



## **RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – DOC RAL Whakapapa Gondola Application**

**To:** Ella Tennent, Planner Cheal Consultants

**From:** Kara Scott, Landscape Planner  
Perception Planning Ltd, with technical input from HB Architects and RAL.

**Date:** 9 March 2018

**Subject:** Response to request for further information from Department of Conservation, dated 1 March 2018

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The proposed Gondola replaces the facilities and capacity taken by the National Downhill Chair (NDC) and is consistent with the draft 2017 IDP. This alignment in my view has a significant landscape and visual benefit to the previous 2011 IDP, which extended the proposed gondola out of the Amenities Area, and into an undeveloped part of the mountain, requiring an additional café and terminal building.

Policy 5.2.1.2 of the Tongariro National Park Management Plan is for all major infrastructure including buildings to be located within this amenities area (while exception is made for ski lifts, which may be possible to locate outside of the amenities area if considered appropriate). The proposed gondola maintains an alignment within the Amenities Area and utilises existing ski services such as the Knoll Ridge Café and replacing the Waterfall Express top terminal building (which will no longer be required under the draft IDP). The proposed development is consistent with this policy.

Overall the proposed gondola is considered to have greater landscape and visual benefits to the previous IDP. This is because:

- The proposed alignment is confined to existing infrastructure and facilities areas being the base area and the Knoll Ridge Café, versus the previous alignment which extended the Gondola into a greenfield site and undeveloped part of the ski area.
- There will no longer be an additional café or terminal building to the upper mountain – the proposed Gondola top terminal building will replace the WFE top terminal, and the existing Knoll Ridge Café will provide for the upper mountain facilities to the Gondola.
- The proposed Gondola is designed to provide an overall landscape and visual improvement on the existing ski infrastructure, including lower profile upper terminal compared to the existing WFE upper terminal, and using design materials and colours on the buildings that fit with the more modern and recent development on the ski area.
- The Gondola uses compact cabins that require infrastructure akin to typical chairlift infrastructure in the ski area; i.e. no need for lattice towers. While some of the towers will be taller than the existing WFE, overall the site being within the amenities area and



the topography being incised in nature has considerable landscape and visual benefit over the previous Gondola alignment or following the historical NDC alignment.

Overall the proposal achieves the Tongariro National Park Management Plan (TNPMP) Objectives for;

- confining large-scale use and intensive use to existing amenity areas which provide for appropriate management (Objective 4.2.4);
- providing high standard facilities for day users without compromising the values of the park (Objective 4.3.2.8)
- maximising the recreational experience of skiers in the Tongariro National Park through the highest quality ski area operation, minimising the adverse effects of ski area operations, ensuring the ski area does not adversely affect the experience of park users, natural landscape and environment beyond ski boundaries, and limits the effects of large-scale development and intensive use to existing amenities areas (Objective 5.2)
- concentrating intense land use of base areas on already disturbed areas (Objective 5.2.3)
- protecting the landscape values of the Tongariro National Park utilising landscape planning methodologies (Objective 5.2.4), and
- ensuring current and proposed buildings do not affect Tongariro National Park values and avoiding localised effects of building projects beyond the building envelope (Objective 5.2.5)

Please find below response to the specific request for further information in relation to technical requirements and landscape and visual effects.

**1. In regard to the proposed gondola towers:**

- ***Are any of the tower locations on ridge lines or seen as silhouettes on skyline?  
Please advise what will be the diameter of the towers,***
- ***what size the gantries on the towers are and the visual impact of these both in summer and winter.***
- ***Will there be any flood lighting requirements on the towers?***

The tower locations are not positioned on any ridgelines, they are sighted below the ridge within the incised topography. When viewing from afar; a backdrop of topography maintained. There will be instances when viewing in close proximity that towers may be visible against skyline, for instance when



viewing from Hut Flat looking north (eg Towers 7 and 8), or when directly below the towers (eg Tower 14).

When viewing at this distance the towers are seen in the context of the Amenities Area where ski area operations are anticipated, and therefore are not anticipated to be a significant adverse effect. Beyond this; intervening landforms and the incised nature of the topography visually confines the alignment.

