

**BEFORE THE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED BY
THE MACKENZIE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

UNDER

the Resource Management Act 1991

IN THE MATTER

of RM230149 an application for land use consent to establish and operate a commercial tree-climb ropes course and picnic facilities at Lakeside Drive, Takapō/Lake Tekapo

BETWEEN

**QUEENSTOWN COMMERCIAL
PARAPENTERS LIMITED**

Applicant

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SAMANTHA STRONG-RECREATION

Dated: 27 August 2025

Summary Statement of Samantha Strong

Introduction

- [1] My name is Samantha Morgan Strong. I prepared evidence for the Queenstown Commercial Parapenters Ltd (**Applicant**) relating to RM230149 an application for land use consent to establish and operate a commercial tree-climb ropes course and picnic facilities at Lakeside Drive, Takapō/Lake Tekapo dated 13 August 2025.
- [2] This summary statement provides a synopsis of the key issues identified in my statement of evidence. These issues include:
- (a) Does the proposal fit within the Operative District Plan zone of Passive Recreation Zone and PC29 Open Space Zone Objectives, Rules and Policies, and other Mackenzie District Council non-regulatory planning documents?
 - (b) Mode Shift: Will the ropes course significantly change how people currently use Lakeside Drive—for example, will it alter the experience for walkers, beachgoers, and passive users in the area?
 - (c) Dominance: Will the ropes course dominate the experience for other users? Will the physical structures associated with the activity be sufficiently evident to change the experience of existing users?
 - (d) Carrying Capacity and Crowding: Will the new activity increase the patronage of the site to the point where the sites carrying capacity is exceeded and crowding becomes an issue or overwhelms the capacity of facilities in the area, leading to more conflict between visitors?
 - (e) Specialisation: Will the ropes course displace any specialised recreation? Is the current visitor experience at the site dependent on a specialised resource that will be compromised by a commercial development?

- (f) Commercialism: To what extent is commercial recreation, such as the proposed ropes course, compatible with the character of Lake Tekapō and the existing visitor experience, and complementary to the recreation focus of the zone, particularly in the Lakeside Drive area, and would its commercial nature noticeably affect the experience of current users?

Summary statement

Operative District Plan & PC29 Zoning

- [3] The Operative District Plan – Passive Recreation Zone (Recreation P) identifies the purpose of this zone as protecting areas for informal, low-intensity recreation while maintaining their open space and amenity values. While the policy direction emphasises avoiding visual clutter and intensification, it does not explicitly preclude active or commercial recreation activities provided these values are retained.
- [4] In my opinion, the ropes course is consistent with the objectives and policies of the Passive Recreation Zone, as it introduces an additional recreational opportunity without displacing or preventing activities such as walking, cycling, picnicking and general enjoyment of open space. It sits within an urban fringe setting, as per the ROS, which fits within the context of the zone. The activity is small-scale, maintains a planted and open character, and therefore does not conflict with the Operative provisions.
- [5] The Proposed District Plan (PC29) – Open Space Zone (OSZ) provides for both passive and active recreation activities, alongside compatible and complementary community and commercial recreation uses (OSZ-O1, OSZ-P1, OSZ-P2). The decision version anticipates informal recreation supported by limited facilities, and requires that built form be limited, maintain a predominance of open space, and maintain important viewshafts to the lake.
- [6] The proposed ropes course directly supports these outcomes by providing a complementary recreation activity which is informal in nature, publicly accessible, and compatible with other uses in the zone, as well as the activities in the adjacent zones. It has been sited and scaled to

preserve open space predominance, lake outlooks, and pedestrian/cycling access (OSZ-P2, P4, OSZ-R2).

