

5 RURAL ISSUES, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

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5.1 rural areas

5.1.1 RESOURCES, ACTIVITIES AND VALUES

Further description of the Rural Areas is found in the following Sections of the District Plan:

Nature Conservation Values	Section 3.1
Landscape Values	Section 3.1
Natural Hazards	Section 3.4
Open Space and Recreation	Section 3.5

Rural Plains

The Rural Plains area of the District covers approximately 335,000ha, over half of the total District, extending from the foothills for 48-56km to the sea. The broad flat plain was, and is continuing to be, formed by outwash gravels and till, derived from the rocks of the main ranges and deposited by the major rivers. The alluvial land of the Plains is very variable. Most of the soils are well drained with considerable areas being bouldery and stony. The major soil limitation is periodic moisture deficiency in the stonier soils. However, large areas of these soils are, or have the potential to be, irrigated, which allows them to be used for a wide range of very productive land uses. In addition, large areas of the Plains have Land Use Capability Classifications of Classes I and II, being highly productive land on more recent floodplains and terraces with deep fertile soils having better water retention than other soils. Land between the Hinds (Hekeao) and Ashburton River (Hakatere)s towards the coast is subject to high water tables and has some peaty soils. Substantial drainage works have been carried out in this area.

The climatic conditions on the Plains, the high summer temperatures, drying north-west winds and variable rainfall means that the Plains has some degree of annual summer drought and a susceptibility to wind erosion.

The Plains area is bordered by the two important water resources of the Rakaia and Rangitata Rivers, as well as being traversed by the Ashburton (Hakatere) and Hinds (Hekeao) Rivers and the smaller Wakanui Stream. Each of the major rivers is perched above the adjoining groundwater table, resulting in loss of river flow through the surrounding gravels to the underlying aquifers. In addition run-off from parts of the eastern foothills infiltrates into the gravels on emergence from the hill country. Rainfall and irrigation wastewater also contribute to the sizeable underground aquifers of the Plains. The District has a number of water systems harnessing the Plain's surface and ground water resources for irrigation, stock and domestic water supplies and hydro-electricity production. The Rangitata Diversion

Race (RDR) extends from the Rangitata to the Rakaia Rivers, feeding major irrigation schemes, stockwater systems and two power stations. Groundwater is being increasingly used for irrigation purposes.

The District's coastline extends for approximately 66km between the Rakaia and Rangitata Rivers. The coastline is predominantly eroding coastal cliffs and gullies with gravel beaches, broken by only by the four river mouths. Sand dunes are concentrated south of the Rakaia River mouth. The beaches along the coast are mostly undeveloped, because of the limitations imposed by the harsh physical environment.

The Plains area is dominated by a variety of agricultural uses, including sheep and cattle farming, dairying, deer farming, horticulture, and cropping, and intensive animal activities, such as pig farming. The pattern of farming that has developed has been determined by a combination of the soil resource, climate, availability of irrigation, proximity to urban settlements and principal transport routes.

The District's dominant land use remains pastoral farming, producing wool, fat lambs and surplus stock, beef cattle, milk and deer velvet or meat. In 1993, 1.9 million sheep were carried on farms in the District and 8,200 tonnes of wool produced. In addition, 80,500 cattle, 56,000 deer and 6,000 goats were run. Dairying is increasing on irrigated areas of the Plains and on land subject to higher rainfall close to the foothills, with 49,500 milking cows being run in the District in 1993.

Approximately 225,000ha of the District is arable land, primarily on the Plains. In 1993, cropping accounted for approximately 51,000ha of the land area, with potential to increase to about 80,000ha on productive land. Traditionally cropping has involved grains, seeds and field crops and forage crops planted in association with livestock farming. In 1993, barley accounted for approximately 40% of the total cropping area of the District, and field crops and wheat 34%. The District produced 37% of the country's wheat and 27% of its barley in 1993. Diversification into new crops, such as evening primrose seeds, are continually being assessed by arable farmers.

In 1993, 1,500ha of the Plains areas was under horticulture. The dominant crops were potatoes and garden peas. Stone, pip and berry fruits are grown on high quality soils close to Ashburton (Kapuka) and Rakaia, and to a lesser extent, Hinds (Hekeao). Diversification into crops such as squash, pumpkin, onion, and garlic has also occurred.

Horse breeding and training is also important, with a number of horse training tracks located in the District.

Diversification into intensive farming activities has also become evident with the main expansion occurring in the pork production industry. Ashburton District is the third largest pork production area in the country, which is a reflection of the availability of a good feed supply (barley) and relatively unfragmented allotments in the rural area. A total of 23,781 pigs on 172 farms were recorded in the District by statistics NZ in June 1993. Annual sales of pork within the District have a farm gate value of approximately \$9M with a retail value of \$30M. Pork production has been increasing both from existing pig farms and new pig farms are being established. Other intensive farming operations include cattle feedlots, poultry farming and nurseries.

Small-scale or part time-farming blocks have also become more common and is reflected in the subdivision of some rural farms, particularly near the urban area of Ashburton (Kapuka). The Council's

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records show that 57 lots were subdivided between May 1986 and January 1992 in the Rural A zone. This is an average of approximately 10 lots per year. However, in the Rural A zone over the last two years the number of lots subdivided has risen dramatically, with 17 lots subdivided in 1992 and 39 lots subdivided between January and October 1993.

One large cattle feedlot has established, at Wakanui. This accommodates a maximum of 15,000 beef cattle at any one time on a land area of 53ha. Over a six month period each animal consumes two tonnes of grain, largely supplied by local sources.

Salmon farming in ponds and rivers is a recent innovation. Young fish are bought in from hatcheries and reared to an optimum size at harvesting. There are presently salmon farms in operation on the north branch of the Ashburton river (Hakaterere), and at Lowcliffe near the sea.

In 1990 approximately 3,985ha of the District was planted in exotic forest, most of which is located on the Plains, particularly towards the foothills. The forests are being developed primarily for timber production and shelter purposes. Most exotic timber produced is processed locally at private sawmills for the local building industry.

Historically fishing has been a major recreational pursuit with anglers on the Rakaia, Rangitata, Ashburton (Hakaterere) and Hinds (Hekeao) Rivers, ocean beaches and river mouths. The Rakaia and Rangitata Rivers are internationally recognised for salmon and trout. These rivers also offer other recreational opportunities, including jetboating, swimming, canoeing, rafting or wildfowl shooting. Other tourism or recreational activities such as farm visits and playing golf also occur in the Plains area.

Gravel extraction is by far the predominant extractive industry on the Plains with over 250 gravel pits in existence. Kaolin has been mined for use in brick-making near the Stevenson Stream, near Mt Somers, though no extraction presently occurs.

The Plains area of Ashburton District is included within the rohe (area) of Kati Huirapa. In earlier times, the way of life for the Kati Huirapa people was closely related to the natural environment and natural resources were used to feed, clothe and equip people. Across the Plains of the District, the rivers, streams and the coast, in particular, were important. These were named and owned, and the physical landmarks were often associated with atua (gods), and with the births, lives and deaths of Kati Huirapa tipuna (forebears). The natural and physical resources and traditional areas, such as mahika kai sites, within the District remain culturally and spiritually important to Kati Huirapa and Arowhenua Runaka maintains its guardianship obligations (kaitiaki duties) to ensure that the health and survival of these resources and areas are maintained for future generations.

High Country

The High Country area, as defined in this Plan includes all the foothill and mountain ranges through to the Main Divide, the Heron Basin, up the Rakaia River from Little River, the Ashburton River (Hakaterere) from the Stour River (Mata kou) confluence, and the Rangitata River upstream from the lower end of its gorge. It is generally north-west of a line which varies between 450m and 500m above sea level.

The High Country experiences a climate that is cooler, wetter and more windy than the Plains, although this varies considerably across the High Country. Temperatures, like rainfall, are subject to a high level of annual and seasonal variability. Mean annual rainfall varies from 1500mm in the foothills to mountainous areas where the precipitation can exceed 5000mm/year much of this being snow. Snow falls are common throughout the High Country with the heaviest falls often coming in spring. At the foothills snow lying for a week or more is not uncommon. Severe winter frosts are also common. The prevailing wind in the High Country is from the westerly quarter, and in spring and summer the "nor-west" wind can rise to gale force.

