

**APPENDIX D - URBAN DESIGN ASSESSMENT IN RESPONSE TO  
VARIOUS SUBMISSIONS**

## **1 Introduction**

1.1 My name is Tim Williams I hold the Qualifications of Bachelor of Resource Studies from Lincoln University and Masters of Urban Design and Development with Distinction from The University of New South Wales. I have practised in the planning field in the Queenstown Lakes District since 2003 and am currently employed by the Queenstown Lakes District Council as an Urban Designer. I reside in Queenstown.

1.2 I have reviewed the application prepared by John Edmonds and Associates regarding the proposed private plan change request including and urban design assessment prepared by RA Skidmore Urban Design and subsequent addendum report. I am familiar with the site and its context and have recently visited it for the purposes of this assessment.

1.3 I have been asked to provide urban design advice to assist the planner in the preparation of the S42A report.

## **2 Context**

2.1 The urban design assessment by *RA Skidmore Urban Design* submitted with the Plan Change application provides an analysis of the site and surrounding context and identifies a number of key constraints and opportunities. Being familiar with the Plan Change area and surroundings, and having visited the site for the purposes of this report I agree with this context analysis, making the following further comments on key aspects of the context:

2.2 The site is located in close proximity to the existing commercial area of Frankton and other amenities such as the events/aquatic centre, Frankton Village shops and the Frankton Bus Exchange. However, the site is isolated from these facilities due to the state highway and cemetery creating a barrier and the lack of pedestrian connectivity to the existing Frankton environment.

2.3 Currently the land is zoned for low density residential development, with a requirement for a footpath to be constructed along the highway frontage and planting of a 5 metre landscape strip adjacent to the highway. Accordingly, built form can be anticipated to develop on the site. As noted in the urban design assessment provided with the application low density development of the site would most likely result in the backs of the lots fronting the highway with fences running the length of that boundary. The required landscaping would soften this (particularly as trees have to be able to grow to at least 3 metres at maturity), however, this plan change does provide the opportunity to improve the relationship the development has with the highway and therefore positively contributing to the entry experience into Frankton and Queenstown in a more active manner. The development of a mixed-use precinct also has the opportunity, if strongly connected to the identified 'strengths' associated with the proximity of the site, to positively contribute to the fabric of Frankton.

2.4 However, the plan change as proposed does very little to address the existing constraints and in particular develop connections to the wider environment to support the proposed change in use and increased density on the site. Currently the matters relevant to assessment of an outline development plan include:

*Pedestrian safety and permeability within the site, including provision for a pedestrian connection to the adjoining Terrace Junction to the east.*

Although this is a positive mention of a pedestrian linkage, it is not necessarily required and is the only connection that appears to be provided for in the provisions for the proposed zone.

- 2.5 The omission of a street connection to the Terrace Junction development at the back of the site is an example of how the development has not addressed its current isolation. Providing for a vehicle connection here would improve the overall connectivity of the site. Providing vehicle movement through this area would also assist with the safety of pedestrians and cyclists utilising this connection as well. Without traffic movement providing a pedestrian connection to terrace conjunction in this location would have safety challenges given the lack of activity that would be associated with this area.
- 2.6 The development of other connections, including across the highway to the Events/Aquatic centre and greater assurance regarding the pedestrian connection to Frankton along the highway frontage are necessary. Given these connections would require approval from other parties assurance needs to be provided that in principle these connections can be made and subsequently provided for in the zoning provisions for the site.
- 2.7 If these wider connections cannot be resolved to support the development of the site it will do little to contribute to the consolidation of Frankton as a centre or improvement for the amenity of people if they were to live and work in the site or seek to visit it by means other than car.

