

Minutes of a hearing of submissions to the (draft) Mount Iron Reserve Management Plan held in the Armstrong Room, Lake Wānaka Centre, Wānaka on Tuesday 10 December 2024 commencing at 10.00am

Present:

Councillor Lyal Cocks (Chairperson), Councillor Barry Bruce and Mr Chris Hadfield.

In attendance:

Ms Christine Skipworth (Parks and Reserves Planner), Ms Kat Banyard (Senior Parks Advisor), Mr Dom Harrison (Parks and Reserves Planner), Ms Jane Robertson (Senior Democracy Services Advisor), Mr Jon Winterbottom (Democracy Services Team Leader), Ms Sophie Millar (Democracy Services Advisor), Mr Matthew Hulscher (Democracy Services Advisor), two members of the media and members of the public as detailed below.

Election of Chair

It was moved (Councillor Bruce/Mr Hadfield):

That the hearing panel agree to appoint Councillor Cocks to chair the hearing.

Motion carried unanimously.

Declarations of Conflict of Interest

No declarations were made.

Confirmation of Agenda

It was moved (Councillor Cocks/Councillor Bruce):

That the agenda be confirmed without addition or alteration.

Motion carried unanimously.

Summary by Reporting Officer

Ms Skipworth spoke to the officer report on the submissions, and it was noted that:

- Consultation had shown strong engagement, demonstrating that Mount Iron (Mt Iron) was greatly valued by the community.
- Submissions showed strong support for ecological enhancement and pest control and general support for the vision, objectives and community participation.

- The main areas where submissions showed widely diverging views were (a) biking, (b) the extent of commercial and community activity on Mt Iron and (c) access points.
- A small number of submissions were out of scope and raised operational matters that staff would pursue.

Hearing of submissions

1. Mark Buckingham

Mr and Mrs Buckingham lived adjacent to Little Mt Iron and were opposed to mountain biking on Mt Iron because bikers used their private accessway (driveway) to access the reserve. Mr Buckingham felt that mountain biking had taken priority over all other activities on Mt Iron but ironically this was contrary to Mt Iron's highly valued characteristics of an unmodified landscape with high aesthetic attributes. Bike tracks left scars on the landscape and the tracks would need to be closed in periods of high rainfall.

More tracks were needed for people with restricted mobility as they did not currently have easy access to these sorts of facilities and cyclists already had Sticky Forest to use. It was immaterial that Bike Wānaka had made a commitment to build and maintain bike tracks on Mt Iron at no cost to the ratepayer because it was not appropriate to prioritise the needs of one small user group over others.

2. Karen Buckingham

Mrs Buckingham was also opposed to her and her husband's residential driveway being used as an access to Mt Iron. She asked for 'Access point 9 Mt Iron Heights' to be removed from the Mt Iron Reserve Management Plan (RMP) map as an access way to Mt Iron because their private driveway had become a downhill racecourse. 800m of their driveway was steep and narrow with insufficient room over much of its length for two vehicles to pass. Further, in the area were 10 residential properties of which five were visitor accommodation and there was therefore a high likelihood of meeting other traffic. It was unsafe to permit access on such a dangerous access way.

Bike Wānaka had encouraged its members to make submissions and had prepared a form submission for members to use. However, she considered that this access point was a private driveway for residents and their visitors only.

She noted that wildfire on Mt Iron was a huge concern and more visitors accessing Mt Iron via multiple access points increased the risk of fire danger. There were already plenty of other access points available, meaning that this particular access was not necessary.

She supported the objective in the draft RMP to protect the biodiversity of the reserve and she was keen for a full study to be undertaken to determine the values and species to be protected.

3. Ian Graves, Bike Wānaka

Bike Wānaka had more than a thousand members and many had made submissions and had asked for him to speak as their representative. Generally, Bike Wānaka was in support of the RMP and there was overwhelming support amongst members to reinvigorate

mountain biking on Mt Iron. Residential development was planned for Sticky Forest meaning that it would eventually be lost as an area for mountain biking. High ecological values and mountain biking did not need to be mutually exclusive and although Bike Wānaka wanted to reestablish biking on Mt Iron, it also wanted to ensure that sensitive areas were acknowledged and that cycling tracks remained separate from walking tracks.

Mountain biking was an appropriate activity on Mt Iron as the purpose of a recreation reserve was to provide an area for recreation and sporting activities as well as protecting the natural countryside. The Reserves Act 1977 clearly placed an emphasis on activities on reserves, tracks especially.

It was an exaggeration to describe what Bike Wānaka wanted to establish on Mt Iron as a 'bike park', as the group just wanted to re-establish some trails. They would develop trails sensitively and would have to obtain resource consent for which an ecologist had already been engaged.

