

SHAFTESBURY GROVE, STOKES VALLEY PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE

Landscape response to comments on Landscape and Visual Issues raised in Submissions and further Submissions

Given the duplication of a number of submissions, I have responded to the issues raised rather than to individual submissions per se.

Summary of Submissions on landscape

Issue	Submitter	#
1 Loss of distant and panoramic views from Shaftesbury Grove and Aldersgate Grove	Phil Angus	2
	Kathy Foote	13
	Karyn Sirota	16
	Anthony Allan	21
	Margaret & Michael Reed	24
	Geraldine MacMillan	26
	Terry Speirs	28
2 Impact on geographical environment	Kathy Foote	13
3 Loss of privacy for Aldersgate Grove residents – closest houses 75m away	Christine Jowers	20
	Kathleen Abbott	23
	Margaret & Michael Reed	24
	Michelle Reed	25
	Geraldine MacMillan	26
4 Visual effects of built development viewed from lower elevations, especially Aldersgate Grove	Christine Jowers	20
	Margaret & Michael Reed	24
	Geraldine MacMillan	26
	Michelle Reed	25
5 Loss of amenity due to removal of vegetation, particularly foreground vegetation	Christine Jowers	20
	Kathleen Abbott	23
	Margaret & Michael Reed	24
	Michelle Reed	25
	Geraldine MacMillan	26
6 Flaws in landscape assessment	Phil Angus	2

Issue 1: Loss of distant and panoramic views from Shaftesbury Grove and Aldersgate Grove

A number of submissions note that Shaftesbury and Aldersgate Grove residents enjoy the current the views from Shaftesbury Grove out across the Hutt Valley, to Wellington city, the harbour and Matiu/Somes Island, and the distant Kaikoura Ranges. Furthermore, as Anthony Allan says in his submission, the area nearest the road is the only area in all of Stokes Valley that the general public can come to enjoy the magnificent panoramic views.

Depending on the final built development, the outlook will change for Shaftesbury and Aldersgate Grove residents, with existing panoramic views restricted to viewshafts or distant views.

However the on-going revegetation process is already changing the views from houses and from the verge alongside Shaftesbury Grove. The original geotechnical report notes *“Historic aerial photos of the area show the development of Shaftesbury Grove and subdivisions at the top of the ridgeline occurred between 1972 and 1977. Only minor earthworks appear within the site boundary. The largest of the two spurs appears to have been identified for a cul-de-sac type subdivision development on 1965 plans, and this spur was cleared and cut during the same earthworks between 1972 and 1977.”*¹

Fifty years later, vegetation patterns on the spurs and adjacent to the road are changing from a cleared site to gorse to pioneering gorse-dominated scrub to native vegetation which overtime will limit views from the streets and houses overlooking the reserve.

On the issue of a lookout point, I note that there are no other lookout areas that I know of in Stokes Valley that provide panoramic views to the west and south. While it is beyond the scope of this plan change, it may be appropriate if and when Shaftesbury Grove is extended for Council to consider public access to a lookout point along the ridgeline. This could be located in conjunction with the existing reservoir to the south.

Issue 2: Impact on geographical environment

Kathy Foote submits that building on the plan change area would have an impact on the geographical environment and an impact on properties in Shaftesbury Grove. While not strictly a landscape issue, a number of Shaftesbury Grove residents purchased their property in the belief that the area in question would not be built on due to its classification as a reserve.

I agree with Mr Blaschke’s comment that *“All areas within the wider site not rezoned residential should be returned to Hutt City Council as reserve land and considered for scenic reserve or equivalent formal protection.”* Council’s intent to grant formal reserve status to the remaining area within the wider property would protect the on-going revegetation process on the remainder of the unbuilt land and provide residents with certainty in respect of the wider geographical environment.

Issue 3: Loss of privacy for Aldersgate Grove residents

Residents from Aldersgate Grove and Holborn Drive are concerned that they will be overlooked from the houses in the development with a subsequent loss of privacy. The Reed family at 2 Aldersgate Drive, for example, noted that they have large windows and a deck with views out over the reserve, and both indoor and outdoor living areas would be seen in views from houses at the higher elevation.

Residents currently enjoy uninterrupted privacy. This will change with the proposed residential development, although the proposed built development will be no less than 75m from the closest house in Holborn Drive. For residents at Aldersgate Grove, houses on the closer, lower spur will be at least 200m to the southwest. These relatively large viewing distances provide effective mitigation in the issue of privacy, although there is loss in the perceived sense of seclusion and isolation.

