

**BEFORE CENTRAL OTAGO DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**IN THE MATTER** of the Resource Management  
Act 1991 and Private Plan  
Change 12

**AND**

**REQUESTOR** Wooing Tree Holdings Ltd.

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF REBECCA ANNE SKIDMORE  
(URBAN DESIGN)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 My name is Rebecca Anne Skidmore. I am an Urban Designer and Landscape Architect. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree from Canterbury University, Christchurch (1987); a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (Hons.) degree from Lincoln University, Christchurch (1990); and a Master of Built Environment (Urban Design) degree from Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia (1995).
- 1.2 I am a director of the consultancy R. A. Skidmore Urban Design Limited and have held this position for approximately fourteen years.
- 1.3 I have approximately 22 years' professional experience, practising in both local government and the private sector. In these positions I have assisted with district plan preparation and I have reviewed a wide range of resource consent applications throughout the country. These assessments relate to a range of rural, residential and commercial proposals.
- 1.4 I have considerable experience working in the Queenstown Lakes District. This includes providing urban design advice in the preparation of a number of plan changes to accommodate urban growth in the district together with the preparation of design guidelines for the Queenstown Town Centre.
- 1.5 I regularly assist Councils with character assessments and the development of frameworks for the protection and management of identified special character areas.
- 1.6 In my current role I regularly assist local authorities with policy and district plan development in relation to growth management, urban design, landscape, character and amenity matters.
- 1.7 A summary of relevant projects is contained in Appendix 1.
- 1.8 I am an independent hearing commissioner. I also regularly provide expert evidence in the Environment Court and I have appeared as the Court's witness in the past.

### **Involvement in project**

- 1.9 An Urban Design report was prepared by Erin Quin of Vivian+Espie and formed part of the Plan Change request Assessment of Environment Effects (**AEE**). The author of that report is now away on maternity leave and is not available to provide evidence and attend the hearing. I confirm that I support the findings of that report.
- 1.10 I was engaged following the close of submissions. I have reviewed the Plan Change request information, and particularly the Urban Design report. I have also read the summary of submissions and the Council's Section 42a report.
- 1.11 I last visited the site and surrounding environs on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

### **Purpose and scope of evidence**

- 1.12 The purpose of my evidence is to set out my opinion regarding the urban design considerations of the proposed Plan Change and to respond to matters raised by submitters and in the Council's Section 42a report.
- 1.13 Specifically, my evidence will:
- (a) Provide an overview of urban design considerations and the appropriateness of the proposed zone framework (Section 3);
  - (b) Set out my opinion about the urban design rationale and amenity effects resulting from the provision for higher density housing (Section 4);
  - (c) Comment on the urban design considerations regarding the proposed Business Resource Area (Section 5);
  - (d) From an urban design perspective, comment on the proposed crossing of SH8B (Section 6);
  - (e) Comment on proposed provisions for open space and the rural buffer with SH6 and SH8B (Section 7); and
  - (f) Provide a brief conclusion (Section 8).

## **Expert Witness Code of Conduct**

1.14 While I note that this is not an Environment Court hearing, I confirm that I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses, contained in the Environment Court Consolidated Practice Note (2014) and I agree to comply with it. I can confirm that the issues addressed in this statement are within my area of expertise and that in preparing my evidence I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed.

## **2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

2.1 Given the close proximity of the Site to the town centre core of Cromwell, I consider the existing zone enables a pattern of development that is inefficient and does not follow well accepted urban design practise. Generally, within settlements the highest density of residential activity is concentrated in and around town centres. This both supports the vitality of the town centre and also provides easy access for residents to the range of services and amenities usually available in a town centre.

2.2 If developed to the density enabled under the current zoning it would be difficult in the future to retrofit the land to create a suitable urban structure that could accommodate smaller sites. Infill development often results in poor amenity outcomes.

2.3 The Plan Change proposes a variety of zones that will enable the creation of a varied neighbourhood, providing housing choice and tourism based amenities in a configuration that is responsive to the characteristics of the surrounding context. The configuration of the zones, and the package of provisions proposed, have been derived from a multi-disciplinary design process. The Future Development Masterplan submitted with the plan change request demonstrates the vision for the land that has driven the package of provisions proposed. From an urban design perspective, I support the Masterplan, and the resulting plan change provisions, as a suitable means of providing for additional urban growth within Cromwell.

2.4 In my opinion, the proposed mix and distribution of residential zones proposed will result in better urban amenity outcomes than the existing zone structure.

