

**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 ropes course and picnic
facilities at Lakeside Drive, Takapō/Lake
Tekapō

BETWEEN

**QUEENSTOWN COMMERCIAL
PARAPENTERS LIMITED**

Applicant

**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF SAMANTHA STRONG (RECREATION
AND OPEN SPACE)**

Dated: 10 August 2025

Statement of evidence of Samantha Strong

Introduction

- [1] My name is Samantha Morgan Strong.
- [2] I am a consultant recreation and open spaces planner at Thrive Spaces and Places.
- [3] My tertiary qualifications are as follows:
 - (a) I graduated from Conestoga College with a Diploma in Recreation and Leisure Services Programming in 2011.
 - (b) I graduated from Lincoln University in 2022 with a three-year Bachelor's degree in Sport and Recreation Management (with Distinction).
 - (c) I am concluding my Master's in Parks Management from Lincoln University with completion July 2025.
- [4] Between 2011 and 2022 I was a Recreation Programmer across both Canada and Australia, developing and implementing a range of local and regional wide recreation programmes.
- [5] Since 2022, I have been a Recreation and Open Spaces Planner at Thrive Spaces and Places based in Wanaka. I have undertaken recreation and open spaces planning and management assessments.
- [6] I have provided open space, recreation and open space provision evidence in district plan changes across New Zealand and completed recreation impact assessments for other consent applications.
- [7] I am familiar with assessing the effects of development proposals on recreation and open spaces, to which this matter relates. I undertook a site visit on 10 February 2025 and a second on 17 March 2025, and I have visited Lake Tekapō and the Lake Tekapō waterfront numerous times previously observing recreation activity at peak and off peak times.

- [8] I have been instructed by Queenstown Commercial Parapenters Limited (**QCP / Applicant**), to give expert open space and recreation evidence in respect of RM230149, an application for land use consent to establish and operate a commercial ropes course and picnic facilities at Lakeside Drive, Takapō/Lake Tekapō (**Proposal**).
- [9] I have reviewed the following documents for the preparation of my evidence:
- (a) The Public Facilities, Parks and Places Asset Management Plan (Mackenzie District Council, 2012).
 - (b) The Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (Mackenzie District Council, 2022).
 - (c) Destination Management Plan (Mackenzie Tourism, 2022).
 - (d) s95A notification decision RM230149 and the application as submitted.
 - (e) Mackenzie District Council District Plan (Operative).
 - (f) Draft expert and corporate evidence for the Applicant.
 - (g) Master planning/ concept plans development reports (e.g., Tekapo parking and landscape concept report (2014).
 - (h) Other relevant academic literature.

Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses

- [10] While this is not an Environment Court hearing I have read and agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses in the Environment Court Practice Note 2023. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on material produced by another person. I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions that I express.

Scope of evidence

- [11] My evidence will deal with the following:

- (a) the current application RM230149;
- (b) a review of the proposed site (Lakeside Drive) and Takapō/ Lake Tekapō Township as a recreation and tourism setting;
- (c) a description of the QCP management expectations for the ropes course;
- (d) an assessment of the effects of the proposal on the passive recreation and social values of the Lakeside Drive site, according to the assessment matters that I identify in **Attachment 1**;
- (e) statutory planning policy, strategies and plans;
- (f) other matters;
- (g) the open space-related issues raised in submissions; and
- (h) my response to the open space matters raised in the Mackenzie District Council planner's s 42A report.

Executive summary

[12] The Applicant is applying for resource consent to establish and operate a commercial ropes course on a site at Lakeside Drive, in Takapō/Lake Tekapō Township. The sites are owned by Mackenzie District Council and the land is part of the open space network which is located along the lakefront within the Takapō/Lake Tekapō township.

[13] The proposed site is not classified under the Reserves Act 1977 and therefore does not have a Reserves Management Plan. Further, Mackenzie District Council's Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022) and Destination Management Plan (2022) do not provide any direct impediment to the proposal in relation to recreation activities on this site, specifically the exclusion of either passive or active recreation. My evidence provides an assessment on two key aspects, being:

- (a) the effects of the proposal on existing recreation and open space values at Takapō/Lake Tekapō and reviews the proposal's compliance with the Council's strategies, plans, and District Plan's policies on passive recreation; and

(b) the net positive recreation benefits of the Applicant's proposal.

- [14] Takapō/Lake Tekapō is a major recreation destination in the Mackenzie District, attracting international and domestic visitors. A popular lakefront pathway connects key attractions like the Church of the Good Shepherd, the township, Tekapō Hot Springs, and Mount John, offering the main attraction, panoramic lake views. The pathway through the proposed site is wide, well-maintained, and supported by existing facilities, including a toilet block and informal parking.
- [15] It is worth noting that the Destination Management Plan does anticipate a state-of-the-art zipline or similar options,¹ more active recreation opportunities, and experiences and attractions suitable for youth and individuals 18-35 years old.²
- [16] The Proposal overall is consistent with the outcomes manifest in the assessment matters applicable to the Passive Recreation Zone, and more particularly with regard to the recently adopted PC29 provisions concerning the aforementioned proposed Open Space Zone.³
- [17] The primary concern is whether the Proposal's potential adverse effects on existing recreational values are acceptable when assessed in relation to the nature and purpose of the zone, and the specific recreation environment of Tekapō and Lakeside Drive. My assessment concludes that, given Lake Tekapō's established role as a developed recreation and tourism destination, and the capacity of the area to sustain current recreation and tourism uses in the vicinity of the site, the Proposal is appropriate from a recreation and tourism development perspective. Furthermore, it has the potential to generate net positive outcomes for local recreation and tourism activity.
- [18] I have reviewed Bron Faulkner's review of the application. I disagree with her approach to the assessment of open space values and their associated social impacts. Ms Faulkner's evidence overlooks that when the ropes course is busy, Lake Tekapō, along with the shared pathway and lakefront beach, will also typically be experiencing high levels of

¹ Destination Management Plan (2022), pg 41

² Destination Management Plan (2022), pg 59

³ Within the appeal period at the time of writing

activity. Ms Faulker relies on a view that the 'passive recreation zoning' name is synonymous with limited noise or a quiet and tranquil environment, whereas recreation is seldom noiseless, including passive recreation. Due to Lake Tekapō waterfront at this location already providing a hub for recreation infrastructure and associated activity, Ms Faulkner's view that the tree-climb will be able to operate or be very busy when the setting is naturally quiet, when, in reality, the reverse will apply.

- [19] In my opinion, the Proposal will have a less than minor effect on existing passive and active recreation users of the area, including the shared pathway, the pine tree area, and the adjacent lakefront. This is due to its elevated design, which maintains public access beneath the course; its location within an established urban fringe recreation setting that supports such activities; the presence of existing commercial recreation businesses nearby; and the small-scale, temporary nature of the activity that does not inhibit other recreation uses.
- [20] None of the matters raised in the s42A report have caused me to reconsider the observations and conclusions I reach in my evidence.
- [21] Overall, and in summary, adverse effects assessment (see Effects assessment on passive recreation and associated social values for detailed descriptions and assessment matters) is as follows:
- (a) Mode Shift: No change
 - (b) Dominance of Ropes Course: Less than Minor
 - (c) Carrying Capacity and Crowding: Less than Minor
 - (d) Specialisation: Less than minor
 - (e) Commercialisation: Less than minor

Takapō / Lake Tekapō setting

- [22] Takapō/Lake Tekapō is one of the most popular stop over destinations on the drive from Christchurch to Queenstown Lakes. This is a result of its geographical location, approximately the middle point on the 5.5-6 hour drive, its dark sky accreditation, and, in the main, Lake Tekapō and the lake front. The area is a year-round holiday destination for both international and domestic visitors, with lake access for summer water activities, mountain access for both summer and winter activities, one of the trails heads for the Alps 2 Ocean Great Ride, 4WD access to the Godley and McCauley Rivers, and a ski field (Round Hill).
- [23] The Mackenzie region is a hub for tourism, attracting almost 2 million visitors pre COVID19, and just over 1.1 million visitors post COVID19,⁴ with 65% of all total international visitors visiting Tekapō, and 50% of all total visitors to the Mackenzie region solely stopping in Tekapō. Tekapō Township provides for a spectrum of recreational activities including walking and tramping, dark sky tours, hot springs, boating, sightseeing, frisbee golf, lake kayaking and white water kayaking, and paddle boarding, to name a few.
- [24] The site is located at Lakeside Drive, Tākapō/Lake Tekapo and is zoned Recreation Passive (P) in the Operative Mackenzie District Plan 2004, and Open Space Zone in the Proposed District Plan. The site is also located within a Flight Path Protection Area and within an Area of Visual Vulnerability (High). Lake Tākapō/Tekapo (but not the site) is identified as being within a mapped Outstanding Natural Landscape (ONL) in both the Operative District Plan and Plan Change 23 and is also a Site or Area of Significance to Māori under Plan Change 24.
- [25] The area where the proposed base building (**Figure 2**) will be two repurposed shipping containers adjoining one and other, which will create a 4.8m x 12.2m footprint. It will be standard container height of 2.6m. Where it will be located is a flat, unsealed area, that is currently not used for parking for boats or any other vehicles. The proposed site is directly across from a new five stall toilet block, and adjacent to the Power Boat and Water Ski Club building.

- [26] Passive recreationists, walkers, and cyclists use the shared path adjacent to the site to connect to the many tourism providers and attractions along Lakeside Drive and Lake Tekapō. Visitors will encounter the Power Boat and Waterski Club clubhouse, a large, elevated campground, and two other lodge accommodation providers, public toilets, and a large, unsealed carpark. Walking north-west users will see the largely developed Tekapō Hot Springs area, Mount John (and linking tracks), and a medium sized residential development. The setting is urban or urban fringe (see Other Matters below) and there is no impression of having departed Takapō/Lake Tekapō township for a natural or remote experience. Such experiences would be sought in Tekapō Regional Park or beyond the Tekapō Hot Springs, for example, the Mount John or Godley Loop Track, or the Alps to Ocean Track.

Strava-pedestrian and cycle activity indications

- [27] **Figure 3** shows the Strava heatmap for 'all foot sports' in Takapō/ Lake Tekapō for the 12 months up to December 2024. Strava is a social media platform that utilises GPS data from users' smartphones and other devices, which is then uploaded to a central database. It enables individuals to track their performance, compare speed and time with other athletes performing the same activity, and monitor personal activity or training goals. While Strava is widely used by professional athletes, the majority of its users are recreational participants. As of early 2020, Strava reported having 50 million users worldwide, 80% of whom were outside the United States, with an additional million joining each month. The platform has since become particularly popular among regular cyclists and runners.
- [28] Comparisons between different data collection methods indicate that Strava data is relatively reliable, with 1% to 12% of on-site users also recorded on the platform, a figure that continues to grow. These response rates are comparable to on-site intercept surveys in outdoor settings, with the added advantage that Strava data is collected continuously across all seasons and throughout the day, whereas intercept surveys typically capture only short timeframes at specific locations.

