

Before the Independent Hearings Panel  
Christchurch City Council

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*under:* the Resource Management Act 1991

*in the matter of:* Submissions and further submissions in relation to Plan  
Change 14 to Christchurch City Plan

*and:* **Ryman Healthcare Limited**  
(Submitter 749)

Statement of Evidence of **Matthew Brown** on behalf of Ryman  
Healthcare Limited

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Dated: 20 September 2023

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## **STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF MATTHEW BROWN ON BEHALF OF RYMAN HEALTHCARE LIMITED**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- 1 My full name is Matthew Glen Brown.
- 2 I hold a New Zealand Certificate in Mechanical Engineering.
- 3 I am the General Manager – Development at Ryman Healthcare Limited (*Ryman*). I manage and oversee the development of Ryman’s retirement villages across New Zealand from land acquisition through to operation of the village. The key development phases include site acquisition, concept design and the resource consent process, followed by construction, commissioning and handover to the Operations Team. In Christchurch, I have recently led the development of proposed new Ryman villages at Kevin Hickman Retirement Village (located in Riccarton), Northwood and Park Terrace, including through the consenting phase. I am also involved in other sites that have ongoing development needs.
- 4 I am also responsible for general management of the New Zealand development team and consultant inputs into our resource consent applications and plan submissions. I also lead our stakeholder and council engagement, as well as community consultation. I have held this role since March 2020. Prior to joining Ryman, I was the NZ Development Manager for an aged care provider from June 2011.
- 5 Although I do not give evidence as an expert witness, I have considerable knowledge and understanding of the retirement sector and the challenges the industry faces in resource management processes. I have appeared as a witness in district plan and resource consent processes relating to retirement villages, including a number of recent appearances relating to Intensification Streamlined Planning Processes. I also appeared as a witness in relation to Plan Change 5 to the Christchurch City Plan, which dealt with commercial zone provisions.

- 6 I am familiar with Plan Change 14 to Christchurch City Plan (*PC14*) as it relates to the submissions lodged by Ryman and the Retirement Villages Association of New Zealand Incorporated (*RVA*). I also note that I have read the Council Officers' Report where it addresses the *RVA*'s and Ryman's submissions on *PC14*.

#### **SCOPE OF EVIDENCE**

- 7 My evidence will:
- 7.1 Address the key challenges faced in consenting retirement villages, including my particular experience obtaining consents for three villages in Christchurch; and
  - 7.2 Support the evidence of Mr Turner as to how *PC14* can better enable retirement village development.
- 8 Relevant background information on Ryman, its residents and its villages is provided in **Appendix 1**.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 9 Ryman has a significant interest in *PC14*. We currently have eight operational villages in the Canterbury region. Two villages are under construction. One additional village went through resource consenting relatively recently. We are actively looking for new local sites.
- 10 Ryman has identified that good quality housing and care for older people is significantly undersupplied in many parts of the country. Providing accommodation and care for the ageing population is a critical social issue. In Christchurch, recent village development means the undersupply issue is less pronounced than we have seen for some time. Nevertheless, we still have waiting lists of around 120 people across our Christchurch villages. The rapidly ageing population means that, in my view, it is critical to continue to supply new retirement housing to avoid the undersupply issue reaching crisis point.

- 11 Ryman has a breadth of experience in consenting, including from our recent experiences implementing the operative City Plan. In that regard, Ryman alongside the RVA has actively engaged in the Council's plan processes over many years to ensure the City Plan appropriately enables retirement village activities. In many respects, Christchurch City has led the way in actively addressing ageing population issues and retirement village consenting needs. That said, the present process provides an ideal opportunity to further improve the City Plan to address implementation issues and to bring it into line with the Government's expectations for housing intensification.
- 12 Naturally, people want to "age in place" as their health and lifestyle requirements change over time; that is to remain close to family and friends and familiar amenities. As highlighted by Mr Collyns, this concept was endorsed in the earlier Replacement District Plan process and is also outlined by Professor Kerse.
- 13 Ryman's retirement villages must also provide for the specialist physical and wellbeing needs of older people. The average age of our retirement unit residents is 82.1 years. The average age of aged care residents is 86.7 years. These residents have complex and sometimes severe mobility and health related constraints affecting many of their daily tasks. We therefore provide many communal amenities and services on site to cater for residents. These features allow people to access the things they need to stay independent for as long as possible, as well as to stay socially connected and engaged. These aspects lead to specific functional, operational and locational requirements. Our villages tend to be medium to high density as a result.
- 14 In practice ageing in place is achieved by enabling retirement villages in locations where people already reside. However, the size and location requirements of modern retirement villages mean that suitable sites in existing urban areas are rare. Therefore, it is important to Ryman that retirement accommodation on all appropriate sites is encouraged and enabled. For example, our Northwood village is located on commercially zoned land due to a

