

Plan Change 50; Queenstown Town Centre Zone Extension

Submission by the New Zealand Institute of Architects Southern Branch

This submission is on behalf of the southern Branch of the NZIA and is made by Preston Stevens our chair, and myself as a member of the committee. This view represents our expert and collegial view .

I hold a Bachelor of Architecture and a Masters degree In Urban Design (Honours) and am a fellow of the NZIA. I have previously served 9 years as a QLDC councillor and have been a resident of Queenstown for 35 years.

Preston Stevens holds a Bachelor of Architecture, is a fellow of the NZIA, occasional chair of the QLDC Urban Design Panel and a resident of Queenstown for 20 years.

We have concerns not only on the changes to the built environment that will occur through this plan change but about the quality and uses of the spaces created between the buildings.

WE have fundamental concerns that this plan change has been brought about, not by an urgent need to expand the town centre, but by an urgent need to justify the location of the conference centre on the edge of a freehold portion of council owned land currently occupied by cabins and campground.

The creation of a second town square plaza and retail precinct has the potential to undermine the Queenstown town centre.

We feel that this plan change represents a conference centre looking for a town centre.

As our written submission stated we have concerns about

1. The use of community land
- 2.the need to expand the town centre
3. the location of the conference centre
- 4.town centre strategy ; objectives, policies and rules
6. The role of the urban design panel.
7. The vision of council

and we would like to speak to those points.

1. The use of community land.

a. Structure plan.

This is our interpretation of reserve "swaps" that have occurred.

There are two portions of land, the reserve on which the main part of the campground resides, the lynch block which is freehold and James C reserve which will remain a reserve.

Green areas are what will remain as reserve land. The balance becomes freehold or road.

Reserve land is

- the strip running between the 12m buildings and the toe of the mountain.
Is this area to remain for campers? As the reserve land thins out to the west and receives less and less sun, it appears to be useful only to provide an opportunity for space and light to the back of the proposed 19 and 22m buildings on its edge. This reserve land is only really accessible to the buildings it fronts, and as such has no community purpose or possible use.
- the hot pools, also a privatisation of reserve land.
- the developed portion of the campground.
- The thin wedge, or new town plaza. the creation of this plaza is a compensation for the loss of reserve land on the reserve block. We would contend that open space would be required anyway in a development of this intensity.

the height limit plan shows

- that most of the reserve land, bar the hot pool area and the useless portion behind the tall buildings are overlaid with a 12 m height limit. The clear intention is that over time the campground will be redeveloped.

As most of this land is to be sold, one has to ask what will the community gain?

Which brings us to the second point. displacing the campground displaces a large amount of affordable housing. However the conference centre will require the services of those very people it displaces.

In a previous iteration, this land was masterplanned for housing and hotels, and 30 percent was earmarked for affordable housing.

This Council has led the way with many initiatives on affordable housing and it is surprising that in this case it is not doing so on its own land.

The conference centre will be the generator of many tourism jobs . These jobs are not well paid but will require a large number of stable and dedicated, easily accessible staff to offer the service required in a world class resort. Providing stability through housing local people would be complementary to the activity of the conference centre.

For a town centre to remain vital, it must have residents and a good mix of local and visitor residents is essential to provide authenticity to the town. Locating affordable housing in this area will promote walking and cycling.

We ask that consideration be given to affordable housing on this site, and in particular to that land on the reserve.

2 The need to expand the town centre

2a Actual need and commercial success

Why could there be a need to expand Queenstown's existing town centre. Only because there is pressure or there will soon be pressure on the existing town centre to cope with growth.

We have not been successful in finding the analysis of the evidence of this pressure that justifies such a substantial expansion, when reviewing the documentation submitted in support of this Plan Change.

However we are aware of the status of the existing town centre as it copes with the demand for space.

The existing town centre may appear full, but many vacancies remain at upper floor levels, as we have discovered first hand in our current review of options for our own new office premises.

Vacant sites still remain within the existing town centre:

- The site on the Earl Street frontage of Church Lane.
- The site of the former World Building in Shotover Street, following the demolition of that three level building resulting from damage beyond repair by fire.
- The Skyline site adjacent to Eichardt's Private Hotel immediately adjacent to the water front. It is interesting to note the apparent difficulty in getting a development underway for probably the most desirable site with the existing town centre. Although I do understand that planning is finally underway.

10 to 15 years ago developers generally wanted to achieve the maximum net let-able floor area within their developments. Thus within the prevailing 12m height restriction (that successfully only permits three levels of quality development) design briefs included the requirement to achieve four level developments. But the only built commercial examples are Warren Coopers building in Athol Street, The Mountainair building adjacent to Beech, Rees and Shotover Streets and the building on the North West side of Church Street. Most other recent developments have achieved three levels.

Now when discussing projects with owners and developers we are advised that the only commercially viable space is at ground floor level and that development at upper floor levels needs to be restricted to mitigate capital cost and the risk to project viability. Current projects that are evident of this position are the development on the former AMI site at the top of Shotover Street, currently under construction and the potential building for the former World Building site, mentioned above. The former of these two being ground floor level plus upper floor level only for three quarters of its area. I understand that a building on the World Building site is likely to be ground level only.

