

# **THE MANAGEMENT OF SUBURBAN AMENITY VALUES IN WAITAKERE CITY**

*Office of the*  
**PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**Te Kaitiaki Taiao a Te Whare Pāremata**

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**This report is one of three council case studies undertaken as part of an investigation into local authority management of suburban amenity values. Conclusions from the case studies are synthesised in a main report available through Bennetts Government Bookshops. A brief summary of findings is available from this Office on request.**

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### **Bibliographic reference**

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1997. The *Management of Suburban Amenity Values in Waitakere City*. Wellington: Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM SYNTHESIS REPORT

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Suburban intensification (ie increasing housing densities and population densities) can **affect** a city's **infrastructure**, transportation network, the natural environment, heritage places and areas, and amenity values. This investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment focuses on the management of amenity values in suburban residential areas that are subject to intensification.

## Introduction

The term “amenity values” is defined in the Resource Management Act 1991 (**RMA**) as “those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes” (s 2 RMA). Contributing factors to suburban amenity values include public and private open space, historic and cultural heritage, neighbourhood character, vegetation (eg bush, trees and gardens), safety, views, and noise levels.

Significant effects of intensification on suburban amenity values include:

- changes to the streetscape and the combination of the natural and built environment;
- the loss of vegetation, special character, and public and private open space;
- increased **traffic**, noise levels, on-street car parking and the effects of increased **traffic** levels on safety.

Auckland, Christchurch and Waitakere City Councils were chosen as case study councils for the investigation and separate background reports were prepared on how each council is managing suburban amenity values in its city. Relevant information has been drawn together in a synthesis report and in the formulation of good practice guidelines for the management of suburban amenity values.

*(Recommendations have been italicised and their recipients noted in bold type)*

Some residential areas in Auckland, Christchurch and Waitakere Cities are in transition **from** a suburban form to an urban form. Suburban intensification will continue as all three cities have policies to manage urban growth within existing boundaries by encouraging intensification of existing suburban areas. Traditional low density development at one unit per 1,000 **m<sup>2</sup>** was common 10-15 years ago; today, low density development is more likely to be at one unit per 500 **m<sup>2</sup>**.

## Findings

### Urban form and intensifi- cation

As intensification continues, which it must if more sustainable transport and other infrastructural systems are to evolve, there will be changes in amenity values. Some communities consulted during this investigation expected little change in residential amenity values as residential intensification occurred. This is unlikely to be the case. Sustainable management of the total urban environment (eg the adoption of an urban consolidation strategy) will bring changes to local amenity values but these effects can be mitigated with increased management of the urban environment.

## Identification of amenity values

All areas of a city have their own identity and characteristics and, therefore, amenity values. It is appropriate that these characteristics and values are identified by local communities in consultation with councils.

Describing amenity values is difficult as there are subjective aspects to be considered. However, there are aspects that are measurable and that can be identified. From this investigation, it appears that only a few communities have described their neighbourhood amenity values through consultation processes.

## Management of amenity values

The management of amenity values in a neighbourhood that is subject to intensification requires the development of both statutory and non-statutory mechanisms by councils.

Most private amenity values (eg access to sunlight and privacy) can largely be managed by district plan mechanisms. These can include rules on site area, height in relation to boundary, and setback distances, and councils **often** consider these rules as a “package” in managing the effects of residential intensification.

The design of buildings and their relationship to adjacent buildings is a critical issue that affects amenity values as site and housing densities increase. The identification of the design characteristics of an area and the extent to which new buildings can enhance the amenity values of a street or neighbourhood are key factors in the community’s acceptance of intensification. While perceptions of “good design” may change with time, there are universal issues such as the siting, configuration and aesthetic quality of buildings, their relationship to each other or context, and their relationship to the open space around them that need to be considered.

As managers of public open space including parks, reserves, streets and the coastal edge, councils have the ability to maintain or enhance **off-site** amenity values through the management of these assets.

Some areas subject to intensification lack sufficient areas of open space. Increasing the area of public open space would be a significant

response to intensification. It is essential that adequate reserve contributions are obtained from areas subject to intensification to enable councils to purchase additional public open space in those areas. Adequate funds need to be provided to upgrade existing streets, parks and reserves. Streets are valuable public open space and, where appropriate, **traffic** calming measures and landscaping could assist to mitigate any effects of intensification and improve the streetscape.

There has been intense public concern about the loss of urban vegetation which has accompanied residential intensification in some areas. The identification of heritage trees and the use of general tree protection and special indigenous bush zones can assist councils in the management of vegetation cover. The establishment of a green network of ecological linkages also contributes to the management of amenity values.

***It is recommended that all Territorial Authorities recognise the importance of amenity values to communities and use appropriate management techniques accordingly, including those approaches in the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's management of suburban amenity values good practice guide.***

The management of the amenity values of a neighbourhood is a complex undertaking. Councils will need access to expertise including professional staff with urban design, architecture, landscape, heritage and horticultural skills. The insufficient use of professionals with the required expertise to assess effects on amenity values will compromise the adequacy of an evaluation of an assessment of environmental effects for residential **infill** or redevelopment. An urban amenity team could be established with professional staff from all relevant disciplines to individually and collectively comment on any assessment of effects on amenity values. This would include obtaining input from the local community and special interest groups when identifying amenity values.

## **The need for expertise**

The processing without notification of resource consents for some proposed activities has resulted in concerns being expressed by local residents that significant amenity values and other environmental values would be adversely **affected** by the activity. Subject to s 94 RMA, the use of criteria to test if an application should be notified would improve the consistent processing of resource consents.

## **Resource consent issues**

The assessment of cumulative effects on the amenity values of an area is a critical issue in terms of the medium to longer-term changes to amenity values. There are examples where there has been inadequate consideration of the cumulative effects of a series of individual housing developments in a street or neighbourhood in the evaluation of resource consent applications.

The enforcement of conditions on resource consents that relate to amenity values, eg landscaping conditions, is crucial to community acceptance of intensification.

## **Role of central government**

Central government has a role to assist local government in the management of amenity values. New solutions are required to accommodate urban growth within existing city boundaries instead of relying on traditional suburban development. There is very little New Zealand developed research or information to assist councils in planning future urban form to achieve sustainable management of their cities. There is also an inadequate understanding and appreciation of the role of urban design in planning future urban form.

***It is recommended that the Minister for the Environment invest in, and encourage research into, urban design that will be appropriate to New Zealand to provide information to local authorities to assist them in promoting the sustainable management of urban environments and the management of amenity values.***

***It is recommended that the Minister of Science, Research and Technology invest in, and encourage research into, urban form and urban design that is appropriate for New Zealand conditions to assist local authorities with the sustainable management of urban environments.***

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring the changes in amenity values that occur when intensification takes place is a crucial element in the ability of councils to manage amenity values. There are, however, no nationally developed environmental indicators that would assist councils and communities to describe and monitor changes in amenity values.

***It is recommended that the Minister for the Environment develop environmental indicators for amenity values to assist local authorities and communities to monitor and report on the state of amenity values.***

## **Role of major housing providers**

Major housing providers and private landowners have a role in ensuring that amenity values are maintained or enhanced when properties are redeveloped.

***It is recommended that the Minister of Housing direct Housing New Zealand to include, in its Statement of Corporate Intent, information stating the steps that Housing New Zealand proposes to take to assist the Crown in meeting its social objectives in relation to the provision of housing and related services and, in particular, the steps Housing New Zealand proposes to take to address effects on amenity values from the intensification of established residential areas.***

***It is recommended that Housing New Zealand increase the focus on managing the effects on amenity values from the intensification of established residential areas, in accordance with the principal objective of the company (s 4 Housing Restructuring Act 1992) and “having regard to the interests of the community” in which the company operates.***

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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This investigation is the fourth in a series of local authority quality assurance reviews being undertaken by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment under section 16(1)(b) of the Environment Act 1986. The purpose of the reviews is to examine the environmental management of local authorities and to report on good practice.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Background

This investigation focuses on the management of amenity values in established suburban residential areas that are subject to intensification. In the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) the term “amenity values” is defined as:

*those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes (s 2 RMA).*

Definitions and interpretations of amenity values and how amenity values are affected by suburban intensification are discussed in chapter 2 of the Synthesis Report (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 1997). Although the focus of this investigation is on the management of suburban amenity values, the linkages between the management of amenity values and other issues such as transport planning and the provision of infrastructure have been acknowledged where appropriate.