Distant views may be seen in certain light to the upper alignment where the towers near Knoll Ridge Café – particularly when ascending the Bruce Road. These are distant views and proposed Gondola towers will not be significantly different to the existing effect of the WFE with some towers being less obvious due to the alignment being lower on the topography when viewed from this location.

The towers will be painted black as per ski area standard. While this will initially appear darker than the surrounding summer landscape, it will fade overtime to similar effect as the WFE towers. The foundations are proposed to be painted black also.

The gantries will be bigger but not significantly different to the Rangatira Express gantries. The towers will be more visually prominent in winter when snow accumulation on the ground contrasts the outline of the towers. At this time of the year the towers are viewed in the context of the ski area operations, and the proposed alignment within the Amenities Area ensures that this visual effect is confined to the area where ski area infrastructure is anticipated to occur.

The Ruapehu Ski Club lodges will experience the proposed Gondola in closer proximity than the current ski infrastructure – where the alignment passes between the two lodge buildings. This will change the outlook for these lodges. Views from the main lodge are oriented to the north and east and the Gondola will pass behind this building. The secondary lodge will have direct views of the Gondola. The gondola cabins will be elevated above around 13m above the ground level between the RSC buildings, therefore avoiding cabin occupants from being able to look directly into the lodge windows.

This is a localised change in character for this lodge. It is also part of the nature of being on the ski area and within the amenities area where this type of activity is anticipated to occur. By maintaining the Gondola alignment within the amenities area, localised effects on club lodges will inevitably result. In my view the overall landscape benefits of maintaining the Gondola alignment within the amenities area are greater than proposals to extend the Gondola into undeveloped areas of the ski area.

There will be no floodlighting of the towers.

The tower tubes will have a diameter of 1.016m.

The gondola cabins will be approximately 2.3m - 2.8m wide by approximately 2.4m high. In comparison, the Rangatira Chairlift quad chairs are 2.33m wide and 1.79m high.

***2. What will be the visual impact of services placed on site such as Comms cables, power cables etc. Will they be trenched or above ground?***