High Country soils that have formed on steep mountain slopes have severe limitations for intensive pastoral or forestry use due to poor fertility or a high erosion potential. Where soil profiles are shallow, drought is also a limiting factor. Further west, podzolised steepland soils occur under alpine vegetation or beech forest. However, in the valleys and basins debris brought down by glaciers and rivers has been deposited, and a series of younger soils have formed as a result. These soils are often stony, but areas of finer sand and silts occur, which are not so limited in their range of uses.

It is within this physical environment that pastoral farming became established in the 1850s-1860s, with the original Crown leases being taken up in the High Country for extensive pastoral farming purposes. Extensive pastoral farming continues to characterise land use over much of the High Country today, although areas close to the Main Divide are now considered largely unsuitable for grazing, and substantial areas have recently been retired from grazing.

When the leases were first taken up, tall and short tussock species, matagouri and *Aciphylla* species predominated in many areas and it was impossible to get sheep onto unburnt country, or to find grazing for them once they got there. To provide sheep access and encourage young growth palatable to stock, the early runholders fired the vegetation. As a result of the burning and grazing, and at lower elevations oversowing and topdressing, the vegetation associations have been modified with short tussock associations predominating these days. Introduced plants including gorse, introduced broom, *Hieracium* and wilding trees are also conspicuous in many areas today. These pest plants, as well as pest animals, continue to pose threats to the vegetation patterns and natural character of the High Country.

Although variable, the average run today in the High Country is in the order of 10,000 hectares. Because of the harsh climate and rugged terrain, merino bred for their fine wool are the predominant livestock type, although beef, cattle and deer are common, particularly in the valleys. Cattle numbers are appearing to increase, mainly as a result of decreasing wool prices.

Approximately 20,000ha of the District remains under indigenous forest vegetation, mainly in Conservation Areas. Most of the indigenous forest is in the High Country, with some of the smaller low-altitude remnant stands remaining in private ownership. Most of the exotic forestry in the District is located on the Plains, although areas have been planted in the foothills and low-altitude areas of the High Country.

Exotic forestry blocks have been established in the past, largely as a result of a requirement of the lease or the enthusiasm of particular run holders or individuals interested in forestry. In addition to these planted forests, there are now areas of exotic trees establishing as a result of the spread of wilding seedlings, such as around Lakes Clearwater, Camp and Heron.

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The only settlement located in the Ashburton High Country area is Lake Clearwater, a holiday home settlement of 178 huts administered by the Council, although a popular camping area at Lake Heron is used over the summer. Residential development is otherwise associated with High Country pastoral runs situated adjoining or at the end of Hakatere-Potts Road, Ashburton Gorge Road, Hakatere-Lake Heron Road and Blackford/Double Hill Road, or farming properties located around the perimeter of the foothills. The population of the High Country area was approximately 350 people in 1991. Accommodation for tourists is available at Erewhon Lodge for people wishing to ski and to experience and enjoy the landscape and recreational opportunities in the High Country. Tourist accommodation and a parachute school are located at Pudding Hill and Mt Hutt Station provides tourist and recreational accommodation. The townships of Methven and Mt Somers provide accommodation for many people using the High Country for recreation.

The landscapes of the High Country are unique and distinctive due to its vast, open vistas with subtle colourings. This remote environment of scenic beauty provides recreational opportunities for a variety of different user groups. For the more fit recreationalist, hunting, mountaineering and tramping are popular throughout the valleys and ranges of the District's High Country. Mountain huts are located throughout the mountain ranges which can be used for recreational accommodation. More readily accessible walkways and scenic reserves are concentrated around Mt Somers and Mt Hutt. The Mt Hutt ski field has catered for upwards of 160,000 people annually in recent years and is a popular recreational attraction servicing both tourists and the residents of Ashburton District and Canterbury. A small ski field is also developed at Erewhon Park and heli skiing is popular in the Mt Hutt range, Mt Taylor, Black Hill, Arrowsmith Range, and other Conservation Estate areas.

Fishing is a very popular recreational pursuit on the District's rivers and lakes. The upper sections of the Rakaia and Rangitata Rivers are important for fish during the spawning season. Most of the High Country lakes are important for angling, with all lakes, except Heron, Camp and Emma, being restricted to fly-fishing only.

Wildfowl shooting is carried out from time to time around the High Country lakes and wetlands (other than the wildlife refuges), riverbeds and berm areas. Public access to the lakes and wetland is often not readily available, but where access can be obtained it provides an opportunity for wildfowl shooting in a remote environment.

Boating provides both a means of access for fishing and a popular sport on the rivers, although of lower use in the High Country relative to the Plains. The Rakaia and Rangitata Rivers are used for canoeing, rafting and jet boating with commercial rafting through the Rangitata Gorge and commercial jet boating in the Rakaia Gorge. Lake Camp is used for power boating, water skiing and jet-skiing, and Lake Clearwater is popular for yachting, wind surfing and canoeing.

The High Country of Ashburton District is included within the rohe (area) of Kati Huirapa. In earlier times, the way of life for the Kati Huirapa people was closely related to the natural environment and natural resources were used to feed, clothe and equip people. In the High Country, every mountain, hill, lake, river and stream, was named and owned, and the physical landmarks were often associated with atua (gods), and with the births, lives and deaths of Kati Huirapa tipuna (forebears). Seasonal camps were established well into the High Country associated with particular resources to be worked. They were generally deserted in the harsh winters, but in summer they were occupied by eeling and birding parties. The natural and physical resources and traditional areas, such as mahika kai sites, within the District remain culturally and spiritually important to Kati Huirapa. Waahi tapu and waahi

taoka for Kati Huirapa are located throughout the High Country. Arowhenua Runaka maintains its guardianship obligations (kaitiaki duties) to ensure that the health and survival of these resources and areas are maintained for future generations.

5.1.2 ISSUES

Discussions of additional resource management issues, relevant to the rural area of the District, are found in the following Sections of the District Plan:

Nature Conservation Values	Section 3.1
Landscape Values	Section 3.1
Takata Whenua	Section 3.2
Natural Hazards	Section 3.4
Open Space and Recreation (including Surface of Waterways)	Section 3.5

Retaining the Productive Potential of the Plains' Highly Productive and/or Versatile Soils.

- **The productive potential of the highly productive and/or versatile soils of the District's Plains can be lost or reduced as a result of intensive subdivision and building development or inappropriate land uses that significantly deplete or cover over the soil.**

Ashburton District is fortunate that its Plains area is well endowed with highly productive and versatile soils and that irrigation water is widely available. Approximately 60,000ha of the Plains area has been intensively cropped for many years forming the basis for the District's arable farming reputation. Given that the present, and probably future, welfare of the people on the Plains is likely to be reliant on primary production, the Council is concerned that the soil resource retain its productive potential for future generations.

The Council has a responsibility under the Resource Management Act to sustain the potential of natural and physical resources to meet the reasonable foreseeable needs of future generations and to safeguard the life-supporting capacity of soil. 11% of the land of the Plain's area of the District has been identified as being of Class I and II Land Use Capability in terms of the New Zealand Land Resource Inventory classification. The soils of these areas are considered to be highly productive and/or versatile and capable of sustained pastoral, arable and horticultural production. In addition, the District contains large areas of Class III land, which, with irrigation, sufficient rainfall and fertiliser application are also highly productive and very versatile for a wide range of productive land uses.

Subdivision and use of small rural lots for principally residential activities can result in substantial areas of the allotments being covered by buildings, hard-standing and other unproductive investment, which can make the long-term productive use of the soils and their associated irrigation resources unlikely. In addition, activities such as topsoil removal or turf production can adversely effect the productive potential of the Plains' soils.

