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Memorandum subject to further RFI - landscape

Date 16 December 2024

To Waitaki District Council
 Attn: Rachael Annan / Emily Somerfield

From Andrew Craig – landscape architect

Subject Land use resource consent application
 At: 2/1857 Twizel – Omarama Road, Twizel

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This memorandum has been prepared in response to further information sought by Waitaki District Council requested by Rachael Annan (landscape architect). This request arose from a meeting held on 5 December 2024.
- 1.2 In a written request (dated 12 December 2024), Ms Annan asked that three matters be addressed:
- (a) Identification of place specific landscape attributes and values;
 - (b) Determination of appropriateness of the proposed development in summary;
 - (c) How overall design, layout and ‘finer grain’ mitigation measures respond to the above two matters.

2 PLACE SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES AND VALUES

- 2.1 Specific landscape character as distinct from the generic arises from the particular combination of elements, patterns and processes occurring in any one landscape (or character area) that contribute to its uniqueness. Elements include, for example, vegetation, buildings, water bodies, land forms and infrastructure. Patterns concern their layout, location, extent and consequent relationships. And processes are those natural and physical phenomena that influence patterns and the presence of elements. In this case they include alluvial, glacial and climatic processes while the physical arises from farming practises, electricity generation and the presence of infrastructure such as roading.
- 2.2 When considering specific landscape character, a number of principles apply. One is that all landscapes are unique, irrespective of their character. The second is specific landscape character cannot be ranked, although its degree of naturalness can be. Thirdly, specific landscape character is subject to hierarchy. In this case the landscape of the application site is part of its greater Table Hill setting, that in turn is part of Upper Waitaki within the wider Mackenzie Basin and overall Canterbury region. The larger the landscape is the greater is its diversity.
- 2.3 In this case, the landscape of the overall lower Mackenzie environment is quite diverse, that in summary incorporate the following elements, patterns and processes:
- (a) Townships – Twizel and Omarama;
 - (b) Farms comprising in spatial terms the most common land use;
 - (c) Lakes both artificially and naturally formed;
 - (d) Rivers
 - (e) Canals
 - (f) Power stations and transmission lines
 - (g) Irrigation infrastructure – water races, pivots
 - (h) Recreational facilities – ski field, fishing, tramping (Te Araroa), cycling (Alps to Ocean)
 - (i) Salmon farms
 - (j) Rural residential activity (eg: Manuka Tce)
 - (k) Airports – Twizel and Omarama

- (l) Conservation areas incorporating mountains, tussock grasslands, wetlands and geo-preservation sites.
- 2.4 Patterns are that nearly all human activity in the wider setting is confined to lower elevations and so the proposal is consistent with this.
- 2.5 Urban activity patterns are concentrated north of Ohau River – namely Twizel. The same applies to rural lifestyle activity such as that at Manuka Terrace. Notwithstanding the presence of Ohau Village, no such activity currently exists south of Ohau River. Consequently, the proposal will deviate from existing patterns of development, albeit while unequivocally maintaining rural character. Nevertheless, the proposal will maintain a pattern where rural lifestyle activity is located in the vicinity of Twizel as opposed to an isolated development located remotely from any urban centre. As a result, the proposed development would not be entirely unexpected in relational terms with regard to nearby activity.
- 2.6 Farming patterns vary depending on prevailing conditions such as terrain, soils, and water availability which is the case within the application site where dryland stock grazing prevails. Elsewhere on Table Hill more intensive farming practises occur including irrigation, cultivation, over-sowing and top dressing. Current land use within the application site will continue, thereby maintaining the predominance of existing land-use.
- 2.7 Natural patterns are evident in landform throughout the entire local landscape all of which arise from orogeny, prehistoric glaciation and alluvial processes. These land forms – namely remnant glacial outwash terraces - will remain intact within the application site should the proposed subdivision proceed.
- 2.8 Other ‘natural’ processes include wilding pine invasion that without control obscure landform, thereby diminishing its legibility. A proposed mitigation or avoidance measure will ensure wilding pine is permanently eradicated anywhere within proposed lots 1 - 14 and the ROW, excluding the balance of Lot 100.¹
- 2.9 Alluvial processes in the wider area are now largely artificially controlled due to the prevalent hydro – electric activity.
- 2.10 Currently there are no active naturally occurring processes within the application site such as that resulting in alteration to landform, although at a more nuanced level there exists an interplay between the presence of exotic and indigenous vegetation.