### **3 Site Layout**

- 3.1 The request includes an indicative layout plan and although not fully resolved. It does serve to illustrate one design solution for the site and presents the opportunity to discuss some shortfalls with this one example of a potential layout. It also provides the opportunity to consider, if this were a layout subsequently promoted in the future development of the zone whether enough guidance is currently provided in the proposed provision to identify shortfalls and provide adequate mechanisms to direct change.
- 3.2 The indicative layout plan illustrates how car parking ratios can drive the overall layout of the site when there are no specific limits on floor space. In this situation a 'maximum' development scenario effectively represents the greatest floor area that can fit all the necessary car parking spaces required. This consequently creates a lack of successful or pleasant amenity space, and challenges for the future design of the buildings, as almost all facades are presented to the public and the public domain is effectively the left over space.
- 3.3 In addition reliance on a site coverage rule also suggests a level of control over development of the site and therefore amenity. However, as illustrated by the 'indicative layout' plan, which only achieves a 33% site coverage, this lower site coverage does not automatically mean a higher quality space for residents or visitors is provided.
- 3.4 It is considered the strengths of this Plan Change relate to providing a mixed use development. Therefore, provision of residential living is important. Consequently, the layout of the development needs to provide a balance between commercial activity and high quality space for future residents.
- 3.5 It is considered an outline development plan process can provide an effective tool for addressing the layout of the site and the discretionary status of this process is supported. However, further guidance should be provided in the assessment matters and policies to ensure a clear vision for the layout of the site is communicated regarding the public domain and the development of the site to provide for the amenity of

residents in addition to commercial activity and pedestrians. One way to achieve this would be to require a public domain plan to be developed with assessment provided on how this then informs the layout of the site and provides for all future users and in particular residents. This would then ensure the public domain and amenity of residents and visitors is also informing the layout of the site rather than this being driven by parking ratios and floor space. It is considered this should be in the form of specific public domain policies and assessment matters to inform a future outline development plan proposal

3.5 As development of the site may not take place all at once an assessment matter should also be added to the outline development plan assessment to consider the staging of development and how this can occur in a logical manner. This should consider landscaping and the public domain and how it can ensure key connections beyond the site and the public domain are established in the initial stage of the development. Given the sensitivity of the highway frontage the comprehensive development of this frontage should occur in advance of other areas of the site where it can effectively sleeve development behind. In a similar manner, ensuring pedestrian connections to Frankton and across the highway are developed first will ensure the development is successfully integrated into the Frankton environment from the outset.

3.6 Given the outline development plan will be critical to the comprehensive development of the site any development before the approval of this should be strongly discouraged.

#### **4 State Highway Frontage**

4.1 The location of the site along the State Highway and how future built form here will contribute to the entry experience to Frankton (and on to Queenstown) is considered critical in the assessment of this plan change.

4.2 It is important to note that although in this location the roading environment is designated State Highway the actual speed of traffic along this frontage is more akin to an urban environment (with a 50km posted speed limit and given the proximity to existing and proposed intersections). This traffic environment subsequently leads to a change in the manner that future development should respond to the adjoining road.

4.3 Considering the wider context of the site, the development of a strong built edge to the highway is considered to be an appropriate design response, as it will contrast the openness of the park-like setting associated with the events/aquatic centre and golf course across the highway. Such a response will also contribute to a sense of arrival in conjunction with a slowing of traffic speed as vehicles approach the roundabout and Frankton.

4.4 In terms of addressing the State Highway frontage, the Plan Change proposes the use of a five metre landscape setback for buildings from the road boundary and controls over buildings, in looking to provide built form with a positive interface to the highway.

4.5 However, fundamentally, the plan change provisions allow for a model of development that is internally focused and does not front the highway. The controls proposed within the plan change which will remedy this are not considered to be effective or certain enough to achieve an appropriate response, given the importance of this site informing the entry to Frankton/Queenstown.

4.6 In particular, as depicted in the 'indicative layout plan' the development will not front the highway due to car parking and entry to buildings being located internally. Subsequently, the application relies on design controls to mitigate blank walls being presented to the highway.

