

BEFORE THE ASHBURTON DISTRICT COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER                      of the Resource Management Act 1991

AND

IN THE MATTER                      of Proposed Plan Change 3 to the  
Ashburton District Plan

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Statement of evidence of **Robert Watson** for Farmers Corner Development Limited

24 August 2020

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## **Introduction**

1. My name is Robert Tannahill Watson. I have an LL.B (University of Canterbury 1974) and a post graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture (Lincoln University 1982) and am a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects. I am the principal of Robert Watson Landscape Architects Ltd which I established in 1983 and since then have worked on a wide range of landscape design and planning projects for the last 37 years.
2. Although this is a Council hearing, I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note and that I agree to comply with it. I confirm that I have considered all the material facts that I am aware of that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express, and that this evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on the evidence of another person.

## **Scope of Report**

3. In 2018 I was engaged by Farmers Corner Ltd (FCL) to prepare a landscape concept plan for their proposed development at 12 Longbeach Road, Tinwald, Ashburton which is on the corner of Hinds Highway and Longbeach Road on the south side of Tinwald.
4. The proposal is to develop the 21ha rural property into a rural tourism park with associated accommodation for the purpose of providing a unique New Zealand agricultural experience for both local and overseas visitors, thus attracting more tourists to the Ashburton District. The development is to be facilitated by way of a plan change made to the Ashburton District Plan, to change the zoning of the site from Rural B to a new Rural Tourism Zone.
5. For the purpose of the proposed plan change I was engaged to undertake an assessment of the proposed plan change in which I considered the landscape and visual effects only. Here I focus on matters raised in submissions from interested parties to the application and in the council's s42A report.

## Summary of Landscape Assessment

6. The Landscape and Visual Assessment (included as Appendix 9 in the plan change application) provided an assessment of the additional built form that the plan change would enable on the application site, and the effects this could have on landscape values and visual amenity by:
  - setting out the context of the receiving environment, including key viewpoints;
  - considering the changes in built form permitted by the plan change; and
  - assessing the potential effects from the permitted framework on landscape character and values and visual amenity, particularly from key viewpoints
7. It identified mitigation measures that could be applied to ensure development under the proposed new zoning would still be appropriate in the context of the application site. These included limits on building coverage, height and appearance; requirements for internal landscape; and limits on earthworks, lighting and boundary setbacks.
8. It concluded that in terms of landscape context there is no effect on existing topography or waterways. The removal of some of the existing vegetation cover would result in limited short-term adverse effects but the proposed extensive indigenous planting scheme would ultimately have wide ranging positive effects on vegetation cover. The construction of new buildings is expected to be a significant change regarding the existing built context within the rural environment but with mitigation measures regarding building density, height, appearance and internal boundary planting the adverse visual effects were expected to be less than minor at Day 1, further reducing to nil after 5 years.
9. In terms of landscape values, the site is not located in or adjacent to a significant landscape or Outstanding Natural Landscape either under the Regional Plan or the Ashburton District Plan, and so there will be no effects resulting from earthworks, building construction or planting on any significant landscape. The establishment of an extensive indigenous planting scheme will provide significant habitat for both flora & fauna, greatly enhancing the landscape values of the site and surrounding environment. This will result in overall positive effects for landscape values. It will retain the character of the surrounding rural environment.

10. In terms of the visual amenity experience the proposal will have the greatest effect on residents in the immediate area and closest to the development where significant effects are expected to manifest if unmitigated. Others affected include commuters along Longbeach Road and Hinds Highway, who could potentially be subject to more than minor effects to their visual amenity. With the implementation of mitigation measures regarding building density, height, appearance and internal boundary planting, the adverse visual effects are expected to range from more than minor to less than minor at Day 1, further reducing to less than minor / nil respectively after 5 years.
11. These recommendations were adopted in the final plan change lodged with the Council, which was consistent with these recommendations.

