



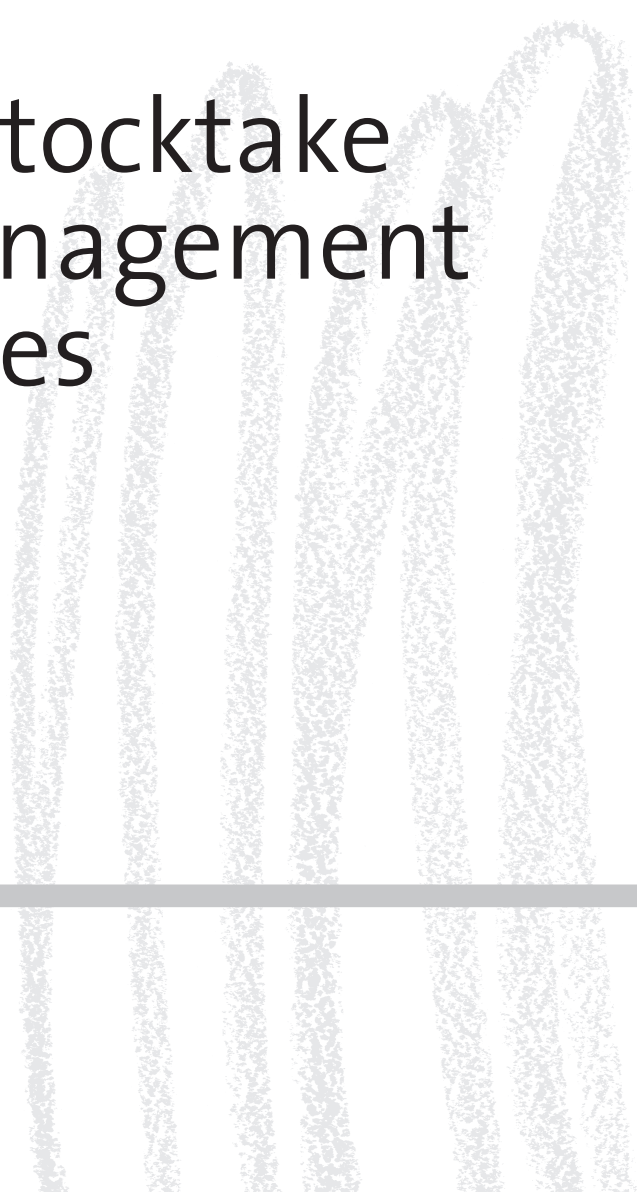
Ministry for the  
**Environment**  
*Manatū Mō Te Taiao*

New Zealand Government



# Urban Design Stocktake of Resource Management Plans and Policies

Summary Report



URBAN DESIGN PROTOCOL



**This report was prepared for the Ministry for the Environment  
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# 1 About this Report

In late 2008, the Ministry for the Environment commissioned consultants MWH New Zealand Ltd (MWH) to investigate the nature of urban design related provisions in local authority plans and policy statements prepared under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). The aim was to provide baseline information on how local authorities are incorporating urban design into their various RMA documents. The research was undertaken between December 2008 and April 2009. It is important to note that the research was limited to providing a snapshot of the level of inclusion of urban design provisions in local authority RMA planning documents at that time, and not to investigating the reasons for the results found.

The full research report *Urban Design Stocktake of Resource Management Plans and Policies* is available on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

This report summarises key findings from the research report. It will be of particular interest to local authority staff, councillors and others working with plans and policies under the RMA.

## 1.1 This report and other Ministry for the Environment workstreams

This report supports the implementation of the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol. The Urban Design Protocol is a voluntary commitment by central and local government, property developers and investors, design professionals, education institutes and others to create quality urban design in New Zealand towns and cities.

Under the banner of the Urban Design Protocol, the Ministry for the Environment has produced a suite of documents including:

- *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol*
- *The Value of Urban Design*
- *Urban Design Case Studies*
- *Urban Design Case Studies: Local Government*
- *Urban Design Toolkit*
- *Review of Urban Design Case Law*
- *A Survey of Local Government Authorities Urban Design Capability.*

The above documents were used as background material in preparing this report and are all available on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

The full research report provides baseline information that can be used to inform future Ministry for the Environment policy analysis.

## 2 Assessment Process

The MWH consultants selected a representative sample of documents from 25 regional councils, unitary and territorial authorities in metropolitan, provincial and rural areas.<sup>1</sup> The areas were chosen to reflect a range of urban growth scenarios. Documents were assessed according to the extent to which they addressed a set of urban design sub-criteria. These sub-criteria represented plan provisions that were developed from established urban design principles and issues. Further details of the methodology, and a table of the sub-criteria used, are included in [appendix 1](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Metropolitan areas are those with populations over 90,000; provincial areas are those with populations between 20,000 and 90,000; and rural areas are those with populations below 20,000.

## 3 Key Findings

Regional policy statements included a relatively low number of urban design provisions. Of the regional policy statements assessed, all addressed less than half of the urban design sub-criteria. Several regions had introduced urban design related plan changes that significantly increased the number of urban design provisions. These plan changes were often initiated as a result of regional-level planning exercises.

