

BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN-LAKES DISTRICT COUCIL

IN THE MATTER of a hearing on submissions to the Proposed Queenstown Lakes District Plan pursuant to clause 8B of the First Schedule to the Resource Management Act 1991

ON BEHALF OF **MOUNT CARDRONA STATION LIMITED (407)**
Submitter

**EVIDENCE OF BENJAMIN ESPIE
(LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT)**

28th MARCH 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My name is Benjamin Espie. I reside in Queenstown. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (with honours) from Lincoln University and Bachelor of Arts from Canterbury University. I am a member of the Southern Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and was the Chairman of that branch between 2007 and 2016. Since November 2004 I have been a director of Vivian and Espie Limited, a specialist resource management and landscape planning consultancy based in Queenstown. Between March 2001 and November 2004 I was employed as Principal of Landscape Architecture by Civic Corporation Limited, a resource management consultancy company contracted to the Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**).
- 1.2 The majority of my work involves advising clients regarding the protection of landscapes and amenity that the Resource Management Act 1991 provides and regarding the landscape provisions of various district and regional plans. I also produce assessment reports and evidence in relation to proposed development. The primary objective of these assessments and evidence is to ascertain the effects of proposed development in relation to landscape character and visual amenity.
- 1.3 Much of my experience has involved providing landscape and amenity assessments relating to resource consent applications and plan changes both on behalf of District Councils and private clients. I have compiled many assessment reports and briefs of Environment Court evidence relating to the landscape and amenity related aspects of proposed regimes of District Plan provisions in the rural areas of a number of districts. I provided a number of assessment reports and briefs of Environment Court evidence in relation to the formulation of the landscape related provisions of the Operative District Plan (**ODP**). I have provided Environment Court evidence in relation to the landscape categorisation of the Cardrona Valley and in relation to a number of resource consent applications and plan changes within the Cardrona Valley.
- 1.4 I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained within the Environment Court Practice Note of November 2014 and agree to comply with it. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on information I have been given by another

person. I confirm that I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed herein.

- 1.5 The purpose of this evidence is to assist the Hearings Panel on matters within my expertise of landscape architecture and landscape planning in relation to submission 407 on the Proposed District Plan.

2. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 2.1 The submission seeks an extension to the Cardrona Ski Area Sub Zone (**SASZ**). It also seeks changes to various provisions of the District Plan in order to refine/or clarify the way in which recreational activities are provided for. Since the time the submission was lodged, the submitter has refined the relief that is sought in relation to the proposed SASZ extension. I understand that the submitter has amended its submission so that the proposed extension to the SASZ will only provide for a passenger lift system (excluding terminal or base buildings); the proposed extension will not provide for all of the other recreational and associated activities that are provided for elsewhere in the SASZs. The proposed SASZ extension can be seen on Appendix 1. It is approximately 400 metres long and 200 metres wide.
- 2.2 I have been asked to assess and comment on the landscape and visual effects of the proposed SASZ extension in the context of a gondola located generally as shown on Appendix 1 to this evidence.

EXISTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- 2.3 Appendix 1 to this evidence shows existing activities in the relevant vicinity. Other witnesses will give more detail on the operative provisions of the SASZ and the Mount Cardrona Station Special Zone (**MCSSZ**). In short, I understand that the SASZ provides for ski and recreation activities including ski lifts and gondolas, subject to some controls and standards. I understand that the MCSSZ provides for an integrated community within a village environment that provides for a range of activities including visitor accommodation, commercial and residential, educational and community activities¹. The MCCSZ is subject to proposed Plan Change 52

¹ Queenstown Lakes District Plan (Operative), Section 12.22.1.

(PC52), which is yet to be heard. PC52 seeks to reconfigure the relevant structure plan but still seeks to provide for a village form of development. In both the operative situation and the situation sought by PC52, the central part of the MCSSZ provides for a dense commercial/visitor accommodation village centre. Under the operative situation, I understand that the MCSSZ provides for a gondola including a base building as a discretionary activity. Under the PC52 situation, if confirmed, I understand that a gondola and base building would be a controlled activity.

