Transport Planning Report

On behalf of Christchurch City Council

Request for Further Information

In the matter of the Resource Management Act 1991

Application to construct a café, entrance building and the expansion of the sculptural gardens at the Giants House

70, 74 Rue Balguerie, Akaroa

RMA/2020/2000

Contents

Description of the proposal

1. The proposal includes construction of a café, entrance building and expanded sculpture gardens.

2. The proposal would attract up to 150 visitors per hour, and proposes that this be limited to 20 weeks per year. For the remainder of the time, 125 visitors per hour is included in the Application.

3. Visitors would arrive on foot, by coach and by car. Survey of visitors found that 89% arrived on foot, however it is also noted that travel mode share is likely to vary from one day to another, depending on numbers of cruise ships (serviced by coaches).

4. The proposal seeks to control coach arrivals by implementing a booking system.

5. Unlike the previous application, no car park or coach park is proposed.

6. The Application is stating that the proposed activities will not generate more car traffic or 'notably increase' pedestrian numbers. The Application seeks to control coach numbers through a booking system and provide on street coach bays.

Consented baseline

7. I note the evidence of Ms Hislop which includes a synopsis of the transport environment that has been given consent.

8. Established in 2001, the activity was consented to be of a small scale attracting small groups of people. The Planner, in his report, anticipated 'small groups in modest numbers'.

9. Reference was made to buses gaining access to the site, though the frequency and size of these vehicles was not specified.

10. Car parking was provided on site.

11. It was deemed 'unlikely' that conflicts would arise in respect of on-site parking and access

12. A section 128 review clause was included

13. The operation 'on the ground' appears to have expanded significantly over and above what has been given consent.

Description of environment

14. Rue Balguerie includes an 8.4m wide unmarked carriageway, with a signed speed limit of 50km/h. There are footpath along both side west of Watson Street, and no footpath on either side for a distance of approximately 85m extending west from the site

15. Rue Balguerie is characterised by a high demand for on street parking, which occurs on both sides of the road. Consequently, the available trafficable width is in the order of 3.3m. The extent of this demand is seasonal, and during peak times can be observed for a distance of around 400m east of the town centre.

16. There are informal signs installed to guide pedestrians.

17. There is reported no crash history, except for one crash involving collision with a parked vehicle.

18. Traffic counts undertaken in May 2019 report an average of 365 vehicles per day, and an 85th percentile speed of 50.8km/h. The measured speeds indicate that speeding is not a problem. The count might be considered non-representative due to it taking place in May, which is an off-peak time of year.

19. The site is located approximately 640m east of Rue Lavaud.

20. The width of Rue Balguerie east of the site is narrow and the road way winding. The route from approximately 50m east of the site would not be suitable for larger vehicles, including coaches, as there are no safe turning locations. Though it is noted that use of the road east of the site does not form part of the application.

21. The high on street parking demands do not extend as far east of the site. From Muter Street eastwards, the character of the environment is quieter and more reminiscent of a quiet neighbourhood.

22. There are footpaths on Rue Balguerie from Rue Lavaud, on both sides of the Road until Watson Street, and then on the north side only ending mid-way between the site and Watson Street (a distance of approximately 85m).

23. Due to the present disruption to the economy caused by the pandemic, I have not had opportunity to observe the existing activity under 'normal' conditions.

Potential environmental effects

24. There are potentially effects relating to:

    a. Safety, particularly of pedestrians (including those parking on street) without provision for walking

    b. Amenity, including effects of parking on street

Coach access

25. The Applicant provides details that coaches are a key mode of access to the site, particularly servicing cruise ship passengers. Information provided suggests that coaches serve access on more than one third of operational days, and up to 4 coaches have arrived at the site.

26. The Applicant proposes that coaches will turn by reversing into Rue Cachalot.

27. Although this arrangement is not ideal, and no other alternatives to enable direct bus access to the site, the inclusion of buses accessing the activity directly is mentioned in a past consent (RMA/2000/193)

28. Application paragraph 3.7 states that the "Applicant seeks to consult with Council's Transport Unit and the Community Board to enable on street works to establish a designated parking area for coaches with associated signage." A location on Rue Balguerie is suggested.

29. More information would be required before recommend changes to the Community Board (subject to consultation) in order to ensure that the approved works are safe. For example, the propose reverse manoeuvre via Rue Cachalot would require the coach to reverse across the road, as the intersection is located on the opposite side of the road from where the coach may legally park (in accordance with NZ road rules).

Pedestrian access

30. The Applicants' data indicates almost 9/10 of visitors arrive on foot. During the peak season this equates to approximately 134 pedestrians per hour, each way (268 pedestrians per hour in the road). This presumably doesn't include the visitors arriving by car, parking on street and walking to the site.

31. There is no dedicated footway on Rue Balguerie for approximately 85m on approach to the site.

32. There are safety and levels of service considerations.

33. Crash history provided by the Applicant shows no crashes. The crash period of time is generally more than usually required, but there is no knowledge of exposure during this

period: how much have pedestrian demands grown over twenty years? The Application describes demand being 'developed over decades' implying that for some or much of the crash history period, pedestrian demands would have been lower (perhaps much lower) than present.

34. Although a twenty year history is provided, the surveyed demand data for the activity only cover since 2018. If the 'current' rates of pedestrian demands have been operative for ten years, then more confidence could be placed in the crash history as being plausibly a true representation of underlying safety risks.

35. Furthermore, safety is not the only consideration of pedestrian planning – the NZTA Pedestrian Planning Guidelines include more information here.

36. The Applicant does state that 'pedestrian demand would not notably increase simply because the garden area is larger'.

