

PPC28 Hearing Attendance and Presentations [Ron Thomson - Written Submission S135]

Verbal submission 20 July 2022

Introduction...

I am speaking in my personal capacity. . .

We have lived in Nelson for over 20 years. We when we first moved here our children were young teenagers. We had lived overseas for 10 years and so we set about exploring the town we had chosen to move to.

My first memory of the Maitai Valley is in that context — we discovered that 10 seconds after leaving the houses of Nile Street, we were in the country !! — wide green open space with fields and hills to the left and right and a river on one side.

As we explored further, we discovered the back side of the Botanical Reserve, Branford Park with its beautiful trees, the Maitai Cricket Ground, the picnic and barbeque areas by the riverside, and the three main swimming holes — Black Hole, Dennes Hole, and Sunday Hole.

We were gob-smacked by the space, the green, the calm, and the lack of traffic. What foresight the City Fathers must have had, we thought, to set aside, so close to the city centre, such a wonderful place for the enjoyment of its citizens.

And people do enjoy it — go to Branford Park and the recreation areas by the river and the noise there is not of traffic but of families playing family games and, in summer, the sounds of laughing and splashing.

Nelsonians use the parkland and the river all the time for their recreation — for walking their dogs or just walking, tossing frisbees, playing cricket, picnicking and swimming. And, of course, in recent years the number of cyclists using Nile Street and the Maitai Valley Road has increased enormously — heading off to trails in the Upper Maitai,

It is not overstating it to say that the Maitai valley is one of Nelson's precious taonga. And the farm that fills the Kaka Valley is part of this taonga; it is rural, it is quiet, it is green, it is traffic free...

Surely the past leaders of our community — the same leaders who set aside and developed Branford Park, the cricket ground and the swimming and picnic areas — surely those leaders also deliberately kept Kaka Valley green and distanced from development because they appreciated its value as open space forming the background to the public parks.

The fact that in 2022 it is still part of that background and is zoned rural demonstrates that our city founders and those who have come subsequently have valued it as a very special place.

It saddens me that the current Nelson City Council could even contemplate allowing Kaka Valley to be urbanized. How horrified their predecessors — men and women whose foresight gave us this special place — how disappointed those earlier councillors would be to see it dominated by houses and traffic.

As I said in my initial submission, great cities preserve greenscapes close to their centres because they are seen as essential to people's health and wellbeing. In other parts of New Zealand, look at the green belt in Wellington... Cornwall Park and One Tree Hill Reserves in Auckland and all the regional parks surrounding that city.

When Nelson is a bigger city with infill housing and a significantly bigger population, green spaces like the Maitai Valley will be deeply appreciated and valued. I would hope that this Council and the Commissioners can see that and have the foresight that our City Founders had, and keep it from further development.

If it is developed, it will be gone forever and future generations of Nelsonian will shake their heads in amazement that it was allowed to happen.

In my original submission, I recorded my prediction that if the development proceeds then, within a year or two of the inevitable traffic increases, there will be pressure to cut down the trees that line Nile Street in order to widen it. We will then lose the only avenue of trees we have in Nelson. I stand by that prediction and am saddened at the prospect.

Many other speakers and submitters will have described the impacts of this development on traffic flows, noise levels, and water quality and I support those submissions.

For me, as with many of the other individual submitters, I wanted to tell you today how much our family and countless others, enjoy the recreation areas in the Maitai Valley. With our family, that enjoyment has extended over 20 years.

I have deep admiration and respect for previous Councils who have shaped the lower valley into the parkland we have today, and allowed Kaka Valley to remain unspoiled. I hope it will remain the green and calm space that it currently is, for future generations.

I implore the Council and the Commissioners to see the area for what it is — one of Nelson's most precious taonga.

Ron Thomson