

BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL HEARINGS PANEL

UNDER

the Resource Management Act 1991

IN THE MATTER

of the review of parts of the Queenstown Lakes District Council's District Plan under the First Schedule of the Act

AND

IN THE MATTER

of submissions and further submissions by
REMARKABLES PARK LIMITED AND
QUEENSTOWN PARK LIMITED

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF REBECCA ANNE SKIDMORE ON BEHALF OF
REMARKABLES PARK LIMITED AND QUEENSTOWN PARK LIMITED**

(URBAN DESIGN AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE)

STREAM 13 REZONING HEARINGS

9 June 2017

**BROOKFIELDS
LAWYERS**

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1. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1 My name is Rebecca Anne Skidmore. I am an Urban Designer and Landscape Architect. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree from Canterbury University, Christchurch (1987); a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (Hons.) degree from Lincoln University, Christchurch (1990); and a Master of Built Environment (Urban Design) degree from Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia (1995).
- 1.2 I am a director of the consultancy R. A. Skidmore Urban Design Limited and have held this position for approximately fourteen years.
- 1.3 I have approximately 22 years' professional experience, practicing in both local government and the private sector. In these positions I have assisted with district plan preparation and I have assessed and reviewed a wide range of resource consent applications throughout the country. These assessments relate to a range of rural, residential and commercial proposals.
- 1.4 From 1995 – 1998 I was employed as a landscape architect in the planning department of the Queenstown Lakes District Council. Since then I have regularly consulted to the Council and the private sector in relation to a wide range of plan changes and resource consent applications throughout the District.
- 1.5 I regularly assist councils with character assessments and the development of frameworks for the protection and management of identified special character areas.
- 1.6 In my current role I regularly assist local authorities with policy and district plan development in relation to growth management, urban design, landscape, character and amenity matters. I am also an independent hearing commissioner.
- 1.7 I have appeared as an expert witness in the Environment Court on numerous occasions and have also appeared as a witness of the Court.
- 1.8 RA Skidmore Urban Design Ltd. is a founding signatory to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol.

Code of Conduct

- 1.9 While this is not an Environment Court hearing, I note that I have read and am familiar with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the current Environment Court Practice Note (2014), have complied with it, and will follow the Code when presenting evidence to the Council. I also confirm that the matters addressed in this statement of evidence are within my area of expertise, except when relying on the opinion or evidence of other witnesses. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 My main conclusions are as follows:

- (a) The Site is appropriately identified as falling within an Outstanding Natural Landscape (**ONL**);
- (b) Queenstown Park is a distinctive place that exhibits a number of characteristics that make it particularly well suited to accommodate the rural based tourism and recreation hub that is enabled by the Queenstown Park Special Zone (**QPSZ**);
- (c) The QPSZ is a rural zone that will enable the establishment of a range of tourism and recreation based activities in a manner that capitalises on its rural setting, reinforces the rural character to create a distinctive place, and respects the special landscape values of the ONL;
- (d) I consider that the refinements to the suite of zone provisions now proposed are positive. In my opinion, the objectives and policies, use of a structure plan to spatially identify development areas within the zone, and the requirements for the preparation of Comprehensive Development Plans (**CDPs**) together with targeted development controls and requirements for assessment of specific development proposals, are appropriate to ensure the pattern of development enabled will be subservient and sensitive to the bold and dramatic landscape setting and will reinforce the rural character upon which the tourism experience relies; and

- (e) In relation to urban design, landscape and visual amenity considerations, I am of the opinion that the proposed zone provisions are consistent with the strategic direction set out in Chapter 3 (Strategic Direction) and Chapter 6 (Landscape) of the Proposed District Plan (as amended in the Council's right of reply versions).

