



Growth pains in paradise

For decades the awesome grandeur of Lake Wakatipu has attracted the affluent and the young to Queenstown.

Most years, apart from those of the Depression and wartime, views to die for have brought both tourists and investment capital. Demand for property in Queenstown, intensified by the natural constraints of lakefront and hillside, has long affected values.

Now, an attractive exchange rate, low interest rates, soaring immigration, the drift of Auckland money south and the rediscovery of relative isolation as a kind of post-9/11 romantic ideal, have all heaped new ingredients into the Queenstown growth equation.

Driven by strong growth in the tourism and property sectors, Queenstown has become one of the fastest growing local economies in New Zealand. Rapid investment has exerted pressure on both infrastructure and underlying property values for years, with at times piecemeal development making planning and design difficult.

The Queenstown Lakes District Council identified several priority planning issues in a recent report entitled *Tomorrow's Queenstown* –

Quality or Chaos. They relate to managing population and visitor growth, protection of the landscape, ensuring adequate access and transport networks, and ensuring that infrastructure and community facilities keep pace with growth.

The importance – and difficulty – of preserving and maintaining local identity and character was recognised by Christchurch developers RFD Investments in their report to the Frankton Flats charrette.

“Queenstown’s central activity district, located on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, is dominated by land uses catering mostly to the tourist market. As such, the area is evolving into a tourist precinct with facilities being developed to meet the specific needs of local residents becoming more difficult to achieve.”

RFD says the principal constraints relate to parking problems, restricted access, traffic congestion, poor pedestrian amenity and limited availability for affordable residential, retail and commercial space.

In recent weeks, RFD has promoted a masterplan for a new township at Frankton Flats.

An even larger residential/commercial development, potentially the biggest in Central

Otago history, is proposed for Jacks Point, 10 minutes southwest of Queenstown. This proposal from Darby Partners envisages a 1253ha project with a capital value of \$500m on completion.

Both proposals are welcomed by Queenstown businessman James Boulton, who chairs the council’s working party for a new \$44m community centre. “My personal view is that affordable housing is the biggest problem in the district and there has got to be an innovative solution. The problem also applies to Wanaka.”

Boulton says residential sub-divisions have been quickly bought up by international buyers, expatriate Kiwis coming back with enhanced buying power, and ‘out-of-towners’ seeking a life-style change. Sections sold at fair value one year have been traded at substantially higher prices the next, perpetuating the shortage of affordable housing.

He describes the new township proposals for Frankton and Jacks Point as “heartening”.

Other businesses are focusing on other uses for 400ha of land in the Frankton, Remarkables Park, Shotover and downtown areas, with several expansions planned.

It all adds up to a region where property remains as significant a focal point as tourism.

Billion-dollar virtual village

As Queenstown growth spills from the squeezed tourist centre to flat land near the airport, Christchurch developer Dave Henderson unveils billion-dollar plans for a new township celebrating the traditional village. Warren Head takes a virtual tour.

Like fabulous resorts worldwide, Queenstown is accustomed to the polarisation of views spawned by the pressures of over-development.

There has been a particularly protracted and often acrimonious planning history associated with the area known as Frankton Flats, driven by its location as the 'gateway' to Queenstown, its rural nature and the 'big box' type of development proposals put forward in the past.

Located south of SH6 and adjacent to the airport, the site is 32ha of flat land only 6km from Queenstown.

It is here that Christchurch property company RFD Investments proposes to develop over 10-15 years a township called 'Five Mile' that will follow the principles of New Urbanism.

RFD Investments acquired the site a year ago from Australian company Terrace Tower, reportedly at a cost of \$11m.

The site is zoned for commercial and special residential use. RFD managing director David Henderson says it's an important piece of land that needs to be treated properly: "We're willing to

recognise the two key covenants required by QLDC, adequate setback along SH6 and inclusion of open spaces enabling vistas of the Remarkables Range."

The initiative to create a new settlement at Frankton Flats took a big step forward in late August-early September when a 10-day urban study culminated in an astonishingly detailed development plan.

The catalyst is known as the Frankton Flats Charrette, conducted by the New Urbanism American architects and town planners Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company and Melbourne town planners and designers Roberts Day, for RFD Investments Ltd.

CHARRETTE

The most intensive charrette process is unusual in New Zealand, involving concentrated research, dialogue and consultation by a large team of professionals who then pool their knowledge to produce a 'first edition' blueprint for the proposed project.

