

Queenstown Times

Glenorchy school site too difficult

JAMES BEECH



PROMOTERS of an international college say developing it near Queenstown could be too difficult.

Glenorchy had been identified as a potential site for a United World College, of which there are 12 around the world. Local enthusiast John Hillhorst approached the Glenorchy Trust, which subsequently agreed to provide land to set up the college.

The international school, which would have 250 pupils, 200 of them from overseas, of final year school age and older, planned to offer a programme with a strong academic as well as citizenship and outdoor activity focus.

However, chairman of the trust formed to look at setting up the school, Nelson-based Tony Baldwin, said after initial consideration, advice from Queenstown Lakes District Council and two independent consultants, the Glenorchy site did not appear to be a viable option.

It was located in an area classified as an outstanding natural landscape in the district plan, which could make it

extremely difficult to get resource consent, Mr Baldwin said.

"It could be a long road and we want to be in a place where the project is welcomed. If you get a whole lot of objections from people who don't want it there, then it's going to be very difficult."

Just because the land was an outstanding natural landscape did not mean the school could not be located there, he added. The problem was getting the resource consent.

"If it was viewed as a really valued project for that place, then it would be there."

Instead, he said the trust had "stepped back" from the Glenorchy site to consider 55 other potential sites around New Zealand and narrowed them down to seven, of which two were in Wakatipu.

Mr Baldwin would not identify the other Wakatipu sites, but said the school trust had discussed the possibility with a land owner who was considering the proposal.

Of the other sites under consideration, including two in Nelson-Tasman, Taupo, Rotorua and Bay of Plenty, the Nelson-Tasman option was looking like a strong possibility.

The region offered all the qualities the trust board was looking for — access to a special New Zealand outdoors environment, a strong cultural and community resource — and



World away . . . Chairman of the New Zealand United World College trust Tony Baldwin says getting consent for the Glenorchy site may prove too difficult.

PHOTO: JUDE GILLIES

had very strong backing from the councils there, he said.

While the next step was to narrow down the options to three contenders, he said the Nelson and Tasman councils had been "unbelievably enthusiastic" about supporting the proposal.

He said the council in Queenstown was "noticeably less proactive" about it.

If the college was eventually sited somewhere in Wakatipu, Mr Baldwin hoped it would retain some links with Glenorchy as an outpost or location for outdoor pursuits or community work.

The school was estimated to cost \$70 million to set up and \$7 million to run, said Mr Baldwin. To date, the trust, through corporate sponsorship, had

raised \$500,000 of the \$850,000 required for a feasibility study. Corporate sponsors including Air New Zealand, New Zealand Post, Contact Energy and ASB bank had put up \$100,000 each because they regarded it as an investment in developing future worldwide links.

Wherever the college was located, the aim was to be operating by the end of 2012.