

## **Private Plan Change 28 – Maitahi Bayview**

Written statement

11 July 2022

Dr. Aaron Stallard

### **Introduction**

My name is Aaron Stallard. I am an eight-generation Nelsonian, and I have a PhD in geology and run a scientific editing business that serves clients in Asia and Europe. I have three adult children, and I care very much about this city and region, and the well-being of its people and environment.

When I heard of plans to build 550 houses in the Maitai Valley, I knew that I wanted to speak at this hearing because I value peaceful open spaces close to the city and I want the commissioners to know of how the proposed development would negatively affect the people in this region. I also knew that I had to take action because I don't want to be remembered as the generation that enabled urban sprawl into the Maitai Valley to the detriment of the wellbeing of the community.

### **Connection to the Maitai Valley**

Like many of us, I have strong connections to the Maitai Valley. My family have enjoyed the tranquil rural setting of the Maitai Valley for many generations. [Appendix item 1](#) shows my aunty and uncle at Black Hole in about 1965, and [Appendix item 2](#) shows me and cousins at the same spot a generation later. One of my earliest memories is of a large family picnic at Sunday Hole: me and my sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, my grandparents, relaxing, sharing a picnic, swimming and enjoying the open spaces, the birdsong, the trees, the river, all in the beautiful setting of the Maitai Valley. Over the decades, I've spent countless hours running the trails in the valley, cycling, going for walks with friends and family, valuing the chance to escape the city and bustle, to clear my head, relax, be mindful and enjoy beautiful nature.

### **Qualities of the Maitai Valley**

It is these qualities of the valley that make it so highly valued by the community and visitors alike. It is also the landforms, the feeling of taking refuge from the stresses of life, as though time is slowing down and offering us the chance to rest and recover, to simply be. That is why we go there. We could access the river in the city, but the river is less healthy in urban areas, and the setting is developed and cramped, with traffic and noise. I don't want this to happen to the Maitai Valley. If this development were to go ahead, we would lose so much more than we would gain, and the rural qualities of the valley would be lost forever.

### **News of the proposed subdivision**

Like most people, I was shocked to hear via the media that Council and a consortium of private developers considered a huge subdivision in the Maitai Valley to be a shovel-ready

project. You have heard of how the public has been excluded from decisions regarding the proposed subdivision, despite the fact that urban sprawl would have a strong intergenerational effect on the community, and despite the known strong opposition of the community to such a subdivision on the grounds of conflict with recreation values, loss of amenity, environmental harm, loss of a rural setting, and a desire to protect open green spaces and the urban–rural boundary. Put simply, the proposed subdivision is inconsistent with the known values of the community

### **The proposed subdivision**

I would argue that greenfield developments and urban sprawl are ideas of the past and are not part of today's solutions. Today the emphasis is on a compact urban form, a clear urban–rural boundary, a mode shift to active and public transport, intensification, and the protection of the remaining open green spaces that are so important for the physical and mental well-being of the community. It's time to look forward, not back, and to fundamentally change the way we do things for the better, to recognise that we must set limits in order to protect the things we value most as a community.

I'm not a planner, but it seems to me that Council's plans and strategies place an emphasis on protecting green space rather than promoting 1970's style urban sprawl into a treasured recreation area. I do wonder how the proposed subdivision can be consistent with the plans and strategies of local and central government.

To my mind, this approach to accommodating growth represents a failure of imagination and effort. It's akin to suggesting that traffic congestion can be solved by building more roads, when in fact the opposite is true. By taking such business-as-usual approaches we are just kicking the can down the road, at great cost to future generations.

I'm aware that Councils are under pressure from central government to identify housing capacity, but we know that we cannot achieve endless growth on a finite planet, and if we apply this reality locally, surely it's unrealistic to require a geographically constrained city such as Nelson (ocean to the west, mountains to the east, and existing urban areas to north and south) to make provisions for endless growth. I would argue that the community should be allowed to protect highly valued recreation areas and that we endeavour to meet as much housing demand as possible via intensification. There is simply a limit to how much growth Nelson can accommodate.

If we turn to details of the proposed subdivision, it is my view that the proposal by the applicant to change by engineering works the bank of the Maitai River, the river's floodplain, and even the course of Kākā Stream is invasive and disrespectful to nature. If nature truly had a voice and was speaking to you today, I'm sure it would have a timeless message: the wish to be left alone and to be given the space and time to be its amazing self.

Furthermore, it's concerning that the applicant's indicative masterplan shows that around 210 of the houses proposed in the lowest, coldest, and dampest part of the valley will have as little as four hours of sunlight per day in winter. This would not appear to be a sufficient gain to justify the known negative effects of urban sprawl into a prime recreation area.