2.5 In my opinion, the extent and mix of activity proposed to be enabled within the zone will make a positive contribution to the character and amenity of the Wooing

Tree neighbourhood and wider Cromwell. It will provide a small destination commercial hub embedded within the predominantly residential neighbourhood.

- 2.6 In my opinion, the proposal to provide additional vehicle and pedestrian crossing of SH8B will improve the integration between the northern and southern area of Cromwell.
- 2.7 I support the use of the RU zone to create a suitable buffer between the neighbourhood and the adjacent state highway corridors. Enabling the continued operation of the vineyard with grapes grown in this corridor will make a positive contribution to the character and identity of the Wooing Tree neighbourhood.

### **3. URBAN DESIGN OVERVIEW**

- 3.1 The land that is subject to the proposed plan change (the **Site**) is currently used for wine production with most of the land planted in grape vines. It also has a cellar door, restaurant and associated amenity area in the northern portion of the Site. The land is currently zoned for residential activity with the RRA6 zone enabling a minimum lot size of 4,000m<sup>2</sup>. This low density pattern of development is evident in the surrounding area to the north of SH8B. However, land immediately to the north of the Site has been subdivided into three clusters of smaller lots (between 900m<sup>2</sup> and 1,100m<sup>2</sup>) contained by open space.
- 3.2 Given the close proximity of the Site to the town centre core of Cromwell, I consider the existing zone enables a pattern of development that is inefficient and does not follow well accepted urban design practise. Generally, within settlements the highest density of residential activity is concentrated in and around town centres. This both supports the vitality of the town centre and also provides easy access for residents to the range of services and amenities usually available in a town centre.
- 3.3 In Cromwell, the location of SH8B does create a strong edge within the settlement. The proposed Plan Change includes mechanisms to better integrate and connect the environment to the north of the highway to the urban core of Cromwell. This is discussed further below.
- 3.4 The Plan Change proposes a variety of zones that will enable the creation of a varied neighbourhood, providing housing choice and tourism based amenities in a configuration that is responsive to the characteristics of the surrounding context. The configuration of the zones and the package of provisions proposed have been derived from a multi-disciplinary design process. The Future

Development Masterplan submitted with the Plan Change request demonstrates the vision for the land that has driven the package of provisions proposed. From an urban design perspective, I support the Masterplan, and the resulting plan change provisions, as a suitable means of providing for additional urban growth within Cromwell.

- 3.5 As set out in the evidence of Geoff Bews, enabling the continued operation of the vineyard, together with associated tourism activity is a key aspect of the Plan Change. The mix of activities proposed will assist to create a distinctive character for the neighbourhood. Scheduling of the 'Wooing Tree' will also provide protection to the landmark tree that will contribute to the neighbourhood's identity or 'sense of place'.

#### 4. RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

- 4.1 The projected growth and demand for residential land in Cromwell in both the medium and long term is set out in the evidence of Natalie Hampson. As noted above, the density of residential activity enabled in the existing RRA6 zone is inefficient when considering the location of the Site in relation to the urban core of Cromwell. If developed to this density it would be difficult in the future to retrofit the land to create a suitable urban structure that could accommodate smaller sites. Infill development often results in poor amenity outcomes.
- 4.2 The Plan Change proposes a variety of residential zones that will enable additional housing choice within the urban environment of Cromwell, in close proximity to the urban core of the settlement. The proposed residential zones, their minimum lot size and the maximum number of lots for each zone include:

Zone	Area of Land	Minimum Lot size	Maximum No. of Lots
RRA3	7.58 ha	1,000m <sup>2</sup>	60
RRA 11	8.32 ha	400m <sup>2</sup>	100
R	2.78 ha	250m <sup>2</sup> (and max 350m <sup>2</sup> )	50

- 4.3 The range of lot sizes enabled within the neighbourhood will provide additional choice for residents with different requirements and preferences. As noted in the economic evidence of Ms Hampson, while it is projected that the majority of demand will be for stand-alone dwellings, there will be a sharp percentage increase in demand for attached housing. Ms Hampson's analysis also predicts

that there will be a marked increase in the number of single and two-person households. The variation of lot sizes and resulting site development enabled by the different zones within the Wooing Tree Overlay area will meet the differing preferences that are likely to develop in the future. The variation of housing options enabled will also contribute to the visual richness and character of the urban neighbourhood.