¹ Condition was proposed in a letter from Ms Penny Gallagher to WDC in August 2024

- 2.11 Specific character within the application site largely arises from the combination of remnant glacial outwash plains and terraces, variable vegetation cover comprising a mix of predominantly exotic grasses, indigenous cushion plants and grey shrub (matagouri) along with wilding pine. Salient features include the two artificially formed ponds (on proposed Lots 4 and 6 where the latter is more of a wetland subject to a proposed Wetland Enhancement Management Plan). The absence of buildings and any infrastructure also contributes to specific character hence the conclusion that the site is assessed as having moderately high naturalness. Contributing to specific character also is the consented 100ha forestry block adjoining proposed Lots 12,13 and 14 to their south east (WDC ref. 201.2020.1622-3).
- 2.12 verall, therefore, the specific landscape character of the wider application site setting comprises a mix of diverse activity. As a result, the proposal is not out of character in this regard. Additionally, it is located at lower elevations and is in this regard consistent with the pattern of human activity in the area. But as mentioned, it does however deviate from existing patterns of residential activity which is largely absent south of the Ohau River, but given that its density is consistent with what the District Plan anticipates for the zone, rural character will nonetheless be maintained. That is to say, the proposal in no way represents any form of urban expansion, especially given that all proposed lots exceed 20ha. Consequently, the relationship pattern of urban to rural will be maintained, as will the contrast between the two environments.
- 2.13 Finally, it is noted that all of the Upper Waitaki landscape is zoned Rural Scenic, although much of the mountain country is subject to an ONL overlay. It is evident that the land subject to the RS zone is variable in character. That is to say, its specific character is not even or consistently the same throughout. As mentioned, some of the zone incorporates intensive farming regimes while other areas involve dryland farming with little improvement alongside some conservation activity. So, within the overall context of the RS zone of the Upper Waitaki, the application site sits more toward the less developed end of the spectrum. As a result, it exhibits a higher level of natural character, although it is considerably short of being pristine.

3 APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT IN SUMMARY;

- 3.1 The first point to make is that the District Plan contemplates the possibility of such development as that proposed anywhere within the RS zone. And it does so with certain provisos being achieved as expressed in the relevant objectives, policies and design guidelines. Essentially the District Plan asks that *‘the overall landscape qualities of the rural scenic zone are retained.’* - (Objective 16.8.2). And then in the *Issues* statement regarding protection of rural amenity, those qualities contributing to the RSz include the presence of:

- *open space,*

- *predominance of landform,*
- *remaining indigenous vegetation and*
- *low ambient noise levels,*

3.2 The explanation to Objective 16.8.2 then elaborates where it goes on to list the RSz qualities to include:

- (a) dominant open space vistas and landforms,
- (b) lack of intensive subdivision and landuse,
- (c) overall absence of buildings and structures.

3.3 Notwithstanding the District Plan aspirations, it is my opinion that, firstly, it is possible to achieve acceptably appropriate outcomes subject to a design response where the following are achieved:

- (a) The predominance of vegetated open space arising from low site densities in terms of the proportion of built form to open space – that is, one dwelling per 20ha minimum – and that the overall number of dwellings is low in proportion to the open space of the surrounding balance land and wider rural setting;
- (b) A moderately high level of natural character in as much that overall natural landform is retained along with the predominance of vegetation and the protection of salient naturally appearing features such as the ponds (despite being artificially formed) and water courses;
- (c) That the siting of buildings takes advantage of the prevailing landform so as to minimise their visible presence;
- (d) The avoidance of building prominence;
- (e) Accessory activity, such as utility areas, storage, water tanks, vehicle manoeuvring areas are not visible from publicly accessible vantage points so as to avoid apparent domestication of the landscape.
- (f) That buildings are located and designed in such a way as to maintain overall landscape coherence;
- (g) That apparent fragmentation of the landscape arising from various land uses is avoided;
- (h) Services, such as transmission lines, are not visible.