Finally, the discharge of stormwater from the proposed subdivision into the Maitai River at Dennes hole is a particular concern. Many studies have documented the polluting effects of urban stormwater, which can carry toxic heavy metals such as zinc and lead (<https://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2022/05/Stormwater-Contaminants-in-Urban-Streams-in-the-Wellington-Region.pdf>), and pesticides and oil (<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.9b02867>). Stormwater can also change river flows and result in degradation of stream channels (<https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/environment/water/stormwater/>).

The public is aware that water quality is reduced in urban areas. Indeed, the lower Maitai River, within the existing urban area, is generally rated as unsuitable for swimming by Land Air Water Aotearoa ([Appendix item 3](#); <https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/swimming/>). The proposed subdivision is likely to reduce the attractiveness of the Maitai River as a site for swimming, especially for parents concerned about the health of their young children.

The above points show the great risks of negative outcomes in seeking to undertake urban development in such a sensitive landscape and highly valued rural setting.

### **Protecting and regenerating the Maitai Valley**

The proposed subdivision is also inconsistent with conservation efforts in the Maitai Valley. As a community, great efforts are being made, and millions of dollars spent, to revegetate the valley, restore the river to health, and enhance aquatic life. The proposed urban development is inconsistent with these efforts and would represent a backward step as a result of the proposed artificial engineering of the river and Kaka Stream, sedimentation in waterways (as we've seen during recent residential construction in the Bayview area I believe), and discharge of stormwater into Dennes hole.

### **Effects of a shift in the urban–rural boundary**

Many of the negative effects of the proposed development would result from the inherent nature of this type of development; that is, urban sprawl and the resulting change in the location of the urban–rural boundary. Of most concern is that Nelson's prime recreation area in the lower Maitai Valley, which is currently in a peaceful rural setting, will be overtaken by the shift in the urban–rural boundary and will then be in an urban setting, with all that entails, such as increased traffic; noise, light and air pollution; additional urban infrastructure; loss of the feeling of open space; artificial engineering of the river and natural landscapes; and reduced water quality.

I would like to show some of the problematic outcomes of the proposed sprawl via a series of three aerial images of central Nelson. The first image ([Appendix item 4](#)) shows the present urban–rural boundary in red, the area of the proposed subdivision outlined by a dashed white line, and the well-used recreation area in the lower Maitai Valley in light green, comprising the Centre of New Zealand, Branford Park, Olive Hill, the bmx jump track, various walking tracks in the hills and beside the Maitai River, Hanby Park, the children's playground

and picnic area at Black Hole, the cricket ground, and three popular swimming holes (Black Hole, Dennes Hole, and Sunday Hole at the Waahi Taakaro reserve).

The second image ([Appendix item 5](#)) shows the shift in the urban–rural boundary if the proposed subdivision were to go ahead, illustrating how the recreation area would be overtaken by urban sprawl. The current-day boundary is still shown, in pale red. Note that these slides are approximate and schematic only, intended only to convey the gross nature of the change in the rural-urban boundary.

Another worrying aspect of the proposed subdivision is that it would create a precedent for additional subdivisions in the valley. Council has already identified a second development area in the Maitai Valley at Orchard Flats, as stated in the 2019 Future Development Strategy (again without telling the community of its intentions). The third image ([Appendix item 6](#)) shows the changed urban–rural boundary if Orchard Flats were to be developed, and we can see even greater intrusion of urban sprawl around the recreation area.

In previous presentations you have heard of the many negative impacts of the proposed subdivision on the community, the river, and wildlife. Now I would like to relate two of the many ways in which the proposed subdivision would affect the community in terms of how the Maitai Valley is enjoyed.

First, one of the most popular short walks in Nelson for residents and visitors alike is standing on top of the Centre of New Zealand (Botanical Hill), enjoying the feeling of standing at the urban–rural boundary. Looking west, we see the city. Looking east we see a beautiful rural setting of green spaces and trees and hills, a wilderness playground that is largely free of development ([Appendix item 7](#)).

The applicant's Mr. Milne (landscape) states that he

*'...would expect most users [at the Center of NZ] to be focusing on the view across the city toward Tasman Bay and the distant Kahurangi and Abel Tasman National Park landforms, rather than back toward the inland valley.'*

I'm not sure why one would expect people to ignore the beautiful sight of green hills and valleys to the east, but I can report that in my experience of climbing Botanical Hill, those at the top do three things: recover from the steep climb, look west over the city, and look east over the beautiful Maitai Valley, commonly sitting on the grass to enjoy the view ([Appendix item 8](#)). I know which view I find more peaceful and refreshing.

It is thrilling to stand at the boundary between such different settings and to see human development to the west and peaceful nature to the east. If the proposed subdivision goes ahead, along with further subdivisions in the Maitai Valley that will likely follow, then visitors to the lookout on Botanical Hill will no longer enjoy a purely rural landscape to the east, they will no longer have escaped the urban area, and they will no experience the joy of standing on the urban–rural boundary with such contrasting views in each direction.