- 2.4** In short, the SASZ extension sought by Submission 407 intends to link the SASZ to the MCSSZ so that a gondola or chairlift (subject to controls and standards) can run from the central part of the MCSSZ to the base building of Cardrona Alpine Resort. This is shown indicatively on Appendix 1 to this evidence.
- 2.5** Other existing activities in the vicinity are of some relevance. These can be seen on Appendix 1. In summary, the Cardrona Alpine Resort access road connects Cardrona Valley Road (and the MCSSZ) to Cardrona Alpine Resort. A distillery, stables/tours operation and rural living clusters in Pringles Creek and on the opposite side of the Cardrona River are all on the valley floor close to the MCSSZ. Approximately 1 kilometre west of MCSSZ is the existing Cardrona township within its Rural Visitor Zone (**RVZ**), including some immediately adjacent rural living activities. On the opposite side of the valley, a well-formed road provides access from Cardrona Valley Road to the Wairoau Snowfarm, the associated DOC land and the Southern Hemisphere Proving Ground private car testing facility. Resource consent RM070610 provides for a gondola from the valley floor to the Wairoau Snowfarm, as is indicated on Appendix 1.
- 2.6** In geomorphological terms, the Cardrona Valley is a well-defined valley that follows the Cardrona River from the saddle between Mount Scott and Mount Hocken down to the open, relatively flat landscape that surrounds Wanaka (the floor of the Upper Clutha basin). The valley is also followed by the Crown Range Road that runs from the Wanaka area up the valley and over the Crown Range to meet the Crown Terrace and the Wakatipu Basin.
- 2.7** The eastern side of the valley is defined by the Pisa Range. The mountains of the Pisa Range have a large undulating plateau at their top. From this plateau the topography runs down a steep slope towards the Cardrona Valley and levels out in a rough terrace of sandstone-dominated gravel. This terrace is bisected by many waterways and hence appears as a series of spurs. The

western side of the Cardrona Valley is defined by the eastern extreme of the Harris Mountains, being the Crown/Cardrona range of mountains. The peaks of these mountains have a more jagged form. These mountain slopes descend towards the Cardrona Valley in a more variable way than those to the east, and are made up of many interlocking catchments.

- 2.8** To an observer travelling up the Cardrona Valley from the north, the aesthetic pattern on the floor of the valley is similar to that of the farming landscape of the Wanaka/upper Clutha basin floor, although it also features the obvious willow-lined watercourse of the Clutha River. The mountain slopes that enclose this valley floor on either side contain views from the floor. In the vicinity of the MCSSZ, an observer experiences a cluster of activities associated with tourism and domesticity as set out in my paragraph 2.5. To the south of Cardrona township the floor of the valley disappears. An observer in this (higher) part of the Cardrona Valley landscape feels they are in a more remote and more natural part of the valley. This experience continues until the Crown Terrace.
- 2.9** In recent decades, tourism has been the main driver of the local economy in the valley. Cardrona Ski Area and Wairoau Snowfarm are internationally renowned facilities. Most travellers on Cardrona Valley Road are aware of these facilities; they form part of the perceived character of the valley. As discussed above, the existing SAZS, MCSSZ and Cardona RVZ allow for considerable development over and above what exists on the ground today. It is within this landscape context that the effects of the activities enabled by Submission 407 (i.e. a gondola in a specific location) must be considered.
- 2.10** A number of Environment Court proceedings and QLDC hearings relating to proposed development within the Cardrona Valley have dealt with the issue of landscape categorisation. In all cases, the valley has been considered to be an outstanding natural landscape (**ONL**). I agree with this categorisation. Despite the human modification outlined above, the valley (when considered as a whole) remains dominated by natural character and sublime, dramatic aesthetics.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER EFFECTS

- 2.11** Landscape character effects are the effects that an activity may have on the landscape as a resource in its own right; on the characteristics and qualities that make up the landscape rather

than on views or visual amenity. The existing landscape character of the Cardrona Valley has been discussed above; in an overall sense, it is dominated by natural character but in the relevant vicinity there is considerable development and zoning that provides for more development.