- 4.7 Difficulty arises with this solution as the standard retail model for a shop layout is an entrance and facade forming the retail frontage, and a back of house area for storage, office or secure area uses. A conflict arises with the proposed solution whereby two fronts to the building are effectively being required, one to the internal car park area where the car parking and main entry would likely establish, and a second being prescribed through the proposed provisions relating to activation and levels of glazing to the highway.
- 4.8 Examples should be provided by the applicant to illustrate how this has successfully worked for commercial development of the nature envisaged within this zone. There is a risk that although for example windows are provided on the highway elevation to activate this frontage, they are blocked out over time, and businesses further seek to utilise the highway exposure only for signage purposes, which should be avoided. Although in a different topographical environment, the Gorge Road retail centre at the end of Gorge Road Queenstown illustrates a built example of an internally focused retail centre and the results of a development model with central car parking where buildings front the car park with backs to the road.
- 4.9 It is noted that the principle of using the buildings to sleeve large areas of surface car parking from the State Highway is supported and should be required in the provisions for the zone. However, more certainty in terms of achieving a successful road frontage can be provided on the site through a re-arrangement of the built form, one possible technique allowing this would be the use of a slip road/ lane within the site running parallel to the highway. Given the ability to provide street trees, footpaths, parking and a legitimate building frontage facing south, a more urban response would be developed. This could be provided without necessarily having to retain a 5 metre landscape strip, rather this space may be utilised for a small scale streetscape solution with trees, plant-outs and some parking. Such an arrangement would then provide direct access to commercial development fronting the highway where buildings would naturally front the highway rather than being forced to design a 'frontage' at the rear of a tenancy. The existing arrangement at the Frankton village illustrates an example of this and a similar approach is proposed for part of the Frankton Flats (B) zone. An indicative cross section is provided below to illustrate a possible solution where one-way traffic is provided along with parallel parking on one side.

