

BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER of the Resource management Act (~~Act~~)

AND

IN THE MATTER of the submission by Lake Wakatipu Station Limited on the QLDC Proposed District Plan 2015 (Stream 13) to rezone a piece of land from Rural General to Rural Visitor

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF STEPHEN SKELTON FOR
Lake Wakatipu Station (Submitter #478)**

9th June 2017



INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Stephen Russell Skelton. I have the qualifications of a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from Northern Arizona University and a Masters of Landscape Architecture from Lincoln University. I am the Director of Patch Limited (**Patch**), a landscape architecture and landscape planning consultancy based in Queenstown. I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and am the acting chairman of the Southern Branch.
2. I have been involved in landscape consultancy work in the Queenstown Lakes District area for over 4 years, working in both the public and private sector. I held the position of landscape planner with Lakes Environmental before it was absorbed by the Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**) in 2013. I then held the position of landscape architect at a private practice based in Queenstown before opening my own practice in June 2016. My work includes all facets of landscape architecture and landscape planning through the range of small and large scale projects. Over the last year, my work at Patch has included master planning, commercial and residential design, preparation of native restoration planting plans, preparation of landscape management plans, preparation of landscape assessments for resource consent applications and the preparation and presentation of evidence for Council and District Plan Review hearings.
3. I am professionally familiar with the values of the rural, rural living and urban landscapes in the Queenstown Lakes District. I am familiar with the Strategic Direction (chapter 3), landscape (chapter 4), and rural general provisions of the Proposed District Plan. I am also familiar with the operative district plan, including the various rural visitor zones set out in Section 12.
4. In preparing this evidence I have reviewed the submission by Lake Wakatipu Limited and the landscape evidence prepared by Dr Marion Read dated 24 May 2017.
5. I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Practice Note 2014. This evidence has been prepared in accordance with it and I agree to comply with it. I have not omitted to



consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed.

SUBMISSION # 478

6. This submission seeks to rezone 32ha of land located on the alluvial terraces of Halfway Bay south of the Lochy River (**Attachment A**) from Rural General to Rural Visitor (**RVZ**). This land is hereafter referred to as the **site**.
7. The site is part of an alluvial river terrace landform bound by steep sided mountains to the north and south, the surface of Lake Wakatipu to the east and the deeper portions of the Lochy River valley to the west. It is part of a working farm and improved pasture and exotic shelterbelts are the prevailing vegetation of the valley floor. The sinuous Lochy River, its gravel banks and the steep, craggy faces of the surrounding mountains provide a natural context to the farm, which in turn juxtaposes the modified pastoral character against the landscape's more natural values. This creates a highly memorable landscape.
8. The flatlands and terraces of the site display a modified rural character set within the more natural and romantic context of adjoining the river, lake and mountains. The more modified character of Halfway Bay and the flatlands and terraces of the Lochy River outlet break the otherwise continuous natural mountain landscape on the western banks of the southern arm of Lake Wakatipu. The autumn colours of the farm's exotic trees such as poplars and willows visually highlight the bay.
9. The Halfway Bay valley is too small to be considered a landscape and is part of an Outstanding Natural Landscape (**ONL**).

EVIDENCE OF DR MARION READ

10. Dr Marion Read has provided a brief assessment of the submission. Dr Read supports part of the submission and considers that the proposed zoning should be reduced in area and restricted to the western portion of the site.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RV ZONE

11. The submission seeks to establish a RVZ across a carefully sited portion of the flatlands and river terraces on the southern edge of the Halfway Bay valley. I understand that this rezoning may surrender the ONL status of the site and that any future land development would be subject to the Objectives, Policies and Rules contained within Sections 12.3 and 12.4 of the ODP. Part 12.4.1 of the ODP states that the zone purpose is:

“...to complement the existing range of visitor accommodation opportunities in the District and provide for increased opportunity for people to experience the rural character, heritage and amenity of the rural area. The Zone provides for a range of accommodation, entertainment, cultural and recreational activities.

The Rural Visitor Zone applies to areas of land which are recognised as having visitor interest, are isolated from town centres and can make a significant contribution to the range of accommodation and activities available within the District.”

12. As set out under Rule 12.4.3.2, I understand that all buildings and associated earthworks in the RVZ require resource consent with decision-makers able to control site coverage, location, external appearance of the buildings and earthworks, and access and landscaping, with a particular view to avoiding or mitigating adverse effects on landscape and visual amenity values, nature conservation values and the natural character of the rural environment.

