

Item 2: Investigation of Options for Freedom Camping & Low-Cost Camping

SESSION TYPE: Workshop

PURPOSE/DESIRED OUTCOME:

The purpose of this workshop is to discuss additional freedom and low-cost camping opportunities, including whether Council wishes to investigate more sites, and provide feedback on assessment criteria to identify suitable future locations. Councillors are asked to consider the information provided, and provide feedback to inform the development of this work programme, including:

- Whether there should be additional freedom camping or low-cost camping capacity;
 - If yes, then:
- What types of sites should be investigated;
- What facilities (if any) should be provided;
- What capacity would be appropriate, and should any locations or wards be prioritised; and
- What assessment criteria should be applied for identifying sites.

DATE/START TIME:

Tuesday, 6 October 2026 at 10.30am

TIME BREAKDOWN:

Presentation: 20 minutes

Debate/Discussion: 40 minutes

PRESENTERS:

Amy Galloway (Responsible Camping Programme Manager)

Dom Harrison (Parks & Reserves Planner)

Marie Day (Community Partnerships Manager)

Prepared by:



Name: Amy Galloway

Title: Responsible Camping Programme Manager

24 September 2026

Reviewed and Authorised by:



Name: Ken Bailey

Title: General Manager, Community Services

25 September 2026

ATTACHMENTS:

A	Investigation of Options for Freedom Camping and Low-cost Camping Presentation
B	Assessment Outcomes - Examples (page 15)

Responsible Camping

Investigation of Options for Freedom Camping and Low-cost Camping
6 October 2026 Council workshop

Purpose of Workshop

Officers are seeking direction and feedback on:

- > Whether there should be additional freedom camping or low-cost camping capacity across the district;
 - > If yes, then:
- > What types of sites should be investigated;
- > What facilities (if any) should be provided;
- > What capacity would be appropriate, and should any locations or wards be prioritised;
- > And what assessment criteria should be applied for identifying sites.

Feedback from Councillors will inform next steps.



Context



QLDC reserve land was removed from the scope of the development Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025, as camping activities are already regulated by the Reserves Act 1977. The default position under the Reserves Act 1977 is that camping is prohibited unless it is specifically authorised by the Minister or provided for within a Reserve Management Plan.



At the **26 June 2025** Council meeting to adopt the draft Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025 for public consultation, the report noted that investigations into additional sites for low-cost and freedom camping in the district would be undertaken as part of the wider responsible camping programme.



On **9 October 2025**, QLDC adopted the Freedom Camping Bylaw 2025. This resulted in the identification and designation of 15 car park sites, providing 141 spaces in total. Freedom camping is prohibited in urban areas but camping on rural roads such as on off-road laybys, is permitted subject to a range of specific bylaw conditions – including how close a vehicle can park to the road.



The bylaw was implemented on **1 December 2025**. From then until 30 April 2026, it is estimated 28,000 legal freedom camping nights were provided on local authority land. Over the same period, Council officers responded to 1,054 Request for Service (RFS) and Enforcement Officers issued 2,311 infringements under the Freedom Camping Act 2011 and 151 infringements under the Reserves Act 1977.



The [MBIE International Visitor Survey \(IVS\)](#) results for the year ending June 2026 reported that 3.67 million international visitors came to New Zealand. IVS results indicate 8% of all visitors to New Zealand stayed at a holiday park or campground (approximately 297,000) and 6% of visitors had freedom camped (approximately 217,000). This is an increase from 54,000 in the year ended 2013 to around 123,000 in the year ending 2018.