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The Council, however, also recognises that there is a demand for smaller properties for productive use. This is particularly so around the urban centres where there is an availability of labour, services, a reduction in transport costs and where the soils are generally highly productive and versatile. The Council acknowledges that subdivision of the highly productive and versatile land into smaller allotments is often necessary to enable people to develop intensive farming activities, especially those that are capital or labour-intensive.

Cultivation of the Plains' Soils

- **Cultivation using heavy machinery on a continued basis and wind erosion following cultivation can result in significant loss of soil and soil productivity.**

Cultivation is an important part of arable farming. The purpose of cultivation is to turn under crop residues and to subsequently prepare seedbed for the planting of the following years crop. However, when cultivation using heavy machinery is on a continuous annual basis, research in other parts of New Zealand is showing that the soil becomes compacted and structureless over time. Fortunately, in the Ashburton District most arable farming includes rotation with pasture. Within carefully controlled rotations with pasture the decline of total organic matter may be low, and while components such as plant available nitrogen and soil microbes do decline with cropping, they subsequently increase with pasture restoration, as do soil physical conditions such as aggregate stability.

There has however been some concern from Environment Canterbury at the levels of wind erosion that have occurred as a result of cultivation practices. It appears to be more of a problem at the mouths of the gorges where wind speeds are often higher. Wind erosion results in loss of rooting depth, water holding capacity, organic matter, soil fauna, nutrients and fine soil particles. Though recovery occurs there is concern that the soil's fertility and water holding capacity is being lost over time. The loss of the soil's ability to hold water means crops and pasture are subject to soil water deficits for longer periods of time and are therefore more drought prone.

The risk of wind erosion of the soil has been reduced by maintenance shelter planting, small paddock sizes and reduction of the downwind length of cultivated areas. However, further methods may need to be investigated to overcome soil degradation such as the alternatives of direct drilling and increased paddock rotations.

The Council would like to ensure that the Plains' productivity is maintained to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

Sustaining the Life-supporting Capacity of the Soils of the High Country

- **The continued use of the tussock grasslands of the High Country for extensive pastoral farming has the potential, if managed inappropriately, to adversely affect the life-supporting capacity of the soil and the robustness and diverseness of the vegetation cover of these areas of the District.**

In the High Country, the land is an important resource for the people who live and work in the area, as well as for many New Zealanders and overseas visitors. Extensive pastoralism in the tussock

grasslands, shrublands and wetlands of the South Island has to some extent become part of the cultural identity of New Zealand.

However, a pressing issue that confronts many rural communities in High Country areas in the South Island is the apparent degradation¹ of the tussock grasslands. The worst land degradation has occurred in the semi-arid areas of the High Country and, although it is an issue for Ashburton District, the problem is currently not as severe as in areas of the Mackenzie Basin or Central Otago, due in part to the maintenance of local pest management efforts.

There is considerable debate as to whether the use of these tussock grasslands for pastoral production is the cause of the current land degradation or whether exotic invaders such as rabbits and hawkweeds (*Hieracium*) are primarily the cause.

Sustainable management of the land resources of the High Country has importance for many aspects of the District's well-being. Stable and viable rural communities depend upon the implementation and maintenance of sustainable pastoral farming systems which retain soil quantity, fertility and health; protect water and air quality; and are energy efficient. The range of landscape, recreational and nature conservation values associated with the District's High Country are also dependent on the implementation of pastoral farming systems which sustain these values.

In recent decades parts of the High Country of Ashburton District have experienced changes in vegetation. Many of these changes have been into species such as hawkweeds and woody species, which reduce grazing and in some cases threaten nature conservation and landscape values. Some of these changes are thought to be the result of structural changes in the plant community which occurred as a result of burning and grazing in the period of early pastoral occupation. Other changes are thought to be a result of present uses and management practices on the land.

Fluctuations in farm product prices and previous government incentives to encourage land development have contributed to the problems of achieving sustainable land management. Poor returns for wool in recent years have had implications for expenditure on farm inputs to maintain improved pasture and higher stock numbers, even on the more productive parts of runs. A lack of expenditure on maintenance fertiliser for improved tussock grasslands is thought to be associated with the more rapid spread of hawkweeds in these pastures, particularly in areas of less reliable spring and summer rainfall. Any reduction in expenditure on rabbit control also has important implications for rabbit numbers, which continue to be an ongoing concern in the High Country.

Although periodic surges in rabbits and the increase in hawkweed cause a loss of livestock feed, research in recent years is suggesting that in some areas the techniques of repeated burning and continuous grazing may not be sustainable in the upland tussock grasslands over the long term. This is because areas transformed from tall tussock grasslands to short tussock grasslands seem to be more vulnerable to invasion by rabbits and hawkweed. Further, irrespective of rabbits and hawkweed, the soil's nutrient status is slowly decreasing with loss of nutrients and carbon from the soil. The rate of

¹ Land degradation may be defined as land which is damaged in such a way that ecosystem functioning and ecological resilience are impaired and it cannot sustain a range of land uses into the future.

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this decline is however very dependent on the terrain. Loss of landscape and nature conservation values are also important issues for long-term sustainable management of these areas.

The Council is concerned that in some areas a loss of vegetation health and cover; changes to vegetation composition; and, over time, decline in soil fertility and health, will damage the land so that it cannot sustain the District's soil, vegetation and landscape resources into the future. The Council has a responsibility under the Resource Management Act to sustain the potential of natural and physical resources to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations. Council considers that the health of the vegetation needs to be maintained to ensure that the underlying soil is sustained in order to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations.

Rural Character

- **The rural areas contain a wide range of activities which result in levels of noise, dust, smell, traffic generation and visual effects which may be contrary to the expectations of people more used to the amenity of urban areas. Residential activities dispersed throughout the rural areas can make these areas less able to be used for the productive activities which are, and are likely to remain, essential to the Ashburton community. At the same time, such activities must not create unacceptably unpleasant living or working conditions for the District's residents or visitors or significantly reduce environmental quality.**

Intensification and diversification of rural activities has occurred in the last two decades. This is a result of rural people wishing to either exploit new opportunities or having to because of economic necessity; or because of new people coming into the rural areas wishing to farm small rural properties and being prepared to try a range of new pastoral and horticultural enterprises. In addition, there has been a demand for residential dwellings in the rural area for retiring farming people wishing to remain in the rural area; people wishing to live and enjoy the rural environment; or residents providing visitor accommodation within homestays.

The rural environment has particular amenity and environmental values which are important to rural people. These include privacy, rural outlook, spaciousness, ease of access, clean air and, at times, quietness. In addition, there is an expectation from people that water will be available for both domestic and farming activities without the need for treatment. However, because of the range of activities that necessarily occur in a rural area, there are levels of noise, dust, traffic generation and smell that are an integral part of rural amenity values. Provided that these effects do not constitute a genuine nuisance or a health risk, they must be accepted as anticipated components of rural amenity values.

The Council is supportive of rural diversification, in that it enables people to provide for both their economic, social and cultural well being. However, the consequence of the increased variety of activities now occurring in the rural area means that some rural activities have sometimes become the subject of complaints from other people residing in the rural areas. Traditional rural activities, such as spreading of manure, crop spraying, late night and early morning use of machinery creating some noise, dust or vibration and the barking of dogs are normally acceptable to people used to a rural environment, particularly where their livelihood is dependent on the land. Others, perhaps those who are more used to the amenities of an urban area, may find such noises or smells to be a nuisance.

There has been a growing concern in the District in respect of the adverse effects occurring with some farming and factory farming. The principal concerns have been the problem of odour and noise experienced by residential inhabitants in or adjacent to rural areas. These problems are largely due to the proximity of residential development to farming and factory farming activities and to effluent disposal areas. Whilst these problems are most likely to occur around the fringes of urban areas where people's tolerance of odour and noise is often less, there is potential for this problem to extend to the general rural area should ad hoc residential and rural-residential development be permitted to be dispersed throughout the rural areas. To avoid and mitigate these problems it is appropriate to both control the spread and location of residential development in rural areas and to impose buffer separation distances between some rural activities and residential development.