Suburban intensification (ie changing housing densities and population densities) can affect a city’s infrastructure, transportation network, the demand and supply of services, the natural environment, heritage places and areas, and amenity values. The changing housing densities are usually the result of

- suburban **infill** (ie adding another house or houses to a site with an existing house);
- suburban **infill** on vacant or reserve land; and
- redevelopment (ie replacing an existing house with multiple townhouses).

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<sup>1</sup> The first **three** reviews were: *Assessment of Environmental Effects (AEE): Administration by Three Territorial Authorities (1995)*; *Coastal Management: Preserving the Natural Character of the Coastal Environment. Administration by Far North, Tauranga and Wanganui District Councils (1996)*; and *Administration of Compliance with Resource Consents - Report of an investigation of three councils (1996)*.

Auckland, Christchurch and Waitakere City Councils were chosen as case study councils for this review. The selection of a local authority for case study purposes was influenced by the following criteria:

- the council had adopted an urban consolidation strategy or urban growth strategy;
- population growth had been high over the past few years;
- infill** and redevelopment were significant resource management issues; and
- the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values was a significant resource management issue.

Separate background reports were prepared on how each council was managing suburban amenity values in their city and relevant information was then drawn together in the synthesis report and in the formation of good practice guidelines for the management of amenity values.

### **Terms of reference: Waitakere City Council**

1. To review the manner in which the Waitakere City Council is managing amenity values in established suburban residential areas that are undergoing urban intensification.
2. To assess the effectiveness of environmental planning and management by the Waitakere City Council to manage amenity values in established suburban residential areas.
3. To identify areas of good practice in avoiding, remedying or mitigating adverse environmental effects, and to provide advice if appropriate.
4. To report on the outcome of the investigation, and on any recommendations to local authorities, by 20 February 1997<sup>2</sup>; and also in the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's Annual Report to Parliament for the year ending 30 June 1997.

### **Methodology**

The investigation team visited Waitakere City in late August 1996 to meet with the Waitakere City Council and two community boards. In addition, the team met with a selection of agencies, community groups and individuals who have an interest in the amenity values of their neighbourhood or the city. Visits were also made to different residential areas and neighbourhoods to view urban intensification and various projects aimed at enhancing amenity.

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<sup>2</sup> The target completion date could not be achieved because of late responses to the final draft synthesis report.

The city of Waitakere is one of four major cities in the Auckland region. Waitakere City covers 39,134 hectares and has, over the past three decades, become an “edge city” of greater Auckland. The residential areas of the city comprise about one-fifth of the land area of Waitakere City.

## 1.2 Outline of Waitakere City

The city has a diverse social and physical environment. The physical environment includes the West Coast beaches, the Waitakere Ranges, the foothills, the rural areas and a large network of streams. It is also a coastal city bounded by the Tasman Sea and the Manukau and the Waitemata harbours with 150 km of coastline.

The original inhabitants of the area were Te Kawerau a Maki, although the Ngati Whatua people established themselves later in the Waitakere area. European settlement began in the 1830s. Within the city are centres such as New Lynn, Glen Eden and Henderson, based on the pioneering settlements which were developed along the railway line.

Since World War II, the number of people living in Waitakere has grown rapidly. The first stage of the North Western Motorway was completed in 1952 and encouraged suburban growth along the Waitemata Harbour to the east. At the same time, new settlements grew up around the towns of New Lynn, Glen Eden and Henderson and along the Manukau Harbour edge.

Waitakere is now the sixth largest city in New Zealand with a population of approximately 154,000 growing at over two per cent per year over the last ten years. The population was 10,000 in 1920 and 136,715 in 1991. The city continues to experience rapid population growth (the second fastest in New Zealand). The city is a young city with one-quarter of the population being below 15 years and **three-quarters** below 45 years. However, the population is aging with the numbers of middle and older age groups growing rapidly.

Maori comprise eleven per cent of the city's population, Pacific Islanders ten per cent and other ethnic groups from Europe and Asia add to the city's diversity. Immigration from the Pacific Islands in the 1950s and 1960s and later from Asia became significant factors in the city's growth. More recently, the city's high birth rate has meant that natural increase is the main component of the city's growth. However, the economic base has not grown as fast as the population and more than half of the city's workforce now work outside the city.

The district schemes of the former constituent councils had minimal subdivision controls and in 1987-88 the council allowed subdivision to 300 m<sup>2</sup> sections. The Waitakere City Council initiated a plan change in 1991 to standardise the bulk and location rules of the transitional district plan across most residential zones in Waitakere City. Under the present transitional district plan, development to one unit per

350 m<sup>2</sup> is possible anywhere within the residential area provided that there is an existing approval for a dwelling unit on that site, otherwise the minimum site area is 450 m<sup>2</sup>.

The range of communities in Waitakere City includes coastal village settlements, bush living at Titirangi and Laingholm, and the suburban areas of New Lynn, Green Bay, Glen Eden, Kelston, Glendene, Te Atatu, Massey and Ranui. This review is focused on those areas where some **infill** development has occurred or where medium density development is targeted for the future. Within the city there is no one area in which **infill** is predominant. The percentage of properties with more than one unit is an indication of **infill** and in 1993 was:

New Lynn	29.0%
<b>Kelston/Glendene</b>	19.2%
Glen Eden	22.2%
Te Atatu Peninsula	15.1%
Henderson	20.4%
Massey West	12.0%

**Source: Valuation New Zealand**

There are some examples of cluster housing in the city but they have retained the general characteristics of traditional housing forms. There are two older Housing Corporation comprehensive medium density developments and there are two comprehensive developments that have a mix of low and medium density dwellings being constructed at present. As household composition and lifestyles change, a need for more variety of housing other than two to three bedroom houses will become evident.

### 1.3 Eco-city and Agenda 21

In 1992 the city committed itself to a policy of sustainable development. It was the first city in New Zealand to embark on the process of becoming an eco-city which is a city with a commitment to future generations and to the environment the city inhabits. In 1993 the city adopted Agenda 21<sup>3</sup>. A key part of becoming an eco-city is accommodating social, economic and environmental goals simultaneously.

As part of the Agenda 21 approach, Waitakere City has a medium-term goal of consolidating the growth of a mix of residential and commercial development around town centres, railway stations and major highways. This is being carried out for a number of sustainable development reasons. A consolidation policy has been developed with considerable community participation, and is being pursued through promoting and complementing private initiatives.

<sup>3</sup> **Agenda 21 is the outcome of the Earth Summit, a United Nations conference, which addressed global environmental concerns**

An outcome of Agenda 21 for Waitakere City is the priority accorded to strategic planning and on setting priorities for council action based on directions contained in the strategic plans. Generally a consolidation approach to urban development is being pursued along with a promotion of high residential amenity. This is discussed further in chapter 4.1.

The council has placed a strong emphasis on sustainable urban form with the design of development being responsive to the physical and social environment. Overseas work on city form and design has been used in developing a design philosophy that will meet the council's objectives for housing intensification and for transport planning. The design philosophy adopted by the council is different from previous approaches where land developers have usually provided low density subdivisions without much attention being given to the transport, open space and other community requirements that can contribute to amenity values.

The proposed Auckland Regional Policy Statement (Auckland Regional Council<sup>4</sup> 1995) is intended to set a strategic direction for the Auckland region for the integrated management of natural and physical resources.

