

Private Plan Change Request 25
Porter Heights Ski Field Expansion

S42A Landscape Report

Report prepared for Selwyn District Council by Andrew Craig *Registered Landscape Architect*

July 2011

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 My full name is Andrew William Craig.
- 1.2 I am a registered landscape architect. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree and a post graduate diploma in Landscape Architecture. I am also an associate member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects, and have been practising since 1987. For 5 years until mid-2009 I was employed by Peter Rough Landscape Architects Ltd. I now operate my own landscape architecture consultancy. Before that I was employed by the Christchurch City Council for 13 years, working in the area of environmental policy and planning. Most of my work since graduation and to date has involved landscape assessment and the development of landscape policy. I have also taught landscape architecture at Lincoln University.
- 1.3 As a consultant I have assessed many proposals on behalf of applicants and various Councils. I am an experienced witness and have presented landscape evidence on numerous occasions at hearings and the Environment Court.

2.0 SCOPE

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to assess landscape matters arising from a private plan change request seeking expansion of the Porter Heights Ski Field by way of re-zoning. It is understood that the applicant seeks re-zoning of 616ha of land currently zoned 'Rural High Country' to a 'Ski Area sub - Zone.'
- 2.2 The zone is also subject to an RMAs6(b) Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL) overlay. Consequently one overriding landscape issue is whether the proposal will lead to inappropriate subdivision, use and development within an ONL.
- 2.3 It is further understood that the proposed plan change involves development of the following activities.
- Ski facilities in Crystal Basin incorporating three chairlifts, learner's tows, a day lodge/café, snow making reservoir and a half pipe.
 - An alpine village that includes chalets, hotels, a commercial centre, car parking, a heli-pad, hot pools, tennis courts and a snow play area.
 - Two gondolas giving access to the existing Porter Heights ski field and that proposed in Crystal Basin.
 - Waste water treatment and disposal area.
 - Access roads, where those above the village are for servicing.
 - Ski trails, including upgrades in the existing ski area.
 - The replacement of existing lifts within the Porter Heights ski area with a chairlift / gondola.

- 2.4 In preparing this report I have read the plan change application, especially focussing on the landscape assessment of environmental effects (AEE)¹. I have also visited the site with respect to the proposal, and am otherwise very familiar with the area recreationally. In response to the AEE I have prepared a RMA s92 (request for further information) report where all matters have been addressed by the applicant. As part of that exercise I requested that in order to better understand the proposal and its effects, photo-simulations should be prepared which have since been supplied. I am satisfied that they accurately portray what is proposed.
- 2.5 It is not my intent to repeat the landscape assessment prepared by the applicant as I found this to be generally thorough. However, there are some points that I will discuss in more detail than what is the case within the landscape AEE. These are an elaboration rather than dispute. I will also focus on the District Plan provisions and amendments proposed by the applicant.

3.0 THE LANDSCAPE AEE and GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

- 3.1 Generally the AEE gives a clear indication of what is proposed and its effects on the landscape. However, there are some aspects of the assessment that merit elaboration which I address as follows.

The extent of the overall landscape setting

- 3.2 While this aspect is described in some detail there are a number of additional observations that need to be addressed, largely with regard to the setting and value of the Craieburn range within the context of Canterbury Region.
- 3.3 Firstly, the extent of the overall landscape includes all of the Craieburn Range and Basin. This is determined by the environment in which people perceive the application site to be located. Or to put it another way, people will commonly understand that the application site is located in a landscape that displays certain common features or elements and combination thereof. These are expressed as topography (land type), land use, land cover (vegetation), modification or human influence, and extent of visibility. The area is also subject to common landscape patterns and processes. Essentially this landscape will include all of the Craieburn Basin enclosed and defined by the surrounding mountains. However, at a wider scale the Basin has been recognised in the 'Canterbury Regional Landscape Review (2010)² as part of the larger Waimakariri Basin. Additionally this landscape unit is considered by the Review to be in regional terms an outstanding natural landscape and feature (ONF/L) – see **Appendix 1 maps**.
- 3.4 At both levels the extent of the landscape as it affects the proposal extends to the summit ridge of the Craieburn Range. Further west is the Upper Rakaia Valley ONF/L³ where the summit ridge defines the catchment boundary. However, while this is particularly evident from low elevations, for trampers and skiers at higher elevations the whole of the range will be perceived as a singular landscape feature, and therefore one that is potentially affected by the proposal. An overlap therefore occurs between the two landscape unit boundaries depending on the location of vantage points and a general appreciation of landform and the above mentioned criteria. But for the most part the greater effect of the proposal will

¹ Prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd

² Prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd for Environment Canterbury (Ecan)

³ Op.cit

concern the eastern slopes of the Craieburn Range and the perceived landscape character and amenity of the Craieburn Basin. This I would regard as the receiving environment, and while I accept that the visual effects are highly constrained being confined to a narrow view corridor as demonstrated by the applicant, the landscape effects potentially range more widely. These latter effects relate to changes in the landscape irrespective of whether they are visible, but are otherwise perceived or appreciated by the public.

Landscape Values

3.5 While these are described in the landscape AEE [section 3.0] where the ONL status is recognised, it is worth summarising the values for the Basin and Craieburn Range as a whole. These are as follows:

- A premier tourist road and rail route runs through the Basin where views to the Craieburn Range are readily attained.
- Compared to other inter-montane basins (Hanmer, Mackenzie for example) the Craieburn Basin contains diverse landscape features within a relatively compact area which include rivers and streams, limestone outcrops, a limestone tunnel, a lake, mountains, native bush, tussock lands, pasture lands, and a village. While each of these features is not unique in themselves, in combination with each other they are.
- Because of the above and its proximity to Christchurch, the Basin attracts a wide range of recreational activity including tramping, day walks, ski-ing, sightseeing, rock climbing, picnicking, ice skating, fishing, and camping.
- Also for the reasons listed above, and because it contains unique geological and botanical features, the area is of considerable scientific interest.
- And again for the above reasons the area is attractive for educational pursuits, and to this end includes a visitor centre and a number of accommodation lodges.
- Apart from tourism and recreation, economic values include those derived from pastoral farming and the quarry (on the Porter Heights ski field access road).
- As a place to live where residential activity is centred on Castle Hill Village.

3.6 Overall the Basin and the mountains that enclose it have very high scenic, recreational, scientific, natural and educational values from which are derived economic benefits. As mentioned farming also contributes, but is not as extensive as it is on the Canterbury Plains or in other larger basins such as the Mackenzie and Hanmer. Virtually all of these values are dependent on the predominantly natural character of the Basin environment. Any development therefore has the potential to diminish this. Consequently an important consideration regarding the ski field proposal will concern this both singly and cumulatively. The AEE addresses cumulative effects [5.4], where it concludes that the proposal's relationship to the existing Porter Heights ski field is not appreciable due to the '*...significant distance...*' between it and the other three fields. While this is true,

most people who know the area will recognise that the field is an integral part of the Craigeburn Range and the other ski fields it supports. And more importantly, it is the diminished naturalness of the overall setting that is the main landscape issue, especially given that the proposal is located within an ONL. This is important because it is the overall prevailing naturalness of the Basin environment that is the chief source of landscape values as described above.

Naturalness

- 3.7 While this area accommodates a fair degree of modification, it remains a predominantly natural landscape setting displaying high scenic values. In summary modification includes the following.
- Infrastructure – roads, principally SH73, but also four ski field roads and Lyndon Road; and transmission lines.
 - Castle Hill Village.
 - Pastoral farming.
 - Recreational facilities including buildings, walking tracks, ski fields, car parks, signage etc.
 - Wilding conifers.
 - A quarry.
- 3.8 With the exception of ski fields the locational pattern of modification is largely confined to the Basin floor. The higher elevations are therefore comparatively much more natural because they are comparatively less modified. This is despite the presence of four ski fields⁴ all of which accommodate buildings, ski lifts of various kinds, and vehicle access roads. Because the mountains and their landscape setting are expansive, the ski fields appear not to be overly assertive, although some aspects are more visible than others. In this regard it is evident that the roads accessing the fields are the most visible features often forming scars across mountain slopes, followed by buildings and least of all, ski tows – see **Appendix 2 Photographs 1 and 2**. Visibility also varies seasonally, where the tows are apt to be more visible in winter by virtue of their contrast with snow. Nonetheless, the high natural character of the mountains prevails despite the presence of the ski fields and their access roads. This is due to their considerable visual bulk and expansiveness in which the ski fields consequently appear diminutive.
- 3.9 Turning to the Basin generally, while pastoral farming can be considered the most extensive modification, it nonetheless maintains moderately high levels of naturalness. This is because such activity does not involve much in the way of physical structures in proportion to the land area involved when compared to infrastructure and ski field activity. It is quite common for ONLs to incorporate pastoral farming activity. And other activities can also be included such as ski fields and other recreational pursuits. This is currently the case for the existing ski fields on the Craigeburn Range.