Noise is likely to provoke complaints where, by virtue of its level or other distinguishable characteristics, it intrudes upon existing background noise levels. The rural area of the District is valued by residents for its peace and quietness. The disturbance from rural activities may well be accepted by rural residents as an integral part of rural life. However, the rural areas can be disturbed by noise from recreational and other commercial or industrial activities. These can include motorised recreation activities, such as motorbikes, helicopters, jetboats and traffic associated with recreational activities in rural areas. Overflying of aircraft cannot, however, be controlled through the District Plan, except for the location of landing sites. Other industrial and commercial activities can generate unacceptable noise levels from machinery or traffic, for example, if located in quiet rural areas.

Intense dwelling and other building development, associated with subdivision, can also cause a significant loss of "openness". The decline in the openness of an area can cause increased loss of privacy, loss of rural outlook and loss of spaciousness; all important amenity values for many people living in the rural area. In addition, people living in the townships and the visitors to the District value rural open spaces which are nearby.

Intensive livestock development or an increase of dwellings can also result in an increased number of effluent disposal fields. Unless controlled, the proliferation of effluent disposal fields can lead to a deterioration of groundwater quality. This is particularly of concern where the groundwater table is close to the land surface.

Maintaining the Amenity Values of Rural Areas adjacent to Settlements

- **Intensive rural activity immediately adjacent to settlements can adversely affect the amenity values of people living and working in the settlements and reduce the quality of the rural environment surrounding the settlements, such as through noise, dust, smell, crop spray drift, loss of visual amenity and spaciousness.**

The Council has recognised a demand for smaller blocks around some settlements. In providing for this demand, the Council considers however that some additional amenity and environmental protection is needed as rural development intensifies. Subdivision into smaller lots can lead to increased conflict between neighbouring farming activities, and between farming activities and people living in the urban area. As discussed earlier, factory farming and other intensive farming activities can affect closely surrounding neighbours in a number of ways, for example:

- smell nuisance, e.g. intensive animal stocking rates, effluent disposal;

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- crop spray nuisance and possible health risk;
- noise nuisance, e.g. traffic movements, ventilation equipment;
- visual impact, e.g. large buildings, bare ground, solid waste piles;
- dust nuisance, e.g. broiler chicken sheds, free-range piggeries.

Intense dwelling and other building development, associated with subdivision, can also cause a significant loss of "openness." The decline in the openness of an area can cause increased loss of privacy, loss of rural outlook and loss of spaciousness; all important amenity values for many people living in the rural area. In addition, people living in urban areas often value rural open spaces which are nearby.

Intensive livestock development or an increase of dwellings can also result in an increased number of effluent disposal fields. Unless controlled, the proliferation of effluent disposal field can lead to a deterioration of groundwater quality.

The potential for the drift of agricultural chemical sprays on to adjoining properties is increasingly perceived by people within the District as a concern in relation to potential health risk. Difficulties arise in trying to control spray drift under the District Plan, in that it is often the particular spraying contractor or the method of spray application that causes the drift. Registration and training of operators and national requirements for the use of certain chemicals is a more appropriate way of dealing with the issue, which is also already controlled by a variety of other statutes and regulations.

The Council, under the Resource Management Act, has a responsibility to safeguard the life-supporting capacity of water; and avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects of activities on the environment. In addition, the Council is required to have particular regard to maintaining and enhancing both the amenity and the quality of the rural environment.

Business Development in the Rural Area

- **Some business activities will need or wish to be located in rural areas, but these can result in a loss of rural amenity values and other adverse effects on the environment of the rural areas.**

The Council recognises that people need to provide for their economic well-being and, therefore, seeks to allow a wide range of rural land management activities in the rural area, subject to standards and controls to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects. These include farming, forestry, outdoor recreation, home occupations, home-stay accommodation and some commercial activities such as retail of certain primary products grown or reared on site or crafts made on site. In allowing these activities to proceed as-of-right the Council recognises that standards are needed to protect rural amenity, as has been discussed earlier. However, other business activities, can have significant adverse impacts on the rural amenity and environment, irrespective of general standards.

The visual impact of large scale industrial, commercial, service, recreation or accommodation buildings and ancillary structures, as well as the likelihood of significantly increased traffic generation is likely to have a cumulative adverse impact on amenity values such as privacy, rural outlook, spaciousness and

quietness. In addition the lack of services in the rural area would necessitate these activities to extract sufficient quantities of water for their development and also to establish appropriate large scale onsite waste disposal systems.

At the same time, the Council recognises there are occasions where certain activities may need to establish in the rural area. This may be because of scale. For example, a freezing works or food processing industry, with its movement of livestock or crops, special effluent disposal requirements and large site requirements, would in most cases call for location in a lower density rural environment. Other examples may relate to the need to be close to the resources they utilise. For example, a commercial outlet attached to recreational pursuits enterprise such as a ski field or golf course needs to be "onsite." It may also be advantageous for a saw-mill to be established adjacent to a large forest plantation.

The Council has a responsibility under the Resource Management Act to ensure that the development of the rural area is carried out in such a way to sustain the potential of the natural and physical resources of the rural area to meet the needs of future generations and to avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects from activities on the rural environment.

Mount Hutt Ski Field

- **The efficient functioning and development of Mount Hutt Skifield requires it to be recognised as the most significant, established recreational facility within the District. However, its future development needs to be undertaken in a way which is consistent with its sensitive High Country location.**

Mount Hutt ski field was established in the early 1970s on Pudding Hill State Forest land administered by the New Zealand Forest Service. The ski field has continued to grow in popularity with over 160,000 people using the field annually in recent years. It is now an important recreation attraction - regionally, nationally and internationally. Development of the ski field has continued since its establishment with additional tows, buildings, road and car-parking improvements. Snow-making has also been introduced.

The Department of Conservation now administers the ski field lease agreements as part of its conservation estate under the Conservation Act. At present any adverse effects on the immediate environment ski field area are addressed by the Department of Conservation and the Regional Council. This relates particularly to impacts on indigenous flora and fauna, water quality and soil conservation. In addition, the Department of Conservation has lease conditions regarding safety procedures with respect to the operation. Any buildings on the ski field also have to comply with safety standards embodied within the building regulations of the Building Act 1991.

While acknowledging that the Department of Conservation and the Regional Council will to continue have close involvement with Mount Hutt ski field on the above issues, the Council considers it still has a responsibility under the Resource Management Act to consider the wider impacts of any ski field development.

The future development of any buildings or structures on the ski field has the potential to create a number of effects. These may be in relation to the visual effects on the scenic qualities of the Mount

5.1 Rural Areas

Hutt Basin, nature conservation values, water quality, social effects, cultural values, health and safety, the economic wellbeing of surrounding communities and national tourism. The range and significance of effects will be determined by the type and scale of development proposed and will include positive and adverse effects which will require careful consideration.

Extractive Activities

- **Extractive industries, including gravel extraction and earthworks, have, by their nature, the potential to cause significant adverse effects to their environment.**

Ashburton District has to date not been of major interest to the mineral extraction industries. However, it is still important to local operators and local industry. Gravel extraction is by far the most predominant extractive mineral, being used for roading and the building industry. Earthworks are also regularly undertaken throughout the District, generally in association with subdivision, farm and forestry development and building activity.

The extraction of minerals these days is often by an open pit method, with heavy earth moving machines and cartage trucks being used. Blasting is sometimes required, before earth moving machines can extract the minerals of interest. While producing economic returns and providing employment in a District, major mineral extraction operations can have adverse impacts on the rural amenity and environment. Poorly situated excavations can cause a loss of visual, remoteness or conservation values; or a loss of rural amenity associated with noise, dust or heavy traffic during extraction operations. Gravel pits can also penetrate or interfere with the shallow water bearing gravels used for irrigation or domestic use. Poorly managed rehabilitation and stormwater control from earthworks can result in large quantities of sediment entering waterways with loss of water quality and in-stream values. Excavation in steep hillslope areas can affect stability of hillslopes and terraces. These impacts are dependent on the sensitivity of the area, the scale of the operation, and how well the operation is managed.