"We flew in five advisers from Duany Plater-Zyberk along with six from Australia and invited a large number of

professionals from around New Zealand and locally to participate," says Henderson. The core team included urban planners and architects, designers and 'renderers', who walked the land, studied the location, talked with the locals, and lapped to the early hours.

"It was an intensive process. Every 2-3 hours there were meetings with council, builders, real estate agents, educationalists. The process of discussion, feedback and decision-making stunned the local community.

"After all, the typical development path in New Zealand is to work in a vacuum to produce a standard product, with a standard floor-plan, and totally disregard in the design the context of the area," says Henderson. "The Frankton Flats charrette team essentially did eight months work in a week and a half."

Participating in the process were the local community, Queenstown Lakes District Council, Civic Corp (QLDC's services contractor), the Queenstown Airport Corporation, church groups, land owners, architects, builders and agencies involved in transport, engineering and infrastructure.

Henderson wants to show that there is an alternative to developing a conventional suburb with more shopping malls.

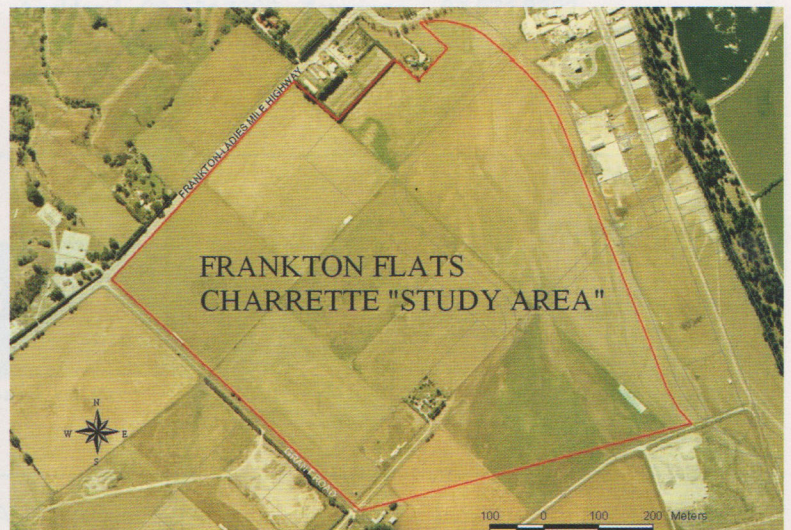
NEW URBANISM

Miami-based DPZ are famed for their New Urbanism work, notably the Seaside project in Florida, which won a Time magazine Design of the Decade award in 1991. New Urbanism is a planning approach that creates a sense of community through active participation of the residents.

It means mixed-use development with higher density and mixed uses typically featuring commercial premises below loft apartments, and narrower roads with vehicle access at the rear of the properties, where essential services are

Left: Walking the talk - a reporter takes audio notes from (from left) Mike Day of Roberts Day (Melbourne), Dave Henderson of RFD Investments, and Demetri Bach of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (USA), on the road in nearby Arrowtown.

Right: The 32ha site is 6km from Queenstown, adjacent to the airport.





Left: Five Mile on Queenstown's Frankton Flats is set out on a "human scale".
Below left: A 'farmers market' area at the village entry is designed to reflect the rural feel of the area.
Below right: An artist's impression of how Five Mile housing might look in keeping with the local vernacular.

also reticulated.

Classic European villages in France, Germany, The Netherlands, London's Soho, Charleston in South Carolina and the Washington DC suburb of Georgetown fit the concept, as might the Wellington suburb of Thorndon.

The antithesis of New Urbanism is suburban sprawl slashed by expensive motorways linking shopping centres anchored on megastores and neighbourhood 'pods' of identical demographical make-up.

DPZ's Demetri Bach says it is about designing towns as they were 100 years ago, at a human scale, rather than one dictated by vehicular use. "Traditional villages can evolve into neighbourhoods,

towns and eventually cities whereas suburbs cannot evolve."

He argues that where retail 'big boxes' form part of a development they should be stepped back and lined on the outside by specialty shops. "Until five years ago New York had no Target or Walmart stores because the big boxes did not fit (the streets)."

Frankton Flats represents "an opportunity to not only relieve the pressure of growth by offering an alternative service centre but also create an environment which reflects the district's inimitable character."

CHARACTER

Queenstown grew out of the gold

rush of the 1800s and early settlers made do with local raw materials such as schist, timber and thatch to build cottages and most commercial buildings were rectilinear stone structures. DPZ photographed numerous historic properties and measured roads, footpaths, parking, verandahs, and buildings to ensure urban and architectural designs for Five Mile were in context.

