Ruakiwi Reservoir Project
Cultural Impact Assessment

Prepared for Hamilton City Council on behalf of Te Ha o te Whenua o Kirikiriroa

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1 Introduction

To support Hamilton's future growth, the Government's Infrastructure Acceleration Fund (IAF) is helping fund upgrades to the central city water supply. This funding is used to speed up new housing developments.

With this expected growth, Hamilton City Council estimates that water storage will need to increase to 40–60 million litres by 2061. To prepare for this, Council plans to design and build the Ruakiwi Reservoir and Pump Station project, which includes:

- A new 25 ML reservoir ready by 2028
- A new Booster Pump Station to supply higher areas near Hamilton Lake

The current Ruakiwi Reservoir is a heritage structure and cannot be expanded to meet future needs.

A new 25 ML reservoir is needed now to handle peak demand and provide fire-fighting capacity. A second reservoir may be added in 20–30 years, depending on how quickly development progresses. Planning is based on future needs through to 2061.

In response to the technical reports for the Ruakiwi Reservoir and Booster Pump Station, this Cultural Impact Assessment (CIA) has been prepared by Te Hira Consultant on behalf of Te Hā o te Whenua o Kirikirioa (THAWK) for Hamilton City Council. The assessment provides a brief overview of the cultural and historical significance of the Ruakiwi area to THAWK as mana whenua. It also identifies key cultural and environmental issues and offers recommendations for mitigation that uphold mana whenua values. This ensures that the reservoir project complies with regulatory requirements while reflecting the aspirations and rights of mana whenua.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Cultural Impact Assessment is to identify and assess the cultural values, historical significance, and potential adverse environmental impacts of the proposed Ruakiwi Reservoir and Booster Pump Station project on mana whenua interests. It aims to provide guidance on how to manage and mitigate any adverse effects in a manner consistent with mana whenua values and tikanga. This assessment supports Hamilton City Council's efforts to align the project with relevant regulatory requirements and to foster meaningful partnership and collaboration with THAWK as one of the recognised mana whenua authority within Kirikiriroa.

3. Methodology

In preparing this Cultural Impact Assessment, the following process was undertaken:

- A preliminary hui was held with Hamilton City Council to confirm the scope of works, agree on a preferred engagement approach, establish review processes, and discuss the integration of cultural design principles into the reservoir project.

- Discussions were held with members of Te Hā o te Whenua o Kirikiriroa (THAWK) to identify key issues and aspirations relating to the whenua, the application of mātauranga Māori, and how cultural significance should be acknowledged and embedded throughout the project.

- A range of trusted sources were consulted to ensure the assessment reflects both the historical context and contemporary values of THAWK.

- A review of the following technical reports was undertaken to ensure cultural considerations aligned with the proposed design and environmental assessments:

    - WSP Stormwater Assessment and Design Report
    - Holmes Stages 1 & 2 Earthworks (Cut and Fill) Plans
    - WSP Mechanical and Waters Description (Front-End Report)
    - Holmes Designation Plans
    - Landscape and Visual Assessment Report

- Technical feedback and information provided by the project consultants were integrated to finalise the report and ensure it provides a comprehensive cultural lens across all relevant aspects of the development.

- The final Cultural Impact Assessment was reviewed and approved by the Chairman of THAWK on 31 July 2025.

5. Mana Whenua

Mana whenua refers to the authority, rights, and power that come from ancestral ties to the land. It is the responsibility and jurisdiction iwi and hapū have over their whenua, based on whakapapa and long-standing occupation (ahi kā).

Each iwi and hapū has an inherent duty to protect taonga such as mahinga kai, water, flora, fauna, and spiritual values. This responsibility includes ensuring these resources can be accessed, used, and enjoyed by future generations.

In the context of Kirikiriroa, both Te Hā o te Whenua o Kirikiriri and Ngāti Wairere hold mana whenua status through whakapapa and connection to the land. These rights are acknowledged and respected by Hamilton City Council through ongoing partnership and engagement.