Gravel extraction also occurs on the beds of rivers in the District, with that activity being most common on the Ashburton River (Hakaterere). The resource management issues for beds of rivers and their margins, including gravel extraction, are addressed in Section 3.1 of the Plan, as well as the issues relating to the effects of earthworks on landscape and nature conservation values in the High Country.

An important facet of the extractive industry is the activities of mineral prospecting and exploration. These activities are needed to enable companies to identify mineral resources of worth. Prospecting is usually a minimum impact activity which may include very limited rock, soil or vegetation sampling. Exploration involves more detailed sampling of areas that have been identified during the prospecting phase as having minerals of possible extractive potential. Exploration may also be a minimum impact activity; although, on many occasions trenching or drilling with explosives may be used in exploration, with up to a several hundred tonnes of material being extracted for testing purposes. As a result substantial clearance of vegetation or earth moving may be required. Temporary roading may also be required.

In promoting the principle of sustainable resource management, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that any adverse effects from the earthworks are avoided, remedied or mitigated .

Rural Water

- **Continued efficient operation and upgrading of the District’s rural irrigation and stockwater supply systems are essential for the economic and social wellbeing of the people and communities of the District and this could be threatened by inefficient use of water and land in the rural areas of the District.**

Ashburton District is fortunate that irrigation water and stockwater is now widely available over much of the District, enabling landowners to make productive use of the District’s range of highly productive and/or versatile soils. With adequate irrigation and stock water and fertiliser application, the land of the District is considered to be capable of sustained, consistent pastoral, arable and horticultural production. The economic and social wellbeing of the people and communities of Ashburton District is to a large extent dependent on the continued productive use of the large areas of productive and versatile soils. Without the supply of water in adequate quantities, this could no longer be sustained. Lack of reliable irrigation and stock water for the rural areas of the District would have adverse economic and social effects throughout the District. Water is literally the “life-blood” of the District.

Irrigation and stockwater are available through various community and/or co-operative schemes, as well as private water abstraction arrangements, using surface and ground water resources. Several major irrigation schemes, stockwater systems and two hydro-electricity stations rely on water from the Rangitata Diversion Race, which carries significant quantities of water from the Rangitata River across the District. This scheme also has the potential to provide irrigation water to further large areas of the District.

The ongoing operation, maintenance, and up-grading of these water supply systems are essential for the continued economic and social wellbeing of the people and communities of the District. Inefficient use of the systems can occur through water wastage, or unpredictable and irregular water demand. In addition, fragmentation of properties connected to the systems can result in a reduction in the number of properties requiring supply, such that it becomes uneconomic to supply the remaining properties.

5.1.3 OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

5.1.3.1 PRODUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF SOILS - OBJECTIVE 1

- 1. Retention of the productive potential of the highly productive and/or versatile soils located in the Plains area.**

5.1.3.2 POLICIES

1. To enable the continued productive use of highly productive and/or versatile soils, and their associated irrigation resources, by ensuring that such land is not developed for intensive residential activity, or subdivided into such small lots that its use for productive purposes is effectively prevented or severely constrained.

5.1 Rural Areas

2. To encourage more intensive farming activities to take place on the highly productive and/or versatile soils surrounding the urban centres, by allowing smaller lot sizes in such localities.
3. To protect areas that contain highly productive and/or versatile soils by discouraging rural land based activities on these that mine or significantly deplete the topsoil or the subsoil.
4. To ensure that the extent of coverage of highly productive and/or versatile soils by structures or hard surfaces is limited.
5. To encourage and liaise with other local authorities and organisations regarding continued research into land use and land management practices that sustain the Plains' soil resource.

5.1.3.3 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Provision of rules to control subdivision and residential activities in the rural areas, and the provision of controls and performance standards including assessment matters for resource consents, regarding the effect of activities on the long-term use of highly productive and versatile soils from certain activities.
2. Through the Council's Annual Planning process:
 - liaise with Environment Canterbury, Government Departments, and Crown Research Institutes to ensure that the research from these organisations can be used to make sound planning decisions, which take into account the effect that land use patterns and land management practices has on the state of the highly productive and versatile soils.
 - to promote the dissemination of that research in a form that can be understood and be useful to the community.

5.1.3.4 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Council recognises that subdivision of land into smaller allotments will allow the opportunity for more intensive farming activities to take place on the highly productive and versatile soils, surrounding the urban centres. Accordingly, the Council has zoned these areas as Rural A which allows smaller lot sizes as-of-right than the Rural B Zone. However, a degree of restriction on minimum lot sizes has been retained for both zones for the following reasons:

- to ensure that parcels of rural land are of sufficient size to sustain a range of potential productive land uses in the long-term.
- to avoid or mitigate potential conflicts between residential activities in rural areas and the effects of productive uses of the District's highly productive and/or versatile soils, making it difficult for such uses to continue to operate, to expand, or to find new sites to establish.
- to minimise the likelihood that significant proportions of the lots will be covered with structures or hard surfaces.

- to retain the efficient functioning of the infrastructural resources of the irrigation schemes established over the Plains.

Opportunity also exists on the large number of existing small lots in the District, particularly in the vicinity of Ashburton town (Kapuka), for intensive rural activities to be undertaken on highly productive and/or versatile soils.

Apart from subdivision into small lots, the principal means of losing the productive capacity of the District's highly productive and/or versatile soils are through mineral extraction or removal of the soils or through coverage with buildings or hardsurfacing, which are unlikely to be removed and the soil restored in the medium-long term.

Research into the effects of land use patterns and land management practices on the productive potential of high quality soils can only be translated into sound planning decisions, if the research is communicated clearly to local authorities. The best way to achieve this is ensuring that the Council advises its research requirements to the appropriate agencies. Similarly, research will need to be translated into practical terms for the wider community to understand its usefulness and implications.

5.1.3.5 CULTIVATION OF THE PLAINS' SOILS – OBJECTIVE 2

2. **Cultivation practices in the rural Plains and inland basins and gorges managed in such a way to ensure the potential for significant loss of soil by way of wind erosion is avoided or mitigated.**

5.1.3.6 POLICIES

1. To encourage in conjunction with other agencies further research which increases knowledge about the degree to which poor cultivation practices may impact on the long-term sustainability of the soil resource, and also research into identifying the correct adjustments needed in cultivation practices to avoid or mitigate the potential of wind erosion.
2. To encourage and coordinate with other agencies the provision of information that promotes land management practices which do not cause accelerated erosion.

5.1.3.7 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

Through the Council's Annual Planning process:

- the Council shall liaise with other organisations to ensure that research from these organisations increases knowledge about the degree to which poor cultivation practices may impact on the long-term sustainability of the soil resource, and also research which identifies the correct adjustments needed in cultivation practices needed to minimise the potential of wind erosion.
- to promote the dissemination of research that can be understood and be useful to Federated Farmer groups, land stewardship groups or individual farmers.

5.1.3.8 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Council wishes to safeguard the soil's life-supporting capacity and to sustain its potential to meet the needs for future generations. Accordingly, the Council is seeking to achieve this outcome by promoting assistance to farmers through supplying information and advice from professionals, which will facilitate changes to cultivation practices, where necessary, in order to sustain the soil resources.

The Council also considered the option of setting performance standards on cultivation practices. The Council elected not to include these standards for the following reasons:

- further research is needed to determine in more detail the types of cultivation practices that prevent unacceptable erosion rates, and the methods to monitor these rates;
- the Council is not sufficiently resourced both financially and in terms of staff expertise to carry out an efficient monitoring programme to ensure compliance of the rural zone;
- other agencies, such as Environment Canterbury, have specific duties and functions in soil conservation matters and are better placed to consider performance standards due to their expertise in this matter.

Research into the effects of cultivation practices can only be translated into sound planning decisions, if the research is communicated clearly to Resource Management Authorities. The best way to achieve this is ensuring that the Council advises on its research requirements to the appropriate agencies. Similarly, research will need to be translated into practical terms for the farmer community to understand its usefulness and implications.

