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WELLSFORD NORTH FAST-TRACK – HIGH-LEVEL ECOLOGY ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Wellsford Welding Club Limited (“the applicant”) propose to lodge an application for a referred project under the Covid-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020 (the “Act”) to utilise the fast-track consenting process. This application relates to a residential development within the north-western portion of Part Allotment SE 118 Parish of Oruawharo (Area 1) and within the western portion of Part Lot 4 DP 9919 (Area 2), Wellsford (the Site). This memorandum provides a high-level assessment of ecological aspects of the proposal.

Methodology

Site assessments were undertaken by experienced ecologists during October 2018, July 2019 and December 2021. Botanic and terrestrial fauna values within the Site were qualitatively assessed. Fauna habitats assessed considered indigenous lizards, birds, and bats.

Overland flow paths / watercourses were classified under the Auckland Unitary Plan - Operative in Part (AUP-OP) to determine, in accordance with the definitions in this plan, the ephemeral, intermittent or permanent status of these watercourses.

Assessments were undertaken to determine whether or not any natural wetlands were present within the Site as per the definitions and criteria laid out in the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 (NPS-FM).

Any potential aquatic habitat was then qualitatively assessed. Identified ecological features within the Site are presented in Appendix I and photos of these features are provided in Appendix II.

Existing Environment

Background and Ecosystem Classification

The Site is within the Otamatea Ecological District of the Auckland Region. Historically (pre-human), the area would have comprised the forest ecosystem type of pūriri taraire forest (WF7-2) and would have supported a diverse range of invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds and bats (Singers et al., 2017). Earliest historical aerials available, indicate that the Site and much of the surrounding landscape has

been devoid of native vegetation and managed as agricultural land for at least the last 60 years (Appendix III).

Currently, the Site consist predominately of pasture with a few isolated exotic trees, a residential house and a farm outbuilding. The Site is surrounded by a mixture of residential development and agricultural/horticultural land. The Site does not support a recognised current terrestrial ecosystem type, as classified under the AUP OP: Biodiversity current extent and is not subject to any Significant Ecological Area (SEA) overlay.

Terrestrial Ecology

Area 1 almost entirely consists of pasture grasses. There are a couple of isolated trees within the paddocks and some garden amenity planting around the existing dwelling. To the east of Area 1, within the wider Site but outside of the proposed development area, there is a thin strip of exotic riparian vegetation.

Area 2 also almost entirely consists of pasture grasses with a few isolated exotic trees within the paddocks. To the North of Area 2, within the neighbouring property, there is a relatively large stand of mixed exotic trees (approximately 1 ha). To the east of Area B, within the wider Site but outside of the proposed development area, there is a relatively large area of mature native trees (approximately 1.8 ha).

The botanical value of the vegetation within Areas 1 and 2 was assessed as negligible, being predominately pasture with a few isolated exotic trees. This vegetation provides very low-quality fauna habitat due to the lack of diversity, structure and connectivity.

Freshwater Ecology

Auckland Council GeoMaps indicates a number of overland flow paths to be present within the site, predominantly draining very small catchments. Within Area 1, the overland flow paths had ill-defined channels, no flowing water 48 hrs after a rain event, no natural pools, rooted terrestrial vegetation (pasture grasses) across their widths and no evidence of substrate sorting. As such, these overland flow paths were classified as ephemeral reaches.

At the confluence of the ephemeral reaches, adjacent to the permanent stream to the east of Area 1, a small wetland (approximately 40m²) has formed where the land flattens out. The area contained watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*), an exotic obligate wetland plant species, and the ground was saturated even during the December site visit. Due to the presence of the obligate wetland plant and the permanent wetland hydrology present, the small area was classified as a natural wetland under the NPS-FM.

Within Area 2, the overland flow paths had ill-defined channels, no natural pools, rooted terrestrial vegetation (pasture grasses) across their widths and no evidence of substrate sorting. As such, these

overland flow paths were classified as ephemeral reaches. Stormwater from the roadside and upstream residential area has been piped and directed into the overland flow paths of Area 2. No stormwater mitigation deuces are present. As a consequence, these overland flow paths receive a higher volume of water over a shorter period compared to what would occur naturally. However, flowing water still ceases following 48hrs after a rain event. As such, these overland flow paths were classified as ephemeral reaches.

Within the overland flow paths, a few soft rushes (*Juncus effusus*), an exotic facultative wetland species, were scattered amongst the pasture grasses. Additionally, creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), an exotic facultative species, was also present. Both of these species are considered common pasture weeds and were present in low abundance (<10% coverage). No standing water was present, and the soils were not saturated, indicating that wetland hydrology is not present. Due to the absence of evident wetland hydrology and the dominance (≈90%) of facultative upland and upland plant species (e.g. perennial ryegrass, kikuyu grass, dallis grass/paspalum and clover) these areas were not considered natural wetlands under the NPS-FM. It should also be noted that these areas are currently, and have historically, been used and managed as pasture.

Assessment of Ecological Effects

Direct effects will be limited to vegetation removal. Botanical values with the site were considered negligible, and the vegetation does not provide any significant value as habitat to indigenous fauna. The loss of vegetation within Areas 1 and 2 is expected to have a very low level effect on ecological values.

