41 residential dwellings, largely single storey but with a small number of double storey, across a 7168m<sup>2</sup> site currently in residential use with a single dwelling (and associated external sheds and garages).
- 3 This review relates to the landscape and visual assessment prepared for the Application and provides an analysis of the adequacy of the assessment method and its reporting on landscape and visual effects, together with a consideration of the outcomes of the assessment against the provisions of the Kapiti Coast District Plan (the Plan) and statutory framework. The review has been carried out by Alexandra Gardiner, a Senior Landscape Architect at Boffa Miskell Limited (BML). As a part of this review, the following application documents have been referred to:
  - Landscape and Visual Assessment prepared by DesignGroup Stapleton Elliot, dated 23 September 2024 (including Appendix 1); and
  - Land Use and Subdivision Consent Application and Assessment of Environmental Effects, 160 Mazengarb Road, Paraparaumu, prepared by Cuttriss Consultants Limited, including:
    - Appendix B – Architectural Plans; and
    - A suite of Scheme Plans, particularly:
      - Existing Layout (drawing number 23333 SCH Sheet 1)
      - Overall Layout (drawing number 23333 SCH Sheet 2)
      - Earthworks Layout (drawing number 23333 SCH Sheet 3)
      - Earthworks Cross Sections (drawing number 23333 SCH Sheet 4)
      - Road Layout (drawing number 23333 SCH Sheet 17); and
      - Staging Plan (drawing number 23333 SCH Sheet 20)

- 4 A site visit was undertaken on 16th October 2024 to the site and its surrounding context to help inform the findings of this review. Weather conditions were fine, with high cloud. Visibility was excellent.
- 5 This review responds to the following questions in relation to the Landscape Assessment contained within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ('the Assessment'), and has been carried out in line with the methodology described for undertaking peer reviews in Te Tangi a Te Manu<sup>1</sup> (Lister et al., 2022):
1. Whether the **methodology** used represents best practice in assessing the actual or potential landscape and visual effects of the activity,
  2. That the **description of the existing environment**, landscape and visual amenity values are adequately covered,
  3. That **the proposal** is adequately described and the illustrative material supporting the proposal and accompanying text are clear and sufficient to form part of the consent,
  4. That all **relevant statutory planning matters** and documents have been identified and addressed,
  5. That all key viewpoints are covered, and the actual or potential **landscape, visual and natural character effects** of the activity have been adequately considered,
  6. That appropriate **design measures** have been taken to avoid potential adverse effects, or to remedy or mitigate such effects, and that these will be effective,
  7. That the **conclusions** are robust and reflect the findings of the assessment.

## 2. Methodology

- 6 The Assessment methodology is supplied in Section 2 of the report. The assessment states the methodology used follows Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines<sup>2</sup> (TTM). The effects ratings are based upon a seven-point scale which ranges from very low to very high, which is accordance with current best practice contained within TTM.
- 7 The methodology within the report is brief and does not set out any detail on what is considered when appraising the existing landscape nor criteria considered when assessing the nature of or the level of each effect. There is no explanation around the difference between landscape and visual effects and how each are considered. However, there is evidence within the description of the assessment process which shows that these considerations have been taken into account.
- 8 No definitions for the effect ratings are provided. Therefore, there is a certain lack of transparency as to how each assessment decision was made which prevents an understanding of the graduation and nuance between the levels of effect.

## 3. The Proposed Development

- 9 The proposal is described in detail in Section 3 of the LVEA. The project description is generally the same as that contained within the main application report and assessment of environmental effects (AEE) with specific focus on the information which is pertinent to the landscape assessment.
- 10 In summary, the LVEA description of the proposal includes:
- 41 residential dwellings, predominantly single storey with some double storey dwellings to achieve variety. Seven of the proposed dwellings will front Mazengarb Road. Dwellings will be a simple gable end building, with single storey dwellings measuring 5.15m to top of gable, and double storey dwellings measuring 6.10m to top of gable;

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<sup>1</sup> *Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022, pp160-163

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

- earthworks to level the site, balancing cut and fill. Retaining wall will be required in some locations along the site boundary;
- fencing will surround each dwelling, ranging in height from 1.2m and 1.5m (front and side yard fencing) to 1.8m (rear yard only)
- community greenspace, central to the Site;
- internal loop road with resident and guest parking; and
- associated landscaping.

