

**BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**UNDER** the Resource Management Act 1991

**IN THE MATTER** A variation to the QLDC Proposed  
District Plan – Urban intensification

**BY** **FRIENDS OF ARROWTOWN VILLAGE**

Various Submitters

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF PHILIP BLAKELY**

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Dated: 4 July 2025

## **Statement of evidence of Philip Blakely**

### **Introduction**

[1] My name is Philip Ronald Blakely.

### **Qualifications and Experience**

[2] I hold the qualification of Bachelor of Applied Science (Landscape Architecture) with Distinction from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. I am a Registered Member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (**NZILA**) and have served two terms on the Executive Committee of NZILA.

[3] I have had 40 years' experience as a practising landscape architect in both public and private practice. I have broad experience in landscape assessment, design and management (including heritage sites and landscapes). A focus of my work has been in the assessment of the impacts of development on the landscape and the integration of development into sensitive environments including heritage sites. From 1985-1997 I was senior landscape architect for the Department of Conservation based in Queenstown and worked on a range of site planning, design, management and landscape assessment across the activities and responsibilities of the Department including historic and heritage sites within the Conservation's estate. From 1997 to the present I have been in private practice for Blakely Wallace Associates (**BWA**).

[4] BWA led and produced the Glenorchy, Head of the Lake Community Plan and the Lawrence Community Plan. These plans assessed the context and growth of these communities within their local landscape and included planning and design strategies.

[5] In 2021-23 I was appointed to a National Panel to assess conservation values on Stewardship Land in the South Island and make recommendations to the Minister of Conservation on tenure and classification.

[6] I have had a long association with Arrowtown planning and design matters. This includes:

- (a) BWA led and produced the first Arrowtown Design Guidelines (**ADG**) 2006. I assisted/reviewed the 2016 ADG for QLDC which incorporated Medium Density Residential zones (**MDR**).
- (b) Member of the design team for both the 1994 and 2003 Arrowtown Charrettes/Community Plans.
- (c) Lead designer for Arrowtown Town Centre landscape development for Buckingham St and Ramshaw Lane (2004).
- (d) Committee member for Arrowtown Shaping our Futures 2017 and the 2022 review.
- (e) Prepared the Arrow River concept and development plan (adjacent to Arrowtown) for the Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**) in 2008.
- (f) Prepared a concept plan and detail design to guide the Buckingham St Miners Cottages for the Arrowtown Heritage Trust.
- (g) Site planning and design for the Arrowtown Chinese Settlement and Historic Reserve over many years for the Department of Conservation.
- (h) Developed the masterplan for the Arrowtown Lifestyle and Retirement Village Special Housing Area (2016) and provided landscape expertise throughout the consent process.
- (i) I am a long standing and current member of the Arrowtown Planning Advisory Group (**APAG**) which is a QLDC-appointed body that assesses applications for consent in Arrowtown's Historic Zone and provides advice on planning issues in the wider town.

### **Code of Conduct**

- [7] Although this is a Council hearing, I have read the Environment Court Code of Conduct for expert witnesses contained in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023 and agree to comply with it. I confirm that the opinions expressed in this statement are within my area of expertise

except where I state that I have relied on the evidence of other persons. I have not omitted to consider materials or facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions I have expressed.

### **Submitters represented**

[8] The Friends of Arrowtown Village has been formed as a consortium group to more efficiently and effectively represent a number of submitters on the Variation who have aligned interests. The full list of submitters and their individual submissions is explained in the evidence of Mr Hosie.

[9] I have close ties to Arrowtown and have lived in or near Arrowtown for 40 years. My landscape architecture consultancy business (BWA) is based in a heritage building in the Arrowtown Historic Heritage Precinct. I did not submit on the proposed Urban Intensification Variation (**UIV**) and confirm that I have been engaged as an independent expert and provide this evidence on that basis.

### **Scope of evidence**

[10] My evidence will address the overlap between landscape, urban design and special character in relation to the UIV proposed by QLDC.