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 I have been requested to review the submission by Queenstown Park Ltd. (**QPL**) to the Queenstown Lakes District Council's Proposed District Plan (**PDP**) in relation to the proposed QPSZ and to provide evidence at the hearing of submissions. The submission included a suite of provisions for the proposed QPSZ. I was engaged by QPL following the close of submissions. As a result of further input from various specialists and in response to the Council's Section 42A report, a number of amendments are now proposed. The following evidence relates to the amended suite of provisions **attached** to the evidence of Dave Serjeant.
- 3.2 The purpose of my evidence is to provide an opinion regarding the appropriateness of the QPSZ in relation to urban design, landscape and visual amenity considerations.
- 3.3 I have read the Section 42A report in relation to the submission by QPL and the accompanying evidence by Helen Melsop (Landscape Architect).
- 3.4 I last visited the 'Site'¹ on the 22nd May 2017.

4. SITE CHARACTERISTICS – SUITABILITY FOR PROPOSED ZONE

- 4.1 Queenstown Park is a distinctive place that exhibits a number of characteristics that make it particularly well suited to accommodate the rural based tourism and recreation hub that is enabled by the QPSZ.
- 4.2 The land sits on the lower flanks of the spectacular Remarkables mountain range running down to gentle lowland terraces on the southern bank of the Kawarau River. The land falls entirely within an area identified as an ONL in the PDP. The craggy western face of the Remarkables Range with its jagged north-south profile forms a dramatic backdrop to the urban area of Queenstown. The Site is an elongated

¹ I refer to the QPL land as the Site.

parcel of land that wraps around the lower portion of the northern face of the mountain range. The characteristics of the land in the lower area are particularly well suited to development. These include: the gentle slope of the lower river terraces, the land's north facing aspect; and the views afforded to the wider dramatic landscape. I agree with the analysis of the landscape values of the land and its surrounding context as set out in the evidence of Helen Melsop (paragraphs 6.4 – 6.14). Stephen Brown also provides a thorough description and analysis of the landscape and I agree with that analysis. I note that based on advice from its experts, QPL no longer seeks amendments to the boundary of the ONL.

- 4.3 The Site is well located to access a diverse range of recreation opportunities. As outlined in the evidence of Rob Greenaway, the Site is proximate to a range of existing recreation activities and opportunities including skiing, rafting, jet boating, fishing, walking, cycling, tramping and climbing.
- 4.4 The Site has a somewhat remote atmosphere and the lower area of the Site has limited visibility from surrounding public places. However, it is very close to the urban areas of Remarkables Park, the Queenstown Airport and Five Mile/Shotover Country. The Kawarau River creates a clear edge and separation from the urban environment.
- 4.5 The proposed QPSZ seeks to enable a range of inter-related activities that are mutually supportive to provide for the sustainable management of the rural land. The zone enables the establishment of a recreation based tourism hub and limited rural living opportunities set within open farmland and managed high country. A key aspect of the proposed zone is provision for a gondola which will enable access between the urban areas of Remarkables Park and possibly Lake Hayes Estate/Shotover Country, the southern bank of the Kawarau River and the Remarkables Skifield. To capitalise on the recreational opportunities this affords and to support the operation of the gondola facility, the proposed zone enables the establishment of visitor accommodation, commercial recreation activities and services and rural living within discrete and defined areas of the lowland terraces. The visitor accommodation and residential opportunities enabled will support the ongoing management of the balance of the high country farm, including maintaining the ecological values and enhancing the network of recreation trails.

- 4.6 In my opinion, the various characteristics of the land and its location in relation to urban Queenstown and a wide range of recreation activities make it particularly well suited to accommodate the mix of uses proposed.

5. ZONE PROVISIONS

- 5.1 The proposed QPSZ is a rural zone that is intended to enable the establishment of a range of tourism and recreation based activities in a manner that capitalises on the rural setting, reinforces the rural character and respects the special landscape values of the ONL. While the proposed zone makes provision for a number of activities that are common to both an urban and rural environment, the scale, intensity and character of development will ensure that a rural settlement pattern is created rather than urban. This matter is discussed further in Section 6 below.