lack of suitable residentially zoned sites available in the area. This location is well suited to a retirement village, being adjacent to established residential areas as well as being in close proximity to shops and other services. The consenting process also established that the site was no longer needed for commercial activities.

- 15 I also note that large sites provide significant opportunities to internalise effects. For example, we can provide large setbacks, step building heights away from neighbouring boundaries and put service functions in areas that ensure any external effects are appropriately managed. These design options allow us to achieve medium to high density without materially impacting our neighbours.
- 16 However, despite the best designs and proactive consultation with the community and council before and after lodging consent applications, our projects are often opposed by neighbours and related resident groups or misunderstood by council officers. The needs of our residents, the social and economic benefits of our villages, and the functional and operational requirements for the layouts of our villages are not given sufficient attention. Instead, the focus of consent processes has tended to be on neighbouring resident status quo amenity interests and concerns. For example, our Park Terrace village was strongly opposed by neighbouring residents despite the site being zoned for high intensity development and designed to closely align with the City Plan's expectations.
- 17 These factors have led to major delays in providing much needed housing and care. Projects that are notified cause substantial delays. For example our Park Terrace village consent application was lodged in March 2020. The final consent decision was not released until July 2021 following a highly convoluted and costly hearing process (noting that this process had no appeal rights available). Other notified consents can take more than 2 years to be issued (eg our Karori site).
- 18 Ryman is therefore very encouraged by the new direction in the

Government's enabling housing legislation. We are hopeful that this process will allow the balance of considerations in consenting processes to be reset appropriately and for unnecessary complexity to be removed. These outcomes will enable us to move more quickly on our housing projects and invest with greater certainty.

- 19 There are a number of technical points of difference between the Council Officers and our planning expert, Mr Turner on PC14, which I leave to them to address.
- 20 Overall, Ryman's key concerns are to ensure that the provisions for retirement villages are sufficiently clear, enabling and consistent across the City Plan and across other growth councils to the extent practicable. I note that our team have developed the provisions in our submissions with many years of combined experience working in planning and consenting processes. I note that Ryman is certainly not seeking to shift away from an 'effects management' approach. The retirement village provisions sought by Ryman and the RVA in their primary submissions are intended to improve and streamline consent processes to ensure efficient delivery of housing for older people, without taking out the necessary safeguards to manage potential effects. They respond to the many positive effects of retirement villages, which have been ignored in past consent processes (eg Park Terrace). We also expect similar treatment to other multi-unit residential activities in terms of managing our effects and reducing notification requirements.
- 21 Overall, Ryman supports the relief sought by the RVA, as outlined by Mr Turner.

#### **INCREASING DEMAND FOR RETIREMENT VILLAGES**

- 22 Mr Collyns and Professor Kerse set out the facts and figures evidencing the growing demand for retirement villages in New Zealand, the Canterbury region and Christchurch.
- 23 Ryman supports this evidence. Despite extensive development of new retirement villages in Christchurch over the last few years, we still have long waiting lists of people wanting to live at our villages

(currently around 120 people). Although the undersupply issue in Christchurch is currently less pronounced than in other parts of the country, I expect the demand to continue to grow in response to the demographic changes outlined in the evidence of Mr Collyns and Professor Kerse.