⁴ From south to north – Porter Heights, Mt Cheeseman, Broken River and Craigeburn Valley ski fields. Also see the 'Craigeburn Ecological District Basin Analysis' plan prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd; 6 April 2011

Visibility Effects

- 3.10 The landscape AEE does a very thorough analysis of visibility effects for the proposed ski field, and I agree with the observations and conclusions in this regard. However some further observations in principal are warranted when considering the visual effects of the proposal, particularly within the context of the overall Basin setting.
- 3.11 Firstly, because ski fields are of necessity activities that require high elevations, their visibility potential is correspondingly elevated. This is simply a function of the fact that the higher an activity occurs, the greater is the range of potential visibility. Conversely at low elevations activities are more likely to be screened by intervening topographic features such as land forms, vegetation, buildings and such like.
- 3.12 More specifically with regard to the proposal, it just so happens that significant land forms readily screen most of it from the key vantage points – namely SH73 and further afield the trans-alpine railway. It is apparent from the landscape AEE and on site observation that the site will also be fully screened by these landforms from nearby key destination points such as the limestone outcrops at Castle Hill, Castle Hill village, and Cave Stream. The photo-simulation prepared by the Applicant also demonstrates this effect.
- 3.13 Similarly it is evident that the proposed activity will not be seen from the other ski fields on the Craieburn Range. In this regard it is also evident that not all four ski fields can be seen collectively from any one vantage point within the Basin. Of these two can be seen collectively - these being Mt Cheeseman and Broken River. Of the four ski fields these two are located centrally on the Craieburn Range and face directly toward the Basin with little in the way of intervening landforms. Consequently they are the most visible from the key vantage points. The least visible is Craieburn Ski Field as it is fully obscured by land form and vegetation. Porter Heights is visible for a relatively short distance along SH73 as indicated in the landscape AEE. There are no views of it from the key destinations as described above. This will evidently remain the case should the proposal be implemented. Overall there will be no cumulative visual effect arising from the proposal with regard to its relationship to the other ski fields.
- 3.14 The only visual effects of any consequence as viewed from key vantage points will be caused by the presence of the proposed village and Crystal Valley return trail / service road. As mentioned, roads and trails cut into the mountain side have the greatest visual impact because they generally run counter to the prevailing natural topographic patterns – in this case bare scree slopes and rock outcrops. The photographs accompanying the application and the photo-simulations show this effect.
- 3.15 Despite their numbers and collective bulk, buildings can be less visually intrusive because in comparison to alpine roads they can be better integrated into their landscape setting without overly disturbing natural patterns. In this case the relative low elevation and alpine shrubbery (and potentially larger trees such as mountain beech and kanuka) will help buildings blend in with their surroundings. Assisting in this regard will be design controls proposed as part of the rules package (principally those listed in proposed Appendix 25) and outline

development plan (ODP). These I will discuss in more detail later with regard to the proposal to remove the ONL overlay from the plan change site.

The outstanding natural landscape

- 3.16 Initially the applicant sought removal of the ONL overlay for the plan change area, but I understand that they no longer promote this. I do not think this is necessary and desirable to excise the ONL from that which surrounds it. The ONL status exists because the landscape has been recognised as a naturally outstanding one, despite the presence of all four existing ski fields. Additionally, in this regard the District Plan is fully operative where the ONL status is beyond challenge. Further its importance has been endorsed by the recently released ‘*Canterbury Regional Landscape Study Review*’ (2010)⁵ that recognises that the application site lies within an ONF/L (which in the Study is identified as the Waimakariri Basin landscape unit – **see again Appendix 1 maps**). While I understand the Study does not have any statutory significance, it nonetheless reaffirms the application site setting as meriting its ONL status⁶.
- 3.17 Given this, the test therefore is whether the proposal achieves the purpose of RMA s6(b) and ultimately that of the Act. S6(b) entertains the possibility of subdivision, use or development in ONLs, provided it is not inappropriate. This means that ski field development including the presence of a village could be accommodated within an ONL provided the outstanding natural character of its setting prevails. I believe this is generally achievable with regard to the proposal in the context of its setting.
- 3.18 It is important, particularly for an activity within an ONL rather than alongside it, that the landscape is treated with consistency throughout, which can be achieved while accommodating appropriate levels of activity. It is evident that the ODP and most of the proposed rules package intend doing this where it is clear that they are cognisant of their surroundings.
- 3.19 The ONL status also ensures that there is adequate control over any future development, including maintenance that is consistent with the landscape status of its setting. This is also reflected in the proposed rules package including matters for assessment.
- 3.20 Overall regarding ONL status, it is important that the integrity of the natural landscape is maintained as its extent encompasses the entire Craigeburn Range, and not just a part of it. That is, the extent of the landscape is defined by topography, land use, vegetation cover, and cultural association and more or less common patterns and processes.⁷ These also occur within the application site as they do for its immediate and wider landscape setting.
- 3.21 I now want to address in more detail cultural or associative elements or what is otherwise better known as the Pigeon Bay Criteria⁸ of ‘shared values’ and how

⁵ Prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd and peer reviewed by myself, Ms Di Lucas and Mr Graham Densem

⁶ The architects for the applicant (bda architecture) describe the setting as follows: *The natural alpine landscape is pristine, unique, wild and timeless. Because of the high altitude and extreme weather encountered here it is a highly sensitive environment. Development in this context must recognise this vulnerability and be carefully planned and carried out. It must observe sound conservation principles and maintain a minimal footprint.* P13

⁷ Also similarly listed in the landscape AEE section 2.1.1 (p.5)

⁸ As one of the criteria to determine whether a landscape merits ONL status

widely they are recognised. The ski fields on the Craieburn Range are club fields although Porters being the larger and most developed attracts wider patronage, where I understand most of who are Cantabrian in origin. Compared to more commercial fields such as Mt Hutt and those around Queenstown Lakes, the Craieburn fields are modest in scale and facilities. Consequently they are not particularly sophisticated, and so might be described as local fields. Their development over the years has been gradual, piecemeal and incremental where the rate and magnitude of change has not radically altered the landscape. In a sense, the Craieburn fields represent an outward expression in the landscape of the 'kiwi can do' attitude. Other recreational and scenic attractions in the Basin display similar character and are otherwise unencumbered by the machinery of tourism. In this regard the Basin as a whole conveys a more or less homogenous character in terms of its use and development which suggests that it expresses uniformly shared values. This view is commonly expressed in many of the submissions which suggest that the shared values are widely recognised.

- 3.22 The proposed ski field will be at odds with these shared values, especially as they are currently expressed in the existing fields. It will clearly be an internationally flavoured, sophisticated and comparatively intense development that is certainly unprecedented in the Craieburn Basin, and indeed Canterbury. It will therefore represent a significant departure from what exists and the outward expression in the landscape of accompanying shared values. This does not however rule out the proposed development provided avoidance and mitigation of adverse effects arising from its presence is sufficient to counter any sense of alien intrusion. In visual terms the landscape AEE demonstrates that visibility of the village will be confined to a relatively confined view corridor (photo-points 3a and 3b and Photo-simulation Figure 3), and so the presence of the village will not appear to threaten the integrity of the Craieburn Basin as a whole. In terms of landscape change it will have a significant effect, but because it is for the most part visually obscured, appreciation of this effect will depend on prior knowledge. Regular users of the Basin (and residents) will therefore stand to be potentially affected in this regard, although tourists and first time visitors probably will not.
- 3.23 As suggested, ski field developments and villages can be an appropriate activity within an ONL, but must be subservient to its natural character. That is, the village and ski field has to continue displaying the underlying character of the surrounding natural environment. While it is accepted that considerable modification will occur, it is important that the overall natural patterns and processes prevail.
- 3.24 There are examples of villages in highly valued natural landscapes in New Zealand that achieve such outcomes, most of which occur in or adjoin National Parks. A number that come to mind are at Mount Cook and Lake Rotoiti (Nelson Lakes National Park) – see **Appendix 3 Photographs 3, 4 and 5**. Another is Mount Lyford village which also achieves a similar result. Whakapapa village at Tongariro National Park can be added to the list as can Punakaiki. In these settlements there are controls on maintaining the prevailing native vegetation and land form. Building design is generally controlled as well, which very importantly includes the avoidance of fences so as to maintain visual continuity throughout the village environment. This will also be a feature of the proposed village.
- 3.25 This means that generally the integrity of the underlying landform remains intact while accommodating earthworks and physical activity. Regarding earthworks this means avoiding abrupt or anomalous changes in land form pattern where otherwise the effects can be avoided or mitigated through, for example, re-shaping and re-vegetating of the affected land.