- 2.12** In relation to the landscape character effects of an extended gondola in the general alignment as provided for by the proposed new area of SASZ, it is relevant that the bottom part of the gondola would be within the village-like development enabled by the MCSSZ and the top part of the gondola would be at or very near the existing Cardrona Alpine Resort base building (indeed most of the gondola would be within the SASZ). Very roughly, the gondola alignment would follow the existing ski area access road (which presumably would become much less used). Approximately directly across the valley would be the Wairoau Snowfarm access road and the associated gondola (if existing resource consent RM070610 is actioned).
- 2.13** A gondola is an obviously man-made element that traverses a straight line across the landscape. It is an element of human modification to the landscape and is a detraction from natural character. The relevant mountain slopes are part of an ONL that, overall, has a high degree of natural character. A gondola would be a significant human element that reduces overall naturalness. In terms of the district's ONLs, the particular area in which the gondola would sit is less natural than most areas of ONL within the district. There are considerable elements of human modification as can be seen on Appendix 1. As outlined above, an observer travelling through the Cardrona Valley certainly experiences a pleasant, scenic, rural form of landscape character. However, the slopes leading up to Mount Cardrona are not of the entirely unmodified, wild and dramatic character of the southernmost part of Cardrona Valley, the western face of the Remarkables or the Matukituki Valley, for example.
- 2.14** In relation to the landscape character effects of the particular gondola corridor, I make the following points:
- Terminus buildings of a gondola would be within zones that provide for considerable development. The bottom base building would be within the village-like development of the MCSSZ and the upper base building would be within an existing ski resort.
 - The Objective relating to SASZs in the ODP is to *“encourage the future growth, development and consolidation of existing ski areas, in a manner which mitigates*

*adverse effects on the environment*². The corresponding Objective in the Proposed District Plan (**PDP**) is practically identical. The SASZ zone has been drawn such that it is effectively an island, isolated from the roading network and population except for the existing access road. Notwithstanding this, growth and development of the ski area are anticipated.

- The vast majority of observers that experience this part of the Cardrona Valley are aware that a ski area exists on Mount Cardrona. The ski area access road is easily visible, as is prominent signage and periodic traffic and dust. Without doubt, this tempers their perception of these particular mountain slopes; they are not perceived as entirely unoccupied or unused.
- The new element of the gondola will be perceived as an element associated with, or ancillary to, the existing ski area and the village anticipated by the MCSSZ. In this regard, it will not be perceived as something that is entirely foreign to this landscape. Obviously in some mountainous landscapes that support skiing (even otherwise very natural mountainous landscapes), gondolas are common; examples being widespread in Europe, North America and Japan. Additionally, a gondola alignment that links a valley floor village to a ski resort is the most logical and expected place to see a gondola.
- A gondola in this location would be part of a cluster of modifications and activity as described above (most relevantly the Cardrona Alpine Resort, the Wairoau Snowfarm, the associated ski access roads, the existing MCSSZ and Cardrona township with its associated RVZ). These modifications are all confined to this particular part of the valley.

2.15 I consider that the above factors mean that the effects on landscape character are mitigated; the detracting from natural character is not as significant as it would be in most parts of the ONLs of the district. There would be considerable logic in a gondola in an already modified vicinity that connects a valley floor village with a high-altitude ski resort.

² Queenstown Lakes District Plan, Section 5.2, Objective 6.