- [29] However, caution is needed when interpreting Strava data, as it reflects participation only among its members. This creates a bias toward more competitive and tech-savvy users, and some data may be skewed by users who remain logged in while engaging in other activities, such as driving. Additionally, GPS inaccuracies or map projection errors can cause location offsets by several meters, though most records are correctly positioned.
- [30] Strava therefore has similarities to a tag and release programme. However, unlike tagging 10 kea (for example) with GPS devices and seeing nesting patterns,⁷ Strava essentially tags several thousand active people in an area and monitors where and how they recreate. Accordingly, its greatest strength is in showing the relative value of settings for different forms of recreation. In my experience, if an area is publicly accessible and accessed for recreation purposes, it will appear on the Strava heatmap.
- [31] Heatmaps indicate the cumulative activity of Strava subscribers in any setting. The brighter the colour, the more activity there. **Figure 3** indicates that the shared pathway through the site is a very popular recreational pedestrian setting in Tekapō. In addition, there is a high level of use of the Mount John Summit Track, and Godley Loop Track which is connected by the north-west end of the shared pathway, adjacent to the site. The proposed site also is adjacent to a large carpark, which recreationists who are accessing the trails may use. It is noted that the popular Mount John Trail does not have a trail counter.
- [32] **Figure 4** shows the Strava heat map for 'all cycling activities.' In comparison to the foot sports heat map, there is a reduction in cycling activity on the shared pathway that runs through the site. As this route acts as a recreation and ecological linkage, connecting the town centre to a variety of accommodation and other attractions (e.g., Tekapō Springs) most cyclists do not record this as a route, leaving their GPS record off live while they walk the track, or miscoding of activity type.

Effects assessment on passive recreation and associated social values

[33] By examining national research on recreation conflict (see **Appendix 1: Assessing the effects on passive recreation experience in Lakeside Drive Takapō/Lake Tekapō, social impacts**), I have identified a set of assessment criteria suitable for evaluating the proposal's impact on existing passive recreational values. These are:

- (a) 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?
- (b) Will the commercial nature of the ropes course noticeably affect the experience of existing users?
- (c) Will the new activity attract so many visitors that it causes crowding or strains local facilities, leading to conflict between users?
- (d) Does the current visitor experience rely on a unique feature that the ropes course could compromise?
- (e) Is commercial recreation in this location generally seen as incompatible with the character of Lake Tekapō and its existing visitor experience?

[34] In this section of my evidence, I consider the potential effects of the ropes course proposal on current users of the Lakeside Drive area and beach front using the assessment matters identified above.

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?

[35] Since users of the ropes course will access the site by either the publicly accessible shared parking area or by foot, existing users will only encounter other walkers on the shared pathway directly in front of the base building on Lakeside Drive or bystanders who are viewing the tree-climb action from the beach/carpark or beneath the trees.

- [36] The area is highly dynamic and currently attracts individuals who utilise the area for multiple different activities (e.g., beach activities, paddle boarding, water sports, boating/jetboating, public playground, and the beach/tree area). Access to the site will depend on whether participants are staying in accommodation within walking distance (e.g., the campground facilities and lodging across the Lakeside Drive), participating in other tourism activities like the Tekapō Hot Springs or mini-golf or simply using the area as a base, use the carpark, arrive as a cyclist or a foot sport participant, or driving specifically to the site to climb.
- [37] I agree with the findings of the traffic assessment by Mr Leckie in his evidence that the ropes course will generate very low traffic volumes, particularly relative to existing seasonal traffic variations.⁵ Pedestrians currently access this area by foot and there would be no significant change in mode shift in recreation from the Proposal. Although there may be a small increase in pedestrian activity across Lakeside Drive to access the public toilets, this increase will be minor compared to existing demand, particularly during peak periods, and will not adversely affect pedestrian safety.⁶ It is notable that the area is also accessed by alternative routes on foot (e.g., through the residential development, from Mount John, through the campground and along the lakefront).
- [38] Similarly, there is no proposed alternative access option for other passive recreationists, walkers and cyclists, accessing the site from either direction, and the proposal will not significantly change how people currently use Lakeside Drive and will not alter the experience for walkers, beachgoers, and passive users in the area.
- [39] Therefore, in my opinion, there will be no change in mode shift on the site as a result of users encountering people using the ropes course.

Dominance of the ropes course

Will the physical structures associated with the activity be sufficiently evident to change the experience of existing users?

⁵ Statement of Evidence (Traffic) Andrew Leckie, par. 35

⁶ Statement of Evidence (Traffic) Andrew Leckie, par. 30-33

- [40] Existing users will encounter the facilities associated with the ropes course along the shared pathway on Lakeside Drive and within the clusters of pine trees between the Lake and the road with the base building location directly across from the public toilet block.
- [41] **Figure 2** shows the proposed area for the base building. The base building sits between the power boat and waterski club to the north-west and the larger, unsealed carpark to the south-east. Visitors to the site and shared pathway users will clearly be aware of the new development. Mr Craig's landscape evidence examines the effects related to landscape and natural character, and viewpoints from the residential housing development that sits above the proposed site along Station Bay Rise. **Figure 1** illustrates the viewpoint from Station Bay Rise through looking north-east on Lake Tekapō. I am in agreement with Mr Craig that the proposal by its very nature will be inherently transparent.⁷
- [42] **Figure 5** shows the proposed tree-climb course. The course has been designed to integrate into the pine trees and natural environment. From a recreation effects perspective, I am similarly of the view with Mr Craig that while some visual effects will still occur, the site can generally still be enjoyed, though there may be some challenges depending on some factors.⁸ The ropes course and the base building will not dominate the recreation experience on Lakeside Drive at Tekapō, nor will it dominate the main feature of the proposed site, which is the views to the northeast across Lake Tekapō and access to the lake. It will become another recreation and tourism experience on Lakeside Drive.
- [43] Mitigation of visual effects has been proposed as soft landscaping around the base building. Ms Faulkner does raise concerns about the visual effects of the ropes and platforms. However, as outlined in Mr Craig's evidence, the key natural element contributing to the mitigation of potential adverse effects are the pines.⁹ For example, the zip lines have been positioned to minimise visual disruption through gaps in the trees where people can see the lake. Instead of seeing five wires and

⁷ Landscape and Natural Character Evidence, Mr. Andrew Craig, par. 124

⁸ Landscape and Natural Character Evidence, Mr. Andrew Craig, par. 141

⁹ Landscape Evidence, Mr. Andrew Craig, pg. 40 (s.169)

some timber obstacles there is a single 12mm wire. Again, this will not dominate the recreation experience for others.

- [44] The potential noise generated by users of the ropes course is described in the evidence of Mr Hay. He concludes that peak noise levels are expected during summer, public holidays, and weekends, primarily from increased traffic and boat activity. During off-peak periods, noise effects will be significantly reduced due to lower activity levels. In my opinion, this level of noise is consistent with the noise made currently by recreationists in the area, whether they are walking or picnicking or out on a jet boat.
- [45] Mr Hay considers that while the proposal will introduce additional noise sources to the receiving environment, namely the ziplines, this noise source is not expected to be dominant within the tree climb activities, and based on predicted noise levels, the proposed course activities can operate within permissible noise limits during daytime hours.
- [46] From a recreation perspective, during my two site visits despite strong winds and minimal beach use, it was evident that course activity would not have been audible from the beach. This is unlikely to 'dominate' the experience, as the noise generated is consistent with other noises from active recreation in the vicinity (e.g., boating, children playing on the playground).
- [47] Site visits were conducted between the hours of 1:00pm and 5:30pm, and the number of vehicles in the adjacent carparks fluctuated. **Figure 6** was taken at 1:30pm and **Figure 7** was taken at 4:30pm, illustrating the variances in the number of vehicles using the carpark at different times of the day and the number of casual day users/walkers that were using the shared pathway and beach during those same times.
- [48] In summary, my opinion is that the Proposal will not dominate the Takapō/Lake Tekapō experience on Lakeside Drive, but will be an obvious feature of it.

Carrying capacity and crowding

Will the new activity increase the patronage of the site to the point where the site's carrying capacity is exceeded and crowding becomes an issue or overwhelms the capacity of facilities in the area, leading to more conflict between visitors?

- [49] Research into the social impacts of recreation has focused on the quality of recreational experiences, and studies focus on the relationship of user satisfaction and the number of type encounters with others. 'Crowding' is a perceptual or subjective concept, and therefore differs from individual to individual, say overall an objective measure like density.¹⁰
- [50] Carrying capacity is a conceptual framework that essentially measures the level of recreation use that an area can withstand while also providing a sustained and agreed upon quality of recreation, therefore individuals perceived enjoyment of the area is unchanged.¹¹
- [51] Below I will discuss the concepts of crowding and carrying capacity in relation to the proposal.
- [52] During my first site visit on 10 February, between the hours of 1pm-4:30pm, it was a sunny 25 degree day. **Figure 8 and 9** illustrate the level of 'busy-ness' I experienced. I did not witness a single person use the area beneath the trees (specifically under the proposed course) for shade or picnicking. However, individuals did utilise the shared pathway as a connection link, the carpark to relax, prepare food (in their campervans), and walk down towards the water, the beach to participate in a range of active recreation activities, and lounge under the clusters of trees closest to the lake (not included in the proposal).
- [53] Timelapse photos were also taken on 31 January 2025, imagery captured at one minute intervals from approx. 8.30am until 7.30pm, which concluded similar notions of vacantness. Photos were taken from two points (east near the playground looking towards the site, and west

¹⁰ P.J Devlin, R.A Corbett, C.J Peebles (Eds.), Outdoor Recreation in New Zealand: A Review and Synthesis of the Research Literature, Department of Conservation and Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand (1995), pp 119-121

¹¹ Booth & Cullen, Outdoor Recreation in New Zealand: A Review and Synthesis of the Research Literature, Department of Conservation and Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand (1995), pp101-105

at the Powerboat club looking towards the site). These photographs have been provided as part of our evidence bundle.

- [54] As I noted earlier, the Strava heat maps show increased activity through the pine tree corridor from all foot sports, and all cycling sports, connecting the township to Tekapō springs, and the adjacent walks (e.g., Mount John Summit Track). The target patronage of the commercial ropes course is expected to be approximately 250 per day¹² in peak season, which is just under 6.5 per cent of the current patronage of the Mackenzie Lakes average daily visitor numbers.¹³ The capacity of the ropes course will be between 1 and 60 participants at one time. Some of the patronage will come from existing users of the area, residents, and bach owners and so, at peak times, total use of the recreation zone should not increase to an inappropriate degree.
- [55] Additionally, 'crowding' is a perceptual concept that varies between individuals, local users may perceive an increase in activity more acutely than first-time visitors.¹⁴ While the addition of a new tourism feature is expected to attract more visitors, in my opinion, the level of increased patronage will not significantly alter the existing recreational experience for others.
- [56] In any event, numbers are strictly regulated by the tree-climb's health and safety requirements and the booking system for the facility. There is the potential for larger user groups to arrange group bookings, reaching the maximum of 60 participants on the course at one time. It should be noted that the nature of group bookings involves a greater spectator value where people observe their friends and colleagues from the ground more so than strangers. Currently, there is no evidence of conflict between users, and or that crowding is an issue.
- [57] The tree-climb course structures and lines will utilise a stand of mature pine trees occupying a footprint of 8210m² above the forest floor (see **Figure 4**). Although the area spread along Lakeside Drive, the actual structures would not inhibit people from activating the space beneath the

¹² S95 report pg.3

¹³ Mackenzie District Council Draft Infrastructure Strategy 2024-2034, pg. 11

¹⁴ Vaske, J. J., Donnelly, M. P., & Heberlein, T. A. (2009). Perceptions of crowding and resource quality by early and more recent visitors. *Leisure Sciences*, 31(4), 367–381.

trees. I disagree with Ms Faulkner's opinion regarding the activation of the 8210m² beneath the tree-climb, as she is concerned that the activity above the forest floor will deter people from using the area for passive recreation.

