

Item 5: Wanaka-Upper Clutha Economic Development Update

SESSION TYPE: Briefing

PURPOSE/DESIRED OUTCOME:

This briefing for information and Q&A purposes only.

DATE/START TIME:

Monday, 12 October 2026 at 1.00pm

TIME BREAKDOWN:

Presentation: 20 minutes

Questions: 25 minutes

PRESENTERS:

Peter Harris (Manager, Economic Futures)
Jan Maxwell (Relationship Manager, Arts & Events)
Kahli Scott (Queenstown Lakes Film Office Manager)
Bex Wollard (Economic Diversification Advisor)
James Mulcahy (Destination Management Advisor)

Externals

Ali Meredith (General Manager, Startup Queenstown Lakes)
Rene Koehler (Coach, Startup Queenstown Lakes)

Prepared by:



Name: Peter Harris
Title: Manager, Economic Futures
30 September 2026

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Pennie Pearce
Title: General Manager, Strategy & Policy
1 October 2026

ATTACHMENTS:

A	Powerpoint Presentation
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Upper Clutha Economic Development update

A brief intro to the Wānaka economy

01

As a % Wānaka's population has grown almost twice as fast in the last 5 years

POPULATION GROWTH | 2020–2025

+21

Wānaka & surrounds
15,390 → 18,650

%



+11%

Queenstown



02

Wānaka has around 1/3 of the businesses, but 1/4 of employment

SHARE OF DISTRICT | 2025



This suggests Wānaka businesses are smaller on average

03

Wānaka has fewer jobs per resident

JOBS PER 100 RESIDENTS 2025

48

Wānaka & surrounds



74

Queenstown-side*

The gap points to a more residential economy in Wānaka

Economic Futures Team Goals

1

Destination Management

Tourism as a force for good

2

Diversification

Growing incomes and career choices

3

Events we can be proud of

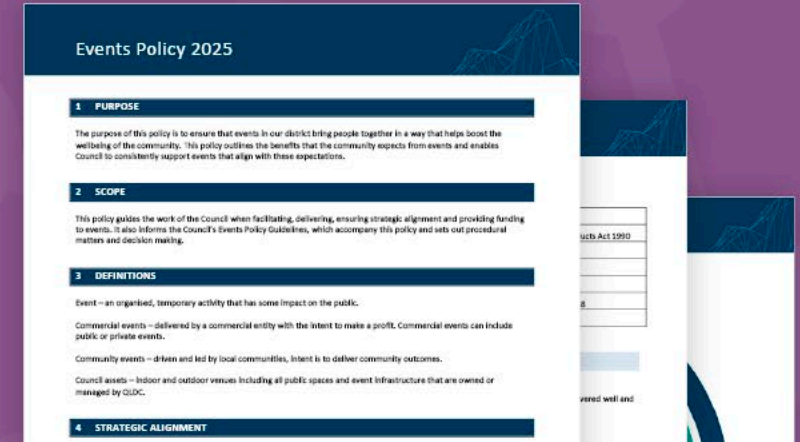
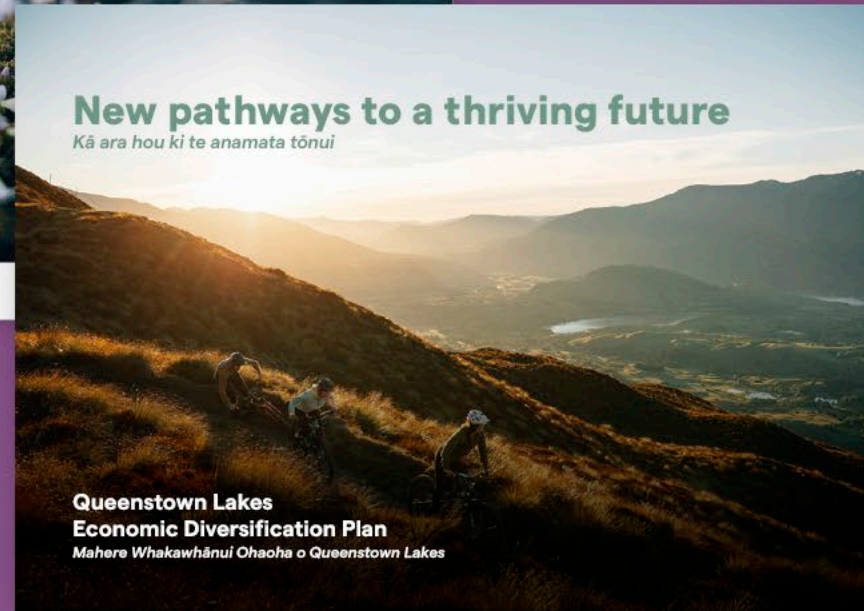
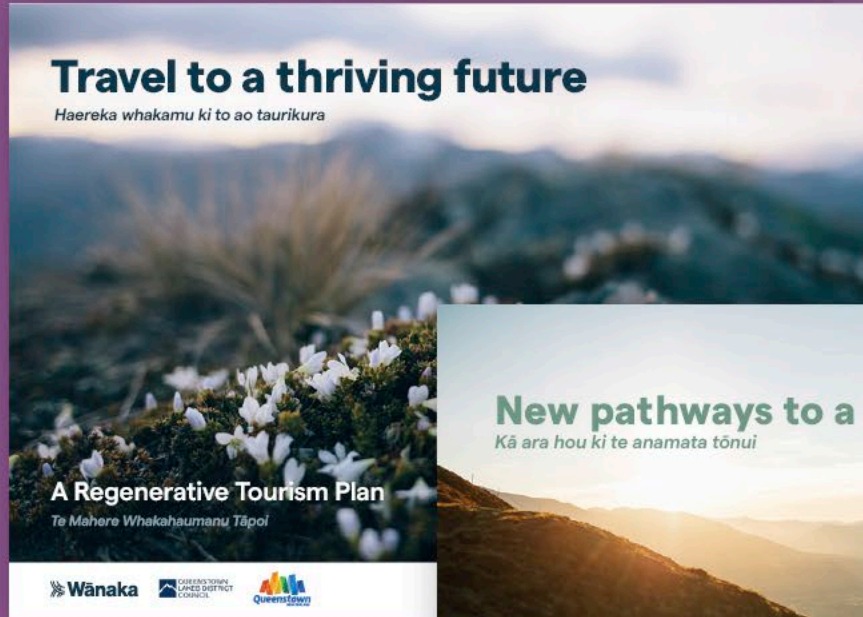