Finding the right balance



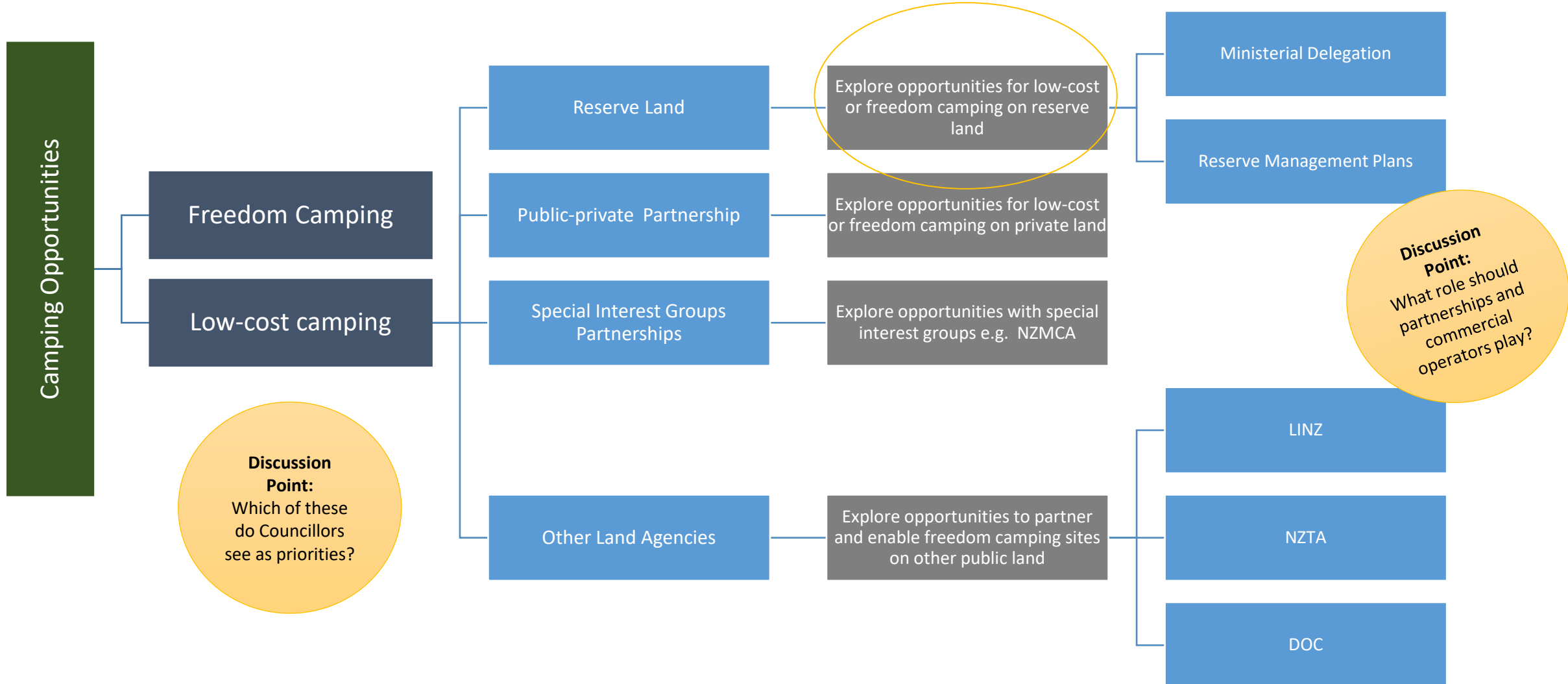
Providing more camping opportunities has both pros and cons...	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Could help reduce pressure on existing sites and help to disperse visitor demand	Would likely lead to increased community concern and opposition
Could improve the visitor experience in Queenstown Lakes	Would require further investment e.g. signs, enforcement, maintenance and infrastructure if required
May result in a more equitable distribution of the impacts of freedom camping across the district	May result in undesirable environmental impacts which would need to be carefully considered and managed appropriately
Supports affordable tourism, and a full spectrum of camping opportunities would be available in the Queenstown Lakes	Risks creating further demand for 'free' nights and council provided facilities
May support improved social cohesion if sites are well managed and in suitable locations	Requires monitoring and management across additional sites

Discussion Point:
Given these pros and cons, what is the appetite for additional low-cost and freedom camping opportunities in the district?

Discussion Point:
What capacity of freedom camping opportunities do Councillors think could be appropriate?

The Freedom Camping Act provides a structure to regulate freedom camping. Neither it nor the Reserves Act stipulates a specific number of freedom camping spots that must be provided. Given high visitor numbers to the district, the opportunities provided are unlikely to meet the demand.

Further exploration options



Further exploration - continued

Discussion Points	Free or Low-cost Camping	Council directed that further investigations into additional sites for low-cost and freedom camping in the district will be undertaken. Further direction is required from Council to determine priorities, as both types of camping will require separate approaches.
	Types of Land	Officers have noted that reserves, private or other public land could provide opportunities for camping.
	Special Interest Groups	Council Officers are seeking guidance from Councillors on whether a NZMCA partnership, for example a leased campground, is appropriate and should be explored.
	Volume	Whilst it is acknowledged that the demand for freedom camping may never be met, is there a volume of camping opportunities the Councillors would like to target, above what is currently provided for in the 2025 bylaw?
	Site Facilities & Investments	Council officers are seeking guidance from Councillors on whether further investment in site facilities (free or pay-per-use) is appropriate to facilitate more camping.
Considerations	Assessment Matters	When considering the suitability of freedom camping on QLDC reserve land, the assessment should consider the purpose of the Reserves Act 1977 and the reserve classification, as these direct how a local authority must manage that land. The assessment should also consider the practicalities of providing freedom camping on reserves.
	Council's Role	What role should Council play in the funding and administration of future camping sites and to what extent should future provision be delivered through partnerships with private operators or other public agencies?
	Ministerial Delegation	Council may consent under section 44(1) of the Reserves Act 1977 (exercising the delegation to Council by the Minister of Conservation), to allow camping on all or part of a Reserve subject to the conditions.
	Reserve Management Plan	Camping may also be enabled through a Reserve Management Plan. Further exploration into both methods, and guidance from Council is required. For example, as a Reserve Management Plan requires community consultations it is a lengthy process and unlikely to show support for freedom camping.

