

# HURUNUI DISTRICT RURAL SUBDIVISION GUIDE

*A guide to rural subdivision that retains rural character and enhances the attractive qualities of the rural environment.*



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# 1 *Introduction*

The design of subdivisions in any environment requires consideration of a range of matters; issues such as financial feasibility, market demand, the supply of services and road access are routinely and competently handled by land development consultants and consenting agencies.

Consideration of landscape and ecological matters is often less confidently handled.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide landscape guidelines and design ideas for those involved in assessing and designing rural subdivisions in the Hurunui District.

The Council seeks to promote a high standard of subdivision design. It has therefore adopted specific criteria in the Proposed District Plan to be used in assessing applications for rural subdivisions. Many of the criteria relate to maintaining and enhancing landscape character, features and amenity.

It is important for applicants to consult with the Council at an early stage of the development. Careful planning and consideration of alternative design approaches in the early stages should increase the chances of obtaining subdivision approval and substantially reduce the time frame for processing a subdivision application.

This booklet highlights design approaches and techniques that can be incorporated into subdivision plans. Innovative design solutions are encouraged. The Council recognises that the characteristics of sites differ and there will be a range of ways to satisfy the assessment criteria.

The key design considerations highlighted in this guide are:

- Designing appropriately with the existing rural landscape character in mind,
- Enhancing the natural and rural character of a particular landscape.
- Designing subdivisions that are sympathetic to the natural landforms of the site.
- Reducing the effects of urbanisation of the rural landscape through clustered developments.
- Incorporating natural features such as existing trees, waterways, areas of indigenous vegetation, or rock outcrops.
- Siting buildings sympathetically and unobtrusively in the rural landscape.
- Incorporating and protecting areas of ecological importance such as native vegetation and waterways as part of the subdivision plan.
- Providing appropriate planting as part of the subdivision.
- Designing subdivision details that are sympathetic to the rural character of the area.
- Protecting areas of ecological value in and around a proposed subdivision.

Multiple lot subdivisions require greater design and location considerations than single lot subdivisions as they have the greatest potential to generate adverse effects on the environment. Applicants should endeavour to address all, or most of, the above subdivision considerations. These subdivision design considerations are further explained in the following guide along with explanations of the HDC assessment criteria, amenity values, special features and landscape character.



## 2 *Hurunui District Plan Assessment Criteria*

In considering applications for rural subdivisions, the Council is guided by a list of specific assessment criteria in the District Plan (paragraph C1.2.3). The Council will evaluate how well the application meets these criteria, in relation to design and appearance. In particular :

- Whether the amenity values and character of the area will be protected or enhanced.
- The preservation and protection of the natural character of the coast from inappropriate subdivision and use.
- The preservation and protection of outstanding natural features.
- The preservation and protection of significant indigenous vegetation and habitats of indigenous forests.
- The scale and visual impact of any earthworks.
- The recognition, protection or enhancement of natural or heritage features
- Whether there are adequate linkages to nearby amenities and facilities.
- Whether there is adequate access for pedestrian and cyclists.
- The provision of open space.
- Whether existing planting is to be retained.
- The extent of proposed planting.
- The provision of adequate sunlight access, building sites, and access.
- Any proposed landscape treatment to enhance amenity.
- The extent of recognition of the existing character of the area (lot size, location of building sites, planting, natural features and landscape).
- The adequacy of buffers between conflicting uses.

### 3 *What are Amenity Values?*

“Amenity values” is a subjective term which is defined in the Resource Management Act. Amenity values are the natural and physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes.

Amenity values can be :

