

PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE 25

PROPOSED PORTERS SKI AREA EXPANSION AND VILLAGE

REASONS FOR PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE

Porters Ski Area was founded in 1968 when it was the first commercial Ski Area in the Canterbury.

From the 1960s up until the mid 1980s, Canterbury was considered the major ski destination for both New Zealanders and visiting Australians. Since then, Canterbury's position has been overtaken by Southern Lakes where significant capital has been injected into infrastructure, an accommodation base and associated tourism services.

At Porters, where ownership has changed several times over the years, each new group of owners has, to varying degrees, identified the potential to improve the business. Unfortunately none has been able to consolidate an economically viable case to fund either major improvements (such as chairlifts) or expansion to become a large commercial area. This resulted in a progressive deterioration of the ski infrastructure to a point where many key elements such as the existing T-Bar lifts can be considered to be at the end of their useful life. This scenario makes it difficult to attract investment capital into the existing operation particularly as there is uncertainty about the land tenure of the Ski Area and the ability to efficiently consent new infrastructure.

As a result of market movements Porters has been stranded between the two primary categories of Ski Areas being (a) 'club fields' that rely primarily on voluntary resources, or small family operated Ski Areas and (b) large commercial Ski Areas that provide modern and high-capacity lifts along with automated snow making systems. Even though it has loyal family-based customers Porters' current position is therefore not commercially sustainable.

Growth in skiing and snowboarding

Growth of the New Zealand domestic ski market is perceived as relatively flat and tied to the variability of snow conditions that occur from year to year. In contrast, the number of Australian skiers travelling to New Zealand has grown in recent years.

Between 2006 and 2009 there was an average of 386,000 skier days (lift tickets sold) by Australians in New Zealand and of these 324,000 were in Southern Lakes. Notably, about 50% of international visitors to the Southern Lakes region pass through Christchurch International Airport and visit Canterbury as part of their stay in New Zealand. The market profiles of the visitors to Queenstown and Wanaka Ski Areas show they attract a younger market which stays there longer than those visiting Ski Areas in Canterbury.

A major difference between New Zealand, and Australian and other international Ski Areas is that New Zealand lacks on-mountain accommodation. In addition, the mountain roads accessing New Zealand Ski Areas are routinely identified as severely detracting from the visiting skiers' experiences, especially when the visitors come from cities and are unused to driving in the conditions experienced on New Zealand roads.

Visiting skiers therefore complain that their visit is not a true alpine resort holiday where they expected to park the car for the week and ski or relax with their families and friends. Rather, they are required on a daily basis to drive from where they are staying to travel up the mountain and then back with early starts, and variable and at times extreme weather conditions on the mountain roads. Unfortunately there have been a number of fatalities on

these Ski Area access roads over recent years. This scenario is not visitor-friendly and therefore unsustainable in a competitive international market.

Securing the future of Porters means expanding into the neighbouring Crystal Basin. This area would significantly increase the commercially important intermediate/family ski terrain and also give the opportunity to provide a year-round village to support this expansion. This would make Porters the first in New Zealand to offer a destination Ski Area and village with no access road issues. Accommodation would also be consistent with market standards and expectations at the foot of the expanded Ski Area.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PLAN CHANGE

Proposed Plan Change 25 rezones an area of 616ha from Rural High Country to Ski Area Sub-Zone (Porters). The new sub-zoning specifically recognises and provides for Ski Area activities and infrastructure.

The area of land to be rezoned covers the existing Porters Ski Area and its expansion to include the adjoining Crystal Basin. This provides the potential to increase intermediate skiable terrain and enhance snowmaking capability.

In addition to the Ski Areas, the Sub-Zone recognises an area of approximately 21ha for a village. A key function of the Village is to provide accommodation, enabling recreationalists and visitors the choice of staying or living in an alpine environment. The size of the Village reflects the skier capacity of the expanded Ski Area terrain and therefore provides for up to 3,500 beds which is the maximum skier capacity. The Village would also provide commercial, tourist and conference activities.

The Village is to be connected to the existing Porters Basin and proposed Crystal Basin Ski Areas via gondolas and ski out trails. This means the existing Ski Area access road would be down-graded to maintenance and emergency access only. The proposed Village would be fully serviced by reticulated infrastructure with controls on the layout of the Village, building design and re-vegetation.

The combination of a short trip from Christchurch International Airport, on-mountain (slope-side) visitor accommodation and no need to travel an access road would make Porters Ski Area highly accessible and convenient to visitors and recreationalists. Existing issues associated with mountain road safety could also be addressed.

Documentation provided with the application includes reports on - geotechnical issues, ecology, landscape, archaeology, traffic, tourism demand, economic benefits, architecture and layout of the village, a summary of wastewater and stormwater treatment and disposal and provision for water supply.

Key RMA issues related to the project are concerned with:

- the viability of existing Ski Areas as major recreation resources for the community and tourists;
- the safety and wellbeing of the community;
- the social and economic benefits that may attribute to the district, the region and the New Zealand ski industry from the expansion of the Ski Area and the establishment of an alpine village; and
- potential environmental effects on ecological values from the establishment and maintenance of an expanded Ski Area.

These issues are discussed in the Assessment of Environmental Effects and Section 32 Report.