

Hearing In Regard To QLDC's Proposed Urban Intensification Variation

Held at Edgewater Wanaka on 27 August 2025

Presentation Notes From Roger Boyd 8.45-9am, 27 August 2025

-Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, and for accommodating my request for an early start.

-I was born and grew up in Dunedin, and have been coming to the whole Queenstown Lakes District since I was very small, so you could say I have a long perspective.

-The proposed Variation has given rise to an extraordinary volume of material, much of it highly detailed and technical in nature, and contributed by professionals in the fields of law and planning, and other fields. If a layperson such as myself can add value to the process, it is probably by standing back and asking basic questions like 'Why are we doing this?', 'Is it really necessary?', 'What are the aims of the proposals?', 'Are the aims good ones?', and 'Will the proposals achieve the aims?'. This is what I intend doing in the brief time available to me this morning.

-It seems to me that Intensification was born and took flight in Auckland, and has then been applied everywhere else in the country. And it doesn't fit and isn't necessary in many places outside Auckland.

-QLDC's literature always refers to it being required to implement the NPS-UD. But the document itself uses the word obliged. I don't wish to get into a debate over semantics, but 'obliged' has a meaning which is less strong than 'required'. In any case, when I wrote my submission in October 2023 the position was that the NPS-UD was not law, but parts of it had been brought into the law for Tier 1 local authorities. My understanding is this is still the case. QLDC is a Tier 2 local authority, so QLDC is under no legal obligation to implement the NPS-UD.

-In addition, the only urban environment the NPS-UD asks QLDC to engage with is Queenstown. Not Luggate, Hawea, Wanaka etc. These are small towns, without the issues in Auckland, or even Queenstown. It defies common sense that every town or collection of houses in QLDC's catchment would have the Tier 2 label and requirements applied to it.

-Wanaka would be the largest 'small town' in the QLDC's catchment, but even it doesn't currently meet the definition of an 'urban environment' under the

NPS-UD, and may never do so (see the definition of 'urban environment' on p8 of the UPS-UD; Wanaka may never have a *labour market* of 10,000 people, defining 'labour market' as people engaged in work, rather than potentially available for work). Planning for it should therefore sit outside the NPS-UD framework. It should perhaps also be noted that even Queenstown appears to be something of an anomaly in terms of the eight Tier 2 urban environments, being by far the smallest in terms of population. Perhaps the Southern Lakes region was not the type of area the NPS-UD planners had in mind?

-Compare QLDC's approach to the NPS-UD to that of the Christchurch City Council. Despite being a Tier 1 local authority, Christchurch has gone its own way, applying parts of the NPS-UD where it decided it fitted, and ignoring the NPS-UD where it decided it didn't.

-I had an email exchange last week with a senior planner employed by the Christchurch Council (I think it better I not identify him in a public document, but would be happy to privately for verification purposes if required). I put this idea to him:

'Is it fair to characterise the Christchurch Council's approach as being willing to implement the NPS-UD as long as the community doesn't oppose it, for example Policy 3 around City Centre etc heights (and probably also where Council thinks it's a good idea, or at least not a bad one?). But unwilling to implement it where it is clearly opposed by the community, for example the move from low to medium densities (and possibly also independent of whether the Council thinks that is a good idea?)'

He replied:

'I think how you've characterised Christchurch City Council's approach to intensification is broadly correct.'

-One clear characteristic of Christchurch's approach is its willingness to put the views of the community first, over top of the NPS-UD.

-Residential and Town Centre intensification in Wanaka is a non-solution to a non-existent problem. It is not required in Wanaka now, and it may never be. It will provide only a gold-rush for developers, and cheap motels and other visitor accommodation on the Town fringe.

-In response to the Government's announced plans to limit rates increases, Council's around the country have recently once again put their their hands up for approval to develop streams of non-rates revenue such as bed taxes. Is QLDC's apparent enthusiasm to apply the NPS-UD to all areas in its catchment primarily driven by a desire for additional revenue, via rates being applied to higher land values?

-QLDC's proposals recommended changing the designation of the land on which the Department of Conservation Office sits adjacent to Ballantyne Road in Wanaka from low density housing to medium density housing. This caused much consternation amongst residents of the area, who had thought the land was part of the Mt Aspiring National Park, and therefore was not available for development, and didn't understand it having even a low density designation. This has now been recognised in the Section 42 (a) summaries with a recommendation the current low density designation be retained. The summariser also felt an 'open space' designation should be applied to this land, but said this lay outside the scope of the NPS-UD. But why was the designation change applied to this land when as the summariser stated, it was never available for development, and any development in any case would be in violation of QLDC's own policies on 'open spaces'? QLDC's practice of applying to 'open spaces' the designation of nearby housing strikes me as very odd.

-Changing the zoning of a few houses in streets near the current Town Centre will have no effect on the factors invoked as the reasons for the change, primarily, combating 'urban sprawl'.

-There is no 'urban sprawl' in Wanaka. Natural growth is not 'sprawl'. When Wanaka reaches the size of Auckland, which might have a diameter of over 100kms around the City Centre, it might be appropriate to talk of 'sprawl'.

-If you were to define growth as 'sprawl', then the major contributor to it, throughout the whole Southern Lakes region, is probably unoccupied homes, either by owners, or through not being rented. So perhaps a tax, or similar, on non-occupation, is a better way of controlling 'sprawl' than designation changes?

-Intensification through greater height allowances and greater concentration of houses is what many people came to Wanaka to avoid. Intensification hasn't happened in areas it could have happened because people haven't want it.

-Given the benefits of rezoning described, It strikes me as illogical why you wouldn't classify the whole housing stock in Wanaka medium density? Applying a designation change to just a few more streets surrounding the current Town Centre cannot possibly deliver the objectives outlined.

-The benefits of medium density described are vague and generic. They would apply anywhere in Wanaka. They make sense only in terms of the NPS-UD itself, but constitute no benefit to residents, or resemblance to current reality.

-Intensifying the town centre buys in to Auckland's problem: the octopuses head with tentacles. Everything comes into the one centre. What is needed is 'mini town centres': in North Lake, in Three Parks, and elsewhere, taking pressure off the centre.

And markets, which are just people's wants and desires interacting with constraints, have a tendency to produce results anyway: new Town Centres, Five Mile in Queenstown, Three Parks in Wanaka. The NPS-UD wants to intensify, people and the market want to de-intensify. At least for Town Centres. In terms of zoning, section sizes in Wanaka have been reducing over a long period, with major shifts occurring around major demand shifts. So the normal was 1000 sq mtrs in the 1960s, then around 800sq mtrs, now it's around 400 sq mtrs for new builds. People no longer want big sections with the attendant high maintenance. It could be argued the intensification objective of the NPS-UD is now happening naturally in Wanaka, without the need of further regulation.

-In conclusion I would once again like to thank the Commissioners for allowing me to present outside the scheduled hours, and to also acknowledge the extraordinary amount of work put in by everyone involved in this process. It is sobering to contemplate that, given the Government's recent announced intentions, much of this voluminous work may be rendered redundant.

Roger Boyd