- 3.26 The maintenance of existing native vegetation regimes throughout the development area also ensures landscape homogeneity and therefore its cohesiveness. Or to put it another way, the continuity of vegetation throughout the development enables the surrounding natural environment to pervade the site.
- 3.27 The overall effect is to convey the appearance that development has alighted onto the site with the least amount of disturbance. The proposed amendments to the District Plan provisions acknowledge this where proposed Policy B2.3.8 seeks [of relevance] *‘...to require future management of the Sub – Zone to be responsive to the landscape, ecological and cultural values of the locality.’* The proposed additional explanation and reasons to Rural Character Policy B3.4.6 reinforce this outcome where it states, [of relevance] that; *‘The layout, scale and form of built development within this Sub-Zone is required to demonstrate its responsiveness to the landscape and ecological values of the locality. Some multi-storey development is anticipated as capable of being absorbed within the dominating mountain landscape.’* Driving home the message is proposed Objective B4.1.4 which states: *‘A village with a concentration of accommodation and commercial activity at the base of the Porters Ski Area which is respectful of, and responsive to, the landscape and ecological values of the locality.’* Perhaps encapsulating all the above outcomes as outlined in the proposed amendments is proposed Policy B4.1.8. Essentially this policy lists all of the methods employed to achieve, among other things, responsiveness and respect of the landscape in which the development is located.
- 3.28 To achieve the above cited objectives and policies, and any existing that are relevant, the Applicant has proposed a rules package identified as *‘Appendix 25’*. These I understand will be in addition to the Outstanding Landscape rules among others. In general I believe the proposed rules will achieve desirable design outcomes that will ensure that the development will have least adverse impact on its landscape setting. That is not to say that the impact will be insignificant, but rather that given its inherent character there is little more that can be done via the rules and ODP to help minimise effects. Initially I thought there will however be some exceptions, particularly those concerning maximum building heights times the number of tall buildings and their footprint (with up to nine buildings exceeding 22 metres with the tallest being 26.5 metres (architects indicate this will accommodate 7 storeys but at 3m per storey can be up to 8 storeys), and eight up to 19 metres⁹). The effects of these were difficult to discern from the landscape AEE as notified although the K2Vi images representing views from photo-points 3a and 3b did give some indication of effects. Since then two photo-simulations have been prepared which show the actual effects of the all buildings including the taller.
- 3.29 Based on the images portrayed in the Photo-simulations I am satisfied that the proposed buildings will not especially dominate their setting. Additionally it appears that they will not be visually prominent as viewed from SH73. In principle however, it is my opinion that low rise buildings are better able to be integrated into the landscape for the following reasons, although to achieve the same floor area they would disturb a greater area of the natural environment. I accept that this may be difficult to achieve in this case as the potential extent of the proposed village is to some extent constrained by topography. In any event my opinion is that the advantages of low rise are;

⁹ Proposed rule 25.3.1.5 Also see **Appendix 4** list of SDP rules relevant to the landscape

- That it is a lot easier to absorb low buildings among vegetation, particularly in an environment where trees are unlikely to exceed 10 or so metres.
- That lower buildings are more capable of reflecting the lie of the land where they can are better able to align with contours.
- That allied to the above point, low buildings present more horizontal proportions which reflect contours and are therefore more sympathetic to natural gradients.
- That low buildings offer greater opportunities for the incorporation of earthworks where they can be cut into the slope and or incorporate earth roofs.
- That low buildings are less likely to intrude skylines.
- That it is not possible to screen or soften with vegetation the upper levels of tall buildings.
- That lighting effects will be less obvious – see following discussion.
- Those low rises buildings are more in tune with the modestly scaled other existing buildings in the Craigeburn Basin area.
- Statutorily low rise buildings more appropriately achieve Policy B3.4.6¹⁰ of the District Plan which states; *Avoid high rise buildings or highly reflective utility structures.* (Maximum permitted height is 8m for buildings used for human occupation¹¹).

3.30 In addition to the images provided by the applicant's architects (bda) others of existing ski villages give an impression of the effects of building heights and clustering – **see Appendix 5**. Among these are some images of villages at night showing the effects of lighting. At the time of notification, there was no assessment of lighting effects on the landscape. In this regard I do note however that there is a proposed rule where one matter of control concerns the avoidance of excessive light spill¹². This is reinforced by the architects stated aim to ensure that '*External lighting will be designed to minimise glare and light spill.*'[p34]. Since notification the applicant has proffered more information regarding lighting including additional proposed rules. I am satisfied that these will adequately cover the effects of lighting on appreciation of the landscape.

Village design – (bda architects)

3.31 Judging from the ODP and architects concept drawings, it is clear that the proposed village will be very well designed and harbour high levels of amenity. This will be reinforced by its integration with the land form and use of native vegetation throughout The design principals described by the architects [p33] are

¹⁰ SDP Rural Volume Part B

¹¹ SDP Rural Volume Part C Rule 3.12.1

¹² Proposed rule Appendix 25/25.2.4.11(i)

fundamentally good and are appropriately reflected in the proposed Appendix 25 rules package¹³. Essentially they seek the following basic outcomes;

- Linear 'thread like' clustering of buildings that follow the contours.
- Minimisation of the building footprints – hence the need for taller buildings.
- The transition from a high density centre to low density perimeter comprising 5 distinct building types.

So purely from a character and amenity point of view I have no great concerns in generic terms over the proposed design and layout of the village per se.

3.32 The landscape issue is not one that therefore centres on the village design. Instead it is the landscape context of the village that is of concern, particularly with regard to its location within an ONL. As mentioned, the ONL status does not necessarily rule out the presence of a village provided it is subservient to the natural character of its setting. As discussed regarding potential effects on the ONL, the main concern in this regard arises from the collective presence of buildings and supporting infrastructure.

3.33 Turning to the matter of building setbacks I have some concern relating to those from Porters Stream. The ODP indicates that at least five buildings are located either on the stream bank or very close to it. These buildings range in height from five to seven storeys (as shown on the architect's proposal – p.23). This appears to be at odds with the landscape AEE where it states that '*The margins of the Porter Stream are to be kept free of built development*'¹⁴ that one aim is to '*Avoid effects on natural character of waterways by defining set back for activities that may be inappropriate*'.¹⁵ To achieve this proposed rule [25.3.1.7] states '*All buildings (excluding bridges) shall be setback a minimum of 5m from the Porter Stream*'. By comparison the District Plan requires buildings to be setback a minimum of 10m from any waterbody not otherwise listed in Appendix 17 (of the SDP)¹⁶. In my opinion all proposed buildings would need to be setback at least 15m from the stream boundary so as not to overly impinge on its natural character and the amenity derived from it. This would apply to taller buildings especially, which may have to be set back still further as they have the potential to overly dominate and adversely affect the riparian environment.

3.34 Apart from these concerns, the principles underpinning the village design and layout are fundamentally sound and are generally appropriate to the setting.

The gondola and ski field lodges

3.35 The same applies to the 'Mountain Day Lodge' or mid stations located within Crystal Basin and at the existing Porters ski field. The lodges or mid stations are of modest height – 3 storeys including what appears to be a semi-subterranean basement. Proportionately it also favours the horizontal over the vertical. Further, its facades are sufficiently modulated to reduce building bulk. The proposed Appendix 25 rules are in my opinion sufficient to control the design and appearance of the Day Lodges.