- 24 By way of example of undersupply issues we see, Ryman was recently granted consent for a new comprehensive care retirement village at a site in Karori, Wellington City. At the time of the consent hearing, Ryman already had a list of over 440 people who had expressed an interest in living in the village. This number has since risen to 706 people. This interest was without any official marketing. Ryman also experienced a similar level of interest for its village that is under construction in Cambridge, with 126 people on the waitlist without any official marketing.
- 25 In Christchurch, I consider it is critical to continue to supply new retirement housing and care to avoid the under-provision of care across the region reaching a crisis point again.
- 26 Providing accommodation and care for the ageing population is a critical social issue. In my opinion, society has an obligation to provide housing for all members of society and to ensure that older people are adequately provided for. I know from the many enquiries we receive that many older people are being deprived of appropriate care and companionship at a stage of their lives when they are most in need. The importance of providing more retirement accommodation and care in Christchurch City to meet the needs of an ageing population needs to be expressly recognised in all appropriate zones.
- 27 As outlined by Mr Collyns, the Government has expressly recognised that housing and caring for the ageing population is a key housing challenge. Specific recognition of this policy approach has already been successfully adopted in Christchurch in many parts of the Plan.<sup>1</sup> We seek that the City Plan incorporates the proposed

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<sup>1</sup> For example, policy 14.2.1.8 of the Christchurch District Plan focuses on the "provision of housing for an aging population".

amendments from the RVA and Ryman to further enable and improve implementation of this policy.

- 28 I also note that as Ryman residents move into a village, they sell their family home. Every new Ryman village will release approximately 300 to 400 family homes back onto the market to be more efficiently used again by families desperate for homes. This outcome will assist with the housing crisis and will contribute to alleviating housing affordability issues in Christchurch.

#### **KEY CHALLENGES FACED IN RETIREMENT VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT AS RELEVANT TO PC14**

- 29 Ryman has a breadth of experience in planning processes across New Zealand. We have faced an array of consenting challenges that we consider are instructive for the Panel. We also have particular experience in Christchurch, having obtained resource consents for our Kevin Hickman Retirement Village (located in Riccarton), Northwood and Park Terrace villages under the operative District Plan.

- 30 Key challenges particularly relevant to PC14 are:

30.1 the lack of understanding and recognition of the unique characteristics of retirement villages and their positive effects,

30.2 the lack of suitable sites for retirement villages, and

30.3 lengthy and unnecessarily complex consent processes.

These matters are addressed in more detail below.

#### **Retirement villages are residential activities - Provisions should align with '4 or more residential units' proposals**

- 31 As outlined by Mr Collyns, retirement villages are clearly residential in nature. They provide permanent living accommodation to residents. Our residents describe the villages as their homes. Retirement villages provide a range of ancillary activities, but these are primarily for residents and their visitors. These are important



amenities and services as many residents are frail or have mobility restrictions (making it more difficult for them to travel to access amenities and services). These services are not available to the general public.

- 32 However, Ryman has faced challenges in consent processes where retirement villages are viewed as a mixed residential and commercial or hospital use. This confusion has led to lengthy debates about activity status and assessment requirements and has generally increased the risk of Ryman obtaining consents. For example, for our Northwood consent, it took several months of engagement working with council officers to agree that our proposed retirement village was a residential activity. In the Park Terrace consent process, some submitters argued our village was not entirely residential. Although these submissions were not upheld, the evidence and hearing time needed for us to respond led to considerable cost and effort.
- 33 In that regard, I am very concerned that the Council Officer's Report suggests retirement villages are not residential uses.<sup>2</sup> This position demonstrates the importance of the City Plan continuing to provide explicit direction that retirement villages are anticipated and encouraged activities.
- 34 Because of the poor provision for our villages, council officers often seek to find that a resource consent application warrants treatment as a special circumstance for notification purposes even where all of our effects have been mitigated to very low levels. Our Kevin Hickman and Northwood villages were carefully designed to ensure adverse effects were less than minor (including through compliance with the relevant built form standards). In the end, both applications were processed without notification, however it took many months of work for Council to reach the conclusion that notification was not required. These consents took 12 to 18 months from pre-engagement through to consents being approved. These examples show that, even without notification, consenting processes

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<sup>2</sup> Section 42A Report – 05 Residential, 6.1.33.

can significantly delay the delivery of much needed retirement housing and care.