[11] In the context of Arrowtown, landscape character and heritage values are inextricably intertwined and linked.

[12] The current professional practice of landscape architecture conceptualises landscape as three overlapping dimensions:

- (a) Physical (the physical environment – its collective natural and built components and processes); and
- (b) Associative (the meanings and values we associate with places); and
- (c) Perceptual (how we perceive and experience places).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Te Manu a te Manu Aotearoa NZ Landscape Assessment Guidelines

These three dimensions are important in understanding and assessing the effects of the UIV on the landscape context of Arrowtown.

[13] Landscape architecture evidence has a place in both urban and rural settings and in developing sound urban planning outcomes. Arrowtown has a unique combination of characteristics which mean it has a close relationship with, and influence on, the landscape (both within the town and its setting) to be considered as part of any changes to urban design outcomes. Arrowtown's interrelated relationship with its landscape has been recognised in planning and design documents, including the ADG (both 2006 and 2016 iterations). Arrowtown is unique in that the ADG reflect this, recognising both the landscape and built features.

[14] As background information and for the preparation of this evidence, I have read the following documentation:

- (a) QLDC s42A Report prepared by Ms Amy Bowbyes dated 6 June 2025
- (b) QLDC urban design evidence prepared by Mr Cam Wallace dated 6 June 2025
- (c) QLDC infrastructure evidence prepared by Mr Richard Powell dated 6 June 2025
- (d) QLDC heritage evidence prepared by Mr Richard Knott dated 6 June 2025
- (e) Evidence of Ms Heike Lutz for Friends of Arrowtown Village dated July 2025
- (f) Draft evidence of Mr David Clarke for the Friends of Arrowtown Village dated June 2025.

[15] My evidence is structured as follows:

- (a) Landscape character of Arrowtown
- (b) Relationship with proposed urban intensification

- (c) Effects of proposed urban intensification on landscape character of Arrowtown
- (d) Mitigation Recommendations
- (e) Conclusions

### **Assessment methodology**

[16] Key documents that have guided my evidence include:

- (a) ADG, 2016.
- (b) NZILA, Te Tangi a te Manu Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines..
- (c) Heike Lutz, Arrowtown Historic Heritage Character Assessment, May 2025.

[17] Section 6 of the RMA protects outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development. Arrowtown adjoins both Outstanding Natural Landscape (**ONL**) and Outstanding Natural Features (**ONF**) and is in the foreground of ONL. The Crown Range escarpment to the east and the mountain slopes to the north (including German Hill and Brow Peak) are ONL. The Arrow River (to the east and north east) and Feehly Hill (located on the northwest flank of the Old Town) are ONFs. The area affected by the proposed UIV will be in the foreground of the ONL and these ONFs, which will result in higher density and taller buildings in the MDR and Low Density Suburban Residential (**LDSR**) zones.

[18] Sections 7(c) and 7(f) of the RMA are relevant in relation to the proposed UIV. These include:

- (a) Section 7(c) – the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values; and
- (b) Section 7(f) – maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment.

[19] Higher order planning documents are also relevant e.g. Otago Regional Policy Statements are also relevant. Both the RPS 2019 and the Proposed RPS 2021 contain objectives and policies requiring the protection and enhancement of historic heritage values. These documents specifically refer to the importance of built character and cultural landscapes - an essential foundation for managing change in heritage towns like Arrowtown.<sup>2</sup>

### **Landscape character of Arrowtown**

[20] Arrowtown is discreetly tucked into the north eastern corner of the glacial formed Whakatipu Basin. It is enclosed and dominated by the steep mountain slopes of the Crown Terrace escarpment on the eastern side and mountain slopes to the north. The town is contained to the west and south by predominantly golf course parkland and rural residential land use which imparts a rural setting and effectively functioning as a greenbelt and Urban Growth Boundary (**UGB**). The more recent Arrowtown Retirement Village SHA to the south west is an exception and forms an enclave of clearly urban character beyond this containment.



