

PEER REVIEW – LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Prepared for

Mackenzie District Council

by

Bron Faulkner

3 May 2024

1.0 Introduction and Scope

Queenstown Commercial Parapenters Limited are seeking a resource consent from Mackenzie District Council (MDC) to construct and operate a tree climb activity park on Lakeside Drive, Lake Tekapo. The proposed site (Site) is located within the lake margin of Lake Tekapo between Lakeside Drive and the Lake. The area is zoned for Passive Recreation in the Mackenzie District Plan (MDP) and lies within an area identified as having high visual vulnerability. The proposal is a Non-Complying Activity.

I have been commissioned by MDC to undertake a peer review of the landscape assessment for this application (the Assessment). This review is based on a visit to the Site and local area (1 February 2024) and my appraisal of the initial landscape assessment and subsequent assessment provided in response to the RFI. The following documents have been reviewed:

- *Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects and supporting graphics (Appendix 2 of the Application)* dated 23 October 2023. Prepared by Design Works Group
- *Landuse Consent Application, Background information, and Environmental Effects Assessment (AEE)*. July 2023. Prepared by Davis Ogilvie. December 2023.
- *Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects- RFI (RFI Response)* April 2024. Prepared by Design Works Group

2.0 Peer Review

The purpose of this peer review is to appraise both the method and findings of the Landscape Assessment. The review follows the structure suggested in the NZILA Guidelines¹ and is structured under the following headings;

- Appropriate methodology
- Existing landscape
- Proposal details
- Statutory planning provisions
- Landscape (including visual) effects
- Design response / Mitigation measures
- Conclusions and Recommendations.

3.0 Appropriate Methodology

The Assessment does not include a methodology statement but is loosely consistent with the NZILA Landscape Assessment Guidelines² in that most of the essential content is included to some extent.

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¹ Page 160-163, *Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022.

² *Te Tangi a te Manu: Aotearoa New Zealand Landscape Assessment Guidelines*, Tuia Pito Ora New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, July 2022.

4.0 Existing Landscape

The Assessment describes the features and character of the site and its wider landscape context on the shore of Lake Tekapo. It describes the site's recreational value, *The land along Lakeside Drive has a long history of recreational use that is well recognised and valued. During summer the lake and lake front is a high use activity area with the lake being used by swimmers, recreational boaters (watering skiing, wake boarding, fishing, etc) tourists, holiday maker and locals. Cycling, walking, running and picnicking are to name a few activities*³.

From my observations the group of pine trees also offers much needed shade in the summer for relaxation, picnics and enjoyment of the lake views.

5.0 Proposal Detail

The proposal is described with sufficient detail to understand the potential effects of the physical aspects of the activity park but is less clear about potential operational activity and effects. The proposed ropes course is an adventure activity that can generate noise from participants traversing the course interacting with each other and receiving instructions from staff and supporters both on the ground and above on the structures and lines. Understanding the nature of the noise and general 'busyness' of the activity park is particularly relevant when considering effects on visual amenity and open space values of the public area zoned for passive recreation.

The key elements of the proposed activity park as detailed in the Assessment includes:

- Tree climb activity park structures and lines will utilise a stand of mature pine trees occupying a footprint of 8210m², adjoining a 240m length of Lakeside Drive frontage.
- Footprint of the activity park (at its closest point) varies from 15m to 30m from the lake edge, depending on changing lake levels.
- Structures will consist of platforms, climbing wires, ropes, wire bridges and ziplines in the lower canopy of the trees 3m - 10m above the ground and will include a Base Station container building 2.6m (H) x 4.8 (W) x 12.12m (L).
- The Base Station is the only structure proposed at ground level, and the zip lines will not require any interaction with the ground.
- An area of tussock planting is proposed around the base station.
- Maximum of 60 clients at one time.
- Minimal earthworks are proposed.

6.0 Statutory Planning Provisions

The Passive Recreation zoning, and High Visual vulnerability overlay are identified in the Assessment. While most of the relevant effects of the proposal have been considered to some extent, it is not apparent that the Assessment has been framed in response to the relevant objectives, policies and assessment matters in the Recreation and Open Space chapter of the MDP.

³ Para 13 *Landscape and Visual Assessment* August 2023

7.0 Design Response and Mitigation Measures

The Assessment describes the design response and mitigation measures as:

- Retaining existing pine tree buffers
- Minimising built infrastructure with a small base station finished in materials and colours that are sympathetic to the location.
- Planting an area of hard tussock around the base station to integrate the building into the surrounding landscape.
- Positioning ropes courses 3m-10m above ground, within the existing trees.

The Assessment of effects appears to rely quite heavily on the ability of these measures to minimise the effects of the proposal. I do not entirely agree that all the measures provide any substantive mitigation. Minimising built structures in public open space is relevant to reducing the potential effects. But I believe that locating the ropes and ziplines above ground and in the tree canopy is a fundamental design feature of an adventure ropes course. The tussock planting may enhance the aesthetic appearance of the area around the building but I don't consider it would provide any effective mitigation of the effects of the new building and overhead structures.