General Arrangement – Structure Plan

- 5.2 A structure plan is proposed that identifies key development areas within the zone. This includes: the gondola corridor; possible gondola station locations; rural visitor activity areas; rural residential activity areas; indicative public trail alignments; and possible locations for jetties and trail bridges.
- 5.3 Careful analysis has resulted in the identification of a corridor to accommodate the gondola alignment. A key consideration for the alignment has been to minimise its prominence in relation to the key values of the ONL. This is discussed further in the evidence of Stephen Brown. Another key consideration for the corridor alignment has been the location of stations along its alignment. A valuable aspect of the proposal is the ability to connect directly with the urban area of Remarkables Park. The corridor also accommodates the potential for a station at Lake Hayes Estate on the northern side of the Kawarau River before ascending the mountain. This connection would have considerable benefit in providing additional connectivity to an urban residential catchment. If the alternative station location within RV3 is selected, this residential catchment could also be accessed via a pedestrian footbridge over the Kawarau River.
- 5.4 The development pod RV3 has been determined as a suitable location to create a rural village hub associated with a gondola station. The land comprises two distinct terraces providing alternative locations for a gondola station depending on the final

alignment chosen. The grade of the land is gentle and has a good northern aspect with the dramatic mountains rising steeply behind. RV3 is also proximate to the the Kawarau River enabling easy access to river based recreation activities such as jet boating. RV3 would provide the recreation and tourism activity focus for the zone.

- 5.5 There are two other RV development pods identified in discrete locations in close proximity to the Kawarau River. These areas are suitable to accommodate lodge style accommodation. They are both easily accessed from the existing farm road alignment, benefit from the amenity provided by close proximity to the River and have a very limited viewing catchment.
- 5.6 Six Rural Residential (**RR**) development pods are identified on terrace areas. The location and boundaries of these pods have been determined in relation to the topography of the land, their visibility from surrounding areas and accessibility. All pods can be accessed from the existing farm road alignment that runs through the lower terraces of the station. I support the location and extent of the development areas identified.
- 5.7 Development pods RV1 and RR1, which were identified in the earlier version of the structure plan submitted to the Council, were located adjacent to the skifield access road on the visually sensitive western flank of the Remarkables range have been deleted from the proposed zone. The location of identified development pods and the gondola corridor now avoids the western face of the mountain range entirely. In my opinion, this is important given the sensitivity of that area of the landscape to change and its visibility from surrounding areas.
- 5.8 In my opinion, the lower northern river terraces, while within the identified ONL that encompasses the mountain range through the lower terraces down to and including the Kawarau River, have a greater ability to absorb change. While the proposed zone will enable a change of character in this area, I consider the pattern of development enabled will be subservient to and sit comfortably within the dramatic wider mountain setting.
- 5.9 Given the remote location of the RR7 pod and the limitations to access created by the surrounding topography, it is less well suited to accommodate residential activity. This development area has now been deleted from the structure plan.

5.10 In her evidence Ms Melsop expresses the opinion that development within the RR and RV pods would be visible as isolated and sporadic areas of urban or dense rural living at the base of the mountains. In her view, development would detract from the visual integrity and perceived naturalness of the mountainous landforms and from closer viewpoints would adversely affect the pleasantness, aesthetic coherence and perceived naturalness of views towards the mountains.² I note that these comments were made in relation to the less refined set of provisions that were promoted with the submission. In my opinion, the provisions have been substantially refined to ensure the location and scale of RR and RV development pods, together with the suite of rules and matters for control and discretion will ensure a pattern of development that remains subservient to the bold mountainous landscape patterns. I note the analysis set out in Stephen Brown's evidence, identifying the limited viewing catchment in relation to the proposed development areas within the Site. I agree with that analysis and given the distance of many viewpoints and the scale of landscape elements surrounding, I consider the development pattern enabled will not adversely affect the visual integrity of the landscape. Furthermore, I consider that the proposed zone includes provisions to ensure the pattern of development, by virtue of its scale, intensity and character will be rural in nature rather than urban.

RV3 Provisions

5.11 The requirement for a CDP is an important mechanism to encourage a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to development of the RV3 activity area. It will ensure an overall structure and distribution of activities, open space and streets that is responsive to the wider landscape setting and creates a distinctive high amenity environment that reinforces the rural character of the area. The activity status for the CDP is restricted discretionary enabling a rigorous assessment process. The matters for discretion are clearly articulated.