Developments on the fringe of the existing town centre area continue to struggle in achieving ongoing commercial success. By way of example; the Church Lane Development, particularly the ability to develop the vacant site on the Earl Street frontage, plus the Steamer Wharf development, that continues experiencing difficulty in maintaining viable tenancies, as we understand, despite being very successful from an architectural and urban design perspective.

This all suggests that existing pressure on the town centre does not justify expansion as proposed in the Plan Change.

Therefore what is the anticipated pressure to justify such a significant expansion? If town centre development continues as it has over the last 20 year period then space for expansion is not required at the scale proposed, for that period of time. Thus consequently what is the period of time to enable this proposed expanded town centre to achieve a viable outcome; is it 30 years or could it be 50 years. If 50 years then the additional town centre will just be maturing when the convention centre is reaching the end of its economic life. This life period for the convention centre probably be acknowledged in the application for Building Consent.

There will be many changes that will occur during these periods of time that will influence the success and vitality of the Queenstown town centre, also questioning the justification of this proposal.

In your consideration of this Plan Change we request that you please analyse the actual development that has occurred over the last 20 years or so in the existing Town Centre Zone so as to understand the actual scale of development that has occurred. Consider this along with the actual reduction in demand for upper level floor space that is now evident and has evolved over the recent period.

2b What will this expanded town centre actually be

Town Centre according to the Oxford Dictionaries, via Google search is 'the central part or main business and commercial centre of a town'.

When reviewing the documentation submitted in support of this Plan Change, again, we have not been successful in finding the analysis of or description of what the intent of this town centre is, and what it should evolve into or be like.

Is it a commercial and business centre, residential or mixed use? It would appear that the intent is mixed use. But where is the analysis behind this that backs up a set of rules that can be created to ensure success for a mixed use town centre and the form it should take?

The existing town centre has achieved success created by circumstance of history. Influenced by small land tenure titles and narrow streets and laneways and the immediate proximity to Queenstown Bay with a regular street grid that respects this.

The urban design analysis by Fearon Hay / Populous, although describes these aspects, does not appear to include analysis of these fundamentals, but rather focuses on; topography, orientation, vantage points, wind direction and sunlight, in the site analysis along with description of principles for urban design.

Mr Bird's peer review also does not appear to address the fundamentals of the existing town centre either.

Mr Bird in answering questions during his presentation on Monday morning referred to the 'genius loci', the prevailing character or atmosphere of a place, in justifying the proposed location for the expansion of the Queenstown town centre. Mr Bird suggested that Queenstown Bay was the most significant prevailing character and that the proposed zone extension was well connected to the bay.

But in reality the proposed Lakeview sub-zone is removed from Queenstown bay by topographical elevation and separated by the existing Town Centre Zone and High Density Residential Zone along Lake Esplanade.

Wouldn't the significant prevailing character of Queenstown Bay suggest that it would be better to expand of the town centre along Lake Esplanade, up to Man and Brunswick Streets? Perhaps if required in the very distant future and if the possibility that Queenstown does become a city, then consider expansion onto the Lakeview terrace.

We propose that the urban design analysis in justifying this particular location for town centre expansion is incomplete and therefore is not dependable.

3 The location of the conference centre

The commercial success of the conference centre if it is to proceed is fundamental. We propose that the proposed location puts a very high level of risk to this success.

If you consider our earlier discussion; the ability and potential time period required to evolve a vibrant town centre around the proposed conference centre is potentially going to require a long period of time.

It is questionable whether there is an ability for the existing town centre to expand to include the CC. It is also questionable whether the CC itself will be sufficient of a catalyst for the town centre to develop around it. In the proposed location the CC is likely to remain isolated.

Conference centres are passive activities. There are many periods when they are not in use. For the majority of time, when in use, the activity is internal and not actively connected to the adjacent environs. During use connection to the surrounds is generally for very limited periods, when participants arrive and depart and mostly this only occurs for short periods of time, perhaps 30 to 40 minutes.

Consequently a CC provides a very poor contribution to public space and sense of vitality.

Users of the CC want to engage with the location they are visiting. The largest attraction for a CC in Queenstown is our landscape and the activities that it provides, supported by the vitality of our town centre.

this attraction of our town centre is as it exists and not as it might expand or become.

For the CC to be successful from the outset it is essential that it has an as immediate relationship with our existing town centre.

The location identified in the Plan Change is much more than a 400m distance from the existing town centre. 400m being at the limit where people will willingly walk, taking up to 5 minutes or so, before thinking of using taxis or cars to get to their destination. Mr Bird in his answers to questions on Monday talked of an 800m uphill 10-15 minute walk as being acceptable, which we question.

We agree that the Lakeview terrace is a very good location for a CC, but it should not so far removed from the existing town centre. We recommend that a suitable location for the Conference Centre is on the existing camping ground reserve site adjacent to the existing reserve at the corner of Hay and Man Streets.