### **Submissions**

12. I have been asked to comment on the submissions and in particular that of Mr & Mrs Clements, who live at 54 Longbeach Road directly south of the proposed development, and in particular on how the views from their property could be adversely affected by the development enabled by the plan change.
13. Subsequent to writing the Landscape Assessment and after reading Mr & Mrs Clements' submission a visit was arranged to their property by the applicant on 16<sup>th</sup> June. I was joined by Mary Clay - currently the Principal Planner at Avanzar Consulting who has been contracted by the Ashburton District Council to act as the reporting planner for this plan change on their behalf – and Paul Smith, Landscape Architect at Rough & Milne Landscape Architects who has peer reviewed my report for the Ashburton District Council.
14. The minimum and maximum heights for the plantings and buildings proposed in the report and shown on the cross sections and photographs were determined by placing and raising a scissor lift at critical positions along the boundary and within the applicant's property including at the approximate location of the Visitor Accommodation Central Hub.
15. (see attached images of views)
16. The views from the Clements' house range from open and uncluttered views westward across their lawn and the plains to Tripps Peak and Mt Peel and to a portion of the Southern Alps to the north. Except for the view directly to the west they are all limited or restricted by shelter belts growing along fencelines of paddocks between their property and Hinds Highway. Tripps Peak may be seen to the left of a row of mature eucalypts (View A), Mt Peel to the right through a gap between these and another eucalypt shelter belt (View B) and part of the Southern Alps further to the north (View C). There is also a narrow view of Mt Hutt between two rows of Leyland cypress.

17. These views are best experienced in the winter and on the day of our visit there was a moderate amount of snow on the Alps- although none on Mt Peel which is less common - and the views were clear. View shafts A and B would be similar in the summer but the view to the Alps would, at that time of the year, be screened by the existing poplar shelter between the Clements' and applicant's common boundary.
18. The attached plan 'Existing View Shafts on Concept Plan from 54 Longbeach Road' shows how these views would be altered by the proposed plantings. If the eucalypt shelter belts are not retained View shafts A and B and would merge making the view to the north more expansive although the view to the Alps would still be restricted by the poplar shelter belt along the boundary when it was in leaf. View shaft C is already compromised by the boundary planting and the existing house located on the application site.
19. The brief view to Mt Hutt is visible from within Clements' property although it is not the view their house is orientated towards. It is already compromised by existing shelter belts and likely to be lost in time.
20. The plan change proposal includes a provision for screen planting along the boundaries. At a minimum mature height of 6 metres or higher it would change the view for the Clements and they would lose their views through the identified viewshafts. The effects of the screen planting are not adverse in themselves, but as a result of the planting the Clements would lose the landscape values that they currently experience. If, however, the mature height along the boundary of Area 3 (see Outline Development Plan attached) was lowered to be between 3 metres and 5 metres, the expansive views to the west would be retained - and even improved if and when the eucalypts were removed. The maximum height of any buildings proposed for these view shaft areas could also be restricted (from the currently proposed 8 metres to 5 metres) to retain these views. The cross-sections of the views from the house at 54 Longbeach Road to the west and north are attached and illustrate how the proposed plantings along the common boundary and within the applicant's property would impact these views.
21. The boundary planting, in combination with the requirement for the 1:2.5 planting around units will screen buildings. The exact location of the central hub is not prescribed in the rules, but the ODP restricts the general area that it can be located in, which is set back some way from all boundaries and in combination with the boundary planting it would be well screened.
22. To achieve the requirements of the plan change rules, planting along the boundary could consist of a double row of a hardy, fast-growing native species such as a Pittosporum or an Olearia spaced at 1 metre centres, which will satisfy the required minimum mature height of 6 metres.
23. Fire and Emergency NZ Seeks that the Appendix 3A-2 be amended to remove all highly flammable plant species from the list and has provided a list of recommended plant species that are low flammability to reduce the risk to people, property and surrounding environment.

24. I understand that the applicant has accepted the removal of the identified highly flammable species from the planting list. When the planting plans are prepared, and specified any highly inflammable plant species including Kunzea ericoides / Kanuka and Leptospermum scoparium / Manuka will therefore be excluded.

## **Officers' Reports**

### **1. Paul Smith – Landscape Assessment Peer review for the Ashburton District Council**

I have read the peer review prepared for the council by Paul Smith of Rough & Milne Landscape Architects. I make the following comments in relation to the matters raised in that review.

I consider that the lighting restrictions should apply to external lighting only for Areas 2 as well as Area 1, but not to lighting within units, and not more broadly to hours of operation.

I acknowledge that the set-back from roads should be 15 metres to reflect the depth of planting requirements.