Landscape Quality and Character

13. The site is characterised by the terraces, escarpment faces, mature shelterbelts, rural elements and rural character buildings which combined with the steep mountain faces, their pronounced jagged skyline, the adjoining Lochy Rover and Lake Wakatipu, create a distinct sense of place. Built residential development within the site is limited to two dwellings. A homestead exists on a low terrace while a newer dwelling exists on a more elevated terrace. A woolshed and a constructed wharf exists near the foreshore of Homestead Bay. Other rural service structures are located throughout the site to support the farming operation. The presence of these existing buildings demonstrates that the flatlands,



terraces and shelterbelts (which break the expanse of open pastureland) provide discrete locations where built development can occur while not adversely affecting the locations where the landscape's more pronounced and valued features such as the terrace escarpments and adjoining mountain slopes.

14. Assuming building development can be (or will be) subject to certain controls, I consider there is scope for considerable rural visitor type development to occur within the site without adversely affecting the quality and character of the landscape. The RVZ boundary is proposed on or near natural features which hold the more pastoral parts of the landscape. The proposed RVZ boundary is clearly defined by changes in landform and existing vegetation patterns. I consider that the RV zone extent as proposed closely follow the natural lay of the land and contains a portion of the valley floor which could readily absorb appropriate RVZ type development.
15. I understand that the RVZ would allow activities such as earthworks and building to occur as a controlled activity. I consider that additional standards could be applied to the Halfway Bay RVZ to better ensure the landscape values of the site and surrounding landscape are more sensitive to the site's place within the ONL. These recommendations are provided in part in part 31 of my evidence.
16. I consider that considerable, appropriately controlled RVZ type development could occur within the proposed RVZ without adversely affecting the character and quality of the landscape.

Visual Amenity

17. The site and most of the surrounding land is not publicly accessible. I understand that the Halfway Bay foreshore and the Lochy River (including their respective margins) are publicly accessible. Similarly, the surface of Lake Wakatipu is a public place. However, generally, the wider public experiences the site from an approximately 5.2km long stretch of the Kingston Highway which, at its closest point, is approximately 3.5km from the Halfway Bay foreshore.

The Lochy River

18. The outlet and main channel of the Lochy River is sited against the northern edge of the valley. The river's low lying gravel and grassed floodplains stretch to the south to meet the foot of the valley's terrace escarpments (**Attachment B, Image 1**). The proposed RVZ would exist more than 500m from the Lochy River.
19. I assume the Lochy River is highly valued by anglers and private jet boat operators will also use the Lochy River for recreation.
20. From the Lochy River the landscape presents a high degree of visual amenity embodied in the natural slopes and craggy skylines of the surrounding mountains, the scrub-clad terrace escarpments and the rural character patterning of the Halfway Bay farm. I consider that appropriately controlled RVZ activities within the site, if seen at all, would be set within the modified rural pattern of the Halfway Bay farm and would be part of the more modified rural character. The dominance of the surrounding natural landscape would continue to be prevalent. Appropriately controlled activities within the RVZ would not adversely effect the Visual Amenity as experienced from the Lochy River.

The Halfway Bay Foreshore

21. The Halfway Bay foreshore, especially the more southern portion of the foreshore which is away from the Lochy River mouth, is inextricably linked to the Halfway Bay's modified rural character. Fence lines extend from the adjoining pastures to meet the surface of the lake. Disused pylons are present, protruding through the surface of the lake. A constructed marina with a wharf and jetty cuts through the foreshore. A woolshed exists near the foreshore wharf and the white coloured homestead is visible from many parts of the foreshore (**Attachment B, Image 2**). Despite the existing effect of landscape modification, the visual amenity of the foreshore continues to be dominated by views across the lake towards the Remarkables and Hector Mountains as well of views of the surrounding mountain slopes and jagged mountain skyline.
22. I consider that the foreshore of Halfway Bay is part of a modified rural landscape character unit set within a wider and more dominant natural and

outstanding landscape. I consider that appropriately controlled development within the proposed RVZ could occur without adversely affecting the visual amenity as experienced from the Halfway Bay foreshore.