3. VIEWS AND VISUAL AMENITY

EXISTING VIEWS AND VISUAL AMENITY

- 3.1** The existing landscape character of the relevant part of the Cardrona Valley is described above, including aesthetic aspects. In short, the upper part of Cardrona Valley (south of Cardrona township) provides a wild, isolated form of visual amenity. Views are dominated by close, rugged, tussock-covered mountain slopes. Transient atmospheric and weather conditions can provide bright blue skies that contrast with the golden slopes and jagged skylines, or can provide a thick, pristine blanket of snow. Views and visual amenity are dramatic and highly memorable. The lower part of the Cardrona Valley (north of Cardrona township) also provides views and visual amenity that are dominated by natural elements including rugged mountain slopes, but in this part of the valley the verdant, farmed and occupied valley floor means that visual amenity is more rural and countryside-like, rather than wild and sublime.
- 3.2** A gondola in the alignment provided for, including the proposed SASZ extension, will be visible from a specific visual catchment within Cardrona Valley. Without a specific gondola design, this visual catchment can only be identified approximately. Based on the alignment shown on Appendix 1, a generic gondola design and computer modelling based on 20 metre contour interval terrain modelling (i.e. a relatively unrefined form of three-dimensional computer modelling) I have shown on Appendix 1 the stretches of Cardrona Valley Road from which a hypothetical gondola would be visible. As well as Cardrona Valley Road, a gondola would be visible from private land in this part of the Cardrona Valley, from the Meg Pack Track (shown on Appendix 1), from the Wairoau Snowfarm public area and access road, parts of the Cardrona River public corridor and parts of the Pisa Conservation Area (which is joined to the Wairoau Snowfarm area and the Meg Pack Track).
- 3.3** Existing views and visual amenity that are experienced from the valley floor viewpoints (the Cardrona Valley Road, Cardrona River, etc.) are described above. From the elevated areas (Wairoau Snowfarm, Meg Pack Track, etc.), very broad and long views over the valley are available.

EFFECTS ON VIEWS AND VISUAL AMENITY

- 3.4** Visibility of an element in the landscape does not constitute an adverse effect in itself. The visibility of an element can lead to adverse effects in terms of visual amenity and landscape appreciation if the visible element detracts from the qualities that would otherwise be experienced; if it negatively changes our perception of what we would otherwise see. For example, an element in the landscape that clashes with surrounding landscape character will often degrade the landscape experience or alter an observer's perception of natural and/or scenic qualities, while a visible element in the landscape that harmonises with surrounding landscape character will not have this adverse effect.
- 3.5** As discussed in relation to landscape character above, in general terms, a gondola will detract from the natural aspects of the composition of existing views; it will be a visible additional human element. Notwithstanding this, a gondola traversing a natural mountainside has a remarkable and memorable aesthetic quality in itself that is undoubtedly valued. Gondolas in locations such as the proposed are often photographed and appear in tourism marketing, postcards, etc. They are valued by some (possibly many) observers for their engineered appearance contrasting with their (usually) natural setting. As in relation to landscape character, it is again relevant in relation to visual effects that a gondola that links a mountain ski resort with a valley-floor village has considerable logic in terms of its location; it is somewhat accordant with a viewer's expectations.
- 3.6** Particularly when seen from any distance, the gondola will take the form of a line of towers with cables (which are generally invisible) and moving suspended cars. In this sense, a gondola is a relatively insubstantial visual element; it is visually permeable. Although often easily visible, it will not block or screen views. It will allow views through and past its line to the mountain slopes.
- 3.7** In very general terms, the provisions of both the ODP and PDP that relate to landscape issues are protective of the visual amenity provided by ONLs. Part 5.3.1.2 and Part 5.4.1(ii) of the ODP make it clear that the SASZs are excluded from the landscape categories that apply to the Rural General Zone, i.e. the areas of the SASZs are not part of the ONLs that surround them for planning purposes³. I understand that the intention is that the same applies under the PDP. This

³ This accords with the findings of Environment Court decision C180/1999 (Wakatipu Environmental Society vs. Q.L.D.C) that originally created the landscape categories that are now incorporated into the District Plan, although the specific findings of that decision relate to the Wakatipu Basin and not the Cardrona area. In particular paragraph 108(b) of that decision is relevant.

is logical in that the SASZs are specifically identified to accommodate future growth and development of ski areas. I consider it relevant that the only part of a gondola (as provided for by the relief sought by the submission) that would be subject to the ONL planning regime would be the 400 metre long stretch between the existing SASZ and the MCSSZ.