- [7] The proposal is also consistent with the PC29 direction enabling community and commercial recreation activities where they are integrated with and enhance recreational opportunities (OSZ-R6, OSZ-R7). The ropes course broadens the recreation offering without generating adverse crowding or landscape effects, and sits appropriately within the existing high-use recreation setting which already includes water sports, boating, camping, and cycling.
- [8] Assertions that the site should be confined solely to quiet or passive-only recreation are not supported by the policy framework or the existing use environment, which is already characterised by a range of active, noisy, and commercialised recreational activities.
- [9] The ropes course is consistent with Mackenzie District Council's non-regulatory planning documents. It supports the intent of the Asset Management Plan (2024–2034) by responding to open space pressures, encouraging passive enjoyment alongside active recreation, and contributing to amenity plantings and environmental enhancement. It also accords with the Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022) and the Destination Management Plan (2022) by providing diverse recreational opportunities, enhancing user experience, and creating a space that is accessible, vibrant, and compatible with the broader goals for public open space within the district.
- [10] In summary, the proposed ropes course is consistent with the operative Passive Recreation Zone policies and is clearly supported by the Proposed PC29 Open Space Zone objectives and rules. It sustains the open space and amenity values that both plans seek to protect, enhances recreational diversity, and remains appropriately scaled to the local environment. On this basis, the activity is compatible with both the current and future planning framework for the site.

Mode Shift

- [11] The proposal will not fundamentally change the way people currently use Lakeside Drive. This area is already a vibrant, multi-use recreation hub.

On any given day, you'll see walkers, cyclists, families, and beachgoers moving through the space, accessing the lake, the hot springs, other tourism and recreation infrastructure and the playground. The proposed course is designed so that users will access it from the existing shared parking area or by foot, just as they do now. There's no new vehicle access, no new barriers, and no redirection of existing pathways.

- [12] The shared pathway, already a major thoroughfare for both locals and visitors, remains open and unchanged. The only difference is that some users will now have the option to participate in the ropes course, while everyone else can continue walking, cycling, or enjoying the lakefront as they always have. The evidence shows that even at peak, the increase in pedestrian activity will be minor compared to current demand and will not adversely affect safety or the experience for others.
- [13] In summary, the ropes course will sit alongside existing recreation, not in place of it. The character and accessibility of Lakeside Drive for passive users will remain intact.

Dominance

- [14] The ropes course will be visible, but not dominant. The design integrates the course into the existing stand of mature pine trees. The base building, a pair of repurposed shipping containers, has a small footprint, set low and beneath the canopy. The platforms and ropes are elevated, largely screened by the trees, and the main visual element from a distance will be the base building, which is modest in scale and softened by landscaping.
- [15] Also, Ms. Banks states *"Additionally, the active component may detract from the ability to passively use the site, reducing the predominance of passive recreation"*. I disagree with this statement as one could say that when the beach is busy and recreational powerboaters are using the foreshore and the beach, which is an active recreation activity, that others who want to passively use the shaded trees actively choose not to, as the active activity would deter someone from the space.
- [16] As outlined in my evidence, similar ropes courses like the proposal often draw people into a space, either to spectate, participate, or it adds to

their own experience. The current receiving environment is already hosts many different user groups using the area for different recreation and leisure purposes. An added active recreation activity, in my opinion, will not deter people from choosing to use the space for passive recreation.

- [17] In response to Paul Smith's statement *"As assessed, perceptually, the Site will appear privatised due to the Site being used by paying customers, who will by nature congregate and dominate central parts of the Site. Also, the inherent safety risks of being underneath a source of falling objects, may deter the public from entering this space. Therefore, while the proposal will physically maintain a predominance of open space, the proposal will deter the general public from spending time under these trees reducing its perception of openness"*
- [18] As outlined in my evidence, the space under the proposed course is not currently being used. On my multiple site visits, as well as personally visiting Tekapo, I have rarely witnessed people using the area directly under the trees, as the tree debris is a deterrent to sit on. I witnessed most users using the beach area, as well as sitting in or around camper vans in the carpark, or using the walking path at the edge of the trees. It is therefore, in my opinion that that the areas of the course are not highly used for spending time under, and in any event, will not privatise the site or deter public.
- [19] The course minimally impacts lake views, nor does it impede movement along the shore. The main feature of this site, the panoramic views across Lake Tekapo, remains untouched. The evidence from landscape experts confirms that visual effects are minor and the open space character is preserved.
- [20] The course will introduce some new sounds, but these are consistent with existing recreation activity, children playing, boats on the lake, and people enjoying the outdoors. Noise assessments show that even at full capacity, the ropes course will operate within the permissible noise limits for the Recreation Passive Zone. During quieter periods, activity and noise will be lower still.

