



Submission to the Proposed District Plan Hearings stream 1 – Strategic Direction. February 2023.

Presented on behalf of the Newtown Residents' Association by the President, Rhona Carson

An Introduction to our Association

The Newtown Residents' Association has been an Incorporated Society since July 1963. We are residents and business owners from Newtown and the surrounding area, who take a keen interest in the community and local issues. We are concerned with maintaining and improving our area's liveability, connectedness and sustainability and working to make our community a thriving, diverse, great place to live.

The Association has a long history of positive urban design action and active placemaking. Association members led a community based urban design project in the 90's, which created the very liveable and walkable Riddiford St design. The first Newtown Festival Street Fair in 1997 was a celebration of that project's completion.

The Newtown Residents' Association members have also been very engaged and involved with previous developments of the District Plan, and helped to create an urban design guide for the area. We regularly consult on a range of issues affecting the people who live, work and play in Newtown.

Preamble - Some background to our position on urban development in Newtown

It is important to know that we are in favour of increasing housing and housing density, and that we are also in favour of careful planning about where well designed multi unit developments are best situated.

From 2017-2019 we contributed to the Our City Tomorrow and Planning for Growth consultations, which led to the conclusion that the city should grow 'up not out' – that is, increased density in the inner city. We were in agreement with this, and we have a long history of advocating for increased development along what used to be known as the 'growth spine' of Adelaide Rd and Riddiford St, and in particularly suitable sites elsewhere. There are some good examples of the latter among the housing provided in Newtown by Wellington City Council and Kāinga Ora – the 8 storey Newtown Park Apartments are in a good position, the Regent Park Apartments are exemplary and the new Kāinga Ora development being built in Owen St fits well into its environment.

We support the idea that high-quality multi-use developments in Riddiford Street would bring vibrancy and opportunities with trade, commerce, hospitality and entertainment at street level and apartments above.

When the Planning for Growth consultation first started Association members Martin Hanley and Anna Kemble Welch, who together are Red Design Architects, drew up a concept plan for apartment blocks situated within the suburban centre and the Mansfield St escarpment area. They demonstrated

that new buildings on only 45% of this part of Newtown could provide at least 2000 sunny, accessible, comfortable new apartments, while retaining the historic character of the Riddiford St shops. Over the past three years they have refined and developed this concept, with the input of other designers and urban planners.

We refer you to the Red Design submission in this consultation for the full details of what they are proposing.

Where we disagree with the PDP is the requirement, driven by the NPS-UD, that almost all of residential Newtown be opened up to permit developments of 6 storeys – and possibly more. We elaborate on the problems with this later.

We believe that the premises that underlie this PDP are themselves built on shaky foundations. They come from the Government's Urban Growth Agenda, later expressed in the National Policy Statement on Urban Development. In August 2019 when the Hon Phil Twyford, as Minister for Urban Development, announced the release of the NPS-UD he said "Our cities are failing. Restrictive planning is stopping our cities from growing, driving up the price of land and housing, and is one of the big drivers of the housing crisis". In fact there is little hard evidence that restrictive planning is the major cause of the housing crisis. While planning rules do have a part to play, this statement ignores many other factors affecting the cost of housing and the supply issues, including the lack of Government investment in this sector over several decades.

In the attempt to reverse the perceived planning restrictions, the NPS-UD prescribed the requirement for local authorities in the larger and faster growing cities to maximise development capacity in city centres and to enable developments of at least 6 storeys within a walkable catchment of city centres and mass rapid transit routes.

Ironically this 'one size fits all' policy is at odds with the Government Policy Statement on Housing and Urban Development (GPS-HUD) which was published in 2022. The GPS-HUD says "We will take a place-based approach. Every community has their own housing and urban development challenges and opportunities and a 'one size fits all' approach will not work to address them. This is because every place is unique, with different characteristics – including challenges or problems – arising from local history, culture and heritage, geography, economy, and resources." (p14). This is a Government policy approach that we wholeheartedly support, but unfortunately it isn't being put into practice.

