

**BEFORE THE QUEENSTOWN LAKES  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management Act 1991 (the "Act")

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Queenstown Lakes District Proposed District Plan  
Hearing Stream 02

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**EVIDENCE OF PATRICK JOHN BAXTER  
21 April 2016**

**(Wakatipu Basin landscape)**

Ayrburn Farm Estate Limited (430)  
G W Stalker Family Trust, Mike Henry, Mark Tylden, Wayne French, Dave  
Finlin, and Sam Strain (534 and 535)  
Slopehill Joint Venture (537)  
Wakatipu Equities Limited (515)  
Crosshill Farm Limited (531)

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## **Introduction**

1. My full name is Patrick John Baxter. I am a Director of Baxter Design Group Limited (BDG), a Queenstown based consultancy specialising in Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Master-planning, Landscape Planning and Landscape Assessment. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Science and Diploma of Landscape Architecture. I am a registered member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects.
2. I have worked on rural projects in the Queenstown Lakes District since 1989. I was Principal Landscape Architect with Boffa Miskell Partners from 1989 to 1998, based in Queenstown and working throughout the South Pacific. In 1998 I formed Baxter Brown Planning and Design and that was changed to Baxter Design Group in 2004. Baxter Design Group currently have 10 staff and are involved in projects of varying form and scale. In that time I have designed numerous projects in rural areas within the Queenstown Lakes District.
3. The completed projects that I have undertaken a principal design role in include, by way of selected example: Millbrook Resort, Speargrass, Stonebridge, Northridge, Atley Downs, Lake Hayes Estate, the Terraces, Ayrburn Farm rural lots, Threepwood, Bendemeer, Royalburn Station, Matakauri Lodge, Blanket Bay Lodge, Butel Park, Tucker Beach rural lots and Glencoe Station.
4. In the majority of works that I have undertaken I have sought to maintain a balance, where appropriate, between the pattern of dwellings and open space and, more often than not, have recommended the establishment of covenants to maintain that balance.
5. Paragraphs 12-21 of this Evidence repeat my evidence presented in Topic 01B of the District Plan Review Hearings.

## **Rural living evidence Topic 02**

6. I refer to the evidence of Dr Read in her evidence dated 06 April 2016 for Topic 02 hearings in regards to rural living. The apparent view of Dr Read is that any further houses in the Rural Zones of the District are an unwanted intrusion and that rural living dwellings in that landscape will diminish the quality of the landscape.

7. I disagree with this statement. Certainly, I do not disagree that poorly considered residential development in the Rural zones of the District would have an adverse effect on the broader landscape and visual amenity.
8. My experience, having designed and master planned the bulk of the rural development in the District in the last 15 years, is that well considered development in the parts of the Rural zones is appreciated and enjoyed by the majority of viewers.
9. My experience is that the assessment matters contained in the ODP are successful in alleviating adverse effects and produce rural development that is appropriate and pleasing to the eye. I have developed design controls that we recommend to applicants that in most cases include the following:
  - a) Height limits restricted to 4.5 to 6.5 metres
  - b) Roof pitch controls that, in conjunction with flat connections, in a traditional homestead form.
  - c) Recessive colours and appropriate materials.
  - d) Tree planting that is appropriate to the rural landscape, in large groups with appropriate tree species.
  - e) Simple gravel driveways and understated entries.
  - f) Down lighting with the intent to preserve the rural night sky.
  - g) Defined 'curtilage' areas (a notion developed by myself) to contain domestic effects.
  - h) A balance of planted, dwelling and curtilage areas against open space with an emphasis on the retention of open space.
  - i) No linear planting along roads for the purpose of screening.
  - j) If mounding is required for screening purposes, then it should appear as rolling and natural.
10. In general, the matters listed above are above and beyond what is required in the assessment matters. They do however produce quality outcomes and maintain the value of rural development. Those developments have occurred mainly on the valley floors, a result of appropriate assessment matters. The existing assessment matters make it very difficult to undertake residential development on the higher ONL hills and slopes of the District and rightfully so.
11. The existing rural living areas are an expected and enjoyed component of the District. The drive along Speargrass Flat Road, by way of example, takes the viewer along open pastoral views, hedged developments and glimpses towards dwellings set back from the road. These together form the existing patterns of the rural landscape in the Wakatipu Basin. They are not a detrimental component of the rural landscape, they are an expected and valued part of that landscape. It is my experience that those views of residential development in parts of the Rural zones are expected, understood and enjoyed.

