1 Introduction

1.1 Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) has applied for a Resource Consent to construct a Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge across the Manawatū River, near Ruha Street in Palmerston North. This document sets out my review of the Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA) and Urban Design Assessment (UDA) that have been completed by Opus International Consultants Ltd. In undertaking this review, I have also read the application AEE and various supporting documentation and plans, and have undertaken a site and locality visit in December 2016.

About the Author

1.2 I have an honours degree in Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University (1996). I have over 13 years experience in landscape and landscape effects assessment in New Zealand. I am a Registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, and that organization’s current national president. I am currently working with the Ministry for the Environment in leading a project to develop a Landscape Assessment Methodology Code of Practice in New Zealand.

1.3 I am the director and owner of my own landscape architectural practice in Hawke’s Bay. Until recently I was a Senior Principal Landscape Architect at Boffa Miskell Ltd, this country’s largest landscape architecture company. In addition to my landscape architecture degree I have a bachelor degree in Forestry Science (Canterbury 1994).

1.4 I have undertaken assessments of a wide number of development proposals across the country, including many infrastructure and utility related projects. I am currently engaged as the NZ Transport Agency’s lead landscape and urban design consultant overseeing construction of the Southern Corridor Improvements project in Auckland. This project involves the construction of several motorway vehicle bridges and two significant pedestrian and cycling bridges, of which I prepared the landscape and visual assessment for. I have been involved in consenting the Penlink proposal in Auckland, which involves a significant vehicle bridge across the Duck Creek Estuary in Silverdale and re-consenting elements of the Great North Road Interchange of the Waterview Tunnel proposal. I have also been involved with the design, development
and consenting of several shared use paths across the Auckland region and in the Hawke’s Bay region.

1.5 I have assisted several Councils with peer reviews of various applications, including Northside Drive Motorway Overpass in Auckland, wind farm developments within the Tararua District Region and numerous subdivision applications across the country. I have also represented submitters on similar proposals, and provided evidence to assist with the development of District Plans, Regional Plans and the Auckland Unitary Plan.

1.6 I have undertaken a wide range of work within the Palmerston North region over the past 10 years. I am currently engaged by PNCC to prepare long-term management plans for the Esplanade Reserve, Memorial Park and Waitoetoe Reserve. I make the important note that the strategic guidance within these management plans is not dependent on the outcome of the Resource Consent application for this proposal, rather the plans will simply reflect the outcome. I have also worked for PNCC on other projects within the city, and for a range of applicants and submitters on various subdivision and development proposals.

1.7 My experience also includes the assessment of infrastructure and utility proposals, including national Ultra Fast Broadband (overhead deployment) project for Chorus, pipelines and pumping stations for Watercare in Auckland, a High Voltage Transmission Line across Northland for Top Energy, and over 12 windfarm projects.

1.8 I regularly provide evidence at Resource Consent Hearings, where I have represented developers, Council and submitters. I have also appeared before the Environment Court and the Board of Inquiry. I am a qualified Hearings Commissioner, having completed the Making Good Decisions course.

2 Landscape and Visual Assessment

2.1 A comprehensive LVA has been prepared by Stefan Steyn of Opus, a registered and suitably qualified landscape architect, and I note that it has been internally peer reviewed. The LVA provides a brief background and description of the project that is consistent with the AEE and engineering reports, and provides a brief outline of the
design philosophy for the bridge. I consider that enough information has been provided in these descriptions for readers to have a clear understanding of the project and its history.

Statutory and Non-Statutory Provisions

2.2 The LVA provides an overview of the relevant statutory and non-statutory provisions that relate to the assessment of landscape and visual effects of the proposal. I generally concur with the assertion that the District Plan supports informal passive and recreation within the zone the proposal will be located (north side), however I note that s15.5.3 of the plan also anticipates the protection of amenity values of residential areas adjoining the zone. I also note that the south side of the proposal is located in the Flood Protection Zone, which permits recreational activity and anticipates the construction of bridges.