- [58] During my site visit I observed that the forest floor beneath the trees was covered in uninviting natural debris from the trees (e.g., pinecones, needles, and broken sticks) and that the topography of the space underneath the majority of the tree climb course was steep and on a decline towards the lake. **Figure 8** illustrates the topography of the space and clearly shows the 'uninviting status' of the forest floor.
- [59] I believe that the carrying capacity of the area is also far from being exceeded based on this assessment and my site visit. Not only were the biophysical aspects of the site undisturbed (e.g., no damage to the flora and fauna, minimal litter, no desired lines or formed pathways outside of the established sealed path), but also the number of users and experiences on this site. I witnessed multiple people enjoying a spectrum of recreation experiences within the same environment, unbothered by one another, essentially co-existing. No one's specific activity inhibited the others from participating in their chosen experience.
- [60] I agree with the Applicant that the inclusion of publicly accessible additional seating, picnic tables, and signage, will significantly enhance the visual amenity of this space and would, in fact, activate this unused space underneath the pine trees. Providing seating will encourage bystanders to pause, observe, and enjoy the tree-climbing activity above while also making the space more suitable for passive recreation, such as picnicking or seeking shade. At present, the forest floor does not offer a comfortable or appealing setting for these activities. It is noted, that at the TECT All Terrain Park site, an additional spectating area of a formed deck was created to activate a standing zone away from the car park to watch the ropes course.
- [61] In my opinion, there is significant capacity for additional use as well as minimal activation from current recreation users. With the addition of the Applicant's proposed picnic tables and signage, there will be an enhanced experience for passive recreation users of the site overall. If

the Applicant were to include management intentions to activate the space beneath the trees this would:

- (a) Create a more inviting space for the public to enjoy.
- (b) Disperse current users of the carpark for relaxation (e.g., to sit and enjoy a meal outside their campervan) to be dispersed underneath the canopy creating more space within the carpark.

[62] The proposed base building has sufficient surrounding space to accommodate increased visitor numbers without resulting in overcrowding. The existing path network also has substantial capacity to absorb additional use. Encounter rates between visitors will likely increase, but given the site's proximity to Lake Tekapo township, Tekapo Springs, and three major holiday parks, higher visitor densities are typical and already expected, particularly during peak periods.

[63] Research on recreation settings indicates that visitors to high-use areas such as lakefronts and resort towns generally anticipate moderate to high encounter rates.¹⁵ Repeat local users, who may comprise approximately 10–20% of total visitors,¹⁶ are more likely to perceive the increase as a change to their usual experience. However, given the overall visitor profile, I consider any adverse effects from increased encounter rates to be minor and limited to a small proportion of users, particularly during peak holiday periods.

[64] The location is also considered a key destination as referenced in the Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022)¹⁷ which accommodates a large number of visitors (day and overnight) and other tourism activity users.

[65] From a passive recreation perspective, people seeking remote experiences that involve lake views have a number of options to fulfil that experience like areas near the Regional Park, or around the eastern

¹⁵ Manning, R. (2011). *Studies in Outdoor Recreation: Search and Research for Satisfaction* (3rd ed.). Oregon State University Press

¹⁶ Department of Conservation. (2011). *Visitor Monitoring Guidelines*, New Zealand Recreation Association. (2018). *Best Practice Guidelines for Outdoor Recreation Planning*.

¹⁷ Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (Mackenzie District Council 2022), pg 23

side of Lake Tekapō, and therefore would seek those locations for that experience. The area in front of the town also provides a large, undeveloped area to enjoy both lake views and more active recreation. Therefore, the expectation of a centrally located carpark adjacent to tourism activities and accommodation being 'quiet' is low.

- [66] In summary, the increase in patronage of the site from the proposal will not reach a point where the site's carrying capacity is exceeded and crowding becomes an issue or overwhelms the capacity of facilities in the area, leading to more conflict between visitors, therefore having a less than minor effect on existing recreation

Specialisation

Is the current visitor experience at the site dependent on a specialised resource that will be compromised by a commercial development?

- [67] Lake Tekapō offers visitor experiences based on specialised resources (e.g., Tekapō Springs). The proposed ropes course would activate an underused space and is a commercial tree-climbing activity in a controlled environment. It would not displace any specialised user group, as no alternative tree-climbing destinations exist nearby. The site's only specialised feature is the northeast view across Lake Tekapō, which remains unaffected at ground level. In my opinion, conflict is unlikely to arise from effects on specialist recreation opportunities.
- [68] During my visits to the site along Lakeside Drive, I observed a mix of runners, walkers, beachgoers, paddleboarders, volleyball players, families, and people with dogs, all enjoying passive recreation. It is a mixed-use setting, and in my view, these activities would be unaffected by the proposal.
- [69] In situations of inclement weather when the ropes course is operating, the above list of recreation experiences would be naturally reduced and therefore there would be less effect nearby recreation at those times.
- [70] Therefore, the development of the Proposal would have a less than minor effect on the current visitor experience.

Commercialism

Will commercial recreation at the site be considered generally incompatible in the context of Takapō/Lake Tekapō as a visitor destination and incompatible with the existing recreation experience of visiting Lake Tekapō and the Mackenzie Lakes District?

- [71] The Destination Management Plan-Destination Mackenzie (Mackenzie Tourism 2022) identifies Lake Tekapō as a significant drawcard in the tourism landscape of the Mackenzie region offering a diverse and distributed mix of tourism attractions and experiences. A Destination Management Plan guides sustainable tourism development, balancing the needs of visitors, locals, and the environment for long-term viability. **Figure 9** lists the number of attractions by location within the District, highlighting paid vs. free, noting that Tekapō is the only sub-region which, based on the audit, has a greater proportion of paid products (representing approximately 60% of the product identified) compared to free products (40%).
- [72] Of the attractions listed, Tekapō hosts a mix, noting that the product category that received the highest average Net Promotor Score (a measurement of consumer loyalty / **NPS**) was Trekking & Bike Tours, with a very high NPS of +96. This was based on 254 reviews across 6 different operators. This is followed by Adventure Tours (+88) and Scenic Flights and Jet Boating, Boat Tours and Kayaking Tours both received an NPS of +84.
- [73] The region relies significantly on tourism. Before COVID-19:¹⁸
- (a) 65% of international overnight visitors came to Takapō/Lake Tekapō.
 - (b) 56% of all visitors to the region were domestic. This included 20% who stayed overnight and 36% who visited for the day.
- [74] Maintaining a sufficient supply of activity options to maintain a repeat visitor base for Takapō/Lake Tekapō, sustaining a diversified offering, is relevant to this proposal.

- [75] The Destination Management Plan (2022) also identifies four guiding principles for development:
- (a) Protecting our Treasures;
 - (b) Enduring Partnerships;
 - (c) Thriving People and Places; and
 - (d) A Unique Experience.
- [76] A recommendation under '*A Unique Experience*' of the Plan is: Takapō hillside activity precinct. The action is to work with the existing land holder to develop the hillside activity precinct at Takapō as a unique sustainable lakeside nature-based experience. The project description describes the possible inclusion of a state-of-the art zipline,¹⁹ or similar, and downhill mountain bike tracks.
- [77] Another recommendation is to create experiences/attractions for youth and 18-35-year-olds.²⁰ This may include assessing the possibility for youth experiences and attractions that could be introduced including indoor climbing facilities, pump tracks, gym and recreation equipment, and other entertainment facilities.
- [78] In my opinion, the proposed tree-climb course is within a similar nature and fits with the 'unique experience' narrative outlined in the Destination Management Plan and proposed projects.
- [79] The proposed site also sits within the main Tekapō township area, within 1.3 km drive from the central business district. There is no apparent reason to assume that the setting is removed or remote from the township. Services for tourism are part and parcel of the Lake Tekapō experience, and the proposed site sits in-between two of the largest offerings (e.g., Tekapō Hot Springs and the Dark Sky Experience),

¹⁹ Destination Mackenzie, Destination Management Plan (2022) pp.41, item 3.7.1.8. Takapō hillside activity precinct

²⁰ Destination Mackenzie, Destination Management Plan (2022) pp.45, item 3.7.3.9 Experiences/attractions for youth and 18-35 year olds

therefore the presence of commercial recreation services will not be unexpected in this setting.

- [80] The perceived impact of the ropes course's 'commercialisation' will vary depending on individual attitudes. As summarised in **Appendix 1**, objections to commercial activities in remote and wilderness areas often stem from personal values, such as opposition to private profit on public land. Furthermore, perceptions of conflict are inherently subjective, shaped by individual viewpoints and experiences rather than any tangible restriction on recreational use.
- [81] However, I consider that the proposed ropes course is within the scope of tourism development associated with Takapō/Lake Tekapō and the wider Mackenzie District, aligning with the principles and proposed projects outlined in the Destination Management Plan. The proposal is not incompatible with the setting's broader characteristics.
- [82] In summary, the proposal aligns with the existing tourism and recreation context of Lake Tekapō and therefore will have a less than minor effect on the visitor experience as the proposal is compatible with the current recreation offerings.

Summary of overall assessment matters

- [83] Overall, I find that of the five assessment matters discussed above there will be no adverse effect on passive recreation uses and values because:
- (a) Mode shift – The proposed ropes course is unlikely to significantly alter how existing users access or experience Lakeside Drive. The course will not cause major changes in pedestrian traffic or safety, with minimal impacts on the existing recreational patterns.
 - (b) Dominance of the ropes course – While the physical structures of the ropes course will be noticeable along the shared pathway, it will not dominate or detract from the primary recreation experience and will continue to allow for current and future recreation to occur. Mr Craig outlines in his landscape evidence that visual impacts are considered minor, as the course integrates with the natural

environment, and the views of the lake and surrounding areas remain unimpeded and Mr Hay concludes that noise from the course is not expected to dominate the site, with predicted levels falling within permissible limits.

- (c) Carrying capacity and crowding – The ropes course is expected to attract up to 250 visitors per day during peak times. This is a small increase compared to the current visitor numbers, and the site can comfortably accommodate this additional traffic without overcrowding. The introduction of the course will not exceed the site's carrying capacity, and the current mix of activities is unlikely to lead to significant user conflict while participating in recreation. Crowd perceptions may vary, but the overall impact on the experience will be minor for most users.
- (d) Specialisation – The proposed ropes course will activate a previously unused space, but it will not displace or compromise any specialised recreation resources at the site. The primary specialised feature is the view across Lake Tekapō, which remains unaffected by the course. The location is a mixed-use setting that accommodates various types of passive recreation, which will not be disrupted by the new development.
- (e) Commercialism – The proposed commercial activity aligns with the existing tourism context of Lake Tekapō. The Destination Management Plan highlights the area's diverse tourism offerings, and the introduction of a small-scale commercial activity like the ropes course is compatible with the broader tourism landscape. The area already hosts various commercial activities, and the proposed development will not undermine the visitor experience but rather enhance the recreational options available.

Takapō/Lake Tekapō open space management and planning

[84] The following are the planning and strategy documents relevant to the management of open space at the site in Takapō/Lake Tekapō:

- (a) the Public Facilities, Parks, and Places Asset Management Plan (2024-2034)

- (b) the Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022); and
- (c) the Mackenzie District Council District Plan (Operative); and
- (d) Plan Change 29 to the Mackenzie District Plan (Proposed).

[85] In this section, I outline the Council's management expectations for the proposed site in relation to passive recreation and open spaces values, as set out in each of these planning and strategy documents.