I disagree with his comments that a minimum 6 metre high predominantly native vegetation buffer will not provide full screening of an 8 metre high building and that it is not in keeping with the rural character of the surrounding area.

It would be necessary to be at a distance of at least 32 metres from the boundary to view the top of a 8 metre high building at a 15 metre setback over a 6 metre high boundary planting. The screening height of 6m, plus the setbacks and building height limits mean buildings would not be seen from any roads and only from a distance from other properties.

I do not agree with requiring the screening to be a typical rural shelterbelt. I consider that the screen planting can be compromised of a single native species and planted two rows deep to achieve the necessary mitigation. I note that the existing shelter and boundary plantings in the vicinity include mixed native and exotic species. There is not a typical or commonly used shelterbelt in the vicinity such as Leyland cypress or macrocarpa. In addition, a typical rural shelterbelt would not align with the aims of the plan change proposal to increase indigenous biodiversity.

## **2. Mary Clay Section 42A Report**

I have read the report prepared by Mary Clay for the Ashburton District Council

I agree that allowing a view shaft through Area 3 to benefit the property at 54 Longbeach Road would be a reasonable balancing of the loss of some views and openness.

I also agree that the modified environment would be an efficient use of land from a landscape perspective and have positive effects in terms of an increase in trees and other vegetation cover.

### **Summary**

Potential adverse landscape effects on the rural character of the surrounding area can be mitigated by setbacks, planting and limiting bulk of buildings thereby reducing the visibility of the activities provided by the Proposed Plan Change.

The concerns of the submitters will be mitigated by balancing some restrictions with some openness and I agree with Mary Clay that this is the key issue in determining the effects of the proposal.

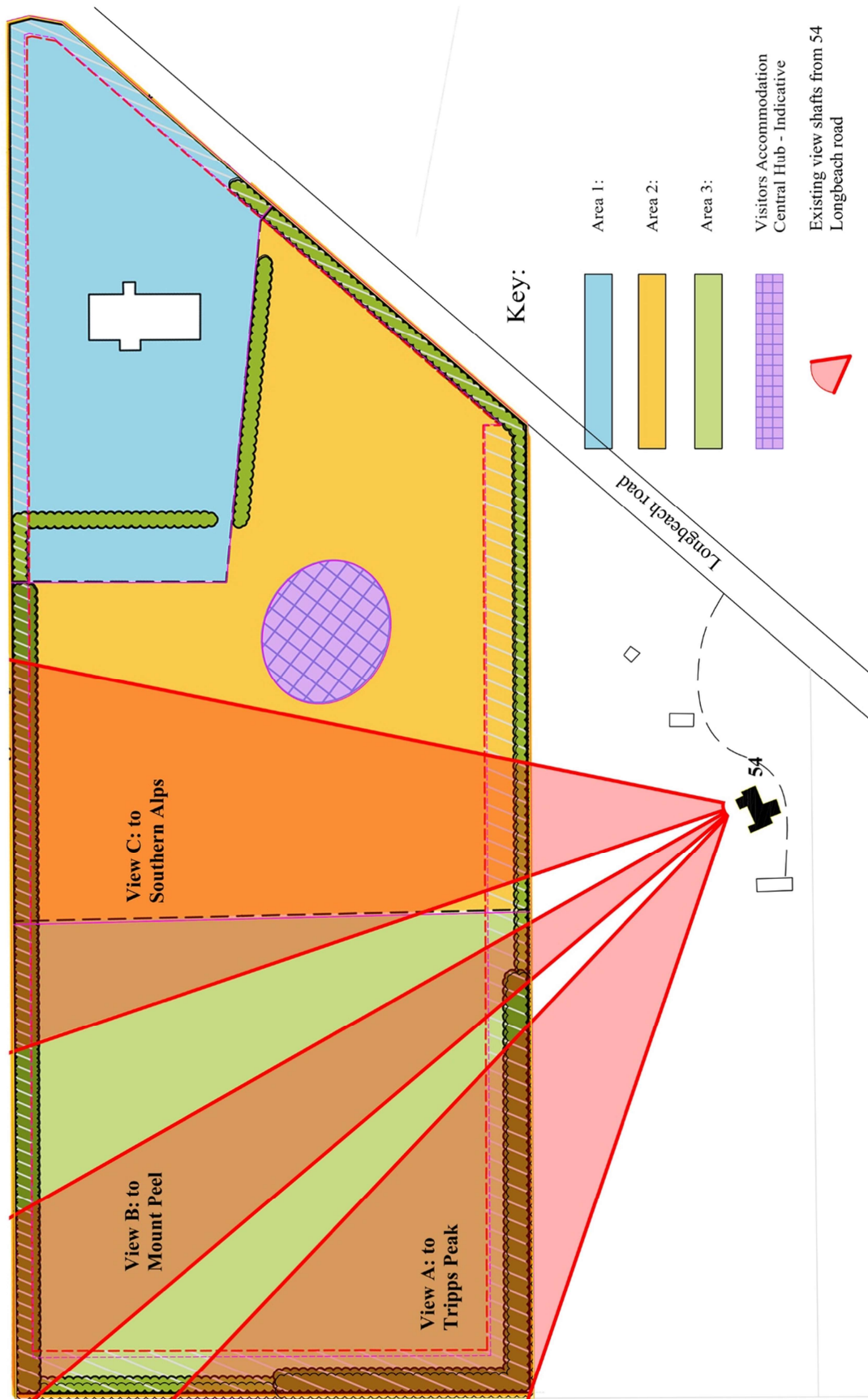
In my view, it isn't necessary to restrict all buildings in Area 3 to address the effects on open space values. The identification of viewshafts and limiting height of buildings and boundary planting within this area is sufficient to maintain the open space values. But as an alternative there could be a no buildings rule within the viewshafts.