*Photo 1: View of Arrowtown from Tobins Track depicting the town's context.*

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<sup>2</sup> RPS 2019 Policy 3.2.6, Policy 4.5.1; Proposed RPS 2021 NFL-P2, NFL-M3

[21] Arrowtown's unique location and topographical features forms a special setting for the historic town. It has its own specific identity which differs from all other towns.<sup>3</sup>

[22] At a more granular level, the ADG identifies the importance of the following features (but not limited to) as the essence of Arrowtown as it relates to landscape and streetscape character:

- (a) its' unique setting (next to the Arrow River and the enclosing hills and mountains)
- (b) low key, rural, small scale, early mining built heritage and features
- (c) the pattern and layout of settlement including lot size and layout
- (d) simplicity, spaciousness
- (e) informal, organic, natural surfaces
- (f) lack of traditional urban streetscape elements (such kerbs and channel), narrow roads
- (g) a walking town
- (h) abundant vegetation, mature trees, plantings, green spaces, grass verges, gravel road shoulders, semi wild character, with trees dominating and usually taller than buildings
- (i) views and vistas to surrounding natural features and landscape.

[23] Arrowtown's character is the product of its origins, consistency, modest scale, and natural setting. This character is unique within the District and central to Arrowtown's identity as both a heritage township and a living community.<sup>4</sup>

[24] Planning documents have sought to protect the unique character of Arrowtown over many years.

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<sup>3</sup> Arrowtown Design Guidelines, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Evidence of Heike Lutz

- [25] Collectively, the Town Centre and the AHRMZ (**Old Town**) give rise to the special identity and landscape character of Arrowtown. With the growth of the town since the 1960's there was a recognition and strong desire by the community for there to be a visual cohesion and connection between old Arrowtown and the newer residential areas.
- [26] Despite some very large houses, and some discreet instances of designs that are uncharacteristic to Arrowtown on the western and southern ridge in recent years (e.g. Cotter Ave, Advance Terrace) there is, in my opinion, a consistency and visual cohesion primarily as a result of current height controls and density. The consistency is derived from a mix of single and low scale double storey buildings across the whole town and the effect of planting and vegetation to soften built form.
- [27] A feature of Arrowtown, especially within the area identified as the ARHMZ and the more established newer areas, is the dominance of trees and vegetation which also contributes to this consistency and visual cohesion across the town. Building height, design standards, and density controls are important in allowing for the presence of trees and vegetation within new development.



*Photo 2: View from Feehly Hill. There is a consistency and visual cohesion across the town and a dominance of trees and vegetation.*

[28] I agree with the comment by Mr Knott in his evidence at p. 6.6:

*Whilst there is some variation in character across the residential zones (ARHMZ, MDRZ, LDSRZ) each is characteristically Arrowtown.*

[29] The existing character and amenity of the town is important in the appreciation of views to the surrounding landscape and features. This is primarily due to the limits to the heights of buildings which allows for unobstructed viewshafts of the surrounding landscape and features to be maintained.

[30] In addition to viewshafts to the surrounding mountains/wider landscape being an important and notable feature throughout the town, views over and across the town from vantage points such as Tobins track, Mt Beetham, Soldiers Hill, Feehly Hill and other publicly accessible elevated locations are also important. Landscape values in the PDP reference historic character and views. Of particular relevance is the Haehaenui Arrow River Schedule of Landscape Values which notes the:<sup>5</sup>

- (a) *visually discreet character of the majority of built development bordering the area; and*
- (b) *the historic built development that is seen in places*

as contributing to the aesthetic appeal of the Arrow River on a finer scale.

### **Relationship with urban intensification**

[31] The relationship between the surrounding landscape context and setting and the built environment is an important aspect of Arrowtown's character e.g. the small township, surrounded by parkland and a rural setting, and nestled into the corner of a dramatic physical landscape provides context and meaning for the historic village. The town sits harmoniously into this setting and, in turn, the setting provides the backdrop for understanding and appreciation of the historic core.