This locates the CC so that it can benefit from the aspect of the elevated Lakeview terrace site, plus locate it immediately adjacent the existing Town Centre Transition Sub Zone and adjacent to the natural expansion of the town centre at between Man and Brunswick Streets with Lake Esplanade plus also into the proposed Isle Street sub-zone.

We submit that the proposed location for the conference centre and associated plaza, with the possible development of adjacent retail, food and beverage outlets, plus office accommodation, represent a second town centre. If this does occur in this location the conference centre has the potential to erode, weaken, disperse and dilute the vibrant and existing compact central town centre that has taken many years to consolidate.

4. The plan change and the town centre strategy

We do not feel that the plan change has utilised the recommended strategies from the town centre strategy in arriving at the extent and breadth of this plan change

for example from the Town centre strategy:

8.2 Character (page 19)- recommended approach

6. Develop character guidelines for any expansion of the town centre

7. Urban design panel-the UDP will continue to provide input into urban design issues associative with development within the town centre

8.12 Development capacity

Identifies Brecon Street and Robins Road as future development areas. Talks about considerable potential for redevelopment in the town centre. Does not identify a pressing need.

5. the objectives rules and policies

The character of the area has not been defined, although there are many areas in the policies and objectives asking for high quality environments, desirable places, etc..(listed in previous submission).

These are subjective qualities and very difficult to create a rule that provides certainty of this outcome, as we have all experienced the gymnastics that can prevail to conform to rules or overcome the intention of a rule.

Some of the anomalies in the plan change

1. The town plaza is not a contained space. It has the very high buildings on one side and a hot pools on the other. How will this create the intensity and vitality required?

2. The 6m rear yard. What is the quality of space and use of this space, given that on south facing sloping sites this area will be shaded for most of the year?

5 The role of the Urban Design Panel

Plan Change 50 proposes to add additional objectives and policies to the Queenstown town Centre Objectives, around achieving quality urban design and building design. We included some examples in our original submission.

As we state in that submission objectives and policies express subjective desires about good design, quality space etc, which are very difficult qualities to make rules for. However the plan change attempts to do so in its assessment matters which have long lists of things to take into consideration. Assessment remains subjective.

We therefore propose that the assessment criteria in the Plan Change for the expanded Town Centre Zone include use of the QLDC Urban Design Panel.

The urban design panel is a group of people appointed by the QLDC and comprising of architects, landscape architects and community representatives with a history and understanding of the physical social and cultural context of the QLDC area. The Panel presents a collective and also independent view.

The findings of an entity like the Urban Design Panel can generally be relied on as having being established by a collective and learned view that has formed a consensus of opinion. Therefore the findings of the Panel are robust and achieve an objective relevance, being more reliable than the opinion of a single learned professional.

I have served on the QLDC UDP for a number of years and can identify projects that were presented to the panel and that have achieved much more successful outcomes, than had they not been assessed by the panel. A few projects that immediately come to mind include:

- The Hilton Hotel development at the Kawarau Falls site
- The Mountainair building
- The expansive development on the North West side of Church Street.
- The development on the AML site in Shotover Street that is currently under construction.
- The development on the vacant site adjacent to Eichardt's Private Hotel that Skyline are currently planning.

It is a very engaging and rewarding process.

Auckland's Urban Design Panel has made a significant contribution to the recent development of that city. What is being talked about in Auckland now is the enjoyment and success of the downtown water front area that includes the Viaduct basin and Britomart plus the redevelopment of the narrow streets and laneways that flank Queen Street. The Influence of Auckland's UDP has been recognised as being so successful that a recent book has been published to acknowledge "the contribution of urban design panels to Auckland's urban story.

To quote the headline from page 31 of this book *"The delivery of what could be regarded as professional peer pressure is instrumental to the urban design panel's ability to both challenge and collectively lift the definition of high quality design within Auckland"*

And also to quote Terry Gould, Director of Phillimore Properties, in the chapter discussing the extremely successful and international award winning Imperial Buildings Redevelopment,

adjacent to lower Queen Street *"Great urban places don't just happen by accident; they occur through a process of layering of quality design over a long period of time"*.

In order to preserve the character and quality of our existing town centre, and to achieve success with any form of expansion of the town centre, all development in the Town Centre Zone should trigger review by the UDP. We propose that this is fundamental in assessing matters around "well designed responsive built form and public space".

And to clarify our original submission we don't propose that the assessment criteria added to the Plan change necessarily require a positive review by the Urban Design Panel. But rather an ongoing dialogue with the Panel until the objectives of the District Plan for the Zone have been agreed.

7. the vision of council

We ask what is the character and vision that council is wishing to create with this town centre extension? Is it like Vancouver? Is it Sydney? Is it central Christchurch?

the character and vision is unclear. We are talking about a town of just over 16000 people. Aspen has only 7000 people and yet it achieves a world class profile with a conference centre under a tent.

In summary we ask that this plan change not be approved

- |The extension of the town centre is too large
- The conference centre is in the wrong place
- The risk to the town centre is too great.