

Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board

2 April 2026

Report for Agenda Item | Rīpoata moto e Rāraki take [3]

Department: Community Services

Title | Taitara: Mount Iron Trail Plan

Purpose of the Report | Te Take mō te Pūroko

The purpose of this report is for the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board to consider whether to approve the Mount Iron Trail Plan.

Recommendation | Kā Tūtohuka

That the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board:

1. **Note** the contents of this report; and
2. **Approve** the Mount Iron Trail Plan.

Prepared by:



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13 March 2026

Reviewed and Authorised by:



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Title: Acting General Manager, Community Services

16 March 2026

Context | Horopaki

1. Council has been facilitating the development of a Mount Iron Trail Plan (Trail Plan) to outline what a future integrated network of walking, biking and horse-riding trails could look like in the Mount Iron Reserve (the Reserve).
2. The Trail Plan has been developed to ensure there is a long-term view for the future of trails, to support the equitable input of different trail groups, to enable an efficient approvals process, and to ensure trails align with the Reserve Management Plan (RMP).
3. On 20 May 2025, the Wānaka-Upper Clutha Community Board (Community Board) was briefed on the development of a Trail Plan. Two further Community Board workshops were held on 25 September 2025 and 12 February 2026 where the Community Board provided direction on the level of engagement to undertake on the Trail Plan and the overall number of trails.
4. The Community Board approved in principle the Stage 1 mountain bike trails requested by Bike Wānaka at a meeting on 16 December 2025, subject to approval of the wider Mount Iron Trail Plan.
5. Council officers have been working with Bike Wānaka, the Upper Clutha Tracks Trust (UCTT) and the Upper Clutha Lakes Equestrian Access Group (UCLEAG), and the Trail Groups, to develop the Trail Plan.
6. Council's decision making around trail development is directed by the Mount Iron RMP. This sets out how the Reserve can be used, enjoyed, maintained, and protected. The RMP was adopted in April 2025 following extensive engagement with the Upper Clutha community.

Existing Trails in the Reserve

7. The reserve has a network of formal, maintained trails (Attachment A). Trails vary in standard between a wide, asphalt, shared use trail parallel to State Highway 84, to a signposted route over Little Mount Iron with no formed trail. There is also a network of informal, unmaintained trails that have developed over time.
8. The existing formal network of trails is primarily used by walkers, dog walkers, runners, and climbers and paragliders accessing their recreation areas in the reserve. It includes the Mount Iron Loop Trail which is a popular walk for locals and visitors.
9. Biking is allowed on the shared use trail at the bottom of Mount Iron between Old Racecourse Road and Anderson Road which is an important commuter route between Albert Town, Three Parks and Wānaka Town centre.

Analysis and Advice | Tatāritaka me kā Tohutohu

10. The Trail Plan (Attachment B - page 2) provides a vision for the reserve which will be used to guide development of a network of trails over time. Having a well-designed plan in place means when trail groups approach Council to build a trail, these can be considered and approved knowing that it will align with an overall network that has considered the needs of all trail groups and addressed potential conflicts. The Trail Plan provides a threshold or limit to trail development.

Description of the Plan

Existing Network of Formal Trails

11. The Trail Plan preserves the existing network of formal, maintained trails but proposes some change to multi-use trails over time. This includes:

- Keeping the existing 5km Mount Iron loop trail as walking only.
- Keeping the existing trail between Old Racecourse Road and Anderson Road as shared use.
- Keeping the Hidden Hills trail as walking only (except at the reserve access point from Hidden Hills Drive where shared use would facilitate access to the mountain biking trails).
- Changing part of the existing Little Mount Iron trail from a walking trail to a multi-use trail.

New Network of Formal Trails

12. The Trail Plan proposes an expanded network over time, created by formalising existing informal trails and building new trails. This includes:

- Creating a network of mountain biking trails.
- New walking and running trails to provide a variety of experiences and improve access through the reserve e.g. a walking trail that provides a more direct connection between the Old Racecourse Road entrance and the Hidden Hills entrance.
- Creating a one-way loop trail for horse riding through multi use trails and horse priority trails.

13. The Trail Plan proposes trails that are priority for certain users e.g. bike priority trails and where appropriate, multi-use trails for all users including walkers, mountain bikers, and horse riders. The multi-use trails will be uphill only for bikers so all users will be travelling at slower speeds.

