

# Rural Study Background Notes

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## Why a Rural Study?

- Strong development pressures are being experienced within the Central Otago District area.
- Fuelled by:
  - overflow of investment and demand from Queenstown and Wanaka
  - increased interest in wine industry
  - wealth of “baby boomers” and their interest in second home or future retirement location
  - expatriates and internationals purchasing property to return to if and when the need arises
- Current proposed district plan encourages the small scale subdivision of rural land and the eight hectare minimum allowance has become a standard for developers. While this has been helpful for the developing wine industry and other crops, when the 8ha rule is used for rural residential subdivision development it has led to some less desirable consequences:
  - Increased pressure for rural residential properties has the potential to detrimentally affect the iconic landscape through inappropriate subdivision.
  - Rural lifestylers aren't normally wanting 8ha blocks, just looking for rural separation. Therefore, large scale 8ha subdivision for rural residential is not good use of productive land.
  - Operation of genuine rural activities can affect the experience people expect when they move to the country. It can be noisy and smelly! Therefore risk is real to rural activities of being restricted because of neighbours complaints when mixed with rural residential.
  - Large scale subdivision for rural residential will lead to loss of rural amenity, the wide open spaces that people enjoy about Central Otago.

## What is to happen?

As a result, Council has undertaken to review the available methods for development so that appropriate development of the land resource of Central Otago is encouraged.

The aim of this review is not to stop development. It is to establish the mechanisms to ensure development occurs that strikes a sensible balance between:

- retaining the productive capacity of the land;
- protecting Central Otago unique landscapes;
- maintaining the rural feel of the district; and
- avoiding reverse sensitivity issues; while
- allowing the demand for land to be met.

## What is the scale of the issue?

Whilst we can only guess at the level of demand in the future, based on thorough analysis of the growth drivers, it is apparent that the current economic activity will be sustained for the foreseeable future.

Conservative predictions put the Central Otago population at 20,000 by 2020. This 5000 increase would require approximately 2000 more homes and on current experience half of these would be in the rural areas.

These figures do not consider second homes which are also likely to be a significant number.

Even using the 1000 houses in the rural area, if these were built using appropriate materials and located in sensible locations the landscape has every ability to absorb this number without losing its character. However, uncontrolled development has already shown examples of buildings that don't achieve this result.

### **How will the Rural Study be managed?**

A collaborative approach, with the community, is desired by Council.

Council recognises that this process has the potential to impact on the plans people have for their land so it is important that we work together to identify issues, develop options and as far as possible agree on outcomes.

It is going to be easier to sort these issues around tables at community halls than in the Environment Court.

As a result, Council is committed to continuing a process of local area meeting and focus group discussions as the review progresses.

### **Timeframes**

The team will be reporting back to the Council in the New Year. During the study Ian Brown will be keeping you informed on progress by email and postal mail and a series of focus group meetings are planned to discuss the issues in more detail. These are scheduled for October and November.

### **What about the variation Council has already advertised?**

That is an interim change until we get the results of this rural study.

Council has advertised a variation to the rules governing rural subdivision. It changes from a controlled activity (can't say no but can require minor changes) to a discretionary activity (subdivider must prove the effect of the subdivision on the environment is minor or else consent may not be granted).

This is a stop gap measure so we don't go through the rural study to find the horse has already bolted.

It has also encouraged greater variation in lot size to be considered i.e. minimum 2ha but average of 8ha is promoted.