

SUBMISSION, Save the Maitai

3 July 2022

My name is David Wheeler. I have been resident in Nile Street East since late 2020, relocating from Waiheke Island with our two resident grandchildren, whom we are raising. In 1992, my wife and I – with two children - immigrated from Europe and lived in Titirangi for 17 years; we are artists and work from our home.

The prime attraction of a life in New Zealand was and has remained the balance of natural and built habitat.

We promote visits to the country as offering 'what man has not done' (in contrast to the Theme Park experience of Australia).

Having responsibility for two young children has considerably raised our level of concern for the consequences of any decisions made today; we have to view the future through a very different lens and re-evaluate our concept of 'progress'.

I wish to voice my opposition to the Private Plan Change 28, Maitahi Bayview.

My objection is based on

1. The overall impact on the environment of the Maitai valley and the public amenity that it offers.
2. The specific effect of the construction proposal for this site.

The Maitai valley is an area of exemplary recreational value to the Nelson region. For residents to have an unspoilt valley on their immediate doorstep, available for recreational use, is a treasure not to be threatened. In essence, the area from the Clouston Bridge is pastoral.

I base my opinion on consideration of the experience my grandchildren will have in 25 years from now. The benefits to their mental and physical health from enjoying the immediate proximity of a natural environment will be measurable. Experiencing the contrast between urban and rural landscape on their doorstep, including the presence of bird-life and livestock, offers a balanced view of life far richer than the urban petting zoo?

The protection of the fringes of the Waitakere Ranges in West Auckland, which was secured under the Mayoralty of Sir Bob Harvey, has proven of immense value to the region and is much treasured by the residents. Similar plans existed to develop large tracts of its land for residential housing.

The awareness and acceptance of this recreational facility is clearly obvious on any day of the week: dog walkers, hikers, runners, families, cyclists, golfers all abound. Being a daily visitor, I observe the constant embrace of the valley. Visitors are mostly arriving on foot, not using vehicles.

A special routine of ours is to spend the Solstice sunrise, winter and summer, on the Centre of New Zealand. This offers an excellent eastern aspect of the night sky with quality astronomical viewing: Matariki presented itself on June 24. Maintaining this almost Dark Sky experience is of great educational and cultural value. The stray light of a development would obviate this opportunity.

The Maitai river itself is a wonderful eco-system to be treasured and preserved; the efforts to replant the banks and clean the water are appreciated. Sustaining the wildlife that inhabits the banks and boundaries is a public amenity essential to the ecology of the district. The proposed infrastructure requirements of the Denny's Hole area would surely have a severe detrimental effect on the balance of nature?

Recovery from such disruption would have to demand many decades.

In light of the recent flood projections issued by Council, I have to ask whether access to the development would be secure in an adverse weather or earthquake event? The combination of the bluff and the river creating a narrow access passage would most probably prevent emergency services from reaching the area, causing major risk to residents' lives and safety.

Our children are taught much about their guardianship role over the natural environment; we must demonstrate strong action to support this teaching.

My primary concern, however, comes from taking a long-term view of the project.

The proposed development would consume a large quantity of energy, in all senses, that I consider to be poorly utilised.

The consumption of fossil fuels in shaping the land, installing infrastructure, constructing the houses would place a severe strain on the immediate and wider environment.

The development is considered as addressing a need in the community, especially for 'affordable' housing. These properties would be located on the lower slopes and in the valley.

This brings issues of ongoing living quality and energy consumption.

The Maitai Valley is notoriously colder than central Nelson. The channelling of wind down the valley has a strong cooling effect. The river also generates a raised humidity, making the air feel cooler still.

'Affordable' housing is by necessity and definition built to lower standards of insulation than premium property. It would therefore demand more energy consumption to heat and dehumidify.

This expense would be a burden for the residents and would counter the 'affordable' nature of the homes.

Adding the cost of transport to and from the city for work, shopping and amenity would soon make the property unaffordable for the target audience.

My prediction is that within ten years, these properties would be run down, vacant, in poor repair and increasingly hard to sell or tenant.

The consequence is that they are then demolished and homes that are better suited to the conditions of the valley are built in their place. These would be considerably more costly. This demands yet another large tranche of energy – vehicles, manpower, materials – to rectify a poor initial decision.

The whole concept of 'affordable' housing, whether that be affordable for the resident, the Council or for the environment, is thereby lost.

The intent of the legislation that recommended this distribution of resources would be completely missed. For this reason, the proposal should be rejected.

Consider alternative options, that would better address the demand for more housing:

There is a proposed Nelson Junction retail site by the airport.

These projects have elsewhere drained retail from city centres. (Tauranga Crossing a prime example).

If Nelson can persuade its 'big-box' stores in the central city – retailers such as Hunting and Fishing, Kathmandu, Farmers etc – to relocate to Nelson Junction, then space for residential building around the car parks could be optimised.

The increase in inner city residents would then enable small, specialist retail to provide targeted service, keeping the inner city alive and thriving. (Auckland central is confronting this evolution at present).

This gives the city an identity distinct from other provincial cities, making an attractive offer to tourists and residents alike.

Conclusion:

The ecological value of the Maitai Valley is too great to risk being disturbed by large scale development.

The Maitai River cannot sustain such an attack on its delicate eco-system.

The overall energy consumption of the proposed development is unsustainable.

The projected demand for repair, renovation, reconstruction would render the project counter-productive.

Preservation of this unique habitat and environment has more beneficial consequence for residents of Nelson City and region than the provision of new residences.

Inner City dwellings have a greater probability of fulfilling the intent of the RMA.

David Wheeler & Christine Hafermalz-Wheeler
176 Nile Street East
Maitai
Nelson

david@dwwheeler.com