14. Trail crossings will be addressed through the detail design process e.g. bringing bikers to a stop at an intersection (which could involve using the natural topography), vegetation trimming to increase sight lines or signage. These approaches work successfully in other reserves in the district.
15. Existing informal trails used by rock climbers to access the climbing areas on the northeastern side of the reserve will remain informal and are not shown on the Trail Plan.

New Recreation Uses on the Mount Iron Reserve

16. The Trail Plan proposes a new network of grade 3-6 mountain biking trails due to the steepness of the terrain. This complements the existing grade 2 shared use trail around the bottom of the reserve and provides for trails that meet the needs of a range of users.
17. The Trail Plan proposes a one-way loop trail for horse riders around the reserve. If the UCLEAG wish to progress horse riding in the reserve (including if it's only partial access to a future loop trail), a 12-month trial will be supported. This will allow consideration of whether access is appropriate and to gauge use. Parking of horse floats and access onto the trails would be from one access point along State Highway 84 (to be confirmed). An events-based approach was considered but it was determined the trial approach would have a lower impact on other users of the reserve.

Staging of Trail Building Over Time

18. Trails will be built over time as trail groups approach Council based on their individual priorities and funding. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate the timeframe in which trails would be built but it is expected to be staged over many years.
19. Council has no plans or funding in the Long Term Plan 2024-34 to build new trails in the reserve. Council's focus will be on maintaining the existing trail network.
20. Bike Wānaka is the only user group that plans to progress immediate trail building. Bike Wānaka will apply for resource consent for the Stage 1 mountain bike trails. If approved, they will progress construction with the aim that trails are ready for use in summer 2026/27. Attachment B - page 1 shows the stage 1 mountain biking trails alongside the existing trails.
21. If the Trail Plan is approved, the width and grade of any proposed trails would be agreed through detailed design in accordance with the NZ Mountain Bike Trail Design Guidelines and Queenstown Lakes District Council's (QLDC) Trail Design Standards and Specifications. In accordance with the NZ Mountain Bike Trail Design Guidelines, adaptive bike trail specifications will be met where feasible.
22. The Trail Plan is a concept-level guide, and minor adjustments to the alignment may occur on site during detailed design and construction.

Consideration of Existing Values at Mount Iron Reserve

23. Mount Iron has significant ecological values, is an important geological landmark in the Wānaka landscape and is significant to mana whenua.
24. A high level ecological assessment and landscape assessment of the proposed trails have been undertaken to inform the Trail Plan. These have informed the removal or relocation of proposed trails from the Trail Plan and identified where trail building will require mitigation of effects.
25. Te Ao Marama Incorporated (TAMI) provided recommendations related to the cultural impacts of the Stage 1 mountain bike trails which have been applied to development of the Trail Plan. TAMI and Aukaha also inputted Kai Tāhu values into the ecological assessment. TAMI and Aukaha will continue to be involved as detailed design and trail building progresses.
26. Further consideration of existing values will happen through resource consenting processes and through detailed design e.g. exact trail alignments being reviewed on site by an independent, qualified ecologist.

Maintenance and Management

27. Maintenance will be required on the trails to preserve them and to minimise their impacts on the reserve. Annual maintenance will be dependent on usage and weather events.
28. Trail groups will be required to fund maintenance of trails they build and any signage, which will be confirmed through a formal agreement with Council. The user group will also be required to manage and rectify any unauthorised trail building.

Approval of Trail Building over Time

29. The Community Board holds the delegation to make decisions on 'shared pathways and tracks' in the Upper Clutha.
30. Approval of the Trail Plan would mean that proposals from trail groups wanting to build trails aligned with the Trail Plan would be considered for approval by Council Officers i.e. individual trails would not require Community Board approval. Consideration would be given to how trail groups were managing and maintaining any existing trails as well as the overall management of the reserve and alignment with the RMP.
31. It is expected that the vision for the reserve and its use may change over time and that the Mount Iron Trail Plan would be reviewed as needed.
32. This report identifies and assesses the following reasonably practicable options for assessing the matter as required by section 77 of the Local Government Act 2002.

