

Consent hearing – speaking notes, 30.5.22

- Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.
- My key concern is the significant detrimental impact that adding another 21 houses to the Southern Terraces development would have on the striking landscape and natural character of the coastal environment at Riversdale Beach.
- I have read all the expert briefs of evidence provided on behalf of MDC and the applicant.
- I comment first on the evidence from Christine Foster and John Hudson on behalf of Eastleigh.
- Their descriptions of the proposed new development consistently downplay the visual impact of the additional houses. They say the additional lots are a “natural adjunct” to the existing development on Rochdale Rd and will simply “consolidate” what is already there.
- But it is evident the proposal is a material addition to the subdivision and that it will extend the development right across the currently undeveloped *foreground* of the southern terraces that form the backdrop to Riversdale Beach. It is obvious, even from Mr Hudson’s own photo simulations, that the proposed 19 houses on the seaward side of Rochdale Rd will be clearly visible from multiple perspectives from the existing settlement, the beach and the southern reserve.
- Indeed, as Ms Foster says (para [25]), “Mr Hudson’s assessment is candid that future houses on the proposed additional allotments *will be visible* from within the Rochdale Road vicinity and from parts of the older Riversdale Beach settlement and from the beach.” Mr Hudson’s own photo simulations of the “simulated proposal with planting” show that the new houses will be clearly visible despite the escarpment planting – particularly at viewpoints 4, 5 and 6 from the beach and southern reserve. Those are the viewpoints that really matter. People visit and live at Riversdale because they enjoy and value what is still a largely natural, rural coastal environment.
- Ms Foster goes on to say that Mr Hudson “... does not, though, equate visibility with significant adverse effects”, since there are already some houses visible on the terraces – an argument, in effect, that the horse has already bolted. I disagree; in fact, I believe that is all the more reason further development should *not* be allowed. Even with the existing Rochdale Rd houses the landscape backdrop to Riversdale Beach has a largely unspoilt natural character that is highly valued.
- I support Eastleigh’s proposed escarpment planting and agree the additional native planting has positive biodiversity value. But Mr Hudson’s photo simulations are based on a very optimistic assessment of the extent of growth, even over time; the southern escarpments are exposed and this is a high wind zone. And as Ms Foster says herself, it is entirely to be expected that the new owners uphill of the planted areas “will want to limit trees within the reserve to a height that does not block their panoramic views to the sea” ([27]).
- Even if those two concerns are put aside, and one assumes the planting at the edge of the escarpments in time reaches, and is allowed to reach, an effective screening height, it will still be only a partial screen – in Ms Foster’s words, it will screen “views from

below *of the walls and windows*” of the new houses ([28]). There is no escaping the fact that even the applicant’s experts expect the many new rooflines to be clearly visible.

- The key point is that even on the most optimistic assessment, as provided by the applicant’s experts, the escarpment planting cannot be said to “mitigate” in any real way for the adverse visual impact of many additional houses across these coastal terraces.
- I agree with all the conclusions reached in the independent peer review by Emma McRae of Boffa Miskell, on the proposal’s impact on Landscape, Natural Character and Visual Amenity (Appendix 3 to Honor Clark’s s42A report [at para 8]).
- In particular, I agree with the following points made by Ms McRae:
 - The lots on the seaward side have the potential to be dominant and overbearing when viewed from the existing settlement, neighbouring reserve area and the beach. ([para 8])
 - The planting is positive but the development will still be a dominant feature due to its location on the terrace edge that forms the skyline backdrop to Riversdale. ([para 26])
 - The development is *not* “co-located within an existing settlement”, as contended by the applicant. I agree with Ms McRae’s statement that: “While the proposal is located adjacent to the consented subdivision, this area is quite separate from the main settlement of Riversdale Beach, being separated from the main settlement by the terrace landform. The intent in granting consent for the original subdivision was that this terrace area would remain to separate the two areas.” ([para 38])
 - And finally, I also agree with Ms McRae that: “The findings of the earlier consent Decision remain relevant to the current development, and as such houses on the skyline which may have an adverse effect on the coastal environment should still be avoided. The existing landscape baseline now includes some rooflines apparent on the skyline. Any new development should not have greater visibility on the skyline to that which is already consented.” ([para 54])
- In closing, I support the recommendations made by Ms Clark and Ms McRae, to allow the boundary adjustments & only the 5 less visually prominent lots (#301-303, 320, 323), subject to appropriate conditions as set out in the s42A report [at pp38 ff].¹

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¹ particularly in relation to Development p39: including – specific housing locations, low reflective building materials, building height restricted to 5m, no boundary fencing, & unobtrusive location of water tanks.