This submission: a summary

The issues we discuss affect wide areas of Wellington, but our submission concentrates on the specific effects on Newtown.

We have considered the strategic objectives of the Proposed District Plan as expressed in the sections on Sustainability, Resilience and Climate Change, and on Urban Form and Development. It is our belief that in both these areas the PDP provisions are incompatible with these objectives, and that this will lead to significant unintended negative consequences unless some changes are made to the PDP.

This forms the background to our submission on qualifying matters, on walkable catchments, and also to the further submissions we will be making about residential zoning, character precincts and

environmental considerations in later streams of these hearings. All of these focus on making full use of the provisions allowed in the National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) to mitigate these negative consequences as far as possible.

Environmental Concerns

Section: Sustainability, Resilience and Climate Change

Sub-section: Strategic Objectives

Provision: [P1 Sch1](#)

SRCC-01

The City's built environment supports:

1. A net reduction in the City's carbon emissions by 2050;
2. More energy efficient buildings;
3. An increase in the use of renewable energy sources; and
4. Healthy functioning of native ecosystems and natural processes.

SRCC-02

Risks from Natural Hazards are

1. Identified and understood;
2. Planned for through adaptation and mitigation measures to ensure the risks are low; and
3. Avoided where the risks are intolerable.

We support these objectives, but the way they are reflected in the PDP needs attention.

This part of our submission considers the effect of up-zoning scattered across a wide area from the perspective of environmental sustainability. The NPS-UD 2020 Policy 3c and 3d requirements have resulted in Wellington City Council zoning wide areas of inner city suburbs to permit 6 storey (i.e. 21m) developments for High Density Residential Zones within the 'walkable catchments'. Outside these catchments the zoning is for Medium Density Residential Zones. However as described in the next part of this submission, the cumulative effect of the up-zoning prescribed by the NPS-UD 2020 and the MDRS permissions for 3 houses of 3 storeys to be allowed on any section so long as certain standards are met, has led to the development capacity far outstripping demand. The policy regards this as beneficial for intensification, but we believe that it has many negative effects.

The issues discussed here affect many communities in Wellington, but in this submission we concentrate on the specific effects on Newtown, as this is the area we know and understand best.

A central objective of the NPS-UD 2020, and by extension the RMA schedule 3A and the WCC Proposed District Plan, is that

"Development supports the creation of a liveable, well-functioning urban environment that enables all people and communities to provide for their social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing, and for their health and safety now and into the future."

An extended definition of 'a well functioning urban environment' contains these points

f- supports reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; and

g - are resilient to the likely current and future effects of climate change

We wholeheartedly agree that this is needed, but the practical application of these principles when it

comes to the built environment seems to be limited to specifying intensification in places with good public transport.

When this development results in the sporadic development of high rise buildings in narrow streets already packed with one or two story homes the existing homes inevitably become heavily shaded. The development capacity, by design, is far greater than is actually needed. So this will become a permanent feature of our suburbs if the PDP goes ahead unchecked.

The major environmental effects come with the loss of sunlight. Sunlight is important for a carbon-zero lifestyle – it fuels solar panels, helps gardens grow, dries the washing, and heats people’s homes. If tall buildings are able to overshadow low-rise homes the latter risk becoming cold and damp, leading to illness, and in some cases the homes will become unfit for purpose. Sunlight is vital for everyday life. With new developments the standards require a certain amount of sunlight access but there is no guarantee of this being protected for existing neighbouring properties. In fact when the development is in the high residential zone the standards allow for 4m wall on the north boundary, with a 60 degree recession plane, which would result in a complete blocking of sun for existing homes on Newtown's small sections, where there is likely to only be a small side yard.

There are also environmental effects associated with demolition and rebuilding. New building, particularly high rise constructed of concrete and steel, is very carbon intensive. On the other hand the existing old houses built of native timbers represent a great deal of embodied energy and sequestered carbon. Many have been adapted and upgraded over time, which is more environmentally sustainable than replacing them. Also these buildings are resilient and have survived 100+ years of earthquakes while many new buildings in Wellington have been badly damaged in earthquakes.