2.3 I concur with the review of the additional statutory and non-statutory provisions provided, and highlighting the need to consider the character and amenity of the river and surrounds when assessing the proposal.

Receiving Landscape and Viewing Catchment

2.4 The LVA provides a thorough and accurate description of the receiving landscape. I concur with the defining of three distinctly different character areas, although note that there is a strong relationship between these areas and the overall identity of the locality. Part of the attraction of this part of the Manawatū River is how it creates a defining boundary to urban development, separating the open countryside surrounding Massey University from the densely populated residential areas on the north side.

2.5 The potential visual catchment is accurately described, although having visited the newly constructed limestone pathway on the southern side of the river, I consider that some views of the bridge will be likely from this location. However, this path will primarily be serviced by the construction of the bridge, and therefore I do not consider it necessary to assess potential visual effects of the bridge on future users in this location. Views of the bridge from the open farmland on the southern side are
likely to be limited due to the presence of relatively dense riparian vegetation (and these views have been considered in the LVA).

2.6 Ultimately I consider that the LVA has scoped the potentially affected viewing audience adequately.

Landscape Effects

2.7 Whilst I agree that landscape effects are dependent on the degree of change to landform, landcover and landuse, what is also worthy of consideration is the degree of change to landscape character. This doesn’t just include physical changes to the landscape, but also incorporates how these changes will be perceived by people traversing through or in that landscape. As mentioned above, the LVA recognises three distinctive landscape character areas.

2.8 The LVA adequately identifies the physical changes associated with the earthworks, the removal of a small portion of exotic vegetation, and how landuse (which is primarily recreation based) will remain relatively unaffected. I agree with the design approaches to provide ‘engineered’ banks, similar in character to the highly modified and maintained flood control banks. I also agree that the earthworks will be limited to a relatively small area, with only a localised effect on natural landforms.

2.9 In terms of landscape character, which is not addressed in the LVA, I consider a change brought about by the proposal will be the physical connecting of two sides of the river in this location. Whilst this is achieved by Fitzherbert Bridge approximately 1.3km upstream, the proposed bridge will represent a stronger connection between the residential and rural environments, particularly for pedestrians and neighbouring residents. As a result, and by way of users who will be granted new access to the south side, there will be somewhat of an erosion of the contrast between these two character areas, and of the continuity of the river itself. This matter is briefly highlighted in the submission of Kenneth Baird (Submission 26).

2.10 For some people, this will represent a positive – providing an ability to easily recreate and explore a part of the river not previously accessible (and many submissions in support attest to this opinion), and to enjoy new vistas across the river back to the city. For others, this connection may cause issue, a domestication of the naturalness of the river corridor. However, considering the statutory and non-statutory context of the
proposal, I consider that such an outcome has already been considered within the District Plan. Whilst not specific on location or details, the connecting of the two river sides by bridge is anticipated.

2.11 Overall, I am comfortable with the conclusions of the LVA that landscape effects will be low to moderate, although I recognise that there may be some people opposed to the broader concept of linking two sides of the river together.

Visual Effects

2.12 The LVA identifies a total of eleven representative viewpoint locations, and I consider this adequately portrays the range of views that will be likely. I have visited all the viewpoint locations and confirm that the photographs provided adequately depict the view from each location. However, I consider that in close proximity to the bridge (Viewpoint 1), a consideration of specific views from properties or locations is warranted. In particular, I consider it important to assess and recognise the potential effects on immediate neighbours of the proposal, those being properties at 22 Ruha Street, and 123, 125, and 131 Dittmer Drive, and also from the Holiday Park where there will be views across the extended car parking facility. In order to complete this assessment, I refer to the cross sections that have been provided by the applicant following a s92 request for additional information (Attachment 8).

22 Ruha Street (Keenan, Submission 18 in Support)
This property is located on the corner of Ruha and Dittmer Drives, and is the closest residential property to the proposal. It is part of a duplex dwelling that has its main aspect facing northeast onto Ruha Street, rather than towards the proposal. Two high level windows, presumably containing bedrooms rather than living spaces face towards the site, but located behind a tall fence. A small gazebo in the back garden is also screened by the fence and a dense hedge. Overall I consider that views of the river and the subject site will be limited, and therefore the potential visual effects of the proposal on this property will be low.