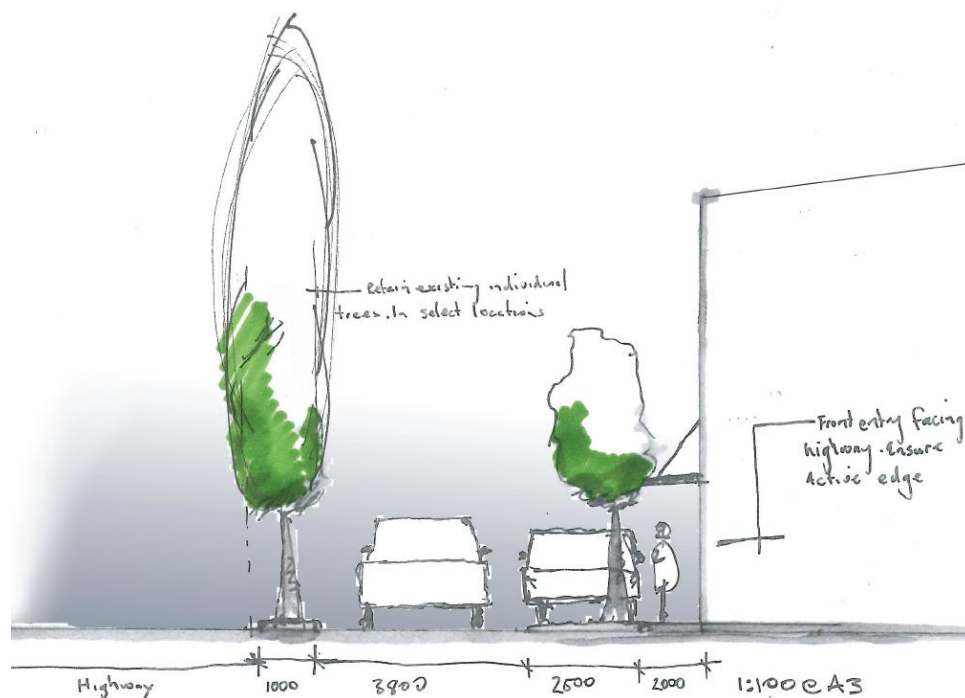


Figure 1: indicative section: Highway

- 4.10 In my view this type of response to the highway would provide more certainty and a better design solution than relying on a landscape setback and controls over the built form that faces the highway, when the model adopted is internally focused. Providing for car parking in a street arrangement would not in my opinion detract from the entry experience in the same manner large areas of surface car parking would. If this type of alternative approach was to be adopted it should be prescribed in the provisions for the zone.
- 4.11 In terms of this matter, the Plan Change application discusses a permitted baseline scenario of rear fences fronting the highway. Given the existing landscaping provisions require fairly substantial trees (1.5m) at the time of planting (which would assist to screen the extent of such fencing); in my view these potential adverse effects of such development in terms of the highway frontage are overstated. Without greater certainty over the way proposed development will present to the highway the plan change as sought would not necessarily result in an improved outcome, and given signage (discussed below) which is more likely with the commercial zoning proposed, a less desirable outcome could result.
- 4.12 To further support providing a strong edge to the highway and certainty over this outcome a requirement that buildings are two stories in height and run the length of this boundary should be provided. It is considered this level of prescription is justified given the importance development along this frontage will play in the entry experience to Frankton and Queenstown. Provisions detailed in the Three Parks special zone relating to mainstreet development provide a good example of how provisions could be worded to achieve this outcome.

## **5 Built Form**

- 5.1 The proposed controls over the height of buildings are considered to be a positive aspect of the proposal and the principle of the height of buildings increasing closer to the hill at the rear of the site is supported. Likewise the control of building height through a combination of storeys and height limit will provide an incentive for articulated roof forms.
- 5.2 In my view, a controlled activity status could be appropriate for the assessment of the built form. However, this is on the premise that most of the major factors influencing the built form and therefore potential adverse effects will have been established through the layout of the site in the outline development plan process. Resolution of, for example how the layout presents buildings to the highway (discussed above) and the general arrangement of streets and open space will largely determine how buildings will then be designed to respond to these spaces. Provided the layout of buildings is appropriate the physical design of the facades can be adequately addressed through a controlled activity status.
- 5.3 The assessment matters detailed in the Plan Change for consideration of buildings are also considered to provide good guidance over the principles that need to be considered when individual buildings are being designed.

## **6 Residential Activity**

- 6.1 The application identifies the amenity of the site is not well suited for low-density residential living. However the indicative layout provided with the application as an alternative illustrates a very poor amenity for future residents of the site. Although the location of the site is in principle well sited to provide access to amenities in close proximity such as the events/aquatic centre and associated green space, the constraints of the site mean that physically getting to these will be very difficult (as discussed above) and very little space is available within the development for residents. Given the shading provided from the hill to the

north locating residential activity at the back of the site places residences in the area of the site with the least amount of sun.

It is also noted that ensuring residential activity establishes on the site will also be critical for the zone to develop into a true mixed-use environment. Therefore, the provisions for the zone should require a minimum number of residential units.

6.2 It is considered at outline development plan stage more assessment should be provided around the location of residential activity to ensure residential amenity is given higher priority. Provisions could relate to ensuring sunlight to outdoor areas for a minimum length of time during winter months for example.

6.3 It is noted the current provisions requires a minimum 8m<sup>2</sup> of private outdoor living space, which is considered a 'minimum' area to provide for a table and chairs. The assessment matters suggest consideration of alternatives to provide for less private open space (vii Site Standard – Outdoor Living Space). The assessment matters suggest less access to sunlight and/or areas of communal space can compensate for a reduced area, it is considered the provision of space available exclusively for a residential unit is imperative to providing the necessary amenity associated with a higher density living environment. Therefore, given 8m<sup>2</sup> is a 'minimum' any further reduction in this standard for each individual unit should be discouraged. If a reduction is to be considered the assessment should focus on ensuring the space that is provided to the residence is functional. For example can still provide for a table and chair arrangement. If such a space cannot be provided then the space would be ineffective in providing for its purpose.

6.4 It is noted that the final assessment matter under the outdoor living space site standard states:

*The extent to which a consistent and comprehensive palette of materials is used for paving and street/open space furniture (including seating, lighting and rubbish bins). Selections of these elements should be considered in association with building design.*

It is considered this assessment matter should be located within the assessment of the outline development plan given matters of paving treatment and street furniture etc should be considered at the outline development plan stage not as part of a potential reduction in outdoor living space.