We also submit that allowing extensive redevelopment, which removes the existing trees and other plants in Newtown’s backyards, does permanent damage to the natural bio-diversity of the area.

A recent article in NZ Gardener <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/homed/garden/129578839/measuring-biodiversity--how-would-yourbackyard-score> stated that private gardens comprise the greatest proportion of green space in urban environments, so their potential to contribute to biodiversity is significant. The researcher who was the subject of the article, Van Heezik, says the research is important and topical due to the current emphasis on developing higher density housing. “On the whole, New Zealand could be doing better at protecting urban green spaces, particularly those on private land, but also incorporating more green with better native biodiversity into all the new housing developments.”

It is ironic for the PDP to be proposing changes which will largely destroy Newtown’s urban green spaces at the same time as the movement to protect and enhance them is growing. It is also of great concern that this is going ahead at a time when the effects of climate change are beginning to be demonstrated in events such as the Auckland floods and the widespread devastation caused by Cyclone Gabrielle. The understanding about the need for permeable urban design, or ‘spongeable cities’, is increasing, but the provisions of the PDP have little to offer to provide for these needs. At the very least the implementation of the NPS-UD requirements throughout New Zealand should be paused and reassessed in the light of these developments.

Urban Form and Development

Section: Urban Form and Development

Sub-section: P1 Sch1

We submit that the NPS-UD 2020 and RMA Schedule 3B requirements for maximising development are incompatible with some of the strategic objectives of the PDP as expressed in the section on Urban Form and Development. These objectives are also in the RMA Schedule 3A Clause 6. In particular we maintain that the PDP provisions are incompatible with establishing or maintaining a “well functioning urban environment.”

As a consequence of our concerns about this we are asking the District Plan Hearings Commissioners to consider the possibility that by specifying wide areas where developments of 6 stories must be enabled, without prior investigation of the development capacity that would actually be unlocked or the pattern of demand in different Tier 1 cities, the NPS-UD (and RMA Schedule 3B) has unwittingly opened the way for a series of negative unintended consequences.

The evidence about capacity leading to this statement comes from the PDP Strategic Objective for Urban Development Form UDF-04 and the recent study, ‘Wellington City commercially feasible residential capacity assessment’ [<https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/yourcouncil/plans-policies-and-bylaws/district-plan/proposed-district-plan/reports/supplementary-documents/wellington-city-commerciallyfeasible-residential-capacity-assessment.pdf?>] which was undertaken by Property Economics and published in June 2022. Additional information comes from the Wellington chapter of the 2022 Wellington Regional Housing and Business Capacity Assessment Update (HBA) – see https://wrlc.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/HBA-Chapt-2-WCC-with-Appendices_web.pdf

The PDP UDF-04 prescribes housing bottom lines of 15,089 for the short and medium term - up to 2031- and 21,532 for 2031-2051, a total of 36,621 over 30 years.

The Property Economics report (p7) states that "The DDP and MDRS allow for the theoretical development of approximately 243,000 units. Of these, Property Economics has assessed (Scenario 1) that 140,700 are Feasible and around 127,300 are realisable." They then tested a scenario 2, where a 10% drop in Sales Price and a 10% increase in Construction Costs resulted in a drop in realisable capacity of more than 40%. This still produced an estimated realisable capacity of 73,401 dwellings. These figures are based on present capacity if the PDP becomes operational. The report also estimates that this capacity will be across a mix of housing types – standalone houses 21,785, terraced dwellings 19,271 and apartments 32,375. This of course is Wellington wide, and this might not reflect the actual demand for housing types.

This is a relevant quote from the HBA: “Based on current market economics and operative District Plan, the shortfall of 10,222 dwellings would be entirely in terraced housing. The demand for apartments would appear to be met by the capacity for apartments within the City across the 30 years of the HBA. Likewise, the capacity for stand-alone housing just meets the projected demand in the 30 year timeframe.” This HBA assessment of the demand for housing typologies reveals that more capacity is needed for terraced housing while the demand for apartments could be satisfied within the current ODP settings. This leads us to query why so much emphasis has been put on enabling 6 storey developments, when the need would be better met within medium density residential zones.