123 Dittmer Drive (Rowden, Submission 16 in Opposition)
Of the four properties listed above, this is located the furthest distance away where Dittmer Drive begins to curve away from the site. It is a single storey dwelling with no boundary treatments, the open views across the road to the flood control bank only hampered by a large street tree and some amenity vegetation close to the house.
The cross section for this property indicates that their view of the river is likely to be largely restricted by the existing bank, and that this view is unlikely to alter as a result of the proposed earthworks. Viewers within the residence will, however, be able to see the side of most of the bridge at an oblique angle (particularly at its highest and tallest point), and view users crossing it. It is unlikely that the bridge will significantly block longer reach views up the river, as these are already restricted by vegetation within the river corridor area, and the neighbours fence/garden.

I therefore am of the opinion that the visual effects of the proposal on this property will be moderate. I anticipate that residents in this dwelling will be aware of an increase in pedestrian and cycle movement, including across the bridge, but this will not be in the main part of their view, which will largely remain unchanged.

125 Dittmer Drive (no submission from residents in this property)
This is a two-storey dwelling that has views of the project site over a low block and steel boundary wall. The dwelling is directly orientated towards the centre of the bridge.

The cross sections indicate that from the upper floor there would likely be views of the river, south bank and fields beyond through two larger windows facing the street. From this position, viewers would also be able to see existing users of the river area. Views of the south bank are also likely from the lower floor, although longer distance views will be restricted by riparian vegetation on the opposite river bank.

In assessing the cross sections for this property, and for the neighbouring properties (particularly the alignment of the section for 22 Ruha Street), I am of the opinion that the bridge will have a notable impact on the view experienced from this property. The lifting of the bank to create the entrance to the bridge, and the urban design treatment on this entrance will be clearly visible from both floors. The bridge itself will reduce views across the river from the lower floor, and users crossing the bridge will add more overall movement in the view. From the upper floor, views will be retained across the bridge, but the bridge surface will interrupt the continuity of the river flowing across the view. At the lower level, the bridge will become a prominent feature of the outlook, exacerbated by the design of the bridge which increases in height (due to curvature) and bulk (due to the rib design) towards the centre of the bridge.

Overall, I consider that the potential visual effects of the proposal on this property will be high, rather than low to moderate as assessed by the applicant.
131 Dittmer Drive (Holdaway, Submission 15 in Support)

The main aspect of this dwelling addresses Ruha Street, and views of the proposal site are reasonably limited by dense trees both on the property and in the road reserve. However, two windows within the dwelling have southerly aspect directly towards the end and (as the cross section indicates) directly across the bridge.

From this angle, the urban design treatment of the bridge entry will be visible, but the structure of the bridge itself will be difficult to determine. Therefore, the key visual effect will be generated by users of the bridge, particularly as they traverse across the entrance. Movement on the bridge is likely to be limited as users will not be traversing the view, however some night time effects might occur from cyclist headlamps.

Overall, given the partial screening afforded by existing vegetation, I consider that the effects on this property will be moderate.

Holiday Park

I acknowledge that the Holiday Park is owned by the applicant, Palmerston North City Council, however also recognise that it is operated by a tenant. Views into the Park are relatively open, and therefore visitors occupying the cabins located at the southwestern corner of the site will have views over the existing carpark and proposed site. The Transportation Assessment (prepared by Opus) suggests that parking demands can be accommodated within the existing environment, and that any effects of vehicle movements resulting from the proposal are already anticipated for within the current designations and provisions. However, the UDA shows an allowance for overflow parking, and potentially a future car park extension adjacent to the existing car park. In either case, I consider that providing a degree of screening of the car park is worthy of consideration by the applicant, achieved by the construction of a low (1-1.2m) solid fence or planting a low hedge. Such a response would allow the retention of passive surveillance, but provide mitigation of visual effects associated with vehicle movements, particularly at night.