6.5 The development of space within the site for residents as part of the outline development plan would also assist to provide a pleasant environment for those living there and contribute to the success of the site as a mixed use environment. Such a space could be integrated and shared with the commercial use also proposed for the site, for example some form of pocket park. This space could also positively contribute to the existing Frankton environment by providing a type of space not currently provided for. Therefore, locating this space toward the Frankton end of the development would be logical. It is important that the identification of this type of space is part of the outline development plan process to ensure it informs the overall layout of the development rather than just being a left over space.

6.6 Currently an assessment matter is provided for outline development plan assessment that states:

*The ability to provide adequate opportunities for open space and landscaping around buildings. Such open spaces shall be easily accessed and well connected to the surrounding activities.*

6.7 This wording suggests a space designed around the buildings not a space where buildings are designed around an area of open space. This assessment matter should be expanded or re-worded to ensure a

space is provided with buildings developed around it with consideration of its location in terms of access to sunlight during winter and integration into the development to provide for the needs of residents, visitors and the existing Frankton village. This could form part of a public domain plan discussed above.

## 7 Cemetery

7.1 The Plan Change relies predominantly on a setback requirement for buildings from the cemetery and associated stone wall to provide protection to this feature. However, this type of control (a setback) is not necessarily effective to ensure development is sympathetic to or integrates this historic feature. The indicative layout provided illustrates how the built form effectively turns its back on this neighbour. It is considered the stone wall in particular presents an opportunity to form an interesting feature that can be celebrated within the development.

7.2 Providing for vehicle circulation along this boundary in a similar manner to that suggested to the highway would be one way the development could then integrate with this boundary, avoid turning its back to it.

7.3 The development of a space adjacent to the wall for passive recreation for residents/visitors could also utilise the character of the wall and provide the opportunity for some of the mature trees existing on the site to be retained to develop a green space that has real character and identity for future residents without being unsympathetic to needs of the cemetery. An indicative cross section is provided below to illustrate a possible solution.