#### 4. Existing Environment

- 11 The existing landscape of both the Site and the local area is described in Section 3 of the LVEA.
- 12 This section provides a brief description of the Local Context and Site Description, noting the legal description and zoning of the Site. The description then describes access to the site and nearby properties, and its position in regard to other amenities such as schools, shopping centres and public transport. A brief description of the character of residential development in the wider urban fabric is provided. It is noted that existing development is largely single storey dwellings which occupy semi-large lots with limited sized private outdoor spaces. Access to local reserves and walkways are also identified.
- 13 The Site characteristics are then described, noting existing vegetation and landcover, fencing treatments, topography and existing features such as the residential dwelling and associated outbuildings.
- 14 A site summary section highlights the key findings of the site which will be used to assist in framing the assessment, relating to the existing trees and dwellings/ buildings on site; zoning under the KCDP, and outlook from neighbouring properties.
- 15 The summary notes that the site is 'out of character' with the surrounding area as it is a single dwelling surrounded by a large area of open space, while the immediate and wider context is characterised by more densely populated residential areas. I agree with this description.
- 16 Following the description of the Site, the section then describes the permitted baseline comprising three residential dwellings with associated detached garages. These are presented in the AEE documentation and drawings. The section then identifies the visual character and amenity associated with the General Residential Zone, as described under DO-O11 of the KCDP.
- 17 More information in this section on the three considerations required by TTM (Physical, Associative, Perceptual) would have been useful in order to directly relate to the assessment as presented in Section 6 of the LVEA (Landscape Effects). Additionally, it would have been helpful to identify the viewing audience of the proposed development, describing their existing views in more detail.
- 18 Based on my own site work and understanding of the proposed development, I generally agree with the description set out in this section of the assessment.

#### 5. Relevant Statutory matters

- 19 Section 5 (pages 9 – 12) of the LVEA identifies the relevant statutory and non-statutory provisions which relate to the proposed development. This section only refers to the Kapiti Coast District Plan (KCDP). It does not identify those relevant parts of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), the Greater Wellington Regional Council Natural Resources Plan (NRP) or the Wellington Regional Policy Statement (RPS) which underpin the district plan policies.
- 20 The site is zoned as General Residential in the KCDP. There are no relevant natural environment overlays, however the site is located within the Coastal Environment overlay as shown on the KCDP

planning map. As a result of the Site being within the coastal environment, the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement (NZCPS) therefore also applies. Applicable policies include 13 (Natural Character) and 15 (Natural Landscapes and Natural Features).

- 21 The LVEA sets out the relevant policies of the General Residential zone which relate to landscape matters and provides a commentary on how the proposed development would achieve these. The LVEA does not provide any commentary on effects on the coastal environment, or on natural character which is a landscape consideration.
- 22 A large area of Kapiti is covered by the coastal environment overlay, which extends from the coast up to and including the escarpment at Hemi Matenga reserve, some 5km inland. From a development management perspective, *the presence of this coastal environment area gives additional weight to consideration of effects and the need to ensure adverse effects are avoided, remedied or mitigated*<sup>3</sup>.
- 23 The site is not identified as an area of outstanding natural character, or high natural character. It is not identified as an outstanding natural feature or landscape, nor is it located within a special amenity landscape overlay. The rules in the coastal environment section of the plan are not applicable to the proposed development site. However, Policy CE-P1 requires consideration to understand the extent and characteristics of the coastal environment within the Site boundary.
- 24 Overall, the site has very low levels of natural character, mainly reflected in the gently undulating landform which is consistent with the dunelands that are characteristic of the Kapiti area. There is no evidence of coastal vegetation or habitat of indigenous coastal species and while it is likely the landform was created by active coastal processes it is considered unlikely that these still occur. There are no elements or features which contribute to the natural character, landscape, visual quality or amenity value of the coast and there does not appear to be any historic heritage which connects the site to the coast. Effects on natural character is therefore considered to be very low.

## 6. Assessment of Landscape, Visual and Natural Character Effects

### 7. General Comments

- 25 The landscape assessment is prefaced by a section which sets the elements which are considered as part of the assessment: Physical landscape characteristics, Associative landscape characteristics, and Perceptual landscape characteristics. The consideration of these element is in accordance with the approach taken in TTM.

