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SOCIAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE RESEARCH, POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

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Westfield St Lukes Private Plan Change: Social Assessment Further Information Request

In a letter of 23 July URS NZ Ltd requested further information relating to social issues, based on a peer review by Justine Bray of the Social Assessment (SA) report.

The following comments are my comments on this request. The first is a general comment about the submissions received by Council. Then there are a series of points numbered 1-6 in response to each of the numbered points in the URS letter.

The letter comments on the large number of submissions received by Council. Mapping of the addresses of submitters (see attachment) shows that they are concentrated to the North and East of the subject site, particularly those in opposition (marked in green). Submitters in support (marked in blue) are spread more widely through the surrounding area. This spread relates to comments below about social effects and their distribution by impact areas.

1 Scope of the SA and effects on adjacent residents

Ms Bray makes two comments about the scope of the social assessment (SA). The first notes how the assessment identifies the high functional and social amenity values of the existing St Lukes centre for those living in the primary catchment and those living in the wider urban community. The second relates to impacts on “directly adjacent” residents.

It is important to note, regarding the first comment, that the scope of the social assessment, as outlined in section 1.1, was “strategic” – that is, it addressed issues and effects at the level of a plan change rather than a specific resource consent. At the time the assessment was undertaken, there was a basic and evolving concept of the plan

change available to discuss with people. Input around local social effects was therefore focussed on the existing WSL facility (mall) and the likely issues and effects arising from its expansion as detailed in Section 3 of the SA. The advantage of this strategic approach is to alert the developer about design issues that need to be accounted for, from a social and community perspective, in a design-led process of preparing the plan change and the proposals for development controls (as explained in paras 28-34 of the Planning Report by Bentley and Co).

Care is needed in considering the amenity value of the St Lukes centre, and an expanded and redesigned centre. I note in Point 3 below that the functional and social amenity benefits of a redeveloped centre, as outlined in the SA, are not confined in some way to the wider urban community. In fact, those living closest to the centre, especially those in walking distance, are likely to benefit the most.

The second comment relates to specific effects on directly adjacent residents.

Submissions identify a number of potential effects including visual, shading, light spill, noise, and local traffic effects including parking, possibly leading to devaluation of quality of life of residents and values of adjoining properties.

The scope of the SA did not focus specifically on the impacts on specific groups of residents such as those in areas to the North, West and East of the subject site. However, Section 3 of the social assessment points to a number of existing effects for local people and points out that the proposed Plan Change has the potential to reduce these. Section 3 of the SA also specifically notes the potential local traffic effect on local residents including Aroha Ave. On the positive side, good design and planning controls should enhance pedestrian links from local residential areas. An example is the link to Aroha Ave, with the present walkway considered poorly designed and lit.

These matters and potential effects are addressed in detail in a number of technical reports annexed to the AEE, including reports on noise, transport, visual and landscape, and urban design.

In considering “local” effects the Council should note that areas to the immediate West and South of the centre should be included as “local”, and these areas should gain from positive social effects from re-development of the centre and experience few, if any, negative effects.

I comment further on the potential effects on local residents in points 2 and 3 below.

2 Social impacts of potential activities on adjacent residents

As noted above, the social assessment was made at the level of a plan change rather than specific activities. Activities enabled by the plan change were not specifically assessed. Those that could possibly be a nuisance to residential neighbours are:

- Entertainment Facilities
- Taverns
- Warehousing and Storage

· Workrooms

Entertainment facilities, cafes and restaurants already exist on the Westfield St Lukes (WSL) site. These, along with taverns, are common elements in town centres and comprise an important component in developing the social amenity values of a full town centre and a wide range of employment opportunities. Such activities would be subject to common development controls, including those for noise. The Plan Change took a precautionary approach by excluding these as permitted activities for the area of the site closest to the Aroha residential area.

Workrooms are already permitted activities at WSL. They are usually rooms or buildings associated with a shop within which preparation or repairs are carried out. 'Warehousing and Storage' was added because storage in particular seems a suitable activity for a town centre. Again, the Plan Change took a precautionary approach by excluding these as permitted activities for area B. That said, they are permitted activities in the Business 4 zone in Auckland City and that zone often sits alongside residential zones.

New activities enabled by the plan change also include residential activities and visitor accommodation. Neither should have a particular social impact on local residents, and indeed both these activities have the potential to add to the social amenity of the centre. Visitor accommodation commonly lies at the interface of commercial and residential areas, and indeed targets these areas to locate.

Any activity anywhere on the site will have to comply with the development controls applying to this Business 8 zone, including noise limits, and any new building over 500sqm gross floor area requires consent.

3 Weighing up potential impacts on different areas

The SA did not weigh up or evaluate impacts on the wider urban and community against those on local residents. In conclusions to the SA, however, some guidance was provided to the Council from a social perspective.