2.13 In regard to the other viewpoints assessed in the LVA, I generally concur with the conclusions that the proposal will have a low to moderate visual effect. I note that the bridge will be visible from other residences, and from public locations, within Dittmer
Drive, but do not equate visibility of the bridge necessarily being a visual effect. I am satisfied that the applicant has adequately assessed such effects.

2.14 As mentioned, I have also viewed the proposal site from locations immediately adjacent to the south bank, although as noted this area will largely be accessed by users of the bridge. I consider it acceptable not to assess the effects of the proposal on this location, noting that the applicant has included viewpoint 6 from Farm Road.

2.15 The report also addresses temporary effects of the proposal that will be generated during construction. The overall construction period is considered to last 12 months, however I would anticipate those works having the greatest visual effect (earthworks and structural lifting) would be relatively short in nature. I concur with the LVA that construction effects will have a low visual effect. I also consider that for many people the construction of the bridge will be interesting to witness, and therefore any such effects may be considered positive by some.

2.16 In summary, I concur with the assessment provided by the applicant that the overall visual effects will be low to moderate. However, from 125 Dittmer Drive, I consider the bridge will be more prominent in the view and assess the proposal as having a high visual effect on this property. It will have moderate effects on the properties at 123 and 131 Dittmer St. As mentioned above, this is a consideration under s15.5.3 of the District Plan.

Conclusion

2.17 Generally I find that the LVA provided by the applicant is thorough, covers the appropriate material and reaches logical and realistic conclusions. Overall I concur with the findings that the landscape and visual effects of the proposal will be low to moderate. However, there will be an increased level of effect on the two storey dwelling located at 125 Dittmer Drive, and to a lesser extent on the dwellings at 123 and 131 Dittmer Drive. I am of the opinion that the effects on these properties cannot
be mitigated, and it will be up to the residents of these properties to provide their opinion on whether such effects are positive or adverse to them.

2.18 I also recommend low planting treatment is undertaken along the boundary between the car park and the Holiday Park to reduce views of moving vehicles from the holiday cabins.

3 Urban Design Assessment

3.1 A comprehensive urban design assessment has been prepared by Nick Aiken of Opus, a planner and urban designer, and I note that it has been internally peer reviewed. The UDA provides a brief background and description of the project that is consistent with the AEE and engineering reports, and provides a brief outline of the design philosophy for the bridge. I consider that enough information has been provided in these descriptions for readers to have a clear understanding of the project and its history.

Context

3.2 The UDA provides a detailed analysis of the policy context, including a review of key Council strategy documents. Key to the strategies is engagement with local iwi, organisations, Council Officers, the development industry, investors and community groups, and it is clear from the AEE that such participation has been sought. Having reviewed the options assessment, I concur that the overall approach to the project is consistent with the objectives and aspirations of the community.

3.3 The UDA provides a brief, but adequate outline of the environmental, human and urban context in which the project will be situated. I consider that the cultural analysis is light, and it would be beneficial to hear from mana whenua in regards to the proposal, beyond the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that has been provided as part of the s92 response. In particular, it would be useful to more clearly understand whether the river has any part to play in the definition of rohe boundaries, and whether there are any cultural issues associated with the concept of bridging it (I note that the MOU states, in s5, ‘It is acknowledged that presently Rangitāne o Manawatū has cultural impacts relating to the project…’). I also note that the design is strongly influenced by the concept of a fallen Karaka tree, but do not have adequate information in regard to the cultural appropriateness of this korero, other than a minor
reference to an early hui held with mana whenua and a brief submission from Tanenuiarangi Manawatū Incorporated (Submission 1).

**Overall Principles of Urban Design**

3.4 Various reports, including the UDA, the Transportation Assessment and the AEE provide a detailed assessment of the wider objectives for the project. Importantly the UDA references key NZ Transport Agency documents (namely ‘Bridging the Gap’) which provide extensive guidance on the development of proposals such as this. Overall I consider the UDA adequately sets out the key urban design considerations for the project.

