

# Landscape assessment peer review report

**APPLICATION REFERENCE:** Private Plan Change 54 Northlake Investments Ltd

**FROM:** Helen Mellsop – Registered NZILA Landscape Architect

**TO:** Ian Munro – Consultant Urban Planner and Designer

**DATE:** 16 May 2023

---

## INTRODUCTION

1. Northlake Investments Ltd (NIL) have lodged an application for a Private Plan Change (PPC) to the Queenstown Lakes District Operative District Plan (ODP). The PPC seeks to extend the residential activity area on the north-western boundary of the Wanaka Northlake development, adjacent to Sticky Forest. The enlarged low density residential activity area would replace a building restriction area (BRA, E1) and two activity areas for large lot residential (C1).
2. I have been engaged to provide a peer review of the Landscape Assessment Report (LSA) included in the notified plan change (Patch Landscape Architecture, dated 22 Jan 2022) and to comment on landscape-related matters raised by submitters and further submitters.
3. The LSA submitted as part of the plan change request includes descriptions of the proposal, the site and locality and the relevant site history. In general I agree with and accept these descriptions. The resource consent history of the site also includes RM200889, the consent for the 5000m<sup>3</sup> water supply tank (7.03m high and about 10m diameter) immediately north of PC area (see **Photograph 1** below). Conditions of this consent require implementation of indigenous planting around the tank area, including kānuka, kōhūhū and mountain beech.

## PEER REVIEW

4. An assessment of the landscape and visual amenity effects of the proposal has been provided in the Patch LSA. This peer review evaluates the adequacy of the submitted assessment and specifically addresses the following aspects:
  - Whether the assessment methodology is appropriate and robust;
  - Whether the analysis of the landscape context of the site is robust and corresponds to the landscape attributes and values.
  - Whether any key issues or considerations have been missed in the assessment;

- Whether the assessment has correctly interpreted the nature and magnitude of visual and landscape effects;
- Whether the conclusions of the assessment are credible and justifiable.

5. In undertaking my review, I have used the same 7-point scale of landscape and visual effects as the Patch LSA (page 9).



**Photograph 1:** existing water tank approved under RM200889 (photograph taken at 50mm lens equivalent on 24 May 2022)

### Methodology

6. The methodology of the Patch LSA is accordance with the profession’s guidelines for landscape assessment<sup>1</sup>, and in the main it is appropriate and robust. It does not however include a comprehensive analysis of the attributes and values of the surrounding landscape.

### Landscape attributes and values

7. Section 2 of the Patch LSA includes a brief description of the landscape context of the site, including the hummocky topography, the developing urban character, the Clutha River Mata-Au and associated escarpments and terraces to the north, and the forest-covered ridge of Sticky Forest to the west. Both Northlake and the Sticky Forest ridge are part of the most recent terminal moraine of the glaciers forming Lake Wānaka. This moraine encloses downtown Wānaka and Roys Bay and has been cut through by the Clutha Mata-Au. The site is effectively a basin/depression within the moraine, surrounded by higher land on 4 sides, although generally falling to the south-east. The

<sup>1</sup> Te Tangi a te Manu, Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines, Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022.

boundary of the Clutha Outlet area of the Lake Wānaka Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL) follows the crest of the ridge that encloses the site to the north. In my assessment, the key attributes and values of the receiving landscape include:

- The rolling or hummocky nature of the moraine landform;
- The distinctive moraine ridge within Sticky Forest, which continues to the south and forms a natural visual enclosure to Wānaka township and Roys Bay when viewed from the lake, Roys Bay foreshore and the Millennium Track to Glendhu Bay;
- The ridge and escarpments that frame the Clutha River Mata-Au outlet of the lake;
- The high level of residential and rural residential amenity experienced in large lot living areas to the south and south-west of the site and within the Northlake subdivision;
- The role of the ridges to the north, west and east of the site in providing a legible natural edge to urban development when viewed from Northlake, Hidden Hills, Mount Iron and suburban Wānaka to the south;
- The strong recreational attributes of mountain bike and walking trails within Sticky Forest, the Outlet motor camp, the lake foreshore at the Outlet, and developing walkway networks within Northlake.

