Planning for successful cities - a proposed National Policy Statement on Urban Development

Submission Reference no: 260

Urban Design Forum
New Zealand

Submitter Type: Professional body
Source: Web Form
Overall Position: Support in part

Clause
Question 1. Do you support a national policy statement on urban development that aims to deliver quality urban environments and make room for growth? Why/Why not?

Position
Somewhat

Notes
The UDF certainly supports a policy statement on urban development, especially one that aims to deliver quality urban environments. However, “growth” should not be seen as the target, or the solution, unless it is growth that truly supports quality urban environments. The NPS does not adequately define what is considered a quality urban environment or how to make successful urban places. Clear expectations, including vision, direction, explicit definition and guidance, are currently lacking but are sorely needed. Unfortunately successive Governments including the current one, have failed in this respect. Not since the excellent Ministry for Environment’s “People+Places+Spaces” guide in 2002 has central government attempted to define what it considers to be successful urban places. Further, the influential and successful Urban Design Protocol, released in 2005, was a valuable addition to the recognition of urban values. This included an accompanying call to action through central government initiatives and by the significant number of signatories to the Protocol. It further highlighted the importance of good design in our urban environments by describing the conditions under which good urban design outcomes will occur, and its legacy, albeit unsupported by central government remains today. But not since those two documents and accompanying initiatives have good urban outcomes been described at a central government level. Without such explicit definition, it is easy to conclude that central government believes that any urban development is good development. In other words, urban growth should be encouraged regardless of its type and location, and implies a uniformity to this, no matter the locale in which it is situated. It is not a binary equation. It is not a matter of having either a rural or urban environment. There are many different forms of urban environment, ranging from “peri-urban” on the edge of our cities, through different levels of intensity in our suburbs, through to central urban areas and city centres. Each has their pros and cons and challenges and bring about different outcomes, and each town or city has its own characteristics. However it has become increasingly clear that edge of city, mono-use, low density, car-dependent residential development is increasing and exacerbating some of our major national challenges including: • Impacts of climate change • Rising levels of obesity – caused in part by the increasing creation of environments that are totally car-dependent and do not provide for sufficient active transportation (walking and cycling) • Illnesses related to air quality – caused in part by excessive vehicle movement and congestion • Increasing feeling of isolation and lack of a sense of community – caused in part by poorly defined urban growth that fails to create clear neighbourhoods and community and the lack of all that is required to create such communities – local shops, social and community facilities – that are easily accessible and usable • Rising inequality and poverty – by providing more homes in locations with poor access to employment and transport costs become crippling, even if the cost of the homes themselves appear to be lower • Difficulty in meeting infrastructure provision – with edge of city developments in new greenfield locations requiring both excessive capital costs to provide infrastructure and then on-going costs to maintain such infrastructure. Of course we should be allowing for growth/intensification of our urban areas to accommodate our increasing population, but only if it is the right type and quality of development in the right location. But this has to be defined in order to promote such an approach.

Clause
Are there other tools under the RMA, other legislation or non-statutory tools that would be more effective in achieving a quality urban environment and making room for growth?

Notes
Central Government has been totally silent on what it considers to be successful urban environments. A very clear definition on what constitutes “quality urban environments” and how to achieve and promote them needs to be provided by Central Government. This should probably stand out separate from the NPS, but referred to directly by the NPS. The national Urban Design Protocol (2005) is out of date and has lost some of its relevance. A replacement or refresh of this document is long
overdue and could provide an excellent way of providing a non-political view on both what constitutes successful urban places, and how to achieve them. Auckland Council has produced excellent design advice on how to produce good quality urban outcomes through its Auckland Design Manual (ADM). Although one of the most important principles of good design is about designing to context, much of the content of the ADM refers to good design principles that are applicable nationally. Central and local government should also consider appropriate legislation and additional financial incentives or measures to facilitate the right type of development in the right place. Value capture of up-zoned areas has been used very successfully overseas but is absent in New Zealand. As a result, landowners are making huge personal financial gains at the expense of our urban environments.