This report does not seek to define or confirm mana whenua status. Rather, it acknowledges that such status is inherent and does not require external validation.

Mana whenua has both political and spiritual authority over their lands, guided by cultural traditions and obligations. Under Te Hā o te Whenua o Kirikiriroa, the iwi with interests in this area include:

- Ngāti Hauā
- Ngāti Korokī Kahukura
- Ngāti Māhanga
- Ngāti Tama Inu Pō

The overarching tribal authority is Te Whakakitenga o Waikato.

Together, these iwi and hapū uphold mana whakahaere, the authority to manage lands, waters, resources, and cultural practices in line with their tikanga and values within the Kirikiriroa rohe.

6. Ruakiwi Reservoir Description

The Ruakiwi Reservoir is in central Hamilton, on Ruakiwi Road and adjacent to Lake Rotoroa. The site sits at a high elevation, which historically supported water supply to surrounding high-zone areas, including properties near Hamilton Lake. The location is surrounded by residential housing, public green spaces, and key transport corridors, making it a strategically significant site for the city's water infrastructure.

The area also holds cultural and historical significance for mana whenua, including Ngāti Wairere and other iwi affiliated with Te Hā o te Whenua o Kirikiriroa.

Figure 1 – Ruakiwi Reservoir layout and design.

The proposed reservoir complex takes shape in two stages, transforming the local landscape while preserving its historical elements.

Stage 1 introduces the first of two circular reservoirs, spanning 62 metres in diameter and standing prominently 6 metres above the natural ground level. This stage also includes the construction of a valve chamber and a hardstand area designed to enable safe access and facilitate future maintenance.

Stage 2 will see the addition of a second reservoir, mirroring the form and scale of the first, reinforcing the site's new visual identity.

The existing heritage tower and its base have been retained, standing as a tangible link to the area's past, now juxtaposed against the modern utility structures.

The landform itself has been reshaped to accommodate the development, introducing gentle mounding and cut terraces that subtly redefine the topography. The removal of trees—predominantly exotic species, has opened up long-distance views, with the most significant visual change experienced across the city's western and southwestern outlooks.

To support public accessibility, a network of new pathways has been introduced, linking the reservoirs with existing walkways and enhancing pedestrian movement throughout the reserve.

Functionally, a new pipe outlet directs clean water scour and stormwater runoff into the nearby lake. The runoff is carefully managed with treatment measures to mitigate effects from both the reservoirs and associated hardstand surfaces.

Together, these elements represent a significant intervention in the landscape—one that balances the demands of infrastructure with efforts to integrate heritage, ecology, and recreational use.

7. History

Lake Rotoroa, known as Hamilton Lake, is the largest of three lakes within Hamilton City. It is a natural, shallow lake estimated to be around 15,000 years old, originally part of a peat swamp that was drained for agriculture and later urban development. Covering approximately 54 hectares, the lake has an average depth of less than 2 metres, with depths ranging from 2 to 6 metres. It features two main basins, north and south, with the deepest point reaching up to 6.5 metres.

Lake Rotoroa was an important food and resource area for local iwi. The lake provided kaakahi, kooura, and tuna, some still live in the lake today. Raupo was gathered from the lakeside and used for weaving, such as in basket-making. A traditional walking track once ran along the eastern edge of the lake, connecting to Te Rapa Pā, located where Graham Park now stands.

The area now known for the Ruakiwi Reservoir development holds deep historical and cultural significance. According to kōrero shared by kaumātua of THAWK, the original name of the area was Ruakōiwi, a name that refers to both the rua (caves) that once existed in the whenua and the kōiwi (bones) that were uncovered during early earthworks. *(Pers. comms: Harry Wilson, Nana Raiha Grey)*

This name embodies the memory of ancestral presence and suggests the area may have been used as a place of rest or burial. The prominent ridgeline, overlooking surrounding lands and waters, likely served as a natural vantage point and place of occupation.