### **Assessment of effects on landscape character and visual amenity**

#### Visual Effects

8. I agree with the description of potential visibility of development within the plan change area in the LSA report. I also agree with the assessment of effects on visual amenity from Aubrey Road, Mount Iron, Hidden Hills and urban Wānaka to the south. Given existing and anticipated urban development, and retention of the open character of the ridges north and east of the plan change area, I agree that adverse visual amenity effects would be low in magnitude. The ridges west, east and or north of the site would still provide a legible natural edge to urban development in these views.
9. I consider there is some uncertainty as to whether the proposal could be visible from land and waters to the west, including Lake Wānaka and Wanaka – Mt Aspiring Road. The majority of the plan change area is 10-20m below the relative level of the ridgetop within Sticky Forest to the west and future housing development up to 7m in height would be effectively screened by the ridge, even if the conifer forest on the ridge is cleared. However, the northern area of the proposed B6 activity area extends up to the 400masl contour to the west and above the 400masl contour to the east (as opposed to the 384masl stated in the Patch report). Given the current earthworked contours and boundary setbacks within the zone, building platforms in this area are unlikely to be higher than 397 or 398masl. The ridge to the west has a minimum height of 395masl, with the higher portions about 400masl. Construction of 7-metre high dwellings in the upper northern part of B6 could therefore potentially result in visible buildings breaching the ridgeline (if the conifer forest is felled) from more distant viewpoints across the lake such as Wanaka – Mt Aspiring Road. Any such visibility would result in moderate adverse effects on the integrity, legibility and aesthetic values of the moraine ridge. The value of the ridge as a natural enclosure to Roys Bay and inner Wānaka township would be undermined.
10. These potential adverse effects could be avoided by reducing the northern extent of the plan change area, by stipulating a maximum RL for any dwellings within the B6 activity area, or by requiring buildings within this area to avoid breaching the ridgeline. Further investigation is required to

determine the appropriate RL to avoid potential visibility from the lake, the Millennium Track and Wanaka – Mt Aspiring Road, but given the height differential between the viewpoints and the proposal, and the intervening ridge, this could be in the region of 395masl.

Effects on landscape character and values

- I agree with the Patch LSA that PC54 would not have any adverse effects on the character and values of the Lake Wānaka ONL. Although the boundary of the ONL is only about 100-150m from the plan change area, development would not be visible from points further within the ONL. From the crest of the ridge that marks the ONL boundary, both within Northlake and within the Sticky Forest site, the proposal would be seen within the context of other existing or anticipated urban development to the south. There is potential to extend the indigenous planting required as part of the reservoir consent (refer **Figure 1** below) to the north-west and south-east to partially screen development within the proposed B6 Activity Area that is closest to the ONL boundary.

