

# **ADDENDUM 2: RESOURCE APPLICATION 11/134- AROUND THE MOUNTAIN CYCLE TRAIL- REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

## **LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**

In response to the request for further Information to Resource Consent Application 11/134 Around the Mountain Cycle Trail from the Southland District Council dated 17 October 2011

1. Council seeks a more detailed assessment of the potential effects of the construction of the cycle trail and structures, the potential effects of the physical structures and the potential effects of the use of the track on angling amenity

In respect of further information on the potential effects on angling amenity, the following additional information is provided.

The Around the Mountain Cycle Trail Landscape and Visual Effects report by Blakely Wallace Associates is referred to in this addendum as 'the main report'.

### **General comments on the landscape and visual effects on the angling experience**

Angler amenity in reference to the Upper Oreti Valley refers to such matters as:

- the natural setting of the river
- the character and intrinsic qualities of the river environment
- the angling experience in terms of the backcountry, sense of remoteness and tranquility etc

The trail will have varying impact on angler amenity depending to a large extent on the distance of the trail from the river and riverbank, and the perception of the angler or other user.

Cyclists on bikes moving along the trail will be a new but transient effect in the Upper Oreti Valley. The bright coloured helmets and clothing will be visible over a wide area especially within the open valley floor. This maybe considered an intrusion and impact on the remote backcountry experience for some but others maybe more accepting of other uses.

The majority of the trail is located well away from the river and will have a limited or extremely minor impact on angler amenity. In the short sections where the trail is close to the river there will be some impact to angler amenity from other recreationalists but this is difficult to quantify.

There are benefits to anglers from the cycle trail in that access to stretches of the river will be easier and I understand in the lower stretches of the study area anglers will no longer require landowner approval across private land as is the case now.

In general terms the low profile of the trail itself will be difficult to detect in many places due to the screening effect of vegetative cover and the narrowness of the trail. The 'hardening' of the surface of the trail will increase the visibility of the trail compared to the softer appearance of the current grass and mud 4wd track within open valley areas.

On higher terraces and the two sections where the trail traverses visually prominent hills, the trail will be visible to varying degrees. The visibility of these areas of higher sensitivity (as referred to in

the main report) have already been carefully assessed. The visual effects have been identified and methods to reduce effects detailed.

Clearly the further away the viewer is from the visually sensitive section the less the visual impact.

In general terms, where the cycle trail is more than 100m from the river effects on angler amenity is considered low.

In terms of noise, it is unlikely that cyclists will be heard by anglers on the river banks due to the sound of the running water except where the trail passes very close to the river.

### **Specific comment on the 8 sections described in the main report.**

#### **Section 1: Ashton Flat North - Mount Nicholas Road to the Ashton Burn.**

As stated in the main report, the proposed route is close to the Oreti River south of the Oreti River carpark then it 'gradually moves away and weaves across the valley floor' before crossing the Ashton Burn.

At approximately 400m south of the carpark, trail users will be within 100m of the river just south of the Oreti carpark and then immediately alongside or close to the river for approximately 150m adjacent to the river meander. This is small section in relation to the extensive stretches of the river which are well away from the cycle trail in Section 1.

The actual trail itself will not be a significant intrusion as there is already a 4wd track on more or less the same alignment. As discussed above it will be more dominant than the current grass and mud track but will not be experienced as an intrusive element as it winds across the valley floor.

The trail gradually moves away from the river to cross the Upper Oreti Valley. Over this section the effect on angler amenity is considered low due to the distance of the trail from the river.

Near Pt. 126, the route for the cycle trail crosses the Ashton Burn (The Ashton Burn also has some anglers use). The simple concrete and steel bridge raised 1.5m on stone filled gabion baskets will introduce a new man-made element in an otherwise natural landscape. However as stated in the main report the structure will be tiny in the context of the valley and will become accepted in the same way as the Upper Oreti Hut is absorbed into the landscape.

Comment has already been provided on the visual effects of the gravel borrow pits in this area in Addendum 1.

#### **Section 2 : Ashton Burn South**

Over this section the cycle trail follows the eastern side of the valley well away from the Oreti River as far as the knoll at Pt 171. The effect of the trail rising over the small hill at Pt 171 has been dealt with in detail in the main report and mitigation methods proposed to limit the visual effects of the track. The effect on angler amenity is as for other viewers in the valley. Visual effects will occur on higher ground and rising up the small hill. Also visual effects are likely to be greater following construction until batters regrass. The distance from which anglers on the river bank view this hill varies from approximately 300m to 1km or more. Visual effects of the trail from these distances will be low especially when regrassing occurs.

Beyond the small hill to the beech forest the trail follows the existing 4WD track on undulating tussock and grass covered terraces to the beech forest. The valley narrows within this section with the trail a minimum of 150m from the river.

### **Section 3: Beech Forest and Knoll**

The trail is entirely within the beech forest in this section and will have no effect on angler amenity other than anglers will not be there.

### **Section 4: Beech Forest to Three Kings (Lincoln Hill Section)**

From where the cycle trail emerges from the beech forest, the river is approximately 150m west. This distance between the river and trail varies along the remaining Lincoln Hill section. In some locations, the trail is close to the river and 'within the river environs'. The effect on angler amenity will correspondingly vary depending on distance from the river. As stated in the main report for much of this section the trail follows existing 4WD track within shrubland, on the toe of the slope below Lincoln Hill. The trail will be seen intermittently but will generally be hidden from view within the margin of shrubland on the toe of the hillslope. In the relatively small sections where rock groynes are proposed, (160m, 70m and 130 m respectively for Option A) the trail is immediately adjacent or located on the groynes.

