

**BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991 (the "Act")

AND

IN THE MATTER of the Queenstown Lakes District Proposed District Plan

EVIDENCE OF PATRICK JOHN BAXTER

[Wakatipu Basin Character]

1. My full name is Patrick John Baxter. I am a Director of Baxter Design Group Limited (BDG), a Queenstown based consultancy specialising in Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Master-planning, Landscape Planning and Landscape Assessment. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Science and Diploma of Landscape Architecture. I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects.
2. I have worked on rural projects in the Queenstown Lakes District since 1989. I was Principal Landscape Architect with Boffa Miskell Partners from 1989 to 1998, based in Queenstown and working throughout the South Pacific. In 1998 I formed Baxter Brown Planning and Design and that was changed to Baxter Design Group in 2004. Baxter Design Group currently have 10 staff and are involved in projects of varying form and scale. In that time I have designed numerous projects in rural areas within the Queenstown Lakes District.
3. The completed projects that I have undertaken a principal design role in include, by way of selected example: Millbrook Resort, Speargrass, Stonebridge, Northridge, Atley Downs, Lake Hayes Estate, the Terraces, Ayrburn Farm rural lots, Threepwood, Bendemeer, Royalburn Station, Matakauri Lodge, Blanket Bay Lodge, Butel Park, Tucker Beach rural lots and Glencoe Station.
4. In the majority of works that I have undertaken I have sought to maintain a balance, where appropriate, between the pattern of dwellings and open space and, more often than not, have recommended the establishment of covenants to maintain that balance.
5. I have read the document dated June 2014 entitled *Wakatipu Basin Residential Subdivision and Development: Landscape Character Assessment*, prepared by Dr Marion Read. I understand that this document forms part of the documentation and research which underpins Councils Chapter 6 Landscape s42a Report.
6. I have been requested to review and comment on page 5 of that report in which Dr Read describes the 'Current Condition' of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin. Dr Read states: *'The first goal of this project is assess the condition of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin to determine of its ability to absorb further landscape change. In order to fulfil this goal it is necessary to establish some principles on which to base the assessment.'*
7. In general I find that the '*key characteristics*' of the Wakatipu Basin, as listed to by Dr Read, to be misleading, heavily swayed towards a romantic image of

a 'rural' landscape, and far removed from reality. Dr Read uses her description of the '*existing condition*' of the Wakatipu Basin to argue what she variously describes as '*rural character*' or '*pastoral character*'. This description then becomes the basis for recommending areas where rural development may occur. I disagree with Dr Read's factual analysis of the landscape character of the Wakatipu Basin. In my opinion large parts of Wakatipu Basin actually have an established rural living character, one that has been guided and controlled through a lengthy planning process based on the retention of appropriate visual amenity values.

8. Dr Read states that the Wakatipu Basin is a landscape character area '*contained by significant mountains on all sides...*'. From that statement, and the description that follows, I understand that Dr Read is assessing the Basin lowlands, excluding the surrounding ONL. I adopt the same approach below.

9. I first list below Dr Read's '*key characteristics*' and comment on each briefly:

- '*Predominance of natural features over human made features*' – agree in part, because the elevated visible ice sculptured landforms, such as the Roche Moutonees of Morven Hill, Slope Hill, Queenstown Hill and Deer Park Heights, create a perception of predominance of natural features. This perception is supported by some less developed areas on the Basin floor. However that description does not apply to significant areas of the Basin which are more developed.
- '*High ratio of open space relative to the built environment and the presence of trees*' – agree in part in respect of those undeveloped areas referred to in the previous bullet point. However again this description does not apply to significant areas which are more developed and which in particular have many more trees.
- '*Significant areas in pasture, crops*' – incorrect. There are areas of pasture, and to a considerably lesser extent crops. However these form a minor part of the visible landscape character and cannot be described as occupying a '*significant*' part of the landscape.
- '*Presence of large numbers of farmed animals (sheep, cattle, deer, goats)*' – an incorrect description. Whilst farmed animals can be seen in the Basin, their numbers fall far short of '*large*'.
- '*Low population densities compared to urban centres*' – correct, as far as it goes. Any rural area will always have considerable less density than urban centres.