In contrast, the plans from metropolitan councils included a high number of urban design provisions. Of the plans assessed, all included provisions that addressed over 60 per cent of the urban design sub-criteria. The three largest cities all had plans that addressed over 80 per cent of the sub-criteria, taking into account urban design related plan changes.

Provincial councils had a highly variable number of urban design provisions in their planning documents. These ranged from 47 to 88 per cent of the urban design sub-criteria. The plans from the provincial councils with the highest populations had the greatest number of urban design provisions.

The plans from rural councils had the lowest number of urban design provisions. Only one of the plans assessed included provisions that addressed over half of the urban design sub-criteria. The other rural council plans ranged from 36 to 41 per cent in addressing the sub-criteria.

In each category of council plans, the areas with the highest populations had the highest percentage of urban design sub-criteria included. The more populous areas were also more likely to have introduced plan changes that addressed urban design issues.

## 4 Regional Policy Statements

Most of the operative regional policy statements addressed between 20 to 30 per cent of the urban design sub-criteria, with the Auckland Regional Policy Statement at 35 per cent. This is a low level when compared with the combined and district plans that were assessed.

The importance of urban design related plan changes was highlighted in several regions. For example, Auckland and Canterbury's plan changes to their regional policy statements significantly increased the number of urban design provisions in these documents. These urban design focused changes also significantly increased the proportion of sub-criteria addressed in these plans. Some plan changes reflect the results of regional-level planning exercises that have provided the necessary frameworks for urban design to be addressed across a region. These frameworks have, in turn, been implemented through a variety of tools, including RMA documents.

Most regional policy statements provided guidance on the following sub-criteria:

- **amenity:** provisions relating to amenity
- **character:** protecting urban water bodies, landforms and vegetation
- **choice:** accessibility of public space
- **collaboration:** using a collaborative approach to structure plans
- **custodianship:** encouraging renewable energy, mitigating hazards
- **urban growth management:** provisions relating to urban growth management.

Urban design sub-criteria not dealt with by any regional policy statements included:

- **choice:** maximum parking standards, building heights, site coverage
- **commerce:** design controls to enhance shopping, large format retail development controls, provision of home-based businesses
- **connectivity:** green networks, encouraging physical activity
- **custodianship:** encouraging safe places/crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles, relationship of buildings and street, ongoing care of places and buildings, impact of design on health
- **heritage:** non-regulatory incentives
- **open space:** improved street design, integrated stormwater and open space, public-private boundaries.

Several sub-criteria are detailed 'street level' urban design issues that would be more appropriately dealt with by district plans. However, given the strategic planning role of regional councils, there were gaps in some areas that might legitimately be considered within a regional policy statement. Issues such as integrating stormwater and open space, and green networks could be set in a regional policy framework. There may be further opportunities for inclusion of a wider range of urban design issues in regional policy statements as the importance of strategic planning at the regional level increases throughout the country.



## 4.1 Case study: Auckland Regional Policy Statement Plan Changes 6 and 7

The Auckland region has a population of around 1.3 million, which is projected to reach 2 million by 2036. Management of this growth is a key concern for the region and has been addressed through the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy. The growth strategy recognises that quality urban design is important for managing growth and improving urban areas.

There is also a strong focus on growth management in the [Auckland Regional Policy Statement \(RPS\)](#). The RPS became operative in 1999. Recently, [Plan Changes 6 and 7](#) were notified as a requirement of the Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004. The Act directed all councils in the Auckland region to integrate their land transport and land-use provisions and ensure these are consistent with the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy.

- **Proposed Plan Change 6 Giving Effect to the Regional Growth Strategy and Integrating Land Use and Transport** introduces several urban design provisions relating to growth management, urban density, integrated land use and transport planning; provisions for the identification, protection and management of the region's heritage resources; retaining or developing a sense of place and urban identity; and requiring higher building standards with acoustic treatment in high-density areas. Plan Change 6 is still subject to appeal to the Environment Court.
- **Proposed Plan Change 7 Metropolitan Urban Limits** introduces a map and is linked with proposed Plan Change 6. Appeals to the Environment Court have been withdrawn on this proposed plan change, however, and it has not become operative because of the appeals on proposed plan change 6.

For a regional policy statement, the Auckland RPS has a relatively high number of provisions embodying urban design principles. The operative RPS addressed 35 per cent of the sub-criteria. This increases to 47 per cent when Plan Changes 6 and 7 are included. The plan changes have not only increased the number of urban design sub-criteria addressed but also the extent of provisions under each of the sub-criteria.

In particular, the operative RPS and the plan changes extensively address urban growth, connectivity, character and heritage issues.

- **Urban growth:** Plan Change 6 introduces a high number of provisions relevant to urban growth management, with a focus on compact urban form, integrated land use and transport planning, development of high-density centres, and containment of growth within identified areas.
- **Connectivity:** as well as provisions encouraging integrated land use and transport planning, the RPS includes provisions enhancing public access to public spaces around the city. Plan Change 6 introduces several provisions encouraging safe, attractive cycle and walking routes, as well as transport planning to reduce the use of private vehicles.
- **Character:** the RPS includes provisions relating to the protection of natural features, and features of the built environment. Plan Changes 6 and 7 include several provisions relating to retaining or developing a sense of place and urban identity.
- **Heritage:** the RPS and Plan Changes 6 and 7 include a high number of provisions relating to identification, protection and management of the region's heritage resources.