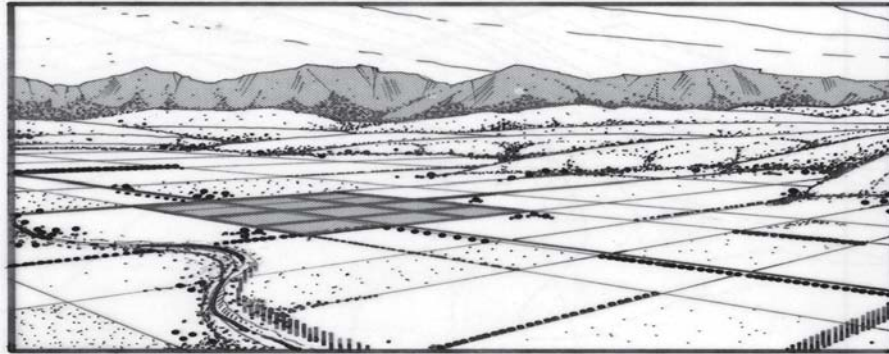
- Views to a beautiful natural landscape with native bush, a river, or pasture covered hills.
- Accessible public open space.
- Nearby recreational facilities.
- History, as expressed in the landscape by old buildings, landmarks, relics and archaeological remains.
- Qualities such as quietness or privacy.
- Fresh air and the absence of foul smells or excessive dust.
- Views to natural rock formations or undeveloped skylines.
- The absence of high traffic volumes
- A small scale, safe and secure neighbourhood.
- The absence of perceived environmental detractors.

Identification of what makes up the amenity values of an area is an essential step in minimising any potential adverse effects of a subdivision.

## 4 *What is Landscape Character?*

**Landscape character** is the combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature or peculiarities of any particular area of land. In New Zealand the landscape is described as a spectrum from the pristine natural to the artificial built. In this spectrum the rural landscape may be restricted to the highly modified farming country outside the urban areas and exclude the extensive pastoral country where natural character dominates.

Within the Hurunui District there are strongly defined landscapes that have clear distinctions between the “natural” character of the high country, the modified rural downlands and plains, and the “artificial” urban settlements and townships.





**Natural character** clearly differs from rural character. 'Natural' is established by nature. The degree of natural character is an expression of natural processes rather than human activities. The preservation of natural character requires the maintenance of the viable functioning of natural processes and systems as well as the visual attributes of 'naturalness', ie natural elements, patterns and processes must all be present to some degree if an area is to have 'natural character'. The extent of naturalness is scale and context dependent, but there must be a clear predominance of natural elements. Artificial elements should contribute very little to the scene. If they do, they should be distributed in natural patterns.

**Rural character** can be described as having natural elements but a predominance of human induced patterns and processes. Patterns, and their underlying processes, would be mostly the result of human activities. Some natural processes would continue to operate, e.g. river processes, but in general natural processes would be overlaid, dominated or modified by cultural processes and patterns such as cropping regimes, paddocks, shelterbelts and forestry blocks. Agricultural, horticultural, or forestry processes underpin the rural landscape of the Hurunui District. The process of subdivision and associated residential development has the potential to interrupt these rural processes introducing conflicts between rural activities and rural lifestyle aspirations.

### ***Adverse Effects on Rural Character***

Adverse effects on the rural character from subdivision can include:

- The change in the balance between built elements and natural elements.
- Loss of “natural” aspect.
- Loss of openness.
- Increased traffic movement and noise.
- Loss of privacy.
- Potential for reverse sensitivity, ie possible future complaints from “lifestylers” about rural odours and noise resulting from traditional farming activities.
- Screening of special features with structures or plantings.
- Loss of, or degradation of, important natural features.
- Obtrusive earthwork scars on prominent slopes.

### ***The Attraction of Rural Subdivisions***

From previous studies elsewhere in New Zealand there is general agreement about what buyers of smaller rural holdings are seeking. These include:

- Space and privacy.
- Convenient location close to a township and work opportunities.
- Land with character and contour.
- A natural aspect with views to mountains, waterways, areas of woodland, bush or farmland.
- A rural lifestyle associated with a slower pace of life, the ability to develop farming interests and a greater sense of community and security
- Rural amenity values, vistas uncluttered by structures and buildings, the absence of urban noise, considerable aesthetic coherence and the presence of rural activities.

### ***Maintaining Rural Character***

Appropriate rural subdivision, use and development will be responsive to the qualities discussed previously. The following are some basic considerations for subdivision in a rural landscape.

- Areas of ecological sensitivity and outstanding landscape areas should be avoided.
- Areas exposed to natural hazards should also be avoided.
- The scale and intensity of development needs to be consistent with the capacity of the locality to absorb them without losing its rural character.
- Building design and its relationship to its surroundings can be seen as an issue of coherence and harmony. It is relevant to the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values.
- 'Village style' developments where people can enjoy the benefits of rural living without the need to use extensive areas of farmland are well worth considering.
- Roads following contours and responding to natural features such as trees, wetlands or changes of level, and property boundaries relating to existing features will soften the appearance of new developments.
- Environmental quality and amenity values can be substantially influenced by the detailed siting and design of development.