- 3.8** Most of the activity areas of the MCSSZ provide for relatively dense built development. Activity Area 7 of the MCSSZ generally provides for open space and therefore, although not part of the Rural General Zone and hence not subject to landscape categorisation, would visually read as part of the surrounding mountain slopes, that are part of the ONL.
- 3.9** Visibility from the valley floor will be intermittent and not all of the gondola alignment would be seen, only parts of it. Generally, the lower parts of a gondola alignment would be less visible than the upper parts (which would be within the existing SASZ). The parts of a gondola that would be within the proposed extension to the SASZ are of relatively limited visibility (as is shown by the blue line on Appendix 1).
- 3.10** An observer in the landscape that is on the valley floor is aware of many of the elements of existing development that are shown on Appendix 1. The ski areas are boldly signposted and the access roads are easily visible. The rural living and tourist activities (stables and distillery) are readily apparent. Cardrona township within its RVZ is a prominent visual element. I consider that the visibility of a gondola from the identified valley floor viewpoints as it ascends the mountain slopes will undoubtedly reduce the natural aspect of current views. The scene will appear more modified and occupied by human activity than it currently does. Given that the relevant views include large areas of open mountain slopes that are part of an ONL and given the ODP and PDP Objectives and Policies relating to ONLs, I consider that this reduction in the naturalness of views and visual amenity must be considered to be adverse. However, I consider that these visual effects will be mitigated in the proposed gondola alignment corridor by the following factors:
- The gondola will link an existing mountain ski resort and a valley floor village. This will increase the visual logic of the new element in the landscape.
 - The gondola would be within a particular part of the Cardona Valley that already accommodates considerable modification, as set out above and on Appendix 1. Therefore, a gondola in this location will be less discordant with existing visual

amenity than it would be in other locations. In particular, the gondola alignment will roughly follow the line of the existing easily visible access road.

- 3.11 The above comments equally apply to views that will be had from more elevated locations such as the Meg Pack Track of the Wairoau Snowfarm area. However, from these areas views will be more distant and will take the form of broad overviews of the valley. All the activities of Cardrona Alpine Resort will be visible, as will the MCSSZ village and the other development within the valley, albeit at considerable distances. I consider that in these views a gondola will be a smaller element in a broader scene and will have less of an effect on the visual amenity that is currently enjoyed.

4. CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

- 4.1 I have read a brief of evidence by Kim Banks and Marion Read dated 10 March 2017. Ms Banks raises the issue of possible cumulative landscape effects if a gondola as enabled by the submission was constructed in addition to the Wairoau Snowfarm gondola enabled by RM070610. Dr Read does not raise any issue in relation to cumulative effects, indeed she appears comfortable with a gondola as enabled by the relief sought by the submission⁴. I have been asked to consider the cumulative landscape and visual effects that would arise if both gondolas were constructed and operated. I give my comments below.
- 4.2 If we consider that the RM070610 gondola is part of the receiving environment and envisage it constructed and operating, then the existing landscape context would be different to what exists on the ground today. The relevant part of the Cardrona Valley would be more characterised by recreation and human activity. The bottom base building and associated car-parking of the RM070610 gondola would be visible from Cardrona Valley Road (although visually softened by vegetation) and there would be a readily apparent vehicle entrance, undoubtedly with significant signage. I consider that in this scenario, recreation would begin to become a prominent part of the landscape character and visual amenity of the vicinity. Cardrona Alpine Resort supports considerable activity over summer in relation to mountain biking and other recreation pursuits. I understand that the Wairoau Snowfarm RM070610 gondola was conceived and proposed on the

⁴ Evidence of Dr Marion Read on behalf of QLDC, dated 10th March 2017, paragraph 5.25.

basis that mountain biking activity would become a considerable part of the Wairoau Snowfarm operation. The combined influence of the two ski areas (the Wairoau Snowfarm with a visible operating gondola), the associated mountain biking activity, along with the stables and tours operations and all with visible signage, would mean that landscape character and visual amenity of this particular part of Cardrona Valley, while still dominated by the natural character of the mountain slopes, would have a considerable recreational aspect to it.

4.3 In relation to the above scenario, if we then envisage the addition of a second gondola as enabled by the relief sought by Submission 407, I consider that in terms of landscape character, this second gondola would represent an intensification of recreational character, rather than a change to character. For all of the reasons given in the landscape character effects assessment above, I consider that the landscape character effects of the gondola as enabled by the relief sought by Submission 407 are significantly mitigated. This, combined with the altered existing landscape character that the first gondola would bring, would mean (in my opinion) that the cumulative effect of the second gondola on landscape character would not be problematic.

