

Urban Intensification Variation

Written Presentation of John Marris – Submitter number 345

My name is John Marris. Along with my wife and family, we own a house in Pritchard Place, Arrowtown in the Medium Density Residential Zone. Although we are residents of Christchurch, we spend as much time in Arrowtown as we are able and in the future plan to achieve our dream of retiring in Arrowtown. I have been visiting Arrowtown for over 60 years and the town is a very special place to me. I am presenting to the Commissioners as a lay witness.

I request that the proposals in the Section 42A Report are rejected, as are the original proposals notified by the QLDC for changes to the MDRZ and LDRZ in Arrowtown, including the maximum height increases that were proposed. I request that the status quo is retained for the planning rules applicable to Arrowtown, but with increased emphasis on the Arrowtown Design Guidelines.

I am opposed to the Section 42A and original QLDC proposals for the following reasons:

Failure to consider the special character of Arrowtown

Arrowtown has a special character that is unique to the QLDC region and is significant nationally. The special nature of Arrowtown lies in part in the historic zone of the town, but it is much more than that. The generally low-level, single-story dwellings, many of which were built as cribs or holiday homes, combined with well planted, mature gardens lend the township a beautiful, peaceful, village-like character. Future development of the town should remain consistent with this character. If the proposed changes to height restrictions in the Medium Density Residential Zone (MDRZ) were to be approved it would likely turn Arrowtown into an artificial, tourist-focussed toy town with a small, well-preserved historic centre bounded by city style suburbia. The proposed changes to height restrictions are fundamentally not suitable for a small town with predominantly low-rise, cottage-style dwellings in a rural setting and are at odds with the Arrowtown Design Guidelines.

Failure to achieve increased housing goals

The proposed changes will have negligible overall impact for the Queenstown Lakes District in achieving the goal of higher density living, while having an overwhelmingly detrimental effect on existing homeowners in the wider Arrowtown community as well as visitors to the town and to tourism.

The high land value of properties within Arrowtown will mean it will only be economic to build high value, larger houses that house relatively few people. This will minimize the intended goal of increasing housing density. The high cost of these builds will likely mean that many will be purchased by absentee owners or as short-term rentals, further negating the intended aim of achieving higher density living.

We have seen a precise example of this in the development at 4 Pritchard Place – see figures 1 & 2 at the end of this submission. The previous single dwelling on a well-planted section was sympathetic with the existing character of the street and of wider Arrowtown. This has been replaced by two very high, monolithic, apartment style houses that are poorly suited to family living, with barely any useable outdoor space and a token, largely treeless green space. The multimillion dollar asking price for the property currently on sale is vastly beyond the means of most Kiwi families. It seems it will most probably be sold to a wealthy out-of-town Aucklanders or Sydneysiders or perhaps operated as an Airbnb.

Impact on views

The proposed changes will have a hugely detrimental effect on surrounding views within Arrowtown and beyond. One of the great charms of Arrowtown is its close proximity to, and brilliant views of, the surrounding peaks, hills and ranges. The prospect of these views being blocked by dwellings up to 9 m in height (and even more so 12m under the original notified proposals) is abhorrent. Even at the lower height of 9m now proposed under the s42A report (when including the roof), many of the iconic views that Arrowtown is renowned for, such as the Crown Terrace face (with its famed autumn colours) to the east, The Remarkables to the south, and Brow Peak and German Hill to the North, would be significantly obscured by up to 3-storey high dwellings.

Again, 4 Pritchard Place is an excellent example of how inappropriate, badly designed and poorly sited buildings can impact on views. The two units are on a raised platform with respect to a single level dwelling to the east and tower above it while obscuring any views to the west. The house to the west, though on a raised platform itself has had its once spectacular views of the Crown Terrace obliterated. And, perhaps worst of all is the house to the south that has lost its northern views and corresponding sun. Moreover, the detrimental impacts of these dwellings on people's views extend well beyond the immediate neighbours. Ironically, the rear of the two sections at 4 Pritchard Place shows some of the worst features of poor planning relating to views and shading. That unit has a large north facing window and balcony from which the occupants can stare straight into the blank wall of the other unit at close proximity.

This new development at 4 Pritchard Place has been made under the existing regulations. The thought of it being built up to 2 m higher under the proposed Section 42A proposal is appalling and abhorrent. Aside from the view impact to house owners, the loosening of the height limit to up to 8 m + 1m for roof would have a much wider general impact. Currently we all enjoy the ability to walk around the streets of Arrowtown and take in the stunning scenery. The possibility of high density, high-rise constructions will also contribute to taking away these much-loved views.

Impact on shading

As for comments above regarding the loss of views, the same is true for the loss of sunlight through shading. Residents rely on solar heat gain to at least supplement their own heating. An increase in shade will inevitably lead to the need for more heating, including increased use of fires. The smoke pollution in Arrowtown is already bad enough without the need for increased fire usage.

There is a large body of scientific evidence to support the need for good levels of sunlight for good health and wellbeing. The increase in shade from the proposed height changes will undoubtedly impact people's health, particularly the elderly who may have reduced mobility.