35 Our Park Terrace village was strongly opposed by nearby residents, despite the site being zoned for high intensity development and designed to closely align with the City Plan's expectations of a 20m building form. The Council therefore decided to hold a preliminary hearing on notification, which delayed the process and increased our costs materially. In the end, Ryman sought full public notification of this application to ensure it could progress, and the application was heard by two commissioners over 6 days. The application for the Park Terrace village was lodged in March 2020 but the consent decision was not released until July 2021. This example shows that projects that are notified cause substantial delays, which comes at significant cost to Ryman. And, the people wanting to move into our villages have to wait even longer for the specialist accommodation and care they desperately need at a late stage of their lives.

36 Mr Turner addresses some of the technical issues we came across in the Park Terrace process in implementing the retirement village planning provisions.

**Positive effects**

37 As well as providing significant positive social and health and wellbeing benefits for older residents and their families, our villages also provide ongoing benefits during construction and operation. Many staff are employed to manage and operate the villages. Local suppliers are used to provide goods and services.

38 At our Northwood site, there are, on average, 150-200 Ryman staff and contractors working on construction, depending on the stage of construction. At peak stage there could be anywhere from 300-400 people onsite and many of these roles are filled by locals. The total investment of construction costs for our Northwood village is approximately \$220 million.

39 Ryman also invests in the local economy by supporting local organisations and projects, such as sponsoring the sports clubs and the Residents Association activities.

40 Unfortunately, these positive effects can be overlooked. For example, I understand the Commissioners were unable to consider the positive effects of our Park Terrace village due to an anomaly in the planning provisions. Mr Turner addresses this issue in more detail.

**Retirement villages have different functional and operational needs compared to typical dwellings – a bespoke approach is required to provide for the day to day needs of residents**

41 Retirement villages are residential activities, but because of their unique functional and operational needs, they do not necessarily fit in with rules designed for typical residential development. These differences are why we need a much clearer and fit for purpose definition of “retirement units” and bespoke rules.

42 Retirement village layout is influenced by a broad range of complex factors, including:

42.1 Ryman’s retirement villages are usually medium to high density to properly cater for resident needs. While independent living townhouses and apartments will include full kitchens, bathrooms, lounges and other household amenities, care suites and rooms will not always have these amenities. These factors may be a key driver for the layout and amenities within a unit.

42.2 Village layouts also need to practically accommodate the care requirements of residents (including distances that allow for staff assistance and access to medical facilities).

42.3 Our retirement villages often require longer building lengths than standard multi-unit developments. This is because areas that provide aged care need to be connected to allow healthcare workers and residents to move between different aged care rooms. Separate buildings for aged care units are

therefore not appropriate. In addition, as noted above, the villages often include a wider range of communal amenities and services for resident needs and convenience.

- 42.4 Because of resident vulnerability, we also prioritise our residents' safety and security. There are strict controls over access to our villages, which means we do not design in public roads through our sites, unless absolutely necessary. Some areas of a village also need to be secure and separate from other parts of the village, such as areas catering to residents with dementia. Public connections through the site were an issue for our Kevin Hickman Retirement Village where an existing structure plan provided for through-site access. This issue was eventually resolved with Council, but required additional effort and time from our team.
- 42.5 Further, accessible and often undercover pathways between car parking areas and buildings enable residents to safely and comfortably manoeuvre around the village.
- 42.6 We also ensure our villages provide visual interest that residents can enjoy no matter where they are located.
- 43 Ryman has a long and positive track record and understanding of what works for our residents. Over many years we have provided high quality environments for residents, developing sites to be sympathetic to the amenity of surrounding neighbourhoods. I have **attached** plans and photographs of our Kevin Hickman Retirement Village to the statement of evidence to demonstrate the high quality villages we provide. I am also happy to arrange a site visit for the Commissioners.
- 44 However, communities (particularly neighbouring landowners) and council officers can have an expectation as to how vacant sites are going to be used. Typically, that expectation is not for medium or higher density retirement accommodation. As a result, consenting of retirement villages has been unnecessarily complex and time consuming.

