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PRESTON DOWNS: Landscape Design Strategy

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1. Purpose of this Document

This brief document intends to explain the philosophy and intentions of the proposed landscape plan intended for the Preston Downs Subdivision, West Melton.

2. The Existing Landscape and Built Environment

The existing landscape is a cultural landscape nestled against outstanding natural features. The Southern Alps dominates the skyline to the west over the wider Canterbury Plains Environment.

The existing site features include a significant swale through the centre of the land being an old river channel, a large sand dune, and a line of significant pine trees adjacent to Weedons-Ross Road.

The land was previously used for pastoral purposes as part of the 10,000 acre Tresillian Run that was later subdivided into a smaller parcel of land named Preston Farm. The land was then used to train horses.

A number of existing implement sheds and timber railing fencing areas are located in SE corner of the site along the Weedons Ross Road boundary.

3. The Subdivision

Preston Downs has been designed to be in keeping with the surroundings and the present landform, maintaining the existing features of the site.

The natural contours will be retained as much as possible to provide variation in section heights, height of houses and add visual interest.

In essence the proposed subdivision is a network of open space, connectivity of roading, and clear connection between the existing West Melton and the subdivision.

The subdivision has a large public open space / reserve running east-west adjacent to the main entrance road that will consist of stormwater treatment, recreational activities, cycle-pathways, and landscaping.

The subdivision will have an extensive network of cycle-ways and pedestrian pathways within reserves and the roads, including a direct linkage to Laird Place and the West Melton primary School.

Section sizes will range from 600m² or thereabouts that are located internally within the subdivision and overlooking the internal reserve spaces; to 5000m² that are located on the Northern boundary along Halkett Road and Western boundary, including 3000 - 5000 m² allotments developed adjacent to existing houses on Westview Crescent and Laird Place.



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4. The Landscape Proposal

The landscape design will be based around three main design objectives; to create a distinct 'sense of place' that appropriately acknowledges the existing rural character of the West Melton township, integration of existing significant site features, and to create strong community linkages with established West Melton community patterns.

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a). Sense of Place

The character of the Preston Downs development will seek to integrate with and protect the existing rural character of the West Melton township. The open landscape of West Melton has been gradually lost to 4ha lots and shelterbelt planting. The 63.7 ha site should try and retain key views and a more open character to traditional suburban subdivisions.

The site boundaries or edges around the existing township character will be treated to create a sense of 'open space'. This has resulted in larger lot sizes along the west boundary and Halkett Road to maintain the openness of this pastoral landscape, minimize the visual impact of development and preserve regional views to the Port Hills and Southern Alps presently experienced. The lot sizes are larger than normal but individual owners will inevitably fence and plant boundaries for shelter and privacy, however careful subdivision planting covenants will prevent a closed in suburban look.

The most significant view from within the site is to the borrowed landscape of the Southern Alps. The landscape design will reinforce the view thrust to this natural feature through the positioning, width and orientation of the roading, recreation and stormwater reserves and planting. The view of the Alps to the west, and Port Hills to the east could be enhanced by a lookout platform located on the highest contour on the site with panoramic information boards.

The East-West main internal road and adjoining reserve reinforces this flow, the view will be framed through strategic planting of trees within the road reserve and recreation reserve. Specimen trees will be planted in natural groupings on East-West orientated roads, within reserves, and covenanted areas within sections to create this open space and uninterrupted views drawing the eye out to the wider Canterbury Plains environment.

The majority of structured avenue tree planting will be evident on North-South road systems and formed Row's to reflect the rural 'homestead' driveway. This planting will direct the user from internal subdivision roads to the main central reserve, Halkett Road, and possibly SH73 in the future.

Specimen trees will include both exotic and native evergreen and deciduous species to give a range of form, height, colour, and seasonal interest.

The shrub planting theme will also be a combination of structured avenue planting and group planting. This will include structured mass group plantings of indigenous native grasses, ground covers, and small shrubs planted at close centres to provide a robust, formal and spatial landscape within the reserve areas. The native theme using mass plantings of individual species will create greater visual aspect and ease of maintenance. This planting theme will compliment the traditional grass and tree parklike reserve setting, however ultimately reducing lawn areas and mowing within the reserve spaces.

The landscape design and planting will be influenced by the local environment, focusing on native vegetation to ensure the natural ecology of the district revegetates and can flourish. The materials and plant palette chosen will have a regional flavour reinforcing the character of the Plains environment.



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The native plant biodiversity of West Melton will be enhanced via the Preston Downs landscape planting to provide better food and habitat range for local fauna. This would not exclude exotics but have a mix which provides the best of native and exotic values.

The hard elements of the landscaping will be designed with a distinctive rural theme using natural, robust, rustic, and earthy materials. The site was previously used to train horses and this link to the past land use could be reflected in the use of horse associated activities and materials such as horse tracks, possible dressage/training area, hitching posts, post and rail fencing, and chip paths.

The use of historic farm machinery is proposed as features within the site, this will enhance the rural identity and sense of place. Careful selection of machinery will be required to ensure good safe equipment is found that meets current Health and Safety requirements.