4. Edwin Sheppard, Wānaka Climbing Club

Mr Sheppard noted that climbers were the second largest user group on Mt Iron after walkers and climbing had been happening on Mt Iron for several decades. In the Upper Clutha area there were limited opportunities to access good quality cliffs and an area as good and as safe as Mt Iron was rare.

The club supported policies in the RMP around community guardianship and was already involved in work on the reserve to manage the climbing areas. The group had an exemplary safety history but sought some minor changes to the RMP to ensure climbing was not limited, including 'existing and future climbing' and also an assurance that walking tracks would be separated from climbing.

5. Tom Anderson, Spark and Connexa (Telecommunications providers)

The telecommunications industry sought consistency between the RMP and the District Plan to ensure that there was future provision for communications infrastructure to be developed on Mt Iron. An elevated position (such as on Mt Iron) was strategically a good location for telecommunications infrastructure.

6. Jill Gardner

Ms Gardener considered there were plenty of bike trails elsewhere in the Upper Clutha and she felt that Mt Iron should be kept for walkers only. She was prepared to accept one bike trail, but not a network of trails because this would impact negatively on the beauty and serenity of Mt Iron. She was also concerned about the proximity of bike trails to walking trails because of bicycles' speed. 380 people supporting a bike trail did not (in her view) represent 'overwhelming support' and she considered that developing bike trails on Mt Iron would be its ruination and ultimately cost ratepayers.

Use of the walking tracks on Mt Iron by those with mobility challenges would require the tracks to be changed and many were too steep to be attempted by those with limited mobility.

7. Guy Steven

Mr Steven advised that he was an athlete who used Mt Iron regularly to exercise, sometimes training as much as three times daily. He did find using the same trail day after day a little boring and he welcomed the opportunity of using more parts of Mt Iron. Notwithstanding this, he felt that establishing mountain bike tracks should not be an overarching goal of the RMP and all users should be treated equally. The inclusion of more trails was also inconsistent with protecting Mt Iron's ecological values and he felt that the RMP was inclined in favour of mountain bikers. He suggested that policy 6.7.1. *Maintain and upgrade the walking network* should be amended to 'extend', noting that the Upper Clutha Tracks Trust had only suggested one additional trail on Mt Iron.

Numerous mountain bikers would also be noisy (as occurred at present at Sticky Forest) and was contrary to the qualities of peace and quiet that many valued on Mt Iron. He also recommended removing 5.2 *To enable active and passive recreation use, access, and enjoyment of the Reserve* as the only way of managing biking and walking trails in the same area was for them to be completely separate.

The meeting adjourned at 11.07am and reconvened at 11.16am.

8. Arne Cleland, Upper Clutha Wilding Tree Group

The project to remove wilding pines from Mt Iron was almost complete but was only part of the job because the group was concerned about all wilding species, many of which were in the scenic reserve. He was keen to see wilding species removed to enable natural regeneration to continue. This work was not a quick fix and would take many years to achieve but without an active programme to remove wilding species, all of Mt Iron would eventually be covered with wildings. The group also supported adding to the RMP an appropriate revegetation programme.

9. Pete Jamieson

Mr Jamieson noted that his home was also close to the legal access and he did not support adding mountain bikes into the mix as they travelled downhill faster than cars. Mt Iron attracted about 180,000 walkers every year so there needed to be parking available for which a traffic management plan could be put in place.

If the panel did not agree to stop access via 'Access 9 Mt Iron Heights', the Council would have to upgrade the road and put retaining walls in which would have cost implications. It was noted that there had always been access from this location but it should not be advertised as being public.

10. Ben Thomson

Mr Thomson advised that he was an active mountain biker and a member of Bike Wānaka but the views expressed in his submission were his own. He believed that the Upper Clutha was not well served by good quality bike trails that catered for a wide range of abilities. Although Sticky Forest was currently available, it would eventually be lost as an area for biking and he was concerned about illegal trails being built by non-riders. Generally, local riders were more skilful because of their particular demographic but they needed somewhere to go and he supported developing bike trails on Mt Iron. He was not opposed to shared use trails and did not agree that it would cause issues with parking.

Councillor Cocks asked how practical it was to separate walkers and bikers in a limited area. Mr Thomson noted that over the district there were multiple examples of where these parties operated in harmony.

11. Andrew Bartholomew

Mr Bartholomew expressed support for objective 5.3 *retain the reserve as an undeveloped slice of the outdoors* and noted that if this objective was adopted then it made sense not to allow too much extra activity in an unencumbered space. The draft RMP suggested events and increased car parking but there were plenty of other places where commercial events could take place so Mt Iron did not need to be a location.

Mr Bartholomew questioned policy 6.5.1 *Maintain the convenience of accessing the Reserve from the adjoining urban areas* and asked whether this meant parking for buses or campervans, both of which were large vehicles. He was a resident of Hidden Hills and it was a quiet residential area that was well connected by footpaths and cycleways but there were no formed parking spaces.