4.4 In general terms, the same is true in relation to cumulative effects on views and visual amenity. If we consider the existing environment to include the Wairoau Snowfarm RM070610 gondola, then the existing form of visual amenity that is experienced in the relevant vicinity would include increased recreational activity. As mentioned, gondolas in natural mountainous settings are aesthetically memorable, often-photographed elements in the landscape. The addition of a second gondola would mean that certain views are even more characterised by human structures and activity. This may not decrease the aesthetic merit of the vicinity but it would make it a less natural form of aesthetic merit. I consider that, in the particular proposed location, a second gondola would bring cumulative visual effects that are mitigated as much as is practicable.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The effects of a gondola as enabled by the relief south by Submission 407 on landscape character and visual amenity would be mitigated by the following factors:

- Terminus buildings of a gondola would be within zones that provide for considerable development.

- Most of the gondola would be within the existing SASZ that is an area identified for the growth of ski and recreation activities.
- The vast majority of observers that experience this part of the Cardrona Valley are aware that a ski area exists on Mount Cardrona and this tempers their perception of these particular mountain slopes.
- The new element of the gondola will be perceived as an element associated with, or ancillary to, the existing ski area and the village anticipated by the MCSSZ. A gondola alignment that links a valley floor village to a high-altitude ski resort is the most logical and expected place to experience a gondola.
- The gondola would be within a particular part of the Cardona Valley that already accommodates considerable human modification of the landscape (particularly modification associated with recreation). A gondola in this location will not be discordant with existing visual amenity and landscape character.

5.2 A gondola in this location would be part of a cluster of modifications and activity as described above (most relevantly the Cardrona Alpine Resort, the Wairoau Snowfarm, the associated ski access roads, the existing MCSSZ and Cardrona township with its associated RVZ). These modifications are all confined to this particular part of the valley.

5.3 If we consider that Wairoau Snowfarm RM070610 gondola is part of the existing environment, then the Submission 407 gondola would have cumulative landscape and visual effect when combined with it. However, the second gondola would be inserted into a landscape context in which recreation is a prominent aspect. It would intensify recreational character, rather than add something entirely new. Due to all of the mitigatory factors set out above, I consider that the cumulative effects of a second gondola would be mitigated as much as is practicable.