¹³ Proposed Rules; Buildings 25.2.3 – 25.2.4.12

¹⁴ AEE Clause 6.6.3 Porter Stream p25

¹⁵ AEE p93

¹⁶ SDP Rural Volume Part C Rule 3.13.1.4

- 3.36 However, there is considerable difference between the character of the sites for each gondola and lodge. Because the existing Porters Height ski field is already modified, any new, or as is the case, replacement infrastructure is not going to substantially alter the character of the site.
- 3.37 For the lodge and gondola at Crystal Basin the opposite is true, as the affected area is pristinely natural. A substantial change to the landscape will therefore result for this area. With regard to naturalness and in particular the ONL overlay, the Crystal Basin development can only be adverse, and quite significantly so given the degree of proposed change, including earthworks associated with the ski runs. Apart from not developing the basin at all, there is little that can be done to mitigate the effect of landscape change, suffice to ensure the visual effects of the infrastructure is minimised as much as possible. On the matter of visual effects, it is evident that most of the proposed development within Crystal Basin will not be visible from the key publicly accessed vantage points. The exception will be the very top portion of the lifts, but observation and experience relating to existing facilities indicates that their appearance will be insignificant.
- 3.38 The effects of these structures, along with that of the village will be discussed in more detail concerning the statutory matters which are relevant to the landscape outcomes. The only point to make in this regard is a SDP preference for buildings to be located outside ONLs unless they must be necessary to the functioning of the ski field. The day lodges and lifts will fit into this category, and so in this regard their presence is contemplated by the Plan.

Earthworks

- 3.39 Extensive earthworks will occur resulting from development of the site. These will mainly arise from the formation of building platforms, roads, ski trails, snow making reservoirs, underground services provision and service tracks. Although they may involve the greatest volume of earthworks, buildings generally occupy the excavated area resulting in the negation of effects.
- 3.40 As mentioned the formation of roads usually has the greatest effects depending on the degree of cut involved. Further, the effects of roading earthworks are pronounced in alpine environments because of elevation and scant opportunity for vegetation to screen or mitigate effects. Additionally the constant maintenance of alpine roads exacerbates effects over time, especially if they are cut into unstable or naturally dynamic land forms such as scree slopes. This effect can be seen at Porter Heights currently as it is at Cheeseman ski field.
- 3.41 The existing road to Porter Heights will not substantially change in this regard, and therefore effects are expected to remain as they are now. Any new road works, particularly above the village will incur significant landscape effects. This is acknowledged in the landscape AEE where it is concluded that *'Steep erosion prone scree slopes have relatively low visual absorption capability; on north facing slopes cuts would be conspicuous from long distance viewpoints, such as SH73.'*¹⁷ How this will appear is evident in the K2Vi images for photo-points 2, 3A and 3B¹⁸ and the photo-simulations where the visual effects of the proposed service road and return trail is clearly visible. On the plus side however, the length of visible road is relatively short given that landform obscures most of it from SH73. Also a

¹⁷ Landscape AEE Table 2 Item 5

¹⁸ Landscape AEE Graphic Attachments

suitable method for minimising effects is to avoid side casting of cut material. Regarding this is proposed Appendix 25 rule 25.2.2.2 concerning, as a controlled activity, the effects of cuts and fill including castings.

- 3.42 Because roads in the village will be integral to it and are at a lower elevation, their effects will be substantially less than that for the ski access roads. The opportunity for planting will also favour mitigation of visual effects arising from the village roads. The same will apply to the provision of underground services, where the potential to entirely remediate trenching with planting is not precluded.
- 3.43 Ski run shaping and smoothing will also necessitate earthworks at elevation. In my observation of such activity at other ski fields, including the existing Porter Heights ski area, such earthworks are not readily discernable from vantage points beyond the ski field. This will certainly be the case at Porters and Crystal Basins that for the most part will be screened from the aforementioned important vantage points. The same will apply to the snow making reservoir, as this is essentially subterranean. Also for this reason and with it being at high elevation means that it cannot be seen because the vantage points are below the rim of the reservoir.
- 3.44 The effects of earthworks are otherwise generally addressed in proposed Appendix 25 Rules 25.2.2 ff.

Land Swap

- 3.45 I understand that the applicant has reached an agreement with the Department of Conservation (DoC) concerning an environmental offset involving a land swap. This involves land on Banks Peninsula (Steep Head Gully) whose value is largely ecological rather than landscape based. Or to put it another way, little landscape value is achieved as a consequence of the swap.

4.0 SUBMISSIONS

- 4.1 In reading the submissions it is clear that consistent themes emerge relating to landscape concerns. Some overlap or are closely allied. Essentially the submissions in opposition are concerned that the proposal is inappropriate and will result in significant adverse effects on the natural landscape of the application site setting and its wider environment. Each of the concerns are identified and discussed as follows.

1. That the proposal is inconsistent with the relevant objectives and policies within the Selwyn District Plan, the Regional Policy Statement and the Waimakariri Regional River Plan.
2. That it is inappropriate to seek removal of the ONL overlay (as originally notified).
3. That the proposal will result in too much change to the natural landscape of the application site and its wider setting.
4. That the proposal will spoil a pristine landscape – namely Crystal Valley and Basin.
5. That there will be adverse cumulative effects on the landscape.

6. That the proposal will introduce a character that is foreign to the wider setting.
7. That the proposal will interrupt the landscape sequence or continuity extending from Arthur's Pass to the Torlesse Tussocklands Conservation Area.
8. That there will be adverse visual effects.
9. That there is insufficient information regarding landscape effects.

Each of the above matters is discussed as follows.

Consistency with the relevant statutory documents concerning landscape matters

- 4.2 This will be discussed in more detail later under the heading 'Statutory Landscape Matters'. Submitters have identified the relevant documents to include the following;

- The Selwyn District Plan (SDP)
- The Regional Policy Statement (RPS)
- The Waimakariri Regional River Plan (WRRP)

Each of these will be addressed in the discussion on them later, suffice to say that it is understood that the SDP, being fully operative with regard to the application site, is not inconsistent with the RPS objectives and policies. Consequently I give most weight to the SDP when discussing the relevant statutory documents.

Removing the ONL

- 4.3 As notified the applicant sought to excise the ONL overlay from the application site, which I opposed. I understand that the ONL overlay will remain.

Excessive change to the natural environment

- 4.4 The proposal will result in very significant changes to that part of the natural environment not already modified in any way. Principally this will arise from development of Crystal Basin and access to it. Crystal Basin is currently a pristine natural environment completely devoid of any current or past modification. Some submitters have commented that Crystal Basin is the second largest unmodified basin on the Craighburn Range, although the largest is not identified. The applicant has identified on a map¹⁹ the location of all alpine basins²⁰ on the

¹⁹ Figure 6 - Proposed Land Exchange document prepared by Boffa Miskell Ltd November 2010

²⁰ There appears to be no geological definition of an alpine basin, the nearest being that for a **cirque** (also see AEE p29 where the basin landforms are referred to as cirques). The Webster's online dictionary defines a cirque as follows:

1: A steep hollow, often containing a small body of water, found at the upper end of a mountain valley.

Craieburn Range. It appears there are at least 48 discernable basins of varying sizes on the Castle Basin flanks of the Craieburn Range. These included those on the western Rakaia catchment flanks, one of which contains the Mount Olympus Ski field. Four of these are occupied by ski fields, leaving the difference unmodified.

