

Before Queenstown Lakes District Council

In the matter of The Resource Management Act 1991

And The Queenstown Lakes District proposed District Plan -
Rezoning Hearing Topic 12 - Upper Clutha Mapping

Statement of Evidence for John Wellington

Dated 12 June 2017

Introduction

My full name is John Aaron Sebastian Wellington. I have lived in Wanaka for 19 years.

I have a degree in Geography, and have been interested in the District Plan since I encountered it 17 years ago.

I have a general interest in planning in our community and make submissions on resource consent applications, both personally, and on behalf of the Upper Clutha Tracks Trust. I believe that I have a reasonable understanding of the District Plan and the RMA.

My submission to the Proposed District Plan covered Public Access, Open Space Zones, Wanaka Urban Growth Boundary, and Rural Residential/Lifestyle Zones in the Upper Clutha Basin.

It is on the issue of provision of Rural Residential/Lifestyle Zones that I wish to speak to the hearings panel.

Rural Residential/ Rural Lifestyle Zones in the Upper Clutha Basin

My submission looked at the provision of Rural Residential/Lifestyle zoning in the Wakatipu Basin in comparison to the Upper Clutha Basin. I noted that there appeared to be substantially more land in the Wakatipu Basin that had this zoning than in the Upper Clutha Basin.

This is more pronounced when you consider the relative size of the valley floors. The most obvious difference is the relative amounts of this zoning close to Queenstown and Wanaka.

It is noted that there are pockets of these zones in the Upper Clutha Basin but their distribution seems to be related to an outcome of the plan before last.

I would argue that generally they do not seem to have been selected on basis of the landscapes ability to absorb that potential development.

A large pocket of this zoning is at Hawea Flat. This is a settlement that has grown substantially in the last 20 years and it could be argued that it is now more approaching a low density urban zone than being rural in character. It is certainly considered to be a "settlement" in the basin.

I note that there is very little change in the area of land proposed to be zoned Rural Residential/Lifestyle in the Upper Clutha basin between the existing District Plan (map 8) and the Proposed District Plan (map 18).

It is further noted that the amount of land proposed to be zoned Rural Residential/Lifestyle in the Wakatipu basin has increased quite substantially from the operative District Plan. This is especially the case in land adjacent to the Shotover River upstream from the SH6 , and also along Speargrass Flat Road.

I refer to map 13 of the existing District Plan and map 13 of the Proposed District Plan.

The proposed new zoning of these areas seems to be an acceptance that the rural general zone has already been so developed in these areas that the new zoning is more reflective of the actual pattern of development that now exists rather than the original zone standards.

The issue of subdivision and development in the rural zones, especially in the Wakatipu Basin, but also in the Upper Clutha Basin, has been a major area of conflict within the planning process. One of the issues would seem to be an apparent inability to effectively, or at least consistently, assess cumulative effects of individual subdivisions.

To address the cumulative effects issue as part of the current District Plan review, Council commissioned the Wakatipu Basin Land Use Planning Study.

This was published in March 2017 and advocates an 80 ha minimum lot size for much of the Rural Zone in the Wakatipu Basin, in what it proposes as a new zone, the Wakatipu Basin Rural Amenity Zone (WBRAZ).

At the same time the Study advocates that areas of the proposed Wakatipu Basin Rural Amenity Zone be overlaid as Wakatipu Basin Lifestyle Precinct (WBLP).

These "Precinct" areas will permit considerably more development in the parts of the Rural Zone that are currently zoned Rural Lifestyle or Rural Zone.

Whilst the weight that will be given to this report is yet to be decided, its findings make very interesting reading in terms of how further rural development may or may not be appropriate in the Wakatipu basin.

The report states that this should only be applied to the Wakatipu Basin, due to the extreme development pressures that this area has experienced and continues to experience.

The irony of this is that the report has been required due to a perception that the existing plan has not adequately protected the rural environment in the Wakatipu Basin. Therefore, surely, it should follow that if this report is to be accepted and incorporated into the Proposed District Plan, then the mechanism that is best to preserve the already potentially compromised Wakatipu Basin, should also be the mechanism used to protect the Upper Clutha Basin.

I would argue that very similar pressures are felt in the Upper Clutha Basin in respect to rural subdivision and development. It is vital that a Upper Clutha Basin Land Use Planning Study be undertaken to identify the areas of the basin that have the ability to absorb development, whilst at the same time protecting from ad hoc development the areas that are less suitable.

In the Upper Clutha we have the opportunity to learn from the negative experiences and outcomes in the Wakatipu Basin, and hopefully avoid them.

I would suggest that the pressure to develop rural lifestyle and rural residential properties in the Upper Clutha Basin is only going to increase. There has already been substantial publicity about high profile rural land purchases in the basin, and the demand for these will put further pressure on the rural zone.

Anecdotally, a proposed development, currently under appeal to the Environment Court, had 50% of its sections under contract at the time consent was sought. This shows that there is a pent up demand for these type of properties that is not being met.

I note that in his report on submissions, Craig Barr has generally recommended that Rural General land should not be rezoned to Rural Residential/Lifestyle on the basis that the assessment matters on development in the Rural General Zone allows the Council more control on the type/conditions of development that takes place.

This seems to be a very logical position in general, but when examined in the context of the Wakatipu Basin, and the need to produce the Wakatipu Basin Land Use Planning Study, it has clearly not worked in a way that has protected the landscape.

In the absence of an Upper Clutha Basin Land Use Planning Study, it would seem a better solution would be to identify areas that do have the ability to absorb some development and zone them accordingly as either Rural Residential or Rural Lifestyle.

This gives a clear indication where this development could proceed, whilst at the same time strengthening the ability to decline development in areas less able to absorb that development.

This then brings me back to the detail of my original submission where I stated that the obvious place for land to be rezoned to Rural Residential/Lifestyle is to the east of the Wanaka Urban Growth Boundary. This is because the land to the west of the Township is predominantly Outstanding Natural Landscape, whilst that to the east is mostly Visual Amenity Landscape.

The location relatively close to the Urban Growth boundary would provide a transition zone from the wider open rural landscapes to rural living landscapes before becoming urban. This is an expected transition that is seen in many settlements. This would also reflect the facts on the ground that the average size of land parcels in this area increase in size as you move away from the Urban Growth Boundary.

In specific, I believe that the land to the east of the Cardrona River from Mt Barker Road to SH6 and extending to the east as far as Boundary/Morris Road has areas that have the ability to absorb development to a rural residential/lifestyle density, and indeed parts of this area already show some of these characteristics.

To date there has been a desire to use the Cardrona River as a boundary to the Urban development of Wanaka, and this has wide support. However, I believe that this boundary is not appropriate for an abrupt transition from Urban development to a fully rural environment. I would argue that trying to achieve that ignores the existing development that has already taken place in this area, especially along Faulks Road.

Summary

I believe that Council has failed to provide any new Rural Residential/Lifestyle zoning in the Upper Clutha Basin as part of the District Plan Review. As a result it has failed to consider how best to protect the landscape values of the rural areas of the Upper Clutha Basin whilst at the same time making some provision for the demand for rural living options.

The best result would be to commission an Upper Clutha Basin Land Use Planning Report similar to one that has been prepared for the Wakatipu basin.

In the meantime I believe that there is a clear need for some land near to the Wanaka Township to be rezoned to allow for rural living, and suggest that the area identified above is the most suitable.