4.4 In Section 6.1(p.6), the Section 42a report questions the minimum lot size proposed for RRA 11 (400m<sup>2</sup>) and suggests that a minimum size of 500m<sup>2</sup> may be more appropriate. I note that while the minimum lot size of 400m<sup>2</sup> is proposed, this does not mean that all lots within the zone will necessarily be created at this scale. There is also a control of a maximum number of 100 lots within the zone, so that it is unlikely that all lots would be created at this smaller size. 400m<sup>2</sup> is a suitable size to accommodate a standard dwelling with associated outdoor living space. Given the projection for a greater number of smaller households in the future, it is appropriate to enable smaller sites that are suitable for more compact dwellings. Enabling lots of this size will contribute positively to the diversity of house sites enabled within the Wooing Tree neighbourhood. I note that the Section 42a report does not recommend a corresponding reduction in the site coverage or yard requirements for the zone, so that an increase in minimum lot sizes would also result in larger houses and the same relationship to the street and neighbouring properties. The minimum lot size of 400m<sup>2</sup> as proposed, with a maximum permitted site coverage of 40%, will maintain the same level of spaciousness.

4.5 The distribution of zones has been determined in response to the characteristics of the surrounding environment. The RRA3 zone, which enables larger lots, is located adjacent to land that has been developed in accordance with the RRA6 zone. This will provide a sensitive interface. It is also located adjacent to the interface with SH6 and the rural land to the west of the SH corridor. The Section 42a report questions why the land facing SH8B is not also proposed to be zoned RRA3 (instead of RRA11, as proposed)<sup>1</sup>. This area of the Site sits across from the town centre core of Cromwell. The RU buffer area creates separation from the State Highway corridor. In my opinion, it is more appropriate to accommodate the higher intensity of activity (RRA11) in close proximity to the urban core. The buffer created by the RU zone will maintain a sense of spaciousness and the character that is established by the vineyard activity. I do not consider an additional area of RRA3 land within this area is necessary or would be beneficial.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 6.1, p.6, Section 42a report

- 4.6 A number of changes to the provisions for comprehensive residential development within the R zone are now proposed. These are set out in the evidence of Carey Vivian. In my opinion, it is preferable for higher density housing to be developed in a comprehensive manner, rather than land-use proposals on individual sites following subdivision. Therefore, I support the changes proposed, and particularly the increase in threshold for comprehensive development to be 5 units.
- 4.7 In conclusion, I consider that the proposed mix and distribution of residential zones proposed will result in better urban amenity outcomes than the existing zone structure.

## **5. BUSINESS RESOURCE AREA**

- 5.1 As set out in the evidence of Geoff Bews, the purpose of including the BA2 zone is to build on the established cellar door facility associated with the Wooing Tree Vineyard to create a tourism focussed hub within the Wooing Tree neighbourhood. The zone will enable the establishment of visitor accommodation, eateries and a limited range of retail activity that is complementary to the established vineyard. In response to concerns raised by submitters and in the Council's Section 42a report<sup>2</sup> and economic advice from Ms Hampson, further design testing for the proposed zone has now been carried out to determine the spatial extent of development appropriate within the zone. As a result of this testing and Ms Hampson's advice the proposed maximum floor area for the zone is proposed to be reduced from 12,000m<sup>2</sup> to 10,000m<sup>2</sup> and the maximum building coverage reduced from 8,000m<sup>2</sup> to 7,500m<sup>2</sup> (overall coverage of approximately 30% for the zone).
- 5.2 In my opinion the extent and mix of activity proposed to be enabled within the zone will make a positive contribution to the character and amenity of the Wooing Tree neighbourhood and wider Cromwell. It will provide a small destination commercial hub embedded within the predominantly residential neighbourhood. Given its location, scale and activity focus, I consider the zone will complement the town centre across SH8B and will make a positive contribution to the growing urban environment of Cromwell. In this respect, I consider the proposed zone is more appropriate than the RRA6 zone (the current zone) being uniformly applied across the Site.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 6.2, p.7 – 8, Section 42a report



5.3 Buildings within the BA2 zone in the Wooing Tree Overlay area are proposed to be a Controlled activity, with control reserved over:

- (a) Urban design and external appearance;
- (b) The provision of access, parking, loading and manoeuvring areas associated with the building;
- (c) Landscaping; and
- (d) Servicing.

5.4 In my opinion, these matters are suitable to ensure development within the zone makes a positive contribution to the character and amenity of the neighbourhood and, in particular, creates a positive interface with the public realm.

## **6. CROSSING OF SH8B**

6.1 As set out above, there is considerable benefit in enabling an urban expansion of Cromwell within the Site, accommodating a range of lot sizes to accommodate different housing options. However, the function and nature of SH8B does create a barrier between the northern and southern area of the settlement. Currently Shortcut Road provides a link from the SH corridor to the north. In order to improve the connectivity between the northern and southern urban areas, the plan change proposes a street connection directly across from Barry Avenue which connects into the town centre. This is proposed as a round-about. I note that the evidence of Andy Carr considers that a round-about may not be necessary from a traffic generation perspective. In terms of urban design considerations, in this context, either a round-about or a priority intersection will provide a suitable connection. Given the location of the RU zone buffer and the setback of the town centre on the southern side of SH corridor a suitable setting to the intersection can be created to create a high amenity environment that identifies the entrance to the Wooing Tree neighbourhood.

