

LIVE WELLington submission

## District Plan - Hearing Stream 4 Centres

20 June 2023

### Placemaking in our city centres

LIVE WELLington is a grassroots organisation that champions a liveable city.

More information about us is available here: <https://www.livewellington.org/>

#### Overview

Great cities have distinct neighbourhoods, suburbs and communities with a strong sense of place.

The built form, heritage, character, streetscape and public spaces all contribute to this.

Wellington is competing with other cities for residents, students, high skill workers, and high value businesses. Key to our success is providing high amenity centres along with a range of housing that will attract and keep people.

Our submission in this stream is about ensuring our centres are vibrant, interesting, liveable and attractive.

The main topics we cover are:

- Heights in the Central City (CCZ)
- The 'City Outcomes Contributions'
- Zoning of Adelaide Road and Mount Victoria
- Wind standards

#### Heights in the Central City (CCZ)

The authors of the section 4.2a Overview report for Hearing Stream 4 propose that permitted heights in the CCZ should be unlimited, counter to the notified Proposed District Plan.

LIVE WELLington opposes this change, and agrees with the expert evidence submitted by Stuart Niven, and his preference that: 'height limits are required above which there is an assessment of the urban design effects of the height exceedance'.

We agree that the removal of high limits sends the wrong signal – namely, that Wellington is unconcerned about its urban form. Instead, we should send the signal that Wellington welcomes development as long as it makes a contribution to the cityscape and public realm, is thoughtfully designed and respectful of its environs.

Supporters of unlimited heights imagine that it is necessary to maximise capacity. There is a general assumption that for a city to achieve density, very tall buildings must be built.

However, American New Urbanist Jeff Speck points out in his book 'Walkable City' that much density can be achieved at lower heights:

'A ten-story city like Washington simply does not need towers to achieve great walking density. Indeed, outside of Midtown and the Financial District, most of Manhattan's lively avenues are lined by buildings closer to ten stories tall.'<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, many of the cities held up as great examples of density – e.g. Paris, Copenhagen – do not feature high buildings outside of its central city – if at all.

An additional point is the value of providing certainty to developers. If it is not known how high future buildings located around their own sites may go, developers may be wary of investing, and potential purchasers may be wary of being 'built out'. This nervousness is already evident in Te Aro, where there is a phenomenon of mostly corner sites being developed, where that risk is lessened.

If we want good development to occur, stated height limits are preferred.

**In summary, we oppose the replacement of height limits with height 'thresholds', and request that the height limits in the notified PDP are retained.**

### **The 'City Outcomes Contributions'**

The PDP had proposed that developers wanting to exceed maximum or minimum height heights would need to make City Outcomes Contributions.

In the notified PDP the mechanism applies to

- over height,
- under height,
- large scale residential,
- non-residential and comprehensive developments. [ source s42a general report 196]

With the removal of height limits, what were height limits become thresholds beyond which the City Outcomes Contributions applies.

However, the report authors recommend that the triggers for these are reduced to only **over height** and **under height**.

These recommendations are full of contradictions.

Despite setting out in Table 6 of the s42a Overview report how the City Outcomes Contribution helps to satisfy the requirements of the NPS-UD policy (variety of homes, accessibility, greenhouse gas reductions, resilience) the council's s42a authors then proposes that the mechanism to be watered down. It seems strange that the council sees such benefit from the City Outcomes Contribution yet is proposing to 'remove the hooks' that would activate it.

Further, the suggested new text [par 216] puts forward City Outcomes Contribution as the mechanism to ensure 'density done well' where over or under-size buildings can affect amenity:

City Outcomes Contribution is a method which aims to ensure 'density is done well'. It is a method to ensure that tall buildings (relevant to zone typologies) and buildings under the City Centre Zone minimum building height provide beneficial public and private outcomes, as identified in Table 3 below, and contribute to well-functioning urban environments.

It is targeted at commercial, residential and mixed-use developments that are either under-height or above area specific height thresholds. **These developments, typically more so than others, have the potential to impact on the quality and level of public and private amenity within the City's commercial centres**, and securing additional benefits from these developments is therefore required. (My emphasis)

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<sup>1</sup> *Walkable City*, by Jeff Speck, Picador, 2022 edition, p 220

In fact, the City Outcomes Contribution contribute virtually nothing to 'density done well', as it is usually understood.

That is because the four categories of outcomes are not related to the visible design of the building or how it impacts on its surroundings. Providing public space may not compensate for a building that is ugly or impacts amenity. Accessibility, sustainability and affordability do nothing for the streetscape. In other words, a building could tick all these boxes and still wreck the streetscape, create wind tunnels and shade public spaces.

What the City Outcomes Contributions are, is a form of compensation. It is a way of saying: 'we have spoiled your city, however here are some other baubles which may be of some value to you.'

LIVE WELLington acknowledges the expert evidence provided by Stuart Niven in this stream, which points out the many issues that a City Outcomes Contribution model raises and questions why we should not bargain for them.

While the list of public goods that would be scored in the City Outcomes Contribution is laudable, the fact remains that if they are valuable, we should be requiring them anyway. In particular, enabling ease of access for people of all ages and mobility should be a given, especially with an aging population.

The City Outcomes Contributions risk giving permission for a developer to gain permission for a poorly designed building in return for dubious outcomes that are in many cases of limited value to the wider city.

**LIVE WELLington strongly opposes City Outcomes Contributions and seeks for them to be deleted.**

**LIVE WELLington supports the four 'outcomes' being required by some other mechanism but not by trading them for additional height.**

## **Urban Design Panel**

On the other hand, an Urban Design Panel is much more likely to contribute to a building successfully fitting in with its environs, adding to the streetscape and mitigating amenity effects.

