

BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER of a hearing on submissions on a proposed Variation to Chapter 21 Rural Zone of the Proposed District Plan to introduce Landscape Schedules

ON BEHALF OF Various submitters

SUMMARY EVIDENCE OF BENJAMIN ESPIE (LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT)

2nd September 2026

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Benjamin Espie. My qualifications and experience are set out in my Evidence in Chief (**EiC**) dated the 26th of June 2026. My EiC also sets out the submitters that are calling my evidence.
2. Since the time of my EiC, witness conferencing has resulted in a Joint Witness Statement (**JWS**) dated the 14th of July 2026 and also JWS versions of each of the relevant landscape schedules. The JWS and the JWS Schedules record areas of agreement and disagreement between the witnesses.
3. Subsequent to the JWS, the QLDC planning and landscape witnesses (Mses Frew and Gilbert) have circulated briefs of rebuttal evidence dated the 12th of August 2026. In this summary statement, I summarise my current expert opinion, as informed by the JWS and the QLDC witnesses' rebuttal evidence.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE REGARDING GENERAL ISSUES

4. To achieve some Strategic Objectives and Policies of the PDP, landscape schedules in relation to the identified Priority Areas are required. Landscape schedules for non-Priority Areas are not required in order to achieve any Objectives or Policies. In fact, Strategic Policies 3.3.29, 3.3.33 and 3.3.35 set out that non-Priority Areas are to be dealt with via the methodology of Strategic Policy 3.3.45 and not by way of Landscape Schedules.
5. Whether the proposed Schedules for non-priority RCLs are included in the PDP or not, all of the relevant areas will continue to be subject to the same landscape-related Objectives, Policies and provisions of Chapters 3, 6 and 21 of the PDP, which provide a strong set of provisions that require landscape character to be maintained, and visual amenity values to be maintained or enhanced.
6. It is noted in Te Tangi A Te Manu, Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines

(TTatM)¹ that rating landscape capacity is to rate a generic attribute of an area of land; i.e. a rating of capacity is necessarily a generalisation over a broad area. This is reflected in the preamble to the proposed Landscape Schedules. Over a large area of landscape, generalised, “broad brush” description and capacities make sense. By contrast, assessing and describing the attributes, values and capacities of a small area (such as the proposed schedule areas of East of Wanaka Mount Aspiring Road, Studholme Road and others) is necessarily much less of a generalisation; the assessment and description becomes practically site-specific (although I understand that detailed on-site visits or investigations have not been done). This sort of less-generalised rating of capacity discords with the purpose of the schedules as is set out in the preamble and becomes much more targeted and onerous on the landowners.

7. Ms Gilbert comments on the above point in her rebuttal evidence. I accept that some Priority Areas, for which the PDP requires schedules, are of a small size. Of the three examples of this that Ms Gilbert cites in her paragraph 5.3, two are features rather than landscapes (Feehly Hill and Mount Iron). By definition, a feature is a distinct, discrete entity, smaller than a landscape. None of the proposed non-Priority Areas are outstanding natural features.
8. In her paragraph 5.9, Ms Gilbert goes on to note that the smaller, Rural Character Landscape (RCL) non-priority areas are not landscapes but are areas of rural-zoned land that are not ONL or ONF. This aligns with the point of paragraph 34 of my EiC; that areas such as the East of Mount Aspiring Road or the Studholme Road areas are remnants of previously-existing large rural landscapes that are now small isolated areas of rural zoning, akin to the 50ha area of land in the Sticky Forest vicinity that was annotated in the PDP as RCL but was found by the Environment Court to be “*essentially a small remnant of an original rural character landscape that is now far too small to constitute a landscape*”² and therefore not appropriately categorised as RCL. If these areas are not appropriately categorised as RCL (albeit that there is no scope to change their categorisation) and are small remnants, then in my opinion, inserting schedules into the PDP covering them is at odds with the purpose of the schedules as is set out in the preamble and with the TTatM guidance that identifying generic attributes such as capacity is a generalised “broad brush” exercise.
9. Related to the above is the issue described in my EiC, that the PDP gives a default categorisation of RCL to any Rural Zone land that is not ONL or ONF. This discords with past observations of the Environment Court that the Hawea Flats (for example) may be a rural landscape to which Section 7(c) of the Act is not particularly relevant.
10. In paragraphs 7.1 to 7.7 of her rebuttal evidence, Ms Frew discusses the usefulness that she sees the

¹ Te Tangi A Te Manu, Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines, Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architecture, July 2022 (TTatM).

² [2024] NZEnvC 182, paragraphs 78 and 82.

non-Priority Area Landscape Schedules as providing. She opines that since they provide a starting point in relation to describing the existing landscape, they lead to a more efficient resource consenting process. She gives an example of the Little Morven Trust application (RM241112) which proposed a dwelling and shed on the ONF of Morven Hill and she gives the view that the presence of a landscape schedule helped determine that notification was appropriate and “*avoided the need for assessment under RMA s95 – 95G, and the application could progress more quickly to a s42A assessment*”³.

