

Queenstown's Urban Intensification Variation: What the Variation Decision Really Does

On 20 February 2026 Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) released its decision adopting the Independent Hearing Panel Report (Report) and its recommendations on the proposed Urban Intensification Variation (Variation).

QLDC's decision follows an extended process which first began in August 2023, followed by hearings held in Arrowtown, Queenstown, and Wānaka in July and August 2025.

Key decisions at a glance

In short, the Variation:

- changes the mapped extent of different urban zones;
- retains some of the existing Medium Density Residential Zone (**MDRZ**) and High Density Residential Zone (**HDRZ**), and introduces a new MDR A Zone (**MDRAZ**) and HDR A Zone (**HDRAZ**), which enable development at greater heights and densities;
- renames the Lower Density Suburban Residential Zone to the Suburban Residential Zone (**SRZ**), while adopting the zone's previously notified (increased) height standards, but retaining the QLDC's Proposed District Plan's (**PDPs**) existing maximum density;
- outside of the district's main urban centres generally allows two story density, as opposed to increased height limits of over two storeys;
- removes requirements to consider QLDC's Design Guidelines within the zones subject to the Variation

with the exception of the HDRZ, on the basis they are inefficient and ineffective; and

- within the SRZ and MDRZ developments not meeting the minimum net area requirements for residential units must have at least one off-street small vehicle loading space (**Loading Space Standard**), which amongst other matters must comply with the relevant private car parking space standards. This recommendation arose from evidence on the 'substantial pressure for on-street parking that day-to-day service-type traffic associated with dwellings in suburban areas has.'

Significant changes by zone

Suburban Residential Zone (SRZ)

Aside from being renamed, the Variation:

- supports the height standards (as notified), increasing the permitted heights from the current mixture of 6.5 to 8 metres, to a nearly blanket 8 metres – with bespoke lower height regimes for Arrowtown and Kawarau Heights. Breaches to these limits will change from a non-complying to discretionary activity status, providing a more straight forward consenting pathway; and
- maintains the PDP's existing minimum lot size of 450m²)

Additionally, intending to enable small, detached infill dwellings in the zone, the Variation:

- permits one residential unit per 450m² net area;
- provides a new restricted discretionary consenting pathway for development with less than 450m² net area per a residential unit (requiring compliance with several additional standards, for example the Loading Space Standard); and
- removing the zone's maximum site density standard of one residential unit per 300m² (exceedance of which, was previously a non-

Queenstown Urban Intensification Variation: What the Variation Decision Really Does

complying activity).

Medium Density Residential Zone (MDRZ)

Within the MDRZ, under the Variation:

- the PDP's existing height limits are largely retained at 8 metres for Queenstown with site specific uplifts/changes for Arrowtown, Hāwea and Wānaka. Arrowtown's height limit of 7 metres is retained, with a height of 8 metres triggering restricted discretionary consent. Hāwea and Wānaka rise from 7 metres to 8 metres;
- removes the density requirements of one residential unit per 250m² net site area, but retains the minimum lot size of 250m²;
- provides a permitted activity pathway for 3 or less residential units per site (aside from in Arrowtown), this being based on the PDP's existing 250m² minimum net area approach. Additionally, a restricted discretionary pathway is provided for (unlimited) additional density beyond this; and
- the previously notified rules relating to Outdoor Living Space and Outlook Space for residential units are amended to only apply to developments including more than three residential units per site, or three or less units on sites that have a net area per residential unit of less than 250m².

Medium Density Residential A Zone (MDRAZ)

This new zone, generally applying on Queenstown Hill and on largely greenfield land in Wānaka South, enables greater height and density than the MDRZ, by:

- adopting the notified MDRZ height standards, these increase the PDP's current permitted heights from 8 metres to 11 metres, plus 1 metre for pitched roofs (with breaches to these standards being amended from non-complying to discretionary);
- removing the density requirements of one residential unit per 250m² net site area, along with

the Outdoor Living Space and Outlook Space Standards;

- increases the minimum lot size from 250m² provided for in the MDRZ to 600m².

High Density Residential Zone (HDRZ)

Like the MDRZ, the Panel recommended that most parts of the HDRZ retain its existing height limits and other existing built form provisions. Although, the Variation, as previously notified, has increased the minimum lot size from 450m² to 600m².

Generally, areas where greater height and density is considered appropriate are to be rezoned HDRAZ.

High Density Residential A Zone (HDRAZ)

This new zone provides for greater height and density within the central Queenstown residential area and Wānaka Three Parks and:

- supports the increased height limits (as notified), increasing the permitted limit from 12 metres to 16.5 metres;
- introduces a tiered consenting approach. For any building between 16.5m to 24m to be a restricted discretionary activity; and
- increases the minimum lot size from 450m² to 600m².