### 8. Landscape character effects

- 26 An assessment of the landscape effects of the proposal is provided in Section 6 of the LVEA.
- 27 Section 6.1 sets out the effects on the site's Physical Landscape Characteristics. This section describes the topography of the site, noting that it is not typical of the topography within the area surrounding the site which has been highly modified to construction residential development. Detail is then provided on proposed earthworks which would level the site and seek to solve any ponding issues.
- 28 All existing trees and other vegetation will be removed from the site to facilitate construction of the proposed development. The removal of this vegetation, which is present in the background of some views from the wider area is identified as having an effect on passers-by, and on residential neighbours directly surrounding the site. I suggest this is slightly conflating landscape and visual effects however the removal of the vegetation will alter the overall character of the Site, but I think it is unlikely to alter the character of the landscape to any great degree. The proposed development will also introduce new tree species to replace that which would be lost.

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<sup>3</sup> Kapiti Coast District Council (2021) Kapiti Coast District Plan 2021, Part 2 General District Wide Matters – Coastal Environment

- 29 The assessment states that the *“proposed dwellings conform to physical characteristics similar in nature to those present in the existing residential areas in the immediate neighbourhood and across other ‘General Residential’ Zoned areas in the Kāpiti Coast District. Density is a familiar concept on the Kāpiti Coast, where developments are designed with local amenities in close proximity or situated along main arterial routes. The built form of these units will be visually complimented by the assistance of the topography of the surrounding area, mature vegetation surrounding the site, and the residential fabric of the buildings consistent with similar colours tones, and roof types/pitches.”*
- 30 I consider that there is a compatibility between the proposed development and the character of development in the immediate area, rather than a consistency as identified in the assessment. This compatibility is highlighted earlier in the LVEA where a comment was made about the site being ‘out of character’ with the surrounding area, comprising a large site with a single dwelling. Construction of the proposed development would bring the site into alignment with the suburban environment it sits within.
- 31 With regards to consistency, the proposed development is denser than the residential development that surrounds the site. Recent, and still incomplete subdivision to the south of the site (at Niu Sila Way), and slightly older development to the west combined with older housing to the north and east have larger houses on larger lot sizes. The proposed housing typology is different to that which exists in the wider area. However, I do not think this would have notable adverse effects on the physical characteristics of the landscape.
- 32 No level of effect rating (in accordance with the 7-point scale set out in the assessment’s methodology) has been provided in this section of the assessment. I agree with the findings of the assessment that overall, and as proposed planting and specimen trees mature and contribute to the setting of the development, effects on the physical characteristics of the landscape would be minor.
- 33 Associative Landscape Attributes are assessed in Section 6.2. This is explained as *relationships between people and place – history, identity and narratives*.
- 34 The first paragraph highlights the Kapiti Coast region as being predominantly dunelands. It continues to note that *“the proposed site could be located on historic dune land, but it is approximately 1.8km from the Paraparaumu coastline. Although this is an aspect of the district’s character which was significantly lost through colonisation and as the coastline was developed for residential purposes since the 1800’s, it is something that could be celebrated or reflected within the proposed development.”* As the topography of the Site will be levelled to facilitate development of the dwellings and external spaces/ roads I consider it unlikely that the dune land character could be reflected within the proposed development boundary. Additionally, the proposed site plans do not reflect this character as being celebrated within the proposal site.
- 35 The section discusses connections to shopping areas and to Paraparaumu Beach via Mazengarb Road. It identifies Paraparaumu as encapsulating an *“array of residential living, conditions, type and form of development”*. It notes the sense of place people associate with their homes, and how the architectural and physical features of the home is associated with landscape character.
- 36 I understand what the assessment is seeking to describe. Based on my site visit and understanding of the area, my opinion is that this area is a residential part of Paraparaumu which is currently experiencing further development and landscape change. The associations with the landscape of the site and the immediate area is of a place where people live, attend school, and travel through to visit the beach, access Paraparaumu town and the wider Kapiti area. The LVEA does not identify any cultural associations within the description of associative values, and the KCDP does not show any cultural or historic overlays within 500m of the Site.
- 37 I do not agree that the style of the proposed *development is fundamentally different to that of townhouses*. These proposed dwellings, while detached and largely single storey, are uniform in appearance and profile and their layout is not dissimilar to a townhouse development. This is not automatically a negative characteristic but should be acknowledged particularly as existing neighbouring residences will experience views of multiple dwellings.