It is repeatedly said that it is anticipated that the form, appearance and amenity of neighbourhoods within both the High Density Residential Zones and Medium Density Residential Zones will change over time to a more intensive urban built form. We interpret this as meaning that the expected result is that Newtown and Berhampore (and other inner city suburbs) will eventually consist almost entirely of apartment blocks and townhouses.

This is unlikely to be achieved for many years, and probably never achieved, because the area open to development in Wellington is so much greater than needed that supply will soon outstrip demand.

The Boffa Miskell Report on “Planning for Residential Amenity” prepared for Wellington City Council in July 2021 [<https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans-and-policies/a-to-z/spatial-plan/planning-for-residentialamenity-report-july-2021.pdf>] recognised the reality of this -

5.6 PROVIDING FOR BUILT FORM CHANGE OVER TIME

“... However, the broad extent of the areas where increased density is signaled in the draft Spatial Plan means that it is unlikely that large scale, demonstrable change in the built form of these areas will be evident for some time.

“The implications of this are that redevelopment of these areas will occur on a more sporadic, incremental basis, with the built form of existing neighbourhoods punctuated over time by taller/larger buildings (the mass of which may be dependent on the site size and the District Plan provisions employed).

“Although this may affect the amenity previously enjoyed by neighbouring residents, the provisions set out in the Table 2 above are intended to ensure that a reasonable level of amenity is maintained. Inevitably it will be up to neighbouring residents to either choose to increase the utilisation of their own sites or on-sell to someone who will, thus continuing the cycle of change. “

Taking the last sentence, it's very disappointing to realise that reducing amenity so much that people would rather sell up might be seen as a good thing - 'a feature not a bug'! In practice we think that by the time it gets to that the immediate demand for development properties will have been satisfied, selling won't be so easy, and the value of the property will be significantly diminished. We note that when the report says 'a reasonable level of amenity is maintained' that is a faint hope - the proposed amenity in terms of privacy and access to sunlight and daylight is minimal and essentially non-existent when new development is in the high residential zone. The standards are crafted for new buildings without direct reference to the affect on neighbouring properties. A 4m wall on the north boundary, with a 60 degree recession plane, would allow a complete blocking of sun for existing homes on Newtown's small sections, where there is likely to only be a small side yard.

We repeat what we have been saying for years now - that sporadic development of 6 storey buildings in a low rise residential area would have very damaging effects on existing housing. We also note from the HBA that the preference is for terraced housing rather than apartments. We submit that combining terraced homes, typically of 3 storeys, with 6 storey apartment blocks doesn't give good results unless the sites are carefully planned. The effect on the amenity of those townhouses is similarly negative when the neighbouring development is a 6 storey apartment block.

However we agree that apartment blocks make an important contribution to providing a good range of housing types in our community, and we submit that the Red Design plan for increased density in

the Newtown Suburban Centre, as described previously, would meet that need.

A central objective of the NPS-UD 2020, and by extension the RMA schedule 3A and the WCC Proposed District Plan, is that

"Development supports the creation of a liveable, well-functioning urban environment that enables all people and communities to provide for their social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing, and for their health and safety now and into the future."

A well functioning urban environment is further defined as meaning an urban environment that, as a minimum:

- a. Has or enables a variety of homes that meet the needs, in terms of type, price, and location, of different households; and
- b. Has or enables a variety of homes that enable Māori to express their cultural traditions and norms; and
- c. Has or enables a variety of sites that are suitable for different business sectors in terms of location and site size; and
- d. Has good accessibility for all people between housing, jobs, community services, natural spaces, and open spaces, including by way of public or active transport; and
- e. Supports, and limits as much as possible adverse impacts on, the competitive operation of land and development markets; and
- f. Supports reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; and
- g. Are resilient to the likely current and future effects of climate change.