Finally, a personal story that conveys an example of the value of the rural setting of the Maitai Valley to young people. My children, like many I suspect, have had a hot/cold relationship with cycling as a way of getting around, but there is one activity for which they and their friends are very excited to travel by bike, and that is when they are planning to swim and relax in the Maitai Valley on a hot summer's day. Then it's a case of '*dad, can we use the bikes?*' and '*do we have a bike for my friend to borrow?*'. You can imagine why the idea is so appealing: cycling on the quiet and safe Maitai Valley Road on a warm day, with few cars, rolling through a beautiful rural valley, enjoying the peace and quiet, swimming in the clean waters, away from the bustle of the city, the birdsong and open spaces and natural landforms. This is the stuff of treasured childhood memories, of freedom and calm and joy. Quite simply, quality of life. This is worthy of protecting for future generations, so that young people will always be excited at rounding up a few bikes and heading up the Maitai Valley for a swim and to enjoy the company of their friends in the safe, peaceful setting of nature.

### Summary

In summary, I'm asking for open green spaces to be protected, and for peaceful recreation areas that are so important to the health and wellbeing of the community to be protected. I'm asking for the values of the community to be upheld and respected, and for the voice of the community to be heard when until now it has been ignored. And for these reasons, and for the quality of life of my children and their children, I respectfully ask you to decline the plan change request.

Thank you.