Mackenzie District Council Public Facilities, Parks and Places Asset Management Plan 2024-2034

[86] The Public Facilities, Parks and Places Asset Management Plan (2024-2034) (**AMP**) does not specifically define or prescribed the provision of specific areas to provide for passive recreation. The AMP is a key supporting document for understanding Council's approach to recreation and open space provision. It should be considered when evaluating proposals or policy changes that intersect with the provision, function, or use of public places, especially in high-growth and high-use areas such as Lake Tekapō.

[87] While the AMP does not hold regulatory weight under the Resource Management Act 1991, it provides important context for assessing consistency with Council's wider open space planning framework, investment intentions, and service delivery objectives.

[88] The AMP identifies how public spaces are intended to function and evolve over time to meet community needs, population growth, and tourism pressures. This makes it a relevant consideration when assessing development proposals or plan changes that may affect the supply, accessibility, or quality of these assets.

[89] In particular, the AMP is useful in:

- (a) Highlighting existing pressures on public spaces and infrastructure (e.g., demand for lakeside reserves in Tekapō).
- (b) Identifying future upgrade or expansion priorities.

- (c) Supporting decisions about the compatibility of development proposals with recreation use and amenity expectations

[90] Section 1.3.2 references 'Trails and Passive Recreation' and outlines that:²¹

In the foreseeable future, there is expected to be increasing emphasis on passive facilities such as walkways consistent with an aging population and visitor growth. This is also consistent with a general trend towards putting greater emphasis on the environment and restoration of native vegetation and habitats on coastal and other waterside areas. The demand for amenity plantings and trees is a part of any passive appreciation of open space.

[91] The proposed tree climb facility aligns with this statement as it does not impede the use or access to the shared pathway adjacent to the side. It also includes native planting around the base building.

Mackenzie District Council Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022)

[92] Although this specific site is not covered by a reserve management plan, Council does refer to the concept of passive recreation in the Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022), with reference to walking and cycling, recreation, and ecological linkages. While not regulatory, it is a relevant supporting document that helps assess the consistency of development or policy proposals with Council's goals for recreation, amenity, and community wellbeing, and provides a future-oriented, strategic lens for understanding the role of public spaces within the Mackenzie District.

[93] When assessing development proposals or rezoning decisions that affect open space or community amenity, the Strategy can assist in determining whether the proposal aligns with Council's long-term goals for:

- (a) Recreation network functionality,
- (b) Quality of visitor and resident experiences,
- (c) Connections between built and natural environments,
- (d) Provision for diverse recreational needs, including passive recreation.

²¹ Public Facilities, Parks and Places Asset Management Plan (2024-2034) pp. 8

- [94] The Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022) refers to passive recreation opportunities in Goal 1:²²

Parks and open reserves provide vibrant and enticing spaces that enhance experiences for all ages and abilities.

- [95] An objective under Goal 1 is that: *'Parks accommodate a diverse range of **passive** and active recreation opportunities'* (emphasis added). The Proposal does provide for a vibrant and enticing space for people to enjoy, providing enhanced climbing experiences for all ages and abilities, while also promoting passive recreation through the shared pathway, inclusion of picnic facilities, and minimal footprint at ground level.

- [96] One of the key principles in the plan is *'User Experience-Creating an experience and journey for everyone.'* The principal direction is to create diversity of activities throughout the parks and open spaces network that will enhance experiences for all ages and abilities.²³ I believe the proposal achieves this principle, providing a diverse form of recreation for all ages and abilities to experience, while also celebrating the environment, connecting the participants with the natural environment.

The Operative District Plan and Plan Change 29

- [97] The proposed site does not have the status of a reserve under the Reserves Act 1977 and is not administered under a Reserve Management Plan or Parks Strategy.
- [98] Both the operative and proposed District Plan provisions describe the kind of outcomes expected to occur within the proposed activity area and the receiving environment. In consideration of whether the Proposal is consistent with the District Plan, it is relevant to understand whether the Proposal could possibly enable the ropes course to operate in a way that the public can enjoy the qualities of the site while participating in both active and passive recreation activities without unduly limiting the ability of other users to enjoy their existing activities (assuming that the

²² Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022), pg.11
²³ Draft Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022), pg. 4

community wishes for these activities to continue). Secondly, whether it is necessary to consider whether the Proposal is compatible with the primary purpose of a passive recreation zone as listed in the District Plan.

- [99] The District Plan policy on the purpose of a Recreation P (Passive Recreation) Zone states:

protect areas considered by Council to be appropriate for passive recreation. Recreational use of these areas is mostly informal in nature involving activities such as walking and playing. These areas therefore often require seating, playground equipment or other small structures. It is the purpose of this zone to maintain their open space or planted character and avoid cluttering with facilities, while maintaining their important role as recreational areas and visual open space for local neighbourhoods and for all residents and visitors.

- [100] In my opinion, this purpose statement seeks to protect passive recreation areas and the values associated with them, including maintaining their open space, planted character and avoiding cluttering. It does not explicitly exclude active recreation activities. Therefore, so long as the Proposal protects passive recreation, it is not in conflict with statement. Therefore, development proposals on the proposed site on Lakeside Drive, in a passive recreation zone are contemplated by the District Plan.

- [101] The District Plan defines the primary purpose of the Recreation P (Passive Recreation) zone but does not clarify what 'passive' means across the recreation spectrum, offering only select examples. There is no statutory definition of passive or active recreation. The District Plan emphasises minimal stress to site resources and limited built facilities but does not require recreation to be quiet, limit noise, or restrict participant numbers. It does, however, reference acceptable noise limits (I refer to Mr Hay's evidence).

- [102] The term 'passive recreation' is commonly understood to refer to activities that require minimal administration or complex infrastructure and do not involve structured or competitive engagement. 'Passive' implies a less intensive or low-impact form of recreation, often associated with relaxation and appreciation of natural settings. However,

there is no universally accepted definition of passive recreation in the academic literature.

[103] Colloquially, passive recreation is broadly accepted to include activities such as walking, playing, picnicking, hiking, birdwatching, and general enjoyment of open spaces. Conversely, active recreation is, for the most part, confined to referencing organised sport and competition or event oriented physical recreation. In many planning and policy contexts, passive recreation is understood to accommodate a spectrum of activities that, while non-motorised and non-intrusive, may still involve some degree of movement, infrastructure, and social interaction within the landscape.

[104] Plan Change 29 (**PC29**) replaces the Passive Recreation Zone with an Open Space Zone (**OSZ**) that accommodates both passive and active recreation.²⁴ In summary, the decision version of PC29 contemplates the following outcomes for the OSZ:²⁵

- (a) open space,
- (b) green space,
- (c) views to lake,
- (d) lake access,
- (e) activities: walking, cycling, picnicking, BBQ, seating, play,
- (f) informal in character,
- (g) limited facilities and structures,
- (h) facilities: toilets, shelters, playgrounds, sports equipment,
- (i) compatible activities: community and commercial that complement the recreation focus of the zone,

...

²⁴ PC29 APPENDIX 1: OPEN SPACE ZONE (OSZ) CHAPTER (under appeal)
²⁵ PC29 Objectives and Policies

- (j) built form: to maintain uninterrupted views of lakes from urban areas and results in predominance of open space.

- [105] In my opinion, the Proposal directly supports the objectives of the OSZ by providing a recreational opportunity that encourages both active and passive recreation, in keeping with the intention to allow a range of informal recreation activities (OSZ-O1, OSZ-P1). The ropes course will be accessible to the public and can be enjoyed alongside walking, cycling, and other informal uses, and is a complementary activity in line with the zone's anticipated character.
- [106] The ropes course is sited and designed in a way that does not preclude continued access for other forms of recreation, including walking, picnicking, and cycling and other activities, ensuring the ongoing use and enjoyment of open space by the wider community (OSZ-P3, OSZ-R2). The activity does not dominate the landscape or restrict new or existing recreational uses.
- [107] The Proposal is compatible with the policy direction to enable community facilities and commercial recreation activities provided they are of a scale and type that does not detract from the open space or recreational focus of the zone (OSZ-P2, OSZ-R6, OSZ-R7). In my opinion, the Proposal enhances the diversity of recreation options available and has potential positive impacts for users, without generating adverse effects such as crowding or visual impacts.
- [108] In my opinion, Ms Faulkner's interpretation of the area catering only to passive recreation activities and that the inherently quiet space will become unattractive to participate in said passive recreation activities is incorrect. I believe Ms Faulkner's response has a narrow perspective on what the site is currently used for, as well as in the context of the destination. Additionally, Ms Faulkner's interpretation of the area, both within the OSZ and adjacent zoning, omits the acknowledgment that the location is already a busy and highly trafficked area, catering to multiple, noise producing activities including cycling, waterskiing, campground/campervan and accommodation, water sports, and boating.

[109] Further to this, the area is busy due to its location, the shared pathway trail leading up to the Tekapō Hot Springs and hiking trails (see Strava data), the campground directly across the street from the proposed site and within the general vicinity of the site, the use of the beach by the powerboat and waterski club, paddle boarding concessionaire, the generally busy-ness of the beach area for recreation, and the sites location relative to the town centre.

[110] In summary, I consider the Proposal is compatible with the primary purpose of a passive recreation zone and is also consistent with and supports the new policies and rules of PC29, OSZ. It enables a wider range of recreational activities, maintains open space and amenity values, and is appropriately scaled to avoid undue impacts on the environment or other users.

Other Matters

Is the proposal within the recreation opportunity spectrum of this particular area in Tekapō?

[111] The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (**ROS**) is a widely adopted framework in New Zealand recreation planning, originally developed by the US Forest Service. It classifies recreation settings based on physical, social, and managerial attributes to guide the provision of diverse experiences, from urban environments to natural backcountry.

[112] In New Zealand, the ROS informs resource management and policy by helping balance recreation access, environmental protection, and user needs. For example, the Department of Conservation uses the ROS and recreation settings in all National Park Management Plans to help align recreation and visitor management objectives and policies, ensuring that recreation activities are managed sustainably and in a way that protects the natural and cultural values of national parks. In assessing the proposal, the ROS is a useful tool to evaluate the appropriateness of the activity within the existing recreational setting and the spectrum of opportunities offered in the area.²⁶

²⁶ US Forestry Service,
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tonto/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5412121>

[113] Buist & Hoots (1982)²⁷ summarise the logic behind the use of the ROS as the basic logic of the spectrum approach is that people participate in preferred recreation activities, within preferred environmental settings, in order to attain satisfactory experience.

[114] The Department of Conservation ROS consists of six categories:

- (a) Urban - A highly modified and accessible setting offering structured recreation experiences with little challenge or need for outdoor skills, dominated by human-made facilities and infrastructure.
- (b) Urban Fringe - A mixed-use area near urban centres offering moderate access to natural remnants with limited challenge, where natural features are present but still influenced by urban development.
- (c) Rural - A working landscape offering moderate natural experiences, often with visible signs of farming or production, where interaction with others is likely and recreation is often secondary to land use.
- (d) Backcountry - Accessible natural areas with vehicle access and moderate human influence, offering basic outdoor experiences while retaining some sense of being in nature.
- (e) Remote - Highly natural, lightly modified areas only accessible by non-motorised means, offering solitude and challenge, with limited human presence and infrastructure.
- (f) Wilderness - Extremely remote and pristine areas with no visible human modification, requiring high outdoor skills and self-reliance, offering deep solitude and a sense of discovery.