## Evidence of Patrick Baxter- tabled Topic 01B District Plan Review Hearing

12. I have read the document dated June 2014 entitled *Wakatipu Basin Residential Subdivision and Development: Landscape Character Assessment*, prepared by Dr Marion Read. I understand that this document forms part of the documentation and research which underpins Councils Chapter 6 Landscape s42a Report.
13. I have been requested to review and comment on page 5 of that report in which Dr Read describes the 'Current Condition' of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin. Dr Read states: *'The first goal of this project is assess the condition of the landscape of the Wakatipu Basin to determine of its ability to absorb further landscape change. In order to fulfil this goal it is necessary to establish some principles on which to base the assessment.'*
14. In general I find that the 'key characteristics' of the Wakatipu Basin, as listed to by Dr Read, to be misleading, heavily swayed towards a romantic image of a 'rural' landscape, and far removed from reality. Dr Read uses her description of the 'existing condition' of the Wakatipu Basin to argue what she variously describes as 'rural character' or 'pastoral character'. This description then becomes the basis for recommending areas where rural development may occur. I disagree with Dr Read's factual analysis of the landscape character of the Wakatipu Basin. In my opinion large parts of Wakatipu Basin actually have an established rural living character, one that has been guided and controlled through a lengthy planning process based on the retention of appropriate visual amenity values.
15. Dr Read states that the Wakatipu Basin is a landscape character area 'contained by significant mountains on all sides...'. From that statement, and the description that follows, I understand that Dr Read is assessing the Basin lowlands, excluding the surrounding ONL. I adopt the same approach below.
16. I first list below Dr Read's 'key characteristics' and comment on each briefly:
  - 'Predominance of natural features over human made features' – agree in part, because the elevated visible ice sculptured landforms, such as the roche moutonees of Morven Hill, Slope Hill, Queenstown Hill and Deer Park Heights, create a perception of predominance of natural features. This perception is supported by some less developed areas on the Basin floor. However that description does not apply to significant areas of the Basin which are more developed.

- *'High ratio of open space relative to the built environment and the presence of trees'* – agree in part in respect of those undeveloped areas referred to in the previous bullet point. However again this description does not apply to significant areas which are more developed and which in particular have many more trees.
- *'Significant areas in pasture, crops'* – incorrect. There are areas of pasture, and to a considerably lesser extent crops. However these form a minor part of the visible landscape character and cannot be described as occupying a 'significant' part of the landscape.
- *'Presence of large numbers of farmed animals (sheep, cattle, deer, goats)'* – an incorrect description. Whilst farmed animals can be seen in the Basin, their numbers fall far short of 'large'.
- *'Low population densities compared to urban centres'* – correct, as far as it goes. Any rural area will always have considerable less density than urban centres.
- *'Narrow unsealed roads'* –an accurate description of the roading network possibly 50 years ago, but an incorrect statement with regard to the present roading network in the Wakatipu Basin.
- *Absence of Urban infrastructure* – correct, as would be expected in any rural area. I note that the lack of urban infrastructure has been one of the fundamental assessment matters in rural development in the last 15-20 years and a requirement of all 'recent' rural living development.
- *Narrow range of tree species utilised for shelter* –Correct because most conifers are banned on the basis of wilding spread and there are few evergreen shelter tree species that are suitable to the climatic conditions of the Wakatipu Basin.
- *Amenity tree species restricted to the immediate vicinity of dwellings* – Agree; this is a fundamental design principle of well-designed rural living development and has been consistent in all such development over the last 20 years.