The retention of grazed paddocks and the addition of native plantings will retain the rural character of Area 3.

The change to the visual amenity experienced by people will be moderate-low.

The changes to the physical landscape that may alter its attributes, values, character and experience of the landscape will also be moderate-low.

APPENDIX 1: EXISTING VIEWSHAFTS OVER OUTLINE DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Scale: 1:2000 @ A3

Date: 28 July 2020

Drawn - RS

REF 1740

SHEET

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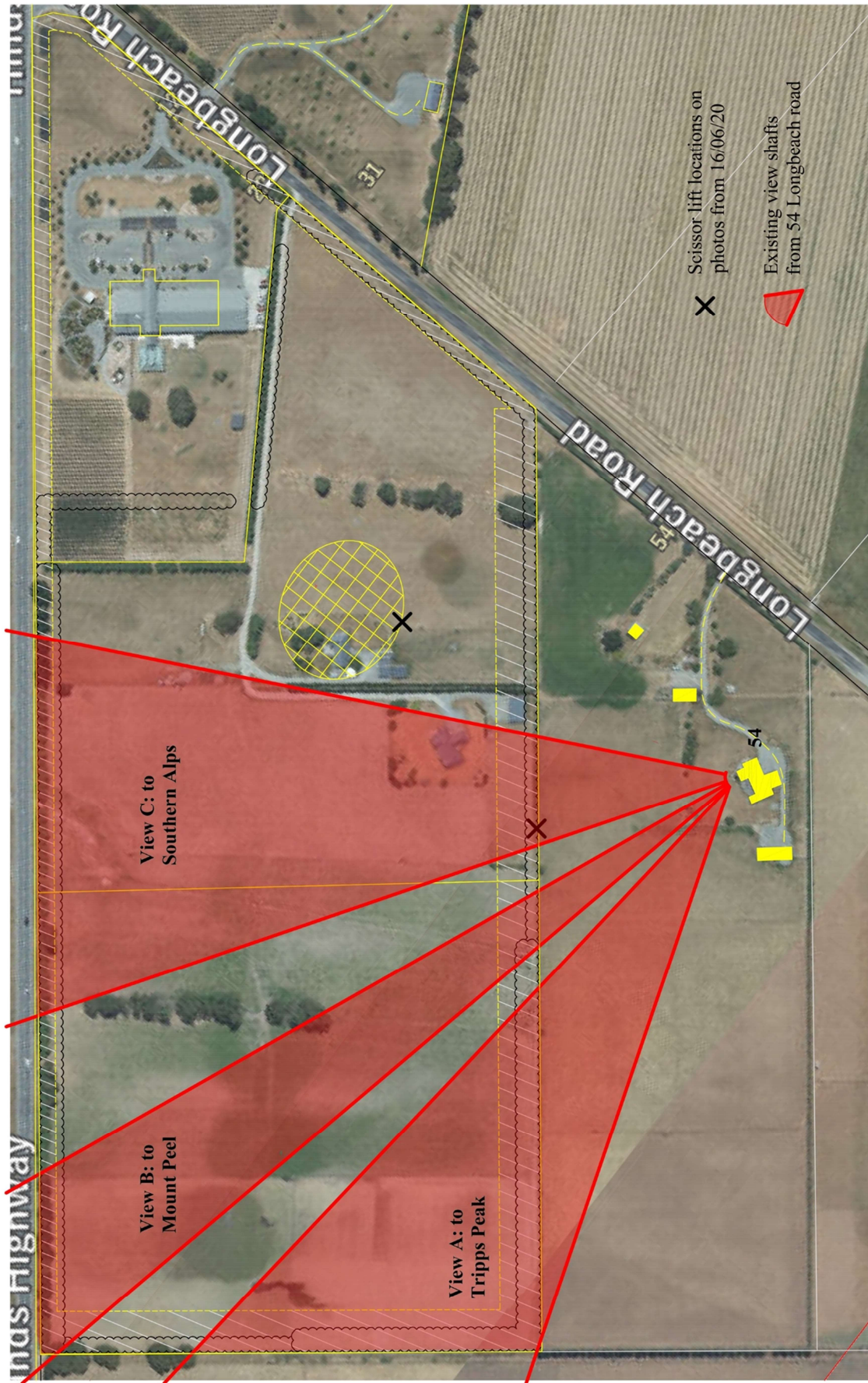
Robert Watson Landscape Architects Ltd.  
60 Cambridge Terrace, PO Box 3215, Christchurch  
New Zealand 8140  
Email: r.watson@rwa.co.nz