Lack of adequate infrastructure

The existing infrastructure in the MDRZ in Arrowtown, and possibly other parts of Arrowtown, is already insufficient and inadequate to cope with the current population. The proposed height changes will increase pressure on infrastructure if the Council's goal of higher population density arises. Of particular concern is the lack of stormwater drainage, the lack of on-street parking and the lack or absence of footpaths.

Climate change will lead to increased occurrences of extreme weather events, such as heavy rain in Arrowtown and flooding in Queenstown in recent years. It is highly likely that, without major expenditure being invested into stormwater drainage, these events will cause significant damage under a higher density housing regime.

The relatively narrow streets in the MDRZ in Arrowtown already create problems of parking congestion. High levels of on-street parking already constrain traffic movement, damage the verge and, most importantly, block safe pedestrian movement. A move to higher density living will doubtless worsen this problem. I understand that part of the rationale of the location of the MDRZ is due to the access to grocery shopping at the Adamson Drive Four Square. Under current conditions it is common for parking rules to be broken, with vehicles stopping on yellow lines, in the bus stop and in the disabled parking area. Again, this sort of behaviour is bound to worsen with an increased population density.

Impact on Biodiversity

An increase in housing density will inevitably lead to harmful impacts on biodiversity. Currently we enjoy regular visits by flocks of tūī, bellbird/korimako and karearea/New Zealand falcon. We regularly see karearea flying overhead and occasionally have them perching on one of the larger trees in our street. There are not many places in New Zealand where you can experience that. The presence of these species has increased significantly in recent years, in part, through outstanding community-led efforts. Higher density living will result in the removal of many of the trees in the zone, especially larger trees, and a general reduction in the green space needed to support these (and other) taonga species. Aside from the environmental benefits from enhancing biodiversity within the Arrowtown environs, the presence of these species is of value to the town's human inhabitants. There is excellent evidence showing the health and wellbeing benefits of having a closer relationship to the natural environment.

Pointing again to our experience with 4 Pritchard Place, we have seen a section with a beautiful green space with large, mature trees become a barren expanse of concrete, except for a token lawn and border hedging. The only trees on the section are planted so close to the buildings that they will never be able to grow to maturity. This type of development will lead to biodiversity losses within Arrowtown.

The problem with retrospective changes

One of the most significant problems with the implementation of the Section 42A proposal is that this would apply to an existing, mature community that has grown under a different set of building restrictions. The consequence of this would be that Arrowtown would become an uncoordinated mix of low- and high-level dwellings. Aside from the poor visual impact this would create and the loss of the town's architectural character, it will have a devastating impact on the unfortunate neighbours who will be towered over, looked down upon and shaded, while also having their views obliterated by neighbours up to 3 storey levels and 9 m high.

Referring to 4 Pritchard Place again, we have seen firsthand the unreasonable levels of stress caused to neighbours by the imposition of inconsiderate designs such as these buildings, and that is under the current rules. It is completely unfair and unreasonable to allow any further relaxing of these rules to allow greater height buildings.

It's not about being a NIMBY

It would be very easy to dismiss criticisms of the Section 42A proposals, and those originally notified by the QLDC, as simply the reactions of Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) residents who are fundamentally opposed to change. But there are very good, sensible reasons as to why so many of the Arrowtown residents are opposed to the proposals, as evidenced by the overwhelming number of submissions in opposition.

I am genuinely not opposed to good quality high-density housing. I fully believe we need more of it in New Zealand. But Arrowtown is not an appropriate place to achieve this due to its unique features of its landscape setting, proximity to the surrounding hills and mountains, its historic legacy and the characterful nature of its dwellings.

One of the best comparisons within New Zealand is Akaroa. Like Arrowtown it has a rich colonial history with many heritage buildings respectfully retained. It also sits in an outstanding scenic setting and has a strong connection to the natural environment. Also, like Arrowtown it has many houses that were built as holiday homes that are generally single storey dwellings. They may not be heritage buildings, but they do reflect the history of the town. Akaroa also has a strongly cohesive community of people living there. The town also faces similar challenges as Arrowtown with issues with the infrastructure, such as sewerage, stormwater and parking. My understanding is that the Christchurch City Council is proposing not to enforce height density housing provisions in Akaroa in recognition of its special character. My hope is that there is the same result with Arrowtown in recognition of its special character.

Ultimately, the decision on how to proceed with the proposed QLDC for changes to the MDRZ and LDRZ in Arrowtown will be a matter of weighing up the risk versus the reward. In my view the risk is high. Arrowtown has a unique character that is special to the QLDC area and beyond. If the proposals were to be adopted that character will be lost forever. In contrast the rewards are negligible. The aim to achieve high density living within Arrowtown will simply not be made due to the reasons given above regarding the financial barriers to achieving this. I sincerely request that the status quo is retained for the planning rules applicable to Arrowtown, but with increased emphasis on the Arrowtown Design Guidelines.

John Marris

30 July 2025

Figure 1 & 2 – the properties at 4 Pritchard Place, Arrowtown, referred to in this submission.

