

# POTENTIAL PLAN CHANGE TO INCREASE RESIDENTIAL CAPACITY AT KINGSTON (Plan Change 25)

Review of draft masterplan

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**vivian+espie**  
resource management and landscape planning

Vivian + Espie Limited Resource Management and Landscape Planning PO Box 1559 Queenstown  
Physical Address Studio 6 74 Glenda Drive Frankton Queenstown  
Tel +64 3 441 4189 Fax +64 3 441 4190 Web [www.vivianespie.co.nz](http://www.vivianespie.co.nz)

# 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Queenstown Lakes District Council (the Council) is contemplating a plan change in order to expand the residential area of Kingston township. We have prepared a “Report on Landscape Issues” in relation to this contemplated plan change dated 15 May 2007 (we will refer to that report as “the Landscape Issues Report”). That report discusses the suitability of such a plan change in terms of landscape issues and to makes some broad findings regarding suitable methods and alternatives.

1.2 I note that this report (and the Landscape Issues Report) provides comments and findings in terms of broad-scale landscape issues. While we comment on the details of the proposed draft Masterplan, we do so in terms of broad-scale effects on the surrounding landscape and observers in it, we do not make findings regarding the details of the urban design of the Masterplan in terms of future residents and users of the proposed urban area itself. It is our understanding that the internal urban design merits of the draft Masterplan will be reviewed separately.

1.3 Subsequent to the Landscape Issues Report and other initial investigative work, the Council’s consultants have produced a draft Masterplan that depicts a proposed extension of Kingston township in a south-westerly direction. The draft Masterplan includes:

- a street network,
- a reserves and open spaces network,
- a configuration of activity areas, being:
  - highest density residential (my understanding is that this will involve residential lot sizes of 350 to 500m<sup>2</sup>),
  - medium density residential (my understanding is that this will involve residential lot sizes of 450 to 700m<sup>2</sup>),
  - lowest density residential (my understanding is that this will involve residential lot sizes of 700 to 900m<sup>2</sup>),
  - employment
  - school
  - golf club house

- open space
- details of how street corridors and associated pedestrian/amenity space is proposed to be designed.

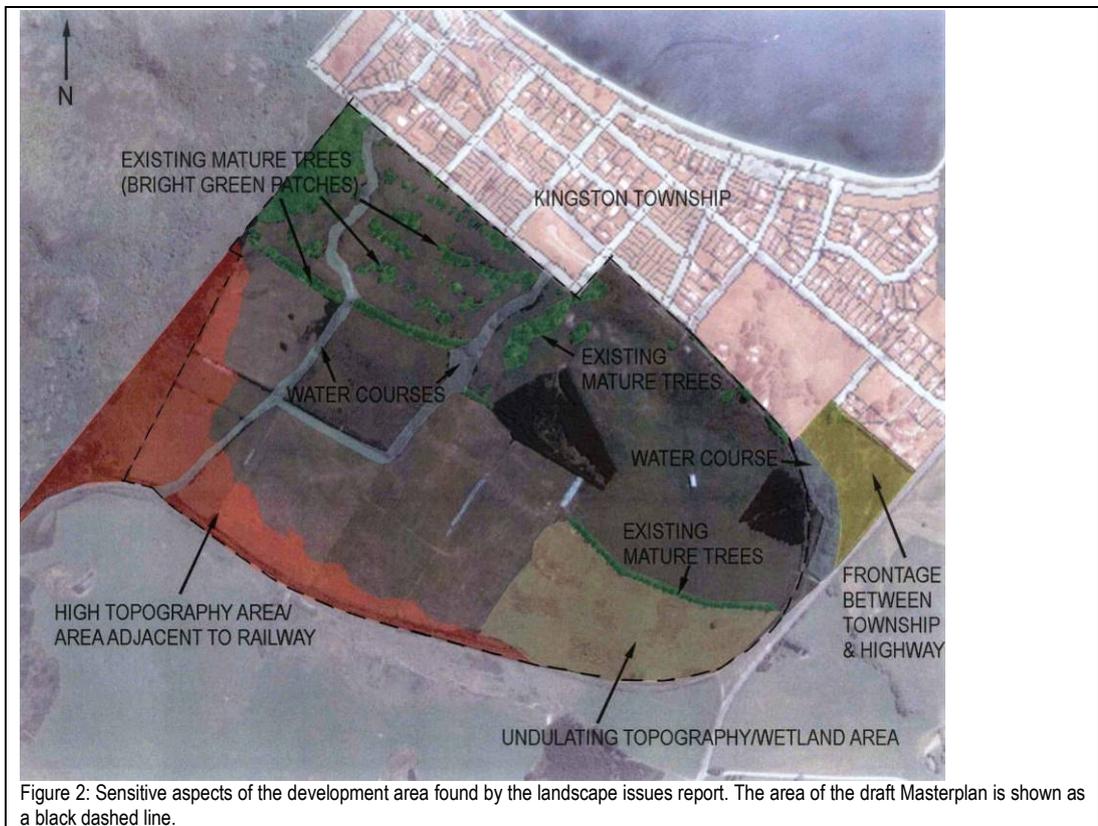
1.4 The purpose of this report is to review the appropriateness of the draft Masterplan in light of the findings of the Landscape Issues Report and in terms of landscape planning and landscape effects in general. This report also makes some comments on proposed zone provisions that have been prepared on behalf of the Council (in relation to building heights etc) and on planting design that is proposed to be included as part of the plan change. We note that this report only considers the effects of development that is proposed within the plan change area (that is shown on Figure 2).