5.12 The RV3 development enables the establishment of a range of rural recreation and tourism facilities in association with the gondola station. The two elements are mutually supportive. In the event that the gondola does not proceed, the recreation and tourism hub would not be so relevant in this location. However, the land would still be suitable to accommodate rural residential activity, within the 90 dwelling cap for the entire zone. The suite of provisions links the use of this area for rural visitor activities, to the establishment of the gondola with a station within the pod.

² Para. 6.32, p.23, Evidence of Helen Melsop.

- 5.13 A number of development controls are included to maintain a low intensity and low profile development pattern. In particular, the site coverage of 30% and 20% for the lower and upper terraces respectively, will ensure a spaciousness that will reinforce the rural character of the environment and responds to the different characteristics of the two terrace areas. The escarpment between the terraces creates a clear vertical separation between the two development areas within the development pod and will provide a topographical feature that contributes to the character of the neighbourhood. A differential height limit is proposed in response to the differing characteristics of the two terraces and the anticipation that the focus of the development pod will be on the lower terrace. Provision is made for areas of additional height (as a restricted discretionary activity) to allow for areas of architectural interest. Such features can also be useful to assist legibility and create focus within a built environment. The list of matters for discretion for the CDP also includes 'the distribution of additional height'. In the context of the large scale of the mountain backdrop, I consider that such additional height can be easily accommodated without being visually obtrusive in relation to the wider landscape setting.
- 5.14 It is proposed that buildings in accordance with an approved CDP be a Controlled activity. Within the overall framework of the CDP this allows detailed consideration of specific development proposals. In particular, control over the location, bulk, design and external appearance of buildings (including the selection of external materials and colours) will be important to ensure a distinctive character that reflects the rural environment and respects the qualities of the landscape setting is achieved. The controls will also ensure a high amenity environment is achieved. Control is specified over the creation of active frontages adjacent to roads and public spaces. This is important to ensure site development engages with and creates a positive interface with the public realm. Control is also reserve over the location and design of carparking. This is important to ensure that carparking is discretely located and does not diminish the amenity of the wider environment.

6. DISTRICT-WIDE PLANNING PROVISIONS

- 6.1 The Panel has already considered a number of relevant District-wide topics including Chapter 3 – Strategic Direction, and Chapter 6 – Landscape. Chapter 3 of the PDP sets out the strategic direction of the District. As amended in the Council's right of

reply version (dated 07/04/16), the chapter recognises the role tourism activity in the District (Obj. 3.2.1.4) and seeks to enable the development of innovative and sustainable enterprises that contribute to the District's economic base and creates employment opportunities (Obj. 3.2.1.5). In achieving this, the policy framework also recognises the importance of protecting the natural environment and ecosystems, including the natural character of the District's lakes, rivers and wetlands and its outstanding natural landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development (Obj. 3.2.4.1, 3.2.4.5 and 3.2.5.1).

- 6.2 In my opinion, the proposed QPSZ would enable the establishment of an innovative rural tourism hub that draws on the locational benefits of the Site in relation to both established urban areas and diverse recreation opportunities configured around a distinct and sustainable alternative transport mode – a gondola. The zone creates the opportunity to enhance the public's opportunities to access the resource of the Kawarua River and for visitors and locals to experience different recreation, entertainment and living options in a distinctive rural environment. In my opinion, the package of zone provisions creates a framework that enables this innovative tourism hub to be established while recognising and responding to the key natural attributes of the area, being the ecological, natural character and landscape values.
- 6.3 The proposed zone will enable a range of activities and their associated built development to establish in a sensitive rural location. However, I consider the package of provisions proposed is suitable to ensure the pattern of development enabled will be subservient and sensitive to the bold and dramatic landscape setting and will reinforce the rural character upon which the tourism experience relies.
- 6.4 In terms of a consideration of urban growth issues as set out in Chapter 4 – Urban Development, I do not consider the proposed zone represents an expansion of the urban environment. As defined in the PDP (as amended in the Council's reply), urban development is:

Development that by its scale, intensity, visual character, trip generation and/or design and appearance of structures, is of an urban character typically associated with urban areas. Development in particular Special Zones (namely Millbrook and Waterfall Park) is excluded from the definition.