# 5 Metropolitan Council District Plans

Metropolitan councils had a relatively high number of urban design provisions in their district plans. Of the operative plans assessed, all included provisions that addressed over 60 per cent of the urban design sub-criteria. The three largest cities assessed (Manukau, Waitakere and Wellington) all had district plans that addressed over 80 per cent of the urban design sub-criteria, once relevant plan changes were taken into account.

The majority of metropolitan council plans covered the following urban design sub-criteria:

- **amenity:** provisions that promoted the retention of urban amenity values
- **character:** identification, protection and enhancement of indigenous vegetation, provisions that promote or retain a sense of place, protection and enhancement of urban water bodies, identification and protection of distinctive landforms
- **commerce:** provision of home-based businesses, provision of design controls to enhance shopping/working/living experiences in town and neighbourhood centres, management of large format retail developments, provision of mixed-use opportunities in town and neighbourhood centres.

Urban design sub-criteria dealt with by only one of the metropolitan council plans were:

- **collaboration:** private–public partnerships
- **custodianship:** water-saving devices
- **open space:** clear boundaries between public and private open space, integrated stormwater and open space
- **urban growth management:** reuse of brownfield sites and buildings, collaboration between regional and territorial authorities.

## 5.1 Case study: Manukau City District Plan

Manukau City Council is a metropolitan council with 329,814 residents (2006 Census). It is the third largest and fastest growing city in New Zealand and it is expected that growth pressures will continue for some time. The [operative plan](#) and relevant plan changes include a high number of urban design provisions. Eighty-eight per cent of the sub-criteria were addressed in the plans.

A large number of provisions in the [District Plan](#) address urban growth and amenity. Several provisions provide for a variety of housing types and section sizes, allow for higher residential densities around town centres, and allow increased density in association with provision of open space.

Although not all of these issues are dealt with on a city-wide basis, the Flat Bush section of the Plan, in particular, includes provisions relating to:

- management of large format retail developments
- protection and enhancement of urban water bodies
- green networks that link public and private open space

- low-impact stormwater
- secure transport networks and streets
- sense of place
- public–private partnerships.

## 5.2 Case study: Wellington City urban design plan changes

Wellington City Council is a metropolitan council with a population of around 190,500. The city continues to experience strong population growth and a trend towards inner-city living. The District Plan became operative in 2000. Since 2007, several plan changes have been introduced with a focus on urban design. These reflect the Council’s ongoing recognition of the importance of fostering high-quality urban design in a growing metropolitan city.

- **Plan Change 43 Heritage Provisions** seeks to strengthen the regulatory controls on protecting historic heritage in the city. Policies and objectives were redrafted to reflect section 6(f) of the RMA. Changes to rules include amendments to provisions on demolition, relocation, additions to and alterations of listed heritage buildings and their surrounds. The decision on this plan change was notified in October 2007. It is subject to appeal to the Environment Court.
- **Plan Change 45 Urban Development Area and Structure Plan** is part of the implementation of the Northern Growth Management Framework. It includes rezoning of an area of land from rural to ‘urban development’, new objectives, policies and rules for new urban development, and a structure plan for the area. The decision on this plan change was notified in March 2008. It is subject to appeal to the Environment Court.
- **Plan Change 46 Subdivision Design Guide Review** is an update of the existing subdivision design guide. It includes new content on environmental sustainability, designing for diversity (mixed uses and a range of lot sizes), and enhancing safety through natural surveillance. The updated design guide will be used in conjunction with structure plans in new urban development areas, and also for large-scale infill subdivisions. The decision on this plan change was notified in March 2008. It is subject to appeal to the Environment Court.
- **Plan Change 48 Central Area Review** is a complete review of all provisions in the central area. It retains an emphasis on enhancing the quality of the public environment in the central area. It also includes strengthening and enhancing policies and other provisions related to high-quality urban design, and revising the central area urban design guide. The decision on this plan change was notified in October 2007. It is subject to appeal to the Environment Court.
- **Plan Change 52 Suburban Centre Rule Amendments** includes new rules in suburban centres to manage the effects of large scale building developments and large format retailing. The decision on this plan change was notified in October 2007. Plan Change 52 has been withdrawn and replaced with Plan Change 73 on 29 September 2009.
- **Plan Change 56 Managing Infill Housing Development** was made operative in July 2009. It responds to concerns about the quality of infill housing. It amends several rules relating to bulk and scale and a requirement for each unit to have its own open space.

The Wellington District Plan includes a high number of urban design provisions and this is increased when plan changes are taken into account. The urban design sub-criteria that are extensively dealt with include:

- **amenity and character:** many provisions deal with amenity and character, controls on infill housing, and comprehensive design guides that aim to enhance and maintain amenity and character (these include a residential design guide, subdivision design guide and character area design guides)
- **commerce:** mixed uses are provided for as long as amenity controls are met, restrictions on large format retail developments
- **heritage:** a high number of listed buildings, objects, areas, trees and areas of significance to Māori, and policies and objectives that aim to avoid the loss of heritage values.