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<sup>5</sup> Section 21.22.8.57.c

[32] In the same way that Arrowtown's UGB controls the size of the town and gives meaning to, and provides understanding of, the historic context, it is important that new development within the town is compatible and harmonious with the historic and landscape context and sits comfortably in the landscape.

[33] The distinguishing features of Arrowtown's landscape character have been described above in my evidence and also in Heike Lutz's 'Arrowtown Historic Heritage and Character Assessment' report which I concur with:

*The distinctiveness of Arrowtown lies not only in its heritage origins but also in the consistency of scale, integration of mature vegetation across both historic and newer areas (within the UGB) and the open views to the surrounding hills from nearly every part of the town. These qualities are fundamental to Arrowtown's character and contribute to its enduring appeal for both residents and visitors.*

#### **Effects of proposed variation (as notified) on landscape character of Arrowtown**

[34] The effects of the proposed variation on the landscape character of Arrowtown, including in respect of amendments proposed through the s42A report and evidence, are effects at both a contextual level and effects within the town on streetscape, landscape character and amenity. The effects are outlined below. These comments relate to both the notified variation and the revised variation as recommended in the s42A report, although the effects are somewhat lesser but still significant in respect of amendments proposed through the s42A report.

(a) From elevated points around the town, the changes in height and density (especially in the MDRZ and to a lesser extent within the LDSRZ) will be highly visible in the landscape. The area affected by the proposed UIV will also be in the foreground of the ONL of the Crown Terrace escarpment and enclosing mountains to the north which will result in higher density and taller buildings in the MDRZ and LDSRZ. In my opinion this will have some effects on 'the physical environment' on the foreground of the ONL

landscape. Due to the scale of the surrounding landscape the effects will not be adverse on a landscape scale. However, in terms of the perceptual (how we perceive and experience places) and associative effects (the meanings and values we associate with places) the changes will affect the human scale of the urban development, relative to the landscape.

- (b) It will impact and change the perception of the small scale, unified, coherent historic town nestled easily into its location, and importantly providing the setting and context for the historic/heritage town. This is exacerbated by the location of MDRZ being closer to, and therefore having greater effect on, the Old Town Historic zones (i.e. Town Centre/TCZ and ARHMZ). This has implications for section 6 of the RMA in terms of protection of adverse effects on the foreground of an ONL.
- (c) Impact on the views and viewshafts to surrounding mountains and wider landscape from within the town by taller buildings and higher densities blocking and interrupting views.
- (d) Effects on the character and amenity of the historic core both the TCZ and the AHRMZ. The variation result in, and increase, the town's population<sup>6</sup> which will put further pressure on the Old Town in terms of parking, and people eroding the fragile characteristics and features that are the essence of the Old Town. It is already at capacity especially in the summer months. As a member of APAG I have personally witnessed the huge growth in the town over the last 20 years and the consequent effects on key features contributing to streetscape character and amenity. Specifically this includes: wear and tear and damage to grass drainage swales and grass verges by vehicles and pedestrians; streets close to the Town Centre in the AHRMZ are already increasingly being dominated by vehicles. Vehicles and parking on grass verges in the AHRMZ causes damage to both gravel shoulders and grass verges and can overwhelm the heritage elements in these streets. There is ongoing pressure within the TCZ and AHRMZ to

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<sup>6</sup> Evidence of Susan Fairgray para. 6.58 and 6.59

'upgrade' to more modern urban features like concrete kerb and channels, hard pedestrian surfaces e.g. concrete or asphalt, and replace gravel carparks with asphalt and/or chip seal because of wear and tear. More people will only compound this problem along with infrastructure solutions required to accommodate the same.