EXISTING VIEW SHAFTS OVER OUTLINE DEVELOPMENT PLAN FROM 54 LONGBEACH ROAD



APPENDIX 2: EXISTING VIEWSHAFTS OVER AERIAL PLAN



REF 1740  
sheet

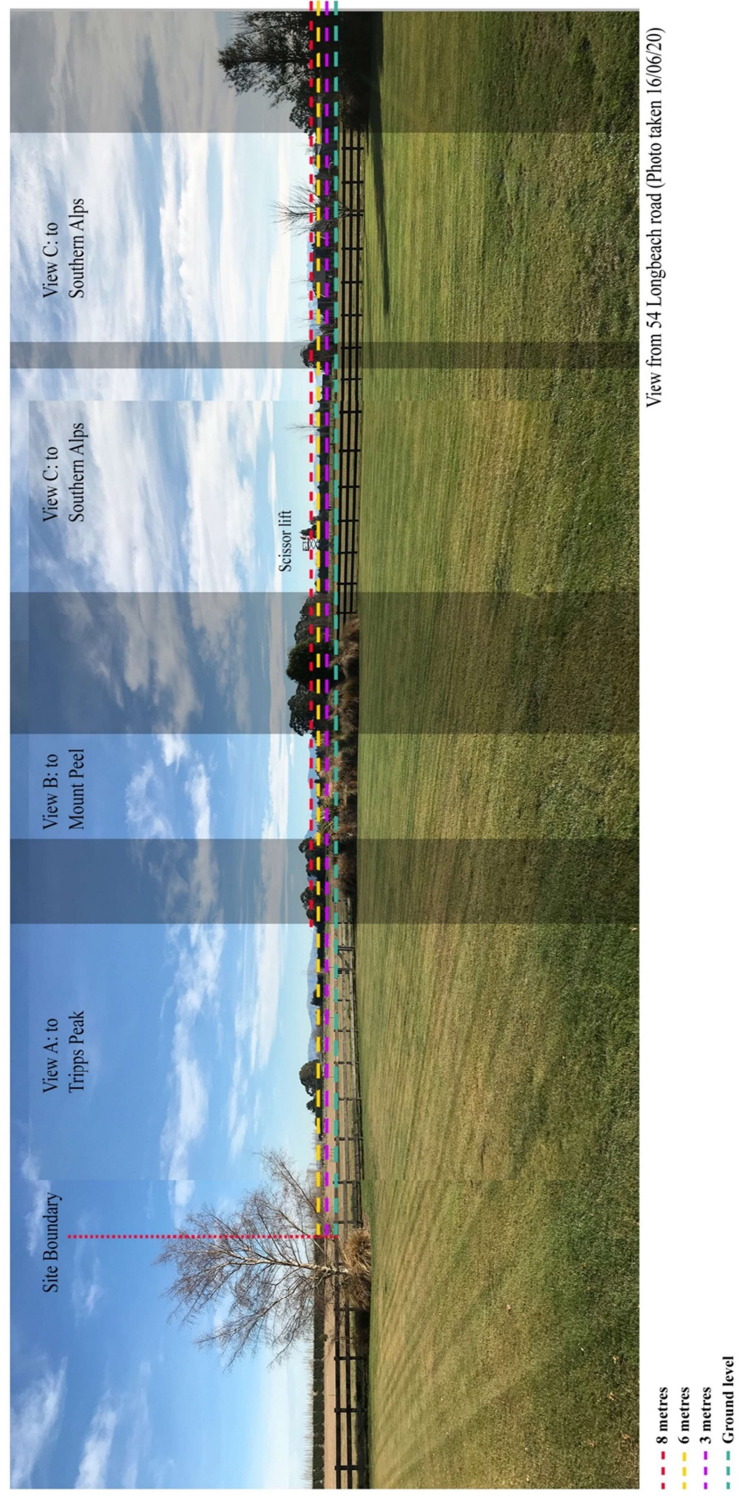
Robert Wilson Landscape Architects Ltd  
65 Cambridge Terrace PO Box 12115 Christchurch  
Phone (03) 366 2988 Fax: (03) 366 2987  
Email: rwa@robertwilson.co.nz