## 6 Provincial Council Plans

There is high variability in the number of urban design provisions in provincial council plans. Of the plans assessed, all but two addressed over half of the urban design sub-criteria. However, the range within these plans varied from 47 per cent to 88 per cent of the sub-criteria.

As with the metropolitan council plans, the plans from the provincial councils with the highest populations and growth pressures had the greatest number of urban design provisions. Papakura, Kapiti and Tasman all addressed over 70 per cent of the sub-criteria.

The urban design sub-criteria addressed by all nine of the provincial council plans were:

- **amenity:** provisions relating to amenity
- **character:** provisions retaining a sense of place, protection of distinctive landforms and indigenous vegetation
- **choice:** site coverage affecting density
- **commerce:** mixed-use opportunities, design controls to enhance shopping, provision for home-based businesses
- **connectivity:** provisions promoting walking and cycling
- **custodianship:** measures to mitigate hazards
- **open space:** provision of open spaces.

The urban design sub-criteria addressed by only one or two of the provincial council plans were:

- **choice:** maximum parking standards
- **collaboration:** collaborative approaches to structure plans
- **custodianship:** ongoing care of buildings and spaces
- **urban growth management:** reuse of brownfield sites and buildings, collaboration between regional and territorial authorities.

### 6.1 Case study: Tasman Resource Management Plan

Tasman District Council is a provincial unitary authority with an estimated 2009 population of 44,625. The area experienced 8 per cent growth between the 2001 and 2006 census periods. The region is popular because of its climate, access to the coastline and national parks, and arts community. It has seven urban areas with populations of over 1000.

Tasman District has a [combined district and regional plan](#). The District Plan component was operative in November 2008. There are 13 current plan changes; seven of which relate to urban design matters.

The Plan and plan changes have a relatively high number of urban design provisions. The Plan addresses 88 per cent of the urban design sub-criteria. In particular, it extensively addresses amenity, custodianship, character, open space and urban growth issues.

- **Amenity:** the Plan includes a high number of provisions for avoiding the adverse effects of development on amenity. This includes detailed guidance in subdivision and development design guides.
- **Character:** the Plan provisions and design guide criteria comprehensively address character. They include provisions for retaining character through design, form and scale consistency, and promoting and developing identity in new developments.
- **Custodianship:** the Plan has a strong focus on avoiding the adverse effects of natural and man-made hazards. This includes provisions restricting or controlling development in hazard-prone areas.
- **Open space:** a high number of provisions deal with open space. These include adequate distribution of open space, minimum provision requirements, promoting multi-use open spaces and integrating with stormwater management.
- **Urban growth:** the Plan includes a high number of provisions for managing urban growth. The focus is on avoiding expansion into hazard-prone areas, providing for expansion and intensification within urban boundaries. Structure plans are favoured for new developments.

Urban design sub-criteria that the Plan does not currently deal with but that may become relevant in the future include:

- maximum parking standards
- promoting higher densities around town and transport centres
- requirements for dwellings in high-noise areas to be acoustically treated
- public–private partnerships
- encouraging physical activity
- reuse of brownfield sites.

# 7 Rural Council Plans

Rural council plans typically have a low number of urban design provisions. Only one of the plans assessed included provisions that addressed over half of the sub-criteria. The other rural council plans ranged from between 36 per cent and 41 per cent of the sub-criteria. For all the rural council plans assessed, less than 10 per cent of the sub-criteria were addressed to a high extent.

These results are not surprising given the relatively small size of the towns these plans cover and the reduced level of development pressure facing these areas, compared with their metropolitan or provincial counterparts.

The sub-criteria addressed by all the rural plans were:

- **amenity:** provisions relating to amenity
- **choice:** variety of maximum building heights
- **commerce:** mixed-use opportunities, design controls to enhance shopping/living experiences
- **custodianship:** consideration of residential buildings to the street, mitigate hazards
- **heritage:** respond to heritage values.

Urban design sub-criteria not dealt with by any of the rural council plans were:

- **choice:** allowing increasing density with open space
- **collaboration:** collaborative approach to structure plans, involve communities in high-interest developments
- **custodianship:** renewable energy, water-saving devices, design to improve infrastructure performance
- **heritage:** level of protection of heritage
- **open space:** open space and stormwater integration, clear private–public boundaries
- **urban growth management:** structure plans.

## 7.1 Case study: Rangitikei District Plan

Rangitikei District is a predominately rural community of just over 4500 square kilometres. The key driver of Rangitikei's economy is the farming sector. The district is experiencing limited urban development pressure. In fact, Census figures show the population is declining – from 15,102 in 2001 to 14,712 in 2006.

The [Rangitikei District Plan](#) was made operative in 1999 and updated with plan changes in 2007. None of these plan changes have dealt with urban design issues.

The Plan deals with some aspects of urban design, with a focus on heritage, amenity and hazards. These are all matters councils are required to address under the RMA. Heritage and amenity are included as Part II matters. Avoiding and mitigating natural hazards is one of the functions of a territorial authority under section 31 of the RMA. As such, you would expect

consideration to be given to these statutorily imposed urban design issues, even in an area experiencing little pressure in urban growth.