The strategic direction for the Auckland region is containment of urban development within defined limits and encouragement of intensification at selected places within those limits. Metropolitan Auckland has traditionally accommodated the bulk of its population growth in relatively low density suburban development which has, to a large degree, been an outcome of the community's aspiration for a low density form of living. But this form of development has had a high public cost, particularly in terms of the provision of utility services and transport, as well as the inefficient use of land.

The regional policies to give effect to the objectives for development include:

- the permitting of urban development in defined areas (this policy has been upheld recently in the Environment Court<sup>5</sup>); and
- the promotion of urban intensification around selected nodes and selected transport corridors in defined urban areas.

## 1.4 Regional view of urban development

<sup>4</sup>

*North Shore City Council and others v Auckland Regional Council [ 1996 ] 2 ELRNZ 305.*

Waitakere City is a member of the Regional Growth Forum, convened by Auckland Regional Council to assess the options for future growth in the region while **recognising** the constraints of transport, drainage, topography, heritage areas and the potential loss of amenity values in neighbourhoods.

## 1.5 Consolidation policy

Urban consolidation is one of the core strategies of the council and is one of the major issues facing the city. The consolidation strategy is a key response of council to the constraints to further development. These constraints include:

- ✍ protecting soils to the north of the city, around the air bases;
- ✍ protecting the Waitakere Ranges;
- ✍✍ protecting the upper Waitemata Harbour **from** the effects of development;
- ✍✍ ensuring that stormwater runoff **from** any development in the foothills area is not exacerbated;
- ✍✍ ensuring the **efficient** use and development of existing physical resources, particularly focused on town centres; and
- ✍✍ ensuring the viability of public transport systems, thus reducing dependence on the private motor vehicle (and consequent motorway congestion and high energy consumption).

The council decided that further urban sprawl was unacceptable because of its environmental, social and economic impacts (Waitakere City Council 1996). The city's growth policy comprises:

- ✍ a limited area on the edge of the city is available for urban growth;
- ✍ detached dwellings in established areas of the city ( residential **infill**); and
- ✍ medium density housing' in selected areas.

The need for a consolidation policy was canvassed with the community during the consultation associated with the district plan preparation (Waitakere City Council 1994a). While people realised the need to contain urban sprawl and accommodate the increasing population of the city, there were concerns over the design standards of some **infill** developments.

The recent **charrette**<sup>6</sup> at New Lynn (refer chapter 4.4) has allowed the community and the council to explore the manner in which the consolidation and transport policies might be translated into medium density development and the way in which those amenity values as expressed by the community can be maintained or enhanced.

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<sup>5</sup> Medium density housing is **15-20** dwellings/ha compared to the traditional low density of ten dwellings/ha.

<sup>6</sup> An intensive consultation and group design process.

## 2. AMENITY VALUES OF WAITAKERE CITY

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The district plan defines amenity values as “those natural and physical characteristics of an area that contribute to people’s enjoyment of it”. Landscape, both natural and built, is an important part of amenity values for people. In the urban (living) landscape, the character is described as dominance of residential activities, a feeling of openness and greenness, and quiet (relative to other parts of the urban environment).

### 2.1 Amenity values in the district plan

There is a description of landscape character in the district plan which includes both city-wide elements and local neighbourhood elements.

### 2.2 Description of amenity values

City-wide amenity values are closely tied to the city’s natural landscapes and, in particular, the outstanding landscapes. The urban areas have the Waitakere Ranges as a backdrop and views of the Waitakere Ranges are an important feature of the urban area. The outstanding landscape elements and landscape character are **recognised** and described in the proposed plan at a city-wide, local environment and neighbourhood area scale. Landscape character is defined as “the dominance of residential activities, a feeling of openness and greenness, and quiet (relative to other parts of the urban area)“.

In the residential parts of the urban area, the differences and distinguishing characteristics arise from three factors: section size, housing style and location. Waitakere’s residential areas have a mixed development pattern with no definite character areas but there have been some differences identified between suburbs. The proposed plan includes a description of landscape character for the different suburbs within the city.

Residents in various parts of the city expressed concerns about amenity values as part of the consultation process for the new district plan. Although there was overall support for a range of housing types in the city, there were concerns about **infill** housing which included:

- the quality of housing and housing developments, including relocated houses;
- design issues, particularly in terms of maintenance of privacy for adjacent homes, open space, access and amenity;
- the way these issues impact on the character of the area, neighbourhood and ultimately the city; and
- concerns about on-site and neighbour amenity, including the retention of large trees.

Local area	Landscape elements and character
Older low density suburbs of New Lynn, Green Bay and Glen Eden.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• larger lots (800 m<sup>2</sup> to 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>).</li> <li>dominant cottages, villas, bungalows.</li> </ul>
Kelston, Glendene, Te Atatu South, Te Atatu Peninsula.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>moderate sized lots (600 m<sup>2</sup> to 800 m<sup>2</sup>).</li> <li>houses built since 1945.</li> </ul>
The younger suburbs of Massey, Ranui.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>smaller lots (&lt;600 m<sup>2</sup>) with moderate sized lots and low cost housing</li> </ul>
The new suburbs of West harbour developing above the Waitemata Harbour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>small lots with larger houses, often two storey.</li> <li>important views and strong visual links with the harbour edge and the central city.</li> <li>strong edge city effect.</li> </ul>
The mixed area around Henderson based around the Oratia and Opanuku Streams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mixed activities.</li> <li>residential activities on the fringe of the town centre and commercial area.</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Changes to amenity values

The development of Lincoln Road as Waitakere City's de facto commercial centre in the 1970s and 1980s strongly reinforced the message of a car-oriented society prepared to make few concessions to aesthetics and local community values. This rather utilitarian philosophy is reflected in nearby subdivisions of much the same era. This is a legacy for the Waitakere City Council to deal with in the future.

The communities within the city have identified some of the adverse effects that have arisen from intensification of housing eg increased traffic flows, increasing graffiti, loss of views and loss of privacy. Residents wish to retain those amenity values that are associated with their own private amenity such as private open space, sunlight and daylight. Public amenity values associated with the character of a street or neighbourhood are also important. However, communities have indicated that if intensification is done well, then it would be acceptable.

In preparing the new district plan, the council set parameters for permitted activities at a level that was intended to protect the interests of neighbours. Although residents were able to raise concerns about the thresholds that had been set for permitted activities in the submission process, there were few concerns about amenity standards. The council acknowledges that not all of what may be perceived to be



“adverse effects” can be dealt with as in an urban environment there must be a balance between urban development needs and effects on private amenity values.

Even if the activity is a permitted activity or an application for a resource consent complies with the district plan, there can still be some adverse effects on neighbours’ private amenity values. Residents who have discovered that developments are suddenly started on an adjacent section either because the development was a permitted activity or an application for a resource consent had been processed as a non-notified resource consent have been concerned about the effects of the developments. In neither situation is there an opportunity for the neighbours’ concerns to be taken into account.

The council is aware that some neighbours find out about developments on adjacent sections only when the site is cleared or the builders start work. The council adopted a process of information (rather than an approval requirement) for neighbours of medium density housing developments processed through a non-notified application procedure. Neighbours therefore have knowledge of a development before work begins.



### 3. STATUTORY MECHANISMS

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#### 3.1 District plan provisions

The council's proposed district plan uses an approach that **recognises** both the natural and the built environment. Two layers of management areas form the basis for the management of the effects of activities on natural and physical resources. The first management layer is Natural Areas, defined by certain key resources and the level of protection required to ensure their continued health and survival. The Natural Areas are further divided into six categories.

The second management layer is the Human Environments, defined by the discrete city landscapes and local areas. They form the basis for managing the effects of activities on landscape, amenity values, neighbourhood character and heritage. The Human Environment layer is further divided into 12 categories, one of which is the Living Environment which applies to the suburban residential areas of the city.

The policies in the district plan are organised to relate to the significant resource management issues of the city eg land, water, heritage. Policies relating to the effects of an activity, such as residential activity, are consistent and the effects on the different resources (land, water, air, amenity values) are discussed under each heading.

