

**Before the Panel of Hearing Commissioners
For the Queenstown Lakes Proposed District Plan**

In the Matter of the Resource Management Act 1991

And

In the Matter of the Queenstown Lakes Proposed District Plan
(Stage 2 – Hearing Stream 14)

**Statement of Evidence of
Brendan Karl Allen for Trojan Helmet
Limited (Submitter 2387 and Further
Submitter 1157)**

Dated: 13 June 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Qualifications and Experience

1. My name is Brendan Karl Allen.
2. I am the General Manager of the Hills Golf Club, a position I have held since August 2016.
3. My professional qualifications include a National Certificate in Horticulture and Amenity Turf Management.
4. As General Manager of the Hills Golf Club I am responsible for the overall management and performance of all operations of The Hills Golf Club, including strategy development, asset and facility maintenance, operating and capital budgets, and all staff. I am also responsible for the maintenance and operation of the family owned surrounding farm land.
5. Prior to becoming General Manager, I was the Golf Course Superintendent at The Hills from 2012, responsible for the maintenance of the golf course, outdoor areas, and surrounding farm land, along with being part of the wider management team.
6. Prior to arriving at The Hills, I was the Golf Course Superintendent at Royal Auckland Golf Club for 6 years, the Golf Course Superintendent at Tauranga Golf Club for 3 years and held roles at Russley Golf Club in Christchurch and Hamilton Golf Club.
7. I am a former President and Board Member of the New Zealand Golf Course Superintendents Association (NZGCSA). While on the NZGCSA I was instrumental in the establishment of, and a judge for, the NZGCSA Environmental Award for golf courses.
8. Since 2009 I have spoken at several New Zealand Turf conferences and seminars and New Zealand Golf Managers events, primarily focusing on sustainable management practices.
9. I have also travelled extensively through Australia, the USA, and the UK studying golf course operations.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

10. In this evidence I will:
 - (a) outline the history and philosophy of the development of the Hills Golf Course land, including recent developments;
 - (b) describe the facilities at and operation of the Hills Golf Club;
 - (c) outline the membership of the Golf Club;
 - (d) describe the tournaments and special events hosted at the Golf Club;
 - (e) detail the number of staff employed at the Golf Club, both day to day and during tournaments and special events;
 - (f) describe the land maintenance and management philosophy and practices adopted at the Hills;
 - (g) discuss in general terms, the costs of operating and maintaining a golf course like the Hills; and
 - (h) discuss how development enabled by the proposed Hills Resort would complement and enhance the existing facility.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

11. In preparing this evidence I have reviewed the Trojan Helmet Limited's (THL's) submission on Stage 2 of the Proposed District Plan (PDP).

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

12. The Hills Golf Club had its genesis as a small 'pitch and putt' golf course with 3 greens around Sir Michael and Lady Christine Hill's residence. Sir Michael's passion for golf along with their combined passion for the property and the landscape lead to the construction of a full 18-hole championship golf course, which was opened for play in 2007. This proved to be a major financial commitment which was expanded even further when The Hills held 3 consecutive New Zealand Open golf championships, underwriting the event.

13. Organically and as an expression of their commitment to art, Sir Michael and Lady Christine began to create a collection of large scale sculptures which are spread out across the property. This fits with a culture of creativity and enhancing the landscape, which is also in evidence in the large-scale plantings undertaken.
14. Most recently a piece of the land which had consented house sites on it was developed into what will be a world class Par 3 golf course when it opens for play in 2019. It is rustic and natural and designed to feel like a 'walk in the farm', having its beginnings in Lady Christine Hill's desire to share the feeling of the land she walked her dogs across with others.
15. Our goal at The Hills is to ultimately create an environment that is a unique blend of outdoor activities, art, family, and environment.

FACILITIES AND OPERATION

16. There is currently an 18 hole internationally recognised championship golf course at The Hills, along with a 9-hole Par 3 course due to open late summer 2019, and an extensive sculpture park. The clubhouse is an award-winning building which includes a restaurant, gym, and spa rooms. There are also walking tracks around the property, and a high-end lodge onsite. While primarily used by members, visitors can also use the property through a golf and hospitality package.
17. The clubhouse is opening from approximately 7.30am until dusk every day of the year except Christmas, providing high quality food and beverage, a meeting point, and golf services. The clubhouse remains open until the golf course is clear of golfers. The clubhouse is also used by members for evening functions and holds regular dinners for members throughout the year.

THE MEMBERSHIP

18. The Hills Golf Club has a self-imposed limit of 200 family memberships. With a mix of family ages and sizes there are approximately 400 golfers. Family membership includes any children up to the age of 25, with regular golf coaching and extra family activities such as school holiday cooking classes taking place.

19. The membership consists primarily of families with a residence in the area. Approximately 40% of the members are permanent full-time residents. Approximately 30% of the members have a residence here and live here up to 8 months per year. The remaining 30% reside elsewhere and are here for shorter periods on multiple occasions.

TOURNAMENTS AND EVENTS

20. The Hills held its first NZ Open Golf Championship in 2007 and has now held a total of 8 NZ Opens. The Hills is also the main venue for the 2019 NZ Open which is the centenary event. We have also held the NZ PGA Championship twice. In total the Hill family has underwritten 8 major national golf events at a significant personal cost, providing a significant boost to golf tourism in the region.
21. The Hills also holds charity golf and other events, with recent recipients including the Wakatipu Junior Golf Club, Hospice Southland, and Cure Kids.

