



Why Urban Design?

Why do we need a guide on urban design? There are a number of reasons. Over 85 percent of our population live in urban areas so it is important we pay enough attention to the design of our towns and cities. It is critical to ensure that our urban environments work for us, and support a high quality of living. Plus the quality of our urban areas is one factor that can give us a competitive edge to retain skilled Kiwis thinking of heading overseas to live, or attracting Kiwis thinking of returning, as well as investors, skilled immigrants and tourists.

We have much to celebrate about our towns and cities – stunning physical locations, and a strong built heritage. But we also face some very real issues, such as urban form that reduces the attraction of walking, cycling or public transport, and inefficient transport systems that can add to business costs, raise transport emissions and make it difficult for unemployed people to access work. We also want our settlements to reflect our Pacific setting, both Maori and European culture, and the range of other ethnic groups that now make up our communities.

What is Urban Design?

Urban design aims to get the urban structure right. This means the relationship between spaces, street networks, density and what activities are done where. The design of a particular site is also vital, but it can't compensate if the parts don't work together as an integrated whole.



If the urban structure is right, then New Zealand's towns and cities will become more prosperous places for businesses. They will look and work better for the community, and they will become more environmentally friendly by reducing energy and water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. They will be more 'sustainable'.



Urban design helps to make the connections between people and places, between public and private space, and between the natural and built environment. This may mean contributing to large-scale interventions at a strategic level, such as the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy, down to town centre regeneration schemes and neighbourhood-based projects, as shown here in views of Wellington's Civic Square, Picton and suburban Wellington.



For further information

If you would like a full copy of the booklet, *People, Places and Spaces: A design guide for urban New Zealand*, contact one of the Ministry for the Environment offices below. This document and the full copy of the booklet is also available on the Ministry for the Environment's website: www.mfe.govt.nz

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The front cover shows views of Cathedral Square in Christchurch, an aerial view of Christchurch and Great South Road, Otahuhu, Auckland.

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People+Places+Spaces

A design guide for urban New Zealand



Working Together

New Zealand settlements are relatively young, and their suburban, car-oriented design reflects the enormous growth during the baby boom with its accompanying family values. Adapting this pattern to more diverse lifestyle and economic trends, while achieving good design outcomes, is a complex task.

Urban design cannot be successful if it doesn't incorporate what will work for the people who live, work and play in the community. We all have a role here – from the public to iwi, the transport planner to the stormwater engineer, economist and urban designer, the planner to local and central government politicians.

Good urban design needs to be:

- **community-led** – to ensure people's values and visions are incorporated
- **place-based** – to take into account what is there, options and solutions
- **design-informed** – to articulate the goals and give a practical form to the community's vision
- **multi-disciplinary** – to bring together the public and relevant professional groups
- **a partnership between the public and private sectors** – to ensure private developers work in harmony with public planning.

Urban Design in Action

Everyone wants a better urban environment, but does urban design actually achieve this? When setting about improving the urban design of an area there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Urban places we enjoy – like Broadway, Newmarket in Auckland, Courtenay Place in Wellington, and Oxford Terrace in Christchurch – tend to have similar qualities in terms of how spaces, streets and activities are arranged. The landscapes and building styles may differ, but the design principles behind their success are often similar and usually correspond with some or all of the design principles summarised below.



Consolidation and dispersal

Increasing density in appropriate locations, for example, in growth nodes and along transport corridors, is making many of our urban places stronger, safer, and more vibrant. If done well this is an effective way to consume fewer resources (including energy and land), and reduce the need to travel. High density housing, such as these apartments across from the Domain in Auckland, can be effective and appropriate when situated near a transport corridor or node (such as Newmarket), and in conjunction with good amenity.

Integration and connectivity

Urban places that are joined together in a complex web of spaces, rather than being isolated, are easier, more economic and enjoyable to get around, especially on foot. At Sturgess Road, Waitakere, several new developments (shaded red) have been connected. Improvements can often be made by creating new street links or relocating the position of a station or bus stop.



Diversity and adaptability

Promoting choice, through a diverse range of activities and uses can bring a place to life and add greater interest, often resulting in economic benefits. It can also make it easier to respond effectively to change. Well-designed commercial areas with a mix of activities and building styles add to the quality of an area, while also being commercially successful, such as in The Chancellery development in central Auckland.

Legibility and identity

Buildings and places that help people get around by marking key points, framing views and vistas, celebrating important places, and reflecting local identity make particular urban areas special. Town centre upgrades can improve community hubs, and help to orientate visitors. A clear, strong character supports greater use, enjoyment and pride in local areas as suggested in this view of Trafalgar Street in Nelson.



Environmental responsiveness

This helps to reduce the environmental footprint of the city, while improving amenity and recreational opportunities. It involves promoting urban development that is energy efficient, uses less water, reduces waste, and is responsive to natural features. The Octagon provides a tranquil retreat in the Dunedin city centre. Achieving high standards of natural amenity within compact spaces is important in built up areas.



Achieving Better Urban Design

Urban design is about involving people and communities, iwi and all the diverse professionals and sectors that create the fabric of our urban areas. It is about creating places that we want to use, that work well, and that celebrate the natural environment, our built and cultural heritage, and strengthen local and national identity. It is about promoting development that fits in with the street and the community and protects and enhances our economic competitiveness by ensuring our urban areas are easy, efficient places to work and do business in, and contain transport costs. Urban design is about creating the urban futures we want to be a part of.

Achieving this goal is a long-term process. We need:

- leadership that recognises the need to consider how we design urban places
- integrated urban policy that recognises the importance of the quality of our urban areas to economic and social life, as well as the environment
- the involvement of people, both the public and professionals who are well trained and skilled
- to build on the delivery mechanisms we currently have, and to develop a wider range of tools to promote positive design outcomes, rather than just to stop bad outcomes.

Many centres are reaping the rewards of good urban design. Wellington has a lively urban centre, Christchurch and Waitakere have improved their sustainability, and numerous smaller centres have been revived. If we pay enough attention to urban design, we can improve our quality of life, create distinctive and valued urban places and protect our natural environment.