²⁷ Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Approach to Resource Planning, Buist & Hoots (1982) pg.84-86

- [115] **Table 1** depicts ROS setting definitions used by DOC. The proposed site for the ropes course could be defined as ‘urban fringe.’
- [116] The ‘urban fringe’ setting represents a transitional area between urban and rural environments, typically located on the edge of towns or cities. The setting offers a hybrid recreation experience, accessible and structured, yet with a degree of naturalness and openness not usually found in urban cores. It is characterised by modified landscapes with a mix of open space, rural land use, and residential development. These areas are highly accessible, support a range of informal recreation activities, and provide opportunities to engage with nature in a setting that is less developed than urban parks but still influenced by surrounding land uses.
- [117] In my opinion, the proposed site sits within an urban fringe setting, a transitional area where open space, rural land, and residential development meet. It offers a hybrid recreation experience, accessible and structured, yet still maintaining natural elements, and serves as a key point for urban dwellers to engage with semi-natural landscapes. The surrounding area includes accommodation, hospitality businesses, and tourism infrastructure, reinforcing that this is a modified environment with a strong recreational and tourism function, not a remote wilderness.
- [118] The site is located near a mix of commercial, residential, and recreational land uses. Lakeside Drive itself is a key route leading to Tekapō Hot Springs, a well-established commercial attraction drawing high visitor numbers.
- [119] Visitors to this part of Tekapō anticipate a range of experiences that blend both structured and unstructured recreation. The presence of commercial attractions, including Tekapō Hot Springs and paddle water sports, new mini-golf course, and scenic lakefront areas, has established that a mix of passive and recreation-based recreation already is an accepted part of the visitor experience at the proposed site.

Table 1. ROS Definitions (Department of Conservation, NZ) (Taylor, 1993).²⁸

Land Experience Characteristics

Urban	Urban Fringe	Rural	Backcountry			Remote	Wilderness
			Drive in	4X4 Drive in	Walk in		
<p>The probability of experiencing and interacting with other groups and individuals is very likely. It is also highly likely that sites, facilities, services and opportunities are convenient, accessible and highly influenced by human activity. The challenge, risk and use of outdoor skills will be relatively unimportant. Purpose built sports grounds and complexes, amusement parks and other highly developed, and/or competitive recreation opportunities, along with the general urban environment will form the bulk of the opportunity.</p> <p>NATURAL REMNANT Occurring within urban recreation opportunity will be remnants of the natural environment. This open space parkland, and remnant natural environment offers the chance to experience a little bit of nature in the otherwise urban environment.</p>	<p>The probability of experiencing and interacting with other groups and individuals is highly likely as is the likelihood of encountering convenient sites, facilities and opportunities. The challenge risk and use of outdoor skills will not be particularly important. Experiences involving developed sites, facilities and opportunities such as sports grounds and amusement parks will be less prevalent than in the urban opportunity.</p> <p>NATURAL REMNANT The opportunities for experiencing open space and remnant natural environments are likely to be more pronounced than in the adjacent urban environment yet the presence of the urban environment with its associated civilisation invariably permeates this opportunity.</p>	<p>Being primary production land there is a variable but generally moderate to high probability of experiencing interaction with other uses or users, groups and individuals. This may be localised and concentrated. The challenge, risk and use of outdoor skills will not be so important though it may be more prevalent in some activities or at some specific sites.</p> <p>NATURAL REMNANT Within natural remnants visitors will be offered a moderate degree of natural environment experience, though the experiences might be quite modified. The sights and sounds of the rural or primary production environment generally pervade. Farming, forestry or hydroelectric generation, for example, are readily apparent and would often surround the area. Natural experience in the rural opportunity may be highly significant if the remnants contain unique or sought after scenic, conservation or recreation values.</p>	<p>The experiences in this opportunity have many human elements but there is an equal probability that users will at times experience isolation from the sights and sounds of humans. There will be good opportunities for interaction with nature. Challenge, risk and the use of outdoor skills will vary considerably depending mainly on activity. There may be good opportunity for learning outdoor skills.</p> <p>DEVELOPED INCLUSION These areas will offer experiences that are significantly human influenced and give feelings of still being in civilisation while in a natural environment.</p>				
			<p>The experiences in this opportunity will generally be readily accessible to visitors from highways or standard all weather two wheel drive roads on land or from trailed runabouts on water. The convenience of the vehicle with the shelter and security that this affords will be a significant part of the experience.</p>	<p>Experiences based on or that are influenced by off road vehicle access, jet boatable waters or back country airstrips predominate in this opportunity. Though activity may not be based on the use of a motorised vehicle the influence of vehicles, the safety afforded or the disturbance they create may be present and significant.</p>	<p>The experiences offered will give the visitor close contact with nature. The interaction with civilization and motorised access in particular will not be highly significant. The general sights and sounds of civilisation will be lower than for drive in. The use of outdoor skills may be important although people relatively inexperienced in the outdoors will often still be able to experience the environment in relative safety with the security of good tracks and shelter readily available.</p>	<p>There is a high probability of experiencing isolation from the sights and sounds of humans, and experiencing a closeness to nature. Outdoor skills, challenge and risk are important, though some reliance can still be placed on human modification, tracks and huts in particular.</p>	<p>There is an extremely high probability of experiencing complete isolation from the sights, sounds and activities of humans, with an extremely high probability of no interaction with other user groups (let alone individuals). Users will be totally reliant on their outdoor skills and it is likely that there will be a high degree of closeness to nature, with a sense of discovery, solitude and freedom.</p>

Land Physical Setting: Primary Characteristics

Urban	Urban Fringe	Rural	Backcountry			Remote	Wilderness
			Drive in	4X4 Drive in	Walk in		
<p>MODIFICATION Profoundly modified overall, few elements of the natural environment remain. Environment quality may be impaired. Generally constant noise from human activity. ACCESSIBILITY Very accessible to most members of the community. Many alternative means of transport. Public transport gives good access, very accessible by vehicle. Foot access well defined, surfaces hardened, hazards reduced, numerous alternative routes. Water access from land generally very easy with steps, ramps and paths. On water, access variable though often straight forward.</p> <p>SIZE No size criteria for defining urban area. As a guide, several hundred residents and several shops or 50 dwellings at a density of 4/ha with facilities, services, shops etc.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES The outer limits of the residential or industrial development. All land within or substantially surrounded by the sights and sounds of dwellings, industry and urban transportation network (highways, railways etc).</p>	<p>MODIFICATION Predominantly a cultural landscape with mixed urban-rural land uses. Adjacent to and readily accessible from an urban setting. Will only exist around larger urban areas. Sights and sounds of urban environment present. ACCESSIBILITY Very accessible from the urban/residential environment to wide cross-section of community. Generally within walking/cycling distance, often within 1 km of urban boundary. Urban/public transport to boundaries and through area. Walking opportunities well signposted, natural hazards reduced.</p> <p>SIZE No size criteria but as a guide urban fringe will only be located around larger urban areas.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES Identified by cultural features, roads, housing, dams as well as natural features, ridge lines, vegetation.</p>	<p>MODIFICATION Predominantly a cultural landscape with mixed land uses, mainly primary production, farming, horticulture and forestry with some tourist/visitor attractions. Will have a network of services and facilities, roads, power lines, buildings, small population centres, rural communities, villages.</p> <p>ACCESSIBILITY General network of roads and vehicle access throughout. Easy foot access.</p> <p>SIZE No size criteria but generally tens of hectares or larger.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES Boundaries are usually culturally defined, fences, road lines, built up areas, cultivation, developed pastures, plantations or extensive native vegetation as along back country or remote boundaries.</p>	<p>MODIFICATION A modified environment that is accessible to road vehicles and outboard motorboats, includes sealed roads, gravel roads, lakes and large/deep rivers but one that is generally dominated by natural vegetation and landscapes and is natural looking. Obvious elements of modification include roads, roadside facilities and some primary production, however these would all be isolated or extensive, generally not intensive. It may include small or environment based facilities.</p> <p>ACCESSIBILITY Generally within one kilometre of motorised access. Foot travel often facilitated by good standard tracks. If there are no tracks, access to the adjacent roads relatively easy.</p> <p>SIZE No size limit, however area must be large and feel like back country, generally 500 ha or more. If the area is adjacent to a back- country walk in or remote opportunity or has topographical isolation then this area may be smaller than 500 ha. As a guide the area may often be large enough to support centre-fire rifle hunting.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES The more remote boundary will usually follow ridge lines or natural boundaries. Cultural features, fence lines, cultivation, etc will often form the other.</p>	<p>MODIFICATION This is a modified environment but one that is generally dominated by natural vegetation or landscapes and is natural looking. It is all terrain vehicle or jet boat accessible country, that is traversed mainly by unformed or ungravelled roads, 4x4 accesses, motorbike tracks or back- country airstrips. Obvious elements of modification include roads, roadside facilities and small areas of farming or forestry. These would all be quite isolated or extensive and not intensive. It may include small or environment based facilities. ACCESSIBILITY Motorised access is along ungravelled or unformed roads that are off road vehicle accessible or shallow or difficult rivers that are jet boat accessible. Generally the area is within 1 km of motorised access. Foot travel often facilitated by walking or tramping tracks though where there are no tracks access back to the vehicle assess is relatively straight forward. SIZE No size limit, however area must be large and feel like back country, generally 500 ha or more. If the area is adjoining a back country walk-in, or remote opportunity, or has topographical isolation, this area may be smaller than 500 ha. As a guide the area may often be large enough to support centre-fire rifle hunting.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES The more remote boundary will usually follow ridge lines or natural boundaries. Cultural features, fence lines, cultivation, etc will often form the other.</p>	<p>MODIFICATION Predominantly natural environment, signs of earlier occupation of the land may exist, old fences, disused roads, etc, however nature now taking over or predominant. Facilities often limited to huts, tracks, bridges, signs.</p> <p>ACCESSIBILITY Aerial and motorboat access possible where permitted. Otherwise non-motorised access only. Foot travel facilitated by good tracks, (mostly benched) huts, campsites, bridges. All weather access under most circumstances. Generally further than 1 kilometre from formed roads, ¼, to 1 km from all terrain access. Generally within 1 km of, or readily accessible on foot from, good quality or highly used tracks.</p> <p>SIZE No minimum size, but generally greater than 1000 ha.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES Delineated by topography.</p>	<p>MODIFICATION Highly natural landscape. Minimal apparent modification. Few facilities, limited to light tracks, with occasional bridges, huts and signs.</p> <p>ACCESSIBILITY Non-motorised access only. Access facilitated by some light tracks, bridges, etc, but often weather dependent. Minimum distance 1 km or ½ , day travel on foot from motorised access.</p> <p>SIZE No minimum size but generally greater than 1000 ha.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES Usually follow ridge lines or natural boundaries.</p>	<p>MODIFICATION Highly natural landscape. No apparent modification. No huts, tracks, bridges, signs or other facilities</p> <p>ACCESSIBILITY Non-motorised access only. ½ -1 day's foot travel from motorised access or 4 km from 4x4, jet boat, airstrip access and 5 km from developed roads and readily accessible inland waterways. Foot access totally dependent upon the environment and resources and skill of the visitor.</p> <p>SIZE Minimum size 2000 ha. At least 2 day's foot travel to traverse.</p> <p>BOUNDARIES Boundaries clearly defined by topography, usually ridge lines.</p>

- [120] Unlike remote wilderness areas, where solitude, natural quiet, and natural character are the primary draw, this setting caters to a broader spectrum of recreation and is not 'naturally quiet', but in fact relatively busy.
- [121] In summary, the Proposal aligns with the expectations of an urban fringe recreation setting and a ropes course fits within a recreation opportunity spectrum for this site, without conflicting with the area's established recreation use patterns.