## **2.0 THE FINDINGS OF THE LANDSCAPE ISSUES REPORT RELEVANT TO A REVIEW OF THE DRAFT MASTERPLAN**

2.1 The Landscape Issues Report makes a number of findings that are relevant to a review of the draft Masterplan. After an analysis of the landscape context and statutory context of Kingston township, The Landscape Issues Report examines the ability of the landscape to absorb development and comments on suitable locations and methods. The valley floor area to the south-west of Kingston township, to the north-east of the escarpment followed by the Kingston Flyer track, is found to be able to absorb development in accordance with the provisions of the Plan and the Act. This area (that we will refer to as “the development area”) is shown on Figure 1 below. It is within this development area that the draft Masterplan proposes development. We note that the draft Masterplan does not propose development over the entirety of this area.



2.2 Having identified that this area is suitable for development, the Landscape Issues Report makes some findings regarding sensitive aspects of this identified development area that should be considered at the time of development design. Again these findings are arrived at after consideration of the provisions of the Plan and the Act. These sensitive aspects of the development area are identified on Figure 2 below.



2.3 The sensitive aspects, and the suggestions relating to these, that are found by the Landscape Issues Report are:

- The water courses that run through the area (the alignment of some of which have been modified for farming purposes). While currently in a degraded state, the water courses identified on the figure above are potentially sensitive in terms of the impact of rural use and further development on water quality through the site and ultimately in Lake Wakatipu. They could also potentially provide positive amenity and public access through a new suburban area and could provide for natural character and ecological linkages. Possible treatment of the identified water courses includes protecting them from building and treating them in a useful way such as providing pedestrian access and providing appropriate riparian management in order to enhance natural character.
- The high topography area adjacent to the railway. This area is sensitive to future development due to its potential visual prominence when seen from the east, including the highway. This area, if developed, could appear as sprawl of the township, particularly when approaching Kingston from the north and from the surface Lake Wakatipu. Development in this area could have a potential adverse effect on the amenity that is currently enjoyed by passengers on the Kingston Flyer. Also, the railway could have potential adverse effects on the amenity of this high topography area if it was used for dwellings. We note with reference to Figure 2 that part of this area (the highest part in fact) is outside of the area of the draft Masterplan.
- The undulating topography/wetland area. This is an obviously less modified area contained by the south-eastern part of the identified development area. There is a row of gum trees that runs along its entire north-western boundary. This area is sensitive to future development in that it displays original natural topography and contains large areas of native wetland species (*Juncus* sp). Dense housing in this area also has the potential to be seen as sprawl along the highway to the south of the existing township. Possible treatment of this area includes lower density living while protecting areas of native vegetation and further revegetation including tree planting. This area also has opportunities to create a clear southern edge to future expansion of the township.

- The frontage between the township and SH6. This area is sensitive to future development as it is very visible from the highway and will be the most publicly viewed and experienced part of an expanded township. Possible treatment of this area includes careful design of the town's road frontage to create an interesting, interactive interface between Kingston and the highway corridor. We note with reference to Figure 2 that this area is outside of the area of the draft Masterplan.
- The existing mature trees. These are the row of gum trees to the south-east of the area, the trees contained within the golf course, the trees that line the southern boundary of the golf course and an area of willows north west of the golf course. These are sensitive in relation to the possible growth of Kingston in that they could potentially add natural character and amenity to future township development. They could provide some screening and visual softening to future township development when viewed from the north and provide a mature natural element amongst new suburban growth. They could also provide ecological linkages and habitat for native fauna. At the time of design, there should be careful consideration of which trees are beneficial and which are not. Subsequent treatment should include the incorporation of beneficial trees into urban design.