Significant resource management issues in the district plan include:

- effects on amenity values (other than outstanding landscapes);
- effects on local areas and neighbourhoods. The key factors affecting local areas are changes in section size, style of housing, and loss of the essential character of an area that is derived from the dominant activities such that they no longer contribute to or are a factor in the amenity values of an area;
- effect on amenity values: health and safety; and
- effects on heritage.

The policies and the rules in the district plan have been developed to manage the effects of activities in the city. Protecting and enhancing amenity values is explicitly **recognised** and is divided into two parts in the proposed district plan. The first part covers health and safety issues and the second covers landscapes, local areas and neighbourhood character.

The policies on the protection of amenity values: health and safety relate to:

- noise, odour, and glare;
- provision of private open space;
- overshadowing (adequate levels of daylight);
- privacy;

- safety (of new public and semi-public spaces as well as the safety of roads); and
- public open space.

The policies on landscape are:

- quality and nature of change;
- vegetation; and
- design and appearance of buildings.

### **Non-residential activities**

Several policies relate to ensuring that non-residential activities (in residential areas) should be designed and managed in such a way that they maintain the amenity of the site and the surrounding area.

The controls on non-residential activities (home occupations in particular) within some residential areas of the city have been relaxed compared to previous planning schemes where separation of residential and other activities was more pronounced. The concept behind the relaxation is that the provision of a greater mix of activities at a local level would contribute to a reduction of vehicle trips and associated adverse impacts on amenity values. Residents were concerned that there could be adverse effects on amenity values from the fragmentation of the residential nature of a neighbourhood and there may be conflicts between the provision of mixed land uses in a neighbourhood and the maintenance and enhancement of essentially residential amenity values.

The issue of appropriate location of non-residential activities (home occupations) and the criteria by which their establishment is assessed were raised during this investigation by residents who were concerned about potential loss of amenity values. People were also concerned as to what kind of home occupations would be appropriate for the medium density housing around transport nodes.

## **3.2 Residential activities**

This investigation has focused on the urban and suburban parts of the city where housing intensification is occurring or is likely to occur. The council's strategy for the management of residential development in these areas (referred to in the district plan as Living Environment) is:

- to open up the opportunity for more intensive development but concentrate this around town centres and transport routes; and
- in suburbs with particular character, to reduce the potential for piecemeal **infill** development to help retain the character (particularly open space, trees etc). This will also help to provide a range of housing choices.

The following are the proposed categories of residential activities in the Living Environment:

- single unit or multi-unit development is a permitted activity anywhere within the Living Environment, provided that the minimum area is one unit per 450 m<sup>2</sup>. Standards are also in place to cover privacy, coverage, private open space etc;
- single or multi-unit development is possible on smaller sites, to 400 m<sup>2</sup> per unit in Kelston and Te Atatu and 350 m<sup>2</sup> everywhere else in the living environment except Green Bay/Glen Eden. Such development will require a resource consent as a limited discretionary activity.

In the proposed district plan there is a comprehensive set of Living Environment Rules related to residential activities. The amenity value issues are managed through rules covering: density of development, building location, building height, height in relation to boundary, front yards, building coverage, building location for privacy/amenity, outdoor space, carparking and driveways, noise, air discharges, odour, dust, glare, vibration, signs, works and services, infrastructure.

Controlled activities and limited discretionary activities are regarded as not affecting neighbours and the proposed plan states that applications for resource consents for these activities need not be notified and the written approval of affected parties will not be required. For example any residential activity involving medium density housing which is established on a site of 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> and meets other stated requirements is a limited discretionary activity and does not need affected parties' approval. Any activity involving the relocation of a building onto a site or a **front** yard setback of less than three metres is also a limited discretionary activity. Critical amenity concerns such as height, height in relation to boundary and privacy are discretionary activities, however, and neighbours' approval is required in these areas.

The design guides seek to locate private open space away from the street but to have well used indoor spaces such as kitchen, lounge, dining room etc providing casual surveillance opportunities over the adjoining street. Ideally, houses should be close to the street with no high front fences or landscaping to separate the house **from** the street. Landscaping includes fencing types that should enhance the development and the streetscape. The street is seen by the council as part of the urban fabric rather than just a vehicle route which must be divided off from adjoining housing.

Medium density housing is based on important thresholds including a 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> minimum site area and location within the environs of a town centre, railway station or major **traffic** route. This is to allow flexibility in the establishment of the development, not only to provide a good internal design but also to protect the interests of surrounding properties. Consent is required from the council for medium density

development, subject to a range of strict medium density housing criteria which are designed to provide flexibility for developers and amenity protection for neighbours.

In order to achieve the policy outcomes in respect of amenity values, the council has reserved considerable discretion in the rules with the use of qualitative assessment criteria. Amenity values will be maintained or enhanced 'partly through the implementation of the rules and the manner in which the assessment criteria are interpreted. Design guidance is provided in the district plan with the use of diagrams to give applicants an indication of the way in which a rule can be interpreted.

### **Heritage**

The city's heritage includes buildings, trees, native vegetation, habitat and wildlife, natural features, the city's outstanding landscapes, the character and amenity of older suburbs and local neighbourhoods, places of memory and sacred places such as cemeteries.

There was an in-depth analysis of character values of different parts of the city in the preparation of the district plan. Following this analysis, it was decided that there were no areas with sufficiently definable character to be given particular attention in respect of amenity values. The general approach of limiting densities in some parts of the city, particularly the older parts, **recognises** the character value of maintaining larger site areas.

The identification of heritage buildings and trees preceded the district plan notification, with some 200 heritage trees being recorded. Of these, some 70 trees have been identified as having particular importance to warrant protection under the district plan. There is a list of heritage items that are subject to controls through the district plan. Additions or alterations to a heritage item are limited discretionary activities and assessment criteria include whether the exterior alterations protect the heritage value and neighbourhood character.

### **Tree protection**

The City-wide Rules include rules relating to a schedule of listed trees. The trimming or pruning of any listed tree is a permitted activity (ie there are no rules) whereas the removal of a listed tree or any activity proposed within the **dripline** of a listed tree is a limited discretionary activity. The Natural Areas Rules include rules for vegetation cutting and clearance, earthworks, impermeable surfaces, and establishment of vegetation. The General Natural Area rules apply to vegetation clearance (ie tree protection). Cutting and clearing of vegetation under certain heights and diameter plus the trimming and pruning of vegetation is a permitted activity.

The cutting and clearing of native (indigenous) vegetation 3.0 metres or more in height or 300 mm or more in girth and of exotic vegetation 6.0 metres or more in height or 600 mm in girth or more is a limited discretionary activity. One of the assessment criteria is “the extent to which cutting and clearance adversely affects amenity values and neighbourhood character”. Another is “the extent to which the cutting is to preserve public views”.

### **Subdivision Rules**

The Subdivision Rules include some for the regulation of **infill** subdivision with the assessment criteria including: the extent to which the subdivision design **recognises** the natural qualities of the land and encourages strong and positive amenity values and neighbourhood character by providing for sufficient open space; and **recognising** the natural values of streams, vegetation and fauna habitat. The Subdivision Rules cover all standards relating to the subdivision of land in the city. The Human Environment Rules cover the placement of buildings on a site and its relation to adjacent properties.

### **Effect of these provisions on managing amenity values.**

The policies relating to the protection of the city’s amenity values are expected to achieve the following:

- integration of developments with surrounding landscape elements, landscape character and neighbourhood character of each part of the city, such that the significance of the latter is retained;
- improvement of the overall open and vegetated landscapes, local areas and neighbourhoods as a significant factor in defining the amenity of the city;
- increased variety of housing and location of housing within the urban area of the city;
- vibrant, interesting town centres;
- accessible, safe and attractive pedestrian networks into and through town centres;
- retention and enhancement of the range and quality of streetscapes within the city and of the links between street and private land; and
- safe, attractive public open space.

