



“Managing Urban Growth”

A position paper developed by the New Zealand Planning Institute – March 2014

This position paper has been prepared collaboratively by members of the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI). Its purpose is to provide a set of principles to guide NZPI responses on urban growth issues. The paper has not been prepared in response to a specific proposal, geographic area, or political decision, and does not advocate for specific planning tools or interventions.

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Purpose

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It is intended that this position paper be reviewed no later than 2019, or at an earlier time should circumstances require.

Key Issues

New Zealand is highly urbanised, with 86% of the population residing in urban areas¹. The population in major urban areas is growing rapidly. This growth varies throughout the country and is highly concentrated in the upper half of the North Island. This on-going change in population gives rise to changes in land use and increased demands on our urban areas to meet the needs of existing and new urban populations. The increase in population in urban areas and changing demographics also gives rise to changes in the economic, social and political structures of a region.

New Zealand's urban areas are a major focus for growth and development, through public and private sector investment. Our urban settlements provide the focus for most of our new community and social infrastructure, including homes, shops, leisure and cultural facilities, and places of work. As our urban populations grow, it will be an on-going challenge to accommodate new homes and build the infrastructure needed to serve them – all while maintaining a high quality of life and an attractive environment.

Unplanned or poorly planned growth leads to less successful or functional urban areas that do not serve the needs and interests of their urban communities in a way that best provides for the community's long term well-being. Inefficient use of infrastructure is reflected in our cities and experienced by people every day as air and water pollution, traffic congestion, unsafe neighbourhoods, excess use and cost of energy, and a range of other undesirable conditions that can adversely affect our quality of life and our economy. In contrast, well planned growth will produce highly competitive, quality urban environments with good amenity.

These planning challenges need to be addressed if New Zealand's cultural, environmental, economic, and social well-being is to be sustained. This sustainability includes a community's ability to deal with the local effects of growth. Sustainable communities are supported by well-planned, localised built and civic infrastructure such as transport, schools, hospitals, as well as supply of energy, clean and wastewater, and a healthy ecological environment.

New Zealand has environmental and geographic diversity and vulnerability. Our cities and residents are vulnerable to rising sea level, volcanoes, seismic waves, sea and river flooding, slope failure, and earthquakes, etc. These risks increase the risk of human and economic calamities and the potential breakdown of the socio-economic structures that support our cities and their residents. Well planned urban growth can mitigate risk by applying appropriate standards, and directing development towards areas of low risk.

NZPI's Role in Managing Urban Growth

As an organisation that promotes planning excellence, NZPI is committed to ensuring forward thinking planning responses. This involves planning for the future of growing urban areas, as well as for

¹ In New Zealand an urban area is defined as having a minimum population of 30,000.
http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/Geographic-areas/urban-rural-profile/defining-urban-rural-nz.aspx

changes in other areas. NZPI members are employed in a wide range of sectors including central government, local government, institutions, and consultancies. NZPI members are involved at every step of planning processes in New Zealand, including being involved in planning for the growth of our cities, undertaking resource studies, providing advice in the preparation of plans for the future, and managing community consultation before statutory plans under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and other legislation are adopted. Planners take a cross disciplinary approach, collaborating with many other professions such as engineers, scientists, and architects. Planners also work closely with organisations and groups in the preparation and administration of plans, and appearing as expert witnesses at the Environment Court on cases relating to urban growth issues.

On behalf of New Zealand's professional planners, NZPI advocates for best practice planning for urban growth management. With their comprehensive understanding of New Zealand's unique biophysical and social character, professional planners are well placed to address the broad range of related social, economic, and environmental issues that accompany urban growth. NZPI stresses the importance of using research, and both quantitative and qualitative evidence, and public collaboration when making critical planning decisions.

NZPI Position and Principles for Managing Urban Growth

NZPI recognises that the future growth and change of our towns and cities needs to be managed to create well designed urban environments that support economic prosperity and create places where people want to live, work, and play. Planning effectively for urban growth involves establishing a framework for creating urban communities that meet a range of environmental, economic, social, and cultural outcomes – sustainable places that can be left as a legacy to, and are able to be enjoyed by, future generations.

Managing growth and change effectively means planning for a range of housing, work, community, recreation, and transportation options. Growth and investment should be encouraged in places where existing and planned infrastructure has sufficient capacity (allowing for environmental, social and cultural constraints) and in locations that regenerate or build on our urban fabric. It should allow for the protection and conservation of our natural environment and ensure that land is used efficiently for all the purposes needed to sustain our society's well-being, including agriculture, industry, recreation, commerce, and high quality community amenity.

Managing the growth and change of our towns and cities ensures that our economic needs are accommodated with careful consideration given to the location of business and employment opportunities. Managing growth also ensures that our most valuable cultural, historic and natural resources are identified, protected, and incorporated into urban settings.

The preparation of future plans and managing urban growth under the RMA and other legislation is a comprehensive and collaborative process. Good planning involves communities, individuals, national agencies, and government working together to develop and implement plans that address the agreed challenges facing our urban areas. As physical, social, and community infrastructure becomes increasingly more expensive to deliver, planning collaboratively with communities and integrated planning between regions will become more critical. This requires planning efficiently across cities, towns, and regions that is informed by, and aligned with, other district, regional, and national strategies. This also requires coordinated timing and sequencing of planning, using frameworks for certainty that provide flexibility necessary to respond to on-going change.