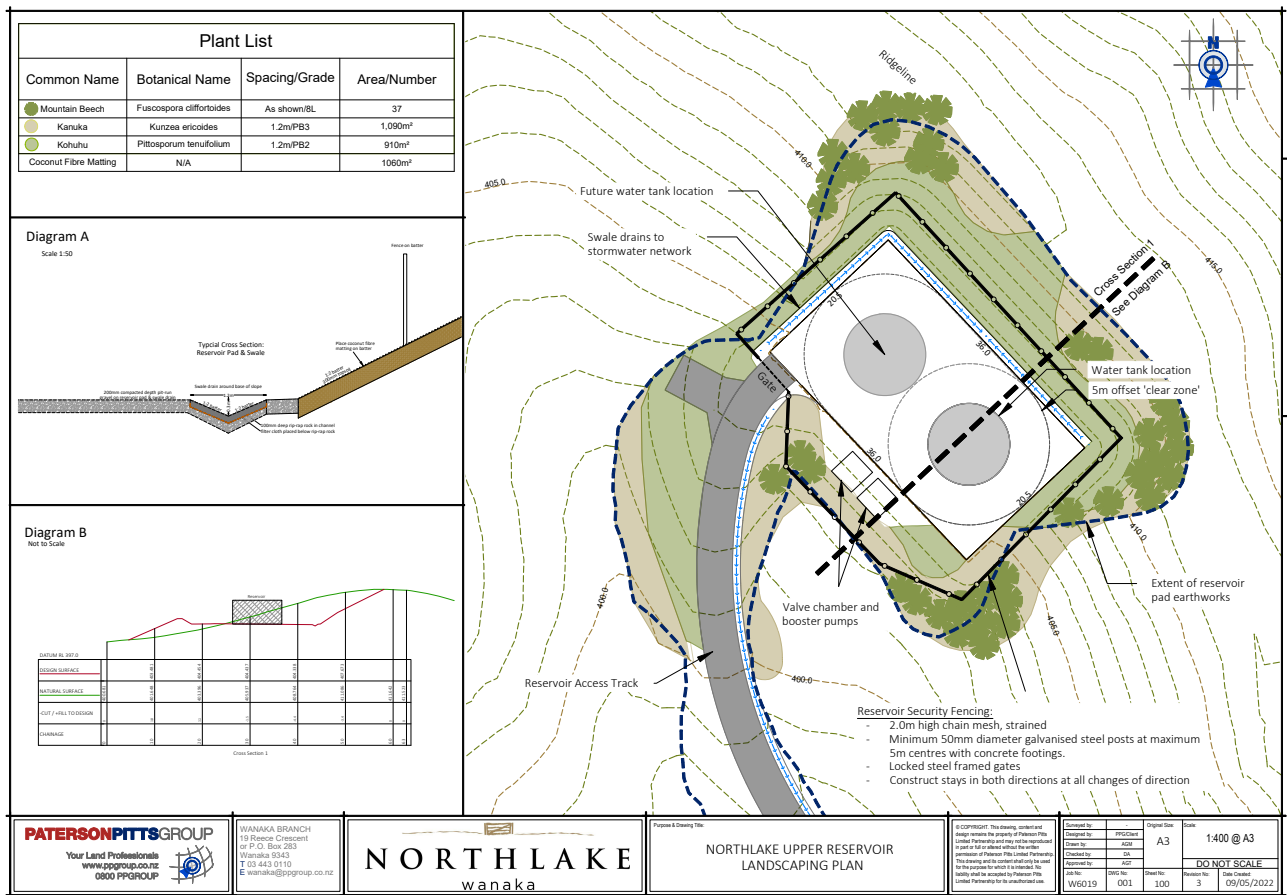


Figure 1: Mitigation landscaping plan for water reservoir above the plan change area.

- I also agree that the plan change would reduce the level of open character within the landscape and the extent of open rolling hill country framing urban development. Built development would extend partway up the lower slopes of the ridges to the west, north and east of the site and thus reduce their legible extent and openness. However, the water reservoir to the north has already undermined the legibility and naturalness of the northern ridge slopes. In my assessment sufficient open space would be retained to avoid significant adverse effects on this valued landscape attribute (the legible natural enclosure to urban development). Other important landscape attributes and values listed in paragraph 7 above would be unaffected by PC 54 or would be impacted to a low-

moderate extent. The recreational value of the E1 activity areas within Northlake would be reduced, both through loss of available shared open space and through the closer proximity of urban development to the required walkway/cycleway links.



**Photograph 2:** earthworked toe slopes in south-western corner of plan change area (photograph taken at 50mm lens equivalent on 24 May 2022)

13. I am unsure of the original purpose of the E1 and E4 open space buffers on the western side of the Northlake Special Zone. I assume that these may have been included to avoid development on the toe slopes of the ridge within Sticky Forest and its extension south to Peak View Ridge. They may also have been partly intended to provide a fire break between the forest and residential development in B2 and B1 Activity Areas.
14. The plan change would facilitate dwellings on the toe slopes in the south-western corner of the site, and there would be a sharp mismatch between urban development in B6 activity area and retained open space in E4 activity area to the south. From a landscape character and visual amenity perspective, it would be preferable to retain a smaller E1 building restriction area in this corner that covered the steeper toe slopes (refer **Photograph 2** above) and aligned to some extent with the E4 activity area to the south. The consented Outline Development Plan for the WHF Properties Ltd land south of the plan change area includes a public open space and walkway connection within the northern part of E4 (refer **Figure 1** below). A suggested extent for the additional E1 building restriction area is shown in **Figure 2** below.