37. Past consents have established 'modest' visitor numbers; proposed pedestrian demands in the order of 268 people per hour walking to or from the site – is very high from a design perspective; far more than 'modest'.

38. High on street parking would escalate pedestrian risks as well, firstly by generation more pedestrian activity, but also forcing pedestrians to walk in the middle of the road, as the berms are obstructed by landscaping and/or power poles.

Car parking

39. The proposals includes no car parking, and therefore it is expected to be accommodated on street.

40. No substantial effects based assessment is provided for on street parking. Information is provided relating to the numbers of vehicle currently accessing the site are reported, with the 85th percentile demand being for 22 vehicles per day, but not the maximum number observed parking on street at any time.

41. Although I agree with the Applicant, that the café, being an ancillary use, may not generate a separate parking demand by its own right, (but acknowledge that it still might), the overall parking and general access demands to the activity will increase, as the net area and general attraction of the site increases, in line with what has occurred since the permitted baseline in 2001.

42. There is little meaningful parking data to guide assessment either. Although there are parking and traffic generation data bases available, there is little, if any data available for this type of activity, and its unique circumstances.

43. The District Plan would anticipate a parking demand for 47 spaces. This is based on the activity being classified as a food and beverage and museum/gallery.

44. The District Plan parking rates could be considered high, based on the very high share of visitors not arriving by car – a higher share than the District plan would envisage.

45. However, in the absence of alternative data, the AEE should assume a possible future where car parking demand is for 47 vehicles.

46. The effects of high on street parking demands would escalate concerns about pedestrian safety. The berms are typically planted out and landscaped, or inclusive of power poles. Therefore, the pedestrians would be forced to walk in the middle of the road – in the live traffic lanes.

47. The section of Rue Balguerie from 200m west of the site is not subject to the high seasonal parking demands witnessed at the west end of Rue Balguerie. Therefore, the established planning context of this section of street is residential neighbourhood – seen to exhibit very few on street parking demands when the activity is not operating.

48. Therefore the introduction of parking associated with the activity would transform this context, and 47 vehicles parking would generate a section of crowded out road space. Based on space requirements of a car, and location of driveways, this section would be approximately 150m long. Each vehicle would also need to perform a u-turn.

49. The presence of high parking demands, and vehicles manoeuvring in the road, would be noticeable, especially as most turning opportunities available involve three point turns using vehicle crossings.

50. The street is not well designed to accommodate high degrees of parking on both sides. The seal width is 8.4m meaning that that, where there is parking on both sides, two way flow would not be possible.

51. There is also no kerb and channel on the north side of Rue Balguerie, meaning that some drivers would park on the grass. This has potential to damage the berm and under estimate the attractiveness of the street environment.

52. It is difficult to imagine that the proposal would generate a demand for 47 spaces on a regular basis, and note that the previous application included a demand for 18 spaces. However, this would still generate the same effects described above, but relating a smaller area – more like 80m, not 150m

53. On site mobility spaces are not provided. If the activity were restricted discretionary or controlled, there would be no requirement as the Plan requires a provision based on the number of parking spaces provided. However, the Applicant acknowledges the numbers of elderly and potentially disabled visitors, and under such circumstance provision of appropriate parking facilities for these people would represent a reasonable community expectation.

Guidance from the District Plan

54. The transport assessment might consider the extent to which the receiving road network is appropriate to support this activity, noting that the road and access standards were developed for a residential context.

55. The proposal effectively incudes 134 people per hour accessing the development by walking in the road. Although there is not a crash history, this is not a good reflection of the true risk (as noted above). The proposal to generate 150 visitors per hour, even for 20 days per year may be considered to be well above and beyond a threshold for which road provision has been made.

56. There are requirements in the Sub division chapter of the District Plan for when footpaths are and are not required, and this might be taken as a useful guide.

57. The proposed pedestrian demands, of 134 people per hour, far exceeds the standards at which a footpath is deemed required, under Appendix 8.6.8. The minimum requirement, being a footpath on one side only, is deemed appropriate where the road serves twenty dwellings or less, which would produce a small fraction of the walking demands compared to what is proposed.

Conclusion

58. The activity which exists on the ground (pre Covid 19) is used in the Application as a description of the existing environment, with changes proposed thorough the Application being measured against this.

59. However, recent operations appear to be far in excess of the Consented activity.

60. The propose visitor numbers of 125 – 150 per hour are far in excess of 'small groups and modest numbers' established in 2001.

61. Attaining a 6 star garden status has elevated the operation, and places it on the itinerary of cruise liners. However, the required infrastructure to support such an activity – including walking access, parking and a suitable coach parking and turning area – has not been developed.

62. The inclusion of a café could be 'game changer' for this development. It is also difficult to envisage visitor numbers being limited by conditions: effectively the operators would need to turn people away at the gate.

63. The majority of visitors do not currently arrive by car, and therefore wider network effects (associated with traffic) are not anticipated, even in the event of significant traffic growth, based on the data provided.

64. However, localised effects are anticipated, including

    a. Safety effects, derived from significant numbers of visitors walking in the road, in the absence of appropriate walking infrastructure in proximity of the site, and mixing with on street parking and manoeuvring coaches

    b. Effects on residential amenity resulting from high degrees of car parking and manoeuvring, and noting the design of the road is not well suited to high on street parking, potential damage to the berm and the presence of a congested section of road space that would otherwise be more removed from the busier town centre parking environment.

65. With such uncertainty over future numbers, a range of possible scales of effects are possible. A key measure of scale of effect is frequency. However, with the information available, it would be possible to anticipate localised effects to be at least minor.