Scale: 1:2000 @ A3 Date: 07 July 2020 Drawn - RS  
**EXISTING VIEW SHAFTS OVER AERIAL PLAN FROM 54 LONGBEACH ROAD**



VIEW A: TO TRIPPS PEAK



APPENDIX 3: VIEW A



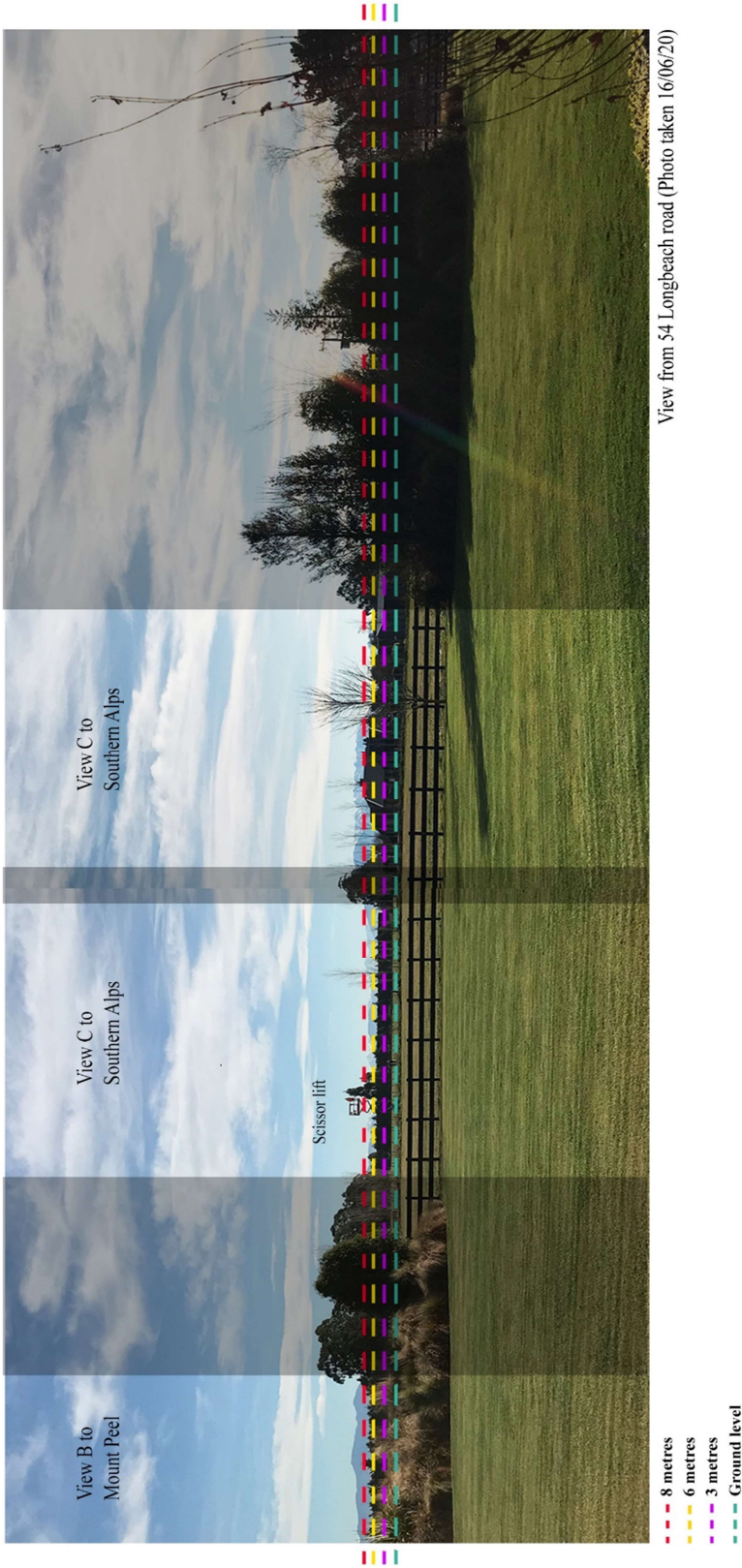
VIEW B: TO MOUNT PEEL

APPENDIX 3: VIEW B

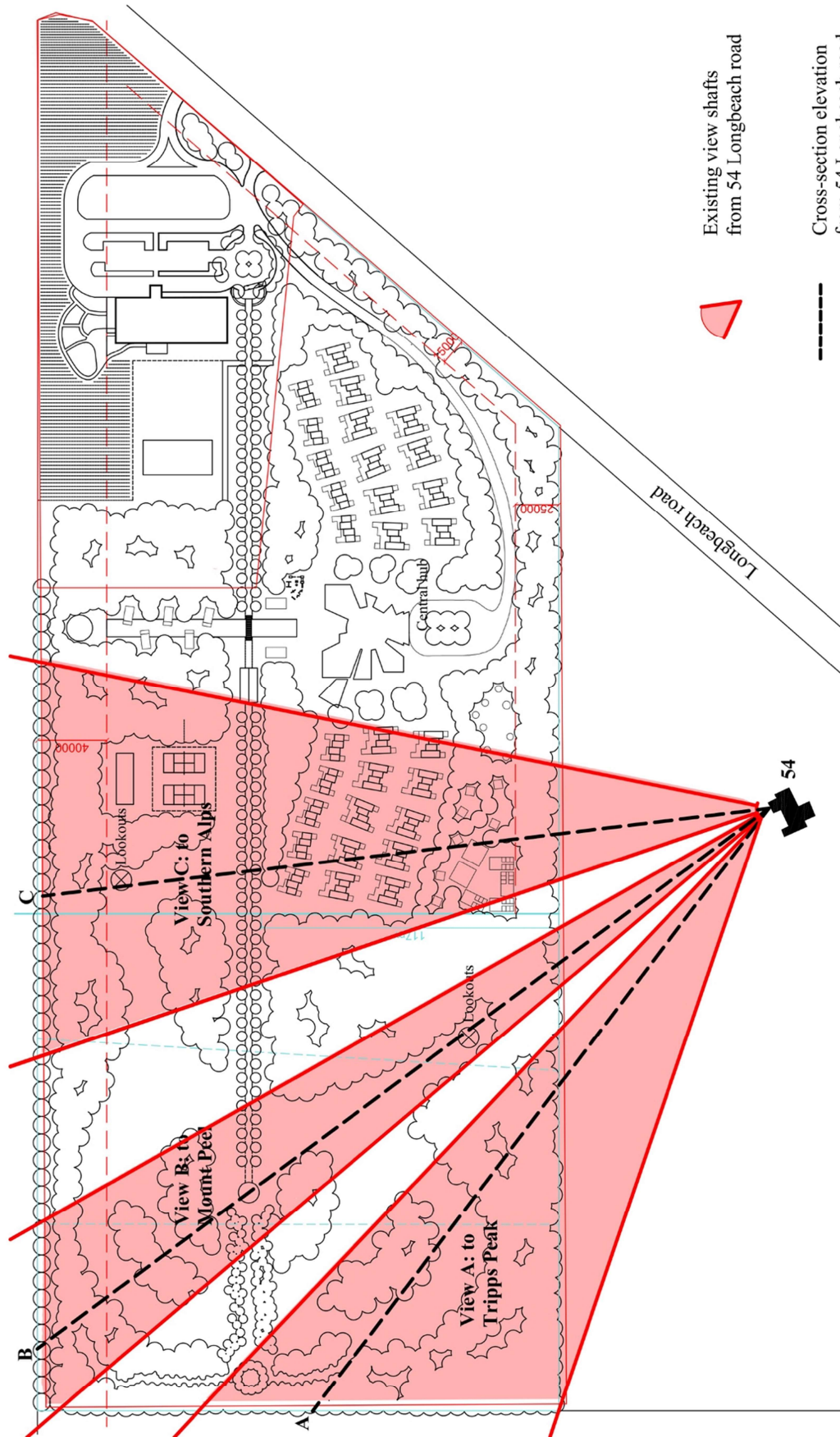


APPENDIX 3: VIEW C