The Plan includes provisions that recognise and protect a wide variety of the District's heritage values. These include buildings and features, marae, areas of significance to Māori, and notable trees. Non-regulatory incentives for heritage protection are also covered in the Plan. Amenity provisions focus particularly on maintaining the amenity of residential properties and minimising the nuisance of non-residential activities. Controls include noise, daylight setbacks for buildings and screening from residential boundaries. There is also a large focus in the Plan on avoiding and mitigating the adverse effects of hazards, particularly natural hazards.

Urban design sub-criteria that the Plan does not currently deal with, or deals with in a limited way, include:

- rules to support existing policies that define the geographic extent of settlements and promote consolidation
- connectivity
- open space
- collaboration issues
- efficient use of energy or other resources
- large format retail developments
- increasing densities in exchange for provision of open space
- promotion of a sense of place
- encouraging people to become more physically active.



## 8 Overall Trends

One urban design sub-criterion was addressed in all of the 25 plans assessed.

- **Custodianship:** avoids or mitigates the effects of natural and man-made hazards.

The following urban design sub-criteria were addressed by more than 75 per cent of all the plans assessed:

- **amenity:** urban amenity values
- **character:** protection and enhancement of urban water bodies, identification and protection of distinctive landforms, identification, protection and enhancement of indigenous vegetation
- **commerce:** mixed use, design controls in town centres
- **connectivity:** provisions that promote walking, cycling and different modes of transport
- **heritage:** provision of a heritage place register, responding to heritage values of an area
- **open space:** policy framework to provide for open spaces, including the provision of a wide range of reserves
- **urban growth management:** provisions that provide for the management of urban growth.

The inclusion of several of these is not surprising because they are matters specifically identified in various parts of the RMA. For example, both regional councils and territorial authorities are required to avoid or mitigate natural hazards under sections 30 and 31. Therefore, it is to be expected that all the plans would deal with this.

The matters of national importance in section 6 of the RMA were also reflected in several of the character and heritage sub-criteria in the plans assessed. Under section 6, all councils must 'recognise and provide for':

- section 6(a) – the preservation of the natural character of the coastal environment (including the coastal marine area), wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins, and the protection of them from inappropriate subdivision, use and development
- section 6(b) – the protection of outstanding natural features and landscapes from inappropriate subdivision, use and development
- section 6(c) – the protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna
- section 6(f) – the protection of historic heritage from inappropriate subdivision, use and development.

Similarly, the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values is a matter all councils must 'have particular regard' to under section 7(c) of the RMA.

As well as being in section 6, both regional councils and territorial authorities have various functions pertaining to indigenous biological diversity under sections 30 and 31 of the RMA.

## 8.1 Population-based trends

Under each population-based category (metropolitan, provincial, rural), the regions or districts with the highest populations had the highest percentage of urban design sub-criteria provisions in their planning documents as illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Urban design sub-criteria by population**

Category	Name of document	Population	Percentage of sub-criteria addressed
Regional	Auckland Regional Policy Statement	1,300,000	47
Metropolitan	Manukau City District Plan	330,000	88
Provincial	Tasman Resource Management Plan	47,400	88
Rural	Rangitikei District Plan	14,700	58

The more populous districts were also more likely to have introduced plan changes that address urban design issues. These include four metropolitan councils (Manukau, Rodney, Tauranga and Wellington), and two of the three largest provincial councils (Kapiti and Papakura). None of the smaller, rural councils have initiated any urban design related plan changes. This trend likely reflects an increased pressure for urban growth in larger urban areas, compared with less development pressure in smaller towns.

## 8.2 Growth strategies

Most of the councils that had initiated urban growth related plan changes did so in response to a growth strategy at the regional or sub-regional scale. These include:

- [Auckland Regional Growth Strategy](#)
- [Wellington Regional Growth Strategy](#)
- [Western Bay of Plenty Smart Growth Strategy](#)
- [Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy](#).

There is an increasing trend towards the use of non-statutory urban growth strategies in high-growth population areas. Growth strategies are long-term strategies that provide a comprehensive spatial framework for managing an area's growth. They can be used to inform RMA documents (as seen in this research), as well as other council plans such as long term council community plans, urban design strategies and regional land transport strategies.

Further information on the use of [growth strategies](#) can be found in the [Urban Design Toolkit](#). A [case study of the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy](#) can also be found in [Urban Design Case Studies: Local Government](#). These documents are available on the Ministry for the Environment's website.

## 9 Overall Gaps

The following urban design sub-criteria were addressed in less than 25 per cent of all the plans assessed:

- **collaboration:** public–private partnerships
- **custodianship:** water-saving devices, ongoing maintenance of buildings and spaces
- **open space:** stormwater integrated with open spaces, public–private boundaries
- **urban growth management:** reuse of brownfield sites and buildings, collaboration between regional and territorial authorities on growth.