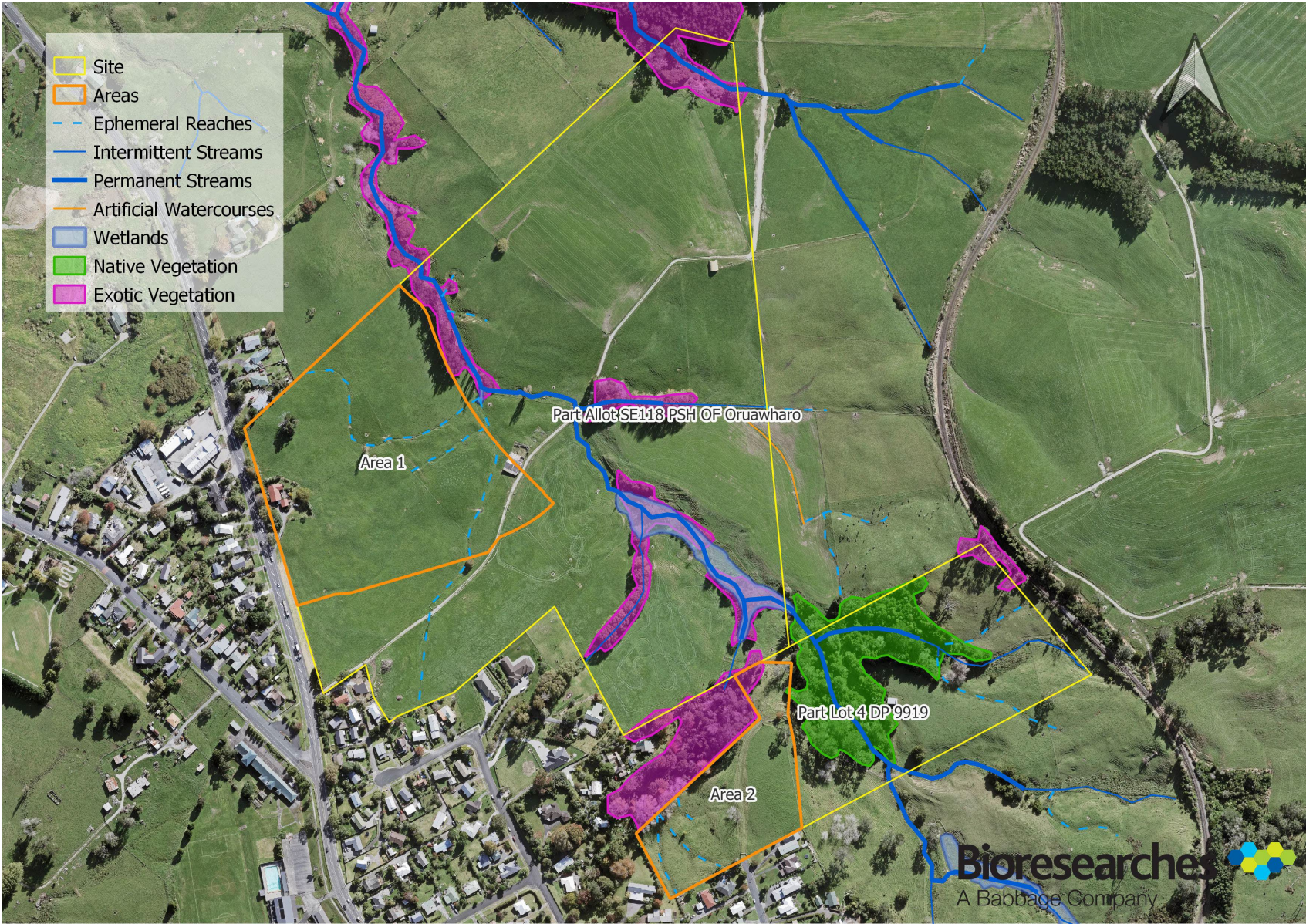
Indirect adverse effects, such as sedimentation and stormwater contaminants, are proposed to be adequately mitigated through appropriate controls and following best practice guidelines, to ensure adverse effects on ecological values are no more than minor.

There are no wetlands within Areas 1 and 2 that meet the definition of a natural wetland under the NPS-FM and no intermittent or permanent streams. Natural wetlands are located within 100m of Areas 1 and 2, however the proposed earthworks and development are to be designed and/or mitigated to ensure there is no partial drainage of any natural wetland.

The proposed development of the Site is consistent with the outcomes expected of the NPS-FM and the AUP-OP.

A more comprehensive ecological assessment will be provided to support the development application at the expert consenting panel stage, which will further assess the potential indirect adverse effects and detail any proposed ecological enhancement actions.

Appendix I: Identified Ecological Features







Appendix II: Photos of Identified Features



Photos 1 – 4: Ephemeral Overland flow paths within Area 1.



Photos 1 – 4: Ephemeral Overland flow paths within Area 2.

Appendix III: 1961 Aerial Image



*Base image sourced from Retrolense.