5.1.3.9 SUSTAINING THE LIFE-SUPPORTING CAPACITY OF THE SOILS OF THE HIGH COUNTRY – OBJECTIVE 3

- 3. Rural High Country land uses that are managed in such a way as to sustain or enhance ecosystem functioning, the life supporting capacity of soil, and the significant nature conservation values of the High Country.**

5.1.3.10 POLICIES

1. To ensure that land use activities in the High Country are carried out in such a way that a robust, diverse and intact vegetation cover is maintained, in order to assist in sustaining the life supporting capacity of the soil.
2. To avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on overall ecosystem functioning, natural character and habitat values of the High Country.
3. To achieve a vegetative cover and pattern of land management practices which will improve or maintain soil organic matter and soil nutrient balances.
4. To achieve a vegetative cover and land management practices which will retain the soil and avoid accelerated soil loss through erosion.

5. To encourage and co-ordinate with other agencies regarding the continuation or establishment of local community-based groups to encourage land uses and land management practices which are appropriate for the environment.
6. To encourage and assist in continued research to establish thresholds for sustainable soil condition and vegetative cover and means of achieving sustainable land management practices in the District's uplands.
7. To encourage land-users to monitor the condition of vegetation on their land by providing information and assistance, where possible.
8. To ensure that District Plan controls do not unnecessarily inhibit a range of land use, management and subdivision options that may be necessary to sustain the land and soil resources.
9. To avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on overall ecosystem functioning, natural character and habitat values of the High Country.

Other related policies are found in Section 3.1 Natural Environment.

5.1.3.11 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. The provision of rules which enable a range of land uses in the rural areas, subject to other objectives and policies.
2. Through the Council's Annual Planning process:
 - to support local land-holder groups through the provision of advice and information and through assistance with monitoring programmes;
 - to co-ordinate the above support and assistance through and with other organisations working in this area, such as Environment Canterbury, the Hieracium Trust Board, Landcare New Zealand and the Commissioner of Crown Lands;
 - to support those organisations undertaking research into means of achieving sustainable land management practices in the District's High Country and to work closely with organisations undertaking monitoring of the state of the High Country soil and vegetation resources.
3. To review these provisions of the District Plan when research provides adequate information regarding prescriptive thresholds for sustainable soil condition and vegetative cover, in order to determine the appropriate means of including the results of such research in the District Plan.
4. To work jointly with the Regional Council, other District Councils, landholders and other interested organisations, in investigating the development of performance standards for High Country land uses, which will sustain and enhance soil condition, vegetative cover and nature conservation values generally.

5.1 Rural Areas

5. Provision of rules controlling vegetation clearance and earthworks in areas above 900m in altitude; in areas of significant nature conservation value; in and adjoining wetlands; and in the beds of, and adjacent to, water bodies.
6. Provision of rules generally controlling the clearance of tall tussock grassland of the genus *Chionochloa*, and forest and shrubland vegetation greater than 3m in height.

5.1.3.12 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Council wishes to see the High Country develop a range of land based activities and management regimes that sustains the ecosystem functioning, soil resources, and nature conservation values in the High Country. Council considers the monitoring of vegetation health and cover will be the strongest indicator of the soil's health. Council considers the best means to maintain a robust, diverse and intact vegetation cover is by providing assistance to local stewardship groups, through supplying information and advice (including monitoring techniques) from professionals, which will facilitate changes to land based activities or practices in order to sustain the soil resource. This assistance will, if possible, be co-ordinated with other organisations such as Environment Canterbury. The Council intends to take an active role in providing support and assistance to community-based stewardship groups and research organisations and will continue to monitor the outcomes of research and changing management practices in the High Country. To complement this strategy the Council will not have controls that unnecessarily regulate alternative activities.

The Council has considered the inclusion of performance standards on grazing intensity and burning. The Council elected not to include these standards for the following reasons:

- other agencies, such as Environment Canterbury, are better placed to set performance standards due to their expertise in this matter;
- that research to date has not determined:
 - the frequency of burnings or the level of grazing intensity that initiates a decline in the vegetation cover or soil condition or facilitates the influx of rabbits or hawkweed;
 - cost effective tools for vegetation and soil condition monitoring, and the integration of the results of this monitoring and research with land use systems;
 - the relationship between land use practices and *Hieracium*, and its impact on farm management and *Hieracium* control.

However, the Council recognises that research is progressing in these areas and it intends to monitor the outcomes of this research, and work jointly with the Regional Council, other District Councils, landholders, research organisations, and other interested parties, in the development of standards for High Country land uses, which will sustain and enhance soil condition and vegetative cover. If, and when, appropriate standards are developed, the Council will review the provisions of the District Plan in order to assess the best means of including the results in the Plan.

In the interim, the District Plan includes rules controlling vegetation clearance and earthworks:

- in areas above 900m in altitude;
- in areas of significant nature conservation value;
- in and adjoining wetlands; and
- in the beds of, and adjacent to, water bodies;

and generally controlling the clearance of tall tussock grassland of the genus *Chionochloa*, and forest and shrubland vegetation greater than 3m in height.

These rules have been included in the District Plan principally for the purpose of protecting indigenous biodiversity and ecosystem functioning and maintaining indigenous vegetation, communities, and habitats generally within the District. However, these rules will also act to sustain or enhance the life-supporting capacity of the soil resources in the High Country.

5.1.3.13 RURAL AMENITY – OBJECTIVE 4

- 4. A rural area, where a wide range of productive rural activities generating some adverse effects, such as noise and odour, are carried out; but where the health and safety of the District's residents and visitors are protected and the visual character, heritage and cultural values and recreational attributes of the rural environment are maintained or enhanced.**

5.1.3.14 POLICIES

1. To retain an open and spacious character to the rural areas of the District, with a dominance of open space and plantings over buildings, and within which the potential for conflict between rural activities is minimised.
2. To ensure that the scale and siting of development - building height, building setbacks and building density is such that:
 - development will not unreasonably detract from the privacy or outlook of neighbouring properties;
 - sites remain open and with a rural character as viewed from roads;
 - the character and scale of buildings is compatible with existing development within the surrounding rural area.
3. To enable the carrying out of a wide range of rural land use and land management activities in the general rural areas, by avoiding the dispersal throughout the rural areas of residential activities that require a higher standard of amenity values than rural activities, unless the effects can be avoided or mitigated.

5.1 Rural Areas

4. To ensure that any further rural subdivision and associated dwelling development retains the character of openness, avoids conflicts between residential and neighbouring rural activities and does not have an adverse effect on water resources.
5. To recognise the historical existence of numerous small lots with separate certificates of title throughout the rural areas and the need to enable the development of dwellings to assist in the productive use of these lots.
6. To avoid or mitigate the effects of activities that can cause unpleasant living or working conditions for other people in the rural community, or that cause a significant adverse effect to the environment.
7. To ensure that the adverse effects of factory farming activities, including any potential effects of noise, dust, smell and effects on visual amenity, are avoided, remedied or mitigated.
8. To ensure that residential dwellings are setback from property boundaries, so as to reduce the probability of dwellings being exposed to significant adverse effects from an activity on a neighbouring property.
9. To liaise with the industry organisations, the Regional Council and other appropriate organisations, regarding monitoring of all intensive farming and factory farming operations and the dissemination of information and guidelines regarding acceptable management practices.
10. To encourage further research into identifying the trends between the state of the environment (e.g. water use, water quality, soil health) and changes in land use patterns or practices.
11. To maintain, as far as possible, the open space qualities, natural character and low ambient noise levels of the High Country.

5.1.3.15 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Provision of rules to control subdivision and the provision of controls and performance standards to protect the amenity and environmental quality of the Rural Zones.
2. Through the Council's Annual Planning process:
 - liaise with Environment Canterbury, Government Departments, and Crown Research Institutes to ensure that any research from these organisations on the state of the environment (e.g. water use, water quality, soil health) can be used to make sound planning decisions, which take into account the effect that land use patterns and land management practices have on the environment.
 - to promote the dissemination of that research in a form that can be understood and be useful to the community.
 - the Council shall ensure that industry organisations, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Environment Canterbury are contacted regularly so that monitoring of all intensive farming and factory farming operations is completed in a coordinated way. The Council shall also keep in

close contact with industry organisations to ensure acceptable management practices are being promoted to their members.