He had walked up Mt Iron the previous day and had asked walkers if they were concerned about their personal safety whilst walking there. He noted that there was no signage in place warning of potential wildfire as would occur in California and Australia. He believed there should be a risk website as the current notices about fire were feeble. Signage needed to be much larger, contain words and images and ban any fire related issues such as smoking or barbeques.

12. Becky McCormack and Andrew (son), Te Kakano

They were generally supportive of the RMP and excited about the new planting opportunities suggested in it. Ms McCormack suggested that the RMP needed to reinforce the importance of people volunteering to work on reserves. A lot more planting could be undertaken as a community event which helped the community to care for its environment. If someone planted a tree, they were more invested in looking after the planting and in this way, caring for nature would help with socialising the plan.

13. Anne Steven, Central Otago Lakes Branch Forest and Bird

Trapping predators and weed control were a priority as this helped to protect Mt Iron's biodiversity. Most of the area was identified as a regional area in need of protection. Ms Steven highlighted four rare native plant species at the top of Mt Iron that only grew in spring. Thirteen types of plants were at risk and the diversity of species on Mt Iron was declining. She suggested that the RMP be connected to the Otago Biodiversity Plan.

14. Meg Taylor

Ms Taylor stated she was divided about giving mountain bikers access to Mt Iron as it was a small piece of wilderness that she felt should be kept for walkers. She asked the panel to press pause on developing bike trails but supported installing new seats and signage.

15. John Wellington Upper Clutha Tracks Trust

Mr Wellington praised officers for a well drafted RMP that sought to meet competing uses and desires. He believed that the newly enlarged area of Mt Iron could balance existing

uses alongside new activities, including the careful addition of some new walking tracks. However, he was a little hesitant about shared pathways, noting that there was increasing conflict between walkers and cyclists on the cycling route between Cromwell and Wānaka and on this trail in particular, he favoured separating walkers and cyclists because of bad sight lines.

16. Amanda McHolm

Ms McHolm felt that Mt Iron should be a place of peace and she had used it for meditation. She considered it a sacred place of learning and had sought more information about its te reo name with mana whenua. Whilst she could understand the desire to build mountain bike tracks, she favoured keeping the space clear for the mental and physical health benefits it provided.

17. Andrew Tomes, Chair, Hidden Hills Community Association

Mr Tomes stated that he both supported and opposed aspects of the RMP. He supported recreational use of Mt Iron Reserve but he was also opposed because the RMP failed to address adequately the risk of wildfire. The area already had an extreme fire risk and increasing the number of visitors served to double the risk. Further, the area would be difficult to access by ordinary fire appliances so any fire would have to be fought by helicopters which would take time to arrive. There were no fire mitigation strategies contained in the draft RMP such as improved signage, establishment of fire breaks, green belts or clearings around vegetation. In his view, such information should be embedded in the RMP.

He believed that pest control objectives and policies needed to be stronger as there were already lots of rabbits in the area and there needed to be realistic levels of population control. He suggested introducing rabbit proof fences.

He considered that the RMP made too much provision for commercial activities which contradicted some of the stated goals in the RMP. If commercial activities were allowed at all, they should not detract from Mt Iron's natural features. He suggested they should only be allowed at the base of the reserve on the southern side and events with food or alcohol should not be permitted.

The meeting adjourned at 1.05pm and reconvened at 1.35pm.

18. Ewan Mackie

Mr Mackie supported establishing a small bike trail on Mt Iron, noting that many submissions had supported this. He was a keen walker, biker, climber and environmentalist and he wanted the RMP to reflect fully the views of the community. Too often the community was in conflict but enjoyment of being in nature helped to bring people together. Bike trails need not be ecologically damaging and could be low impact and visually sympathetic to the landscape. He believed that the community would like to see ecological improvement of the reserve and he was excited at the creation of a great community space. He had not observed such a level of community engagement previously.

19. Doug Patterson, Southern Hang-Gliding

Mr Patterson showed a hang-gliding safety plan that he wanted to develop. Mt Iron was a popular site for hang-gliding when sufficiently windy although drones were always a potential issue and the reserve area was near the flight path of Wānaka Airport.

The hearing of submissions concluded at 1.55pm.

Initial deliberations

A question was raised about legality of access from 'Access 9 Mt Iron Heights' (as it was not a public road). A suggestion was made to add signage at permitted access points so that people did not try to gain access from non-permitted areas.

The meeting adjourned at 2.05pm.

Minutes of deliberations on submissions to the (draft) Mount Iron Reserve Management Plan held in the Armstrong Room, Lake Wānaka Centre, Wānaka on Wednesday 11 December 2024 commencing at 9.00am

Present: Councillor Lyal Cocks (Chair), Councillor Barry Bruce and Mr Chris Hadfield.

