

**BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

IN THE MATTER of the Resource Management Act 1991 (the "Act")

AND

IN THE MATTER of the Queenstown Lakes District Proposed District Plan Hearing
Stream 02

EVIDENCE OF STEPHEN SKELTON

21 April 2016

(Landscape)

Ayrburn Farm Estate Limited (430)

Wakatipu Equities Limited (515)

Crosshill Farm Limited (531)

G W Stalker Family Trust, Mike Henry, Mark Tylden, Wayne French, Dave
Finlin, and Sam Strain (534 and 535)

Bill and Jan Walker Family Trust (532)

Slopehill Joint Venture (537)

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 My full name is Stephen Russell Skelton. I am employed as a landscape architect with Baxter Design Group Ltd (BDG), a Queenstown based consultancy specialising in Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Master-planning, Landscape Planning and Landscape Assessment. I hold the qualifications of Masters of Landscape Architecture, Bachelor of Arts in Communication, a Certificate of Sustainable Design, I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and Chairman of the Southern Branch.
- 1.2 I have worked as a landscape architect in the Queenstown Lakes District for 3.5 years, first with Lakes Environmental and now with BDG. In that time I have been involved in dozens of projects within the District, ranging in scale from larger developments to single family residences. My work has included producing regional landscape planning documents, developing design controls for large scale developments, undertaking landscape assessments and design work ranging from master-planning to detailed design.
- 1.3 I have been provided with a copy of the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained in the Environment Court's Consolidated Practice Note 2014. I have read and agree to comply with that Code. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying upon the specified evidence of another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

2. Minimum Lot Sizes- Rural Lifestyle Zone

- 2.1 This evidence responds to Part 10 of Dr Marion Read's evidence relating to Topic 02 Hearing Stream for the District Plan Review ("**DPR**"). That Part of Dr Read's evidence focuses on the proposed Rural Lifestyle Zone and deals specifically with the minimum lot size rule.
- 2.2 The central point of difference between Dr Read's opinion and my own is with regards to the appropriateness of the proposed minimum lot size within the Rural Lifestyle Zone ("**RLZ**"). In Part 10.3 of her evidence, Dr Read states it is her observation that a 2ha lot;

'...enables the keeping of animals and other productive land uses which are characteristic of the broader rural landscapes and which cannot be sustained on smaller lots'¹

- 2.3 While I agree that the presence of grazing animals and other productive land uses contributes to the landscape's sense of rural character, I do not consider these uses to be the benchmark on which a landscape's rural character should be judged, particularly in the Wakatipu Basin given the extent of existing rural living development.
- 2.4 Rural means 'of the country' and rural landscapes can be densely wooded areas or open pastures. While much of the historical emphasis within the District's rural zones has been to preserve and enhance the 'aracadian' pastoral character, I consider rural character can be experienced through landscapes which are characterised by the following;
- (a) natural landforms,
 - (b) open space (being land without buildings) including,
 - (i) patches of vegetation (indigenous or otherwise),
 - (ii) patches of pasture,
 - (iii) patches of crops,
 - (c) rural character elements such as stock fences, gates and appropriately sited and designed structures and dwellings.
- 2.5 The fundamental landscape issue with regard to a minimum lot size is the perceived landscape change, should the minimum lot size in the RLZ be reduced from a 2ha lot to a 1 ha lot. Dr Read rightly points out that the purpose of the RLZ is to direct residential development into parts of the landscape which can better absorb development and away from landscapes or landscape units which are more sensitive to degradation.² One area she cites as successfully supporting a density of 1ha lots is the Hawthorn Triangle.
- 2.6 Decreasing the minimum lot area from 2ha to 1ha would effectively double the current permitted density in the RLZ. It would also likely increase the density of vegetation within the zone. This increase in vegetation will increase the landscape's ability to absorb change and could have positive effects in terms of enhancing natural values.

¹ Para 10.3, page 27, Statement of Evidence of Dr Marion Read, dated 06 April 2016

² Para 10.4, page 27, Statement of Evidence of Dr Marion Read, dated 06 April 2016

- 2.7 Below I assess the potential effects of this proposal using the Dalefield Hill Rural Lifestyle Zone as a particular example, which takes in much of the Dalefield Road, Mountain View Road and Littles Road corridors. This area is used as it is considered a highly regarded area within the Basin which is typical in character of the existing RLZ.
- 2.8 As Dr Read has stated, the RLZ is generally in locations where their visual effects can be contained and/or do not adversely affect significant landscape features. It is the case that often, residents tend to plant along the roadside boundaries. These roadside belts of planting often prevent views across both the immediate and wider landscape. As evidenced in Dalefield, the surrounding topography and roadside vegetation provides a high level of screening of the existing RLZ from the surrounding lands and adjoining roads. As with many of the existing RLZ areas, the effects of development within the Dalefield RLZ are generally experienced from within the zone itself.
- 2.9 Reducing the 2ha density down to a 1ha density in an existing RLZ such as Dalefield will change the existing development pattern, especially when viewed in plan or from elevated views. From more elevated views such as the Coronet Peak Road, the increase in density within RLZ's will have effects, as the zones will appear more compact in terms of vegetation and built form. However I consider these effects can be appropriately mitigated through provisions which control the exterior appearance of buildings so they are visually recessive. Also views of the RLZ's from elevated places are generally held within the wider context of the Wakatipu Basin which is dominated by the outstanding landscapes of the mountains, rivers and lakes. Denser living areas appropriately sited and designed on the valley floor will not adversely affect the appreciation of the wider landscape.
- 2.10 For the reasons detailed above, I do not believe that this change in density will have adverse consequences from external viewpoints. However internally it could result in a new house being erected unexpectedly close to an existing house. This could adversely affect the rural living amenities of the owners of the existing house, particularly if they cannot be involved in the consent process. Adverse effects could arise if a new house is particularly close to the existing house or has a significantly adverse effect on an important view from the existing house.
- 2.11 I have been asked to consider a minimum distance within which an existing landowner should have a limited notification right to submit on a consent application to subdivide from a 2 ha density down to a 1ha density, with the possibility of consent being refused if the effects are sufficiently adverse. I believe an appropriate distance to be 65m. If a new house or residential building platform is further than 65m away from an existing

house or residential building platform, it is highly unlikely that adverse effects would arise, particularly as a direct view line, can usually be addressed by straightforward boundary screen planting.

- 2.12 I consider that the provisions in the Plan which prescribe reasonable setbacks of buildings from roads, control the external appearance of buildings and enable land uses which foster open space and natural values such as vegetation which supports fauna, will ensure an appropriate level of rural character is maintained. While residential density may increase as a result of a minimum 1ha lot size, the overall perceived rural living character of the landscape in the RLZ will be maintained, both in a physical sense and as perceived from internal and external viewpoints.

Steve Skelton

21 April 2016