### **Effects on neighbours**

Even when a neighbour’s approval is sought for aspects of discretionary activities, there are problems if the neighbour either doesn’t understand the plans, is not told clearly of the proposed development, or is harassed into signing the consent form. A new system was introduced in December 1996 whereby the council advises neighbours individually that their approvals are required and asks them to contact the council with any query or concern they have.

### **Reaction to proposed plan**

There are interested parties in the housing market, such as Housing New Zealand, that **in** the past have had a major influence on the style

and form of residential housing in the city. In submissions on the district plan, Housing New Zealand requested a change to Rule 7 of the Living Environment section to allow a greater than 40 ~~per~~ cent site coverage to be a limited discretionary activity and to remove Rule 16 in the same section to allow for relocated buildings in order to allow for more flexibility in urban intensification for the company.

Some of the land developers consulted during this investigation (August to September 1996) were not convinced of the merits of the council approach to design of **infill** housing or comprehensive developments nor of the discretion given to **staff** to interpret the criteria. In some instances, higher development costs were a constraint to a company pursuing medium density development opportunities within the city.

Another developer was of the view that the council is creating amenity values rather than following the RMA in maintaining or enhancing amenity values. This land developer considered the rules were difficult to interpret and that a design-based approach and medium density housing would not deliver a neighbourhood of high amenity values.

Council ran a staff/developers workshop in early December 1996 to set out the council's intentions and to discuss issues relating to medium density housing and other developments. This workshop was run by consultants involved in the New Lynn charrette workshop process. Council staff and a number of developers were present. At the workshop the council was complimented on the approach and flexibility of the proposed district plan, the consultative approach council took to developments and the outcomes that were being achieved.

### 3.3 Monitoring

The council's monitoring programme, as outlined in the proposed district plan, is divided into four main areas:

- ≠ state of the environment monitoring;
- ≠ monitoring to gauge the suitability and effectiveness of the plan;
- ≠≠ procedures monitoring; and
- ≠≠ resource consents monitoring.

Monitoring the environmental outcomes of the district plan, in terms of environmental gains and losses, is one of the most critical elements in the management of amenity values and all other ecosystem needs of urban communities.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the policies and methods, the council intends to set up a monitoring programme. It will include surveys of people's perceptions of the quality and amenity values of the environment, neighbourhood character, local area character, and their access to open space and recreational facilities.



Social impact assessment (SIA) is regarded as necessary by the Titirangi Residents Association and the council expects to use SIA as a monitoring tool in the future.

Monitoring of the effects of activities such as home occupations in residential areas would be needed in order for council to assess the cumulative effects on amenity values and any social fragmentation.

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## 4. NON-STATUTORY MECHANISMS

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### 4.1 Strategic planning

Waitakere City Council has devoted considerable resources to ensuring its strategic directions for the city are set and that the different strategies fit into a coherent whole. This process has taken four to five years and is reaching the end of the intensive phase of work.

The council adopted a strategic plan in 1993 “City Futures Strategic Directions”. The urban development policies in this strategy include:

- protecting the Waitakere Ranges;
- preserving the rural character of the foothills;
- **recognising** infrastructure opportunities/constraints; and
- promoting quality, affordability and high amenity values.

Greenprint was drafted in 1995 and identifies the key changes required for Waitakere City to become an eco-city and the actions council would take. Some of the main themes of the Greenprint are to:

- improve the urban environment;
- promote urban consolidation and town centre revitalisation;
- promote community linkages in suburban areas;
- support Safer Community Council;
- support public transport; and
- encourage economic development for the city, with an emphasis on local jobs (Waitakere City Council 1996b).

The council is devising an urban consolidation strategy which will help in the achievement of a range of council actions:

- Town Centre Revitalisation programme;
- Parks Strategy;
- Transport Strategy;
- Green Network Programme (to restore streams, bush areas to increase health of ecosystem and people’s enjoyment of natural areas);
- Leisure Strategy; and
- Waitakere District Plan.

Some of these strategies are in preparation but all relate back to the Greenprint to encourage consistent policy responses by the council. The council’s view is that it is difficult to develop an annual plan without having a longer-term view of significant resource management issues.

## 4.2 Urban strategy

The urban consolidation strategy is to encourage future dwelling growth around town centres and along transport corridors, creating urban villages with the following features:

- significant numbers of people living and working close to the town or village centre;
- mixed use development; and
- well-designed streets that maximise connections and are safe and people-friendly.

Waitakere City Council is promoting the redesign of parts of the city so that people can live within walking distance of a range of facilities including buses, schools, shops, libraries, parks and railway stations. The council has drawn on the principles of “traditional neighbourhood development” also known as “new urbanism” to guide the development of the city and has sought advice from overseas consultants (refer appendix 2 for more details of “new urbanism”). This is done through the creation of a number of urban villages which have the following characteristics:

- the neighbourhood has clear boundaries and focuses on its centre;
- the neighbourhood is limited in size to approximately 400 m (ie equivalent to a five minute walk) from its centre to its perimeter to facilitate pedestrian access and public transport use;
- there are mixed land uses in close proximity including housing types, shops, work places, public buildings and squares to minimise vehicular use; and
- the neighbourhood has, or has the potential for, good and safe connectivity, particularly for pedestrians; and preferably a transport node eg railway station or bus route.

In addition, the council expects that increased densities would arise from the conversion of industrial/commercial land to residential activities and the promotion of higher intensity than normal development on undeveloped lots.

## 4.3 Town Centre Revitalisation

The council has a ten year strategy on revitalisation of town centres based on the level of business commitment, public support and compatibility with the city’s strategic goals. The 1996/97 year is year four of the programme. In 1992 the Henderson Mainstreet programme commenced with stage three being implemented this year. Upgrading of the Titirangi village centre was completed in 1993. Initiatives at Te Atatu Peninsula, New Lynn, Glen Eden and Green Bay are programmed for the 1996/97 financial year. (Waitakere City Council 1996) There will be quite different outcomes from each of these revitalisations which will reflect the diversity in the city’s people.

## 4.4 Future planning

In March 1996, an intensive workshop process known as a charrette took place to visualise the future design of the New Lynn town centre using “new urbanism” design principles. The charrette involved local residents, the regional council, Trans Metro, businesses, developers, interest groups, council staff and consultants in an intensive consultation and group design process in which the community’s knowledge and special interest expertise was an important component. The New Lynn town centre is important as it is a transport hub for the city and intended to be one of the centres of medium density housing in the future. The charrette was preceded by a staff training workshop in January 1996.

Publicity for the charrette involved preliminary meetings with interest groups, media information, targeted mail-outs, letters to ratepayers, newsletter deliveries in the surrounding area and radio coverage before and after the event. Local residents were encouraged to attend through letter drops. The three questions which formed the basis of the initial part of the charrette were:

- ⌞ what do you like about New Lynn?
- ⌞ what don’t you like about New Lynn? and
- ⌞ what would be an improvement?

Through the charrette process the community was, in effect, articulating the amenity values of their neighbourhoods and addressing a range of issues in one forum including heritage, safety, transport, and concerns of businesses.

The outcome of the five day charrette was the drafting of comprehensive drawings of a structure for the New Lynn centre and the surrounding neighbourhoods. The benefit of the process was that information sharing between the various participants was encouraged. Following the charrette weekend, comment on the outcomes is being sought by the council and there are follow-up tasks to complete. Follow-up tasks include provision in the council’s annual plan for the 1996/97 year for several developments to build on private initiatives (eg footbridge across a stream, development of a stormwater quality/detention pond) as well as council’s Town Centre Revitalisation Programme designed to knit together commercial areas, including road and pedestrian links. There has been interest in medium density housing following the New Lynn charrette and the council has promoted and facilitated the kind of development that ensures a high standard of development and long-term robustness of urban amenity values.