EMPLOYMENT

22. The staff levels at The Hills change seasonally because of the climate on golf playing numbers, as golf is not a winter sport in this District. At peak during the summer of 2017/8 we had 42 staff, along with a lodge garden team of 4. We have a permanent staff of approximately 24. We also hire temporary staff for member events such as evening functions.
23. During events such as the NZ Open, more than 100 staff will be on site, including those paid by contractors employed to help deliver the event.

LAND MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICES

24. Given our overarching ideals of health and wellbeing, at The Hills are very conscious of the impacts on the land and the environment of the golf course and development. Our land and particular golf course management practices are targeted at reaching the lowest possible input levels, protecting and developing the soils, and ensuring the healthiest possible water bodies. I believe that we have substantially improved the property over the years and take its custodianship seriously. Many of the practices

we follow involve a more labour intensive and costly approach to reduce the effect on the environment. What follows are some examples:

- (a) Waterway management – We have significant planted ‘buffer zones’ around most of our waterways. We maintain the waterway edges mechanically rather than using agrichemicals. We have Tar Amur grass eating carp to control any weed and algae growth, and physically remove any excess weed during the spring growth flush in order to help aquatic health. No nutrients are applied where run off to waterways is possible.
- (b) Plantings – We have planted thousands of tussocks, shrubs, and trees, and continue to do so. We have “no maintenance” zones around much of the property, where we do not undertake any mowing, spraying, or pruning, allowing the flora and fauna uninterrupted. We have seen a large increase in bird and insect life in these zones.
- (c) Fertiliser management - Approximately 90% of the property has no fertiliser applied to it. The golf course operates on an “as little as possible” approach unique in high end golf around the world. For example, our fairways have had an actual nitrogen rate of <2kg/ha/yr. for the last 6 years. This is less than 5% of an average high-end golf course usage. The entire maintained playing surface has had no phosphorus applied in over 5 years. Soil testing is used to push nutrient levels as low as they can be taken while keeping grass cover and playability. All our short-mown surfaces are drip fed using foliar nutrient applications to minimise loss.
- (d) Agrichemical management - Agrichemicals are applied only on an as needed basis with relatively high thresholds for application. We do not broadcast spray herbicides, preferring to spot treat with knapsacks and weed brushes. This is very labour intensive but minimises the potential for damage to the soils and creates a safer environment for our members and staff along with the Hill family who have 3 generations living on site. For essential applications we have switched to products such as acelepryn insecticide which is very targeted and extremely safe. It also happens to cost approximately 10 times traditional agricultural insecticides. We also

use organic products such as tea extracts to discourage insect pests.

- (e) Soil management - The only way to reduce fertiliser and agrichemical use to the extent we do, and maintain exceptional turf surfaces, is to have a very healthy soil. This is done through frequent mechanical aeration and decompaction, judicious water usage, and the application of compost teas for microbiological health. In an effort to 'balance' the soil we use annual soil assays to determine the levels of organisms such as fungi, bacteria, azotobactor, protozoa and the like. The results are used to create a custom compost tea designed to constantly improve the soil health on the property.

OPERATING COSTS

- 25. The Hills is comparatively a very labour intensive and expensive golf course to maintain. The expectations of members, family, and guests are high. The golf course is spread out over a large footprint to fully utilise and experience the land. As outlined above, the Hill family commitment to good custodianship and minimal impact on the land does increase the maintenance costs. In general terms The Hills Golf Club is operated broadly on a break-even basis of cost recovery. There is certainly no return on investment for the many millions spent developing the property.

UPSIDES OF THE PROPOSED HILLS RESORT ZONE

- 26. The proposed Hills Resort Zone has the potential to enable further development of the existing facility, both complementing and enhancing the current operation. The addition of Visitor Accommodation (**VA**) and/or an increase in residents on site could bring additional income streams allowing for the expansion of the facility.
- 27. Invariably, expansion into a resort would necessitate the construction and maintenance of extra facilities such as tennis courts, maintained open spaces, lawn bowls rink, and increased walking and cycling paths for example. The maintenance of the golf courses, the grounds, the associated clubhouse and administration activities and the VA offering would potentially need the staff size to be more than tripled. VA would also require the establishment of building maintenance and housekeeping

teams. Given the accommodation situation in the region, onsite staff housing would be an important addition.

28. There are a variety of golf course VA models already existing in New Zealand such as Kauri Cliffs (Northland), Cape Kidnappers (Hawkes Bay), Kinloch (Taupo), Clearwater (Christchurch) and Millbrook (Arrowtown). Some have no resident accommodation, and others a mix of resident and VA. Further afield there are examples of successful operations such as Barnbogle Dunes in Tasmania, and Bandon Dunes in Oregon that have no resident accommodation but offer quality VA as a counter to their location.
29. A possible model for the Hills Resort would be a mix of high quality residences, owned by members of The Hills and maintained by The Hills staff, and high-quality VA apartments. This would allow us to continue to maintain the highest of standards of the facility while minimising the overall built coverage of the property. We envisage that many of the residences would also be available in the VA pool during the winter period and ski season, when many of our members head to warmer climates.

CONCLUSION

30. The Hills was set up by the Hill family due to a love of the outdoors, the landscape, and golf courses. It has progressed to become an internationally recognised golf course, tournament venue, golf tourist attraction, and sculpture park. The development of the land thus far has been thoughtful and enhancing, reflecting the Hill family beliefs around the health and wellbeing of both people and environments. The Hills Resort could help secure the long-term future of the Golf Club and greater surrounds, providing significant extra employment opportunities, and enhancing the landscape with high quality architecture and plantings that complement the existing facility.

B K Allen

June 2018