6.2 In addition to vehicle connectivity, a key consideration is pedestrian connectivity. In response to comments made in submissions, the Section 42a report recommends that the plan change makes provision for a pedestrian/cycle underpass to connect the Wooing Tree Overlay area to the town centre to the south<sup>3</sup>. The report recommends that the connection is made to the west of the Barry Avenue /SH 8B intersection. I agree that this would provide the most direct

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<sup>3</sup> Section 6.5, p. 12, Section 42a report

connection to the town centre core. At the subdivision stage, careful consideration would also be required to ensure good pedestrian and cycle connections are made within the Wooing Tree neighbourhood to the underpass.

- 6.3 In terms of safety and amenity, underpasses are not considered to be the best option. At-grade connections are preferable. However, given the characteristics of this context, and from reading the submissions, in this instance I consider an underpass to be a suitable solution to improve connectivity. Careful consideration of the design of the underpass will be required to ensure a safe and comfortable environment is created.

## **7. OPEN SPACE PROVISION AND SH BUFFER**

- 7.1 A number of submissions raise concerns about the visibility and appearance of the proposed residential zones when viewed from the adjacent state highway corridors. This issue is also addressed in Section 6.3 of the Council's Section 42a report. The report questions the practicality of retaining grape vines in this area and suggests a combination of mounding and planting may create a more appropriate buffer<sup>4</sup>. It is also suggested that it may be more efficient to include the buffer area within individual residential lots with the landscape treatment provided at the time of subdivision and then required to be maintained by individual lot owners.
- 7.2 I agree with the opinion provided by Ben Espie that the proposed zone configuration will provide a better outcome than may result from residential development under the existing zone provisions. The existing RRA(6) zone, which enables the creation of 4,000m<sup>2</sup> residential lots up to and adjoining the state highway corridors does not include any specific provision to create a visual buffer with the state highways. It is likely that varied boundary treatments would create a confused and potentially unsightly interface.
- 7.3 In my opinion, the distribution of zones, with the RU zone creating a productive rural activity buffer at the periphery of the Wooing Tree overlay area will result in a better outcome. As set out in the evidence of Geoff Bews and outlined above, an underlying principle of the Wooing Tree proposal is to create a mixed residential and tourism based commercial environment that is influenced and its character derived from the established vineyard activity. The on-going use of the perimeter for growing grapes is an important feature that will contribute to the neighbourhood's character. It is also an important productive use of the land that

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<sup>4</sup> Section 6.3, p. 9

will continue to contribute to the Wooing Tree vineyard operation. In my opinion, the use of the land for vineyard production will reinforce the rural productive character of the wider Cromwell area. This is consistent with the tourism promotion of the area in relation to its horticultural and wine industry (Central Otago “World of Difference”) as set out in the evidence of Glenys Coughlan.

- 7.4 I do not agree with the suggestion in the Section 42a report that mounding and tree planting of the buffer area may provide a better interface with the State Highway environment. In my experience, the creation of mounds to visually screen development is rarely successful. They tend to look artificial and draw attention to the area being screened. The Wooing Tree overlay area is located adjacent to the commercial core of Cromwell. It is an appropriate location for an urban expansion of the settlement. In my opinion, it is important to create a high amenity environment that is responsive to the character of the area, rather than requiring it to be hidden from view.
- 7.5 In response to submissions, a question is also raised in the Section 42a report about the provision for communal open space and reserves within the neighbourhood. The indicative Future Development Masterplan indicates a park (open space) and a communal open space. I envisage that the provision for local purpose reserves would be determined at the time of subdivision. It would not be appropriate to identify the location or size of a reserve at this stage as the subdivision layout is not yet fixed.
- 7.6 With the creation of smaller lots and a higher density of residential activity within the R zone, I think it is important that provision is made for suitable open space, either private or communal. The location, design and functionality is important in order to contribute to the amenity of living environments. Given the limitation on the maximum number of residential units within the zone (50 units on 2.78 ha) there is ample space available to provide generous open space. The layout shown in the Future Development Masterplan demonstrates a layout that provides effective communal open space. I recommend that the matters for discretion for ‘comprehensive development’ are expanded to include the provision of open space. This can then be considered in relation to the overall layout and amenity for dwellings.
- 7.7 The ‘Wooing Tree’ is a landmark feature that is the namesake for both the vineyard and the proposed neighbourhood and makes a particular contribution to the character of area. The proposed scheduling of the tree will ensure its ongoing protection.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