- 38 The assessment concludes this section stating that the effects of the proposed development on the associative landscape characteristics are seen as positive however again, no level of effect rating is given. I suggest this is a Low and neutral effect, as the proposed development will be much denser than existing residential development in the area but will reinforce the current use of the landscape and will bring an area which is currently out of character with the existing environment more into alignment.
- 39 Perceptual Characteristics are assessed in Section 6.3 of the LVEA. The report cites Mazengarb Road as being a main arterial route and its street edges are lined with various uses and movement, resulting in a varied user experience. Removal of site vegetation is identified as a change which would impact upon the sensory experience. I would also suggest that the establishment of an area of housing would also impact the sensory experience of the landscape, filling in an area of perceived open space in views from immediate neighbours and users of Mazengarb Road.
- 40 The assessment concludes this section stating that the removal of mature vegetation would have an adverse effect, however this is a permitted activity. The conclusion also notes that as the proposed development would introduce new areas of planting, this would contribute to new senses, aesthetics and experiential qualities over time. Again, no level of effect rating has been provided for this section of the assessment.
- 41 Following my site visit, my perception of the site and surrounding area is of a populated residential area. As identified in the LVEA, the site is located on an arterial route which services schools, shops and residential properties in the wider area. The sounds and sights experienced from the site and neighbourhood are reflective of this – movement of vehicles and people, activity in gardens such as lawnmowing etc. The proposed development would introduce a denser residential activity within the proposed site but would correspond with the activities which already exist and would not alter the perception of the landscape in this area. I agree that the removal of the vegetation would alter the characteristics of the site however I do not think this removal would fundamentally change the perception of the landscape. I suggest the effect on perceptual characteristics of the landscape is very low, and neutral.
- 42 Section 6.4 of the LVEA sets out conclusions on landscape effects. An effect rating is provided, stating that the landscape effects of the development would be low, reducing to negligible as new areas of planting are established and the new look of the built form begins to soften over time. I agree with the findings of these conclusions.

## 9. Visual effects

- 43 An assessment of visual effects of the proposal is provided in Section 7 of the report. Ten viewpoints have been identified and assessed as part of this and is described as being representative of the public view at those locations.
- 44 The key findings of the study identify that the proposed development is most visible within 200m of the site boundary along Mazengarb Road; views from further distances are largely sheltered from visual impact due to existing development screening the site; and overall there would be a low visual impact in the long term as the site absorbs the change and the increased density becomes more commonly accepted. There is no time frame given to achieving this 'long term' effect.
- 45 The assessment then provides a tabulated summary of effects on each of the ten viewpoints identified. Photographs are provided for each location, with simulations presented for two locations on Mazengarb Road. Effects on these range from N/A to Low. I generally agree with the viewpoint assessment and can support the findings.
- 46 The conclusions of the visual impact assessment (see Section 7.3 of the LVEA) note that there would be immediate, temporary visual effects from a number of viewpoints. These are anticipated to be short term and will reduce once the proposal begins to integrate within the wider environment through use of sympathetic materials and planting establishment. It is considered that the proposed development

would be visually absorbed by the development in the neighbouring area and visual effects would be low.

- 47 I agree that for the majority of viewers of the site, the effect on views would be no greater than low. However, the LVEA does not provide any commentary or assessment on the nature and level of effect experienced by the immediate neighbours of the proposed development site. It is these viewers who I consider to be most impacted by the development given the high value and static nature of the view.
- 48 Currently, views for these residents extend across a largely open area of landscape, with a single dwelling and associated outbuildings located towards the rear of the site, set back from the boundary and surrounded by trees (see Photograph 1 and 2, below). Views from rear and side windows from neighbouring properties and garden spaces would be impacted by the proposed development as new dwellings would be built in proximity to the site boundary, and multiple dwellings would be visible in a single view. While views of neighbouring properties are to be expected when living in a residential area, the proposed density/ number of dwellings seen from an existing property would be different to views resulting from a permitted baseline scenario.
- 49 The permitted baseline scenario presented by the applicant identifies that three residential dwellings (up to a height of 11m) with detached garages could be constructed on the Site, provided the relevant permitted activity standards were met. Development of this hypothetical scenario would affect views from neighbouring properties, particularly those where new development is placed in proximity to the shared boundary, such as 11, 9 and 3 Holcombe Drive – as shown in the hypothetical baseline scenario presented. Neighbouring properties would view a building of a larger/ taller scale than those which are present in the existing environment. While they can be disregarded by the consenting authority, a permitted development scenario would nonetheless result in adverse visual effects on these immediate neighbours.
- 50 The proposed development would introduce residential properties along the full boundary(s) of the site, reducing the level of 'balance' land around dwellings that would be present in a permitted development scenario. All neighbouring dwellings would have direct views of multiple new residential buildings, with little 'relief' in the built form. For instance, residents of 6B and 8B College Drive would view into over 4 new dwellings from their rear boundary. On balance, however it is considered that the proposed development would result in effects which are similar to those experienced in a permitted development scenario as, even though the density is greater and more neighbouring properties are directly affected, the proposed dwellings are single storey rather than multistorey. In my opinion, effects on views from neighbouring properties would be low-moderate adverse. The proposed development would result in a modification to the view, however this change would not be uncharacteristic in the receiving landscape.