The Surface of Lake Wakatipu

23. Halfway Bay is visually confined by the mountain ridges which fall from the surrounding summits to the surface of Lake Wakatipu to the north and south of the valley. This creates a narrow window of visibility which I present graphically in **Attachment A**. When seen from the lake, Halfway Bay presents a focal point as it, aside from Collins Bay to the north, offers the only flat relief and obvious sheltered boat landing on the western banks of the lake. As I have discussed above, this flatter area is part of a more modified rural landscape bound by much more dominant natural landscape features.
24. Existing built development within Halfway Bay is not obvious from more distant location on the lake. However, as the user approaches the bay, the form of the large but recessively coloured woolshed becomes more apparent. Similarly, the white homestead building which is set back into the lower portions of the site becomes more obvious. Another dwelling located on an upper terrace and set within vegetation is very difficult to see.
25. As I have discussed above, the visual amenity of the landscape is embodied in the dominance of the surrounding natural features and mountains. The modified rural character of the Halfway Bay farm also contributes to the visual amenity providing a more pastoral landscape pattern composed of rural elements such as exotic shelterbelts fences and rural character trees. There is potential for RVZ type development to detract from the visual amenity as experienced from the surface of Lake Wakatipu. However, I consider that appropriate controls can avoid or mitigate any potential adverse effects on the visual amenity as experienced from the surface of Lake Wakatipu, including those listed below.

The Kingston Highway

26. The Kingston Highway is where the wider public most frequently experiences the site. From the Kingston Highway between the Devils

Staircase and Wye Creek, views across the lake extend to the north towards Coronet Peak and Queenstown's distant urban areas (**Attachment C, Image 3**) and to the south towards the mountains west of Kingston township. The western edge of Lake Wakatipu is dominated by steep, forest clad and rocky mountains. The flatlands of Halfway Bay are a distinct intrusion into this vast western mountain and lake landscape. Halfway Bay is visible from a length of approximately 5.2kms of the Kingston Highway at a distance of more than 3.5km across the lake.

27. From the Kingston Highway, existing built development within Halfway Bay has a very low level of visibility (**Attachment C, Image 4**). The woolshed which is sited near the Halfway Bay foreshore is recessively coloured and set against vegetation which readily absorbs it visually. The white Homestead building is set low in the landscape and well screened by vegetation. The overall rural patterning of shelterbelts, rural character vegetation and patches of open pasture form the main visual indicator of landscape modification as viewed from the highway. This rural patterning is often perceived as enhancing the visual amenity when viewed through the lens of the picturesque aesthetic.
28. Increased built development within the proposed Halfway Bay RVZ could detract from the visual amenity as experienced from the Kingston Highway by highlighting domestic activities and visually reducing the dominance of rural and natural elements. The area proposed to be rezoned RVZ is large varied in its land form and cover. I consider the proposed RVZ area contains discrete pockets of land where landform and vegetation could appropriately contain the spill of domestic effects.
29. Appropriately designed, recessively coloured buildings can be difficult to perceive from distances over 3km. Accordingly, I believe future buildings within the proposed RVZ should be recessively coloured. Furthermore, I have recommended controls on lighting so that future development within the proposed RVZ will not increase the perceivable presence of domestic activities at night. I consider that recessively coloured buildings, even buildings up to 12m in height could be sited in parts of the site where they would be reasonably difficult to see.



30. Overall I consider that the site has the capacity to absorb rural visitor development without significantly adversely effecting visual amenity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31. In addition to the ODP RVZ Site Standards, I consider that the following standards should be implemented as part of the Halfway Bay RVZ Standards:

- a. Minimum 15m setback of all buildings from the bottom fold and/or top edge of any terrace escarpment.

Purpose: To ensure the natural integrity and form of the site's terraces is maintained and that built development is not located where it may detract from the natural character or visual amenity of any terrace escarpment.

- b. All exterior surface of buildings shall be coloured in the range of browns, greens or greys and all exterior surface finishes should have a LRV of less than 30%.

Purpose: To ensure buildings are coloured in natural hues so that the built form can be better absorbed within the site's vegetation patterns and colours and appear subservient to the wider landscape's more dominant natural character.

- c. All exterior lights shall be no more than 1.2m in height and directed down.

Purpose: To reduce the visual effects of light spill, especially as viewed from the Kingston Road.

CONCLUSION

32. The submission seeks to establish a RVZ on 35ha of Halfway Bay's northern terraces and flatlands. The site is part of a modified rural landscape character unit set within a much wider and more dominant natural landscape. This landscape is valued for its visual amenity. The flatlands and modified character of Homestead Bay is juxtaposed against the highly natural character of the surrounding mountains, lakes and river, creating a distinct and memorable landscape.
33. The proposed RVZ boundary is closely aligned with the site's natural terraces and vegetation patterns. Existing development in and near the site is reasonably difficult to see. It is considered that the site has capacity to absorb appropriately controlled development without adversely affecting the landscape character and quality or the visual amenity.

Stephen Skelton



Landscape Architect

June 9, 2017