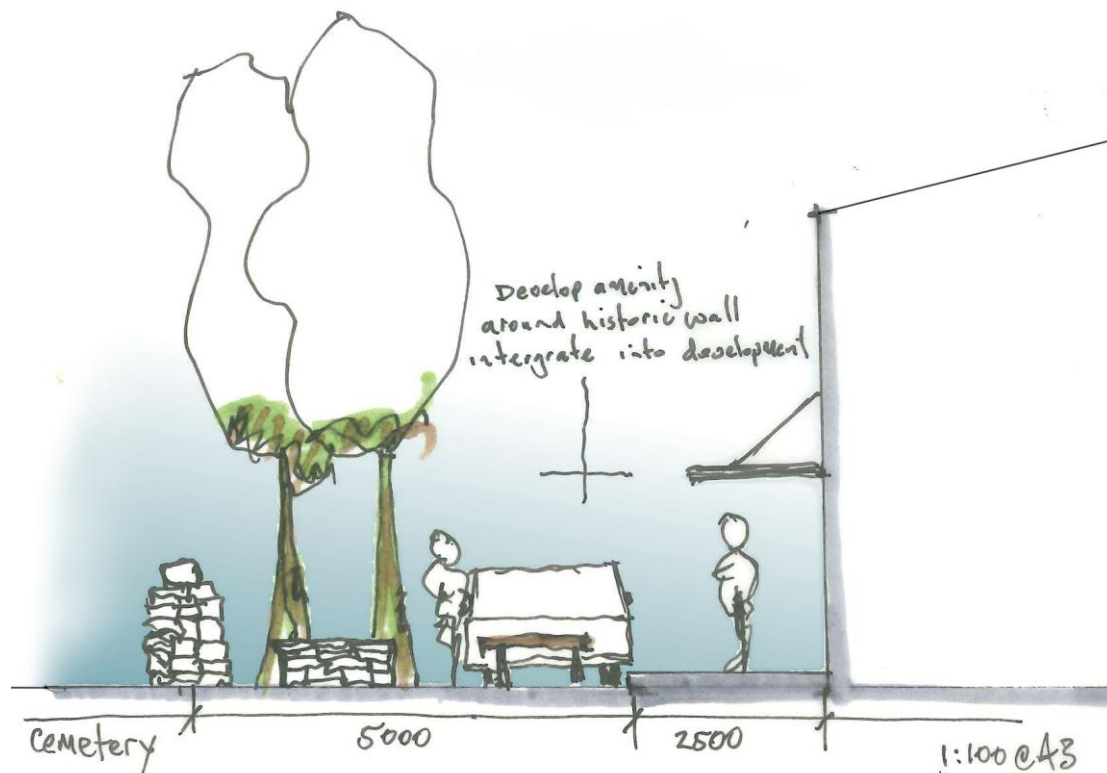


Figure 2: indicative section: Cemetery

7.4 Plan provisions relating to the integration of the stone wall including specific assessment matters for approval of an outline development plan could ensure a sympathetic solution to the cemetery that provides benefit to users of the site and future residents.



## **8 Existing Trees**

- 8.1 The existing trees along the highway and cemetery frontage do provide significant character to the site, and a prominent vertical scale. Retaining these trees or some of these trees would be beneficial in terms of providing some character and identity to the development. In this regard one of the assessment matters for consideration of the outline development plan states:

*The extent to which imaginative, efficient and comprehensive design solutions are applied to encourage a layout that will establish an individual site specific response*

- 8.2 It is acknowledged that there is tension between the desire to present retail activity to the highway and this exposure and the current visual screening the trees provide (and also with respect to the desire to retain trees and their health and safety). If some of the trees were retained to contribute to the street frontage, they would contribute to the amenity of the site and the entry to Frankton/Queenstown particularly given the association these species have with our cultural heritage and would also assist with the absorption of higher built form here. As discussed above trees along the cemetery boundary could be retained in the development of a pocket park. In both instances the way the retention of the existing trees would inform the design would go a long way to providing a site specific response promoted by the assessment matters proposed for the zone.

## **9 Signage**

- 9.1 Currently signage is proposed as a controlled activity with signage within the 5 metre setback proposed from the highway able to be considered at the outline development stage. Signage has the potential to significantly detract from the entry experience to Frankton and therefore needs to be more carefully managed. It is clear there will be a desire for commercial activity to capture passing trade and signage will be a simple means to achieve this. The erection of freestanding signs within the 5 metre setback (if it is to be retained) should be avoided to ensure a proliferation of signage (highway or billboard style) does not become dominant along this entrance to Frankton/Queenstown.
- 9.2 Signs to the highway should be limited to the building façade only and be integrated in the architectural design of the building. The size of these signs should also be limited as the present provisions could allow for very large signs which again would not be appropriate when trying to maintain a high amenity along the highway frontage.
- 9.3 Depending on how buildings front the highway simple signs identifying the name of the business would be appropriate and therefore a limit of 1m<sup>2</sup> to 2m<sup>2</sup> depending on the size of the building would ensure the signs do not dominate the impression of the area and the entrance experience to Frankton. Given the actual speed environment of the highway in this location provision for large signs to achieve transit standards could create conflict with achieving a quality urban response to the highway. Therefore consultation with transit should identify what parameters they would expect to guide signage in this location.

## **10 Conclusion**

- 10.1 The site has the potential to positively contribute to the development of Frankton and provide for a positive interface with the highway as a mixed use development. However, the current proposal needs to actively provide for connections to the surrounding area and provide further guidance in the policies and assessment matters to guide the layout of the site to ensure it provides a development that is well

connected to its surrounds and with a high amenity for future residents. Without further detailed provisions, an internalised and isolated development with poor amenity for future residents, visitors and workers can result.

It is considered given the size of the site and its current physical containment the use of an outline development plan model to guide the overall development of the site is appropriate.

Tim Williams

17 February 2012