*Photograph 1: Neighbouring properties along the northern boundary of the Site. Note the living room window at 150 Mazengarb Road which looks directly into the site.*



*Photograph 2: Neighbouring properties along the western boundary of the site (left of image), and empty lots still to be developed along the southern boundary of the site (foreground of image).*

## 10. Recommended Mitigation

- 51 Section 8 of the assessment sets out the recommended measures to ensure that the proposed development is successful in integrating into the surrounding environment. The measures proposed are appropriate.
- 52 However, consideration of views from neighbouring properties should be undertaken to identify whether any further mitigation is required to reduce, remedy or avoid effects on these neighbours. Further information on the boundary treatment between the proposed development and existing neighbours is required to understand how these effects would be mitigated.



## 11. Conclusions

- 53 The landscape and visual effects assessment by DesignGroup Stapleton Elliot is prepared using methodology endorsed by Te Tangi a Te Manu, the Aotearoa New Zealand guidelines for landscape and visual assessments. The assessment provides a useful description of the existing environment and sets out the statutory framework at the district level. The general findings and conclusions of the assessment are agreeable and provide an understanding of the impact of the proposed residential development on both the landscape of the site, the wider area and on the visual amenity of public viewers.
- 54 However, no consideration of effects on private views are presented in the assessment. The views of these residents will be the most impacted by the proposed development as they are static, sensitive and in proximity to the development site. In my opinion, effects on these viewers would be moderate adverse. Therefore, further information on the boundary treatment between the proposed development and existing neighbours should be requested to understand how these effects would be mitigated.

# Appendix 1

## Method Statement

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22 November 2023

This assessment method statement is consistent with the methodology (high-level system of concepts, principles, and approaches) of 'Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines', Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022. The assessment provides separate chapters to discuss landscape, visual and natural character effects where relevant, but is referred to throughout as a Landscape Effects Assessment in accordance with these Guidelines. Specifically, the assessment of effects has examined the following:

- *The existing landscape;*
- *The nature of effect;*
- *The level of effect; and*
- *The significance of effect.*

### *The Existing Landscape*

The first step of assessment entails examining the existing landscape in which potential effects may occur. This aspect of the assessment describes and interprets the specific landscape character and values which may be impacted by the proposal alongside its natural character where relevant as set out further below. The existing landscape is assessed at a scale(s) commensurate with the potential nature of effects. It includes an understanding of the visual catchment and viewing audience relating to the proposal including key representative public views. This aspect of the assessment entails both desk-top review (including drawing upon area-based landscape assessments where available) and field work/site surveys to examine and describe the specific factors and interplay of relevant attributes or dimensions, as follows:

**Physical** –relevant natural and human features and processes;

**Perceptual** –direct human sensory experience and its broader interpretation; and

**Associative** – intangible meanings and associations that influence how places are perceived.

### **Engagement with tāngata whenua**

As part of the analysis of the existing landscape, the assessment should seek to identify relevant mana whenua (where possible) and describe the nature and extent of engagement, together with any relevant sources informing an understanding of the existing landscape from a Te Ao Māori perspective.

### **Statutory and Non-Statutory Provisions**

The relevant provisions facilitating change also influence the consequent nature and level of effects. Relevant provisions encompass objectives and policies drawn from a broader analysis of the statutory context and which may anticipate change and certain outcomes for identified landscape values.

### *The Nature of Effect*

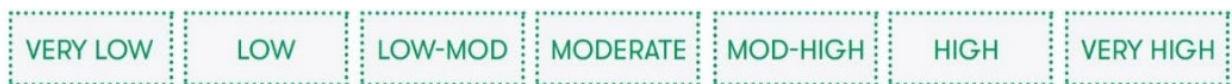
The nature of effect assesses the outcome of the proposal within the landscape. The nature of effect is considered in terms of whether effects are positive (beneficial) or negative (adverse) in the context within which they occur. Neutral effects may also occur where landscape or visual change is benign.