Comparable Activities

- [122] There are many comparable examples across New Zealand or similar proposals that are located in similar recreation settings. The following examples illustrate how active recreation infrastructure can be successfully integrated into natural or open space settings without compromising passive recreation values.
- [123] **Adrenalin Forest Sites (e.g., Wellington, Christchurch, Bay of Plenty):** These high ropes courses are located in areas that blend structured recreation with natural settings, often within forested areas near urban or peri-urban environments. Despite their presence, other forms of recreation, such as walking and picnicking, continue unaffected. I completed a separate site visit to the Adrenalin Forest in Christchurch and found the setting to be peaceful and passive while participants were actively using the ropes course. I could hear ropes course participants laughing and enjoying the activity, but can still hear the birds.
- [124] **Treetop Trekking (Horseshoe Valley Resort, ON Canada):** Similar to the Adrenalin Forest, these high ropes courses are located in areas that blend structured recreation with natural settings, often within forested areas near urban or peri-urban environments. Despite their presence, other forms of recreation, such as walking, mountain biking, and picnicking, continue unaffected. I completed a separate site visit to Treetop Trekking at Horseshoe valley Resort while holidaying in Canada and found the setting to be peaceful and passive while participants were actively using the ropes course. Similar to Adrenalin Forest, I could hear ropes course participants laughing and enjoying the activity, but could still hear the birds.

- [125] **TECT All Terrain Park (Bay of Plenty):** This park accommodates both passive and adventure recreation within a setting that includes infrastructure for visitor management. The presence of high ropes courses and other adventure activities demonstrates that these facilities can coexist with more traditional open space values. An observation of this site is the presence of spectators during the course of their walk or cycling excursion making a stopover at the ropes course part of their recreation experience.
- [126] **Tekapo's Existing Recreation Network:** The area around Lakeside Drive is already well used for various recreation types, as demonstrated by Strava data showing significant pedestrian and cycling movement. The introduction of a ropes course supports the established recreation precinct, is consistent with the established function of the area, and would support the location as a recreational corridor to further opportunities (e.g., Mount John Summit, Godley Loop, and access to the lake).

GODWIT Ltd. Mini Golf Approved Consent (Tekapō Hot Springs)

- [127] On 8 September 2022 Mackenzie District Council granted resource consent for the development and operation of a mini-golf course on Lot 1 DP 455053 to Godwit Leisure, indicating an acknowledgment of the potential increase in recreational value and public interest in this type of leisure activity.
- [128] The approval was based on:
- (a) **General Specifications:** The development includes a reception kiosk building with a café and associated parking, which implies an anticipation of visitor traffic seeking amenities.
 - (b) **Design and Materials:** The mini-golf course was approved as having "natural design utilising natural materials" which suggests an integration with the surrounding environment to appeal to visitors.
- [129] In alignment with the proposal, the potential impacts on recreation from the mini-golf course were outlined as increased foot traffic and noise,

particularly the operation of a mini-golf facility with a café, as it would likely attract families and groups, resulting in increased foot traffic. Further, the provision of ‘associated parking’ in the consent, anticipating a notable increase of visitors, “has the potential to generate increased noise in the area through vehicle movements and patrons participating in the activity.”²⁹

- [130] The Proposal is of a similar recreational nature as a mini golf course, attracting a wide range of participants of different ages and stages, with the difference in proposals not inclusive of a cafe.
- [131] Given the proximity (within 50 m) of the proposed ropes course to the mini-golf site, it is likely that this similar recreational setup would attract a comparable demographic, thereby consistent with the aforementioned effects on passive recreation values.
- [132] In my experience, a high ropes course, like the mini-golf, would constitute an interactive leisure activity, similarly increasing foot traffic and potentially contributing to noise levels. The sites are within close proximity of each other, therefore, the probability that visitors may want to participate in both activities is possible. The mini-golf course, like the ropes course, is a form of active recreation within an area already dominated by such uses. Both are consistent with the zone’s recreational character and have similar implications for passive recreation values.
- [133] While the mini-golf course and proposed ropes course both contribute to increased activity in the area, in my opinion their cumulative effect on passive recreation values is minimal. The ropes course has a limited physical footprint, is elevated above ground level, and maintains open space character beneath. The broader setting still offers extensive passive recreation opportunities, and the scale and nature of both activities are consistent with the established recreation zone. Together, they enhance recreational diversity without displacing or significantly diminishing passive recreation experiences.

²⁹ Report On An Application for Land Use Consent Pursuant to Section 42a Of The Resource Management Act 1991 – Rm220060, pg 11

Summary

- [134] In summary, the Proposal does not introduce an entirely new recreation typology to the area but rather builds upon the existing range of activities, similar to how other high-use rural ROS locations integrate both passive and active recreation.
- [135] The Proposal sits within the perceived urban fringe setting, making its location appropriate given the existing land-use mix and visitor expectations. It aligns with similar recreation developments (e.g., the mini golf course) within the general vicinity of the site and expands the recreation opportunities in Lake Tekapō. Considering the low scale of effect on existing activities, it can be considered to enhance the recreation use of the area by increasing activity diversity.
- [136] The Proposal will generate positive tourism and recreational economic impacts, relevant to Destination Management Plan objectives, supporting broader Mackenzie District Council recreation and tourism initiatives.
- [137] The Proposal fits within an urban fringe setting and would not pose adverse effects on the overall recreation values intended for the Recreation P (Passive) Zone, therefore the development and operation of the course are expected to be no more than minor.

Matters raised by submitters

- [138] I have reviewed all submissions made on the application. Twelve submissions³⁰ raise general concerns related to loss of public open space/public access, effects on recreation/contrary to zoning. I consider that my evidence has addressed these concerns. I comment on specific matters from other submissions below.

³⁰ Currie, Staley, Ott, Groundwater, Keen, Houghton Family Trust & Muir Family Trust, Satterthwaite, Tekapo Landco Ltd & Godwit Leisure Ltd., Taylor, Frye

Loss of public open space and effects on recreation

- [139] The Ott, Satterthwaite, Keen, Taylor, Frye and Staley submissions raise concerns that the Proposal takes away the historical use of this land for others to enjoy the lake front for passive recreation like picnicking, boating, sunbathing, and walking and is contrary to the nature of the zoning. I have already addressed effects on passive recreation above, specifically mode shift in paragraphs [36]-[39], carrying capacity/conflict in paragraphs [49]-[66], and specific recreation settings in paragraphs [111]-[121].
- [140] The Houghton submission raised concerns about the useability of the space underneath the ropes course for passive recreation and how a ropes course would deter people from recreating. As outlined in paragraphs [52]-[56] of my evidence the site is currently not being 'activated' and used in the prescribed way that the Houghton's, Muir's, Ms Faulkner, and the submitters outline. The current condition and topography of the proposed site does not currently suit the use for picnicking and other passive recreation activities, but will have the very activities people are concerned about activated by the facilities the applicant will install. The Applicant's proposed addition of further seating, picnic tables and signage contributes to the activation of the area beneath the pine trees, extending its current use.
- [141] Ian and Juliet Satterthwaite's submission raises concerns about the impact of commercial activities on the lakefront and the potential to encourage more commercial activity in the area. However, as outlined in paragraphs [71]-[82] of my evidence, the proposal aligns with the Lake Tekapō Destination Management Plan, supporting a mix of tourism attractions, including adventure and youth experiences. The ropes course fits within the site's specific tourism offerings (e.g., hot springs, mini golf course, powerboat club). The commercial nature of the proposal supports the region's tourism goals, enhancing the area's appeal without conflicting with the lakefront's recreational and natural features.
- [142] The Currie submission states that "high ropes course would restrict the ease of which to access the waterfront area here." As outlined in my

evidence in paragraph [40] and [53]-[59], the proposal is designed to sit above the forest floor, allowing other recreational activities to continue unhindered. The development does not physically prevent access to the forest, lakeshore, or beach, nor does it create significant barriers to activities such as picnicking, boating, or casual passive recreation. The elevated nature of the course ensures that the space beneath remains open and usable, as evidenced at Adrenalin Forest Christchurch, where walkers, runners, and cyclists continue to access the area freely. Currently, the space beneath the site is covered with tree debris, is not being activated (as witnessed on my site visits) and has no visual amenity.

Comment the s42A report

- [143] The s42A report incorporates recreation and open space advice prepared by the Council's consultant landscape architect, Ms Faulkner. Here I respond to this, and the conclusions reached by the Council's consultant planner, Mr Nick Boyes, concerning recreation and open space matters.
- [144] The s42A report acknowledges that recreational infrastructure and activities within the area are already diverse, including boating, waterskiing, cycling, campgrounds, playgrounds, water sports, and commercial hot springs. The introduction of the ropes course does not create an entirely new pattern of use but complements the existing mix, supporting broader variation and choice in recreation experiences along the lakefront. The Proposal's elevated design and limited built form ensure that open space and accessibility remain dominant characteristics, as anticipated by both the operative and proposed District Plan provisions.
- [145] While Ms Faulkner and the s42A report consider that a ropes course is not 'complementary' to passive recreation values, the report notes that the Passive Recreation (P) Zone and the new Open Space Zone (OSZ) under PC29 both recognise the value of providing a '*range of active and passive recreational activities*.' The ropes course is, therefore, explicitly contemplated in the zone objectives as a potentially compatible activity, subject to appropriate design and management. The ropes course will

enable greater recreational diversity, consistent with both the existing character and policy direction for the zone.

- [146] Ms Faulkner suggests that passive recreation within this zone generally encompasses low-impact activities such as walking, picnicking, and nature appreciation. However, these activities and the protection of them does not necessarily preclude the presence of structured recreational facilities that allow for a diversity of experiences within an open space setting. High ropes courses, as seen in other locations, can coexist within passive recreation zones without fundamentally altering their intended function. I do note however, that adopted PC29 now includes in its Objective concerning the zone purpose (OSZ-01) that: “The Open Space Zone provides areas of open space which predominantly provide for a range of passive and active recreational activities” (emphasis added) and the Policy concerning the zone (OSZ-P2): “Provide for community facilities and commercial recreation activities which are of a nature and scale that is complementary to, the recreational focus of the zone” (emphasis added).
- [147] In my opinion, the presence of existing tourism infrastructure and active recreational activities within the broader setting of the proposal site indicates that structured recreation facilities, such as the ropes course, would be compatible and complementary to these existing activities. The proposal aligns with the intent of the Passive Recreation (P) Zone and PC29 by providing opportunities for physical activity and outdoor engagement without restricting other recreational uses or compromising access to the lakeshore.
- [148] The consultant planner Mr Boyes expresses concern over the sense of ‘exclusive occupation’ and potential for discouraging passive recreation beneath the course. However, as noted in my evidence, the Proposal is purposely elevated to ensure full public access continues across the forest floor with pathways and lake access retained, while also activating the areas that are currently being underutilised due to tree debris. Additional seating and signage are designed not to clutter but to indicate that recreation is encouraged, addressing the very concerns raised in the peer review about access and engagement.