¹ Site Description Page 3, *Preliminary Geotechnical Suitability Assessment, Shaftesbury Grove*. Tonkin & Taylor Ltd. August 2009

Issue 4: Visual effects of built development viewed from lower elevations, especially Aldersgate Grove

A number of submitters raised the concern that *“the visual impact of the overlooking properties can be expected to be significant and negative, as most homebuilders will choose to build multi-storied houses.”*

I agree and extend these concerns to include the visual impact on views from the floor of the Hutt Valley including SH2 and Eastern Hutt Road. It is my opinion that adverse effects arise not just from the dwelling but from the overall site development. This includes the aggregation of house and the deck structures plus the retaining walls and fences used to create functional, flat, outdoor living areas on sloping sites, such as can be observed in the existing Aldersgate Grove properties.

I consider that the most effective means to manage built development bulk is to impose limits on building height (including decks) from ground level to roofline, and control the height of retaining walls. As well as being beyond the scope of a Plan Change, such controls are most effective when they are applied to a specific subdivision on a site by site basis. I recommend that at the time of the Resource Consent application, Council commission a more rigorous assessment that provides assessment criteria based on the final subdivision layout and the contours of each individual lot.

Issue 5: Loss of amenity due to removal of foreground vegetation

Submissions referred to in Issue 4 also express disquiet at the removal of foreground vegetation. There is a reasonable wedge of vegetation between Aldersgate Grove and Holborn Drive properties and the proposed development. Council’s intent to protect this by granting formal reserve status to the land will alleviate submitter concerns to some degree.

With respect to the subdivision itself, I note that any residential development requires clearing some vegetation removal, although restrictions on built development (as outlined above) effectively limit some of the clearance as residents usually want a flat lawn (which requires a retaining wall of some form) and do not wish to be continuously mowing/clearing steep slopes.

Construction of fences and/or retaining walls on the rear boundary can result in further vegetation clearance outside the lots which is highly visible from lower elevations. The detailed landscape assessment recommended for Issue 4 could include consideration of these issues and provide specific assessment criteria covering the impacts arising from the removal of foreground vegetation.

Issue 6: Flaws in DWL assessment

Phil Angus submits that the Drakeford Williams assessment is flawed. In July 2012, prior to the call for further submissions, I was asked to provide a response to matters raised by Mr Angus in his original submission on the proposed Plan Change. In the matter of views from existing houses in Shaftesbury Grove, Mr Angus notes that the Drakeford Williams report “is inaccurate as it states the view across the valley for a number of properties, yet one of the properties mentioned is a back section with no view of the gully”.

In my report, page 10, I state

“Residents on Shaftesbury Grove have direct views to the site, with houses located as little as 15m away from the site boundary. Properties at the bottom of the street have views filtered through

mature vegetation on the perimeter of the site but as the road rises and the topography changes, the views become more expansive: first views across to the spurs within the site, then to the Western Hutt hills and finally the harbour and the distant Kaikoura Ranges.”

In short, rather than describe views for each residence, I acknowledge that all houses on this street are located close to the site with direct views to the site. I go on to discuss the two development options, noting that the difference between them in terms of visual effects is that Option 1 has a 40m gap between housing clusters that potentially allows uninterrupted views to the valley for residents across the road at 4, 5 and 6 Shaftesbury Grove. It is my understanding that Mr Angus’s reference is to the house at 6 Shaftesbury Grove.

The report is as accurate as it can be in terms of the analysis of residential views, given that the field work was done from the street rather than from going onto private property. Shaftesbury Grove runs along a hill slope with properties on the slopes to the east. Houses are a mix of single storey, split level and two storeys high. A number of houses have steep pitched roofs with dormer windows for the upper level. In these circumstances it is not easy to ascertain exact views or viewshafts from each property. I note for example that Mr Angus’s residence at 7 Shaftesbury Grove is itself on a back lot yet has views to the study site.

In a study such as this, it is my professional opinion that it is best to err on the side of caution and assume that a resident has views of the study site, rather than assume the reverse. While I may stand corrected in the matter of views from 6 Shaftesbury Grove, I am comfortable with the landscape and visual assessment and do not feel there is a requirement to add to the original report.

Julia Williams
NZILA Registered Landscape Architect

5 March 2013