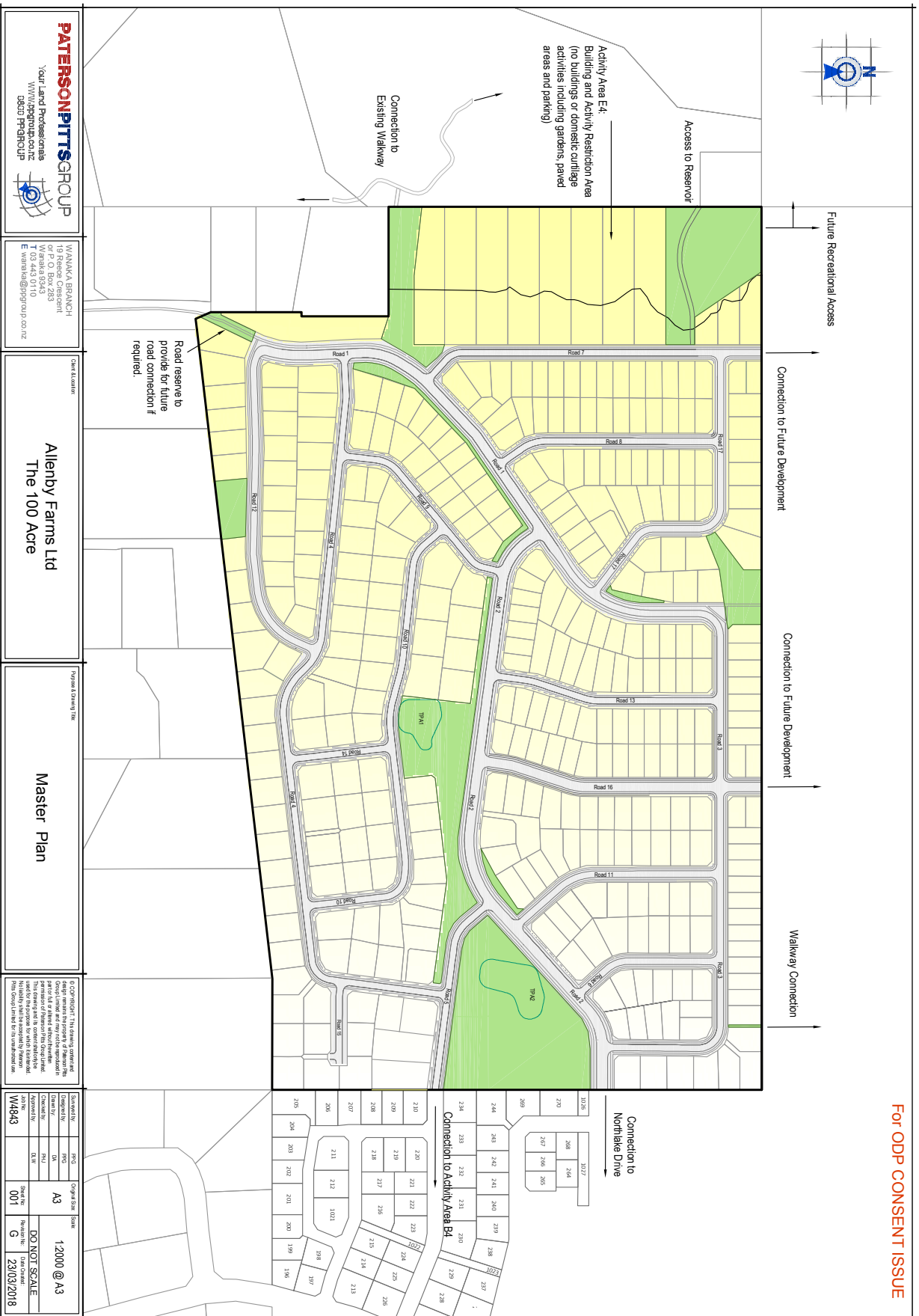


Figure 1: approved Outline Development Plan (RM180502) for WFH Properties Ltd land.