## 5 *Making the Most of Existing Features*

Sensitive subdivision design through building on the special features of a site has market, community and consenting advantages.

There are many successful techniques for responding to the special characteristics of an area. These include:

- Protect and enhance existing waterways.
- Locate walkways or esplanade strips along waterways.
- Link the subdivision to nearby parks, towns or schools with walkways and cycle parks.
- Protect attractive views to and from the site.
- Protect any rare and endangered plants or animals living on the site.
- Protect and enhance patches of native vegetation or special habitats.
- Connect patches of native vegetation.
- Consider reservation, and/or covenants for areas of high ecological value.
- Retain existing trees for shelter, privacy, or as focal points.
- Retain in view any important rock outcrops.
- Retain old buildings where feasible.
- Protect archaeological sites.
- Plan for ongoing management of habitat.

## 6 *Design Ideas and Mitigation Techniques*

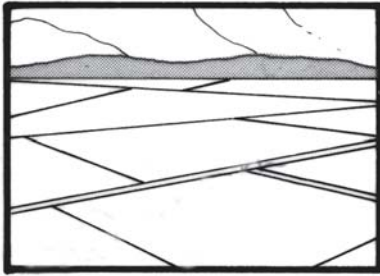
There are a number of ideas, opportunities and techniques to take into account in subdivision design which can be employed to reduce any adverse effects on landscape character, amenity values and special features of particular sites.

Generally, each site requires a specific approach with specially tailored techniques if a subdivision proposal is to be designed with landscape character in mind.

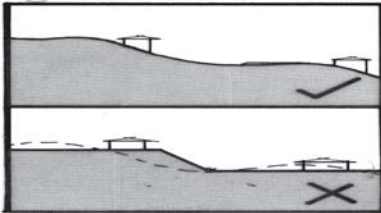
It is often very desirable to look at the site from a distance and to try and make the subdivision fit into the landscape. In a rural landscape, avoid creating a subdivision that has the character of a city suburb.

Rural character is an asset and a desirable quality for many people. The pattern and scale of the lot layout, the plantings, the road layout, and the nature and extent of buildings and earthworks all have a considerable effect on the acceptability or otherwise of a subdivision in a rural area. Other matters for consideration include the design and layout of footpaths, road edges, fencing, lighting and signage.

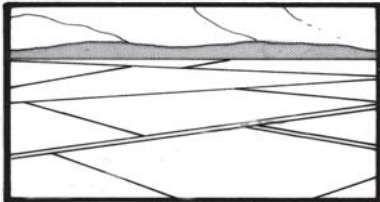
Good subdivision design will incorporate all, or most of, the design ideas included in this guide rather than concentrating on just one element.



Geometric patterns of flat rural land provide an existing character that can be extended to the layout of a subdivision with rectangular shaped lots and roads.



Use roading that follows the contours.



Avoid roading patterns that ignore the contours.

## On Flat Sites

Straight roads and rectangular lot layouts are not incompatible on flat sites.

Look at the existing roading, agricultural, vegetation, drainage and urban patterns in the broader landscape. Use these as guides for your subdivision.

If your flat site is at the foot of a hill consider clustering new buildings near the base of the hill. This will provide a backdrop to the buildings and help to retain rural open space on the flat land.

## On Hill Sites

Make the subdivision fit the land. Consider varying and adjusting allotment sizes to fit the landforms.

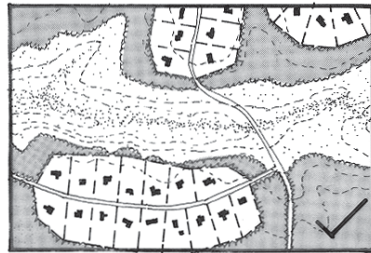
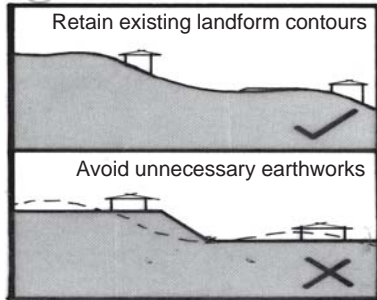
Roads that curve with the landform and avoid hilltops provide a good landscape fit.