- 4.5 The Crystal Basin development will therefore result in the greatest change or departure from its currently pristine natural character followed closely by that caused by the proposed village. The village site is to some extent already modified with existing buildings and roads, but compared to what is proposed this is very modest in scale and effect. The existing Porters Ski Field is currently the most modified environment in the area, and because of this it is expected that no significant changes to naturalness will result from the proposed development.
- 4.6 While development of Crystal Basin involving a building, ski tows, service road and reshaped ski runs will clearly have a deleterious effect on its natural character there are some factors that mitigate in its favour. Principal among these is the fact that all but the upper reaches of the basin is not readily visible from key publicly accessed vantage points²¹ – namely SH73, Castle Hill Rocks / Kura Tawhiti and Castle Hill Village. Those parts of the upper basin that will be visible carry the proposed four seat chairlift. In my observation the existing T-bars are not readily visible from SH73 and although the chairlift will be slightly larger in terms of its bulk, I am confident it will not be visible either. At a similar distance as the proposal is from SH73 (approximately 6.5 - 7km) I have also noted that it is not possible to see the Christchurch Gondola accessing Mt Cavendish at the same distance. On this basis it would appear that the proposed chairlifts and gondolas will not be readily visible from the key vantage points. Distance from these is therefore another mitigating factor.
- 4.7 A further consideration is that Crystal Basin is not one that appears to be readily accessed by the public for recreational purposes – apart from occasional skiers. This is so when compared to the more popularly accessed areas such as Castle Hill / Kura Tawhiti Rocks, Cave Stream and various walking tracks such as those accessing Helicopter Hill and Camp Saddle.
- 4.8 An additional mitigating factor is that the proposed Crystal Basin development is more or less contiguous with the existing development at Porter Heights. This means that the overall development will appear relatively clustered rather than sporadic or dispersed. Or to put it another way, the proposal represents an expansion of existing effects, even though this entails intruding an area that is currently pristine.
- 4.9 Another factor concerns the visual effects of ski field infrastructure – namely lifts - is generally characterised by low bulk. Consequently their presence enables a relatively high degree of transparency where the integrity of land form more or less remains intact. This does not apply to buildings however. And as identified earlier, ski field vehicle tracks have an even greater effect as they tend to dissect and therefore interrupt natural patterns.

2: A glacially eroded basin shaped like half a bowl; a deep, steep-walled recess in a mountain, caused by glacial erosion.

²¹ Note that SDP Rural Rule 3.2.5.3 requires as a discretionary matter that effects on views are considered '...from land which is publicly owned and freely accessible by the public.'

- 4.10 The final consideration relates to the land swap environmental offset that is on offer. I understand this involves swapping land of high conservation value, via various mechanisms, which is made available for protection and public ownership. As mentioned an agreement has been reached with the Department of Conservation regarding a land swap involving land on Banks Peninsula.
- 4.11 Overall, implementation of the proposal will result in very significant adverse changes to the natural environment. Notwithstanding this, in landscape terms the effects have to be considered within the context of the immediate setting – that is; the application site and receiving environment – and also of the Craieburn Range as a whole. It is also important to take into some account the character of the range in relation to other similar landscapes in Canterbury. The Mount Hutt, Torlesse and Puketeraki Ranges are examples that are relatively close to the Craieburn and display similar characteristics. With the exception of Mt Hutt Ski Field all of these ranges are generally free of modification. In comparison the Craieburn Range supports a relatively high concentration of modification. In considering landscape effects, it is better to contain the effects of such activity in areas that are in the wider context already modified, leaving the other ranges relatively untouched. Or to put it another way, if a development such as that proposed is to be located anywhere in the Canterbury Mountains, then the application site is the more appropriate location, even if it entails the sacrifice of areas displaying high natural character. And within the Craieburn Range itself, the Porters area is the better location as it is the least visible of all the Castle Hill Basin ski fields.

The proposal spoils a pristine landscape – especially Crystal Basin

- 4.12 This matter has been covered in the preceding discussion.

Adverse cumulative effects

- 4.13 As mentioned there are four existing ski fields on the Craieburn Range within the Castle Hill Basin catchment, and another one (Mt. Olympus) in the Rakaia catchment. Arguably the proposed Crystal Basin ski field introduces a new field, even though it is more or less contiguous with the existing Porter Heights field. In landscape terms the number of ski fields there are is less important than the overall effect they have on natural character. The proposal will undoubtedly lessen this.
- 4.14 As discussed the visual effects of this are such that the reduction in natural character as viewed from the key vantage points will be potentially insignificant subject to more appropriate building heights and sufficient controls on lighting. Additionally with regard to cumulative visual effects, the field is not easily discernable within the same visual catchment as the others. In other words, all of the ski fields cannot be seen from any one key vantage point at the same time. The cumulative visual effects will therefore be relatively insignificant subject to the above provisos.
- 4.15 The landscape effects (degree of change to the landscape) will however be significant. In cumulative effects terms this degree of change would have to be appreciable. Given the preceding discussion concerning cumulative visual effects, it is unlikely that the degree of change would be collectively perceived with regard to the other fields from the key vantage points. Appreciation of cumulative landscape change can only come about through prior knowledge – that, knows

that the proposed ski field exists in combination with knowing the others do as well. Frequent users of the ski fields and of Castle Hill generally are likely to be aware of this, and therefore for them the cumulative effects arising from landscape change will be appreciable. In reading the submissions it is clear that not everyone will find these effects adverse, while others clearly will.

- 4.16 As a matter of principal, whether the effects of activity on the landscape are adverse or not are inextricably linked to peoples' expectations. That is, would people expect or otherwise be surprised, to find an activity in a particular landscape setting? This applies irrespective of whether the activity is visible or not. An example; no one would expect to find a suburban subdivision in the heart of Fiordland given that the common expectation is that it is a protected pristine natural environment. This view is formed even if people have never been there. In landscape terms this principal is sometimes referred to as 'associative effects'.
- 4.17 The same principal applies to the Craighburn Range in relation to its Castle Hill Basin setting. Because this area harbours relatively diverse activity including the four ski fields, there is in the public's mind that this area is associated with ski field activity that co-exists with an otherwise highly natural environment. Further it is very accessible and close to a major metropolitan centre. The various attractions (listed earlier) and recreational infrastructure conveys the impression that the Castle Hill Basin area is an important recreational landscape. Or to put it another way, people will associate the area with relatively intense outdoor recreation, and because of the supporting infrastructure should not be surprised of its presence. By comparison, in the nearby Torlesse and Puketeraki ranges there would be little or no expectation that such recreational facilities exist.
- 4.18 The proposed ski field development, particularly with regard to the apparatus of ski-ing, will therefore be expected within the context of its landscape setting. In other words, people will not be surprised to find it there. The proposed village will be surprising though, as there is nothing like it in the area. The nearest would be Castle Hill village, which is comparably much more modest and less diverse than that proposed. Arthurs Pass, including Bealey Spur, are also nearby equivalents, and further west is Otira. Clearly there is an existing pattern of villages or settlements along SH73 located in an alpine environment – see **Appendix 6 topographic map**. Generically the proposed village would be in keeping with this and in terms of the activities within and its alpine setting; it would be most closely related to Arthurs Pass. Consequently the presence of a village or villages is more likely to be expected in this area and along SH73 than in association with other Canterbury mountain ranges.
- 4.19 So while cumulative effects will definitely accrue, especially with regard to those relating to landscape change, the proposed ski field and village cannot be considered entirely foreign or unexpected within the context of its overall setting. Assisting considerably also is that the village at least will be very well integrated with its natural setting and given the proposed rules package it would doubtless be the most consistent in its design and appearance.

The proposal will be foreign to the setting

- 4.20 See the above discussion.

The proposal interrupts landscape continuity

- 4.21 In this regard submitters identified that in particular the development of Crystal Basin would interrupt the continuity of natural landscape character between Arthurs Pass and the Big Ben Range including the Korowai /Torlesse Tussocklands Park. Given that the existing Porter Heights ski area and the three others on the Craieburn Range the continuity between affected basins is already disrupted to some degree. The Crystal Basin will certainly compound that effect, but does not by itself introduce it.
- 4.22 Secondly I have doubts that landscape continuity is particularly well appreciated at the scale affected by the proposal. Appreciation would certainly occur at the macro scale where for example, the jagged and wetter climate peaks of Arthurs Pass and the Main Divide contrast with the gentler gradients of the Craieburn and its rain shadow climate. Allied to this are the contrasts in vegetation extent, where at Arthurs Pass it is much greater and more verdant than that on the Craieburn Range. In my opinion I do not believe that peoples' appreciation of this continuity or east / west transition would be unduly affected by the proposal.

Adverse visual effects

- 4.23 These have been discussed in the preceding discussion where it is concluded that for the most part there will be no significant adverse visual effects as experienced from key publicly accessed vantage points. This is mainly due to the fact that most of the development will be screened by intervening land form in combination with the narrow view corridor from SH73. This effect is evident in the photo-simulations which accompany the application. These demonstrate that even the proposed taller buildings (<13m) are not particularly evident when viewed from the State Highway.

