

Appendix F

Auckland Regional Landscape Assessment – Explanatory Material

Introduction

Policy 6.4.19 (Heritage chapter) and Policy 7.4.7.3 (Coastal Environment chapter) relate to the identification and protection of the landscapes of the Auckland Region. Those areas identified as Outstanding and Regionally Significant Landscapes are identified in Map Series 2 and 3. This information is based on the 1984 study An Assessment of the Auckland Region's Landscape, carried out by the Planning Department of the Auckland Regional Authority. The purpose of this appendix is to explain the methodology used in the study to classify landscape and the use of this classification for resource management purposes.

The 1984 Landscape Assessment – Explanation of Method

Landscape Quality

The assessment of landscape quality throughout the Auckland Region was based around 633 landscape units. All of these lie outside the Region's metropolitan and other urban areas, and capture areas which display a consistency of landscape character. These units provided a platform for the identification of 85 'landscape types'. Large scale photos of each landscape unit were then used in a public preference study carried out over the summer of 1983-4. Some 1091 respondents from throughout the Region were polled in the study, with each being asked to categorise different landscape types on the basis of the visual quality which they felt each landscape conveyed (through the photos). The categorisation process resulted in seven classifications or groupings of visual quality – from low to high. Each landscape type was then allocated to one of these quality groupings. These findings were then extrapolated to all 633 units based on the visual similarities between each landscape type and the individual landscape units found throughout the Region.

Landscape Sensitivity

Assessment of landscape sensitivity was designed to indicate the ability of each landscape to accommodate change and development, without detriment to its landscape character and value, purely on the basis of its physical characteristics. The identification of key

variables against which the 'vulnerability' of different landscapes to change are assessed, had its foundation in work carried out by Yoemans et al. in British Columbia in the 1970s, and by Anderson, Mosier and Chandler in 1979 in the USA. Based on the combination of their research and expert trialing within the Auckland Region, it was decided to use the following key criteria as indicators of 'sensitivity':

- Land use diversity and type
- Slope
- Vegetation cover
- Vegetation diversity and type
- Topographic diversity
- Site recoverability potential (Capacity of a site's physical elements to accommodate change, e.g., through the growth of screening vegetation or the restoration of any surface.)

A range of ratings was determined for each of the criteria, again based on local experimentation, and a range of cumulative scores (the 'added together' ratings) was established which corresponded with seven levels of sensitivity – from low to high. The 633 landscape units already defined were then analysed, using both ground survey and NZMS mapping. Each landscape unit was then allocated to one of the seven sensitivity groupings, based on its cumulative scores.

Application to RPS Provisions

Based on the landscape quality and sensitivity ratings developed in the 1984 study, those areas classified as having a landscape quality rating of 6 or 7 have been identified as Outstanding Landscapes, while those with a quality rating of 5 have been identified as Regionally Significant Landscapes. These areas have been identified in Map Series 2.

The sensitivity of these landscapes to the effects of subdivision, use and development has also been recognised by the identification of those areas having a sensitivity rating of 5, 6 and 7 in Map Series 3. In many cases those areas with a landscape quality of 5, 6 or 7 have a similar landscape sensitivity rating. This reflects the fact that many of the attributes which contribute to the quality of a landscape unit also mean that that landscape is highly sensitive to the visual effects of use and development and its ability to accommodate change without reducing its quality is low.

The factors which contribute to the quality of any landscape unit or which influence its sensitivity vary depending on the particular circumstances of each unit. Hence it is not possible to develop a single set of criteria which categorise outstanding and regionally significant landscapes throughout the Auckland Region. In some parts of the Region, coastal landscapes are classified as being outstanding, while in other parts rural landscapes have characteristics which make them outstanding. Each landscape unit has to be reviewed individually. However, it is possible to identify broad factors which contribute to the classification of individual units as outstanding or regionally significant.

Factors which contribute to areas being classified as having a landscape quality rating of 5, 6 or 7 are:

- the presence of coastal features, particularly open beaches and enclosed harbours;
- a strong sense of native/endemic heritage with the presence of indigenous vegetation, with the more continuous or extensive the cover, the higher the rating, although remnant stands of native forest are also rated highly;
- the presence of large rivers or lakes;
- the presence of varied and often convoluted landforms;
- diversity and variety within each unit, provided this retains a sense of unity and does not contribute to discontinuity and disharmony within the unit.

Factors which contribute to the sensitivity of a landscape are noted in the section above.

Their presence or otherwise reflects the ability of the landscape unit to visually accommodate any adverse effects arising from use and development. For example, significant or visually dominant ridgelines or slopes, or the interface of land and water areas usually have a high sensitivity rating. The presence or otherwise of a diverse vegetation cover or varied topography can influence the degree to which change can be accommodated within the landscape unit without adverse effects. Particular components which contribute to the sensitivity of a landscape unit are the presence or otherwise of:

- significant or visually dominant ridgelines
- exposed slopes
- open space
- land/water interfaces
- vegetation cover
- the presence of small scale features, such as water courses

1994 Landscape Assessment Work

While individual landscape assessments have been commissioned for particular projects and for certain geographic areas (e.g., North Shore City urban area), there has been no comprehensive region-wide landscape assessment work undertaken since the 1984 study. In 1994 the ARC commissioned landscape assessment work for the coastlines of Great Barrier and Waiheke islands and for the urban area within the metropolitan limits. The results of this work have been incorporated in the Regional Plan: Coastal. Other landscape work using a similar methodology has been commissioned by various territorial authorities in the Auckland Region, but this focuses only on parts of their city or district (e.g., Manukau City Council's landscape assessment of the rural parts of the city).

The need to update the 1984 landscape assessment work is recognised by the ARC. Its commitment to working in conjunction with territorial authorities to complete a region-wide comprehensive and integrated landscape assessment is outlined in Methods 6.4.20 and Reasons 6.4.21 of the Heritage chapter.

For a number of reasons, both legal and technical, the 1994 landscape assessment work has not been included in this RPS. However, it is proposed to progressively update the 1984 work and to incorporate the findings of this new landscape assessment work in the RPS or a regional plan as appropriate.

Further information on the extent of the 1994 landscape assessment work completed to date and the methodology used can be obtained from the ARC.