VIEW C: TO SOUTHERN APLS



# APPENDIX 4: EXISTING VIEWSHAFTS OVER CONCEPT PLAN



Scale: 1:2000 @ A3 Date: 07 July 2020 Drawn - RS  
**EXISTING VIEW SHAFTS OVER CONCEPT PLAN FROM 54 LONGBEACH ROAD**

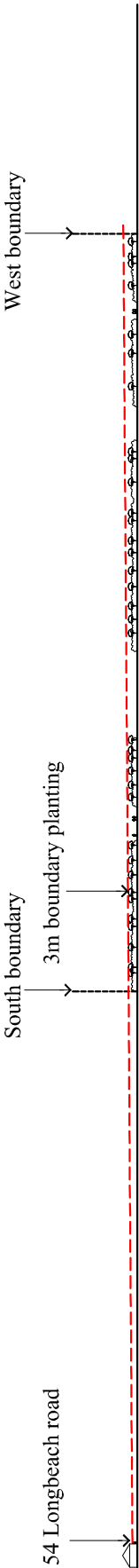


Robert Watson Landscape Architects Ltd.  
 45 Cambridge Terrace, PO Box 3215, Christchurch  
 Phone (03) 366 2968 Fax (03) 366 2967  
 Email: r.watson@rwa.co.nz

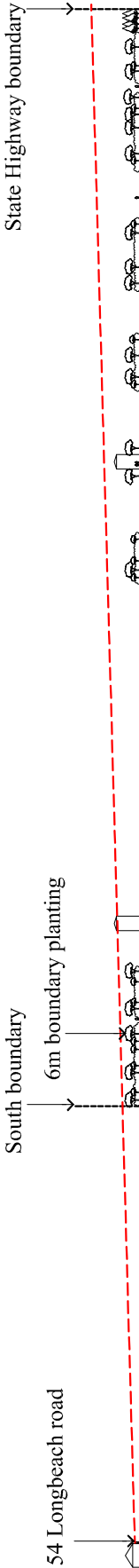
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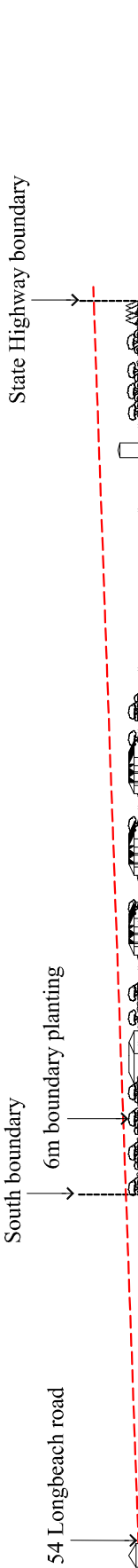
APPENDIX 5: CROSS-SECTION A, B, & C



Cross-section A



Cross-section B



Cross-section C