In addition, less than half of the plans assessed contained provisions relating to:

- **character:** promotion of a sense of place
- **choice:** allowing greater density if open space is provided, maximum parking standards, provision of higher density subdivision around town centres and transport nodes
- **collaboration:** collaborative approach to structure plans, community involvement in high-interest developments
- **commerce:** large format retail controls
- **connectivity:** green networks, streets designed as multi-function public spaces, environments that encourage physical activity
- **custodianship:** noise mitigation for inner-city dwellers, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles in design, relationship of buildings to the street, design to improve infrastructure
- **heritage:** levels of heritage protection, non-regulatory heritage protection incentives.

### 9.1 Review of Urban Design Case Law

It is interesting to note that at least two of the gaps (heritage protection and large format retail controls) were also identified in the [Review of Urban Design Case Law](#).

**Heritage protection:** Although some of the heritage sub-criteria may have been addressed, less than half of the plans reviewed had provisions that provided for different levels or categories of heritage protection. This is despite historic heritage being elevated to a matter of national importance in the 2003 amendments to the RMA. The urban design case law review states: “it is apparent from case law that the Court will now give full weight to heritage values even if those values are not specifically protected by a district plan” (page 12). The review goes on to say “the Court has also observed that, where heritage values exist and this is reflected in policy, recognition should be backed up by methods in the district plan ... this is a best practice point for all district plan making” (page 13).

**Large format retail controls:** More than half of the plans assessed did not contain any provisions relating to large format retail controls. The urban design case law review states that the Environment Court “encourages councils to maintain up-to-date plans. This assists the Court when it is considering cases involving urban environments and the changing nature of activities that occur within them” (page 20).

Further, the urban design case law review went on to say: “there are cases where non-provision in district plans for large format retail activities has been considered an insufficient reason to disallow such activities. Where no provisions exist, such activities tend, by default, to be located on large sites that are peripheral to urban areas” (page 20).

## 9.2 Role of other non-RMA documents

The list of gaps above raises the question what is an RMA issue and what is not? Are all urban design issues matters that should be dealt with (primarily) in regional policy statements and district plans?

Regional policy statements and district plans are part of a suite of tools available to councils that wish to pursue urban design initiatives.

Many of the plan changes investigated during this research were a result of a broader, non-RMA process, such as a regional strategy or urban design framework. The research did not look at the full range of council planning documents, only those pertaining to the RMA. Consequently, it is difficult to say whether the sub-criteria that these plans have not addressed are gaps that councils are not addressing at all, or urban design issues that are being addressed in other ways by councils.

For more information on the full range of non-RMA planning and design tools available to councils see section 4 of the *Urban Design Toolkit*. In particular refer to:

- [community plan](#)
- [growth strategy](#)
- [heritage strategy](#)
- [transport strategy](#)
- [urban design framework](#)
- [urban design strategy](#)
- [walking and cycling strategy](#).

A primary non-RMA vehicle for councils to address urban design issues is through long term council community plans (LTCCPs). RMA policies and plans can act as a regulatory means to support implementation. Under the Local Government Act 2002, all councils are required to develop an LTCCP. They are intended to inform other planning functions undertaken by councils. LTCCPs identify the community outcomes of a district or region and how the council’s activities can contribute to these outcomes.

The use of non-RMA documents reflects that urban design requires an integrated approach to design that is not always possible under the restrictions and parameters of the RMA. Urban design by its very nature cuts across a wide range of legislation, works at different scales and involves many players. The emergence of a range of regional and sub-regional planning strategies has been in response to growth management pressures and the need to design a long-term strategic urban vision across regional and territorial authorities. It was therefore surprising to see that less than 25 per cent of the plans assessed for this research included provisions that dealt with collaboration between regional and territorial authorities on growth. An area for future guidance could be collaboration techniques and tools available for councils. Research into the extent of collaboration between councils could be useful, and the ways this is, or can be, documented in plans and other material.

## 9.3 Further opportunities for research or guidance

Some of the gaps identified above are new or emerging issues for New Zealand. Others present opportunities for future research, such as research into the best ways for councils to address these urban design issues through RMA documents, or other means.

In some situations it may be useful to learn from the experience of others. For example, one of the overall gaps identified was a lack of provisions in plans that deal with public–private partnerships. While relatively uncommon in New Zealand, public–private partnerships are a well-established tool in both the United Kingdom and Australia. It could be useful to take stock of lessons learnt to date in these countries and how they could apply to the New Zealand situation.

Other areas where New Zealand could consider looking to overseas jurisdictions for ideas or solutions include the reuse of brownfield sites, and streets designed as multi-function public spaces. Further research on the applicability of overseas approaches to New Zealand could be considered.

It is surprising that the sub-criteria “provision of higher density subdivision around town centres and transport nodes” was dealt with in less than half of the plans assessed. This is a fairly well-established, if sometimes hotly debated, urban design principle. Further investigation into the reasons for the lack of such provisions may be required, along with potential guidance on different policy and implementation approaches in the New Zealand context.

Similarly, the sub-criteria “promotion of a sense of place” is a well-accepted principle of high-quality urban design that less than half of the plans addressed. A sense of place is as important in declining rural areas as it is in fast-growing urban cities. Although these areas have different declining growth pressures, it is possible for plans and policies to reflect these pressures. This may also be a matter that could benefit from further guidance.