A uniform subdivision layout can obliterate landform character on a rolling or sloped site.

Straight roads visually disrupt the landform on rolling or sloped land.



## Landforms and Contours



Clustered subdivision layout that retains and enhances rural open space.



Avoid subdivision layouts that destroy the landform character and the open space of the rural landscape.

Avoid changing the existing natural landforms.

Consider contouring existing earthworks on the site to harmonise with the surrounding natural landforms.

Use the existing landforms and vegetation as a backdrop for new buildings.

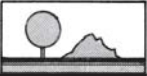
Consider clustering new buildings within the contours of the land avoiding ridge tops and exposed slopes.

Smaller lot sizes clustered together help to retain rural open space.

Clustering of lots and buildings allows for enhancement of the surrounding natural and agricultural landscape character.

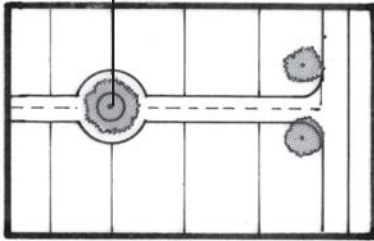
Avoid locating lots in gully and catchment areas. These can be ecologically enhanced as part of a subdivision adding character and value.

Vary lot sizes to accommodate landforms, contours and variable market requirements.



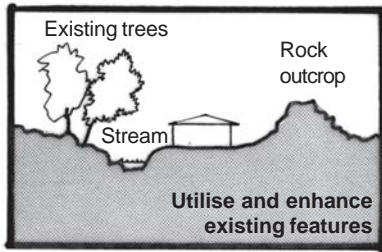
## Landscape Features

Existing tree incorporated into subdivision design



Natural or physical features such as streams, existing trees, shelterbelts, rock outcrops, interesting relics or historic buildings on the site should be enhanced as part of the subdivision.

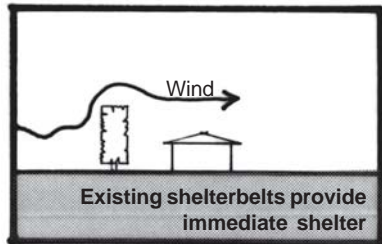
Don't fell any trees or remove any features until it has been carefully considered how they might be used to enhance your subdivision.



Try to incorporate existing landscape features in the layout of sections and roads. Existing trees can be used as focal points for entrances, roads and paths.

Identify and locate protected features such as archeological sites and areas of ecological importance.

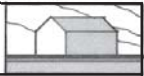
Streams are attractive features which can be enhanced as part of the open spaces in the subdivision.



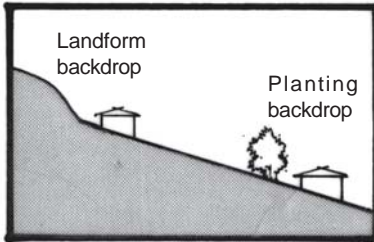
Locate new buildings so that existing landforms, shelterbelts and trees provide shelter from wind and rain.

Look for attractive views from your subdivision to the surrounding landscape. Try to incorporate these into the subdivision. They will add value.





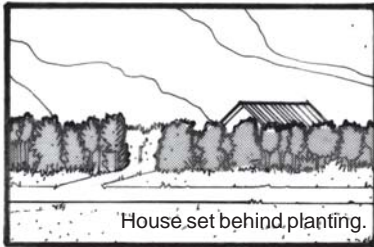
## Buildings



Buildings sited down the hillside with a low profile often have a lower visual effect than buildings on skylines.

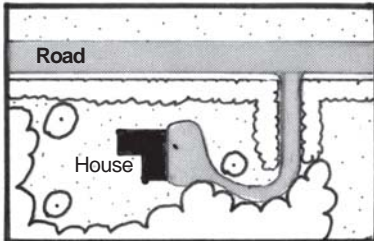
Houses nestled behind shelter plantings help preserve natural character.

Locating buildings against a backdrop can reduce the visual impact of a building in a rural landscape.



The adoption of design components for housing materials, colours and roof slopes can help to minimise adverse effects on rural amenity values.

Indirect access to buildings provides screening and privacy.