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Our work is informed by...



**Te Muka Toi,
Te Muka Tākata**
The Creativity, Culture and
Heritage Strategy for the
Queenstown Lakes District

Locals on this side



Locals on your side



Destination Management

Technology uptake (Digital Catalyst)

25/26 Pilot - Lavender Farm

"We've taken our basics and redone them, but done them really well. If I had to pay for the whole thing myself and do it properly with that audit, that would have been worth it."

Love Wānaka FY26

\$40,085 in impact grants and \$9,395 invested for the future from 215 visitor and industry donors, 290 volunteer opportunities, 800 natives planted, and 1.8m people reached.

Impact grants supported Te Kākano Mt Iron planting, Predator Free Wānaka, Upper Clutha Wilding Tree Group, Friends of Bullock Creek and the Upper Clutha Tracks Trust



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Destination Management

Improving accessibility at Wānaka lakefront

Trial using mobi-mat to improve access for wheelchair users, mobility scooters and prams

Supporting delivery of “New to Queenstown Lakes” digital hub

Development of a new digital guide to help newcomers and visitors connect with services, opportunities and community networks in the region



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Diversification: Supporting existing businesses

Promotion

- AWOL (1964 and Three Lakes Cultural Trust video)
- Alice Herald Jeweller - Three Lakes Cultural Trust video
- Locally produced beverages – product placement options on Netflix TV production

Investment

- Mainland Angels – Wānaka investor evenings - 15 investors in Wānaka attended most recent investor evening
- Race Ranger – raised \$2.2m via Mainland Angels
- Sidekick soda referred

Strategic advice

- Criffel Futures, Southern Hemisphere Proving Grounds, 1964, Unmaking Podcast, Armadillo Merino





Alice Herald

Jeweller and Designer

Alice transforms ideas, drawings and precious materials into finely crafted jewellery, revealing the patience and precision behind a creative practice.



Charity Tycer

Co-founder, AWOL

Charity shares the journey of turning an idea into an adventure vehicle business - bringing together design, problem-solving & entrepreneurship in Queenstown Lakes.

www.threelakesculturaltrust.co.nz/creativity-innovation#local-creative-stories

Diversification: Fit-for-purpose business infrastructure

Wānaka Airport

Economic potential beyond airline compliance

Energy

EECA battery subsidy – QLDC acting as the broker to access to \$2m+ of subsidies for industrial batteries.