- [21] In summary, the ropes course becomes a feature of the recreation landscape, not a detraction from it. It sits comfortably within the existing busy, active, and social character of the area.

Carrying Capacity and Crowding

- [22] The ropes course is designed for a maximum of 60 participants at one time, with a peak day total of about 250 users. This is a small fraction of the overall visitor numbers to the lakefront, which regularly sees thousands of people during busy periods (as per the Destination Management Plan (2022) reports). The area beneath the course, currently underutilized and covered in pine debris, will not be restricted to the public, but rather be activated with new picnic tables and seating. This not only encourages passive use but also improves the quality and usability of the space from its current state for everyone.
- [23] Importantly, the addition of the ropes course will not exceed the site's carrying capacity. There is ample parking, the pathways sufficient to accommodate multiple groups of people, and the area is already accustomed to high visitor numbers. Research and site observations confirm that different recreation groups, walkers, cyclists, families, adventure seekers, can and do coexist without conflict in similar recreation settings. The course's booking system and health and safety requirements ensure that numbers are managed, and crowding will be avoided.
- [24] In summary, there is no evidence of current crowding or conflict within the application area, and the ropes course will not change that. Instead, it will activate an underused space and add to the diversity of recreation opportunities currently on offer.

Specialisation:

- [25] The site is not used for any specialised recreation that would be displaced by the ropes course. The main unique feature, the lake view, remains available to all users. The site is an urban fringe, mixed-use setting, with runners, walkers, powerboat and jet boaties families, and beachgoers all sharing the space. The ropes course simply adds a new, controlled activity to the mix, without compromising the ability of others

to enjoy their chosen recreation. Again, by activating the area beneath the pine trees with seating and picnic facilities, the proposal enhances passive recreation opportunities. Those who wish to sit in the shade, picnic, or spectate will have more options than they currently do.

- [26] In summary, no specialised user group is displaced, and the overall recreation experience is broadened, not diminished.

Commercialism:

- [27] Lake Tekapō is a tourism and recreation destination. The area already features a mix of commercial and non-commercial activities, hot springs, mini-golf, powerboat clubs, and more. The Destination Management Plan (2022) specifically encourages new adventure experiences and attractions for youth and young adults. The ropes course is exactly the kind of activity envisioned in these strategic documents.

- [28] In response to Ms Banks statement, *“I consider the examples and images of other climbing/obstacle courses presented by the applicant are typically in more remote locations away from residential areas, and generally within a ‘forested’ area’ being surrounded by large groups of trees that provide physical separation and visual screening from sensitive activities and locations. These typical forested surroundings associate the activity with its environment”*

- [29] In this case, it is in my opinion that the proposal site associates the activity with its environment appropriately because it is closely located with other commercial recreation and active uses, in this way it is a unique site that can integrate with a surrounding hub of recreation activities on the foreshore, rather than being surrounded by a forested location. As outlined throughout my evidence, it is clear that the receiving environment already hosts a myriad of both commercial and non-commercial recreation opportunities, making the proposal just another fixture in an already busy recreation hub.

- [30] Concerns about commercialisation are understandable, but the evidence shows that commercial recreation is already a well-established and accepted part of the Tekapō experience. The proposal is small-scale, fits within the existing tourism precinct, and does not restrict public

access or enjoyment of the lakefront. Its presence is consistent with the area's character and supports the region's economic and social goals as outlined in the Destination Management Plan.

- [31] In summary, the ropes course is not out of place. It is a natural addition to a destination that thrives on offering a variety of recreation and tourism experiences to a wide audience.

Conclusion

- [32] After careful assessment, I am confident in concluding that the proposal will have no more than minor effects on existing recreation and open space values at Lakeside Drive, Takapō/Lake Tekapō. It does not displace existing users, does not cause crowding or conflict, and does not compromise the open space character or passive recreation values of the site. Instead, it enhances the diversity and quality of recreation opportunities available to both locals and visitors.

Dated: 27 August 2025

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Samantha Strong