In attendance: Mr Simon Telfer (Chair, Wanaka-Upper Clutha Community Board), Ms Christine Skipworth (Parks and Reserves Planner), Ms Kat Banyard (Senior Parks Advisor), Mr Dave Winterburn (Parks Manager), Ms Jane Robertson (Senior Democracy Services Advisor); one member of the media and no members of the public.

Deliberations

Initial comments from the panel:

The panel asked officers to follow up on the following questions:

- Clarify with Aukaha and TAMI what 'cultural landscape' means;
- Clarify what is meant by 'primary purpose' and ensure that it is different from definition contained in the Reserves Act 1977;
- Is the word '**informal**' needed in the following phrase: "*informal walking and biking tracks*";
- Officers to try to edit out the frequent use of the words 'natural/nature';
- Officers to clarify meaning of *geomorphology*;
- The panel noted that many submitters supported objective 5.3: *'To empower the community to participate in protection, preservation, and guardianship, to protect and enhance the Reserve'*;
- Officers to explore use of '*commercial*' in objective 5.4 : *'To provide for community non-profit events and ensure commercial activities and events align with the primary purpose (section 1.1) of the Reserve'*;
- The Panel noted the many comments about safety in submissions (especially fire).

Discussion of policies

- 6.1 Commercial Activities: There was discussion about the implications of not permitting commercial activities and note that 6.1.5 allows for overflow parking to be considered on the reserve for '*temporary*' or '*infrequent*' events;
- 6.4 Ecology: The panel suggested that officers add '*biodiversity*';
- Discussion about pest plants and animals, with the panel agreeing that QLDC and the local community could not be solely responsible for rabbit control;
- Pest plants: Ensure that the plan makes it clear that pest plants will be removed before new plantings take place;
- The panel asked officers to review the many suggestions about biodiversity contained in the Forest and Bird Society submission and consider adding them;
- 6.5.12: Discussion about whether the panel should accept the Connexa submission and agree to add '*public service utilities*'. Members questioned whether '*discourage*' was a sufficiently strong word but noted that the policy contained a high threshold requiring it to be '*critical for public health and safety*' and implemented only when '*all other options have been considered and found unsuitable*';

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- 6.5.12: There is reference to ‘*commercial and public infrastructure*’ but officers need to clarify what is meant by the term ‘*commercial infrastructure*’;
- 6.5.14: The panel considered whether accessible toilets needed to be added, noting that a number of submissions had commented on ensuring enabling and encouraging disabled access to Mt Iron Reserve;
- 6.5.3: Access Point 9 is not a good access point and not suitable for vehicles although it would be fine for walking access. Officers noted that policy 6.5.3 promoted establishing a main arrival area and would try to discourage anyone using Access Point 9;
- 6.7.1: Tracks and Trails – The panel discussed the addition of ‘extend’ to the following phrase: *Maintain, upgrade and extend the current walking trail network* (that is, more trails). Members agreed that mountain biking would have to be addressed at some point but did not support describing any biking tracks as a ‘park’ or ‘network’. The panel agreed that walking trails and biking trails should be kept separate in principle. Suggested text: *‘Provide for well designed for biking, walking and commuting trails that meet the needs of users, ensuring that walkers are separate from cyclists, unless shared use is deemed appropriate’*;
- 6.7.4: Officers to check for a consistent use of the words ‘trails’ and ‘tracks’ throughout the RMP;
- 6.7.2: There was discussion about the need for trails need to be peer reviewed if they were well-constructed;
- 6.7.22: Officers were asked to redraft this policy as it was unclear what it was seeking to achieve.

General comments and questions

- Officers to check that the content runs in a logical order;
- Officers to consider whether ‘mountain biking’ should be added as a specific activity; whether ‘and future’ climbing crags should be added and whether the ‘Natural Hazards’ section was strong enough;
- The panel discussed whether specific cycling trails could be added in certain areas of the reserve. It was agreed that if added, these should be contained in an appendix as this would avoid having to change the RMP to accommodate any updates;
- Officers to elevate ‘*serenity*’ and ‘*tranquillity*’ comments;
- Officers to add a policy re stakeholders;
- Officers to bolster the requirements for ecology assessments;
- RMP will identify a main arrival area to the reserve.

It was moved (Councillor Cocks/Councillor Bruce):

That the hearing panel:

- 1. Note the contents of this report;**
- 2. Receive all submissions to the draft Mount Iron Reserve Management Plan, hears the submitters who wish to be heard; and**

3. Recommend to Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board the final form of the Draft Mount Iron Reserve Management Plan to be adopted, with changes as an outcome of the consultation process subject to agreement on the final form of the Reserve Management Plan by the hearing panel.

Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting closed at 11.23am.