A similar Community Design Workshop has commenced for the Glen Eden town centre but the timeframe has been lengthened so that there is sufficient feedback of ideas to the community within the process. The community was involved in safety surveys and heritage assessments prior to the commencement of the workshop process as

well as a lengthy period of pre-meetings with retailers, residents and interest groups.

## 4.5 Open space

The city has over 400 parks and reserves covering 824 hectares located throughout the city area and includes open space for both passive and active recreation. This is approximately ten per cent of the residential area of the city.

### Green Network

The Green Network is an important element in the city's open space provision and comprises four Natural Areas described in the district plan viz riparian margins, protected areas of outstanding native vegetation, coastal areas and managed areas of significant native vegetation. It links existing open space, streams and bush remnants into an ecologically continuous network extending from the Ranges, along the stream and road networks, and across open spaces, to the sea. Council has identified and mapped a Green Network comprising the margins of streams, rivers and lakes, coastal margins, areas of native bush, and linkage areas that have the potential to be replanted as "ecological corridors" between isolated bush fragments. The Green Network serves a number of ecological and natural hazard purposes as well as enhancing visual amenity in the city.

### Other strategies

Council has developed a Leisure Strategy (Waitakere City Council 1994b) and is developing a Parks Strategy. The Parks Strategy will identify the means by which the goals for open space will be implemented. One criterion to be used for the provision of a new park is based on a 400 metres walking distance to a neighbourhood park. The Parks Strategy will **identify** where new sports grounds are needed.

The reserves contributions of either land or funds to provide for public open space that can now be levied for **infill** developments, implemented by cross-lease, will contribute to the ability of the council to plan for parks in these areas.

The Auckland Regional Council's draft open space strategy is one of the resource documents available to the council in its planning. There are various issues that could be addressed in the Parks Strategy including:

- whether there is a lack of quality open space in some parts of the city;
- whether there is a need to rationalise the public open space within any one area;
- the pressures for council to use some reserve land for roading purposes eg the Hart Domain in Henderson and the need for public open space to compensate for this kind of loss; and

the management of weeds and pests in council parks and reserves, and weeds spreading from one area to another.

Council has commissioned a weeds strategy recently to address the issue of the spread of weeds in council parks and reserves and their management.

The organisation is a branch of the national organisation Keep New Zealand Beautiful Inc that aims to create a beautiful city, attractive to residents, tourists and visitors. It is a council community initiative to reduce litter and **graffiti**, clean up streams, plant trees on streets and parks and contribute to the city council's Strategic Plan objectives in such areas as environmental quality, town centre upgrading, leisure and recreation. Since 1989 Keep Waitakere Beautiful Inc has assisted in cleaning up streams which have often been neglected where factories owned land to the stream bank and waste was deposited in the stream. However, not all stream cleanups have been ecologically successful; in one instance mature indigenous trees were removed as part of cleanup and it took years for the stream bank to recover.

#### **4.6 Keep Waitakere Beautiful Inc**

There are related initiatives. For example there is a scheme to link a school with their local park. The scheme "Eco Gecko" comprises both classroom and outdoor activities for children.

The organisation also works with the Plunket Society with the "Trees for Babies" programme in which a grove or a number of trees are planted for the babies born in the city. There are about four of these events per year.

In October 1995 council resolved to proceed with the development of the northern residential zone of the Harbour View Estate in accordance with a concept plan. The total area, comprising some 110 hectares on the harbour edge, was transferred from the Harbour Board to the council in 1989. Consultation with the community over the use of the land has been carried out since 1992 and some concerns have been raised with the Commissioner as to the use of the **land**<sup>7</sup>.

#### **4.7 Harbour View development**

Waitakere Properties Ltd, the council's local authority trading enterprise (LATE), assumed control of the Harbour View land in July 1996 after preparing the necessary plans and obtaining resource consents on behalf of council in 1995. The proposed subdivision is expected to contain some 425 units in a mix of low and medium density development. There is expected to be a significant amount of high quality open space, including the coastal margins.

<sup>7</sup> Investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, January 1997.

Council sees one of its roles to be the promotion of good design and one of the ways to achieve this is through undertaking **joint ventures** or demonstration projects incorporating particular design features. The subdivision has been designed using the council's design requirements based on "new **urbanism**" principles whereby the roading network reflects connections between streets, some of the houses face onto open space areas and the internal living areas of homes are located to overlook the streets in order that safety of individuals on the streets is enhanced.

## 4.8 Consultation

The most important non-regulatory mechanism to maintain and enhance amenity values, in the council's view, is consultation with the community.

### Developers

Council staff spend time with developers who wish to undertake a medium density development to ensure that the council rules are interpreted in a manner that will achieve the council's design objectives. Because the district plan reserves discretion on the compliance with the rules, through the assessment criteria, there are times when discussion may not resolve all the design issues. There are one or two substantial development companies who have decided not to build in Waitakere City because of what is perceived to be criteria that are interpreted too restrictively. However, smaller companies have demonstrated that medium density development can be achieved and there is a market for the smaller units within a mixed density development.

### Community

Council has consulted extensively during the preparation of the district plan, through the development of the various strategies and plans and through the charrette and urban design workshop processes (described in chapter 4.4). The district plan consultation comprised:

- over 30 meetings with residents in different localities;
- surveys of 200 interest groups and individuals as to what the major issues might be;
- seeking feedback from approximately 500 groups and individuals on a series of environmental issues papers;
- consideration of responses to questions in the council's household annual survey;
- consideration of submissions to the annual plan and strategic plan; and
- meetings with sector groups including business, youth and other interested parties.

The council received 1300 submissions to the district plan with some 7,000 separate points for consideration. There were few submissions



on the rules relating to amenity values in the plan. The council plans to develop a consultation strategy in 1997 to build on the processes used to date.

Planning for transport has included improving connections between activities by regularising street patterns in residential areas. There is also an ongoing programme of traffic calming, reducing road widths to ensure that residential streets are safer and that there is less stormwater generated from the impervious surfaces.

## **4.9 Street design and street tree strategy**

Street tree planting can be carried out either by Keep Waitakere Beautiful or by the Roding and Traffic section of the city council. There is a plan for planting streets using selected species for different areas and funding allocated through the annual plan. Coordinated tree planting of major routes and key points within the city is carried out according to a street tree strategy.



## 5. KEY ISSUES FOR COUNCIL'S MANAGEMENT OF AMENITY VALUES

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Although the need to contain urban **sprawl** appears to be **recognised** by the council and communities, there are concerns about the potential changes in private amenity values ie the loss of sunlight, loss of privacy that can arise. The interested parties with a real stake in the outcome of the urban intensification policy are the residents of the city. They have quite clearly stated that unless the design of such developments is high quality, then the vision for medium density housing in urban villages will not be accepted in the future.

To accommodate the anticipated growth will require development at greater densities than New Zealanders are traditionally used to. The design approach to intensification can ensure that development is appropriate to the site and the area. Good design can improve accessibility, promote safety, assist social cohesion, and identify and generally contribute to social well-being which includes amenity values.

The mechanisms being used by the council have included design guidance in the district plan, the urban design workshop and the promotion of a development through the council's business arm.

Although the council has endeavoured through the district plan to provide clear design guidance, the developers who build the houses will have more influence on the style and design of such housing. The use of a model, eg Waitakere Development's Harbour View project, may provide the impetus for a greater acceptance of the concept of medium density development provided economic, environmental and design objectives can be achieved. There is also the issue of transparency of costs as the private sector is unlikely to pursue these concepts unless they are also economic. The concept of a council facilitating new forms of housing development was used in the 1960s in Auckland with the Freeman's Bay urban renewal where the then Auckland City Council started the renewal but left further redevelopment to the private sector.

The council approach to the design of **infill** housing or comprehensive developments and the discretion given to **staff** to interpret the criteria has been raised as an issue. Council's intention to hold workshops with developers to explain the issues related to medium density housing is to be commended.

