



Media Release

10 December 2007

Rural Study Findings Released

What was the reason for doing the Rural Study?

Council initiated the Rural Study in mid 2005, in response to strong levels of growth and subsequent development pressure, which had the potential to create effects on landscape and rural amenity. In addition increased development had the potential to cause reverse sensitivity and fragmentation of productive land if not managed effectively.

The proposed Central Otago District Plan, notified in 1998, provides for subdivision to a minimum lot size of 8 hectares as a controlled activity. While this effectively enabled viticulture and horticultural development on the land for a period of time, it was recognised that with increasing demands, changing land uses and pressure for rural residential opportunities, 8 hectare subdivisions may not be achieving the “best use” of the land. Being a controlled activity Council was unable to decline subdivisions which did not achieve appropriate outcomes.

As an interim measure, Council publicly notified Variation 1 in July 2005 which changed the activity status of subdivision from a controlled to a discretionary activity subject to an average 8 hectare and minimum 2 hectare standard. This provided some flexibility and enabled Council to decline inappropriate subdivision while the Rural Study process was being undertaken.

Extensive consultation was undertaken with the community during the Rural Study process, by way of meetings in community halls, pubs, and rugby clubs throughout the district. The feedback from the people, telling us how they want to develop, and what they consider worthy of protection proved valuable in developing the proposed variations

What is the content of the proposed changes?

Council wanted, through the Rural Study, to introduce a range of mechanisms to ensure that subdivision and building could continue, yet still have the ability to protect the values that make Central Otago distinctive.

The proposed variations include landscape assessment maps for the district, which will be appended to the District Plan. The maps indicate the sensitivity of the land to development, ranging from limited sensitivity to extreme

sensitivity. There are changes to the rules which require people to consider the landscape assessment maps and a number of assessment matters when undertaking development.

The variations also introduce additional areas of rural residential zoned land around some of the towns to provide further opportunities for lifestyle development.

How does the Rural Study match our vision?

Recommendations in the Rural Study are completely aligned to the regional vision for Central Otago -

Imagine Central Otago as a vast land of uncompromising beauty. People with noble hearts, strength, bravery, ingenuity, high spirits, freedom and pride that soars. A place that attracts new thinking. Central Otago will be a better world for those that succeed us.

Development is encouraged in the right places while special landscapes and features will be protected. The intention is that there will no longer be fragmentary development in rural areas where the development is a mismatch of lifestyle blocks with established rural activity. This can cause issues of reverse sensitivity, such as noise associated with frost fighting and bird scarring in horticultural and vineyard blocks.

What is the process once Council hears the report?

- Once Council makes its decision, it then goes through a statutory process where it must publicly notify the variations to the Proposed District Plan. This will be done at the earliest opportunity.
- Copies of the Variation will be freely available at all Council's Service Centres and Libraries for anyone interested.
- The community are encouraged to make submissions on the proposed variations.
- The submission process is two staged – with submission and cross submissions.
- Submissions will then be heard by Council's Hearing Panel.
- The Hearings Panel will decide if there are any changes to the proposed variations, these will be notified and will be subject to a right of appeal.
- If in the event there are no submissions, then the variations would be integrated into the District Plan and become operative.

How long will that process take?

The initial Hearing process will take at least six months. However, Council cannot anticipate the level of submissions which may be received or any subsequent appeal to the Environment Court.

Will these be included in the District Plan?

Once the statutory process is completed and the variation finalised, potentially the Rural Study provides a range of recommendations to deal with resource consent applications for building in a rural area and also rules to focus development in appropriate areas.

What happens with resource consent applications that are not in keeping with rural study recommendations?

Once Council has made a decision on Wednesday and the proposed Variations are publicly notified, the variation has effect from that date. This means that the current provision in the Amended Proposed District Plan will be superseded from that date.

Does the Hearings Panel take Rural Study recommendations into consideration?

In short yes.

Once the variation is publicly notified they are given some consideration by the Hearings Panel, particularly when the level of submission to a resource application are high and reflect some of the proposed variation to the Plan.

What are some of the key features being proposed in the variation 5A – 5V?

Some of the proposed amendments introduce:

- Additional areas for rural residential zoning in Letts Gully area, Springvale area, north of Omakau township and south of Waipiata township.
- A wider colour palette for building in the rural area.
- Heights of residential buildings have been reduced (from 15 metres) to 5.5 metres to 7.5 metres (depending on location) and yard requirements increased from 10 metres to 25 metres.
- There will be Landscape Assessment Maps which categorise the sensitivity of the land from limited to extreme sensitivity.

- Subdivision will generally be a discretionary activity in the rural area (excluding Rural Residential Resource Area where it will be a controlled activity).
- A broader range of assessment matters has been introduced for rural subdivision including:
 - The effects on open space, landscape, natural character and amenity values
 - Potential for visual absorption of built development with particular attention to those areas identified on the landscape assessment maps as: Extreme; High; Significant; and Moderate sensitivity
 - Capability for sustainable use of the productive land resource
 - Potential reverse sensitivity effects
 - Earthworks
 - Whether or not clustering of lots will be beneficial in avoiding or mitigating adverse affects
 - Any community benefit obtained from preserving in perpetuity indigenous vegetation or outstanding landscape feature
 - Off site works which may contribute to environmental compensation or biodiversity offset
 - The appropriate size of any allotment.

For further information please contact:

Louise Van der Voort
Planning and Environment Manager
Phone: (03) 440 0627
louise.vandervoort@codc.govt.nz