2.4 In an overall sense, the Landscape Issues Report finds that residential development in the area proposed is suitable and appropriate in terms of its effects on the landscape, although the above aspects of sensitivity should be taken into account.

### **3.0 THE DRAFT MASTERPLAN**

3.1 The draft Masterplan proposes residential use of three density categories interspersed with open space, an employment activity area, a school area and a golf club house area. In general terms, the denser residential use is proposed to be towards the centre of the development area.

3.2 As outlined previously and as detailed in the Landscape Issues Report, we find that the development is generally appropriately located in terms of its potential effects on

landscape appreciation. The remaining issue is how development is configured within this area. Again, we note that we do not make findings regarding the details of the urban design of the Masterplan in terms of future residents and users of the proposed urban area itself. We have, however, found that the way in which the sensitive aspects of the development area (listed above) are handled may potentially affect broad-scale landscape appreciation. We will review how the draft Masterplan handles these sensitive aspects of the development area in subsequent paragraphs.

## *WATERCOURSES*

- 3.3 The alignment of the existing watercourses bisecting the development area is shown on the figure above. The western watercourse forks in two as it travels in a northerly direction across the development area and enters the golf course at two points. This watercourse alignment appears to have come about by human modification for agricultural purposes. The draft Masterplan proposes to realign this watercourse such that it drains in a northerly direction as part of a landscaped buffer between the employment activity area and the western part of the residential area (as is shown on Section A of the draft Masterplan). This watercourse will then meet the existing natural alignment that flows through the golf course. The eastern fork of the existing watercourse will be removed but three other north-south running watercourses are provided for within the draft Masterplan area. Again, these are aligned as part of landscaped corridors associated with the roading network.
- 3.4 Given that the existing watercourses that cross the western part of the development area are degraded by stock browsing and have been considerably modified in terms of alignment, we find that the draft Masterplan's treatment of watercourses will not be adverse. The proposed alignment of the new watercourses as components of landscaped corridors will provide for linkages in terms of natural character and ecology and will bring a network of green space amenity into the new suburban fabric.
- 3.5 The existing watercourse at the extreme eastern edge of the development area (shown on Figure 2) is outside of the area that has been considered by the draft Masterplan.

### *THE AREA OF HIGH TOPOGRAPHY ADJACENT TO THE RAILWAY*

- 3.6 The westernmost (and highest) part of this high topography area has been excluded from the draft Masterplan area (as can be seen on Figure 2. Consequently, no development will occur in this area.
- 3.7 The proposed employment activity area occupies a strip of relatively elevated land. It will be potentially visible from the east, including the State Highway and from the surface of the lake. The avoidance of visible sprawl and the encouragement of the absorption of development into the landscape are goals of the Plan, as is the screening of structures using vegetation. With regard to the mitigation of the potential effects of the employment activity area, we note that the height of buildings in this area is restricted to 7 metres by proposed Plan provisions. We have also examined a draft “Open Space and Reserves Establishment and Maintenance Plan” prepared by Te Ngahere Ltd dated June 2008 (the Te Ngahere plan). As can be seen on the draft Masterplan documents, there is an open space strip of some 20 to 28 metres in width that runs down the south-eastern side of the proposed employment activity area. The Te Ngahere plan suggests various native shrub and small tree species in this strip and specimen trees from a list of five species. We find that this open space strip allows ample space to install dense, high planting that is useful in terms of the mitigation of potential visual effects. We support the suggestions of the Te Ngahere plan but suggest that the proposed specimen trees are given particular emphasis in terms of numbers in this area (particularly in the reserve areas labelled LR01 and SW01). We also find that planting need not be wholly native (as the Te Ngahere plan suggests) but should suitably include repeated exotic species so as to reflect the character of the existing Kingston township. We expand on this issue below.
- 3.8 The blocks of residential development labelled as R2, R11 and R17 on the draft Masterplan are also on an area of locally high topography. Again, there are considerable areas of open space adjacent (and to the east) of them that can be effectively used to mitigate potential adverse effects stemming from prominence of buildings. These reserve strips (labelled as LR02, SW03 and, less importantly, LR04) are wide enough to allow good mitigatory planting to be installed. Again, we support the suggestions of the Te Ngahere plan in this regard but suggest emphasising the proposed specimen trees as above.