### 5.1 Communication of vision for intensification

The need for information on the “new urbanism” principles is not confined to land developers. A recent article in the *National Business Review* (under the heading Town Planning, 13 December 1996) gave an impression of “new urbanism” as “Disneyfication” rather than as an attempt to develop more sustainable urban forms. There are many international examples of new urban forms that could be adapted to New Zealand. Waitakere City Council is endeavouring to be innovative in evolving urban form beyond the “quarter acre paradise.” The need is to evolve to a South Pacific urban form that is adaptable to different climatic and environmental factors in New Zealand. It is unfortunate that there is very little New Zealand research or information that could assist councils on planning for future urban form to achieve sustainable management of cities. The relationships between transport corridors and residential density, and housing and public/private open space will need to be examined for New Zealand as few imported models are likely to be **fully** compatible with local attitudes and physical conditions.

The council has a continuing role in informing the wider community of the benefits to the city of developing new urban forms. The council needs a commitment to monitoring the outcomes of the intensification process, including the medium density developments, in the future in order to be able to assess whether the environmental outcomes are being achieved.

## 5.2 Administration of the district plan

In order for a design approach to urban intensification to succeed, council staff require a high level of knowledge of urban design matters (currently assisted by a consultant to the council), skill in discussing and interpreting plans, and a monitoring base in order to assess whether the policies for urban consolidation are delivering the expected outcomes in the future.

The proposed district plan may be “resource hungry” to administer, with its concept of natural and urban ecological areas and the complexity of layering the natural and human environments. This plan requires a strong ecological understanding of the effects on both the natural and urban ecological systems. The council is aware that planning staff at the counter need sufficient training in order to give accurate advice to people, especially those who would plan only one medium density development. Similarly, the concept of a team approach to discussion of designs for comprehensive developments in the early stages of a potential development is sound.

However, the management of any complex ecological/human community system is going to require detailed information if councils and other interested parties are to note the effects of resource uses. The effects-based planning system requires considerable information and sophistication to administer and the council is to be commended

for **recognising** this in its development of the statutory planning responsibilities.

The council has identified limited discretionary activities that are not expected to **affect** neighbours in the Living Environment section of the proposed district plan. These activities do not require the approval of adjoining parties. There were no significant submissions on that part of the plan structure. Instead of the applicant being required to obtain written approval from affected parties as part of an application, the council is assuming the role of assessing any environmental effects on **affected** parties. The evaluation of an application will require the council to assess whether the effects are minor or not and whether all the potential environmental effects have been **recognised**. It will be difficult to do this for effects on amenity values without input from affected parties.

Since the effects-based approach of the proposed district plan is new, it may be useful for council to require the written approval of affected parties for limited discretionary activities so that their views can be explicitly taken into account in decision making. This would also build up an information monitoring database on the extent to which the council evaluation of effects (as minor or not) aligns with the assessment of effects by the affected parties. **If**, after a period of time, the assessments are closely aligned then the need for written approval could be reviewed. In effect, the “threshold” of minor effects on neighbours would be reviewed through such monitoring.

The council has addressed the issue of personal safety within a community in a number of ways and has made strong linkages between the work of the Safer Community Council and other mechanisms such as the district plan. Many of the rules relating to residential activities in the district plan eg the placement of houses on a section, the requirement for living areas to face onto a street and for houses to face onto reserves are concerned with the health and safety aspects of amenity values.

### 5.3 Safety in the community

The land developers consulted during this investigation did not agree with the need for the district plan rules to manage these safety aspects and saw that there were other ways of addressing personal safety. The community may not have realised the implications of these rules and how the rules would **affect** the way they live in their houses and in streets. There could be other more important living parameters such as having a secure and sunny back yard for children to play. The extent to which use of district plan rules to achieve personal safety objectives and not achieve other objectives such as energy efficiency should be re-evaluated. The promotion of community initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch may be more appropriate to achieve community safety objectives.

## 5.4 Assessment of council performance

A summary assessment of the Waitakere City Council's performance in terms of managing amenity values in established suburban areas subject to intensification is shown in the following table.

PCE CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING COUNCIL PERFORMANCE	ASSESSMENT
The council has identified amenity values in specific areas.	Yes, but more guidance could be provided.
The implications of urban growth and urban consolidation policies for the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values is considered by the council.	Yes. The council has clearly considered the implications of growth and urban sustainability in preparing its new district plan.
The council has developed policies and practices to maintain and enhance amenity values.	Yes, particularly with the development of the medium-density housing provisions...
The council integrates the use of various environmental planning mechanisms to maintain and enhance suburban amenity values in specific areas.	Yes. The strategic development of various policy and plans will assist integrated management. The "Greenprint" will provide; for an integrated network of green space.
The council implements agreed priorities for the maintenance and enhancement of suburban amenity values.	Yes.
Parties affected by changes to suburban amenity values are meaningfully consulted by the council at appropriate times prior to final decisions being made (eg during strategic planning, the development of urban growth and urban consolidation policies, and the identification of suburban amenity values).	Yes but some problems with non-notification of particular developments.
Community action is encouraged by the council to maintain and enhance suburban amenity values.	Yes, through participation in the Trees for Babies programme, litter cleanup, and tree planting.
The council monitors and reports on the state of amenity values.	Not at the present time but the council intends to do this.
Amenity values are maintained and enhanced to a degree which meet community aspirations.	Mostly yes, isolated incidents where this is not the case. Some unease in community about future intensification and medium density housing.

## 6. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 6.1 Findings

1. Waitakere City is in a transition stage as it moves from a low density suburban housing pattern to a future pattern of having medium density housing in selected nodes as well as retaining selected areas of lower density housing.
2. The council has **carefully** linked the strategic direction of becoming an eco-city to the various plans and strategies developed over the past five years, including urban consolidation policies, to the benefit of the management of amenity values in the city.
3. The council has based many of the policies and rules in the proposed district plan on the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values and has clearly articulated the effects of activities such as residential housing on the different amenity values. The plan does not just “have regard to” these values but stresses their importance to the city.
4. Council has used a mix of regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms to maintain and enhance amenity values.
5. Council has **recognised** the complexity of the urban ecosystem and the need for detailed information to administer an effects-based planning system which will maintain and enhance amenity values.
6. The emphasis on design of residential activities in the proposed district plan is a key element in the management of amenity values for areas that are subject to intensification. The council has been innovative in researching international approaches to assist in planning for new urban forms.
7. Not all of the interested parties agree with the concept of medium density development because of the potential for a perceived lack of market demand and concern about the discretion in the assessment criteria in the rules for comprehensive medium density development.
8. The use of the Waitakere Properties Ltd development at Harbour View has the potential to demonstrate the advantages of medium density development for the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values.
9. The Green Network of ecological linkages in a city is an innovative concept which will enhance amenity values in some areas.

10. The rules in the proposed district plan relating to safety of individuals in the community may be inappropriate for New Zealand society.

11. **Consultation** with the community has been extended by the use of a consent information system to assist residents who need information on the role of affected parties in giving approval to an adjacent development.

## **6.2 Recommendations To the Waitakere City Council:**

1. Review those rules in the proposed district plan relating to safety of individuals in the community to assess their acceptability and effectiveness.
2. Continue with education of all interested parties as to the benefits of medium density housing as a more sustainable urban form within the city.
3. Assess the applicability and adaptability of the principles of “new urbanism” to the Waitakere urban ecosystem.

## **6.3 Waitakere City Council response**

A formal response to these findings and recommendations is in appendix 3 at the end of this report.