- *'Narrow unsealed roads'* –an accurate description of the roading network possibly 50 years ago, but an incorrect statement with regard to the present roading network in the Wakatipu Basin.
 - *Absence of Urban infrastructure* – correct, as would be expected in any rural area. I note that the lack of urban infrastructure has been one of the fundamental assessment matters in rural development in the last 15-20 years and a requirement of all 'recent' rural living development.
 - *Narrow range of tree species utilised for shelter* –Correct because most conifers are banned on the basis of wilding spread and there are few evergreen shelter tree species that are suitable to the climatic conditions of the Wakatipu Basin.
 - *Amenity tree species restricted to the immediate vicinity of dwellings* – Agree; this is a fundamental design principle of well-designed rural living development and has been consistent in all such development over the last 20 years.
10. The glaring omission from Dr Read's list of key characteristics is the extensive existence of houses and the rural living characteristics associated with these houses.
11. I set out below my description of the current condition of the Wakatipu Basin (excluding the surrounding ONL):
- A mix of visible open spaces, predominantly, the Roche Moutonees described above and small paddocks adjacent to lifestyle development, with some areas of larger open space such as the north side of Malaghans Road.
 - A contiguous pattern of visible lifestyle development alongside and/or visible from the majority of the roads of the Basin. That pattern is characterised by large scale indigenous planting and tree planting. Some developments have involved the retention of balanced open space, such as Stonebridge on Domain Road, Littles Stream on Little Road and Northridge to name examples. Other developments have involved a more even spread of development across the land, such as within the Hawthorn 'Triangle' for example.
 - Most views include a greater or lesser number of houses. There is usually a degree of landscape screening, but houses are a feature in many views.

- There has been a significant amount of tree planting within the Basin in the last 20 years. Much of that has taken place within the last 10 years. To that end, the landscape of the Basin is still in its infancy in regards to tree planting. In time, with the maturity of existing tree planting (and even if no further planting was undertaken) the landscape character of much of the Basin is going to change to a heavily treed park like character as trees grow and mature.
- Because many of those trees are deciduous, spring and autumn tree leaf colours will increasingly be a characteristic of the Basin.
- A consistency in setback and planting, and building form and colour. I note that this arises from the bulk of the lifestyle development undertaken in the last 20 years. To each dwelling undertaken in that time has been attached a rigorous set of controls and covenants relating to dwelling heights, colours and landscape works.
- Sealed roads in all but a few minor short sections of the district, with kerb and channel kept to an absolute minimum as a result of covenants and controls largely offered by applicants and controlled by Council.
- Street lighting only at State Highway intersections, where required by TNZ, with all rural lighting restricted to low level down lighting.
- Low visible numbers of stock, predominantly on Malaghans Road but very few in the rest of the Basin. The majority of small paddock spaces in the basin are either mown or managed by off-site farmers that bring stock in on demand to keep grass down. Visible evidence of farming is restricted to a few remaining pockets within the Basin. Recreational horse riding is becoming a frequently noticed activity,

12. In summary, the list of characteristics that I have set out above describe the current landscape character of the Wakatipu Basin. I am aware that many dwellings are yet to be built on approved lots, and the large number of rural developments that are in their infancy. Their development and maturity over time, when viewed in conjunction with the existing established lifestyle character, will shift the balance well towards a predominantly rural living character, far removed from the characteristics described by Dr Read in her description of the *'current condition'*.

13. Some people do and will view the change described above negatively, as Dr Read obviously does, primarily because of the loss of rural character. Others do and will view it positively, primarily because the rural living

characteristics create a more varied and interesting pattern and because many people actually like driving through the countryside and looking at other people's houses. I consider the key point to be the predominance of amenity tree planting which I have described above. Over time that will enhance the existing significantly treed aesthetic which I consider to be a pleasant and enjoyable aesthetic with a high degree of visual amenity, provided development is carried out under the stringent landscaping controls which have been consistently applied over the past 15-20 years in the Basin.

14. The rural living character I have described above varies throughout the Wakatipu Basin in terms of location, density, and the extent to which it has affected local landscape character. As a consequence there are some areas of the Basin which should be rezoned as rural residential rural lifestyle, some areas where I believe rural living development should be avoided, and other areas which can accommodate the limits to a greater or lesser extent, potentially including urban development. I have not been briefed to address this level of detail as I understand that will be dealt with during later hearings.