The SA noted that there are "many advantages and some disadvantages" to the proposed Plan Change. The main advantages of the Plan Change relate to the fact that all new development will have to achieve a very high standard of urban design, addressing over time many of the perceived shortcomings of WSL. This re-development will have significant benefits in terms of the relationship of the shopping centre to the surrounding centre, particularly with better pedestrian linkages. The main disadvantages relate to potential effects on local residents.

It is important to note here that the amenity benefits of St Lukes centre are not confined to a wider urban population. In fact, they will be captured best by those people living in the primary catchment. Within that catchment the greatest benefits will accrue to those people living within the catchment pedshed – say approximately 800m walking distance. Clearly this includes adjoining residents.

Furthermore, there is potential for future residential intensification close to or in St Lukes centre - therefore those people representing future growth in population nearby can also expect to benefit from developments facilitated by the Plan Change.

The SA identified existing issues and potential effects on people, particularly as a result of traffic and on-street parking. The assessment found some of these issues and potential effects could be exacerbated by the Plan Change. It noted traffic effects will be localised, particularly for residents of Aroha Ave if there is direct access to the Centre from that street.

As noted above, local effects on residents are dealt with in detail in a number of technical reports as annexures to the AEE (noise, transport, visual and landscape, and urban design) and are dealt with in proposed development controls.

As a guide to the Council, from a social perspective, the potential effects across impact areas are summarised in the following table.

Impact Area	Negative Effects	Positive Effects
Close residents	Change to the nature of a local residential street on Aroha Ave. Traffic, on-street parking if not properly managed. Nuisance effects through poor design or if not properly managed, eg car-park or activity noise, litter, discarded trolleys.	Improved functional and social amenity (from a greater mix of activities) and design features, particularly improved pedestrian access, allowing the centre as a whole to have better focus as a town centre. The ability to walk to employment in the centre. A commercial-residential interface to the N-E of WSL using latest urban design techniques and more sensitive interface controls.
Local area (walking distance)	Increased traffic flows if not properly managed.	Improved functional and social amenity and design features, particularly improved pedestrian access, better focus as a town centre. The ability to walk to employment in the centre.
Primary Catchment	None assessed.	Access to employment in the centre (by vehicle or PT). Improved functional and social amenity, design

		features such as internal movement, improved traffic flows and parking.
Wider Urban area	None assessed.	Improved functional and social amenity, design features such as internal movement, improved traffic flows and parking, and improved public transport facilities.

The SA did not cover impacts of construction on local residents; major construction work, while temporary, has the potential to affect local residents (e.g., noise, vibration, dust, heavy traffic). It was assumed this issue would be covered in any resource consent application and dealt with through the usual controls.

4 Impacts on the library from changes in pedestrian flows

During consultation on the plan change, library staff noted the importance of its clients being able to access the existing shopping mall and being able to undertake cross “shopping” (ie visit the library in conjunction with other activities on the same visit). At present the pedestrian access routes from Westfield St Lukes to the library are not working well as the SA noted in Section 3.3.

Improved pedestrian access through the proposed plan change both into and within the mall itself is a major social benefit. If the pedestrian access to the library is through the mall to the library from the north or west (through a new pedestrian entrance on Exeter Road) then these library clients will have the advantage of improved foot access through a covered mall with reduced potential conflict with vehicles. So long as adequate internal signage is available, then access from the Morningside-Exeter Road area should be improved considerably.

5 Management of nuisance issues

The SA identified a number of nuisance issues for local residents in 2000, namely:

- discarded trolleys
- litter
- tagging
- hooliganism (including in vehicles)
- intermittent noise issues such as car alarms going off
- localised problems such as noise from delivery trucks.

Any of these issues, which are common to town centres, have the potential to become worse and affect local residents due to poor design and, most importantly, poor management. The SA notes (section 3,5) that most of these issues were resolved by 2008 with the main ongoing problem for local residents relating to the noise nuisances.

Solutions now in place to control nuisances include a contract to collect discarded trolleys, regular clearing of litter bins and a daily litter patrol (increased during Autumn when there is more leaf litter), regular maintenance inspections, and rapid removal of any graffiti.

Noise from car parks should improve as a result of the plan change, with better car-park design, layout and management. The AEE includes a noise assessment report by Hegley Acoustic Consultants. This type of effect is subject to controls in the District Plan and other nuisance effects can be addressed by way of resource consent conditions.

It is essential that there are clear internal and external lines of communication between the facility operator, tenants, other businesses and organisations located in the centre, and local residents to deal with any issues that arise. A joint approach involving businesses, residents, Council and agencies such as the Police has been shown to work best in town centres, which commonly have to deal with these sorts of issues.

6 Requirements for CCTV

Provisions for CCTV are not included in specific requirements of the Plan Change but are an essential part of facility security and management – which includes a number of factors incorporated in the overall design approach particularly the site of entrances and car parks, lighting, security guards, policing, and signage.

The SA observed (section 3.6) that safety and crime are issues for mall management and appropriate agencies to deal with as in Point 5 above, in addition to utilising the latest understandings of relationships between urban design and human safety.

Yours sincerely

C N Taylor
Director