Planning Principles

NZPI supports a comprehensive and collaborative approach to managing urban growth underpinned by the following planning principles, in no particular order:

1. Urban Intensification

Promoting intensive and compact development through both greenfield (undeveloped land) and brownfield (previously used urban land) settings optimises the use of infrastructure and services.

In promoting intensive and compact development it is important to recognise the nature of demand and the market's ability to deliver new and innovative development forms a mix of regulatory and incentive based tools may be required to encourage market adjustments toward more intensive urban form. Likewise, for some urban areas intensification may not be the most appropriate planning response.

2. Plan for quality and amenity in urban environments

NZPI supports well-designed urban areas that promote a sense of place and identity within a strong functional urban frame. Quality urban form should enhance people's lives and minimise environmental impact. NZPI is a signatory to the New Zealand's Urban Design Protocol².

Urban areas should be designed to respond to local cultural, heritage, and environmental contexts as well as on-site attributes. The urban form, street networks, and infrastructure in an area should be well-connected and integrated, contributing positively to the wider urban area.

3. Plan for a mixture of compatible land uses

Well-designed communities provide for a mixture of homes, shops, businesses, community services, and recreational opportunities so residents can live in close proximity to the services they need.

Mixed land uses and higher development intensity can add to the value of land without a corresponding increase in the cost of infrastructure and other services. Compact cities can provide greater diversity in terms of access to destinations for residents. Efficient transport for all modes of travel, including public transport options and road networks, are required to support mixed, compact urban areas.

4. Encourage urban growth through redevelopment and greenfield development

Determining the best places for urban growth is a fundamental requirement for appropriate growth management. There are many areas in and around our towns and cities that should be protected from development because of their natural, cultural or recreational value. The design of urban spaces should enable green or biodiversity corridors to provide a counterpoint to the built environment and enhance the quality of the urban experience.

NZPI supports urban renewal and redevelopment of brownfield sites, and recognises growth may be required along the edges of urban areas, or indeed in extra urban new locations. NZPI advocates for urban growth management that carefully considers the amount of new greenfield land required, while simultaneously protecting productive rural land and special landscapes, and avoidance of areas with a high risk of natural hazards.

Poor urban development can threaten natural areas, which once lost to development will be difficult and costly to regain. A balance must be struck between protecting and enhancing productive rural land and urban growth.

Growth options should be evaluated having regard to long term assessments of land supply and environmental constraints, and future demand that takes into account demographic change and business activity. Growth directed to existing urban areas, particularly to centres, supports established infrastructure such as schools, community centres, health facilities, and public transport. While reinvestment in existing towns and cities may be less resource-intensive, the effects that renewal may have on the existing character of urban areas must be considered as part of any decision making.

5. Provide for housing choice and diversity

The country's population is increasingly diverse and ageing. Urban development should reflect this greater diversity by providing more choice for housing, and supporting shopping, recreation, and

² <https://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/urban/design-protocol-mar05/index.html>

community services. Quality planning considers a community's needs for a variety of types of appropriately located housing.

6. Provide a variety of transportation choices

High quality urban transportation networks prioritise walking and cycling as a viable means of getting around our towns and cities supported by an effective public transport system. A planned arterial roading network is fundamental to the efficient movement of goods and services to and within urban areas. Greater intensity of land uses should be directed towards corridors and centres where walking and cycling are preferred modes of transport and public transport can efficiently and effectively serve residents' travel demand needs of development. These outcomes can be best achieved through integrated land use and transportation planning.

Quality transportation planning embraces comprehensive and integrated surveys, study, modelling, and plan preparations. Time frames should recognise the short (10 year), medium (20 year) and long-term (30-50 years) for major transportation corridors. This recognises all modes of travel and space required for networks and associated areas for landscaping, access, and parking.

The regional, metropolitan, district and local needs for travel by all modes, their varying trip lengths and relative safety, should be clearly defined and understood so that a balanced transportation system with a hierarchy of suitable networks can be planned and managed. Development in locations where services and infrastructure already exist should be favoured over those that require new or extended transport services or infrastructure. At the same time, additional investment may still be required in the short, medium and long term future to enhance infrastructural and transportation network capacity.

7. Encourage community collaboration in urban growth decisions

Demographic change in New Zealand is on-going and addressing the changing needs of different communities can be a challenge. It will be increasingly important to encourage and support local decision making, and local responses based on realistic options.

When planning for change, there may be some opposition by those whose interests will be affected. Active stakeholder engagement and public collaboration in decision-making processes is integral to successful planning, with input taking place at the earliest stages of the process. The most flexibility in shaping planning responses and growth management choices should occur before notification of formal planning proposals. Planning decisions should be predictable, fair, and realistically demonstrate how they will affect current and future residents.

8. Environmental risk

Planning requires careful management of the environment, recognising the potential loss of natural values both in and surrounding urban areas. Development should make use of natural features and enhance amenity through, for example, open space and stormwater management that simultaneously mitigates natural hazards.

Planning for urban growth requires considered assessment of environmental risks, both human and natural. New Zealand urban areas are susceptible to human hazards such as contamination; and natural hazards such as floods, slope failure, earthquakes, volcanic activity, and rising sea levels. All risks, whether catastrophic or insignificant, immediate or long term, can be addressed through urban growth planning. This planning needs to reduce potential natural hazard risks with either, or a combination of, mitigation, avoidance, and adaptation.

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