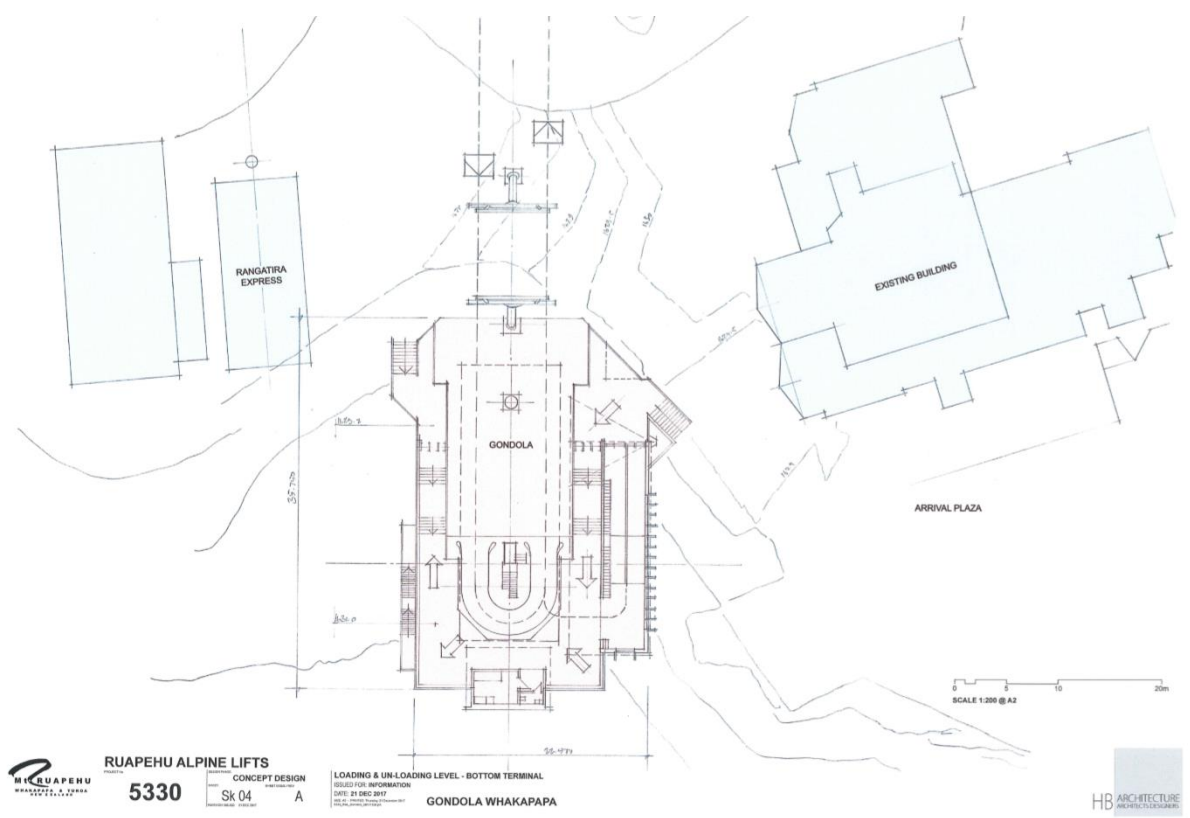


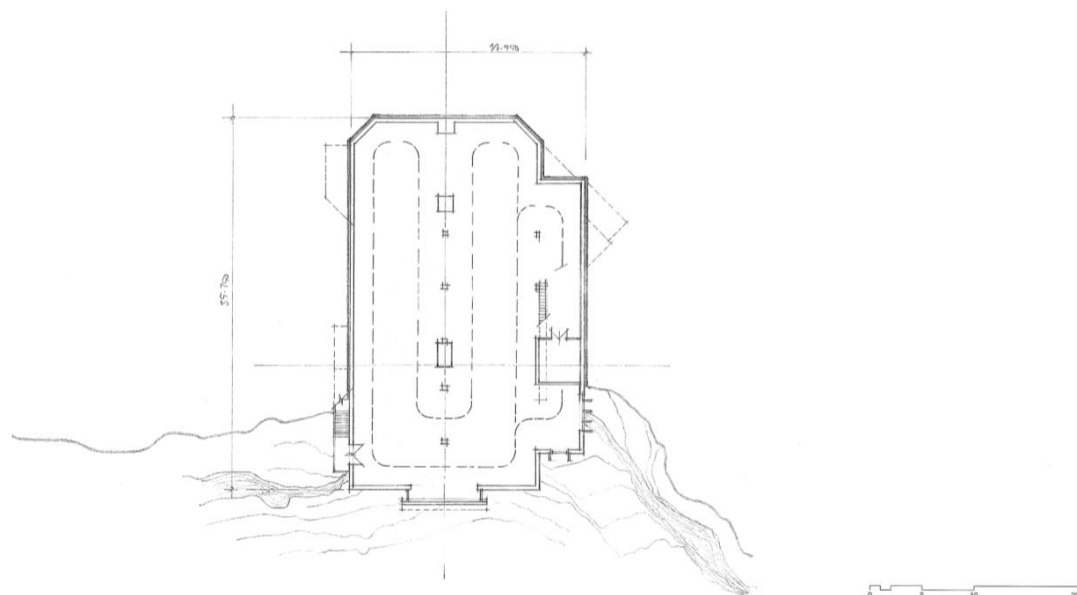
The comms cables will be trenched where possible (from the lower terminal to beyond Hut Flat). The cable will be overground where the rock is a solid welded lava flow. Where possible small rocks will be used to disguise the cables. There will be no power cables required.

**3. Please advise how pedestrian flows will work at the base area. How does the new drive station and chair storage structure impact on the Rangatira chair and walking access out of Happy Valley and access to Meads Wall? Will no vehicular access required in the future to Happy Valley?**

There will be pedestrian access from the gondola terminal down to Happy Valley. Vehicle access to Happy Valley will be from an existing track by Meads Wall. Pedestrians will be able to walk around the south side of the gondola to the Rangatira Chairlift terminal and towards Meads Wall as there is sufficient clearance between the ground level and the suspended cabins and sufficient width as shown in the plans and appended architect's impression.