It should be emphasised that a change in a landscape (or view of a landscape) does not, of itself, necessarily constitute an adverse landscape effect. Landscapes are dynamic and are constantly changing in both subtle and more dramatic transformational ways; these changes are both natural and human induced. What is important when assessing and managing landscape change is that adverse effects are avoided or sufficiently mitigated to ameliorate adverse effects. The aim is to maintain or enhance the environment

through appropriate design outcomes, recognising that both the nature and level of effects may change over time.

### *The Level of Effect*

Where the nature of effect is assessed as ‘**adverse**’, the assessment quantifies the level (degree or magnitude) of adverse effect. The level of effect has not been quantified where the nature of effect is neutral or beneficial. Assessing the level of effect entails professional judgement based on expertise and experience provided with explanations and reasons. The identified level of adverse natural character, landscape and visual effects adopts a universal seven-point scale from **very low** to **very high** consistent with Te Tangi a te Manu Guidelines and reproduced below.



### *Landscape Effects*

A landscape effect relates to the change on a landscape’s character and its inherent values and in the context of what change can be anticipated in that landscape in relation to relevant zoning and policy. The level of effect is influenced by the size or spatial scale, geographical extent, duration, and reversibility of landscape change on the characteristics and values within the specific context in which they occur.

### *Visual Effects*

Visual effects are a subset of landscape effects. They are consequence of changes to landscape values as experienced in views. To assess where visual effects of the proposal may occur requires an identification of the area from where the proposal may be visible from, and the specific viewing audience(s) affected. Visual effects are assessed with respect to landscape character and values. This can be influenced by several factors such as distance, orientation of the view, duration, extent of view occupied, screening and backdrop, as well as the potential change that could be anticipated in the view as a result of zone / policy provisions of relevant statutory plans.

### *Natural Character Effects*

Natural Character, under the RMA, specifically relates to ‘*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*’. Therefore, the assessment of natural character effects only involves examining the proposed changes to natural elements, patterns and process which may occur in relevant landscape / seascape contexts.

As with assessing landscape effects, the first step when assessing natural character effects involves identifying the relevant physical and experiential characteristics and qualities which occur and may be affected by a proposal at a commensurate scale. This can be supported through the input of technical disciplines such as geomorphology, hydrology, marine, freshwater, and terrestrial ecology as well as input from tāngata whenua. An understanding of natural character considers the level of naturalness and essentially reflects the current condition of the environment assessed in relation to the seven-point scale. A higher level of natural character means the waterbody and/or margin is less modified and vice versa.

A natural character effect is a change to the current condition of parts of the environment where natural character occurs. Change can be negative or positive. The resultant natural character effect is influenced by the existing level of naturalness within which change is proposed; a greater level of effect will generally occur when the proposal reduces the naturalness of a less modified environment. In short, the process of assessing natural character effects can be summarised as follows:

- Identify the characteristics and qualities which contribute to natural character within a relevant context and defined spatial scale(s), including the existing level of naturalness;
- Describe the changes to identified characteristics and qualities and the consequent level of natural character anticipated (post proposal); and
- Determine the overall level of effect based on the consequence of change.



### *The Significance of Effects*

Decision makers assessing resource consent applications must evaluate if the effect on individuals or the environment is less than minor<sup>4</sup> or if an adverse effect on the environment is no more than minor<sup>5</sup>. For non-complying activities, consent can only be granted if the s104D 'gateway test' is satisfied, ensuring adverse effects are minor or align with planning objectives. In these situations, the assessment may be required to translate the level of effect in terms of RMA terminology.

This assessment has adopted the following scale applied to relevant RMA circumstances<sup>6</sup> (refer to diagram below), acknowledging low and very low adverse effects generally equate to 'less than minor' and high / very high effects generally equate to significant<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>4</sup> RMA, Section 95E

<sup>5</sup> RMA, Section 95E

<sup>6</sup> Seven-point level of effect scale. Source: Te tangi a te Manu, Pg. 15

<sup>7</sup> The term 'significant adverse effects' applies to specific RMA situations, including the consideration of alternatives for Notices of Requirement and AEEs, as well as assessing natural character effects under the NZ Coastal Policy Statement.