

Statement from Dr Benjamin A. Payne on behalf of Susanne E. and David A. Payne (Submitters 160) regarding the Strategic Directions of the Proposed Timaru District Plan (Proposed TDP).

Hearing A – Strategic Directions | Thursday, 9 May 2024

Introduction

Kia ora koutou

- My name is Benjamin Alexander Payne and I am here to make a brief statement on behalf of my parents, David and Susanne Payne [who are here with me] as a form of introduction.
- I will then pass over to Lynette Wharfe, who is acting as our consultant. Lynette will speak to her professional evidence statement related to one aspect of the Proposed Plan’s Strategic Directions relating to rural lifestyle infrastructure.
- I hold a BSc in physical geography and ecology, and a Postgraduate Diploma in human geography from the University of Otago. I also hold a PhD from the University of Otago, which focused on strategic land use management within the South Island’s High Country.
- I began my professional career as a Resource Management Consultant with Mitchell Partnerships (now Mitchell Daysh). I worked across a range of complex project Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE) and in particular supported the provision of advice to Auckland Council during the process of amalgamation under the Auckland Unitary Plan.
- Since then, I have worked in a range of roles in areas of land use planning, complex risk, sustainability, and climate change mitigation at global, national, and local scales.
- I am self-employed as a consultant and currently work remotely from my parents’ home in Geraldine, supporting them on the property when I am able. One of my primary clients is currently Auckland Council.
- I therefore have a relatively good understanding of the RMA and council processes. I certainly appreciate the challenges of achieving balance across complex interests at a regional and district level.
- This is not always an easy balance to strike, but it is critical that all councils, whether they are large like Auckland or mid-sized like Timaru, show vision for all of their communities.
- This is especially important during a District Plan development process. A lack of vision and poor strategy can effectively stall a small community like Geraldine and undermine its future prosperity.

Our situation

- **Today**, I am not acting in any professional capacity. I am here on behalf of my parents. The ongoing process of seeking to engage constructively with the Timaru District Council regarding the Proposed Plan has been lengthy and, at times, challenging for them as 'lay people', and the increasing strain is impacting their well-being.
- We are grateful to now have the opportunity to be heard by the Commissioners. You will be hearing more from us as other matters are covered by District Plan Hearings, as well as from other submitters with similar issues.

To provide you with a bit of a snapshot:

- My parents have grown pip fruit (apples and pears) at Peelview Orchard on the northern fringe of the Geraldine township since arriving in August 1995.
- At the time, nearly 30-years ago, they were full of excitement and anticipation for what the future held as we embarked on a rural life in South Canterbury.
- They had recently purchased an established orchard, which while rundown, showed a great deal of development and production potential.
- They left professional roles in Wellington, packed their lives, including my sister who was 3 at the time, myself who was 6, and our Labrador Chancey into the back of our station wagon, and together we moved south to be closer to my grandfather who lived in Timaru.
- Mum and Dad have persisted for 29 seasons frequently confronting challenges both weather related and industry driven. They have survived by keeping things simple, working incredibly hard and doing as much of the work as possible themselves and ultimately growing a very high-quality product. They also have consistently lived an incredibly modest lifestyle.
- The challenges they face now are different. Mum and Dad now have 9 neighbours on their immediate boundaries. As stated in both our Feedback on the Draft Plan and our Submission on the Proposed Plan:

"Our orchard now stands as an 'island' of rural use within an increasingly developed and intensively populated space".

It is a small pocket of production, in a broader precinct of lifestyle and residential land use and these residents have very limited understanding of, or sympathy for orchard activities, including the use of air-blast chemical spraying, frost and hail mitigation and bird-scaring canons, to name a few.

- Overtime, the context of where we continue to orchard has changed significantly (both in terms of the physical context of the area **but also** the social expectations placed on horticultural production). The reverse sensitivity impacts of adjacent residential and rural lifestyle development on our boundaries have increasingly made it unachievable to produce at the scale and intensity required to be viable as pip fruit producers on what is a small property.
- The total area of the property is about 8.8 ha and it is the largest lot within this precinct, but the production area in apples and pears has now been reduced to only 1.5 ha to maintain our social license to operate. The balance is used for seasonal baleage and sheep grazing.
- This District Plan process is therefore important for the pathway forward it hopefully provides for my parents' future.
- The Proposed Plan zones a 56.134ha area north of Geraldine defined by Main North Rd, Templer St and Bennett Road as General Rural Use Zone (GRUZ), with a Future Development Area (FDA11) overlay beyond 10 years for rural lifestyle. Peelview Orchard is within this area.
- Our submission is that the area should be zoned Rural Lifestyle Zone (RLZ) now to reflect its existing predominant use – bearing in mind that the 56 ha between the three roads is already subdivided into 38 titled lots.
- Hence our interest in the Strategic Directions for Rural Lifestyle development.
- The development of the current Proposed District Plan has been a long process. The initial scoping for the plan review was undertaken in 2015. This included reviewing the operative Plan and previous operative Plans. This scoping identified that weaknesses in those Plans had allowed inappropriate rural lifestyle development to occur and the clear intention was for this Plan to not allow this to continue.
- This is well covered in the document: *Topic 13 Rural Residential Areas Discussion Document, December 2016. 2.0 Issue Identification*. A pertinent quote is this report states that:

“Such [lifestyle] development has historically occurred on an ad-hoc basis, resulting in ‘poppy seed’ development throughout the District’s Rural Zones.”
- My parent's reality though, is that the consequences of these weaknesses have had significant impacts on their business's viability. They know that there are no further pivots that the business can make – which is a daunting prospect to confront at their age and stage, given their inability to retire after three decades of 'hard slog' on our property.
- I'd like to emphasise that District Plans and council processes are more than just esoteric concepts and re-jigs of lines on planning maps. They **can and do** have

profound impacts on residents - financially, socially and on their health and well-being, as in our situation.

- We have taken every opportunity, both formally and informally, to engage constructively and positively with TDC to explain the challenges we face operating a now, very small horticultural operation on our property.
- We welcome the fresh set of eyes and ears that the Commissioners will provide to this process and the opportunity to address these matters more fully in later hearings.
- Going forward we also invite the Commissioners to our property so you can see for yourselves the challenges we continue to face, but also, the opportunities the northern end of Geraldine offers in terms meeting issues with deepening housing unavailability in our community – a matter that other Geraldine residents have raised in their submissions and an issue we share with other communities across the district.

We thank you for listening today and if you have any questions, we will do our best to answer them for you.

However, at this point I will hand over to Lynette to address the Proposed Plan's Strategic Directions specifically.