**4. Can we please be provided a plan view of the lower terminal building including cabin storage, drive as per Image 8 (Does this image just show the lift structure?)**





RUAPEHU ALPINE LIFTS

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CONCEPT DESIGN  
SK 05 A

CABIN STORE - BOTTOM TERMINAL  
ISSUED FOR INFORMATION  
DATE: 21 MAR 2017  
GONDOLA WHAKAPAPA



**5. Regarding the visual impacts of earthworks of lower terminal /return and tower sites, especially in summer time. How will the earthworks for the lower terminal lower the building into the landscape as much as practical?**

It is proposed to create a basement level for the storage of cabins through excavation. This lowers the building into the landform on three elevations (south, east and west). If the cabin storage was not within a basement level it would either result in a doubling of the size of the building footprint or the building being significantly higher from all viewing angles. Accordingly, the excavation will reduce the visual effect of the building height when viewed from the south, east and west.

The earthworks for tower sites and the upper terminal will be restricted to the immediate area and will not extend outwards. The top terminal site is in a modified environment and the earthworks are not to a scale that will cause adverse landscape effects themselves. The visual impact of the tower site earthworks is considered further in (6) below.

**6. Can we please have further assessment of the visual impact of excavated materials, especially on the upper terminal station and tower sites? We understand that some sites will be easily excavated but ones up the waterfall (towers 8-12) are in solid rock. Excavated holes will be much larger than the generic foundation plans state to enable formwork etc to be installed.**



It is recommended that all excavated materials and excavated sites are reinstated as close as practicable to their natural form. Where it is on solid rock there is the ability to rock pin, subject to testing on site. Earthworked / excavated areas will be reinstated to near the natural land form.

The hole for the tower foundations almost perfectly matches the size of the foundation assuming the ground conditions are suitable to support a steep batter. The method is to "pour to country" which means no boxing is used for the concrete work. On the lower mountain this may not be possible if the soil is weak however the excess material is backfilled into the hole as soon as the boxing is removed off the concrete. To summarise, the excavation is the same as the foundation size in most cases.

All excess cut material will be distributed around the tower foundation and in most cases used as surcharge loading to disguise most of the foundation and hide them from sight.

In the lower area of the alignment the excess material can easily be distributed in a way that is not noticeable as there is a lot of loose rock on the ground naturally. Where blasting is required in areas that are comprised of welded rock (if rock pining is not practicable) there is less ability to disguise the blasted rock fragments. At the upper terminal there will be rock used to form the rock face below the floor level on the north side of the terminal building and any excess excavated material could be used to naturalise the Waterfall Express upper terminal location.

Where practicable, excess excavated, or blasted material can be used in the rehabilitation of the WFE tower sites.

Attention will need to be paid to the colour of rocks when placing rocks around the tower foundations after completion of foundation construction. For towers with more prominent footing locations it is recommend reinstating earthworked areas with weathered rock as well as excavated rock where practicable, to assist with blending the colour of excavated rock into the surrounding summer landscape.

***7. Can we please have further assessment of the visual impact of reflections from glass from the upper terminal station? Will the louvres mitigate these?***

Timber fins over the windows will be used to minimise the visual impact of reflections from glass from the upper terminal station. The roof of the terminal is tinted and angled at 45 degrees. This minimises the instances of light reflectivity to the surrounding landscape, by being angled towards the sky. This is in contrast to the existing WFE upper terminal which has no such treatment of glass.

***8. Please advise if you are to use weathered timber building materials or timber that will be left to weather over time.***

Timber building materials will be new and will weather over time. There will be a time where timber appears a brighter colour. This will fade over time to dull grey.



**9. Please provide further information on how the new and replacement buildings will be designed with a consistent suite of materials. The recently constructed Snow Factory and Happy Valley Lift contain materials that are not consistent with those of the existing buildings.**

The building materials proposed to be used for the terminals are consistent with recently constructed buildings such as the Knoll Ridge Cafe. These are listed as being iron sand coloured colour steel, weathered timber cladding, and concrete panels. No bright colours are introduced.