Insufficient landscape effects information

- 4.24 There is some further information that would be useful in better understanding actual and potential effects arising from the proposal. In my s92 report further information requested has been responded to, including the provision of photo-simulations and additional rules controlling the effects of lighting. Further information has also been providing concerning the land swap.

Summary of submissions

- 4.25 Regarding landscape matters there are some concerns raised by submitters that I agreed required further consideration. In particular I agreed that the most important of these is that the ONL overlay should remain in place, as it was originally proposed by the applicant to remove this. As mentioned this is no longer the intention. The proposal is therefore assessed against the relevant District Plan ONL provisions which I will discuss shortly. In so doing those submitter's concerns relating to inadequate assessment against the relevant statutory documents will also be addressed.
- 4.26 I also accept that the proposal will introduce significant landscape change within the application site and its immediate environs. It will certainly derogate from the ONL, especially where the landscape of the application site is currently devoid of any modification – namely at Crystal Basin. As discussed though, I also believe that it is possible to design the proposal in such a way that it would be appropriate to the setting and its ONL status.

- 4.27 Otherwise I am of the opinion that the proposal will not generate significant visual effects as viewed from key publicly accessed vantage points. It is acknowledged however that there will be greater visual effects as viewed from the access road to the ski field, and that there will be significant landscape change within the application site the effects of which will extend into the immediate wider environs.
- 4.28 Finally the cumulative effects threshold is in my opinion not breached. When considering cumulative effects on the landscape it is important to take into account not only those on the receiving environment – in this case the Craighburn Range and Castle Hill Basin – but also with regard to the Canterbury ranges east of the Main Divide. Certainly within the context of this broader Canterbury landscape the proposal is in keeping with the concentration of like activity that is centred on the Castle Hill Basin area. In this regard I agree with the applicant's landscape assessment regarding cumulative effects [p36] which states; *'The existing level of development has already reduced the landscape's sensitivity to change compared to other High Country areas which are in a more pristine state. In a landscape like this it is preferable to cluster development and to locate it in visually contained areas'*. Within the narrower confines of the Castle Hill Basin setting the presence of the proposal will at least be visually discrete where the landscape integrity of the receiving environment will fundamentally not appear to have changed to any great extent. New ski fields will of necessity entail the development of highly natural alpine environments, and if this is going to happen anywhere within the Canterbury Mountains, then the Porters site is, with regard to landscape effects, the more appropriate location.

5.0 STATUTORY LANDSCAPE MATTERS

- 5.1 As mentioned the statutory document of most relevance is the Selwyn District Plan. The RPS is not considered as the SDP is fully operative with regard to the application site and its setting. It will therefore be consistent with the relevant provisions of the RPS.
- 5.2 It is understood however, that the Plan Change request introduces proposed new provisions that are not otherwise accommodated in the Plan. In any case, the implementation of these will have an effect on the landscape. In this discussion I focus on the general direction of the landscape related provisions, particularly where they apply to the high country and the ONL overlay. This is because they collectively 'paint a picture' of what kind of landscape is anticipated for the high country and its ONL overlays.
- 5.3 I note that the landscape AEE also discusses the general direction of objectives and policies and that the overall AEE identifies these more specifically with regard to the requested amendments.

The Selwyn District Plan (The Plan)

- 5.4 The Plan firstly identifies in its issue statements²² that the high country within the district has significant landscape values because of low population density and modification when compared to other areas. While extensive areas have ONL status, it is also recognised that much of these are modified due to human activity – especially pastoralism. Outdoor recreation is recognised as another activity common to the high country and ONL areas and this includes *'...small structures*

²² Selwyn District Plan - Rural Volume | PART B - Natural Resources

such as...tramping huts and ski tows.' It goes on to state that these activities along with pastoral farming '*...are part of the Areas of Outstanding Landscape now, and are appropriate uses of these areas.*' The statement then identifies what is inappropriate within the ONL, which includes, of relevance; '*...large structures and buildings, houses (outside existing building nodes), [and] large scale commercial buildings....*' Such a description fits the proposed plan change as it involves these activities. The reason why these activities are considered inappropriate are because they have the potential to alter '*...the sense of remoteness from people and untouched country....*' In this regard it would be fair to say that not all of the ONL high country could be considered equally remote and untouched. And certainly the application site would along with most of Castle Hill Basin be considered one of the least remote and untouched ONL areas within the District.

- 5.5 The statement then points out that the policies encourage large structures, buildings and housing to locate outside of the ONLs, but recognise too that they '*...may be necessary or appropriate uses in the Areas of Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes.*'
- 5.6 Turning to the objectives and policies concerning ONLs and ONFs the Plan establishes that there is a need to balance human (physical) activity with recognition and protection of the natural resource²³. It is important to appreciate that the landscape outcomes for both provide for economic and social wellbeing.
- 5.7 In the explanation and reasons for Objective B1.4.1 it notes that absolute protection of ONLs/ONFs can only really come about via the purchase of land by the Crown or community. I understand from reading submissions that some of the application site, including Crystal Basin, was purchased (from Castle Hill Station) for conservation purposes (within stewardship land administered by the DOC) with financial assistance from the Nature Heritage Fund. I also understand that under s16A of the Conservation Act that such land can be exchanged at the Minister's discretion for land elsewhere meriting protection. So while land purchase by the Crown provides reasonable certainty that natural landscape values will be protected as flagged by the explanation and reasons, it is evidently not guaranteed.
- 5.8 Finally the explanation and reasons summarise the overall policy intent for the District's ONLs and ONFs where only those '*...activities that will have complementary or only minor effects on the landscape values of these areas*' will be allowed.
- 5.9 The district wide policies²⁴ concerning ONLs and ONFs recognise that they are not necessarily going to be pristine environments. Instead the focus appears to be on accommodating human activity and change; the latter which should be allowed, the explanation and reasons state, provided this maintains '*...the fundamental values of the landscape and fit with the character of the area.*' This enables context to be taken into account, where in this case the proposal is located in an area that is characterised by the presence of like activity, albeit on a much smaller scale.
- 5.10 Policies B1.4.21 to B1.4.29 are specific to ONLs and ONFs in the high country (as opposed to the Port and Malvern Hills).

²³ Objective B1.4.1 and Policy B1.4.1

²⁴ Policies B1.4.1; B1.4.2; B1.4.3

- 5.11 Firstly they seek to recognise and protect ONLs and ONFs²⁵.
- 5.12 Secondly, there is acknowledgement that outdoor recreational activities (among others) are appropriate in ONLs.²⁶ Ski fields are identified as one such activity.
- 5.13 Thirdly, while such activities are considered appropriate, further dwellings, large buildings, structures, and utilities in the ONLs are to be avoided unless they must, by virtue of their function, be '*...located in that area to serve its purpose.*'²⁷ The day lodges, ski tows, gondola, service vehicle access and snow making apparatus would fall into this category. The village would not, as accommodation can be provided elsewhere outside of the ONL, which is mostly the case in New Zealand. The exception is that no suitable site is available outside of the ONL. As mentioned however, villages within sensitive high natural character landscapes in this country do exist, namely in or adjoining various national parks such as Mt Cook/Aoraki, Westland (Franz Josef and Fox), Nelson Lakes (Rotorua), Paparoa (Punakaiki) and Tongariro (Whakapapa).
- 5.14 Finally, if buildings subject to the above summarised policy framework is to be located within an ONL then they must blend in and be visually unobtrusive.²⁸ Apart from the taller buildings proposed and possible lighting effects, the rules package offered would appear capable of delivering such an outcome. In visual terms this also takes into account the relatively discrete location of the village and ski field development.
- 5.15 In any event, the overall outcome sought generally favours the absence of buildings and structures as this makes '*...the landscape appear as if it is untouched or unmodified by humans and adds to the sense of wilderness or isolation from human settlement or occupation.*'²⁹ Or to put it another way and with reference to RMA s6(b), ski field infrastructure appears to be considered an appropriate use or development in the District's high country ONLs, whereas dwellings and large buildings not directly required for the functioning of the ski field are not. That is, unless there is no alternative, the buildings have to blend in with their setting.
- 5.16 A policy concerning earthworks³⁰ is also relevant where in essence it entertains such activity provided the effects are avoided, remedied or mitigated and is limited in volume, after which the site is re-contoured and replanted. It is apparent from the AEE and rules package that this will be undertaken. I am confident that such measures as promoted by the applicant will be sufficient to avoid, remedy and mitigate any adverse effects arising from earthworks.
- 5.17 In achieving the policies referred to above, the paraphrased anticipated environmental results are that the high country ONLs present (of relevance):
- natural and open character
 - the predominance of pasture, tussock and native vegetation