We support the views put forward by Stuart Niven on how Design Panels can best work.

**We support the establishment and use of Urban Design Panels.**

## **Boundaries of the City Centre Zone.**

Wellington is lucky that its suburbs are relatively distinct, having their own life and character. LIVE WELLington believes there is value in reinforcing these distinctions, as a way of promoting a sense of place that helps support liveability and community spirit.

However, the PDP risks eroding this with an unwelcome spread of the City Centre Zone, encroaching into suburbs and generally muddying the boundaries of what were previously distinct communities.

This seems to be driven by the need or desire to upzone areas in line with the NPS-UD however we would argue there are other ways to achieve upzoning without sprawling the city centre.

Given the proposal by s42a authors in HS4 (Overview report) to offer unlimited heights in the CCZ, the boundaries of this zone are of material concern. Some of the areas now captured by the CCZ are not suitable for 'unlimited heights'.

The PDP describes the purpose of the City Centre Zone to

'enable and reinforce the continued primacy of the Wellington central city area as the principal commercial and employment centre servicing the city and metropolitan region. The City Centre Zone is the **commercial heart of Wellington** and the wider region and New Zealand's Capital City. It is also a major employment hub for the region and contains a vibrant and diverse mix of inner city living, entertainment, educational, government and commercial activity. **Relative to other areas of the city** it exhibits a heightened intensity and scale of development.

Most Wellingtonians would recognise this description as applying to the Lambton Quay, lower Willis Street, Courtenary Place and Te Aro areas – not Mt Victoria, Aro Valley and Mt Cook (Adelaide Road).

Most cities have a central business district that is clearly defined and so it should remain for Wellington.

**We therefore argue that Adelaide Road, Mount Victoria and the Aro Valley should not be part of the CCZ.** We discuss the important case of Adelaide Road below.

## Zoning of Adelaide Road

Adelaide Road is an area well recognized as ripe for development. Indeed in 2008 the council worked with the local community on a blueprint for how the area might look in 20 years. It is linked below and provided as an Appendix.

<https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans-and-policies/a-to-z/adelaiderd/files/adelaiderd-framework.pdf?la=en&hash=71FEAEFE79D90D97F7B1A262F22C795B2A19Fo86>

This excellent framework was the fruit of consultation with the community and sets out an ambitious and attractive plan to accommodate more people with 'higher density mixed use development'.

The 2008 document had this to say about the Adelaide Road corridor:

*The Adelaide Road corridor is a relatively narrow area that fronts Adelaide Road from the John Street intersection to the Basin Reserve. Its proximity to public transport, the CBD, and major employers and businesses, supports **an active 'live-work' area, ie a mix of commercial and business uses and residential housing (apartments)**. Building heights will be higher in this area to achieve this activity mix (**up to a maximum of 24m**, provided a minimum of two levels of employment activity are provided at lower levels), however, building design will need to be of a high quality. To encourage a more people friendly, attractive and vibrant environment, street frontages at ground level are occupied by 'active' uses (eg commercial, business and retail activities) rather than residential uses. To support the increased employment and residential intensity of this area, improvements to the Adelaide Road corridor, including improving pedestrian safety, **street trees, landscaping and public space improvements** are proposed. **Significant heritage buildings will be retained and enhanced** to contribute to the vibrancy and sense of place of this area. (My emphasis)*

Unfortunately we are nearly 20 years on and very little has been realised, however the potential remains, and the ideas and vision put forward in 2008 are still valid.

It is particularly pertinent to the zoning and height of Adelaide Road. The 2008 framework envisaged heights of up to 18 metres (permitted) and 24 metres (discretionary) along the main thoroughfare, with lower heights (12 and 18) elsewhere.

The current Proposed District Plan puts Adelaide Road in the City Centre Zone (CCZ) with a Height Control Area 10, permitting buildings of up to 42.5 metres.

We do not believe Adelaide Road is suitable as CCZ.

As the 2008 framework explains, Adelaide Road is 'an urban community on the edge of the CBD' and this still holds true: on the edge, but not part of the CBD.

Our submission is that Adelaide Road should not be part of the CCZ and should be regarded as Mixed Use Zone **MUZ** instead.

In the s42a discussion (Centres report) the author rejects a submission for Adelaide Road to be zoned HRZ, saying

'if it was not CCZ it would be retained as a Centres Zoning or a Mixed Use Zone (MUZ) rather than HRZ. HRZ would inhibit the wide variety of activities that currently operate in the area as well as inadequately provide for future anticipated mixed use activities.' [par 118, City Centre Zone report]

While the authors say HRZ is not appropriate and go on to say why they think CCZ is the best zoning, they don't explain why MUZ isn't, despite noting the area has been identified for 'mixed use high density growth' for a long time.

In MUZ-S1 of the PDP this zone allows for buildings with four height control areas ranging in maximum height from 12 to 18 metres. It would be possible to include an additional height control area for the Adelaide Road corridor allowing for a maximum height of 24 metres. This would be in line with the 2008 plan for Adelaide Road, allowing significant density, but still drawing a distinction between Adelaide Road and the central city.

**LIVE WELLington opposes the zoning of Adelaide Road as CCZ and requests it should be a Mixed Use Zone (MUZ) instead.**

### **Wind standards**

Given the new heights being proposed around the city, it is appropriate to extend wind provisions beyond the CCZ.

We agree with changes suggested to broaden the consideration of the effects of wind into other zones, not just the CCZ.