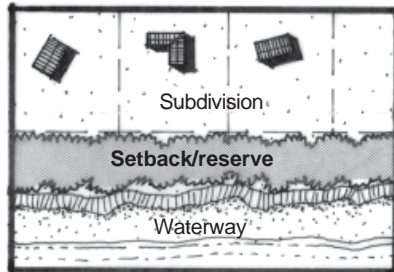
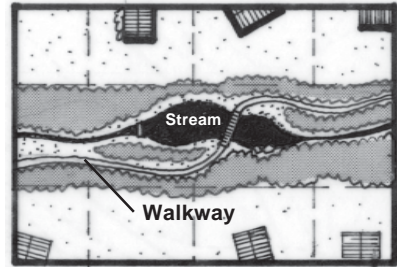
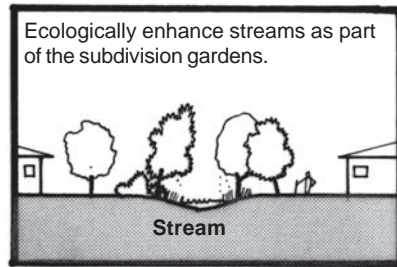
Indirect access for screening of building.

The use of covenants to control;

- the location of dwellings
- building character
- colour schemes
- exterior material use on buildings



## Waterways



If there is a stream, river or drain on the site. If so, these can become a feature adding interest and value to your subdivision.

Consider ecologically enhancing the waterways as part of your subdivision landscape plan.

Waterways can be incorporated into private gardens.

Waterways can be enhanced to attract native birds, fish and plant communities.

Stormwater from buildings can be connected to waterways and swales.

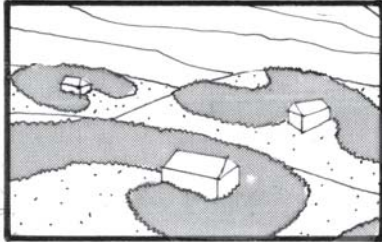
Waterways can become part of a walkway route with ponds, bridges and weirs.

Consider creating an Esplanade Reserve for a waterway. This will ensure the retention of the waterway in the future.

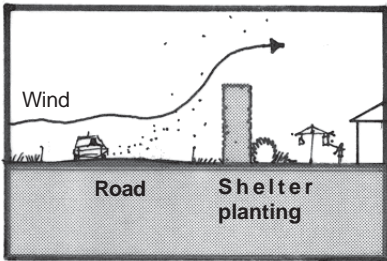
Consider creating a marginal strip jointly owned by all the landowners in the subdivision as a means to ensure the retention of the waterway in the future.



# Planting



Planting or clearing of vegetation can emphasise the natural landforms.



Shelter planting to protect residents from wind blown dust.

Generally, geometric shaped plantings are not out of keeping in flat landscapes.

Naturalistic planting patterns are more desirable on sloping landscapes.

Layout plants to reflect the existing patterns in the landscape. These may be geometric patterns of paddocks, or curves that follow a river, or the contours of ridges and gullies.

Native plantings, particularly those that extend existing areas of native bush or scrubland, add natural character to subdivision.

Use tree and shrub planting in your subdivision to create shelter, avenues to frame roads, entrances and framed views, and to create an overall attractive environment.

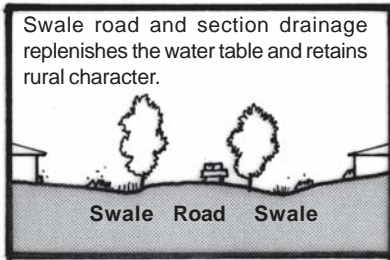
Consider extending existing nearby clusters of trees or shelterbelts into the site as part of subdivision design. This will make the subdivision appear as part of the existing landscape.

The use of covenants to control;

- the protection of existing trees,
- garden plant species near areas of native vegetation,



## Landscape Details

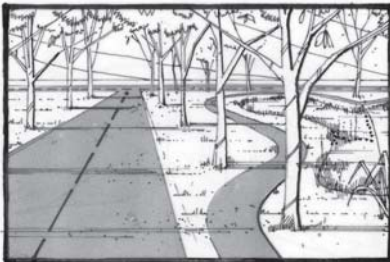


### Roads

Concrete kerb and channelling are suburban rather than rural in character. Use of gravel roads without hard edges helps retain rural character.

In rural-lifestyle subdivisions, kerb and channel and footpaths may be required depending on location.