²⁵ Policy B1.4.21

²⁶ Policy B1.4.22

²⁷ Policy B1.4.23

²⁸ Policy B1.4.24

²⁹ Explanation and reasons

³⁰ Policy B1.4.29

- an area free of intrusive structures, earthworks and buildings, where the latter are few, isolated and dispersed
 - activities that have minor visual effects
- 5.18 The proposal will derogate from all four of the above outcomes to varying degrees. Even though natural and open character will be lessened, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the application site, it will nonetheless prevail. This is because the landscape of the setting is very expansive in proportion to what is proposed. Likewise, the predominance of tussock and native vegetation will also be maintained, albeit to a lesser extent. The fact that it will infiltrate the village counters this to some extent though.
- 5.19 The third outcome concerning structures, earthworks and buildings is where the greatest departure from what is anticipated occurs. In particular the number and scale of the proposed buildings will struggle to achieve the results flagged by the relevant ONL policies. Removing the ONL overlay would not alleviate this effect, as the application site is entirely enveloped by the remaining ONL area. Being such an open landscape means that the effects cannot be confined to the application site, and so will readily invade the surrounding ONL. In other words, the effects do not stop at the application site boundary.
- 5.20 Regarding buildings and structures in the ONL the policies clearly prefer that they are located elsewhere unless they are necessary to the operation of the activity. The applicant argues in favour of the village largely on the grounds of safety and economic benefits³¹ which is an area beyond my expertise. So clearly there is a need to balance the benefits against the cost to the landscape within the policy framework. Context is a very important consideration in this regard, where existing development patterns and current levels of modification have to be considered alongside visual effects.
- 5.21 This brings us to the final policy outcome where the visual effects of activity need to be minor. It appears that this will be the case as viewed from the key publicly accessed vantage points, the effects of which are shown in the photo-simulations taken from the State Highway. This gives an irrefutable impression of what the proposal will look like within the context of its setting, which is particularly important for the village area.
- 5.22 Because the proposal is located in the rural high country zone, other policies are also relevant. It is acknowledged though that these relate to rural activity rather than the establishment of villages such as that sought by the plan change request. Nonetheless, consideration needs to be given to the effects of the proposal on the high country landscape, the character and amenity of which is flagged by the policies.
- 5.23 Importantly, there is policy recognition that the high country provides a backdrop to the ONLs.³² The maintenance of rural character is also considered important where the principal outcome is the '*...predominance of vegetation cover and the sense of sparse and isolated pockets of human settlement which is characteristic of the high country.*' To this end the policy encourages new dwellings and buildings to be clustered or otherwise blend in with their surroundings. Clustering is

³¹ See s32 analysis

³² Policy B1.4.30

generally a sound way of containing effects on the landscape rather than dispersing them. Being a cluster of buildings, the proposed village will achieve this principal. The explanation and reasons also note that the location of new buildings is preferred to be located in the vicinity of existing building nodes. The village will be located where two buildings currently exist, and therefore could be considered a node. The clustering of buildings will in turn be assisted by the proposed rules controlling design and appearance which will achieve other aspects of the policy.³³ This reflects the sentiment expressed in the explanation and reasons which states; *'The policies do not prevent the erection of houses, other buildings or the planting of exotic plantations in the high country area. Rather they manage how these activities are undertaken.'*

- 5.24 Views from the midland railway and SH73 are encouraged to be maintained³⁴ and apart from the relatively narrow view corridor from the latter, this will be achieved also. This is especially so given that the policy, firstly applies to areas outside the ONL and secondly sets out to control the screening of views by buildings, shelterbelts and plantations via setback provisions.

Summary of SDP landscape provisions

- 5.25 While it is clear that the District Plan does not expect its high country landscape and ONL overlays to be pristinely natural, provided human activity is subservient to it. And regarding ONLs especially, this has to substantially favour the natural end of the modification spectrum. It is also clear that activity in high country areas outside of the ONL's need to respect their natural character and integrity. The overarching landscape character anticipated by the Plan for the high country is one that displays very abundant open space and vegetation – significantly much more so than any of the other rural zones within the District.
- 5.26 Human activity, particularly in the form of buildings, structures and utilities are anticipated, but are expected to be discrete and unobtrusive so that the natural open space character of the high country and its ONLs remains dominant. The Plan entertains the presence of ski field activity, which along with other activity such as pastoral farming contributes to landscape character, but prefers it to be subdued.
- 5.27 Within the context of the Plan, the most significant policy obstacle facing the applicant is clearly that discouraging buildings, structures and utilities in the ONL's unless they are necessary to the functioning of the anticipated activity. Notwithstanding this, the more important issue is whether these can be made to blend in with the landscape of their setting to such a degree that its natural character and amenity prevails. In principal I believe this is achievable where the photo-simulations demonstrate what the effects are likely to be. From these it is certainly clear that the development will have negligible visual effect as viewed from the key vantage point of SH73, and will be invisible from others. In other words, the visual effects are well contained by surrounding topography. Where the development can be seen, particularly the village, the design controls are sufficient to help blend it into its setting.

Proposed Waimakariri Regional River Plan (WRRP)

³³ Op cit (c)

³⁴ Policy B1.4.31

- 5.28 This proposed plan sets out, among other things, to achieve RMA s6(a) and (b), and 7(c)³⁵ matters, and ultimately the purpose of the Act. To this end the environmental results anticipated of relevance to landscape outcomes include preservation of the natural character of waterways, the protection of ONLs and ONFs, and that amenity values are maintained and enhanced. The WRRP also describes the kind of environment in which the application site is located as follows:

The Waimakariri River system has a high degree of naturalness above Woodstock³⁶. Particular features of the high natural character of the upper river include: a relative lack of structures and other cultural modifications, high water quality, the presence of distinctive native wildlife, a sports fishery, indigenous vegetation in the beds and margins of the river, the predominance of natural sounds, a relatively unmodified aquatic ecosystem and unmodified flow characteristics.

- 5.29 Relevant to the application the WRRP recognises as an issue³⁷ any activity which has the potential to damage waterways including their natural character and amenity values. Such activities might include the erection of structures and removal of vegetation,³⁸ which will arise from implementation of the proposed activity resulting from the plan change.
- 5.30 The relevant policies then reiterate the s6(a) (b) and 7(c) matters to be achieved should such activity be contemplated. Included among them is a policy [7.1 (vi)] requiring that *'the natural patterns, colours and textures of the riverbed areas are maintained.'*
- 5.31 In order to achieve the policy outcomes sought by the WRRP I believe that it is necessary to increase the setback for Porters Stream from the proposed 5m to my recommended 15 metres. The reasons for this I have discussed in detail earlier.
- 5.32 No other matters arise from the WRRP that are not otherwise covered by the SDP.

6.0 RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS

- 6.1 The following recommendation is made with the aim of reducing potential adverse effects on the landscape that will otherwise arise from implementation of the proposal.

1. That proposed rule '25.3.1.7 All buildings (excluding bridges) shall be setback a minimum of 5m from the Porter Stream' be amended to read 'All buildings (excluding bridges) shall be setback a minimum of 15m from the Porter Stream.'

Reasons:

³⁵ WRRP Section 1.2 Plan purpose and scope and proposed Objectives 6.1 & 7.1

³⁶ also see the WRRP Figure 4 Map

³⁷ WRRP 7.2

³⁸ WRRP proposed Policy 7.1

- To ensure that the natural character of Porter Stream as a salient landscape feature within the ONL is maintained.
- To more appropriately achieve the proposed and existing policies of the Selwyn District Plan and the Waimakariri Regional River Plan seeking maintain the natural character of Porter Stream.

The buildings shown on the ODP to be on or within the stream corridor will also need to be adjusted accordingly.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 In terms of its scale the proposed development represents a significant departure from existing patterns of development in the Castle Hill Basin / Craighburn area. These patterns currently inform the landscape character and amenity of the area. Apart from Castle Hill village, development to date has generally been ad hoc, of a very modest scale, and incrementally very gradual over time. It also tends to display what I would regard as vernacular character, particularly where individual expression is manifest in building scale, design and appearance. Because of these characteristics the area maintains the expansive openness and greenery that is recognised and promoted in the District Plan.

