

Plan Variation 1: Lifestyle Zones and Minden Structure Plan Hearings Committee Decisions Overview

In February 2009, Council introduced a new rural subdivision strategy for the District as a part of the new District Plan. The focus of this new strategy was on protecting the District's versatile land resource against ad-hoc lifestyle subdivision which was fragmenting and taking productive land out of use. This strategy gives effect to objectives and policies introduced under Change 2 (Growth Management) to the Bay of Plenty Regional Policy Statement which require Council to protect versatile soils and rural land productivity within the District.

The key part to this strategy was the introduction of the Minden, Katikati and Te Puke Lifestyle Zones to provide for lifestyle subdivision opportunities within the District in locations suitable for such development. To allow development to occur in each of the areas a structure plan needed to be prepared, hence Plan Variation 1.

The Hearings Committee heard from the community both throughout the consultation phase of preparing the Minden Lifestyle Zone Structure Plan, and through the formal submission phase of the Variation. The concerns raised were given much consideration and have resulted in a number of changes being made to the proposal that was first notified. Unfortunately though, the decisions won't please everyone, and in a number of cases, the Hearings Committee had to balance financial considerations plus individual concerns with the needs of the wider community.

The most significant change that has been made is the removal of bridleways from the Structure Plan. These were removed due to a lack of support from submitters and high construction costs due to the challenging topography. Greenlanes have been retained to provide for connectivity through the Minden Lifestyle Zone. Another significant change is that the number of new lots allowed initially has increased from 97 to 256 as a result of further traffic modeling and discussions with NZTA.

There were a number of submitters who opposed the Variation because of their concerns for the safety of Minden Road. It is acknowledged from the submissions that residents have witnessed a number of crashes and near misses on this Road. Council has no formal record of these and can only go by what information has been passed on. Minden Road is no less safe than most other rural roads in the District and complies with Council's Development Code roading standards for its current traffic volume. Safety improvements and traffic calming to Minden Road will be made as this traffic volume increases, and will be done as a part of Council's rural roading program.

There were also a number of submitters who had concerns with the Variation going ahead because of the geotechnical issues faced by the Minden. While much consideration was given to land stability, it is felt that this risk is more than adequately covered by the requirements for a **geotechnical assessment to approve every building site** and areas suitable for the building of infrastructure. Council has a much greater understanding of the stability constraints in the area than it did in the 1980's when the major slips occurred.

Debate was also held on whether the development of the zone should be staged by allowing certain areas where geotechnical constraints were less significant to be developed before others. Ultimately however, it was agreed that the requirement for the geotechnical assessment (as mentioned above) would be sufficient for resolving any geotechnical issues.

A staging approach was also considered with respect to the availability of reticulated water, as the upper portions of the zone are yet to be serviced by this infrastructure. It was debated whether the lower portion of the zone with access to existing water infrastructure should be developed first before allowing development and the construction of water infrastructure to occur in the upper portion. In the end, the Committee decided not to adopt a staging approach because the upper portion would be serviced in reasonable time, although not immediately, when money was available for constructing infrastructure. The supply will be by trickle feed meaning residents will still need to have their own tanks.

The requirement for "transferable subdivision entitlements" to be purchased before subdivision was another major subject taken on board by the Committee. This requirement has been retained because it is a part of the overall rural subdivision strategy which transfers subdivision opportunities into the appropriate places rather than removing them altogether. Staying with this approach will continue to provide an incentive for the protection of the District's ecological features, the amalgamation of existing rural titles capable of an extra dwelling, and provide a level of compensation to those who lost their previous opportunity to subdivide.

As a final point, it should be noted that the development of the Minden Lifestyle Zone is expected to take place over the next 40 years; it won't all happen straight away. While at the moment the District may be experiencing a downturn in subdivision and development due to the global financial crisis, this will not always be the case and it is expected that development will pick up in the future. The District will continue to be a desirable place for lifestyle development in years to come. Therefore, it is important to start planning now and to plan ahead with a long term focus. This includes developing a plan for establishing walkways now as these will take many years to become established and the opportunity should not be lost.

The Hearings Committee would like to thank the submitters for their input and all others who were involved in this process from its introduction at District Plan Review time and throughout the consultation stages. We believe that this involvement has helped us to come to a better position from which to allow the Minden Lifestyle Zone to develop.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Williams".

Councillor Mike Williams
Chairman of the Strategy and Policy Committee
On behalf of the Minden Structure Plan Hearings Committee.