Historical records also confirm evidence of Māori settlement on nearby ridgelines, such as Garden Place Hill and the eastern and northern ridges of Lake Rotoroa, where stone tools have been found.

While no archaeological sites are currently recorded within the immediate project footprint or within an 820-metre radius (as confirmed by the archaeological assessment conducted by Sian Keith Archaeology Ltd), the historical narratives and oral traditions shared by mana whenua indicate a clear cultural footprint in the area.

The archaeological review included an analysis of historic documents, aerial photography, NZAA ArchSite data, consultant reports, and a site inspection. It concluded that while the risk of encountering pre-European archaeological material is considered low, it cannot be ruled out entirely.

Together, the historical kōrero and archaeological assessment reinforce the need for a culturally responsive approach that honours both the ancestral connection to Ruakōiwi and modern responsibilities to protect and respect the whenua.

8. Te Ture Whai Mana

Hamilton City Council is aware of the relevant regulatory requirements including the background and significance of the Waikato River arrangement, which stem from extensive negotiations between the Crown and Waikato-Tainui, culminating in the Waikato-Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010.

This context, including the Treaty settlement foundations, is highly relevant to the application of the Resource Management Act 1991, particularly sections 6(e), 7(a), and 8, and underscores the importance of Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato , the Vision and Strategy, which holds unique statutory status as one of New Zealand's most influential planning documents.

This statutory and cultural context is directly relevant to the Ruakiwi Reservoir project, as it reinforces the need for active partnership with mana whenua and alignment with Te Ture Whaimana o te Awa o Waikato, ensuring that the values, rights, and responsibilities associated with the Waikato River, its lakes are respected and upheld throughout the planning, design, and implementation of the Ruakiwi Reservoir proposal.

8.1 Tai Tumu, Tai Pari, Tai Ao

Section 40(2) of the Settlement Act also notes the following regarding the Waikato-Tainui Environmental Plan:

A consent authority considering an application for a resource consent under section 104 of the Resource Management Act 1991 must have regard to the Waikato-Tainui environmental plan, if it considers that section 104(1)(c) applies to the plan.

8.2 Te Rautaki Tāmata Ao Tūroa o Ngāti Hauā

The plan has statutory weight under sections 5-8, 35A, 61, 66, 74 and 108 of the Resource Management Act 1991. This means that Regional and District Councils must have regard to this plan when considering a resource consent application.

As part of this CIA, for the proposed Ruakiwi Reservoir development, the technical assessments prepared for the project have been reviewed and assessed against the cultural values, statutory frameworks, and settlement context outlined above.

8. Issues

8.1. Whenua

The land identified for the proposed Ruakiwi Reservoir development holds deep cultural, historical, and spiritual significance to mana whenua, to iwi affiliated with Te Hā o Waikato. This is not merely a site of infrastructure development, it is part of an ancestral landscape woven with whakapapa, kōrero tuku iho, and customary use.

Traditionally known as Ruakōiwi, the name itself reflects the historical importance of this place. It refers to the presence of rua in the area, and koiwi that were disturbed or uncovered during early construction and land modification activities. This name is a living reminder of the area's use as a place of rest, burial, and settlement, situated along a prominent ridgeline that once offered strategic views, fertile ground, and a strong cultural presence.

The earthworks required for the construction of the reservoir are considered significant due to the cultural importance of the whenua. Therefore, any disturbance to the whenua must be approached with care, transparency, and in partnership with iwi to ensure that cultural values are respected and protected throughout the development process.

8.2 Stormwater

THAWK understands that stormwater will originate from four primary sources:

- Scoured clean water from above the sludge line within the reservoir(s)
- Overflow discharges from the reservoir system
- General runoff from the site surface
- Water disposed of following sampling activities

When it comes to managing stormwater, a range of factors must be considered, including site geology, the characteristics of the receiving environment, hydraulic influences, and design of retention and detention devices. Local rainfall patterns and the potential for overflow events also play a critical role in shaping an effective stormwater management approach.