7.2 The establishment of a village in the Basin is not unprecedented however. The Basin is no stranger to landscape change processes that are perhaps greater than anywhere else in the District's high country. Additionally, of all areas within the high country, the Basin harbours one of the highest ranges of activity, surpassed only by Arthurs Pass Village with its dwellings, businesses of various sorts, visitor centre, church, railway station, public toilets, tourist accommodation, roading infrastructure and power pylons.

7.3 As always with landscape matters, what this means is that context is perhaps the most critical factor when considering the effects of this proposal. In summary contextual circumstances are as follows:

- That with regard to the District's high country, that area through which SH73 runs is the most developed.
- That with regard to the above, there are distinct nodes of development.
- That while pastoral farming and conservation activity is the predominant land use common to all the District's high country, recreation, tourism and residential use is relatively more common along the SH73 corridor.
- That allied to the above point, ski fields are a common feature in the area of the proposal, and are generally concentrated in the Castle Hill Basin catchment.

- That the proposed ski field will be contiguous with an existing field.
- That while the Basin area is by no means pristine, but does display very high natural and scenic values.
- That the presence of the highway enables the greatest degree of public access to the District's high country, and therefore its use and appreciation.
- That land form will screen the proposed development from other key tourist destination points within the Basin.
- That the high country in which Castle Hill Basin is located is the closest to Christchurch.

7.4 Virtually all of the above contextual circumstances are favourable to the proposal when considering its potential effects on the landscape. Those landscape matters which are not favourable include the following.

- The modification of pristine landscape areas – namely Crystal Basin and its catchment.
- Irrevocable change to the landscape on a scale that differs markedly from existing development in the Basin.
- The potential presence of very tall buildings in a landscape that the District Plan requires to be predominantly natural, open and green in character and amenity, and therefore would not be an appropriate development and use within an ONL.

7.5 Notwithstanding these, in my opinion it would be possible to accommodate a development such as that proposed in a way that enables the natural character of the landscape to predominate. the proposed Appendix 25 rules package is fundamentally sound, particularly with regard to the design and appearance of buildings, controls on earthworks and site re-vegetation. I do have some reservations about the height of the taller buildings (>12m) but am to an extent assured by their effects as portrayed in the photo-simulations. Given this I am confident that, in principal, the buildings will appear to sit comfortably in their landscape setting. Further, the development's visual effects will be insignificant as viewed from important publicly accessed vantage points as demonstrated by the photo-simulations.

7.6 On the matter of landscape change, which is the bigger issue facing the proposal, is the question of effects on the ONL and whether these are inappropriate. RMA s6(b) does not rule out subdivision, development and use within ONLs, provided it is appropriate. The District Plan gives guidance as to what appropriate means, and especially seeks to discourage the presence of buildings unless they are

necessary to the functioning of an activity that can only be located within an ONL. This is the case here with regard to the more obvious ski field infrastructure such as the lifts and day lodges. Whether the village is absolutely necessary is perhaps another matter where clearly there needs to be a compelling reason for its existence on the field. In any event, it is evident that to some extent the applicant's landscape architect acknowledges that the proposal is not entirely inconsistent with the District Plan provisions relating to the ONL where in the landscape AEE it is stated that; *"Generally the proposed plan change is consistent with much of the existing policy framework for management of land within an ONL...."*³⁹

- 7.7 On the basis of the contextual circumstances discussed earlier, and the proposed provisions, I reservedly agree, where it incumbent on the applicant to advance reasons as to why the village location is considered necessary to the functioning of the ski field. The same applies to the Porters Stream setback.
- 7.8 Overall, I conclude that it would, in general terms, be possible to accommodate the proposal in a way that would be appropriate to its setting. I also acknowledge that there will be some very significant landscape effects, particularly resulting from changes to the setting rather than visual effects. While they will adversely affect natural character and the amenity that is derived from it, I understand such change has to be balanced against the benefits of the proposal. In this regard, the application site is doubtless one of the better ones in terms of landscape effects when considered against alternatives within the District's high country. By this I mean alternative sites that are likely to exhibit greater adverse visual effects; and those sites outside of the Craighburn recreational area which are comparatively unmodified.

Andrew Craig
Registered Landscape Architect
June 2011

³⁹ Landscape AEE p38

Selwyn District Plan rules relating to buildings in ONLs⁴⁰

3.2 BUILDINGS AND OUTSTANDING LANDSCAPE AREAS

Permitted Activities — Buildings and Outstanding Landscape Areas

3.2.1 Erecting any building or any additions or alterations to, or modification or demolition of, any building shall be a permitted activity if all of the following conditions are met:

3.2.1.1 In the areas shown on the Planning Maps as the Port Hills Area and as the Areas of Outstanding Landscape in the Malvern Hills and the High Country, no building has:

- (a) A maximum gross floor area exceeding 40m²;
- (b) A maximum height exceeding 4m; and
- (c) A maximum reflectance exceeding 37%;

Restricted Discretionary Activities — Buildings and Outstanding Landscape Areas

3.2.4 Any building which does not comply with Rule 3.2.1 shall be a restricted discretionary activity if all of the following standards and terms are met:

3.2.4.1 The building is within the Lower Slopes of the Port Hills Area (as identified in the Planning Maps) or

3.2.4.2 In the areas shown on the Planning Maps as areas of Outstanding Landscape in the Malvern Hills and the High Country:

- (a) The building is associated with an activity which is located within the area of Outstanding Landscape; and
- (b) The building cannot effectively serve that activity if it is located on a site outside the area of Outstanding Landscape.

3.2.5 Under Rule 3.2.4, the Council shall restrict its discretion to consideration of:

3.2.5.1 The design of the building including height, size/scale, external finish, colour and reflectance value;

3.2.5.3 The visibility of the building from land which is publicly owned and freely accessible by the public, including any area of curtilage if the building is a dwelling;

3.2.5.4 The extent to which the building, and if a dwelling, any associated curtilage may:

- (a) Dominate or detract from openness, visual coherence, legibility or integrity of the landscape;

⁴⁰ Selwyn District Plan - Rural Volume | Part C - Rural Rules - Buildings C3-005

- (b) Include earthworks or new planting to assist in mitigation of any adverse landscape effects;*
 - (c) Use topography or vegetation to assist in mitigation or containment of visual effects;*
 - (c) Break the skyline or interrupt the form of any ridges, hills or prominent slopes;*
 - (e) Be visually prominent in an area characterised by high natural values;*
 - (f) Affect the amenity values of adjoining properties.*
- 3.2.5.5 Whether the landscape has further capacity to absorb change having regard to existing and consented development on adjoining sites and in the locality, and any benefits that can be obtained from clustering buildings.*
- 3.2.5.6 Whether the proposal creates opportunities to protect open space, indigenous vegetation or nature conservation values.*
- 3.2.5.7 The design and siting of any access to the building, and the visibility of that access, including any contrast with natural contours and the proposed revegetation of any earthworks.*
- 3.2.5.8 The siting of any utilities installed to serve the building, including whether any water storage tanks, cables or pipes are to be placed underground.*
- 3.2.5.9 Any positive effects to be created by the proposed building and its associated accessway.*

Suggested wording of rules

1. That where specifically excepted, the existing rules concerning activity in outstanding landscape areas include the following additional rules;

1.4.1.5 Any earthworks within the Ski Area Sub-Zone (Porters) are subject to rules 25.2.1 – 25.2.2.13 listed in Appendix 25.

1.1.1.2 Except for the Ski Area Sub-Zone (Porters), in the area shown on the Planning Maps as the High Country, the tree(s) are not located within any area also shown on the Planning Maps as an Area of Outstanding Landscape or a Forestry Exclusion Area.

2.1.1.4 Any planting within the Ski Area Sub-Zone (Porters) are also subject to rules 25.2.5 – 25.2.6.4 listed in Appendix 25.

3.2.1.1 Except for the Ski Area Sub-Zone (Porters), in the areas shown on the Planning Maps as the Port Hills Area and as the Areas of Outstanding Landscape in the Malvern Hills and the High Country, no building has:...

3.2.1.2 Any buildings within the Ski Area Sub-Zone (Porters) are subject to rules 25.2.3 – 25.2.4.12 listed in Appendix 25.