Aaron Stallard

11 July 2022

Appendix item 1





Appendix item 2

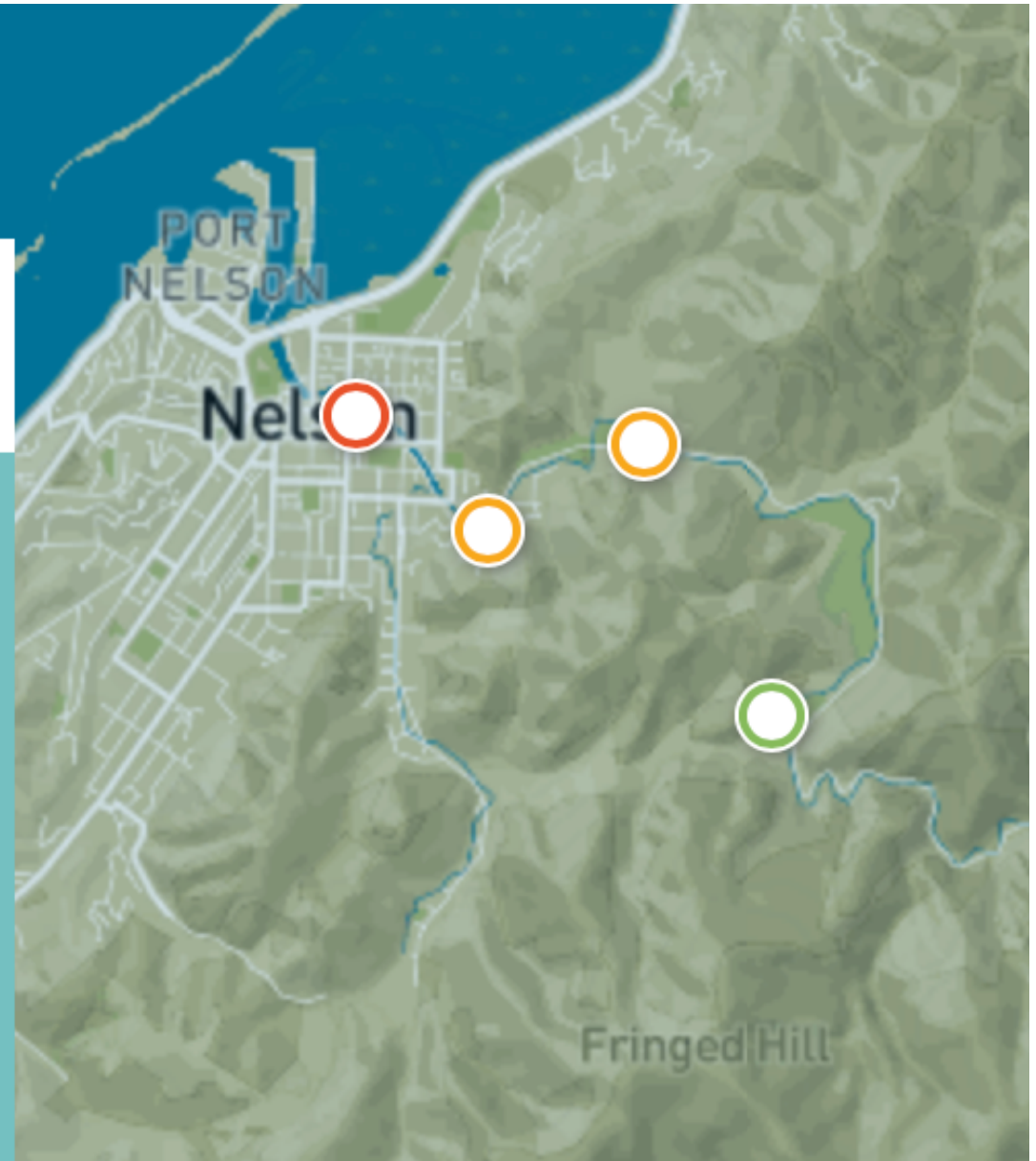




## Recreational water quality result

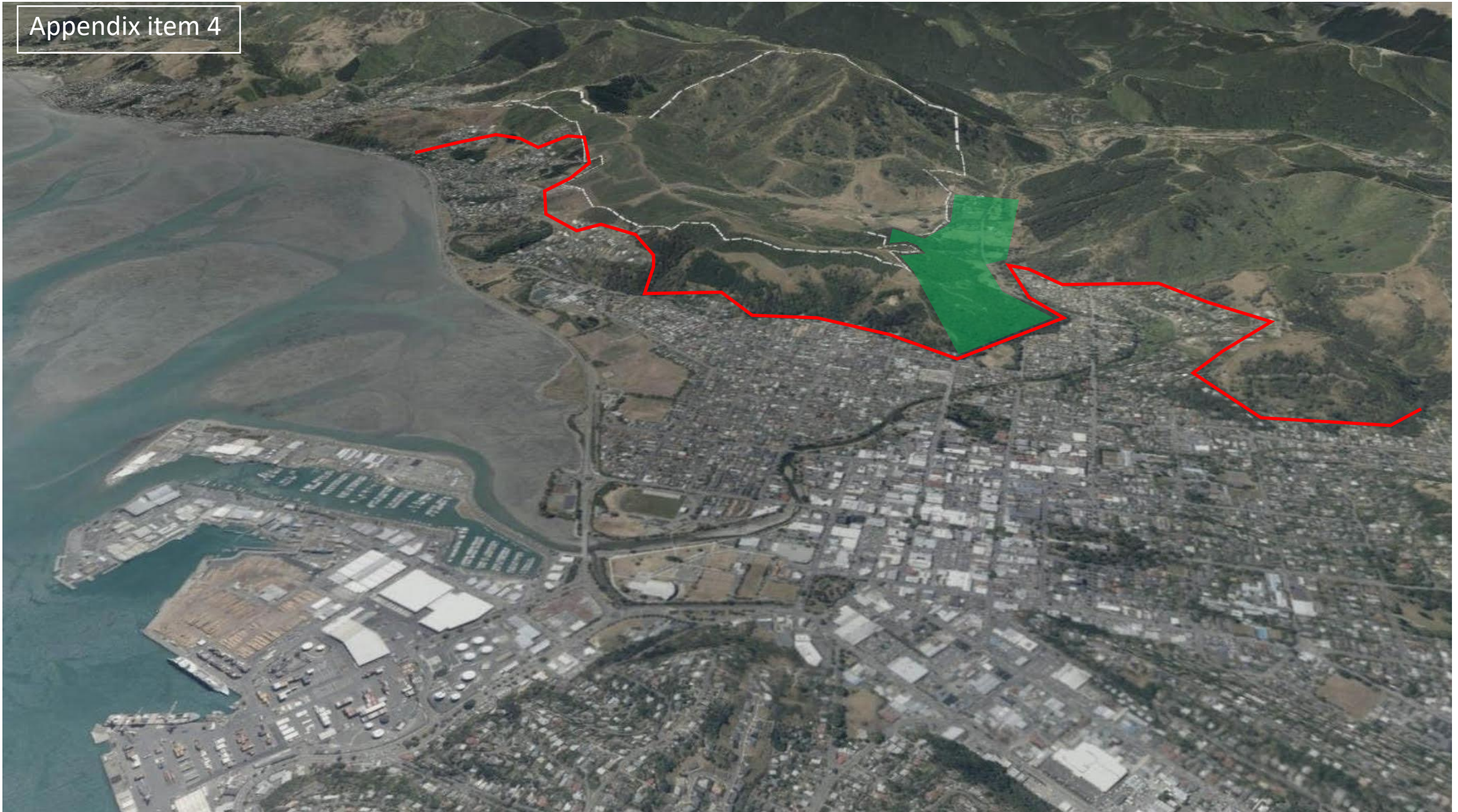
### Long-term grade

-  Excellent
-  Good
-  Fair
-  Poor





Appendix item 4





Appendix item 5





Appendix item 6









View to the east  
from Botanical Hill



View to the west  
from Botanical Hill