## 7. GOOD PRACTICE

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- **Strategic planning and policy development for the eco-city concept:** Council has taken the time to develop consistent strategies and policies for many of the significant resource management issues and to **recognise** and make the linkages between the various policies and strategies.
- **Consolidation strategy:** This strategy has recognised that greenfields developments have social, environmental and economic costs, and that a consolidation strategy is a core strategy to manage the population growth and respond to changing households and lifestyles.
- **Use of expertise:** The council has recognised the value, and hence, utilised international urban research and development expertise in developing strategies and designs for more sustainable urban forms.
- **Use of design principles:** Council has used design principles to ensure that amenity values can be maintained or enhanced in neighbourhoods.
- **Proposed district plan:** There is clear provision within the proposed district plan for the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values while **recognising** the complexity of the urban ecosystem.
- **Green Network:** The concept of the Green Network to **link** the various open spaces and ecological areas within the urban and suburban areas of the city is an innovative approach and consistent with the goal of having an eco city and enhancing amenity values.
- **Early consultation with land developers:** Council has made considerable efforts to meet with land developers before an application for housing activities is lodged with council. The ability to discuss the design requirements of a proposal before a lot of detailed drawing has been done is an investment in getting a development to match the council's and community's requirements more closely.
- **Consent information system:** The consent information system to assist **affected** persons with any query they may have about giving approval for a residential development assists the provision of information.

*LL* **Keep Waitakere Beautiful:** The community and council partnership will improve amenity values by reducing the amount of graffiti and improving the planting of appropriate **vegetation**. A number of initiatives by the organisation have targeted different groups within the community to facilitate their contribution to their environment.

## REFERENCES

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Waitakere City Council 1996b: Greenprint Waitakere. Final draft • July 1996.

Waitakere City Council 1995: *Waitakere City Proposed District Plan* 1995. Waitakere City Council.

Waitakere City Council 1994a. Report on Environmental Policy Public Consultation Programme Sept 1994.

Waitakere City Council 1994b. Leisure Strategy. Adopted September 1994.

Waitakere City Council 1993. City Futures Strategic Directions.



## Appendix 1 Consultation list

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Auckland Regional Council

Fletcher Homes Limited

Kingston Morrison Architects

Ministry for the Environment: Head Office, Auckland and Christchurch

New Zealand Arboricultural Association

New Zealand Institute of Architects

New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects

New Zealand Planning Institute

Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society National Office

The Tree Council, Auckland

Titirangi Residents Association

Universal Homes

University of Auckland, School of Architecture

University of Auckland, School of Planning

Venture Homes Ltd

Waitakere City Community Boards: Henderson and New Lynn

Waitakere City Council

Waitakere Properties Limited

West Auckland Branch Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society

The investigation team also met with a number of individuals from Waitakere City.

## Appendix 2 “New urbanism” and urban design

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A “new” model of urban form called “new urbanism” has been proposed’ as an alternative to continuing suburbanisation. The principles and characteristics of “new urbanism” build on established urban design practice. The “new” form is intended to address the environmental issues associated with urban sprawl; namely demands for new infrastructure, increased traffic flows, inefficient energy use, and the development of rural areas with significant natural values. Proponents of “new urbanism” argue that typical suburban development has created many **unrecognised** social, economic and environmental costs. Historical planning decisions to zone for the separation of different land uses and the typical suburban form has resulted in dormitory suburbs, large sections, and **inefficient** public transport systems.

“New urbanism” mirrors traditional small town design with blocks of villages consisting of a cluster of housing around a central place (eg town square or central park) where the optimal size of a **neighbourhood** is 0.5 km from the centre to the edge. The three key principles of “new urbanism” are:

1. increased housing density: one dwelling per 300 m<sup>2</sup> with a mix of detached, semi-detached and terrace housing and apartments;
2. public open space: the creation and enhancement of parks, squares, and public space for people to gather and interact; and
3. design guidelines: elaborate design and planning controls to enhance design and streetscapes (Adler 1995).

Features of “new urbanism” include:

- ≡ efficient use of open space with larger public areas and smaller private backyard areas;
- ≡ mixed use developments with housing, shopping, entertainment and other land uses;
- ≡ a hierarchy of interconnecting streets with a selection of travel routes, narrower streets in residential areas, and few cul de sacs;
- ≡ design incorporates the needs of pedestrians and public transport users;
- ≡ the use of urban boundaries beyond which growth is prohibited;
- ≡ garages are **placed** behind houses or to the side to enhance streetscapes;
- ≡ a mixture of housing types is provided;
- ≡ planting of streets;
- ≡ the potential for public transport is enhanced through higher densities and nodal development, and zoning and land use controls support the use of public transport; and
- ≡ town centres are promoted as geographical reference points and as a focus of civic life.

“New urbanism” has been **criticised** on the grounds that it is not the type of development that people want to live in, because people live in communities of interest (eg young singles, families with children, the elderly), in areas where they can afford and not in

mixed areas. They suggest that more exclusivity and separation of different groups is required.

However, the principles of “new urbanism” are slowly being adopted in several ways. Transit Oriented Development has been undertaken in overseas cities such as Portland, Vancouver, Sacramento and Melbourne with the linking of public transport corridors and nodes, increased densities, mixed land uses, interconnecting street systems, and design of development to serve pedestrian and public transport users (Caimcross 1996).

In Australia, a study has been undertaken to quantify the relationship between greenhouse gas emissions, energy requirements, and the form and design of new neighbourhoods. The major conclusion of the study was that in comparison with conventional subdivision design (ten dwellings per hectare), substantial savings in energy requirements and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (42 per cent) could be achieved through optimising land use and transport-related factors to reduce car travel, and by optimising the siting of dwellings and design to reduce heating and **cooling**-related emissions. Traditional neighbourhood designs with net residential densities of 25 dwellings per hectare and mixed use developments provided higher levels of emission and energy savings than dwelling-related changes such as additional insulation (Loder & Bayly *et al* 1993).

In New Zealand in 1995 the Auckland Regional Council commissioned the preparation of urban design guidelines to shape a more public transport-supportive urban form that follows many of the principles of “new **urbanism**” (Caimcross & Crosby 1995). The guidelines are now part of the regional land transport strategy and can be used for new developments or to retrofit the existing built environment. The guidelines shape urban form through zoning and land use controls to support public transport, physical design, and process and Incentives.

Waitakere City Council has also adopted “new urbanism” principles in its proposed plan and has used them in preparing assessment criteria for medium housing density developments. The criteria in the proposed district plan are designed to give designers and builders flexibility and to provide opportunities for site responsive designs, while ensuring that medium density housing developments provide a positive contribution to the character and amenity of residential areas. The criteria are grouped into the following design elements: neighbourhood character, site layout, building location, visual and acoustic privacy, car parking and vehicle access, on-site outdoor space, entries to buildings, site facilities, and landscape treatment (Waitakere City Council 1995).

## Appendix 3 Council response

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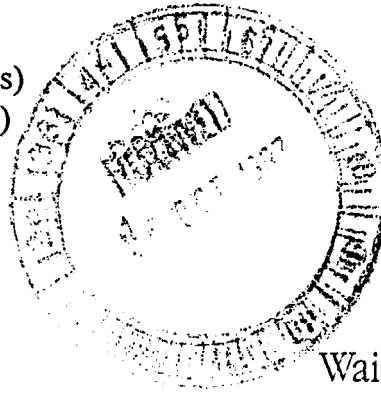
The Waitakere City Council was requested to provide an **official** response to the findings and recommendations contained in this report.

The council had chosen not provided a formal response although it has approved the release of the report.



confirmation of **FAX**

Refer: Peter Reaburn (Regulatory Services)  
Telephone 836-80 14 (Civic Centre)



Waitakere City Council

26 September 1997

The Office of Parliamentary Commissioner  
for the Environment  
P O Box 10241  
**WELLINGTON**

Fax: (04) 471-0331

Attention: Jenny Boshier

Dear Jenny

**MANAGEMENT OF SUBURBAN AMENITY VALUES**

I refer to your letter of 12 September 1997. I do apologise for the delay getting back to you on this.

Waitakere City is happy for you to release the study.

As you know, our Environmental Management Committee passed a number of -resolutions arising from the report, including our own support to various Ministers relating to recommendations made. I will send you copies of the requests we make of those Ministers.

Thank you, and I apologise again for the delay in reply.

Yours sincerely

Peter Reaburn  
**PLANNING MANAGER**