In addition to this many of the potential effects are not of a physical nature that can't be minimised by the proposed measures. Introduction of the climb activity park to the lake shore environment under the pine trees will inevitably change the currently passive and calm environment into a much noisier and active one.

8.0 Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment

The Assessment has considered the effects of the proposal in terms of visual effects, natural character, open space amenity, and recreational values. I concur that these are the relevant effects to be considered given the Site's statutory context. However, the Assessment is largely focussed on the built physical changes and does not fully consider the introduction of noise from clients, their supporters, staff and zip lines and the associated activity at ground level.

The table below collates some of the concluding statements from the Assessments.

	Assessment Findings
Visual Effects	<i>The existing visual amenity of the lakefront will remain intact⁴</i>
Natural Character	<i>Overall, the proposed activity will have no more than minor effects to the existing natural character of the site⁵.</i>
Open Space amenity	<i>It is considered the effects of the development will be no more than minor and the overall character and appeal of Lake Tekapo's open space amenity will be preserved⁶.</i>
Recreational values	<i>The public experience of the Lake Tekapo Shorefront will be affected to a minor degree as there will be some effects to recreational values due</i>

⁴ Para 67 *Landscape and Visual Assessment*. August 2023

⁵ Para 14 *Landscape and Visual Assessment*. April 2024

⁶ Para 32 *Landscape and Visual Assessment*. August 2023

	<i>to the introduction of additional noise and activity. These effects on recreational values are expected to be no more than minor.⁷</i>
Overall conclusion	<i>Considering the proposed mitigation measures and the development's small scale within an area that already displays a high level of recreational activities, its' considered that the surrounding landscape has the scope to absorb the change. The tree climb activity park is therefore considered to be an appropriate development within the Recreation P Zone which and will be a positive addition to the Lake Tekapo Township, with no more than minor visual and landscape effects⁸</i>

Effects on visual amenity

The Assessment considers the visual effects of the proposal from the lake front and landward locations (Tekapo Holiday Park and Station Bay subdivision). The base station building is identified as the main element that would be visible, with the rope structures largely hidden from view in the tree canopies. It concludes that the visual effects when viewed from the lake would be low. When viewed from the Tekapo Holiday park it concludes that; *addition of the base station and climbing course will only slightly effect views to the lake and will not be inconsistent with the wider landscape character of recreational activities.* From Station Bay there is no definitive conclusion as to the magnitude of the visual effects.

I consider the greatest visual impacts of the proposal would be on the visual amenity experienced in the area under the trees.

Natural Character of the Lake Margin

I agree that scale of the proposed built elements in the existing trees is small in the context of the lake and it's margin and this modification would have a minor effect on the level of natural character of the area. However, establishing a commercial activity park within the lake margin does not constitute appropriate use or development of the lake margin in terms of RMAs6(a)⁹.

Open Space Values

While public access will still be available under the activity park, it will effectively occupy 8200m² of lakeshore space under the trees being particularly evident when in use. The activity and noise generated by clients enjoying the ropes challenge will inevitably impact on the open space amenity and passive qualities of this part of the lakeshore. The activity and noise overhead and on the ground is likely to make the area unattractive for the passive recreation activities that the area currently provides, such as; provision of a quiet lake shore experience, summer shade and shelter, picnics and play. I consider that the adverse effects on the passive open space values of this section

⁷ Para 8 *Landscape and Visual Assessment*. April 2024

⁸ Para 67 *Landscape and Visual Assessment* August 2023

⁹ RMAs6(a) *The preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (including the coastal marine area), wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development:*

of the lake shore would be greater than the Assessment has concluded and most likely more than minor.

Summary and Conclusions

Ropes courses are valuable recreational facilities in appropriate settings. My understanding and experience of them is that they are an adventure activity designed to provide challenging and thrilling activity for participants. Inevitably this introduces considerable activity and varying levels of noise when they are in use. These impacts are not compatible with the outcomes sought in a passive recreation zone.

Overall, I consider that the magnitude of the adverse effects has been understated due to a combination of;

- insufficient consideration of the operational effects particularly on the open space amenity of the area under the trees and along this section of the lake margin;
- an over estimation of the proposed mitigation measures' ability to minimise all of the effects of the proposal;
- under estimation of the sensitivities of the Site to a proposal of this nature due it's location within the lake margin and passive recreation zoning.

Based on this I consider that the adverse effects on the visual amenity and open space values of the Site would be more than minor.

While the existing context on the south side of Lakeside Drive comprises a built environment and tourist activities, it does not necessarily make built development, and the proposed commercial activity within the lake margin appropriate. I consider that the proposed activity park is inappropriate in this location in terms of both RMAs6(a) matters, and achieving the purpose of the Passive Recreation Zone.

Bron Faulkner

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30 May 2024