A key issue associated with stormwater from this site is the risk of uncontrolled discharges. If not properly managed, stormwater can move sediments, nutrients, and other contaminants, leading to negative impacts on downstream water quality, erosion of soils, and degradation of aquatic habitats.

Mana Whenua remind councils of such effects which can harm the mauri of the waterways, namely Lake Rotoroa and also adversely effect ecosystem, cultural values and practices of mana whenua that are connected to the health of the wai. THAWK seeks assurance that the stormwater management plan is developed in line with recognised best practice standards and provides clear protection for the water quality of Lake Rotoroa and any connected local water systems. THAWK also requests that appropriate monitoring measures and information-sharing protocols are established to proactively identify and address any stormwater-related issues.

8.3 Biodiversity

A number of site walkovers were undertaken to identify and understand terrestrial ecosystems and vegetation values present within the Ruakiwi project area. THAWK acknowledge and support the need to protect taonga trees where appropriate for wider biodiversity and ecosystem benefit.

sustain. Appropriate ecological and cultural management must be implemented prior to any vegetation clearance, to ensure that taonga species present and their associated values are preserved and that any disturbance is minimised through a planned and culturally respectful approach.

8.4 Visual/Landscape

The development of the Ruakiwi Reservoir and Pump Station has the potential to alter the visual and cultural landscape of the surrounding area, including Lake Rotoroa. The presence of this large-scale infrastructure will introduce elements that will contrast with the natural environment, potentially affecting the aesthetic and cultural value of the site. These changes can adversely influence the character of the landscape, especially given its unique qualities.

9. Restoration and Betterment

THAWK seeks a koha (gift) that goes beyond the standard requirements set out in planning documents or common conditions aimed at avoiding, remedying, or mitigating adverse effects. Our aspiration is to establish a legacy of betterment and gifting a meaningful contribution to the taonga affected by activities associated with the whenua, wai, designation and consents related infrastructure developments.

Examples of such koha include:

- Riparian and ecological restoration projects underpinned by mātauranga Māori and aligned with the objectives of Te Ture Whaimana o Te Awa o Waikato;
- Restoration and enhancement of mahinga kai areas;
- Cultural expression at significant sites, acknowledging historical narratives and ancestral knowledge;
- Education and employment initiatives to inspire and enable rangatahi to take up kaitiaki roles;
- Installation of cultural markers—such as carved pou, landscape features, or artworks—that represent a visible and enduring connection to the land and wai.
- Cultural monitoring.

By fostering a legacy of restoration and cultural enrichment in response to large-scale infrastructure development, we are not only addressing immediate environmental concerns but also helping to weave a future where cultural identity and ecological wellbeing are interdependent.

Through intentional kaitiakitanga and partnership, we can ensure that the taonga of our whenua and wai are not just safeguarded, but enhanced, leaving a koha for future generations to uphold, value, and carry forward. This is our shared responsibility, grounded in the enduring relationship between people and the natural world.

10. Recommendations

These recommendations reflect THAWK's aspiration to create a legacy of betterment by offering a meaningful cultural and environmental koha to the taonga affected by activities associated with the whenua, wai and related infrastructure designations and consents.

10.1 Whenua

- A cultural blessing will be held before construction starts to acknowledge and respect the site.
- Cultural monitors, appointed by THAWK, will watch over the site during topsoil removal to protect important areas.
- All construction workers will take a cultural awareness induction to learn about the significance of the land and the right protocols to follow.
- Continuous monitoring will take place during construction to quickly identify and address any heritage or cultural issues.
- Ensure the design appropriately addresses small-scale surface slips and recognises areas around the reservoir that show signs of slope instability.
- Applied Cultural Discovery Protocols. Apply the Taonga Tuku Iho policy consistently across all environmental monitoring and management processes.