Scope of works

Purpose

To investigate options for low-cost camping and freedom camping opportunities on QLDC reserve land.

Scope

Freedom camping on reserves is outside the scope of the Freedom Camping Bylaw so, it is not confined to the assessment matters outlined in the Freedom Camping Act.

When considering the suitability of freedom camping on QLDC reserve land, the assessment should consider the purpose of the Reserves Act 1977 and the reserve classification, as these direct how a local authority must manage that land. The assessment should also consider the practicalities of providing freedom camping on reserves.

These criteria are considered in the following slides.



It is QLDC's discretion when considering the suitability of camping on reserves

Assessment matters for freedom camping on reserve land

*Purpose of the Reserves Act
1977*

*Purpose of the reserve
classification*

*Sufficient area to ensure
feasibility*

Provision of toilets

*Provision of a formed parking
area*

*Other existing reserve uses
and facilities, such as
community facilities, trails,
barbeques and playgrounds*

Topography

*Loss of amenity values that
may be experienced by
reserve users*

Discussion Point:
Are there any
other criteria
that should be
considered?

*Consideration of existing
Reserve Management Plans
and Development Plans
(including whether relevant
RMP makes explicit reference
to camping)*

*Impact of the exclusive use of
reserve land on the local
community*

*Consideration of layout on
enforcement provisions*

Freedom camping assessment outcomes - examples

Officers have identified and are assessing approximately **166 reserve sites** across the district using the proposed assessment criteria.



Albert Town Lagoon

Not suitable: Reserve has no vehicle access or appropriate space to create a level parking area. It is a regionally significant wetland area.



Spence Road Reserve

Possible with investment: Reserve is largely removed from residential neighbours and currently, is not frequently used. A level area exists with access but investment would be required to form a gravel parking area and install toilet facilities.



Waterfall Creek Recreation Reserve

Possible with controls: Reserve is removed from residential areas. A level flat gravel parking area already exists and toilet facilities are present on site. With appropriate conditions the site could provide some spaces for freedom camping.

The examples provided are to demonstrate how the methodology has been applied and the type of outcomes it may produce.

Assessment matters for low-cost camping on reserve land

*Purpose of the Reserves Act
1977*

*Purpose of the reserve
classification*

*Camping-Grounds
Regulations 1985*

*Sufficient area to ensure
feasibility*

*Consideration of existing
Reserve Management Plans
and Development Plans*

*Other existing reserve uses
and facilities, such as
community facilities, trails,
barbeques and playgrounds,
that may be displaced*

*Loss of amenity values that
may be experienced by
reserve users*

*Viability of required
infrastructure, including but
not limited to potable water,
wastewater and ablution
facilities*

Discussion Point:
What level of
involvement should
Council have in
providing and
managing sites?

*Impact of the exclusive use of
reserve land on the local
community*

*Impact of commercial
activities on the reserve*

Discussion Point:
Are there any
other criteria
that should be
considered?

Low-cost camping assessment outcomes - examples



Albert Town Recreation Reserve

Not suitable: Although this reserve has the physical space to potentially provide for low-cost camping, there are two established campgrounds on either side. For this reason the site is considered unsuitable.



Widgeon Place

Possible with investment: Significant investment would be required on this reserve. Including access, parking area and toilet facilities. Consideration would need to be given to existing services, flood risk, and traffic generation through narrow residential streets of Lake Hayes Estate and Bridesdale. Would require review of RMP and development plan.



Possible with controls: No reserves are considered to be immediately suitable due to the significant investment required for any low-cost camping provision.

Large areas of land that are of a sufficient size to provide for low-cost camping opportunities are limited in the District.

Councillor Feedback & Next Steps

Discussion, feedback and questions.

Next Steps:

- Receive Councillor feedback and note preferred approach
- Confirm strategic direction and identify priority workstreams
- Shape recommendations for future work programmes



**RESPONSIBLE
CAMPING**
QUEENSTOWN LAKES DISTRICT



QUEENSTOWN
LAKES DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Freedom camping assessment outcomes – examples

Not suitable: Albert Town Lagoon, Upper Clutha Ward.



Possible with investment: Spense Road Reserve, Arrowtown-Kawarau Ward.



Possible with controls: Waterfall Creek Recreation Reserve, Ruby Island Road, Upper Clutha Ward.



Low-cost camping assessment outcomes – examples

Not suitable: Albert Town Recreation Reserve, Upper Clutha Ward.



Possible with investment: Widgeon Place, Arrowtown-Kawarau Ward.



Possible with controls: No reserves are immediately suitable due to the significant investment required for any low-cost camping provision.