Queenstown and Wanaka Town Centre Zones

The Variation generally enables increased intensification by increasing the height standards in and around the Town Centre Zones, recognising the suitability of these areas to absorb a higher level of urban development and amending breaches to these standards from non-complying to discretionary, regarding:

- Wānaka Town Centre:** the Variation increased building heights in the Wanaka Town Centre from 8 metres to 16.5 metres (other than in the height precinct, as notified) and adopted a tiered and less

Queenstown Urban Intensification Variation: What the Variation Decision Really Does

onerous approach to consenting in which buildings between 16.5 metres and 20 metres are to be a restricted discretionary activity and those above 20 metres, discretionary (previously non-complying); and

- **Queenstown Town Centre:** the Variation adopts the notified amphitheatre approach to building height in the Town Centre, with lower heights adjoining the historical core and lakefront, with building height increases moving back from the lakefront.

What it means for key locations

Queenstown

The recommendations of the Panel are largely consistent with QLDC's notified approach to the Variation, with the exception of the MDRZ and HDRZ not receiving the material height uplifts:

- greater building heights in Queenstown Town Centre are largely adopted; and
- the MDRAZ and HDRAZ are recommended to apply around the Queenstown Town Centre, aside from some additional rezonings to land located at the top of Queenstown Hill from LDSRZ to MDRAZ and from MDRZ to HDRAZ on Thompson Street;

However:

- outside of the areas identified as MDRAZ, other Queenstown neighbourhoods that have not been upzoned are largely aligned with the PDP's status quo including its enablement of generally 2-storey building heights; and
- for Queenstown's Local Shopping Centre and Business Mixed Use zones, the PDP's height and density standards are largely retained, contrary to the changes promoted in the Variation as notified.

Wānaka

Additional intensification is enabled, but generally below the upper end of what was notified. In short:

- by applying the MDRAZ and HDRAZ, locations for increased residential density in Wānaka are focused around the mostly greenfield urban areas of Three Parks and Wānaka South. This differs from the notified proposal, which had sought to apply greater heights in residential areas adjoining and near the Wānaka Town Centre;
- the Variation increases building heights within Wānaka Town Centre from 8 metres to 16.5 metres (other than those in the height precinct, as notified), adopting a tiered consenting approach to buildings exceeding the permitted 16.5 metre standard; and
- in the residential areas near Wānaka Town Centre, lower heights are to be applied than notified, retaining the PDP MDRZ limit of 8m.

Arthur's Point

Within parts of Arthur's Point, intensification is more limited than originally proposed, with height and density controls remaining relatively constrained. This is likely due to the existing infrastructure constraints in the area.

Generally, the Variation retains the PDP's current zoning in Arthurs Point, although with a reduced building height (than as notified) of 8 metres in the existing MDRZ and of 12 metres for the existing HDRZ.

Arrowtown

Within Arrowtown's SRZ the Panel recommended adopting the tiered consenting approach (as notified), this approach permitting buildings up to 6.5 metres and providing a restricted discretionary status for buildings up to 8 metres (previously non-complying).

However, within the MDRZ a lower permitted building height of 7 metres (with provision for buildings up to 8 metres as restricted discretionary activity), than that which was notified, was recommended to apply. These

Queenstown Urban Intensification Variation: What the Variation Decision Really Does

recommendations aim to retain the predominantly 1-2 storey character of these areas.

In addition:

- the PDP's maximum building height for Arrowtown's Local Shopping Centre Zone is retained at 7 metres; and
- proposals to exceed the permitted density limits within the SRZ or MDRZ zones are to be subject to an additional matter of discretion of Arrowtown's existing character. This is due to the Panel's recommendation that references to the Arrowtown Design Guidelines 2016 be deleted.

Hāwea

The Variation:

- retains the current zoning, this includes retention of the existing MDRZ which accordingly increases the building height within Hāwea from 7 to 8 metres; and
- retains the PDP's maximum height of 10 metres in the Local Shopping Centre Zone (LSCZ) at Lake Hāwea South, a reduction from the notified 12 metres. In the LSCZ within Hāwea itself there is an increase in the maximum height allowed from 7 metres to 10 metres (although this being less than the notified 14 metre maximum).

Next steps

On 20 February 2026, following QLDC's decision to adopt the Report a 30-working day period commenced where appeals may be lodged to the Environment Court. The final date to lodge an appeal will be **7 April 2026**.

Following the completion of this period, any provisions not subject to appeals will be treated as operative.

Want to know more?

QLDC's decision report, together with the reasons for its

decision are available on [QLDC's Website](#).

If you have any questions as to how the above impacts you or you previously submitted on the variation and want to be involved in an appeal, please contact our Queenstown **Environment, planning and natural resources** team [Maree Baker-Galloway](#), Conor Meredith and [Hannah Zyndebois](#).