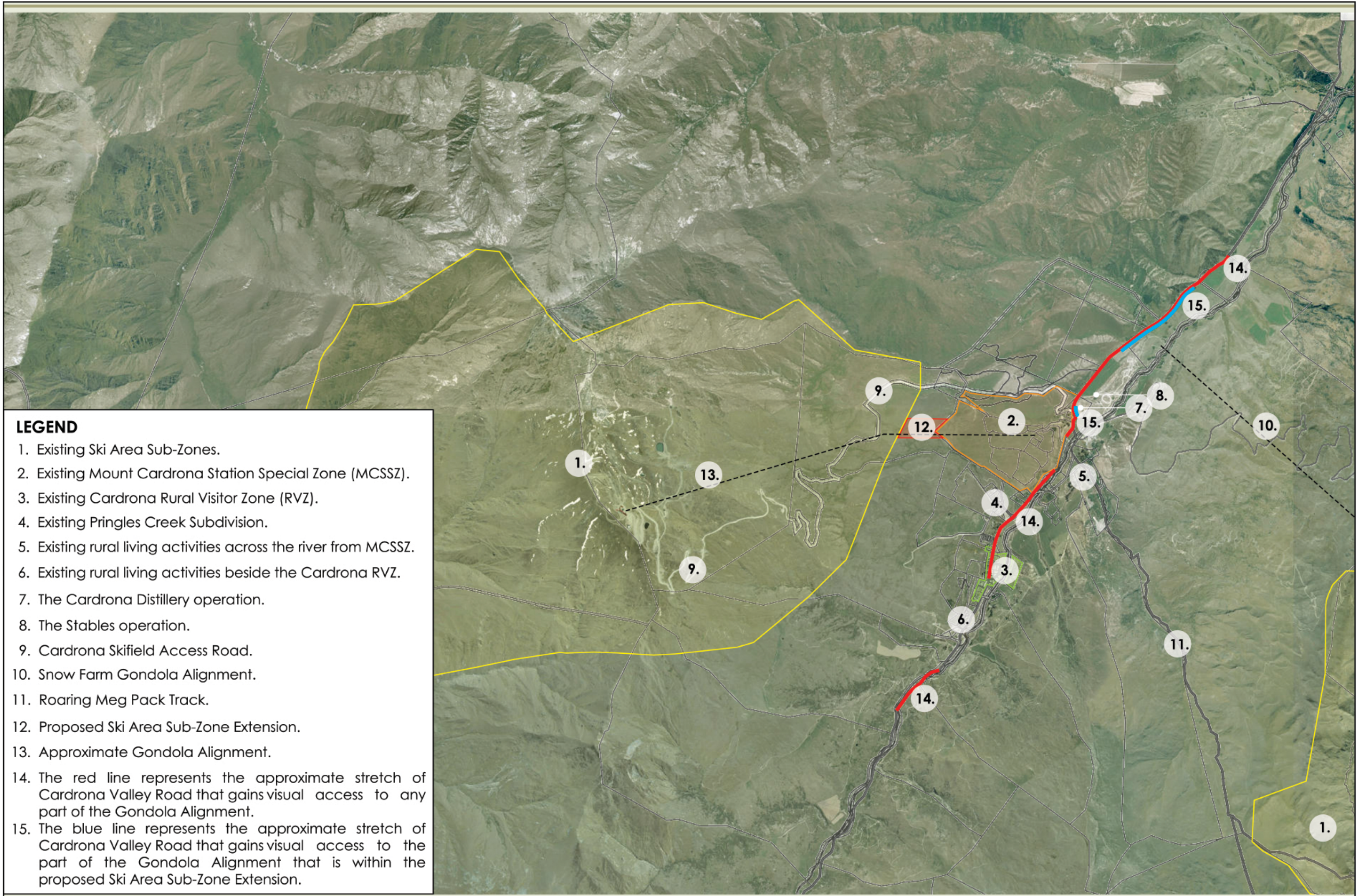
ATTACHED APPENDICES

- 1 PLAN OF EXISTING AND PROPOSED ACTIVITIES.

Ben Espie

vivian+espie1022

28TH March 2017



LEGEND

- 1. Existing Ski Area Sub-Zones.
- 2. Existing Mount Cardrona Station Special Zone (MCSSZ).
- 3. Existing Cardrona Rural Visitor Zone (RVZ).
- 4. Existing Pringles Creek Subdivision.
- 5. Existing rural living activities across the river from MCSSZ.
- 6. Existing rural living activities beside the Cardrona RVZ.
- 7. The Cardrona Distillery operation.
- 8. The Stables operation.
- 9. Cardrona Skifield Access Road.
- 10. Snow Farm Gondola Alignment.
- 11. Roaring Meg Pack Track.
- 12. Proposed Ski Area Sub-Zone Extension.
- 13. Approximate Gondola Alignment.
- 14. The red line represents the approximate stretch of Cardrona Valley Road that gains visual access to any part of the Gondola Alignment.
- 15. The blue line represents the approximate stretch of Cardrona Valley Road that gains visual access to the part of the Gondola Alignment that is within the proposed Ski Area Sub-Zone Extension.

APPENDIX 1:

Existing and Proposed Activities within the Cardrona Valley
Cardrona Ski Area Sub-Zone, Cardrona



REF: 1022 - APP 1
 DATE: 27.03.2017
 SCALE: NOT TO SCALE

vivian+espie

resource management and landscape planning
 vivian+espie Limited Resource Management and Landscape Planning
 PO Box 2514 Queenstown
 Physical Address: Unit 15, 70 Genda Drive, Frankton, Queenstown
 Tel: +643441 4189 Fax: +643 441 4190 Web: www.vivianespie.co.nz