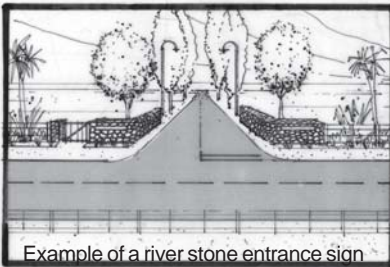
Roading construction should comply with all appropriate NZ Standards and council requirements.



### Paths

Footpaths do not need to follow the roads. Consider making the footpaths meander along avenues, follow waterways, cross bridges, encounter features, and have good views to the broader landscape.

Footpaths always have to be sealed for ease of maintenance.



### Signage

In rural areas keep things simple and functional. Avoid over-embellishing the landscaping - things can look out of place and unnecessarily cost a great deal of money. Try to make the colours, style and overall appearance of a subdivision sign fit into the landscape. Use local materials in subdivision signs eg rocks, bridge timbers, etc.



### **Lighting**

Ensure that adequate lighting for roads and footpaths is provided.

Keep lighting to a minimum in rural areas.

Try to select materials, colours and styles of lighting poles and fittings that are in scale and appropriate to a rural character.

### **Fencing**

Try to limit the amount of fencing to retain views, and an open rural landscape character.

Consider using post and wire fences. They provide clear views, are cheap to construct, and are appropriate in rural landscapes.

The amount of fencing in a subdivision can be reduced by using planting such as hedges and shelterbelts.

Consider using a fencing covenant as a way of controlling the amount of fencing. This will help to retain some open rural character.

The use of covenants to control;

- location, design, colour and height of fences,
- the design style, materials and colours of signs and mailboxes.



Consider the following methods for protecting ecological areas in your subdivision.

- **Reservation** - An area of high ecological value may warrant protecting under the Reserves Act.
- **Esplanade Reserve** (waterways) - This is particularly useful where public access is required.
- **Esplanade Strip** - protects an area of ecological value through agreed management between the Council and the land owner(s).
- **Covenant** - This is particularly useful for areas of ecological value which fall within one title. A covenant is managed in partnership between a willing applicant and a body such as the District Council or QEII National Trust in which the covenant is vested. Water cannot be covenanted.
- **Reserve Contribution** - consider transferring a piece of important habitat or vegetation to Council ownership as part of your subdivision plan.
- **Property Plan** - show in your subdivision plan all the areas of ecological value and set out ways of protecting them during the construction and incorporating them into the management of the subdivision.

## **8** *Subdivision Design Checklist*

### **Site Selection**

- (1) Establish planning and environmental criteria for site selection alongside servicing financial, engineering, and market considerations.
- (2) Evaluate site options and select a suitable site.
- (3) Generally avoid changes to sites that are :
  - part of the natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers, and are likely to lead to inappropriate use and development,
  - recognised as having outstanding natural features,
  - recognised as being within an outstanding landscape.

### **Environmentally Responsive Subdivision Design**

- (1) Identify the character and special features of the site and its surrounds.
  - Is it flat or sloping?
  - Are there interesting features on the site of archaeological interest, rock formations, streams, existing trees?
  - What are the neighbouring land uses?
  - How visible is the site?
  - Is it an open site or is it fully or partially broken up by shelterbelts, land formations, plantations or indigenous plantings?
  - Is it part of the coastal environment?

- (2) Incorporate the special landscape characteristics into the subdivision design to maintain and enhance amenity values, maximise sense of place, add value and speed up projected rate of sales.
- (3) Incorporate appropriate site planning and design techniques into the subdivision proposal to reduce any adverse environmental effects on:
  - amenity values
  - the quality of the environment
  - any outstanding natural features and landscapes
  - significant indigenous vegetation and habitats
  - heritage sites
  - public access to and along the coastal marine area, lakes and rivers.
  - The natural character of the coastal environment, wetlands, lakes, rivers and their margins.

From a landscape planning and design perspective it is clear that the Hurunui District could accommodate an increase in rural housing development without having significant adverse effects on rural character. To achieve this, rural subdivisions should endeavour to incorporate as many of the design and mitigation techniques outlined in this guide, as is possible.

Proposed subdivision designs should harmoniously integrate into the overall character of the particular rural landscape they are situated within.