

Variation to the Proposed District Plan: Urban Intensification Variation

Hearing Panel Presentation

My name is Craig Douglas and I am a supporter of the Friends of Arrowtown Group. I have been associated with Arrowtown since the early 1970s and have lived permanently in Arrowtown for 15 years in what was my families holiday home, the longest I have spent in any one place. My involvement in local affairs includes being a past president of the Queenstown Chamber of Commerce and I was on the Shaping Our Futures task force that produced the initial Arrowtown Visioning report in 2017 where I authored the Character section of the report. Arrowtown is special to me and my family because of its informality, safety, scale and fond memories that go back to my early childhood. Much of what is special is derived from the scale of the town and its built environment. I find it particularly special that my children and grand children have been able to spend time here and form a similar bond that I have to the place.

The National Policy Statement on Urban Development has 2 directives that possibly conflict. To enable more building height and density and ensuring planning decisions contribute to well-functioning urban environments. While I understand there is a formal definition of 'well-functioning', I suggest the local community is well placed to define what is well-functioning to them. This is clearly outlined in the Shaping Our Future Visioning Report. It is disappointing to see that despite being recently revised and brought up to date, this report isn't noted in the documents referred to in forming the views expressed in the Section 42A Report.

The key point I would like to make to the panel is that the outcomes of the decisions made are more important than the process taken to reach the decision on the proposed variation or the intention of the proposed variation. All too often the outcome is lost in the process of governance. We see this play out with Central Government every night on the TV news. Challenged by a social or economic issue, our ministers are quick to point out how much money they spend on the problem but rarely do they address the outcomes of the spend. Action on its own is not enough.

In the case of the proposed Urban Intensification Variation, the objective of creating more residential dwellings appears to be met simply by allowing larger buildings on smaller sites. I suggest this is too simplistic and in the case of Arrowtown, is at risk of creating perverse outcomes that actually work against the objectives.

Currently, it is difficult to build a very large format home in Arrowtown so where the rules are respected, we see the building form being constrained which is an important element of the character of Arrowtown. We know Arrowtown is an attractive place to

live for many people but if you want a very large format home, you simply can't build in Arrowtown.

We know there are plenty of wealthy people looking to move into the area and build, we see it every day in our ever-busy construction industry elsewhere in the basin.

I contend that the opportunity to build bigger in Arrowtown will be appealing to people wanting to settle in the area in their very large format, dream home. We see these large form homes being built in the rural areas and we see the most recently developed area of Arrowtown, around Advance Terrace, displaying homes that maximise their footprint and scale within the current rules. The vast majority of recent new homes in Arrowtown are more expensive homes, built as big as is allowable.

Relaxing the rules may result in the more wealthy, building their large format dream homes in Arrowtown instead of the hoped for multiples of small format homes. These large homes may occupy the land of 2,3 or even 4 intended small format homes. If this was to happen, we could see fewer residences in Arrowtown rather than more. They will also likely be occupied by empty nesters, not young families and may even be a second or third home so not continuously occupied.

The demand for such building opportunities would likely see even more pressure on real estate prices in Arrowtown, already one of the most expensive urban areas in the country.

The dream of affordable housing in Arrowtown is a dream only and will not be achieved by changing planning rules. Arrowtown's strong appeal will continue to find buyers that are prepared to pay and the market will dictate the cost.

The only way to ensure the intended outcome of creating more homes at reasonable cost is to intervene in the market as we have seen in the likes of the Tewa Banks development. Left to market forces, I suspect the Tewa Banks site would have been developed very differently. It is great to see this development go ahead in the form it has, it is good for Arrowtown.

So to conclude, changing the planning rules does not dictate market behaviour but could enable un-intended behaviours. I suggest the intended outcomes will not be gained as expected by the National Policy Statement and in fact, the outcome could be contrary to the objectives stated in the National Policy Statement in every way.

The risk of undermining the fragile and highly valued character of Arrowtown is too great to gamble on a maybe. The hope is the rule changes will deliver more residential dwellings, most likely they won't, certainly not affordable housing. This can't be undone once done. The compromise suggested in the Section 42A report is even less likely to deliver more homes as it sensibly reduces heights but still beyond what is the current norm. Therefore, it makes less sense than the original variation proposal if the objective

is to see more homes constructed. I urge you to focus on the why, Why are we engaged in this process? There is no evidence that the proposed variations or the s42A option will deliver more homes in Arrowtown given the market conditions that are at play. The people of Arrowtown have clearly shown that we don't want these rule changes as there is nothing to be gained from the likely erosion of the character of the town and the living environment we enjoy.

Please reject the proposed variations relating to Arrowtown's urban zones on the basis that they simply won't work as intended.