### *THE UNDULATING TOPOGRAPHY/WETLAND AREA*

- 3.9 This part of the development area is undulating and variable in topography and has apparently not been modified for farming purposes in the way that the remainder of the area has. It includes many boggy areas which accommodate native sedge species. The draft Masterplan locates a mix of residential activities in this area; it will become part of the suburban fabric of the extended township. In addition to the residential activities, there is proposed to be a green corridor down its western edge, another green corridor close to its eastern edge and a 2200m<sup>2</sup> neighbourhood reserve. The proposed green corridors are also to act as storm-water management areas.
- 3.10 It is our understanding that an expert ecological assessment has been conducted in relation to this area. We defer to that assessment in terms of the ecological values of this area. It is our understanding that wetland planting is to be combined with stormwater retention in the green corridors mentioned above and in a large area within the current golf course.
- 3.11 In terms of providing internal amenity, we find that the proposed wetland treatment has merit in that it will provide areas with a wetland character that are linked to a pedestrian amenity walkway network.

### *THE FRONTAGE BETWEEN THE TOWNSHIP AND STATE HIGHWAY 6.*

- 3.12 The existing Township Zone of Kingston fronts State Highway 6 for a stretch of 300 metres. This stretch includes the existing petrol station, café, cemetery and motor camp (which takes up the southern portion of the zone).
- 3.13 As can be seen on Figure 1, the area for potential development that we identified in our Landscape Issues report would potentially extend this frontage in a southerly direction. The draft Masterplan proposes residential development that practically fronts the state highway but is separated from it by the Kingston Flyer track. The draft Masterplan does not address the area between the Kingston Flyer track and the existing Township Zone. This area is identified as “Frontage between Township and Highway” on Figure 2.

- 3.14 In broad urban design and landscape planning terms, we find that this area that is outside the draft Masterplan area is important in terms of planning the expansion of Kingston, particularly since it fronts the highway, is not separated from it by the railway track and is sandwiched between the existing Township Zone and the development that is proposed by the draft Masterplan. We believe that the issue of what sort of character and activities will be presented to the highway in this area (and Kingston township as a whole) is an issue that is worthy of consideration in the future. It would be anomalous if an area of Rural General Zone continued to exist adjacent to the highway between the new part of Kingston township and the existing Township Zone. Such consideration would appropriately include consideration of such things as speed limits, commercial use, setbacks, car-parking, road corridor treatment and built form in order to create an interesting, interactive interface between Kingston and the highway corridor.
- 3.15 Notwithstanding our findings regarding this area, we note that this area of interface with the highway is outside of the draft Masterplan area.

#### *EXISTING MATURE TREES*

- 3.16 When a new “green fields” residential area is created by way of changes to a District Plan, the retention of existing mature trees can help avoid a particularly exposed and new appearance and help to visually “anchor” the development in the landscape and produce a more established appearance. Many large trees exist within the golf course area. A number of the other existing mature trees coincide with areas of proposed open space or street corridors. We believe that the retention of as many of these trees as possible would be beneficial and would not appear to conflict with the suggestions of the Te Ngahere plan.

#### *PROPOSED SPECIMEN TREE PLANTING*

- 3.17 As alluded to above, we have some concern at the use of a wholly indigenous plant palette for specimen tree planting within the proposed development. The vegetative character of the existing valley floor and township is largely exotic, with a strong influence of tall eucalyptus species and coniferous evergreen trees. Many of the conifers and eucalypts are planted in clumps, and a strong line of eucalypts runs through the centre of the proposed plan change area. Large deciduous exotics, such as Lombardy poplar are also in evidence, particularly on the golf course.

3.18 As one of the key drivers of the master plan was to fit with the existing landscape character, we consider a landscape response to the predominance of exotics in the local rural landscape is important. We also consider it important that where space permits, trees selected for amenity planting should be capable of growing of a size commensurate with the scale of the Kingston landscape. Trees should also be selected with a long term vision in mind, such that the choice of species will realise a significant asset of amenity trees over a period of 50-75 years, at least. We also acknowledge the importance of the Council's "District Tree Policy" document and recognise the fact that some trees species can cause problems in a dense residential environment.