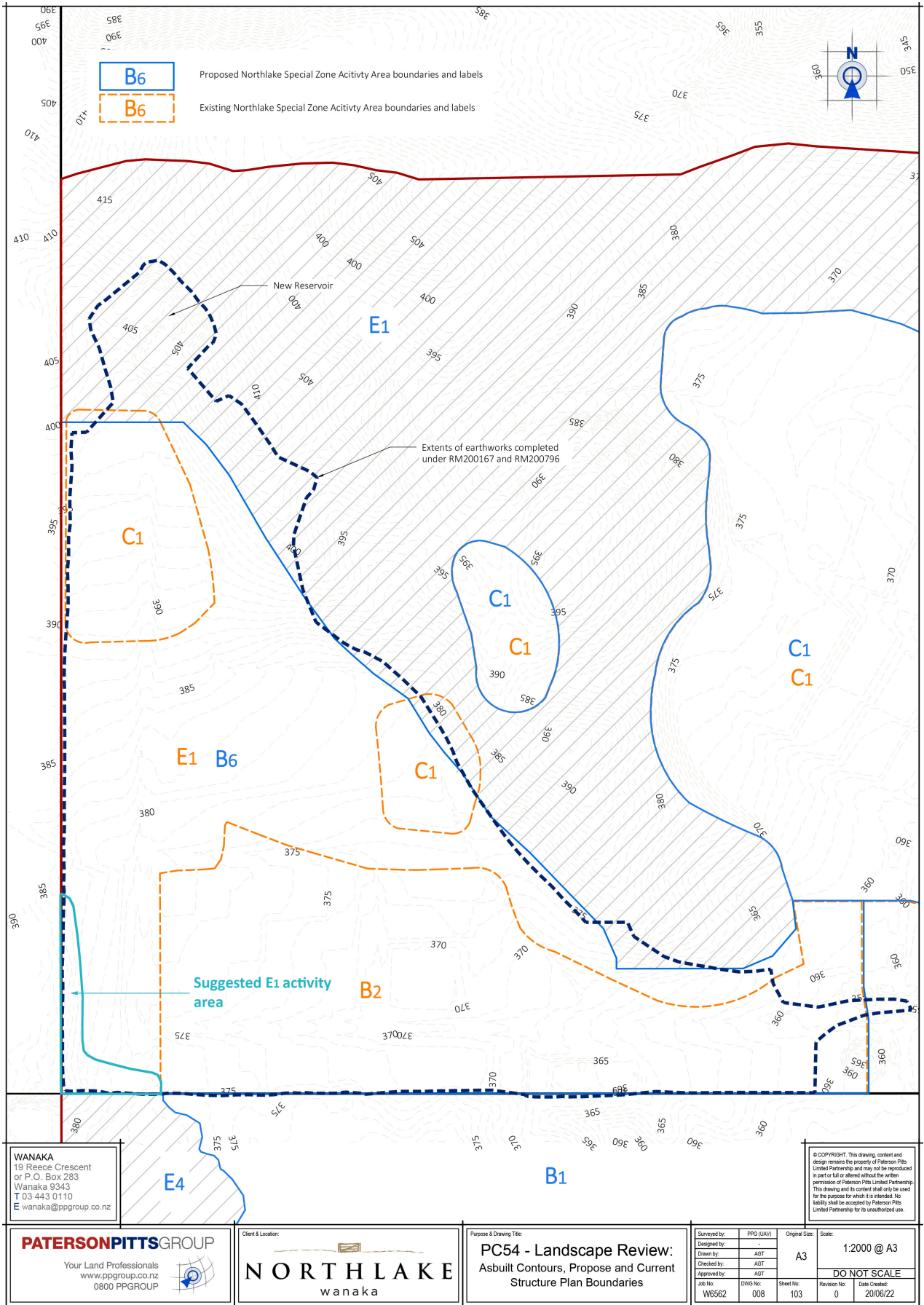


Figure 2: suggested E1 activity area in south-western corner of proposed plan change area.

## Statutory assessment

15. The Patch LSA does not include any assessment against the provisions of the ODP or PDP. My advice from Council's planner is that the following provisions are relevant to the landscape assessment of the proposal:

- PDP, landscape-related strategic objectives and policies in Chapters 3 and 4.
- ODP, Northlake Special Zone, Objective 4 – Landscape and Ecology

### PDP Chapter 3 Strategic Direction

*3.2.5.3 In locations other than the Rural Zone, the landscape values of Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes are protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.*

*3.2.5.6 In Rural Character Landscapes, new subdivision, use and development in proximity to any Outstanding Natural Feature or Outstanding Natural Landscape does not compromise the landscape values of that Feature or Landscape.*

16. Development enabled by PC 54 would protect the values of the nearby Lake Wānaka ONL – Clutha River Outlet area. Development would not be visible from within the ONL, and where visible from the ONL boundaries, it would appear consistent with existing or anticipated patterns of urban development.

*3.2.5.5 Within Rural Character Landscapes, adverse effects on landscape character and visual amenity values from subdivision, use or development are anticipated and effectively managed, through policies and rules, so that:*

- a. landscape character is maintained; and*
- b. visual amenity values are maintained or enhanced.*

17. The underlying landscape classification of the open space activity areas within the Northlake Special Zone is Rural Character Landscape. PC 54 proposes to replace some of this open space with urban development and the Strategic Objective for Rural Character Landscapes is therefore relevant. In the peer review above, I concluded that adverse effects on the character and values of the landscape character would be low-moderate in magnitude. These could be considered to be minor effects. With the exception of potential breaching of the Sticky Forest ridgeline from distant western viewpoints, visual amenity values would be maintained.