5.1.3.16 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Council considers that the continued use of the District's valuable productive land and water resources for a wide range of productive rural activities is essential for the continuing well-being of the District's community. It is most likely to continue to be required to do so, to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of the District's future generations. It is important that the District Plan ensures the avoidance or mitigation of the effects of activities which might make the rural land and water resources less useful for these productive purposes. The particular concern perceived in the District is the effect of dispersed residential activities throughout the rural areas on the continued use of the rural resources for these productive purposes. Through their potential to cause conflicts with neighbouring rural activities, the presence of residential activities in the rural areas can make it very difficult for productive rural activities to continue to operate, to expand or to find new sites to establish. This will have consequent adverse effects on the social and economic wellbeing of the present and future communities of the District.

The Council considers that the retention of the open and spacious character of the rural areas and the avoidance of a dispersal of residential activities throughout these areas will enable the carrying out of a wide range of rural land uses without the noise and odour effects of those uses being perceived as a nuisance.

The Council also considers that the retention of an open spacious character to the rural area with a dominance of open space and plantings over buildings is necessary to maintain the visual character, amenity values of privacy and outlook, recreational attributes and cultural and heritage values of the rural environment. In the High Country, in particular, the open space qualities, natural character and low ambient noise levels are considered to be an integral part of the character of that area.

Most of the problems associated with factory farming and intensive livestock farming activities occur as a result of poorly-sited and designed buildings and enclosures, and poor farm management practices and waste disposal methods. The Council considered setting performance standards for all factory farming and intensive livestock farming activities. However, given the adverse impacts of these activities are so dependent on the management practices used, or the sensitivity of the surrounding environment, the Council will consider factory farming proposals on their merit in the Rural B Zone, and have the necessary standards attached to each operation. While many people who live in the rural areas are willing to accept a level of noise or smell associated with some factory farms, these may be irritating or unacceptable to people living in urban area. Accordingly, these activities will be discouraged from establishing near the urban environment.

The Council, under the Resource Management Act, is required to monitor the state of the environment (e.g. water use, water quality, soil health). The Council considers that research should be encouraged to measure changes to the rural environment and how these changes relate to changes in land use patterns or practices.

Research into the effects of land use patterns and land management practices on the state of the environment can only be translated into sound planning decisions, if the research is communicated

5.1 Rural Areas

clearly to local authorities. The best way to achieve this is ensuring that the Council advises its research requirements to the appropriate agencies. Similarly, research will need to be translated into practical terms for the wider community to understand its usefulness and implications.

The Council considers it important that industry organisations act responsibly and actively promote acceptable management practices in respect to the environment. Clear roles in the monitoring of the effects of factory farming and intensive animal farming activities have on the environment need to be defined.

5.1.3.17 AMENITY VALUES OF RURAL AREAS ADJACENT TO SETTLEMENTS – OBJECTIVE 5

- 5. A level of amenity values in rural areas adjacent to settlements, which protects the residential amenity of people living and working in the adjoining settlements and retains the quality of the rural environment.**

5.1.3.18 POLICIES

1. To enable the creation of smaller lots on highly productive and/or versatile soils surrounding the urban centres, in order to provide for intensive rural development, but with limits retained on subdivision, in order to retain the amenity values of openness and privacy, to reduce the conflicts between residential living and neighbouring farming activities, and to protect water quality and availability.
2. To avoid the establishment or expansion of factory farming in close proximity to settlement boundaries, so to reduce the potential for conflict between these activities and other intensive farming activities, residential living or the anticipated level of amenity within the settlements.
3. To maintain clear distinctions between the urban and rural areas, in order to assist in protecting the character and quality of the surrounding rural areas.

5.1.3.19 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Provision of rules and performance standards to control subdivision and factory farming in the Rural A Zone.

5.1.3.20 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

1. In order to retain the amenity values of the Rural A Zone the Council wishes to place a restriction on very small lots for the following reasons:
 - to minimise any conflicts between farming activities.

- to control the intensity of development which impinges on the rural character of the Rural A zone, particularly its "openness" values.
- to recognise the finite quantities of water available and to control the proliferation of onsite disposal systems, both of which can lead to a demand for reticulated services as groundwater quantity or quality deteriorates.
- to ensure that parcels of land are of sufficient size to sustain a range of potential productive land-uses in the long-term, as discussed under Objective 1.

In addition, the Council considers factory farming should be guided away from the Rural A Zone as there is a greater potential for conflict with other farming or residential activities when lots are reduced in size.

5.1.3.21 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS – OBJECTIVE 6

- 6. The establishment of commercial, industrial, service, recreational and visitor accommodation activities, that are compatible with the amenities of the lower density rural environment.**

5.1.3.22 POLICIES

1. To enable the establishment of commercial, industrial, service, recreational or accommodation activities in the rural areas, where adverse effects on the environment, including effects on amenity values, can be avoided, remedied or mitigated.
2. To maintain clear distinctions between the settlements and the rural areas, in order to assist in protecting the character and quality of the rural areas.
3. In considering applications for business activities in rural areas, to ensure that there is no loss of rural amenity as a result of the effects of the proposal, including cumulative adverse effects in conjunction with other activities that are, or may, establish in the rural areas.
4. To avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of commercial, industrial, service, recreational and visitor accommodation activities on the amenity values of the more closely subdivided and settled rural areas in close proximity to settlement boundaries.

5.1.3.23 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Provision of rules to control establishment of business activity in the Rural A and B Zones.
2. The provision of ample opportunities within the business and other urban zones to accommodate industrial, service, commercial, recreational and accommodation activities within the settlements.

5.1.3.24 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

It is recognised that at times people will wish to establish business enterprises in the rural environment. This may be because they have a direct association with a rural resource; are dependent on the natural characteristics and features of the rural areas; or require large areas of open space, remote from urban areas. The effects of business activities on rural areas may differ from their effects in the urban environment due to the different character, amenity values and environmental quality of the rural environment. For example, the absence of reticulated services may require onsite disposal of wastes, or the generation of traffic may create an unacceptable safety risk for traffic on high speed roads. Large buildings may be visually obtrusive in the open spacious rural environment. The Council therefore wishes to retain the ability to assess the effects of any business activity in the Rural Zones.

The Plan has recognised, through the establishment of a Rural A Zone, that subdivision of versatile land into smaller lots is often necessary to enable more intensive farming activities to take place, especially those that are capital or labour-intensive. Because of the higher density of rural development, the Council considers that any business activities need to be carefully considered in terms of their potential effects on the amenity values anticipated in the Rural A Zones.

5.1.3.25 MT HUTT SKIFIELD – OBJECTIVE 7

- 7. Continued development of Mt Hutt as an internationally known ski field, in a way that is appropriate for a sensitive High Country basin.**

5.1.3.26 POLICIES

1. To recognise and provide for the historical development of Mount Hutt ski field and its current tourism importance.
2. To enable further development of tows, operational or service buildings and other structures required for the operation of Mount Hutt ski field, subject to controls on the location and design of these structures appropriate to the landscape and nature conservation values of the area.
3. To protect the visual qualities of the surrounding environment from any adverse effects of night lighting for recreational activities.
4. To ensure that any development of accommodation on the Mount Hutt ski field avoids, remedies or mitigates any adverse effects of the development, in particular adverse effects in relation to the environmental qualities of the Mount Hutt Policy Area; the social and economic well-being of the District's communities, including existing service towns; and the effects of the servicing of the facility with water, sewage and waste disposal.

5.1.3.27 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Provision of rules and performance standards to control the development of Mount Hutt Ski Field.