# Appendix 1: Research Methodology

## MWH New Zealand Ltd consultant team

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## Assessment process

The consultants developed a questionnaire in the form of a matrix to guide the assessment of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) documents. The questionnaire was based on established urban design principles as set out in the *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* and the *Review of Urban Design Case Law*. This resulted in a list of 10 ‘headline’ criteria. Although there are many ways of representing urban design principles, this combination was chosen because it provided a pragmatic framework for assessing RMA plans for the purposes of this research. The criteria were based on existing published criteria in the *Urban Design Protocol*, and more recent refinements of these in the *Review of Urban Design Case Law*.

A brief description of the headline criteria is included as Table A1.

**Table A1: Headline criteria**

<b>Headline criteria</b>	<b>Brief description</b>	<b>Links to the Urban Design Protocol's seven 'Cs'</b>	<b>Source document</b>	<b>Links to <i>The Value of Urban Design</i></b>
<b>Amenity</b>	The qualities and characteristics of an [urban] place or area that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes.	Choice, context, character	<i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i> , section 2 RMA	High-quality public realm
<b>Character</b>	The physical qualities of an urban place or area as determined by the combination of building types, age, street pattern, open space, slope, vegetation pattern, mix of land uses, and climate.	Character	<i>Urban Design Protocol</i>	Local character
<b>Choice</b>	Quality urban design fosters diversity and offers people choice in the urban form of our towns and cities, and choice in densities, building types, transport options and activities.	Choice	<i>Urban Design Protocol</i> , <i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i> (density)	Adaptability, mixed use, density
<b>Collaboration</b>	Quality urban design requires good communication and coordinated actions from all decision makers: central government, local government, professionals, transport operators, developers and users.	Collaboration	<i>Urban Design Protocol</i>	User participation, integrated decision making
<b>Commerce</b>	The type, location and interaction of businesses within an urban place or area that influences employment opportunities, viability, services and opportunities for growth.	Choice, context	<i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i>	Mixed use, connectivity
<b>Connectivity</b>	The way in which people and goods are conveyed within and to urban places and areas, including by walking, motorised and self-propelled means and the infrastructure required to facilitate it.	Connections, choice	<i>Urban Design Protocol</i> , <i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i>	Connectivity
<b>Custodianship</b>	Quality urban design reduces the environmental impacts of towns and cities through environmentally sustainable and responsive solutions. Custodianship recognises the lifetime costs of buildings and infrastructure, and aims to hand on places to the next generation in as good or better condition.	Custodianship	<i>Urban Design Protocol</i>	Local character, connectivity, density, mixed use, adaptability
<b>Heritage</b>	Includes historic sites, structures, places and areas; archaeological sites; and sites of significance to Māori, including wāhi tapu and surroundings associated with natural and physical resources [in an urban area].	Character, context, custodianship	<i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i> , section 2 RMA	Local character
<b>Open space</b>	The provision of, or changes to, open spaces within an urban place or area that may be for recreational, aesthetic or natural values.	Character, context	<i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i>	High-quality urban realm, local character, density
<b>Urban growth management</b>	The definition of the extent and location of new and existing urban areas, including the process and mechanisms for planning the form and patterns of these areas and the implications for change in land use, such as transport.	Context, choice, character, connections, custodianship	<i>Review of Urban Design Case Law</i>	All

The MWH consultants developed the following sub-criteria to expand and clarify the headline criteria. This included plan provisions the consultant team expected to find in RMA planning documents. The sub-criteria were based on the details of the *Urban Design Protocol* and experience of the consultant team from working with a variety of RMA documents across the country. They were developed to be generic enough to compare across plans, but detailed enough to elaborate on the headline criteria. The sub-criteria were developed for the purposes of this research only and do not represent a comprehensive set of criteria for assessing the general quality of urban design provisions in plans.

The sub-criteria are shown in Table A2.

**Table A2: Sub-criteria**

Headline criteria	Sub-criteria
<b>Amenity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provisions that promote the retention of urban amenity values – that is, pleasantness, aesthetic, coherence, cultural and recreational.</li> </ul>
<b>Character</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provisions that retain a sense of place, for example, retaining architectural style of character areas.</li> <li>• The protection and enhancement of urban water bodies.</li> <li>• The identification and protection of distinctive landforms.</li> <li>• The identification, protection and enhancement of indigenous vegetation.</li> </ul>
<b>Choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reward/allow increasing densities in association with provision of open space.</li> <li>• Maximum parking standards.</li> <li>• Ensures public spaces are accessible by everybody, including people with disabilities.</li> <li>• Provision for a variety of housing types.</li> <li>• Provision for a variety of section sizes.</li> <li>• The provision of higher density subdivision and development around town centres and public transport modes.</li> <li>• Variety of permitted maximum building heights.</li> <li>• Site coverage that can affect housing density and design.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses a collaborative approach to long-term structure planning including subdivision design that acknowledges the contributions of many different disciplines and perspectives.</li> <li>• Involves communities in meaningful decision-making processes for developments with high community interest, for example, through incorporation of consultative methods in design guides.</li> <li>• Forges public–private sector partnerships.</li> </ul>
<b>Commerce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provisions of mixed-use opportunities in town and neighbourhood centres.</li> <li>• Design controls to enhance shopping/working/living experiences in town and neighbourhood centres.</li> <li>• Management of large format retail developments.</li> <li>• Provision of home-based businesses.</li> </ul>
<b>Connectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provisions that promote walking, cycling and different modes of transport.</li> <li>• Constraints and opportunities to provide for connectivity of transport network connections with other streets, for example, limitations on connecting to major roads (constraint).</li> <li>• Provisions to reduce the level of vehicular traffic and/or traffic speed.</li> <li>• Provisions to encourage safe, attractive and secure pathways and links between landmarks and neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• Facilitates green networks that link public and private open space.</li> </ul>