### PDP Chapter 4 Urban Development

*4.2.1.5 When locating Urban Growth Boundaries or extending towns and rural urban settlements through plan changes, protect the values of Outstanding Natural Features and Outstanding Natural Landscapes.*

18. As discussed above, the values of the adjacent ONL would be protected.

*4.2.1.5 When locating Urban Growth Boundaries or extending towns and rural urban settlements through plan changes to provide for urban development, have particular regard to minimising significant adverse effects on the values of open rural landscapes.*



19. The proposal would reduce the extent of open rural parkland within the landscape, but adverse effects would not be significant. The retained open ridges north and east of the plan change area would remain legible and would continue to provide a frame and enclosure to urban development.

ODP Chapter 12 Northlake Special Zone

*Objective 4 – Landscape and Ecology*

*Development that takes into account the landscape, visual amenity, and conservation values of the zone.*

*Policies*

*4.1 To identify areas where buildings are inappropriate, including ridgelines, hilltops and other visually prominent landforms, and to avoid buildings within those areas.*

20. The E activity areas and Tree Protection Areas in the ODP Northlake Structure Plan were identified as areas where buildings are inappropriate. PC 54 proposes urbanisation of parts of the E1 areas, but it would not affect any ridgelines or hilltops. The basin or depression within the site is not, in my view, a particularly visually prominent landform. From a landscape perspective buildings would be appropriate in this location. Development on the lower slopes of the enclosing ridges to the west and east is less appropriate but I consider the legibility of these ridges would be maintained.

## **SUBMISSIONS**

21. A number of submitters (#3, #6, #7, #8, #9, #12, #19, #23, #30) have raised concerns about the loss of protected open space in Northlake through the proposed urbanisation of part of the E1 Activity Area. Some of these submissions have also highlighted the associated loss of recreational opportunities and 'rural' amenity, including cumulative adverse effects.
22. Effects on the landscape character and the physical, perceptual and recreational values of the landscape are discussed in paragraphs 8 and 11-12 above. My conclusion was that the adverse effects of the proposal on these landscape values would be low-moderate in extent. There would be a cumulative loss of open rural parkland, in combination with anticipated and consented development within the Northlake Special Zone. However, in my assessment the landscape has the ability to absorb the additional PC 54 development without significant adverse landscape effects.
23. As suggested by Submitters #19 and #25, removal of the C1 Activity Area immediately east of the PC 54 area would mitigate the loss of open space and the resulting adverse cumulative effects to some extent. Removal of this Activity Area would mean that the rolling moraine ridge would be entirely free of built form, access driveways and domestication, with consequent benefits for the physical integrity of the moraine landform and for the aesthetic and recreational values of the landscape.
24. Potential adverse effects of development higher up the landform, in the foreground of the ONL, were raised by Submitter #30. The ONL boundary is on the crest of the ridgeline north and north-west of the plan change area, and development would not therefore be seen in the foreground of views to the ONL except from elevated viewpoints near the summit of Mount Iron. From these viewpoints, urban development enabled under PC 54 would approach closer to the ONL, but I do not consider it would detract from the character or values of the Lake Wānaka ONL experienced from Mount Iron. Extensive areas of urban development are already visible and there would still be an obvious buffer of open space between PC 54 development and the ONL.

25. Submitters (#19, #23 and #25) identified an issue with potential visibility of houses above the Sticky Forest ridge if the conifer forest is felled. This issue has been discussed in paragraphs 9 and 10 above.
26. Two submitters (#19 and #25) also suggested that all houses should be sited below the reservoir and that screen planting should be established so that buildings are not visible from the Sticky Forest tracks or from the ridge crest to the north. All residential development enabled by PC 54 is below the water reservoir. As discussed in paragraph 11 above, there is potential to extend consented planting around the reservoir to partially screen development in the northern part of proposed B6 Activity Area from any tracks on the ONL boundary to the north and north-west.

## CONCLUSIONS

27. Urban development facilitated by the proposed plan change could be absorbed within the receiving landscape with only a low level of adverse effect on visual amenity values, as long as future dwellings were not visible above the Sticky Forest ridgeline from viewpoints to the west.
28. The proposal would reduce the open character, legibility and naturalness of the landscape, and the recreational value of the open spaces within Northlake. However the adverse landscape effects would be low-moderate, and not significant, in extent. Cumulative adverse effects on landscape character and values could be mitigated by removal of the C1 Activity Area east of the plan change area and by retention of a building restriction area on steeper slopes in the south-western corner of the site.
29. Adverse visual effects experienced from the ridgetop ONL boundary to the north and north-west, could be mitigated by additional native planting west and east of the water reservoir.



Helen Mellso  
*BLA, BHB, Dip Hort (Distinction)*  
*Registered NZILA Landscape Architect*