5.1.3.28 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Council recognises the importance of Mount Hutt ski field within the District, with its important tourism role, particularly in Methven. The Council also accepts that any additional development within the ski field area is likely to have limited impact on landscape values given the presence of the existing structures. However, the Council would like to ensure that any further development does take into account the landscape values with appropriate location of buildings or structures, the appropriate design of building and structures in terms of shape, scale, colour and materials and appropriate limitations in relation to lighting. In addition, the Council wishes to ensure that full consideration is given to the safety of the public.

Any proposal for the development of accommodation will need to be assessed in terms of the social and economic effects on the District and in particular the service towns which currently rely on a substantial amount of business from people using the ski field. Commercial developments on the ski field have the potential to affect the social and economic fabric of some communities in the District. Such assessment would also need to ensure a workable and environmentally acceptable solution to the disposal of sewage and wastes and an adequate water supply. The Mount Hutt ski field is a part of the High Country which is sensitive to visual change and has special conservation and wilderness values which are necessary to consider as part of any assessment.

5.1.3.29 EXTRACTIVE ACTIVITIES – OBJECTIVE 8

- 8. Extractive activities, including prospecting and exploration, carried out in a manner which avoids, remedies or mitigates adverse effects on the environment.**

5.1.3.30 POLICIES

1. To control the potential adverse effects of mineral extraction, including mineral exploration, in order to ensure that the operations avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects on the amenity values and environment of rural areas and on Takata Whenua values.
2. To ensure that during and after mineral extraction, sites are progressively rehabilitated to enable the establishment of a land use appropriate to the area.
3. To recognise prospecting as an activity with limited environmental impact for any area.

Additional policies relating to Nature Conservation Values and Landscape Values are found in Section 3.1.

5.1.3.31 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Provision of rules to control extractive operations and mineral exploration.
2. Provision of performance standards to protect the environment and amenity of rural areas.

5.1 Rural Areas

3. Designation of those existing gravel extraction reserves, which are necessary for the carrying out of essential public works within the District and where adverse effects on the environment will be avoided, remedied or mitigated.

5.1.3.32 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Council considers that controls are necessary with respect to the extractive activities because the scale of the operations, the sensitivity of the area, and the management of the operations may vary considerably. Consequently the effects on amenity values such as privacy, rural outlook, spaciousness and quietness or the effects on remoteness or recreational, landscape or conservation values may vary considerably. For these issues to be adequately addressed Council considers individual proposals need to be assessed on their merits. This will also enable the Council to set conditions on the management of the operation that are appropriate to the scale of the operation and sensitivity of the area.

With regards to prospecting, the Council considers that sufficient performance standards can be placed on this low impact activity by way of rules in the District Plan which will limit any significant adverse effects to the environment.

Gravel reserves were established on sites throughout the District many years ago. The Council considers that it is important to retain the ability for it to use a few of these gravel reserves, where they are strategically placed and of a suitable quality gravel to be used for the carrying out of essential public works, such as road, bridge and stopbank repairs. These gravel reserves are designated within the Rural Zones, where their location is such that any adverse effects of their use on the surrounding environment will be avoided, remedied or mitigated.

Controls relating to earthworks are particularly included in the High Country (Rural C Zone) because of the sensitivity of the nature conservation and landscape values of these areas to loss or damage as a result of earth disturbance.

5.1.3.33 RURAL WATER – OBJECTIVE 9

9. **The ongoing operation, maintenance and upgrade of rural irrigation and stock water systems, including the Rangitata Diversion Race.**

5.1.3.34 POLICIES

1. To recognise and provide for the continuing efficient use and development of the Rangitata Diversion Race, irrigation and stock water systems in the District and their importance to the District's people and communities.
2. To enable the ongoing operation of the various water reticulation schemes in the District.
3. To recognise the need for maintaining or upgrading of rural water reticulation systems to ensure their ongoing use and efficiency.

4. To encourage the efficient use of water abstracted from these systems, and from other water sources, for irrigation and stockwater.
5. To encourage rural water reticulation operators to adopt their own monitoring systems to ensure that the effects of these systems on the environment are regularly evaluated to avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects.

5.1.3.35 IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

1. Rules and performance standards to enable the ongoing operation, maintenance and upgrade of rural irrigation and stock water systems, including the Rangitata Diversion Race.
2. Rules controlling rural subdivision and land uses in way which enables continued efficient use of the District's irrigation and stock water systems.
3. Assistance with the provision of information to land managers and water users to encourage efficient use of the District's water resources.
4. Continued maintenance and upgrading of the Council's stockwater systems to ensure efficient use of the water.

5.1.3.36 EXPLANATION AND REASONS

The Rangitata Diversion Race and the other irrigation and stock water systems in the District are extremely important to the ongoing wellbeing of the community of the District and are likely to continue to be important for future generations in the District. Ashburton District is fortunate that irrigation water and stockwater is now widely available over much of the District, enabling landowners to make productive use of the District's range of highly productive and/or versatile soils. With adequate irrigation and stock water and fertiliser application, the land of the District is considered to be capable of sustained, consistent pastoral, arable and horticultural production. The economic and social wellbeing of the people and communities of Ashburton District is to a large extent dependent on the continued productive use of the large areas of productive and versatile soils. Without the supply of water in adequate quantities, this could no longer be sustained. Lack of reliable irrigation and stock water for the rural areas of the District would have adverse economic and social effects throughout the District.

These irrigation and stock water systems have been recognised in the District Plan as important utilities necessary for the well-being of the community and appropriate rules have been included which will allow the efficient operation, maintenance and upgrade of the systems.

The Council is concerned that inefficient use of these water supplies could prejudice the supply of water to the rural properties in the District generally. Inefficient use of the systems can occur through water wastage, or unpredictable and irregular water demand. In addition, fragmentation of properties connected to the systems can result in a reduction in the number of properties requiring supply, such that it becomes uneconomic to supply the remaining properties. For these reasons, amongst other

5.1 Rural Areas

reasons, the District Plan restricts the subdivision of land into small allotments throughout the majority of the rural areas of the District.

Information, such as the publication of soil moisture deficiency indices, can assist land managers and water users in making informed decisions about water use and improve the efficiency of that use.

The Council's own stockwater system is part of the overall rural water supply system for the District. Improvements in the efficiency of distribution and use of stockwater could result in reduced demand for abstraction from the Ashburton River (Hakatere) and assist in ensuring that the scarce water resources remain available to meet the needs of the District's community.

5.1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS ANTICIPATED

- The retention of the productive potential of the highly productive and versatile soils of the District.
- The development and implementation, over time, of alternative land management practices and a corresponding decline in accelerated soil erosion, such as through:
 - development of alternative cultivation techniques such as direct drilling;
 - reduction in paddocks of bare soil being exposed to high winds at any one time;
 - reduced cultivation or stocking rates and increased retirement of land to allow recovery of erodible land.
- The development, over time, of a range of alternative land management options and uses with a corresponding recovery of vegetation cover and soil and vegetation health, such as through:
 - forestry options; such as agro-forestry, windbreaks for altering micro-climates, woodlots, tree crops and larger scale forestry;
 - development of low -maintenance plant species, including tree, herbage, forage and crop species;
 - reduced stocking rates and further retirement of land to allow recovery;
 - pastoral development of suitable lands to reduce stock pressure on extensive grazing areas;
 - alternative rabbit control methods, including establishment of viral control;
 - areas for resource-based recreation;
 - nature conservation areas for science, education, aesthetic or spiritual appreciation.
- Retention of a lower density of development in the general rural area, without undue levels of complaints or conflicts relating to rural amenity.
- Retention of the amenities, quality and character of the different rural environments within the District.

- Maintenance and, where possible, enhancement of ground and surface water quality and availability.
- Consolidation of business activities within existing settlements, except where there is a need to establish in the rural areas and no reasonable opportunities exist for establishment in the settlements.
- Maintenance of clear distinctions between the settlements and the rural areas.
- Future development and consolidation of the Mt Hutt skifield, in a manner which avoids or mitigates any adverse effects to the Mt Hutt basin or the wider environs.
- Utilisation of mineral resources within the District, providing that the scale of each operation and its effects, both short and long-term, are appropriate to its environment.