- 6.5 The pattern of development proposed will be of a low intensity, will primarily be accessed by gondola and will have a distinctly rural character. Development will be limited to a number of discrete pods that sit within a broad rural landscape. RV3 will

enable the establishment of a recreation hub within a small scale village. However, the package of provisions proposed will ensure that it is of a low intensity and rural character rather than being an urban settlement.

- 6.6 The purpose of Chapter 6 – Landscape is described as recognising the landscape as a significant resource to the District and region. It notes that the resource requires protection from inappropriate activities that could degrade its qualities, character and values.
- 6.7 As noted in Section 4 above, QPL, on advice from its experts, no longer seeks an amendment to the identified ONL boundary. It is accepted that the proposed QPSZ falls entirely within an ONL. In this context, a key question to be answered is whether the proposed zone enables development that is inappropriate in relation to the protection, maintenance or enhancement of the District's ONLs (Obj. 6.3.3 as amended in the Council's reply version 7/04/16). As described above, the proposal will see the establishment of a recreation and tourism based hub within a rural environment. It will result in a change of character. However, in my opinion, the distribution of activities as set out in the structure plan, together with the process for co-ordinating development through CDPs, together with a range of other controls, will ensure the key landscape values of the Site are protected and enhanced. The landscape exhibits large scale, bold patterns. Within the mountainous landscape the development pods are located in the terrace transition area between the steep mountains and the Kawarau River. In my opinion, they will be subservient to and settle comfortably into the broader landscape setting. A more detailed analysis is set out in the evidence of Stephen Brown.
- 6.8 In my opinion, the proposed zone benefits from the spectacular landscape setting, utilising the characteristics of the land and its surrounding context to enable the creation of a distinctive rural recreation and tourism hub enabling the use and enjoyment of the District's landscapes for recreation and tourism (Obj. 6.3.7). In my opinion, the suite of provisions strikes an appropriate balance between enabling the establishment of a range of recreation, tourism and supporting facilities in discrete development pods, with the protection and enhancement of the wider site landscape values.

7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Queenstown Park is located within an ONL. The western face of the Remarkables Range is an iconic landscape that forms a spectacular backdrop to the urban areas of Queenstown. Amendments to the relief sought acknowledge the status of the land as an outstanding natural landscape and removes identified development areas from the highly sensitive western face of the mountain range.
- 7.2 Queenstown Park is a distinctive place that exhibits a number of characteristics that make it particularly well suited to accommodate the rural based tourism and recreation hub that is enabled by the QPSZ. In particular, the land's spectacular landscape setting, its relative isolation while being proximate to the urban environment, the gentle, north-facing topography of the lower terraces, the existing and potential recreational opportunities in the area, make it well suited to enable a range of inter-related activities that are mutually supportive to enable the sustainable management of the rural land.
- 7.3 The proposed QPSZ is a rural zone that is intended to enable the establishment of a range of tourism and recreation based activities in a manner that capitalises on the rural setting, reinforces the rural character and respects the special landscape values of the ONL. In the event that the gondola does not proceed, the RV3 area would not be appropriate for the range of recreation and tourism activities provided for. However, it would still be a suitable location to accommodate rural residential activity within the overall density cap of 90 dwellings for the zone.
- 7.4 As result of further input from various specialists and in response to the Council's Section 42a report, a number of amendments are now proposed to the package of zone provisions. The clear set of objectives and policies that are specific to the Site, use of a structure plan, requirements for the preparation of CDPs and the use of targeted development controls and matters for control of detailed development proposals, are appropriate to ensure that the pattern of development enabled will be subservient and sensitive to the bold and dramatic landscape setting and will reinforce the rural character upon which the tourism experience relies.

Rebecca Anne Skidmore

9 June 2017