- 8.1 The Site is strategically located in relation to Cromwell's town centre and a range of amenities and recreation facilities. Wooing Tree Vineyard is an established activity that is proposed to be integrated into and form the foundation for the character and amenity of a new neighbourhood.
- 8.2 In my opinion, the existing zone enables a pattern of development that is inefficient and does not follow well accepted urban design practise. The Plan Change proposes a variety of zones that will enable the creation of a varied neighbourhood, providing housing choice and tourism based amenities in a configuration that is responsive to the characteristics of the surrounding context. The configuration of the zones and the package of provisions proposed have been derived from a multi-disciplinary design process. The Future Development Masterplan submitted with the Plan Change request demonstrates the vision for the land that has driven the package of provisions proposed. From an urban design perspective, I support the Masterplan, and the resulting plan change provisions, as a suitable means of providing for additional urban growth within Cromwell.
- 8.3 In my opinion, the finer grain of zones and associated provisions proposed will result in a more appropriate mix of activities and range of residential densities than the existing RAA6 zone. I support the changes that are now proposed in response to issues raise in submissions and the Council's Section 42a report. In particular, I support the reduction in maximum floor area and footprint for the BA2 zone and the changes to the provision for comprehensive residential activity within the R zone.

**REBECCA SKIDMORE**

**1<sup>st</sup> November 2017**

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **RELEVANT EXPERIENCE**

**Kingston Urban Design Study (2007-2008)** Following the preparation of a Community Plan, carried out an urban design study and provided advice to the Queenstown Lakes District Council in the preparation of a proposed plan change to enable expansion of the settlement of Kingston.

**Cardrona Valley Urban Design Study and Plan Change (2007)** Prepared a technical report was a member of a team that prepared a proposed plan change to the Queenstown Lakes District Plan for a new village. Subsequently reported on submissions to the Plan Change.

**Albert Town Urban Design Study (2006)** Prepared a technical report to assist the preparation of a plan change to the Queenstown Lakes District Plan.

**Henley Downs Plan Change (2013)** Provided urban design advice on a plan change to accommodate a large residential expansion area adjacent to Jacks Point, Queenstown

**Queenstown Town Centre Character Guidelines (2007)** Member of a team that prepared design guidelines for the Queenstown Lakes District Council.

**Remarkables Park Design Review Panel (2012)** Chair of the design review panel for new development within Remarkables Park in Queenstown.

**Melbourne 2030 (2004-2005)** A member of the team that is assisting the Victorian State Government with the comprehensive planning of the accommodation of up to a million new residents in Melbourne, particularly looking at urban expansion areas at the periphery of the City.

**Whitianga Town Centre Expansion (2000-2004)** In conjunction with Barry Rae Transurban Ltd, prepared a future development plan to guide the expansion of Whitianga Town centre, working with the Community Board and local residents. Following this prepared a District Plan variation to reflect the recommendations made and prepared an Open Space Strategy.

**Matiatia Plan Change (2002)** Provided an urban design audit role in relation to a private plan change request to create a comprehensive residential and commercial zone at Matiatia, Waiheke Island, and subsequently defended Council's decision at the Environment Court.

**Long Bay Plan Change (2005-2007)** Acted for Landco, the major land owner at Long Bay, in responding to the Council's proposed plan change to provide a framework for the urbanisation of this area at the edge of Auckland's Metropolitan Urban Limits. Appeared in Court providing urban design evidence in relation to the proposed District Plan provisions.

**St Heliers Centre Plan (2007)** Prepared and gave evidence at the Environment Court in relation to the plan change introducing a Centre Plan for St Heliers. A primary focus of the Centre plan is to provide mechanisms to recognise and protect the distinctive character of the Centre.

**Milford Town Centre Private Plan Change Review (2008-2014)** On behalf of North Shore City Council, reviewing a private plan change request to enable residential intensification in association with the shopping centre at Milford Town Centre. Subsequently also reviewed resource consent applications within the zone.

**Ellerslie Racecourse Private Plan Change Review (2008-2010)** On behalf of Auckland City Council, carried out urban design, landscape and visual effects assessment review of Private Plan Change request to enable comprehensive development on a portion of Racecourse land. Currently assisting Auckland Council with appeal process.

**Designing Communities? – The Role of Design in the Functioning of Communities (1995)** Thesis prepared as part of the course requirements for Masters of Built Environment (Urban Design).