While the TNPMP does not require buildings to be designed to have a consistent visual appearance, this proposal uses the design approach to provide more consistency where practicable. The proposed buildings have a functional requirement and it will not be possible to exactly match them to existing buildings. However, the proposed designs are considered to respond better to the local landscape than the existing WFE terminal buildings, which are more utilitarian in nature.

In my opinion, for the upper mountain; the Knoll Ridge Café colour pallet and use of materials is extremely effective in integrating the building with the landscape. There will be changes in visibility depending on variable light conditions. To draw on these materials and colours for future building upgrades at Whakapapa Ski Area in my view not only meets policy 5.2.4.9 but is also a positive step towards better integration of the historically ad hoc nature of development at the ski area.

The Snow Factory and Happy Valley Lift (both functional structures) are not inconsistent with TNPMP policy 5.2.4.9 – being dark matt colours.

**10. Please explain how the look of the new upper terminal station will fit the general site with respect to the Cat Shed and the building on the old Knoll café site.**

The proposed upper terminal station will provide a better landscape and visual outcome than the existing WFE terminal (to be removed), by; siting the terminal in closer proximity to the Knoll Ridge Café (better consolidation of structures) and having a lower front profile than that of the WFE top terminal. This is consistent with TNPMP Policy 5.2.5.2 *Building development will be concentrated at a minimum number of ski area servicing points.*

**11. Please provide further assessment of the visual impact of the proposed new upper terminal building. It does not appear to be designed to architecturally fit cohesively with the café building through consistent use of materials and design elements” (the curved roof of the building is in contrast to that of the café).**

The proposed upper terminal building has a functional use. The building is comprised of the terminal structure and an architecturally designed building enveloping the terminal on three sides. The architecturally designed building’s external cladding is designed with similar materials and design



elements to the Knoll Ridge Café with timber cladding that will be allowed to weather over time, and natural rock cladding at the base to integrate with the site.

The external design cladding does not cover the top of the terminal structure to minimise additional bulk to the structure, hence the need for the curved roof as a functional element. This contrasts with the WFE top terminal which is a larger structure and more prominent on the downward slope. The WFE has a greater separation to the Knoll Ridge Café and the effect of this is a more dispersed configuration in the landscape.

The proposed upper terminal is designed to have greater landscape and visual integration than the existing WFE top terminal by:

- Being sited in closer proximity to the Knoll Ridge Café and therefore consistent with TNMP Policy 5.2.5.2 *Building development will be concentrated at a minimum number of ski area servicing points*
- Using materials that assist with integration of the building with the site by using natural timber cladding that will weather over time and visually connect with the Knoll Ridge Café, and tinted windows with timber fins, and stone façade on the lower portion of the building to integrate with the surrounding summer landscape (in contrast the WFE chair is over 3 storeys high with solid timber cladding, and foundations are not integrated with the surrounding landscape). This is consistent with TNMP Policy 5.2.5.3 *Buildings will be designed and sited to harmonise with other buildings and with the natural contour of the site.*
- The proposed upper terminal is not sited in a location where it's profile will be prominent on the skyline when viewed from a distance. A backdrop of topography is maintained. This is consistent with TNMP Policy 5.2.5.4 *Buildings should not be sited in locations where their profiles would be prominent on the skyline when viewed from a distance. Applications to undertake infrastructure development on ridge-lines should be declined.*

The proposed upper terminal and Knoll Ridge Café are not under one roof and therefore do not meet Policy 5.2.5.1 *Whenever possible, integration of compatible facilities and / or uses will be required.* In this instance the proposed design is considered to be a better design outcome than a structure under one roof. This is because integration under one roof would create an overall larger structure in the landscape with additional height to the upper terminal building. Given the proposed upper terminal's close proximity to the Knoll Ridge Café; visually it will appear from most viewing points as a combined structure. This contrasts with the existing WFE upper terminal which is viewed in the landscape as a separate structure, and therefore exasperating the effect of built structures spread throughout the landscape.





**12. Please provide further assessment of the visual impact of the lower terminal building's size, especially in relation to the size of other structures there already (Rangitira/ Snow factory).**

The lower terminal is sited within Iwikau Village and near the entrance of the ski area and within the amenities area.