11. I was engaged as the landscape architect on behalf of the Applicant for RM241112 and, in fact, the applicant volunteered public notification in the application. The presence of a landscape schedule played no part in the determination of notification. Regarding landscape issues, that application involved a Landscape Assessment Report from myself (30 pages); a mitigatory structural landscape plan; photographs, digital model and photo-simulation images; a Peer Review from the QLDC landscape consultant (29 pages); an Addendum Report from myself; an Addendum Peer Review from the QLDC landscape consultant; evidence and supplementary evidence from myself presented at the Commissioner hearing (22 pages); and verbal commentary and discussion at a full day hearing. In the scheme of that resource consenting process, I do not see that the presence of a landscape schedule describing Morven Hill short-circuited the process to any significant degree.
12. Having dealt with many resource consent application processes both before and after the promulgation of the Priority Area Schedules, I consider the process described above in relation to RM241112 to be relatively typical in relation to the type and amount of landscape assessment work associated with an application for rural living on an ONL/ONF site, both before and after the introduction of the Schedules to the PDP. In processes that occurred prior to the Schedules, the disagreements between landscape experts regarding a given application were very rarely regarding the existing landscape; rather any disagreement would typically relate to the effects of the proposed activity. As is set out in the preamble to the Schedules, “*a finer grain proposal-specific assessment of landscape attributes and values will typically be required for plan implementation purposes*”. With the RM241112 application as an example, I do not consider that the landscape-related work associated with a resource consent application of this sort has become noticeably more efficient (in terms of time and cost) since the introduction of the Priority Area Schedules.
13. As the preamble makes clear, the schedules are high-level and a finer-grain assessment is required when a specific proposal is made. In relation to ratings of capacity, as is explained in TTatM:

“Generic attributes such as sensitivity and capacity are necessarily imprecise because they estimate a future. They can be useful and necessary in policy-based assessments, or in comparing alternative

³ Rebuttal of Emily Frew, paragraph 7.4.

*routes/localities, but they become redundant once the actual effects of a specific proposal can be assessed directly*⁴.

14. The assessment of the actual landscape and visual effects of a specific proposed activity in a specific location will always be the main landscape-related task in a resource consent application. The presence of landscape schedules will not significantly increase the efficiency of that work.
15. Notwithstanding the above, I can see logic in a District Plan including schedules that set out the landscape attributes, character, values and capacities in relation to ONLs and ONFs; describing the reasons why a landscape or feature is outstanding. I do not see the same logic in including schedules that describe remnant Rural Zone areas that are not ONLs, ONFs nor Priority Areas, and are often only parts of wider RCLs.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE REGARDING THE WORDING OF SCHEDULES IN THE EVENT THAT THEY ARE INCLUDED IN THE PDP

16. If Landscape Schedules for the non-Priority Area RCL landscapes of the Upper Clutha are to be included in the PDP, my EIC sets out my opinions regarding the wording of those schedules. Furthermore, the marked-up versions of the schedules that are attached to the JWS provide more commentary. Without repeating that evidence, my main points are as follows.
17. In my opinion, including terms like “low-key” and “modestly-scaled” in the capacity ratings text is unhelpful since they are not defined, and they create confusion and the requirement for evaluative policy assessment. Their inclusion also makes the relevant capacity rating particularly specific and narrow, rather than general, which is the intention of a capacity rating. For example, looking at the Studholme Road Schedule (21.23.7), the proposed capacity rating relating to farm buildings is only for farm buildings that are modestly-scaled and that reinforce existing rural character. No capacity rating applies to farm buildings that are not modestly-scaled.
18. “Urban expansions” is now better defined as per the rebuttal evidence of Ms Frew. Additionally, the JWS is clear that the Landscape Schedules are to be used for resource consent processes only; they are not relevant to potential plan changes or spatial planning exercises⁵. I can see some logic in that since urban development that is sought through resource consent processes is likely to be smaller scale developments that may be quite ad-hoc, whereas urban development via spatial planning or plan change

⁴ TTatM, paragraph 5.49.

⁵ JWS, paragraph 51. However, I note that paragraph 4.4 of the preamble states that the Schedules may be relevant for landscape assessments informing plan development proposals. I find that reference confusing and recommend that it is deleted.

processes is likely to more comprehensively deal with a larger area of urban expansion. The schedules, of course, only relate to landscape issues and associated capacity. Through a spatial planning or plan change process, many issues other than landscape are considered and hence an area that is rated as having (for example) very limited landscape capacity for urban expansion via resource consent applications, might be quite logical and appropriate for comprehensive urban expansion via a spatial planning and/or plan change process. However, I am still not comfortable that the proposed wording relating to urban expansion capacity ratings (as per Ms Frew's and Ms Gilbert's rebuttal evidence) fully captures and communicates this issue correctly. I consider that the wording and mechanisms to do so is a plan-drafting issue, rather than one in which my expertise is directly helpful.

19. More specifically regarding the text of particular schedules, I recommend alternative wording to that of the QLDC witnesses in relation to urban expansions in the Mata-au Clutha River (21.22.25) and in relation to rural living in the East of Wanaka Mount Aspiring Road (21.23.6), Studholme Road (21.23.7), Northern End of Criffel/Pisa Range Foothills (21.23.10), Kane Road and Luggate Tarras Highway (21.23.13), Hawea Moraine (21.23.14) and Hawea Basin (21.23.15) schedules. My recommendations are set out in my EiC and in the JWS including the marked-up versions of the schedules that are attached to the JWS.

Ben Espie

2nd September 2026