- 45 Using the recent Park Terrace experience, I note that Ryman made a significant effort to produce a high quality architectural design that will make a positive contribution to the surrounding neighbourhood, as well as a design that will operate efficiently as a retirement village. We employed leading architecture firm, Warren and Mahoney, to design the village. The design generally complied with the relevant built form standards, and responded to the high density expectations for the site set out in the City Plan.
- 46 Despite the planning expectations, shading impacts on neighbours that would be expected from a fully complying development was a key issue the Commissioners focused on. In the end, the height of one of the buildings was reduced to significantly lower than the 20m built form height standard. This height reduction reduced the number of homes the consented design will be able to provide for. And, it was not considered to be the best urban design outcome by Ryman's experts. This issue demonstrates that public participation does not necessary result in the best overall outcome in my view.
- 47 These issues also emphasise the need for clear and fit for purpose retirement village provisions. These provisions should recognise the unique features of retirement villages. They should signal to the community expectations as to what the future built form will look like.
- 48 As I understand, the retirement village provisions developed by Ryman's expert team build on the City Plan's existing provisions. They use the MDRS-based standards as a starting point with minor amendments to ensure the provisions work in practice for retirement villages. Ryman expects generally consistent treatment with other multi-unit developments. We are not seeking special treatment in terms of the management of external effects. Ryman works hard to ensure its villages respond to, and work with, the surrounding environment. However, unclear or overly prescriptive standards can significantly restrict innovative and appealing design solutions.

**Lack of suitable sites for retirement villages – large sites need to be used efficiently and commercial/mixed use sites may also be appropriate**

- 49 As noted, retirement villages are a residential use, and are generally located in residential and mixed use/commercial areas where there is demand generated by the residents living in or near those areas. Ryman’s experience is that, in their retirement, older people want to stay in or close to the communities where they currently live and where they have already significantly contributed throughout their lives as part of the local community. As Mr Collyns notes, they want to remain close to their families, familiar amenities and other support networks and want to “age in place”. As noted, this concept was confirmed as important by the Panel in the Christchurch Replacement District Plan process.
- 50 However, sites that are appropriate for retirement villages are rare due to size and locational requirements. This is particularly the case in existing residential areas. As such, other sites outside of residential zones, such as commercial and mixed used zones, that provide good amenity and access to services will also be considered by Ryman (eg our Northwood site).
- 51 For reasons already noted, we are also able to use a variety of design techniques to increase height and density in parts of our sites that will not impact the external environment, meaning we can use larger sites much more efficiently. A ‘piecemeal’ approach where larger sites are divided up for smaller developments would represent a missed opportunity for a more comprehensive and integrated development.
- 52 It is thus important that PC14 expressly recognises the intensification opportunities provided by larger sites. As noted in the RVA’s submission, this approach was adopted in the Auckland Unitary Plan, which includes a policy to enable more efficient use of larger sites.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Auckland Unitary Plan, H3.3(8), H4.3(8), H5.3(9).

**Consenting pathways vary hugely across planning frameworks – consistency is sought**

- 53 Another key challenge for Ryman is the inconsistent retirement village planning frameworks across New Zealand. This issue is discussed by Mr Collyns in more detail. His evidence is supported by Ryman’s experience with consenting processes across the country.
- 54 This inconsistency ultimately leads to delays and costs during consent processes, which does not enable the speedy and efficient delivery of housing. As a result, Ryman, in support of the RVA is heavily involved in the intensification planning instruments across the country to seek consistency. The regime we seek in the present process is very similar to elsewhere and builds on the existing provisions for retirement villages in the City Plan.

**RYMAN’S SUBMISSIONS ON PC14**

- 55 Overall, Ryman’s submissions focus on the need for PC14 to adequately address the critical need for appropriate housing for the rapidly increasing ageing population. Ultimately, Ryman considers that PC14 must provide a clear and consistent enabling regime for retirement villages. While the current provisions go some way to achieving that, they can be improved and streamlined.
- 56 To that extent, Ryman supports in full the relief sought by the RVA. Ryman agrees that amendments to PC14 are required to provide appropriate recognition of the importance of, and need for, retirement villages. The specific changes sought by the RVA and Ryman are addressed in Mr Turner’s statement of evidence.