- [149] The Proposal does not 'exclude' the public nor 'occupy' the site in any exclusive sense. Its operational model, physical design, and public-facing amenities are set up to maintain, and in fact, enhance, general access and recreational choice at Lake Tekapo.
- [150] The s42A report relies on the subjective assessment of 'amenity values' and 'quiet calm' which it attributes to the pine-shaded area. As confirmed in site observations and the report itself, this part of the lakeshore is subject to significant recreation activity from boats, vehicles, playground users, and tourists, particularly during peak times. The amenity and recreational character are thus robustly dynamic, not tranquil or pristine, and the ropes course fits within that existing usage and expectation.
- [151] Ms Faulkner makes reference to the noise that tree climb participants will make when up on the course and that the general busy-ness of the area may negatively affect those who are participating in alternative forms of recreation. I can agree that the addition of tree climb participants will add to the busy-ness of the area but I disagree that this will attribute to dissatisfaction from other recreationists. In my opinion, Ms Faulkner's perception of the environment as calm or quiet is inherently subjective and dependent on an individual's expectations and experiences.
- [152] The proposed site is not located in a pristine or remote setting according to the ROS, as described in my evidence earlier, but rather within an already developed urban fringe setting that includes a mix of commercial, residential, and recreational uses. The existing patterns of activity already contribute to the area's character, and the introduction of a ropes course will not to alter this.
- [153] Noise effects are addressed in detail by Mr Hay. The s42A report acknowledges that the area is already subject to noise from existing recreation, traffic, and boating, especially during busy periods. Mr Hay concludes that the level of noise created will vary greatly seasonally and weekly and the busiest times will be height of summer on public holidays or weekends. I agree with him that at these times the expectation would be that environment will be at its noisiest with more people recreating and enjoying the area, traffic, tourists, and boats in particular, creating noise.

- [154] The area is already a busy, high trafficked area, catering to multiple, noise producing activities including cycling, waterskiing, and boating, and that the areas' location to the lake, with the large accessible carpark is a 'hub' for activity. In quieter periods he expects that the noise impacts of the proposal will potentially be less, as there would be both less people on the course and less people in the area. I am in agreeance with Mr Hay, as the times noted as busy are ones that would attract a high number of people recreating on or near the site.
- [155] Ms Faulkner argues that the ropes course will impact the shaded area under the pine trees, affecting relaxation, picnics, and passive recreation. However, she does not fully acknowledge that the course is elevated above the forest floor. This design allows continued public access and use of the space below for activities such as walking and picnicking. The positive effects of shade are unaffected by the Proposal.
- [156] I agree with Ms Faulkner's view that the group of pine trees do add shade in the summer for passive recreation activities. However, as I witnessed during site surveys and the appended photographs (Appendix 2: Figures) show that the area beneath the proposed course is currently underused and difficult to enjoy due to accumulated pine debris (as outlined in my evidence earlier), making it less attractive for recreation in its current state. Only specific trees, located close to the lake (which are out of the scope of the proposal), on suitable ground, with little debris, are currently being utilised for this purpose.
- [157] Rather than excluding existing activities, the proposal activates a largely dormant part area under the trees, increasing its recreational amenity and utility for both course users and non-users.
- [158] The Applicant's inclusion of additional seating, proposed picnic tables and signage, will see this currently underutilised area be activated, and Ms Faulkner's view of the use of this space for passive recreation will come to fruition.
- [159] I disagree that the general public who would utilise the space beneath the course would be deterred in number. The 'action' happening above the forest floor would entice people to sit, enjoy the views towards the

lake, as well as spectate the tree climbing participants. The addition of a tree climb course will not reduce or remove these properties that the trees possess and the function that they carry.

[160] As noted in my evidence earlier, and with reference to Treetop Trekking (Horseshoe Resort, Canada) and at Adrenalin Forest Christchurch, elevated ropes courses have demonstrably co-existed successfully with passive and active recreation. There is no evidence that such activities lead to wholesale exclusion or persistent deterrence of other users when designed with public access and amenity front-of-mind.

[161] In reference to commercialisation, as noted in my evidence earlier, the subject site is located within an existing hub of recreation and tourism activity on the Lake Tekapō foreshore. In close proximity to the site are established operations including Tekapō Springs hot pools, a public campground and holiday park, the powerboating and waterskiing clubs, paddle boarding concessionaires, a children's playground, walking and cycling trails, commercial café and mini-golf facilities, as well as visitor-focused accommodation. This concentration of activity has been present for many years and contributes to the area's established identity as a mixed-use, urban fringe recreational environment.

[162] It is my opinion that the commercial nature of the proposed ropes course does not conflict with the intended recreational use or open space values of the site. Rather, it sits comfortably within the existing pattern of activity in the receiving environment, where tourism, recreation, and commercial ventures operate side by side without eroding public access or amenity.

[163] The public's reasonable expectations for this location are shaped by its current use as a busy and vibrant recreational node adjacent to the township. This is not a pristine, remote, or wilderness setting; it is a lakeshore that is already activated by a range of visitor-focused and revenue-generating recreation opportunities. In this context, the introduction of the ropes course would be seen as a natural and compatible addition to the diversity of experiences offered.

[164] In summary, the Proposal does not preclude passive recreation, but instead broadens the scope of recreational opportunity within a high-use,

multi-functional and visually open lakeshore setting, aligning with PC29. It is compatible with operative and proposed planning provisions, does not diminish public access or open space values, and is supported by existing patterns of recreation and the anticipated zone character. Concerns regarding exclusive use, visual dominance, and amenity impact have been addressed through design, management, and voluntary mitigation measures. The Proposal is a complementary addition to the open space network, not a privatisation or diminution of it. Assertions of exclusive occupation are not supported by the facts of the proposal nor the reality of similar recreation spaces elsewhere in New Zealand.

Conclusion

- [165] I have assessed the effects of the proposed ropes course on existing passive recreational users of Takapō/Lake Tekapō Lakeside drive area, and reviewed its compatibility with the provisions of the District Plan, Mackenzie District Council Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022), the Public Facilities, Parks and Places Asset Management Plan (2024-2034), and the Destination Management Plan (2022).
- [166] My assessment finds that the Proposal is consistent with the associated passive recreation values of the area as outlined in the District Plan and the associated open space values outlined in PC29, and aligns with the strategic goals in both the Parks and Amenities Strategy (2022) and the Destination Management Plan (2022).
- [167] My analysis identifies a set of assessment matters appropriate to review the effect of the proposal on existing recreation values. My opinion is that of the five assessment matters the proposal will have no adverse effects on passive recreation at the site. It will not significantly alter pedestrian traffic who are recreating (e.g., walking or cycling), it will not dominate the area or interfere with existing recreational patterns. Noise impacts are minor and fit within the recreation setting and will have minimal effect to traditionally passive and quiet forms of recreation. The site can comfortably accommodate the additional visitors without overcrowding and causing capacity issues/conflict with other recreationists. Finally, the course will activate a previously unused space

without displacing specialised recreation, and its commercial nature aligns with the areas urban fringe setting and the region's tourism context, enhancing rather than detracting from the area's offerings. In consideration of those matters I do not consider there would be adverse displacement of conflict issues, nor an adverse cumulative effect with other commercial recreation uses established.

[168] In summary, the Proposal can be considered an appropriate development for the area and passive recreation zone. The site-specific issue is whether the proposal sustains and enhances passive recreation values on Takapō/Lake Tekapō and Lakeside Drive. My assessment finds that, considering the obvious role of Lake Tekapō as a developed tourism destination, and the ability to sustain existing passive recreation values within the general vicinity of other recreation and tourism activities (e.g., Tekapō Hot Springs, Power Boat Waterski Club, and connections to the hiking tracks up Mount John), the proposal is acceptable from a recreation and tourism development perspective.

[169] The proposal will also have net positive recreational and tourism benefits in the form of:

- (a) **Diversification of Attractions:** It will add a unique adventure experience to the area, complementing existing offerings like Tekapo Hot Springs and the Dark Sky Experience, thus enhancing the overall appeal of the region and also complementing the DMP.
- (b) **Increased Visitor Numbers:** By offering a new, engaging activity, the ropes course will attract more visitors with the potential to encourage longer stays in the region.
- (c) **Support for Local Economy:** The course will generate additional revenue for local businesses, including accommodation providers, restaurants, and transport services, through increased foot traffic and demand.
- (d) **Appeal to Younger Demographics:** It will attract younger visitors and families, aligning with the DMP tourism strategies that emphasise experiences for youth and adventure tourists.

Dated: 10 August 2025

Samantha M. Strong

Appendix 1: Assessing the effects on passive recreation experience in Lakeside Drive Takapō/Lake Tekapō, social impacts

- [1] In this attachment I frame the assessment matters that I have relied on to identify the type and scale of effect of the proposal on passive recreation and open space values.
- [2] Moore & Driver (2005)³¹ define outdoor recreation pursuits as goal-directed behaviour, meaning individuals participate in recreational activities to fulfil specific needs or achieve certain goals. These motivations, needs, and desires drive behaviour. Conflict between recreation users is subjective and individualised, as people have different backgrounds and expectations for recreational experiences.
- [3] Jacob & Schreyer (1980)³² use a recreation conflict model that defines recreational conflict as "goal interference attributed to another's behaviour." In other words, conflict is a special type of dissatisfaction that occurs when one person cannot achieve the recreation experiences they desire because of the interference of other users. Conflict doesn't always mean that people have opposing goals. Conflict is rooted in individuals' perceptions of social interactions, not just the situation itself. It can result from direct contact (face-to-face encounters) or indirect contact.
- [4] Jacob & Schreyer's recreation conflict model outlines four factors influencing goal interference. In more detail:
 - (a) Activity style: The level of importance a person places on the specialisation required to enjoy their particular activity. This applies to more skilled activities like angling and backcountry skiing.
 - (b) Resource specificity: The degree to which people are dependent on a particular resource or place for their activity, and the availability of substitute settings.

³¹ Moore, R. L., & Driver, B. L. (2005). Negative Impacts of Recreation Use. In Introduction to Outdoor Recreation: Providing and Managing Natural Resource Based Opportunities (p. 339). Venture Pub.

³² Jacob, G. R., & Schreyer, R. (1980). Conflict in Outdoor Recreation: A Theoretical Perspective. Journal of Leisure Research, 12(4), 368–380.

- (c) Mode of experience: This relates to the focus of the participant.
- (d) Lifestyle tolerance: This relates to perceptions of personal differences between individuals and may be based on stereotyping.

- [5] Booth & Cullen (1995)³³ provide a summary on the conceptual carrying capacity framework, specifically social carrying capacity, and how it is used to gauge users perception of crowding and conflict when experiencing natural spaces. Overall, researchers have found that:

The effects of crowding on satisfaction would vary, depending on the visitor needs or motivation (Manning 1986). Social carrying capacity research has focused on personal responses to environmental variables, with particular attention to the relationship between satisfaction and the number of encounters with other recreationist (Klinksy 1992).

- [6] Wray & Booth (2010)³⁴ give a useful summary of the concepts (inclusive of Jacob & Schreyer's model) that can be applied in assessing the effects of a new commercial recreation activity in an area with an existing use pattern. These relate to managing recreation conflict. They write:

Recreational conflict can be defined as 'a negative experience, occurring when competition for shared resources prevents expected benefits of participation from accruing to an individual or a group' (Crawford et al. 1991:309). It is a specific type of user dissatisfaction which occurs when people feel that their recreational experience is compromised by other visitors....Research has shown that conflict is increasing between participants in outdoor recreation activities, and that conflict is likely to occur in areas where there are high levels of use and/or a variety of different activities competing for the same resource (Manning 1999). There is also research to suggest that conflicts have developed between commercial and non- commercial recreationists (ibid.). This notion is supported by the Department of Conservation's Visitor Strategy, which states that:

Conflict is most likely to occur between dissimilar groups, particularly if one group's behaviour is considered to be inappropriate by the other ... Some visitor groups resent the intrusion of increasing numbers of visitors and an expanding range of commercial activities. (DOC 1996: 21).