3.19 Tree species recommended in the Te Ngahere report are limited to a "Specimen Tree Mix" of indigenous trees, containing a restricted palette of the following species:

*Hoheria angustifolia*

*Plagianthus regius*

*Nothofagus solandri var. cliffortioides*

*Sophora microphylla*

*Podocarpus cunninghamii* (syn. *P hallii*)

3.20 These species rarely, if ever, attain the stature of the exotic trees that currently characterise the site, and the list should be augmented with species that will be more in scale with the landscape context. We propose that *Hoheria* and *Plagianthus* be deleted from the schedule as they do not develop into specimens that could be regarded as a long term amenity asset for the proposed community.

3.21 The Council's "District Tree Policy" document provides guidance on planting of individual trees, groups of trees and areas of existing and regenerating bush on Council administered reserves, civic open spaces and other Council owned lands that fall within the jurisdiction of the Council Parks Manager. Policy 4.1.2.1(a) of Council's tree policy requires that all new subdivision works must submit a street tree planting plan (detailing species, size, location, irrigation plans and planned on-going maintenance regimes) to Council as part of the resource consent process. It is recommended that prior consultation is undertaken with the Council Parks Manager prior to the consent process in order to identify suitable species. Policy 4.1.2.1(e) requires all tree plantings and after-care maintenance is

undertaken in accordance with the Council's "Arboriculture Tree Operations Manual January 2006" or subsequent amendments. The following list is an indication of species that may be appropriate in this location:

*Prunus serrulata* 'Amanogawa' (particularly suitable as a street tree)

*Metrosideros umbellata*

*Malus* species

*Pyrus* species

*Acer palmatum*

Kowhai

Liquidambar

3.22 The planting of exotic trees in substantial groups of the same species will continue established themes evident in the local landscape. We propose as a general design principle the recommended trees be planted in clumps or groups of say, 3, 5, 7 or even greater numbers of specimens, according to space. It is particularly appropriate that such stands be established in reserve strips and greenways, where sufficient space is available to permit their full development. Generally, clumps should be of a single species, as is evident in existing stands. We recommend that the indigenous species proposed (*Podocarpus*, *Sophora* and *Nothofagus*) also be planted in stands, or groups of a single species.

3.23 We are unaware of any reason why the *Podocarpus* should be restricted to *P. cunninghamii*, and recommend that *P. totara* also be included. Similarly, we question why the *Nothofagus solandri* should be the variety *cliffortioides*, and not just *N. solandri*, and also *N. fusca*. We are not persuaded that in an urban development such as is proposed, the tree palette should be based strictly on whatever may or may not grow in the immediate locality.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The draft Masterplan proposes development within the area that was identified as being suitable by the Landscape Issues Report, however, it the development that is proposed does not cover the entirety of this area.

4.2 The sensitive aspects of the identified development area are handled by the draft Masterplan as follows:

- A number of south-to-north running watercourses are proposed by the draft Masterplan for storm water management. These watercourses will be part of landscaped corridors associated with the street network so as to allow for ecological linkages and amenity. These will take the place of the existing watercourses in the western part of the development area that are degraded and have been artificially aligned.
- The highest topographical part of the development area (being the area to the north and west of the proposed employment activity area) has been excluded from the draft Masterplan area. The proposed employment activity area and the identified R2, R11 and R17 residential areas are also in areas of relatively high topography. We find that the proposed Plan provisions relating to building height, coupled with the proposed open space areas, mean that the potential adverse effects of visual prominence of buildings in these areas can be mitigated, provided that planting is done appropriately in the various open space strips.
- The area of wetland and undulating topography in the south-eastern part of the development area is proposed to be drained by two planted corridors and will essentially become part of the suburban fabric of an expanded Kingston township. Wetland character will be recreated in these corridors and in a considerable area within the existing golf course. These areas will be linked into a walkway network. With regard to the ecological values of this area, we defer to the expert ecological report that has been prepared.

- The draft Masterplan area does not address the area between the Kingston Flyer track and the existing Township Zone at the eastern end of the identified development area (as can be seen on Figure 2). We believe that the consideration of this area as part of the overall consideration of the nature of the future highway frontage of an expanded Kingston township is of importance and is an issue that the Council should examine in the future.
- In an overall sense, we find that the proposed draft Masterplan is generally an appropriate response to the site in terms of broad scale landscape planning. In general terms, it will provide a logical and cohesive extension to Kingston.

**Vivian+Espie Ltd**  
**15 October 2008**