33. Option 1: Endorse the Mount Iron Trail Plan

Advantages:

- Provides a long-term view for trail development on Mount Iron that ensures trails built over time create a cohesive network that also includes a limit on future trail development in the reserve.
- The Trail Plan has been developed with the trail groups and will therefore meet their recreational requirements.
- The Trail Plan supports existing and new recreational activities to happen in the reserve which benefit the social wellbeing and health of the local community.
- The Trail Plan has considered the existing Kai Tāhu values, ecological values and landscape values in it's development.
- Decision making will be more efficient as future individual trail requests aligned with the Trail Plan will not need to be considered by the Community Board.
- The reserve will provide an opportunity for horse riding, as there are currently limited opportunities on QLDC trails.

Disadvantages:

- May create an expectation in the community that all proposed trails will be built immediately.
- The future vision for trail development in the reserve may not be supported by some people in the community.

34. Option 2: Don't endorse the Mount Iron Trail Plan

Advantages:

- No expectation by community of all trails being built immediately.

Disadvantages:

- There will be no clear vision for how the Mount Iron trail network might evolve over time, potentially leading to individual trails being built that prioritise the needs of certain trail groups or that don't create a cohesive network.
- The recreational, social and health benefits won't be realised.

- More efficient decision making won't be realised with individual trails needing to be approved by the Community Board.

35. This report recommends **Option 1** for addressing the matter because it will provide a long-term vision for trail building on Mount Iron developed by the trail groups with consideration of the existing values in the reserve. It will also enable efficient decision making.

Consultation Process | Hātepe Matapaki

Significance and Engagement | Te Whakamahi I kā Whakaaro Hiraka

36. This matter is of medium significance, as determined by reference to the Council's Significance and Engagement Policy 2024 because of the high level of community interest in the development of trails in a highly valued reserve.
37. The persons who are affected by or interested in this matter are current and future users of the Mount Iron Reserve, nearby residents, mountain bikers, horse riders, walkers, runners, and recreation and conservation groups operating in the reserve.
38. As part of the development of the Mount Iron RMP, extensive engagement was undertaken to understand what the community wanted to see for the future of the reserve. Therefore, wider community engagement hasn't been undertaken on the Trail Plan.
39. Development of the Trail Plan is happening with recreation groups looking to build trails on Mount Iron. Engagement has been undertaken with reserve stakeholders and will continue to be undertaken on the effects of trail design on their activities in line with the Mount Iron RMP.

Māori Consultation | Iwi Rūnaka

40. Council has consulted with Aukaha and TAMI on development of the Trail Plan. No specific feedback has been received at this stage of the process.

Risk and Mitigations | Kā Raru Tūpono me kā Whakamaurutaka

41. This matter relates to the Community & Wellbeing risk category. It is associated with RISK10005 Ineffective planning for community services or facilities within the QLDC Risk Register. This risk has been assessed as having a high residual risk rating.
42. The approval of the recommended option will allow Council to implement additional controls for this risk. This will be achieved by having an approved Trail Plan which will set out the future of what a well-planned trail network will look like in the reserve.

Financial Implications | Kā Riteka ā-Pūtea

43. There are no costs to Council by endorsing the Trail Plan. Any groups approaching Council to build trails on Mount Iron will be expected to fund the build, maintenance, and ongoing management of these trails.

Council Effects and Views | Kā Whakaaweawe me kā Tirohaka a te Kaunihera

44. The following Council policies, strategies and bylaws were considered:

- QLDC's Strategic Framework including Vision Beyond 2050: Our Strategic Framework | Queenstown Lakes District Council
- Reserves Act 1977
- Mount Iron Reserve Management Plan
- Significance and engagement policy 2024

45. The recommended option is consistent with the principles set out in the named policies.

46. This matter is not included in the Long Term Plan/Annual Plan. No Council funding is required.

Local Government Act 2002 Purpose Provisions | Te Whakatureture 2002 o te Kāwanataka ā-Kiaka

47. Section 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 states the purpose of local government is (a) to enable democratic local decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities; and (b) to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities in the present and for the future. This decision will support future access to trails in the Upper Clutha by endorsing a Trail Plan. As such, the recommendation in this report is appropriate and within the ambit of Section 10 of the Act

48. The recommended option:

- Can be implemented through current funding under the Long Term Plan and Annual Plan;
- Is consistent with the Council's plans and policies; and
- Would not significantly alter the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of the Council or transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Attachments | Kā Tāpirihaka

A	Appendix 1 Mount Iron Reserve Map from the Mount Iron Reserve Management Plan
B	Mount Iron Trail Plan (including a subset - existing and proposed stage 1 trails)