- (i) Buildings are not collectively or cumulatively visible.

3.4 The overall aim is to ensure that residential activity is subservient to, and harmonious with, the landscape of its setting. It is not the aim that buildings should be invisible when viewed from afar, but they should appear to comfortably blend in with landscape.

4 OVERALL DESIGN, LAYOUT AND 'FINER GRAIN' MITIGATION MEASURES

4.1 In order to achieve the above outcomes, the avoidance and mitigation measures offered in the application will apply. To reiterate, those affecting landscape outcomes are summarised as follows:

- (a) Buildings to be confined to designated home blocks whose location is determined so as to minimise landform disturbance while avoiding skyline intrusion and cumulative visual effects.

- (b) All buildings to be designed in accordance with the Waitaki District Plan Appendix D guidelines so as to ensure they blend in with their landscape setting. The guidelines require consideration be given to (in summary and with reference to the conditions offered):

- (i) Appropriate siting – particularly with regard to effects on landform and skyline intrusion
- (ii) Bold and informal use of vegetation to provide mediate building scale and provide backdrop
- (iii) Minimise earthworks
- (iv) Align buildings with landform
- (v) Group buildings – dwelling and accessory
- (vi) Generous road boundary setback
- (vii) Building form to reflect landscape – roof pitch and form
- (viii) Buildings both dwelling and accessory to maintain uniform design consistency
- (ix) Buildings are proportionately low [condition proposed for maximum building height of 6m]
- (x) Roof to wall proportion is more or less equal

- (xi) Basements and foundation exposure is minimised
- (xii) Materials to compliment the setting
- (xiii) Colour to be derived from setting, while bright light colours are avoided
- (xiv) Darker, muted colours are preferred [conditions proposed to limit colours of external materials and case LRV for cladding is 30% and for roofs 15%]
- (xv) Fences should reflect landform while avoiding skyline intrusion
- (xvi) Tracks and roads to follow natural contours; cuts and fills to be natural in appearance; located at natural change points – forest or landform edges; blend in with existing vegetation; minimise soil compaction; incorporate simple structures such as bridges and gates.
- (xvii) Tree planting is to: follow natural landform contour, merge with existing vegetation; avoid screening of important views; avoid steeper slopes and water body margins; encourage the use of existing vegetation for screening and locate planting in natural depressions or with dominant landform backdrops; avoid straight lines; group woodlots, vary plant species; replicate where possible natural vegetation patterns and that vegetation clearance should be sympathetic to existing vegetation, landform and contours. It should also be noted that the District Plan prohibits the planting of certain pest plant species.
- (xviii) Signage should complement the landscape – note that the only sign will be located at the SH8 entry and none will be sited within subdivision itself.

4.2 It is my opinion that the above recommended conditions of consent, and a newly proposed condition of consent which requires any residential building be certified by a landscape architect to achieve alignment with Appendix D Landscape Guidelines, will be sufficient to achieve the acceptable outcomes summarised under the preceding heading concerning *Appropriateness of the proposed development*. However, an additional condition is recommended which is as follows:

That within the home blocks of Lots 4,6,7,8,9,10,12 all outdoor curtilage (vehicle manoeuvring areas, storage, water tanks and accessory buildings) directly facing Ohau River and Lake Ruataniwha shall be fully screened with evergreen vegetation capable of attaining a minimum height of 6 metres.

Reason: *To screen potentially visible domestic activity from key publicly accessible vantage points.*



Andrew Craig – *Landscape Architect*