10.2 Stormwater

- Design and use rain gardens to control heavy flows, slow water, and allow pollutants to settle, based on local rainfall and overflow risks.
- Protect Taonga Trees and Vegetation: Place stormwater outlets away from important taonga trees and sensitive plants. Create buffer zones where needed.
- Set up devices to check water quality in real time and share results regularly with THAWK for transparency.
- Use best practise methods like silt fences and staged earthworks to prevent soil erosion during building, and always maintain these controls.
- Involve THAWK cultural monitors or kaitiaki presence during earthworks and stormwater construction to ensure cultural values are respected and risks to taonga are spotted early.

- THAWK reiterates its commitment to and fully supports the initiatives aimed at restoring the mauri of Lake Rotoroa and seeks ongoing commitment from HCC.

10.3 Biodiversity

- Only remove vegetation where necessary. Retain as much native flora as possible to support local wildlife and ecosystem health.

- After construction, replant disturbed areas with native species that are local to the area. This will help restore habitat and support biodiversity.

- Monitor for invasive species and take steps to control or remove them to protect native plants and wildlife.

- Use natural methods such as planting ground cover and installing erosion mats to prevent soil loss and protect waterways.

- Work with local iwi to guide planting plans and care for vegetation, ensuring cultural values are respected and enhanced.

- Protect native habitats for mokomoko, bats, and native birds. Namely, avoid disturbance to their roosting, nesting, and shelter areas during construction where applicable.

- THAWK supports collaborative work with the ecology consultants to develop a mutually agreed Ecological Offset and Compensation Pla, which will identify suitable locations and species for implementation.

10.4 Visual/Landscape

- Landscaping should embody kaitiakitanga by promoting sustainable environmental stewardship for future generations, actively involve THAWK at every stage to uphold tikanga and kawa, and incorporate design elements that affirm the local cultural stories, history, and whakapapa.

- Use native trees, shrubs, and groundcover around the reservoir and pump station to blend the structures into the natural environment and screen key views, while shaping earthworks and bunds to create natural-looking landforms that lessen the visual impact of the built elements.

- THAWK supports creating connected landscapes and habitats that include mahinga kai, rongoā, and other traditional plants. Planting areas should be protected from animals and pests through a regular management and maintenance plan with monitoring. THAWK requests involvement in this work.

10.5 Partnership

THAWK will continue to operate in partnership with Hamilton City Council on all related projects associated for IAF within our area of Mana Whakahaere.

11. Position Statement

Subject to the agreement and implementation of the above recommendations, **THAWK supports the designation of the Ruakiwi Reservoir and Pump Station projects,** recognising their significance to both Hamilton City Council and THAWK.

The project is consistent with Te Ture Whaimana and aligns with the relevant environmental management plans outlined in this report.

This kaupapa plays a important role in future-proofing Kirikiriroa growth by supporting housing and infrastructure needs, while also offering an opportunity to embed cultural values, safeguard heritage, and express a shared vision for the future. It empowers THAWK to actively contribute to shaping infrastructure that reflects collective aspirations and supports ngā uri whakatupu.

Through partnership between THAWK and HCC, the Ruakiwi Road Reservoir and Pump project provides for betterment, which includes the preservation of cultural identity, enhancement of the natural landscape, and the creation of skills and employment opportunities for whānau.

THAWK looks forward to working collaboratively with HCC to ensure the Reservoir and Pump Station respects and upholds the cultural and environmental integrity of the whenua, wai and whānau.

THAWK will continue to operate in partnership with Hamilton City Council on all related projects associated for IAF moving forward.

Ko te wai te oranga o te whenua, ko te whenua te oranga o te tangata.

Kia ū, kia mau, kia toitū te mana o ngā taonga tuku iho.