17. The glaring omission from Dr Read's list of key characteristics is the extensive existence of houses and the rural living characteristics associated with these houses.
18. I set out below my description of the current condition of the Wakatipu Basin (excluding the surrounding ONL):

- A mix of visible open spaces, predominantly, the roche moutonees described above and small paddocks adjacent to lifestyle development, with some areas of larger open space such as the north side of Malaghans Road.
- A contiguous pattern of visible lifestyle development alongside and/or visible from the majority of the roads of the Basin. That pattern is characterised by large scale indigenous planting and tree planting. Some developments have involved the retention of balanced open space, such as Stonebridge on Domain Road, Littles Stream on Little Road and Northridge to name examples. Other developments have involved a more even spread of development across the land, such as within the Hawthorn 'Triangle' for example.
- Most views include a greater or lesser number of houses. There is usually a degree of landscape screening, but houses are a feature in many views.
- There has been a significant amount of tree planting within the Basin in the last 20 years. Much of that has taken place within the last 10 years. To that end, the landscape of the Basin is still in its infancy in regards to tree planting. In time, with the maturity of existing tree planting (and even if no further planting was undertaken) the landscape character of much of the Basin is going to change to a heavily treed park like character as trees grow and mature.
- Because many of those trees are deciduous, spring and autumn tree leaf colours will increasingly be a characteristic of the Basin.
- A consistency in setback and planting, and building form and colour. I note that this arises from the bulk of the lifestyle development undertaken in the last 20 years. To each dwelling undertaken in that time has been attached a rigorous set of controls and covenants relating to dwelling heights, colours and landscape works.
- Sealed roads in all but a few minor short sections of the district, with kerb and channel kept to an absolute minimum as a result of covenants and controls largely offered by applicants and controlled by Council.
- Street lighting only at State Highway intersections, where required by TNZ, with all rural lighting restricted to low level down lighting.

- Low visible numbers of stock, predominantly on Malaghans Road but very few in the rest of the Basin. The majority of small paddock spaces in the basin are either mown or managed by off-site farmers that bring stock in on demand to keep grass down. Visible evidence of farming is restricted to a few remaining pockets within the Basin. Recreational horse riding is becoming a frequently noticed activity,
19. In summary, the list of characteristics that I have set out above describe the current landscape character of the Wakatipu Basin. I am aware that many dwellings are yet to be built on approved lots, and the large number of rural developments that are in their infancy. Their development and maturity over time, when viewed in conjunction with the existing established lifestyle character, will shift the balance well towards a predominantly rural living character, far removed from the characteristics described by Dr Read in her description of the '*current condition*'.
  20. Some people do and will view the change described above negatively, as Dr Read obviously does, primarily because of the loss of rural character. Others do and will view it positively, primarily because the rural living characteristics create a more varied and interesting pattern and because many people actually like driving through the countryside and looking at other people's houses. I consider the key point to be the predominance of amenity tree planting which I have described above. Over time that will enhance the existing significantly treed aesthetic which I consider to be a pleasant and enjoyable aesthetic with a high degree of visual amenity, provided development is carried out under the stringent landscaping controls which have been consistently applied over the past 15-20 years in the Basin.
  21. The rural living character I have described above varies throughout the Wakatipu Basin in terms of location, density, and the extent to which it has affected local landscape character. As a consequence there are some areas of the Basin which should be rezoned as rural residential or rural lifestyle, some areas where I believe rural living development should be avoided, and other areas which can accommodate additional development to a greater or lesser extent, potentially including urban development. I have not been briefed to address this level of detail as I understand that will be dealt with during later hearings.

**Patrick John Baxter**

**21 April 2016**