**Matthew Brown**  
**20 September 2023**

## **APPENDIX 1 - RYMAN, ITS RESIDENTS AND THE VILLAGES**

- 1 Ryman is New Zealand's leading retirement village operator. Ryman was established in Christchurch in 1984 and now operates 38 retirement villages across New Zealand.
- 2 Our villages provide homes for more than 13,200 older residents and employ over 6,700 people. We currently have eight operational villages in the Canterbury region, as well as one village in construction and two villages that have recently been consented. We are actively looking for new local sites.
- 3 Ryman is considered to be a pioneer in many aspects of the healthcare industry – including retirement village design, standards of care, and staff education. Ryman considers that our residents deserve a high quality, safe and warm environment, where people can go about their day-to-day activities comfortably and to a standard they choose to live in.
- 4 All of Ryman's residents are less active and mobile than the 65+ population generally as well as the wider population. Ryman's independent unit residents are early 80s on move-in and our aged care residents are mid to late 80s on move-in. As noted by Mr Collyns and Professor Ngaire Kerse, this demographic has many complex health conditions that require specialist amenities and care assistance. Our residents are generally more vulnerable than the general population and have different levels of need, ranging from those who are independent to those requiring a high level of 24-hour specialist care, such as that provided in our dementia units.
- 5 When residents move into a village, they are of an older age, may be frail, many have on-going chronic conditions, and they are beginning to experience reduced mobility and age-related memory impairment. Many will be widows or widowers. Most hospital residents are not independently mobile. Dementia residents are in a secure environment and need to be accompanied when outside. Safety, security and ease of access to village amenities are highly important. It is also important that communal areas are not too



hot, too cold or too bright, as some older people find such extremes difficult.

- 6 The layout and environment of Ryman's villages are therefore designed to meet the specific physical and social needs of older people.
- 7 Ryman also has programmes in place to encourage all of our residents to be as active as their health permits, and as independent as possible for as long as possible. For example, we designed an age-specific low impact cardio programme called Triple A. We also have swimming pools, indoor and outdoor bowls, accessible walkways and high quality landscaped areas. We employ an activities manager to run comprehensive programmes and encourage our residents to engage in as much daily group and social activities as possible.
- 8 For our residents who are no longer capable of independent living and who have limited mobility, we have a philosophy of "*bringing the world to your window*". We strive to have activity happening across the village and especially within and around the buildings. While you and I may not necessarily find it interesting, watching people arriving and leaving the village is enjoyed by many of our residents.
- 9 Ryman also ensures that its villages are blended into established, good-quality residential communities. This is vitally important so that the residents continue to function as an integral part of the community that they have been part of for many years.
- 10 By being located in or close to residential or mixed-use commercial areas, residents are also able to access the services and amenities that these areas provide.
- 11 Accordingly, Ryman's villages include a range of retirement living and care options, including townhouses, independent apartments, serviced apartments, rest home care, hospital care and dementia living care. Ryman provides a 'continuum of care' from independent lifestyles through to 24-hour nursing care. The ability to provide

this continuum of care within the same site is very important as it means that our residents only need to make one move. It also allows couples to remain close to each other despite any differences in the level of care that they need individually.

- 12 In addition, Ryman provides extensive on-site village amenities including entertainment activities, recreational activities, a bar and restaurant, communal sitting areas, and large, attractive landscaped areas.
- 13 Because of the comprehensive care nature of Ryman's villages, all of the communal amenities and care rooms need to be located in a central village centre building to allow for safe and convenient access between these areas. This operational requirement results in a density and layout that differs from a typical residential development. However, Ryman's retirement villages are integrated developments, which often creates opportunities to achieve higher quality residential outcomes compared to typical residential developments, which I discuss later in this evidence.
- 14 I also note that Ryman does not consider itself a developer, as it is responsible for the whole-of-life of its retirement villages. This timeframe spans the acquisition of land, through the design and consenting processes, to construction, through to all aspects of operation and maintenance of the accommodation, care and amenities within villages. As both a constructor and operator of retirement villages, Ryman has a long-term interest in its villages, its residents and the communities its villages are located in.
- 15 We are also committed to the prosperity of the Canterbury region and providing the highest wellbeing we can for the region's older population. We expect continued growth and investment in Christchurch City.