

QUEENSTOWN URBAN DESIGN PANEL REPORT

MT SOHO SUBDIVISION

3 July 2009

Panel members present: Lou Alfeld (Chair)
Peter Ritchie
Preston Stevens
Duane Te Paa

QLDC staff: Karen Page

Lakes Environmental staff: Tim Williams

In attendance: Roger Monk (Developer)
Nick Flight (Developer)
John Edmonds (John Edmonds)

Status: QLDC is currently proposing Plan Change 29 and Plan Change 30. The Applicant seeks a private plan change in addition to these two. The proposed plan change would rezone a 30 hectare site south of Arrowtown to allow a residential subdivision consisting of from 170 to 200 sections. The proposal is now in the preliminary design stage and the Applicant acknowledged that, as the plan evolves, it will be brought before the Panel again.

Findings: The Panel appreciates that the Applicant has volunteered to present this design for Panel review at this early stage. The Panel also values the attentive presence of the developers at the meeting who encouraged a frank discussion of the plans merits and shortcomings. Within the scope of the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol as applied to the Queenstown Lakes District, the Panel notes the following items:

A. Context

1. *Location.* The proposed subdivision lies south of Arrowtown between McDonnell Road and Centennial Avenue, extending from the existing suburban edge to the Arrowtown Golf Course. The land is currently zoned Rural General and reflects that character with its open paddocks, sparse settlement and rural atmosphere. It is flanked by the Hills Golf Course to the east and portions of the Arrowtown Golf Course on the west.
2. *Gateway to Arrowtown.* Centennial Avenue is one of two main 'gateway' entries to Arrowtown, the other located at the intersection of Malaghans Road and the Arrowtown-Lake Hayes Road. McDonnell Road also joins this intersection. Although neither of these gateway entries is identified as such, the enhancement, insofar as reasonable, of a sense of entry and arrival into Arrowtown is desirable. As will be discussed below, the Proposal does not contribute to a positive entry experience; rather it merely extends the existing recently developed suburban layouts further along Centennial Avenue and McDonnell Road.

3. *Site.* The land comprises an exceptional landscape, composed of a steep escarpment, high terrace, undulating terrain and a quiet brook. The interesting topography presents both a development challenge and an opportunity. The opportunity lies in the site's potential to provide a unique neighbourhood character within the context of the larger Arrowtown community. Such an achievement would contribute to preserving and enriching the unique village atmosphere so treasured by the town's residents.
4. *Landscape Planning.* The presentation of the proposal did not include a specific and detailed site analysis study. For example, how might a comprehensive landscape analysis best identify the features, views, vistas and forms that should be preserved and those areas suitable for development? How does the character of the landscape that surrounds the site and its approaches to the site influence its development? How will the development appear from passing vehicles, from sightings to its ridgeline, from distant viewpoints? Answers to such questions will evolve a vision and a logic to make this place as special as is the heart of the town it buttresses.
5. *Vision.* This proposal requires a strong guiding vision and a solid underlying rationale to support it, both to achieve its acceptance and to sustain its future marketing.

B. Character

6. *Subdivision Art.* Subdivision plans have traditionally been prepared by surveyors ostensibly tasked with obtaining the maximum number of saleable sections. Consequently, our New Zealand suburban townscape is frequently criticised for its monotonous appearance. Arrowtown deserves a better outcome. Town planning principles and community aesthetics are well known. Creating the most appropriate mix of plans, lot sizes, densities, economics and ambience may not be an art form but it should be treated as one.
7. *Precedent.* The future building along Advance Terrace, the present cluster at Chartres Green and the jumble of homes along McDonnell Road should not be taken as precedents to follow. Rather, the Panel encourages this development to establish a new precedent, one that departs from traditional subdivision design by thinking first about how people will live and work and play in their community.

C. Choice

8. *Sustainability.* Population expansion and economic growth will always sustain pressures for more housing. Rural land, because it is less costly to develop, seems to bear the brunt of these pressures. But that should not mean that every open parcel of land need be converted to residences. Some choice land should perhaps remain untouched, land banked to serve the needs of future populations. Such premium sites (and this is one) should only be developed if the result serves a larger purpose than merely to house more people. That larger purpose must be to enhance sustainability by strengthening existing neighbourhoods, widening housing choices and nurturing community connections.

D. Connections

9. *Access.* The short cul-de-sac entries off the two main roads appear problematical. They create tiny isolated clusters that seem to have no relationship to the rest of the development. It is likely that these minor intersections could threaten traffic safety.
10. *Central Roadway.* The single sinuous roadway that connects the two sides of the development offers many opportunities for uniting this community. The roadway could be treated as a common community space, a linear heart for the community that provides much, much more than a mere corridor for vehicle movements. For example it might include picnic overlooks, screening planting that opens suddenly to viewpoints, special

pedestrian crossing points and picturesque turnoffs into residential areas. Imagination is the only limit

11. *Activity Hub.* The Panel supports the preservation and reuse of the historic cottage along McDonnell Road. However this seems to be the wrong place for an active community hub; perhaps it would be better placed elsewhere. The present location is detached from easy access. If the heritage value of this building grouping deserves protection then more imagination should be exercised in making the space useful to the community. For example, the open space might be extended across the brook and uphill to cross the central roadway, even incorporating lots 64, 65 and 66 so as to blend into the escarpment wall and create a high place for a public commons, flanked with stone seating for community events.
12. *Walkways.* The many pedestrian pathways and access points provide for good interconnections within the development. However some appear squeezed between homes thus undercutting some of the public walking experience and possibly diminishing residential privacy. A detailed plan highlighting all of the footpaths, including those along the carriageways, would help to provide a clearer picture how residents might connect with one another and with their environment.

E. Creativity

13. *Rethinking the Vision.* This first concept plan lacks a creative vision. It could well be a suburb outside any town anywhere. This is part of Arrowtown. The town is special. This site deserves special treatment.

F. Custodianship

14. *Arrowtown Image.* Many developments over the past decade in and around Arrowtown have detracted from the town image rather than enhance it. This development can make a difference, setting a new precedent for future residential extensions. It needs to project an individual identity that complements the Arrowtown self-image and thus anchor the southern edge of the town.

G. Collaboration

15. *Urban and Landscape Planning.* It is vital that consultant planners, landscape architects and urban designers be involved in the initial concept stages of the design rather than used in support of a pre-conceived plan.
16. *Community Consultation.* The Panel supports the applicant's intention to consult with the Arrowtown community and welcomes the innovative use of a web site to further this two-way communication.

Summary

Key Issues Raised:

- Lack of logic to support this plan as opposed to alternatives,
- Desire to connect this development to wider Arrowtown community, and
- Failure to take full advantage of the landscape features.

Desired Outcomes:

- Seek inspiration for a holistic plan that results in a unique residential centre within the context of Arrowtown,
- Investigate alternative development models containing different or varying densities,
- Offer attractive and useful open spaces, especially near the brook and the escarpment,

- Create a delightful experience for travelling through the development,
- Eliminate the two cul-de-sacs opening onto McDonnell Road, and
- Locate a community hub central to all residents.

The Queenstown Urban Design Panel has limited its review to the merits of the proposed subdivision plan and has not addressed the issue of whether or not a Plan Change for this site is appropriate. The Panel encourages the Applicant to consider the points raised in this report and invites the Applicant to return to the Panel for a second review. At that time the Panel would prefer to have the urban and landscape consultants in attendance to explain their rationale for the design. The Panel does not support the present design for the reasons cited above.

Checked and approved by:

Lou Alfeld

Chair: Queenstown Urban Design Panel