



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao



People+Places+Spaces

A design guide for urban New Zealand



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

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Foreword



People, Places and Spaces: A design guide for urban New Zealand reflects the Government's commitment to sustainable development in New Zealand's urban areas. Sustainable development encompasses social inclusiveness, economic prosperity and environmental quality, and is therefore a foundation for a positive future for all New Zealanders.

But why a guide on urban design? Because over 83 percent of our population live in urban areas. Because it is critical to ensure that our urban environments work for us, and support a high quality of living. Because the quality of our urban areas is another factor that can give us a competitive edge to retain skilled Kiwis thinking of heading overseas to live, or to attract people here – Kiwis thinking of returning, investors, skilled immigrants, tourists.

We have much to celebrate about our towns and cities – often stunning physical locations, and a strong built heritage as witnessed by Napier's art deco, Oamaru's whitestone, and Arrowtown's gold rush buildings. Our 'do-it-yourself' approach underlies what traditionally has been an informal and reasonably inclusive approach to living. Increasingly, too, we are celebrating the diversity of our urban populations, Maori and Pakeha, and our place in the Pacific. The more recent cultural and ethnic groups who have arrived and are now part of our community add to that richness.

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.

Good urban design helps create great places to live, work and play. It has much to offer – including more varied lifestyle, work, transport and recreation options. More effective and efficient urban areas that work better for us, and use less energy and water. That make it easier to access friends, work, and leisure activities. That feel safer and support both physical and mental health, through making walking and cycling real options.



We all have a role to play – from the public to iwi, the transport planner to the stormwater engineer, economist and urban designer, the planner to the local and central government politicians.

Urban design is about both process and outcomes. About involving people and communities, iwi and all the diverse professionals and sectors that create the fabric of our urban areas. About creating places that we want to use and that work well, and that celebrate the natural environment, our built and cultural heritage, and strengthen both local and national identity. About promoting development that fits in with the street and the community. About protecting and enhancing 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.

This guide on urban design has links to other government programmes on transport, climate change and energy. The *Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy*, launched in September 2001, seeks to substantially improve our energy performance. There are significant energy gains to be made not just by improving the performance of our buildings (with attendant health benefits), but by making our towns and cities more accessible. This guide also links to Ministry for the Environment work on urban amenity indicators.

The challenge for us all is to build on the positives of our richly diverse urban areas, to re-create them, to ensure they are socially inclusive, economically prosperous and environmentally responsible. To fulfil the promise of sustainable development.

This guide outlines both urban design and process principles to achieve good urban outcomes and support sustainable development. I commend the guide to you. My hope is that it will support a more informed discussion in New Zealand about the role and value of urban design, and help us all to enhance our towns and cities.



Hon Marian Hobbs

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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Executive Summary

The need for an urban design guide

The purpose of this guide is to give all people interested in more liveable and prosperous urban areas – professionals, councillors, business people and the wider community – a taste of what urban design is, and how to achieve better urban design. Urban design aims to make our towns and cities more economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally friendly, while also making them look and work better for people.

New Zealand has become an urban society, yet we have not given much thought to the design of our towns and cities. We are seeing the erosion of the quality of public spaces and values that underpin liveable towns and cities, threats to the ability of some urban areas to compete for jobs and investment, and the loss of what is distinctive about our urban environments. Increasingly, we want our settlements to reflect Maori as well as Pakeha culture, our Pacific setting, and the range of ethnic groups that now make up our communities.

In today's world, urban design is a key factor in determining the fortunes of our towns and cities.

What is urban design?

Urban design is about making the connections between people and places, between public and private space, between the natural and built environment, between movement and urban form, and between the social and economic purposes for which urban space is used.

Urban design is as much about urban structure (the relationship between spaces, roads and the density and range of activities) as it is about the design of a specific place. Urban structure is important because no matter how good the detailed design of a place may be, it cannot overcome structural deficiencies. Much bad urban design stems from poor urban structure and an inadequate analysis of the placement of a development.



Urban design projects range from contributing to national-level projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve energy efficiency, to regional strategies like Auckland's Regional Growth Strategy, to local projects to improve a street, park, centre, or access to a particular feature, like the Whangarei Town Basin development.

A comprehensive approach

New Zealand settlements are relatively young, and a suburban, car-oriented pattern predominates. Adapting this pattern to more diverse lifestyle and economic trends, while achieving good design outcomes, is a complex task. Creating successful urban places involves:

- understanding the urban context
- ensuring there is a community-led definition of vision and values
- bringing together different sectors, the public and professional groups involved in place-making
- taking a place-based analysis of options and solutions
- developing plans that reflect urban design, planning, urban economics and community values
- combining public and private endeavours.

Successful urban design processes have to be:

- integrated and comprehensive
- consultative and transparent
- viable and deliverable.

Urban design principles

Urban places we enjoy – like Tamaki Drive and Broadway, Newmarket, both in Auckland, Courtenay Place in Wellington, Oxford Terrace in Christchurch, Trafalgar Street in Nelson and Bluff Hill in Napier tend to have similar qualities in terms of how spaces, streets and activities are arranged. While the landscapes and building styles may differ, the success of these areas comes down to the following common design principles.



Consolidation and dispersal

Greater density influences many fundamental qualities we like about urban places, like vibrancy and ‘hubbub’, while also affecting how we consume resources like land, and the need to travel. In central Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland, and at New Lynn, Waitakere City, intensification has helped add life to these centres.

Integration and connectivity

Urban places that are joined together with others in a complex web of spaces and streets, rather than being isolated pods, are easier and more enjoyable to get around, especially on foot. They facilitate movement and exchange. At Sturges Road (in Waitakere City), a connected street network is leading to more people walking than in adjacent, conventionally designed suburbs. In Christchurch, the old university-turned-art-centre and the museum have good linkages to the rest of the city centre.

Diversity and adaptability

A diversity of activities brings a place to life, and providing for choices through a mix of buildings means a place can adapt to changing needs. The historic whitestone warehouse area in Oamaru and Dunedin’s grand old railway station are examples of how older areas can change and adapt to new uses. The Botany Town Centre in Manukau is a new example of the value of a diversity of building styles and activities.

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 for urban areas that are special. In some places, New Zealand cities do well in celebrating landscapes – like New Plymouth town centre, with its new connections to the coastline.



Environmental responsiveness

Environmental responsiveness helps to reduce the environmental 'footprint' of the city, while improving amenity and recreational opportunities. It also involves improving water and energy efficiency, reducing waste and protecting urban biodiversity. The restoration of urban waterways in Christchurch is an example of the synergy between natural and urban objectives.

Degrees of urban intensity and different project levels

When applying these design principles it is important to think about the different spatial 'layers' a city or town has – from the regional structure of suburbs and town centres, down to public and private lot design. We also need to think about the degree of urban intensity. In central areas we would expect a site to have many more internal and external connections than one on the edge of a city, away from important transport routes, for example.

Achieving better standards of urban design

Achieving better standards of urban design is a long-term process. We need:

- interested participants aware of urban design and its value
- leadership that recognises the need to improve how we design urban places, large and small
- integrated urban policy that recognises the importance of the quality of our urban areas to economic, environmental and social life
- a wider range of delivery mechanisms than we have at the moment, especially tools to promote positive design outcomes rather than just to stop bad outcomes.

Cities like Wellington, Waitakere, Christchurch and Timaru are putting effort into good urban design, and are reaping the rewards. If we pay enough attention to urban design, we can improve our quality of life and create distinctive and valued urban environments.