The lower terminal will be a large-scale structure. The proposed gondola lower terminal consolidates the structures of gondola lift and cabin storage under one roof, and places them within the base of the existing ski entrance area. It is acknowledged that the proposed lower terminal with cabin storage will be a large building particularly when viewed in relation to existing buildings in the area – the Rangitira lower terminal and snow factory. In my opinion the location of the lower terminal within the hub of existing buildings at the base of the ski area and within the amenities area, has far greater overall benefits than 'scattering' buildings throughout the ski area and outside of the amenities area.

This approach in my view is consistent with the Tongariro National Park Management Plan 5.2.5 Introduction on building development; that "*Clusters of buildings are preferable to individual buildings scattered across the ski area landscape.*" The base area is the best place in my view for this type of activity to occur.

This approach is also consistent with the TNPMP Policies 5.2.5, to integrate compatible facilities under one roof, concentrate building development to a minimum ski area servicing point. The building is designed and sited to harmonise with other buildings, and while it is not possible to integrate closely with the natural contour of the site given the functional requirements, it is within an already highly modified part of the mountain that has been set aside for ski area operations. It is not sited on a skyline ridgeline and will not be prominent on the skyline when viewed from a distance.

The ski area entrance is visually confined to the immediate surrounding area. Views cannot be obtained until the viewer is within close proximity of the site, and at this point it is viewed in the context of surrounding ski area operations. In contrast to this, if the proposal were to follow the alignment of the original NDC, or the alignment in the previous IDP, this would place new infrastructure into part of the mountain that is more visible to surrounding views and away from more intense ski area infrastructure. In my view this would have far greater impact on the landscape.

The proposed building currently appears out of character with the existing buildings in the base area including Lorenz's Café, ticketing and offices. These buildings have been developed over time in an ad hoc manner to older building standards; many of which are relocatable buildings and not built for purpose or with the site characteristics in mind.

The IDP has signalled a long-term future upgrade of the plaza. Although the detail of this upgrade is not yet determined, should the approach continue to upgrade buildings in Whakapapa to the bespoke architecturally designed character seen at Knoll Ridge Café; in my view the proposed gondola lower terminal will not be out of character with any potential future upgrade of the plaza.

While it is not possible to integrate closely with the natural contour of the site given the functional requirements of the building; it is within an already highly modified part of the mountain that has been

set aside for ski area operations. The proposed building is not sited on a ridgeline and will not be prominent on the skyline when viewed from a distance.

The proposed site is a brown field development – it is already highly modified. The proposed development – while introducing a new large-scale building – will be limited to the existing modified area and will not result in pristine areas of the mountain being affected. Objective 5.2.3 of the Tongariro National Park Management Plan is to concentrate the intense land use of base areas on already-disturbed areas, and Policy 5.2.3.13 is for new developments in the base area to modify a minimum area of natural topography consistent with planned functions. The proposed development is consistent with this policy.

**13. Please provide an image looking downhill of the lower terminal and towers 1 and 2 similar to the one provided for the upper terminal station.**



**14. Please explain how the lower terminal, towers and upper terminal will relate together visually, will they be designed to provide a consistent visual appearance?**

The proposed lower terminal and upper terminal have been cohesively and architecturally designed to combine a similar suite of building materials found in the Knoll Ridge Café. The functional requirements of the terminal buildings will inevitably result in different forms of the terminal buildings. Additional cladding is designed to integrate with and respond to the mountain vernacular that is beginning to emerge at Whakapapa Ski Area. This contrasts with the existing and past terminal structures of the WFE and NDC, which are and were more utilitarian in nature.



While the TNPMP does not require buildings to be designed to have a consistent visual appearance, this proposal uses this design approach to provide more consistency where practicable.

In my opinion, for the upper mountain; the Knoll Ridge Café colour pallet and use of materials is extremely effective in integrating the building with the landscape. There will be changes in visibility depending on variable light conditions. To draw on these materials and colours for future building upgrades at Whakapapa Ski Area in my view not only meets policies 5.2.4.9 and 5.2.5.3 but is also a positive step towards better integration of the historically ad hoc nature of development at the ski area.