The close proximity of the trail to the river and the presence of cyclists along this section of Lincoln Hill will have some impact on angler amenity. It will impact on the natural setting for anglers on the opposite bank to some (undefined) extent.

It was acknowledged in the main report that 2 -3m rock groynes (for both Options A and B) will have significant visual effects and will diminish natural, and wild and scenic values on these short sections of the river bank. No alternative solution with lesser impacts are available. It could be argued however that the rock groynes may arguably be preferable to an actively eroding river bank in terms of angler amenity.

In my opinion however there will be effects on angler amenity by the formation of rock groynes. However the groynes have to be seen within the context of the wider landscape which is not an entirely natural landscape and consists of developed farmland to the west of the river and numerous signs of human intervention.

#### **Option B**

The assessment in the main landscape and visual effects report of Option B omitted to include the 194m of rock armouring at the first suspension bridge (Bridge A). The armouring would be on the upstream side on the true right bank and formed within a ditch excavated into the grass bank to protect the bridge abutment. As with all rock armouring, there would correspondingly be visual effects and impact on the rivers naturalness for anglers alongside these sections.

The trail on the true right within the grassy riverflats would conflict to a greater degree with anglers who would mostly use this side of the river. In addition two additional suspension bridges and with one very close to Three Kings would have significant visual effects. In my opinion Option B has considerably greater impact on angler amenity compared to Option A.

### **Section 5: Three Kings**

On the flats by the Three Kings formation the proposed trail is approximately 90m from the true left river bank. Some impact could be expected on angler amenity in this section from the cumulative effects of the trail itself, shelter/toilet structure, the suspension bridge and switchbacks. However all of these facilities are normal facilities/structures found on Conservation Land administered by the Department of Conservation. The shelter and toilet facilities will also have benefits for anglers.

The trail alignment on the hill section has been amended since the main report was prepared. The number of switchbacks has been reduced from four to three. The first zig extends to the left into the beech forest on the east side to allow for a longer climb across the face of the hill and then into

the vegetated bluff on at the west end. This overall represents a significant improvement and reduces the visual impact of the switchback section. The width of the trail will be reduced to 1.5m across the long incline(s) on the face. The three switchbacks are viewed at short distance from the Three Kings formation and will still be highly visible though to a considerably reduced extent compared to the previous alignment. There will be short term visual effects as outlined in the main report but as also discussed, the shrubland on the hill is advancing and in the longterm will eventually engulf and screen the switchbacks. Methods to reduce these effects and hasten revegetation are detailed in the main report.

At Three Kings some trail users are likely to walk over to the river to view the river and pools as this is a special and appealing area and trail users could be expected to linger.

To assist with reducing adverse effects, it is now proposed that the shelter/toilet structure be relocated to a terrace further south tucked into the landform adjacent to the suspension bridge (crossing the side stream). In this location the structure will be largely tucked away from the line of sight from anglers using the opposite bank of the river.

### **Section 6: Three Kings to Windy Hill**

The impact on angler amenity along this section is considered low. The trail is predominately located away from the immediate river environment either within dense grassland/wetland, or within the edge of shrubland or beech forest. The river is close to the trail for only very short sections. The wider river environment is progressively more developed as the viewer moves downstream.

### **Section 7: Windy Hill to Oreti Bridge crossing**

The impact on angler amenity again is considered low over this section. The trail is located on the terrace well above the river within the tall tussock. The borrow sites are also well away from the river environment and will heal in time

The tall suspension bridge at 95 meters long, just under 12 metres high from ground level at the towers, and 2.5m wide is a very large, but slender lightweight structure. It will be seen over a wide area both upstream and downstream.

The landscape here straddles two landscapes. The reasonably natural landscape on the east side of the Oreti River within the Conservation Estate and developed farmland including shelterbelts, pasture and farm buildings on the west side. In this context I do not consider the suspension bridge to be intrusive or inappropriate. In addition, the scale of the landscape can absorb a structure of this size. It will be a new element but not a discordant one.

The anillary elements such as abutments and cables are an integral part of the bridge design and is difficult to see how they will be detrimental to angler amenity especially in view of the wider landscape context referred to above. However the suspension bridge may have detrimental effects to key fishing spots to the bridge.

[2 Council seeks more information \(in response to Mr Petries concerns\) about the potential impact of the track construction on the beech forest and the slow growth rate of remedial planting proposed for the reinstatement of the gravel extraction sites](#)

#### a) Potential impact on beech forest

This effect of the trail construction on the structure of the beech forest is outside my area of expertise.

However I would comment that the Department of Conservation has formed many km of track through beech forest throughout the South Island with minimal impact on the forest. I understand the beech forest where the cycle trail is proposed, is secondary regrowth as it is fairly even aged. The Department has been advising on the route through the beech forest and is not concerned about the issues raised.

b) Slow growth rate of remedial planting proposed for the reinstatement of the gravel extraction sites

It is accepted that growth rates of remedial sowing of grasses on borrow pits could be slow due to aspect and possibly hare damage. However at the relatively low elevation of the borrow sites successful grass growth will occur over time. The grassing over would occur naturally over time due to the seed source that will exist in the soil and surrounding grassland. This can clearly be demonstrated on disturbed sites within the Upper Oreti Valley such as dozed tracks which have healed over naturally. However to hasten this process seeding is proposed.

The key to successful grass growth will be:

1. the spreading of available topsoil from opening up the borrow pit (and the cycle trail).
2. the application of the correct fertiliser for these low fertility sites (recommended by soils advisers).
3. possible control of hares through poisoning or possibly temporary rabbit fencing

Grassed over gravel extraction sites will take on a greener colour initially compared to surrounding grassland as a result of the young grass and the effects of fertiliser application. This will lesson in time and eventually will merge with the surrounding valley floor.

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