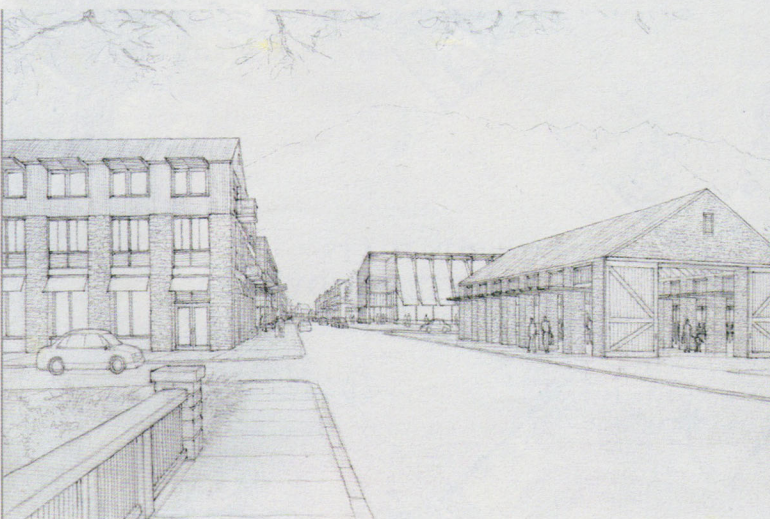
Views to the mountains are aligned with boulevards. Greens are framed by schools, shops, civic facilities, a campus, health clinics, church, library, auditorium, retirement housing, and artists' studios.

The artists' quarter is located along a pedestrian promenade with a built edge of 1.5 storey cottages incorporating work

space, galleries and offices at ground level and residential above.

Main Street will have a supermarket, department store and offices opposite a 'farmers market', and lined with specialty retail, cafes, bars and restaurants. A four-star hotel faces a multi-denominational church. There are plans for 1000 residential units with all residents are located within five minutes walk of easily accessed facilities.

Five Mile targets those who live and work in the region. It intends to provide elegant, affordable, accommodation in a region where high construction and labour costs are pricing housing out of reach of most employees. Housing types include high-density apartments, medium



Right: American Chris Ritter produced dozens of renderings during the charrette to help visualise the project.

Below: The international charrette team, based in the Queenstown Events Centre, completed "eight months work in a week and a half".



density live/work combinations and lower density cottages and villas.

The plan is also to establish a vibrant tertiary student community. Intersecting the spine of the village, a boulevard and avenue connect two civic anchors. The university proposed for the western end is planned around a series of quads and will house approximately 3000 students participating in semester courses. The other anchor is an exhibition hall/transit node to the east.

A village square is located where primary axes intersect at the heart of Five Mile, a formal public green space fronted by key buildings, featuring an amphitheatre and performance space. An ice-rink may use the space in winter.

DINKY STREETS

"A major feature of Five Mile will be wonderful streets for more than just moving cars," says Bach. "They will be social spaces... they will not only be corridors between urban experiences but experiences themselves."

- Drives are boundary roads with development on one side and nature on the other.
- Avenues are thoroughfares characterised by commercial activity on either side.
- Boulevards are mixed use tree-lined streets, which terminate on civic uses.
- Local roads are residential and access major routes.
- Alleys provide access to the rear parking courts of commercial buildings.
- Lanes provide access to private parking spaces at the rear of residential buildings.

The charrette detail already specifies design speeds, width, right-of-way width, pavement width, traffic flow, parking lanes, curb type and radius, planter width, type and pattern, street light type and spacing, bike ways, tree types and benches.

The masterplan envisages 'hangar housing' with direct access by plane from the airport to a residential unit located above an aircraft hangar. This has apparently been successful in the USA and Australia.

Five Mile is sited just north of the Queenstown airport – outside a 45dba noise contour – and adjacent to the Queenstown events centre. A land exchange with QLDC has been proposed to assist expansion of the events centre and playing fields.

DPZ and Roberts Day are now working on the details and RFD intends produce a 3D fly-through to test various propositions such as angles of the sun and provide a marketing tool.

After initial consideration of the charrette report, key components will be developed and further consultation conducted.

The QLDC has sought authorisation from the Environment Court under s293 to the Resource Management Act to resolve the Terrace Towers Reference and other issues. It is envisaged that the Five Mile project could proceed to the Environment Court within 12 months. If approval is gained, it will have a seven to nine-year construction period to provide Queenstown with sufficient housing stock for a decade.