Headline criteria	Sub-criteria
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streets and other thoroughfares are designed as positive spaces with multiple functions.</li> <li>• Provides for environments that encourage people to become physically active.</li> </ul>
<b>Custodianship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporates and encourages renewable energy sources in subdivision and development, for example, passive solar gain.</li> <li>• Incorporates water-saving devices in subdivision and development.</li> <li>• Incorporates noise mitigation to reduce noise impacts from major infrastructure, airports, ports, new roads.</li> <li>• Incorporates noise mitigation to reduce noise impacts from town centres.</li> <li>• Encourages buildings, spaces, places and transport networks that are safer, with less crime and fear of crime, for example, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).</li> <li>• Provision to consider residential building in relation to the street, for example, minimum front yard standard for living areas.</li> <li>• Avoids or mitigates natural and man-made hazards.</li> <li>• Considers the ongoing care and maintenance of buildings, spaces, places and networks.</li> <li>• Uses design to improve environmental performance and infrastructure.</li> <li>• Considers the impact of design on people's health, for example, provision of outdoor living courts.</li> </ul>
<b>Heritage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provision of a heritage place register and an indication of its main focus.</li> <li>• Basis for the heritage registers.</li> <li>• Level of protection.</li> <li>• Inclusion of non-regulatory provisions.</li> <li>• Responding to heritage values of an area – reuse, maintain, enhance.</li> </ul>
<b>Open space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy framework to provide for open spaces, including the provision of a wide range of reserves.</li> <li>• Provision of policies and standards to promote better designed streets and streetscapes and promote as open spaces with public surveillance, for example, landscaping/tree planting requirements, traffic calming.</li> <li>• Open space areas associated with stormwater/utilities/streets, for example, integration of stormwater and provision/retention of open space.</li> <li>• Having clear boundaries between public and private open spaces, for example, through appropriate use of fencing.</li> </ul>
<b>Urban growth management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provisions that provide for the management of urban growth.</li> <li>• Inclusion of structure plans in relation to urban growth management strategies/studies.</li> <li>• Provisions that provide for the reuse of brownfield sites/reuse of buildings, urban renewal.</li> <li>• Collaboration policy, with region and/or territorial local authority/ies in relation to growth areas.</li> </ul>

Each RMA document was then assessed based on the extent to which these sub-criteria could be found reflected in various plan provisions. Plan provisions counted included:

- issues
- objectives
- policies
- rules
- standards
- other methods identified in the plan (such as regulatory design guides, structure plans)
- references to other methods not in the plan (such as urban design strategies, local area guides).

Only the chapters of each document relevant to urban design were assessed. These included the commercial, town centre, residential, open space and recreation chapters. Rural chapters were not assessed.

A weighting system was applied based on the number of plan provisions identified under each sub-criterion. It was assumed that the more times a document mentioned a particular urban design sub-criteria, the more in-depth its consideration. The extent to which each document dealt with the urban design sub-criteria was then categorised as high, medium, low or none.

## **Choosing the documents**

The RMA documents for assessment were selected on a regional basis to help identify any linkages between regional and district planning documents. A pilot study was undertaken based mostly on documents for local authorities in the Wellington region. Other regions were chosen to include areas facing a range of urban growth scenarios – some under significant pressure from urban growth and other areas in decline. Metropolitan, provincial and rural areas with a range of population sizes were represented in the selection. The combined plans from three unitary authorities were selected. In all other regions, the regional policy statement plus a selection of district plans were assessed.

The 25 selected plans were as follows.

### *Auckland Region*

- Auckland Regional Policy Statement
- Manukau City District Plan
- Waitakere City District Plan
- Papakura District Plan
- Rodney District Plan

### *Bay of Plenty Region*

- Bay of Plenty Regional Policy Statement
- Tauranga District Plan
- Western Bay of Plenty District Plan
- Opotiki District Plan

### *Gisborne*

- Gisborne Combined Regional Land and District Plan

### *Wellington Region*

- Wellington Regional Policy Statement
- Wellington City District Plan
- Kapiti Coast District Plan

### *Manawatu–Wanganui Region*

- Rangitikei District Plan

### *Tasman*

- Tasman Resource Management Plan

### *Nelson*

- Nelson Resource Management Plan

### *Canterbury Region*

- Canterbury Regional Policy Statement
- Timaru District Plan
- MacKenzie District Plan

### *Otago Region*

- Otago Regional Policy Statement
- Dunedin City District Plan
- Waitaki District Plan
- Queenstown Lakes District Plan

### *West Coast Region*

- West Coast Regional Policy Statement
- Buller District Plan