- [7] Conflict in nature-based settings is challenging due to the large, and sometimes difficult areas where recreation occurs, and the spectrum of activities and experiences that can be encountered within a specific area. These conflicts often reflect broader land-use management issues

³³ Booth & Cullen, Outdoor Recreation in New Zealand: A Review and Synthesis of the Research Literature, Department of Conservation and Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand (1995), pp101-105

³⁴ Wray, K. and Booth, K. 2010. *Attitudes towards commercial recreation on public conservation lands*. Department of Conservation Science for Conservation 301

and underscore the need for frameworks to mitigate conflict, manage recreation spaces, encourage participation, and maintain the quality of experience for users.

[8] Wray & Booth (2010) outlined additional reasons why independent wilderness visitors opposed commercial recreation in remote and wilderness areas. While their study focused on a different setting than the front-country environment of Lakeside Drive and the proposed site, many of the eight themes remain relevant and applicable:

- (a) The fear that traditional recreation experiences will be damaged, threatened or changed, largely because commercial recreation is 'different' and requires higher levels of service than traditional independent activities.
- (b) Fear that commercial recreation will 'open the floodgates' to commercialisation.
- (c) Dislike of impacts associated with commercial recreation (more people, more facilities, more infrastructure, more noise, etc).
- (d) Commercial clients are 'different' from independent visitors (as per Jacob & Schreyer's (1980) 'lifestyle tolerance').
- (e) Commercial recreation is a reminder of the civilisation that independent wilderness visitors want to escape.
- (f) Commercial recreation is adverse to traditional outdoor recreation (by removing the basic elements associated with wilderness experiences – risk, independence and no profit motive).
- (g) Commercial recreation is elitist and only for the rich (as per Jacob & Schreyer's (1980) 'lifestyle tolerance').
- (h) Inappropriate behaviour of commercial groups (such as taking over public beaches, being noisy, not cleaning up after themselves in public areas).

[9] Cessford (1999) identifies two types of potential recreation conflict relevant to this assessment: 'intra-group conflicts', which occur between

user groups with differing motivations or behaviours, and 'perceived inappropriate uses and behaviours', which may include the introduction of new technology, commercial activities, or events. It is important to recognise that the concept of 'inappropriateness' is inherently subjective and varies based on individual perspectives.

- [10] For assessing intra-group conflicts, Cessford (1999) recommends:

The main information needs identified for managing the social impacts of intragroup conflicts were based on the need to improve understanding of inappropriate behaviour and crowding. This was based on defining and describing different behavioural and crowding problems, and understanding both the common contributing factors applying in most cases, and the unique factors specific to certain activity types or sites.

How do these factors relate to on-site management for specific recreation experience goals? Are these goals made apparent to visitors to influence their expectations prior to their visits, and their behaviours while on their visits?

- [11] Intra-group conflict arises among individuals engaging in the same recreational activity but with differing preferences or expectations. This type of conflict occurs within a single user group and is often driven by variations in how participants believe the activity should be experienced or conducted. The types of intra-group conflict issues identified were:

- (a) Types of inappropriate behaviour,
- (b) Crowding and conflict perceptions,
- (c) Different values and attachments for settings and activities,
- (d) Traditional versus non-traditional cultural use,
- (e) Different activity orientations,
- (f) Guided versus independent participation,
- (g) The degree of regulation compliance,
- (h) The degree of fee compliance.

- [12] For assessing inappropriate uses and behaviours, Cessford (1999) recommends:

The main information needs identified for managing inappropriate uses and behaviours emphasised improving the understanding of interactions between

different visitors, activity styles, place and activity dependence, group values and individual values, and perceptions of place. What makes some particular types of recreation activities, experiences and visitor groups more or less susceptible to impacts than others? What visitor characteristics and behaviours have disproportionately greater impact effects?

[13] Key questions for my assessment therefore include:

- (a) 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?
- (b) Will the commercial nature of the ropes course noticeably affect the experience of existing users?
- (c) Will the new activity attract so many visitors that it causes crowding or strains local facilities, leading to conflict between users?
- (d) Does the current visitor experience rely on a unique feature that the ropes course could compromise?
- (e) Is commercial recreation in this location generally seen as incompatible with the character of Lake Tekapō and its existing visitor experience?

[14] In the body of my evidence, I review these issues under the following headings:

- (a) Mode shift
- (b) Dominance of the proposal
- (c) Carrying Capacity and Crowding
- (d) Specialisation
- (e) Commercialism

Appendix 2: Figures



Figure 1. View from Station Bay Rise towards proposed site.



Figure 2. Proposed base building location.

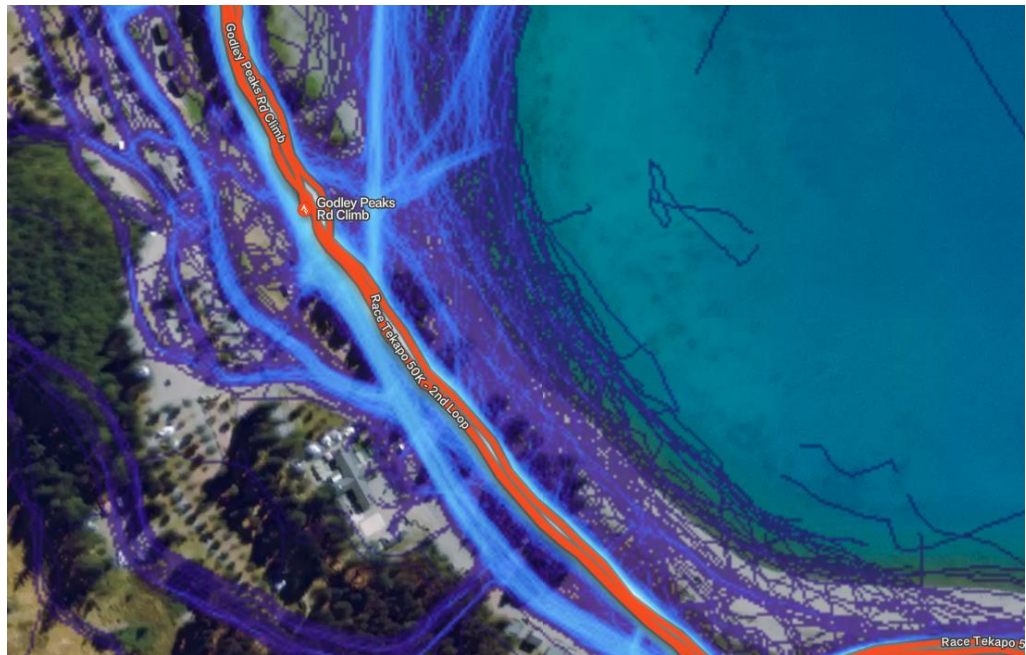


Figure 3. Lake Tekapo Strava Heat Map All Foot Sport.

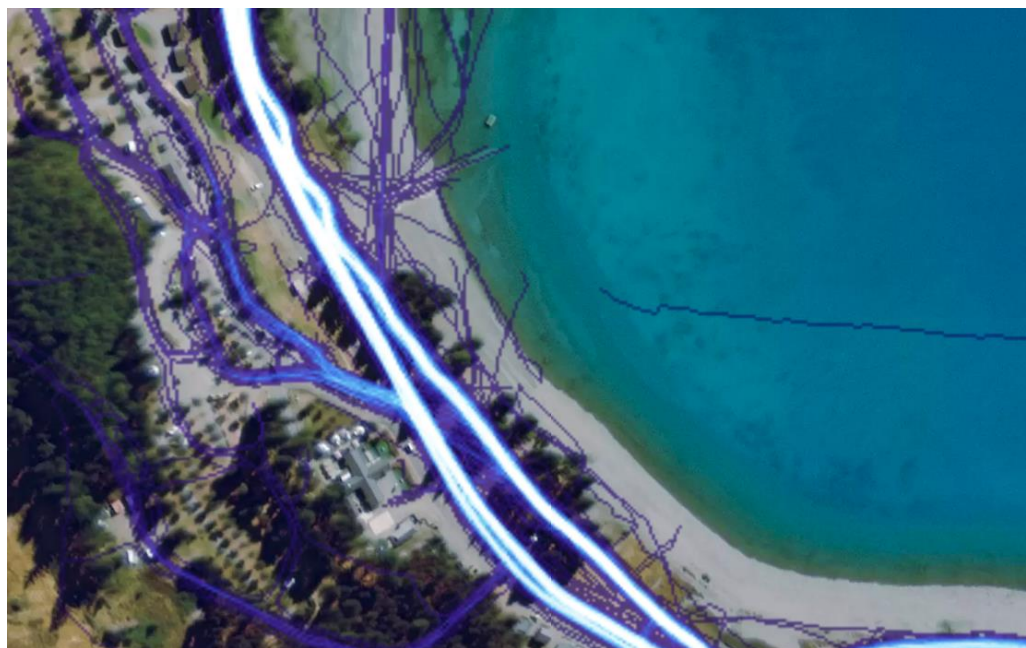


Figure 4. Lake Tekapo Strava Heat Map All Cycle Sports.



Figure 7. Campervans and casual day carpark visitors enjoying the view.



Figure 8. Topography and tree debris on forest floor.



Figure 9. Passive recreationists enjoying the beach.

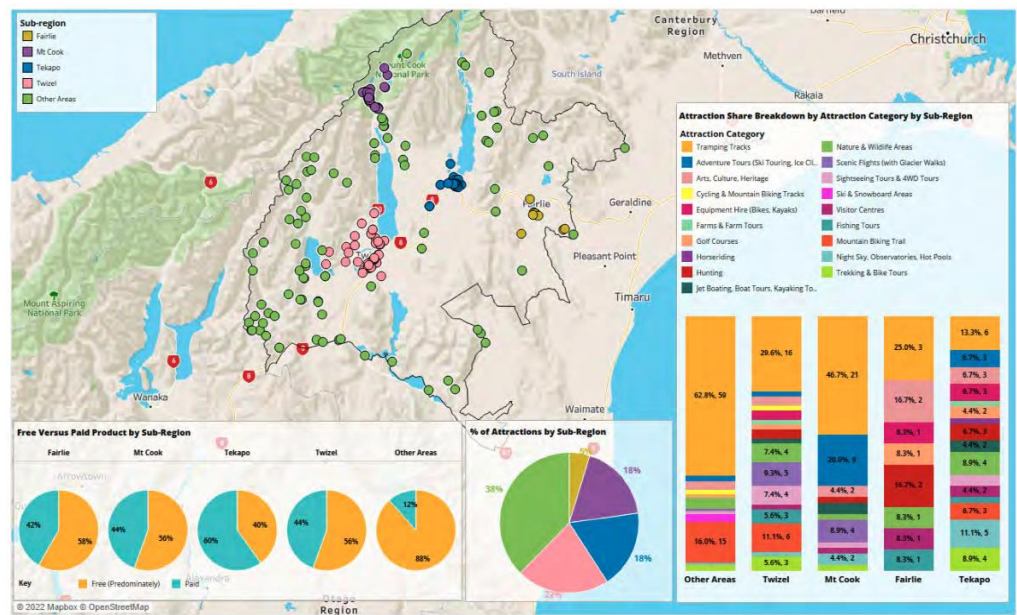


Figure 10. Number of Tourist Attractions.³⁵