**Design Concept**

3.5 In the context of my comments above in regard to the cultural appropriateness of the design, I am of the opinion that there has been a conscious effort to create a bold architectural statement rather than a functional engineered form. This approach is consistent with both the Palmerston North Urban Design Strategy (UDS) and the Manawatū River Framework (MRF), particularly in regard to connectivity and public realm/character. Indeed, the UDS identifies a goal to ‘celebrate iconic architecture’.

3.6 For some, the design may be seen to be too literal in its representation, particularly the urban design treatment at the northern end (the creation of the tree canopy). However, this is a matter of interpretation, and not a matter for debate in regard to potential effects under the RMA. Overall, I consider that the design puts forward a bold statement that is consistent with wider Council policy objectives and strategies.

3.7 I make note that some submitters, including Mr Rowden (Submitter 16) have objection to the bulkiness of the design, particularly in the centre of the structure. I recognise that there are both structural and design reasons for the shape of the bridge and its height in the centre, but recognise that these do lead to potential visual effects (as outlined above).

**Transport, Connectivity, Movement**

3.8 I concur with the assessment provided by the applicant in terms of its integration into the existing pathway network, and connections to the wider Massey Campus area.
The existing Fitzherbert Bridge crossing is more difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to navigate to and across (as noted by some submitters), whereas the dedicated non-vehicular use of the proposed bridge, and its location at the end of a strong lineal road connection lends itself to safe, easy passage for a wide range of users. The 4.2m width is generous and will allow safe passing for multiple users, even if some users are stopped on the bridge for any reason.

Community Ownership and Activation

3.9 I concur with the UDA that there will be increased presence and use of the river as a result of the proposal. I anticipate the bridge becoming a destination focal point where people travel to. In this respect, I consider that the bridge is consistent with the key directions of the MRF. It is also consistent with the key drivers of the UDS in terms of enhancing the public realm, and encouraging or facilitating increased use of public space for recreation through the opening up of the south bank of the river.

CPTED

3.10 The bridge is located above the existing flood control banks, directly at the end of a long lineal street. At 4.2m wide, it will have a high level of natural surveillance across it, with few concealment opportunities. I concur with the UDR that CPTED principles have been incorporated into the design.

Conclusion

3.11 Overall, I am satisfied that the proposal is consistent with the principles of good urban design. I concur with the conclusions of the UDR that the bridge is consistent with the strategies, objectives and policies contained within PNCC statutory and non-statutory documents. It will provide for improved connectivity, and create an iconic feature in this part of the river. However, I recommend further investigation into any mana whenua concerns, and particularly assurance from mana whenua that the fallen karaka tree interpretation is culturally appropriate.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Generally I am satisfied that the LVA and UDA have been prepared to a high standard, present sufficient information to provide an understanding of the proposal
and the method of assessment, and provide reliable conclusions. However I draw the Commissioners to the following key points:

- The bridge will create landscape effects not identified by the applicant as a result of the linking of two distinct landscape character areas (urban with rural), and diminishing the continuity of the river.

- In my opinion, the proposal will have higher visual effects on immediately neighbouring properties than has been identified by the applicant. I note, however, that of the properties I have individually assessed only the residents of 123 Dittmer Drive (Rowden, Submission 16) have submitted in opposition to the proposal. This submission needs to be considered in the context of s15.5.3 of the District Plan.

- I recommend that the applicant consider the construction of a small wall (1-1.2m in height) or low planting between the car park and the Holiday Park to mitigate potential effects of moving vehicles from the holiday cabins. As the car park is existing, and the Holiday Park is owned by the applicant, I do not consider that a condition requiring this outcome is possible, but make note of it for reasons of completeness.

- I am uncertain as to whether the design korero for the bridge is recognised by mana whenua as culturally appropriate, and/or has been interpreted correctly. I note, however, that Tanenuiarangi Manawatū have submitted in support of the proposal.

4.2 I do not consider any further mitigation can be provided to counter the points above, and on this basis I do not have any recommendations for additional or alternative conditions.

Shannon Bray
Registered Landscape Architect