Industrial Land Survey

Connected local tenants to attend workshop to give perspective alongside developers - B-Effect, Ground Up Brewery and Swig Kombucha

Exporting and Logistics Workshops

Bringing together beverage businesses on common challenges



Diversification: Supporting founders and startups

Start Up Queenstown Lakes

- 34% participation from Upper Clutha in past year
- Two Wānaka based part-time roles
- Latin community Startup event included many from Wānaka
- Vibe coding in Wānaka on 21st May with 9 people - 89% rated Excellent/Good
- Connecting founders to networks including Mountain Club events and membership base



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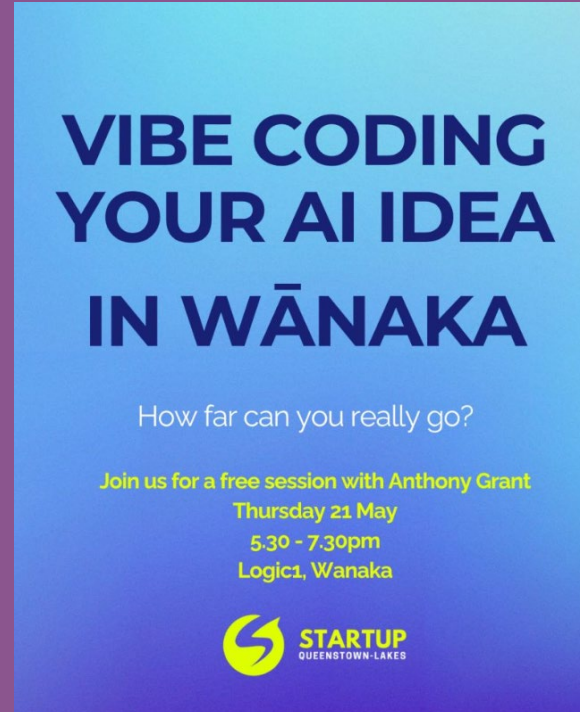


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Wānaka startups being supported include



Connecting Wānaka talent and entrepreneurs



Wānaka Tech Meetup, September 9

Diversification:

Fostering local professional and business networks

Sponsoring emerging business award for Wānaka Business Chamber

Encouraging **Wānaka groups** to apply to Diversification Fund – applications include

- Wanaka Women in Tech
- Logic 1
- Wānaka Business Chamber
- Bunker Street

Join the Dots connection event 12 October

Search for 'legacy leaders' willing to lead local industry initiatives



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Diversification: Exploring other niche industry potential



Eight Wānaka businesses have been involved in initiatives to expand the local beverage sector



And we continue to explore the potential for outdoor products

Film

Permitting

Ongoing film permitting facilitation for Upper Clutha based film productions

Connections

Film Office film community coffee drop-in sessions held in Wānaka and engagement with production companies – e.g. Bunker Street Film, The Beards, Hunt Cinema

Influence

2 Upper Clutha industry representatives on the Film Otago Southland Board



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Film

Talent development

Southern Documentary Accelerator Lab held in Wānaka. Inaugural production grant awarded to a Wānaka based project *Don't Whistle at the Aurora*

New Zealand Mountain Film Festival Adventure Film School (Wānaka) and Outsiders Talent Development Programme (Hāwea) supported to help upskill outdoor/adventure filmmaking talent and crew

Promotion

Strategic emphasis on supporting the outdoor/adventure/sports filmmaking

Local film screenings and film events such as the Little Cinema series



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Southern Documentary Accelerator



NZ Mountain Film Festival Adventure Film School

Arts & Events

New Years Eve

Expanded programme to include extra days prior to and after the 31st December at a cost of approx. \$275K (estimated total cost 26/27 \$550K)

Events Funding

\$122k allocated for 2026/27 across 8 Wānaka events



"The work that goes into this project in creating a safe and contained environment for all downtown cannot be understated..."



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Arts & Events

Funding clinics

3 held annually in Wānaka

Events Water trailer

1 now Wānaka based

Public art

5 significant artworks of the district's public arts portfolio installed in Wānaka – new one to be unveiled this summer

Active member of Better Events Collective



Questions for discussion

Is there any more detail you'd like on any of these initiatives?

Do you have any feedback on the current economic development efforts in Wānaka?

Are there any other groups or individuals that you would recommend we connect with?

Is there any research or data you think would help inform future Wānaka economic development focus?