In summary 'sense of place' will be reflected in the landscape design by the following:

- Wide open spaces to maximize the panoramic NW views to the Southern Alps
- Natural, rustic, and earthy use of materials - timber (seats, bollards, fences, inserts into paving, decks, platforms 'lookout points', information boards); concrete/block walls, boulders, corten steel signage, crusher dust paths
- Large groupings of locally sourced boulders nestled into the landscape for features and retaining soil
- Welcoming areas of open space adjacent to main subdivision entry road incorporating a low-key entry walls and signage and in keeping with the rural fencing theme
- Structural elements to be nestled into the landscape including the feature vertical pole reference points
- Reinforcing the rural character of the Halkett Road frontage with post and rail and post and wire fencing, green hedging and specimen trees
- Utilize old farm machinery within the development to recognize the past and Canterbury's agricultural background
- Incorporation of a possible horse dressage training area within the reserve space
- Information boards throughout the site that provides links to the past - outlining the history of the site/area
- Extensive use of maturing specimen trees and/or hedging to provide established and structured feel. Combination of structured avenue tree planting and natural groupings of species within the road and recreation reserve areas
- Stormwater conveyance and drainage areas including reserves to be native riparian plants endemic to the area, reflecting the natural history of the area
- Flowing mass planted garden beds of native shrubs to fit within the natural contours of the existing landform
- 'Amenity grass' areas to be located with the flatter road reserve berms with longer 'meadow' grass areas located within the reserves and on sloped areas in combination with mass plated garden beds

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b. Existing Site Features

The landscape 'theme' intends to blend the new subdivision with the existing landscape as best as possible. Picking up on existing vegetation patterns, landform, and landscape characteristics is the key to successful integration.

The identified significant existing site features of the site will be integrated into the development of Preston Downs. These significant features are reflective of both natural and man-made patterns. They include natural undulating ground contours such as the sand dunes and the old river channel swale, and an existing barn with a distinct architectural style. These will be incorporated into the design as key identity elements that retain references to the sites past.

The existing site soil conditions and open, harsh Canterbury plains environment will be a decisive factor in plant selection. There is an opportunity to recreate, reinstate, and restore both forest and dry savannah landscape.

Kahikatea (wet) and totara (dry) forest with matai and associated broadleaved species should be included within the reserves, roads, and covenanted sections. There will also be areas with sufficiently drought stony soils that will allow for the restoration of savannah vegetation. Such a restoration is desirable as it would provide a unique landscape natural to the areas that has been totally lost. Cabbage and kowhai trees, mulenbeckia and matagouri shrubs, native grasses and herbs should be used to provide a sense of place and open character providing the 'Canterbury Plains' landscape and preservation of views to the Alps.

The hard elements of the landscaping will be influenced by existing rural features of the site including the post and rail fence, post and wire fencing, timber gates, steel componentry, and timber/steel/concrete storage tanks.

The proposed landscape features will be of simplistic and uncluttered design that will complement and enhance the area rather than setting them apart from the rest of West Melton. A structure is a distinctive feature of many entrances to farming properties in the district, however they can look exposed and in isolation to the surroundings. It is proposed that within the subdivision the majority of the hard landscape features will be set within garden beds and nestled into the landscape rural landscape.

In summary 'existing site features' will be reflected in the landscape design by the following:

- Natural, rustic, and earthy use of materials as a result of existing site materials - timber, concrete, steel
- Central open space reserve incorporating existing sand dunes with the provision of community recreational facilities within the reserve
- Stormwater treatment in the existing old river channel swale and associated swale planting
- Plantings to be responsive to natural landform and contour i.e. planting within gullies and edges accentuating the shape of the land
- Integrate suitable plant communities into the existing landforms to create a visually cohesive landscape

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- Mass plantings of grasses and shrubs along the contours in free flowing organic garden bed forms to create impact
- Selected plant species should be compatible with the soil conditions throughout the site
- Possible retention and utilisation of old farm buildings/farming utilities or new building in similar design
- Existing rural type fencing to be the theme for the fencing style
- Colours of structural elements to be driven from the surrounding landscape

c. Community Linkages

The design will contain infrastructure connections that will link with and create new community patterns and activities. This will occur through a network of paths, walkways and exercise tracks routes connecting to existing local and regional footpaths and roads.

The current primary school cross country route across the site will be incorporated into the development. Public 'exercise stations' and interpretation boards at various points along the walkway network will be available to residents of Preston Downs and the wider community.

Children's playgrounds will be provided in the large central reserve space where a sense of wider community ownership may be cultivated by the possibilities of a community centre on the Preston Downs site.

A strong rural community linkage will be reflected in designated horse tracks within the road reserve and reserve. They will provide access from neighbouring areas into the site, and internal of the subdivision to an area within the reserve that could accommodate a possible dressage/training area.

In summary 'community linkages' will be reflected in the landscape design by the following:

- Extensive network of cycle-ways and pedestrian pathways within reserves and the roads
- Direct cycle-pathway linkage to Laird Place and the West Melton Primary School, Halkett Road, and Weedons Ross Road
- Direct link from Laird Place reserve to internal reserve to encourage pedestrian and cycle access and enhance a feeling of open space
- Open space green footway network along Weedons Ross Road
- Large open space reserve between main subdivision entrance road and existing township with cycleway/footpath linkages
- Direct access from internal central cul-de-sac roads to central reserve space, and eastern cul-de-sac to Weedons Ross Road
- Community recreational facilities such as playgrounds, jogging/walking tracks, exercise stations, seating areas, and tennis court within the reserve spaces
- Horse tracks that provide access from the surrounding district and within the subdivision to the reserve areas



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5. Conclusion

The intention of the landscape strategy is to create harmonic integration of the proposed subdivision into the existing landscape containing high rural amenity.

As the design objectives are outworked through the landscape design process, a distinct sense of place that is sensitive and in synergy with the existing community and natural environment will be the outcome of development Preston Downs.

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