- (e) Within the New Town (MDRZ and LDSRZ) the combined effects of the changes to height and density would substantially alter Arrowtown's low rise, open landscape and streetscape character and amenity. The changes to height and density initially proposed by the UIV:

*i.e. heights of up to 12 metres (11m + 1m pitched roof) in the MDR zone and 8 metres in the LDSR zone. In the MDR zone, minimum lot sizes (currently 650m<sup>2</sup>) and the one-dwelling-per-site standard would be removed, enabling two or more dwellings per site as a restricted discretionary activity.*

- (f) The variation also changes recession planes. In the MDR zone the increased density and height will significantly change the 'spatial relationship' low rise and informal feel of Arrowtown. There would be less space for vegetation and trees to soften built form. In terms of streetscape there will be more vehicles, parking and clutter. Drainage swales (for example in Adamson Drive) will become unworkable because of the number of crossings required to accommodate the increase in density and will inevitably require more intensive urban solutions like kerb and channel. The informal, low key, narrow roads, pedestrian friendly streets characteristic of a small town will be lost. These components make an important contribution to landscape and amenity values. In general, buildings of the height and scale permitted by the notified variation in both zones would be out of keeping with the lower scale buildings characteristic of the town as a whole. This applies also to the s42A report recommendations which allows for three storey buildings.

## Mitigation recommendations

[35] In my opinion, some modest density changes and low building heights across the township for both MDZ and LDRSZ is key to retaining the landscape character and amenity of the town as a whole and to respecting the historic context of the Old Town. I consider that a maximum of two storeys should apply to both the MDR zone and the LDRZ with possibly an exception for the Local Shopping Centre Zone (**LSCZ**). I explain this in more detail below.

[36] In the MDR zone I consider the 7m height restriction should remain, i.e. support retention of the status quo for both height and density. In particular this is supported by:

- (a) The key conclusion of Heike Lutz's evidence:<sup>7</sup> *that Arrowtown is a heritage town of rare and cohesive character, defined by its modest scale, historic built form, and strong integration with topography and landscape. This character extends beyond the formally protected historic zones, encompassing the wider township, which acts as both a buffer and continuation of the town's historic values. Its significance is widely acknowledged and is not comparable to other settlements in the Queenstown Lakes District.*
- (b) This will help to protect values of surrounding ONL and ONFs by maintaining the human scale of the urban development relative to the scale and context of the surrounding landscape.
- (c) Assist with retaining historical references to the Old Town (refer para 21) e.g. low key, rural, small scale; pattern and layout of settlement; infrastructure features such as grass swales and no kerbs and channels.
- (d) In particular, noting that some recent examples of out of character designs have been approved under the current framework, this will

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<sup>7</sup> At [80].

safeguard against a continued exacerbation of that and ensure the ADG remains relevant and fit for purpose.

- [37] In the LDR zone, I consider 8m is too high and that the current limit of 6.5m should be retained but with the ability to increase height (up to a maximum of 7m and some increase in density) by way of a discretionary consent. This should be ensured to occur only with adherence to the ADG and rigorous assessment.
- [38] The new buildings currently being constructed in the Tewa Banks Affordable Housing project (refer Figure 3 below) demonstrate that density can be increased and two storeys achieved within the current LDR zone rules (maximum of 6.5m for a flat site). The current LDR zone building height also allows for views to the mountains to be retained. Increasing the height to 8m would be uncharacteristic of Arrowtown and block views to the surrounding mountains.



*Figure 3: Tewa Banks Affordable Housing Project, Jopp St, Arrowtown. 8m would be too high to the street and block views of the mountains*

**Conclusion**

- [39] Within the New Town (MDRZ and LDSRZ) the combined effects of the changes to height and density would substantially alter Arrowtown’s, low rise, open landscape and streetscape character and amenity.
- [40] The proposed variation, even with the more moderate changes supported in Council’s s42A report and evidence, will adversely impact on the setting and context for the historic/heritage town.
- [41] The proposed variation threatens the visual cohesion and connection between the Old Town and newer residential areas.
- [42] The variation threatens landscape and amenity values and appreciation of those values.
- [43] The proposed variation exacerbates threats to the character and amenity in the historic core by more vehicles and people degrading heritage elements and features.

Dated 4 July, 2025

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Philip Blakely