The first obvious contradiction between the sporadic high rise development described above and the objective of a well functioning urban environment lies in the words "enables all people and communities to provide for their social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing, and for their health and safety now and into the future."

We submit that existing residents as well as future residents should be assured that care is taken with their well being and their health and safety. As outlined, the situation where there is so much development capacity that only a small proportion of the area open to up zoning is actually developed in practice leads to very negative affects on the well being of the community as a whole.

Our submission points on environmental concerns further describe the damaging environmental effects of high-rise developments in a largely low-rise neighbourhood. Many of these result from the loss of sunlight to homes and gardens, and this also has consequences for people's health, both emotional and physical, as previously warm dry homes become cold and damp due to excessive shading.

We have looked closely at the points in the expanded definition.

- a. -Has or enables a variety of homes that meet the needs, in terms of type, price, and location, of different households; - the push for a more intensive urban built form, particularly with 21m up zoning, diminishes the choice of housing type. Sunny family homes and gardens, whether stand alone or attached, would no longer be possible outside character precincts because even where they still remain they would be affected by shading, and increased wind turbulence. Families who want this way of living will need to retreat away from the city centre. It's often said that it's nonsense to suggest that all our existing homes will be demolished, and people who want to keep their villas and

bungalows don't have to sell them. This is true, but doesn't take into account the damage to existing homes caused by unplanned development.

We also note that the up-zoning approach of the PDP will not meet the needs of low income households in terms of the price of the resulting housing, without intervention from either the Government or the Council. Development is expensive and developers will be motivated to get a good return on their investment.

b. -Has or enables a variety of homes that enable Māori to express their cultural traditions and norms; this may also be doubtful, but we will leave it to Mana Whenua to comment on this.

c. – Has or enables a variety of sites that are suitable for different business sectors in terms of location and site size; and

d. – Has good accessibility for all people between housing, jobs, community services, natural spaces, and open spaces, including by way of public or active transport; - these two points are probably achievable. We note in respect of point d that in Newtown we already have this accessibility. However the public and active transport and open spaces are already barely adequate, and rather than the PDP improving access to open spaces we are having to propose remedies for the possibility that these spaces will be heavily shaded in future. We are also concerned that there is no direct provision in the PDP for increasing public open space in step with the growing population.

e – supports and limits as much as possible adverse impacts on, the competitive operation of land and development markets; This implies that market competition is a factor in producing a well functioning urban environment, which we certainly doubt.

f- supports reduction in greenhouse gas emissions; and

g - are resilient to the likely current and future effects of climate change – these points are covered and contradicted in our submission above on the environmental effects of development.

Our conclusion is that the approach to increasing housing intensity by maximising developmental capacity as much as possible is counter-productive to establishing or maintaining a “well functioning urban environment.”

Mitigation of these concerns.

Qualifying matters

We submit that the damaging environmental effects of high rise developments in established low rise communities should be considered a ‘qualifying matter’ for modifying building heights and encouraging retention and adaptation of existing housing stock, under NPS-UD clause 3.32 (1) (h), or should be considered as a specific overlay.

We also ask for approval for a liberal use of the Qualifying Matter of Character Precincts, which we will speak about further in the stream 2 hearings. We are confident that the NPS-UD 2020 requirements under clause 3.33 can be met.

Walkable Catchments

We realise that in following the NPS-UD the planners felt constrained to enable 'at least 6 storeys', which translates to 21m, within the 'walkable catchment' from the city centre. In this Plan the Wellington City boundary extends to the Adelaide Rd/ Riddiford St intersection. This is a long way from the CBD, and it is about another 30min walk from the boundary to get to the city proper. Measuring the walkable catchment from this point is already erroneous, and extending it to 15 minutes walk, which is more than the NPS-UD requires, results in an area which reaches as far south as Harper St and across to Donald McLean St being included in the catchment.

We object to any increase in the walkable catchment, and ideally we would like it further reduced.

Conclusion

Thank for considering this submission. I look forward to speaking to it and answering questions at the Hearing.

Rhona Carson

President

Newtown Residents' Association

16/02/2023