Clause
Question 2. Do you support the approach of targeting the most directive policies to our largest and fastest growing urban environments? Why/why not?
Position
Somewhat
Notes
The UDF agrees that some of our major urban centres are facing particular challenges around growth more than other centres. It is also recognised that different urban centres have different levels of resourcing. For that reason, some of the more onerous requirements of the NPS like Future Development Strategies and monitoring, is a big expense for small councils and they should be exempt. However, for the directive elements of the NPS, they are just as valuable in smaller cities as they are in big cities. Often small cities face the same problems, just on a smaller scale. All of the prescriptive parts of the NPS like the objectives and policies should all apply to all councils, while recognising that a one size fits all approach will not work. Likewise, where rules are disallowed, they should be disallowed in all cities.

Clause
Question 3. Do you support the proposed changes to FDSs overall? If not, what would you suggest doing differently?
Position
Somewhat
Notes
Overall the UDF consider that the list of major centres that need a FDS should be expanded to more urban centres. The Future Development Strategy is key to making sure that whatever outward growth happens is well planned, but it’s important in figuring what infrastructure investment and actions are required to support quality residential intensification.

Clause
Question 4. Do you support the proposed approach of the NPS-UD providing national level direction about the features of a quality urban environment? Why/why not?
Position
Yes
Notes
The UDF supports the idea of providing direction at the national level about delivering quality urban environments. However, the document fails to sufficiently explain the features of a quality urban environment in any meaningful way. This cannot be described adequately in just a few bullet points. This is a complex topic and one that really needs to be the subject of a far more detailed explanation. Not since the excellent MfE document “People+Places+Spaces” in 2002 has central government attempted to define what it considers to be successful urban places. The influential and successful Urban Design Protocol in 2005 was a valuable addition to the earlier MfE document as it further highlighted the importance of good design in our urban environments by describing the conditions under which good urban design outcomes will occur. But these documents are 17 years and 14 years old respectively and now largely ignored by the development community. But they represent an excellent starting point for describing quality urban environments. The crucial element is to describe common principles that underpin successful urban places. Whilst these are relatively uniform throughout the developed world, this does not mean they advocate for the same response everywhere. On the contrary, one of the most fundamental design principles is that of designing to context, recognising that all places are different and the design response should be different. But other principles around successful urban places are transferable - such as the need for a minimum intensity of use; consolidation of activities to encourage the sharing of information and ideas and to minimise trips; a mix and diversity of building uses and building types; the creation of a good quality public realm that is attractive and safe; good quality connections; infrastructure needs etc. Without the establishment of what actually constitutes successful and quality urban places, it leaves the door open for ambiguity where almost any form of urban development is allowed to take place, regardless of the negative impacts that can result. The second paragraph on page 26 of the discussion document states, "The NPS-UD would give direction on what is meant by quality urban environments, both in existing and future urban environments". This will need to reflect the potentially different nature of these two environments and the difficulty and costs of retrofitting an existing urban environment to meet a higher standard than currently exists, as well as urban environments of different scale, and the subjectivity involved. There is a significant missed opportunity to discuss the impacts of climate change on the urban environment. The proposed NPS should consider how to make efficient use of land and infrastructure and move to urban environments that support a low-carbon economy, alongside the delivery of affordable and quality housing.
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Clause
Question 5. Do you support the inclusion of proposals to clarify that amenity values are diverse and change over time? Why/why not?
Position
Somewhat
Notes
The UDF recognise the need to make decisions on the basis of what is beneficial to the community as a whole, rather than focus on the impacts of the individual. The use of amenity values in district plans at the moment appears aimed at preserving the status-quo and supporting a very particular vision of how people should live and can be quickly out of date. However, what, if any additional guidance is proposed that will support the community in making the necessary trade-offs, or will assist in reflecting environments that have a specific character or identity that supports community outcomes? The document lacks promotion of positive change to amenity values over time and recognition of the contribution of amenity values towards increasing a sense of well-being and identity. Therefore, we suggest the following text addition to P3A: "In making planning and consent decisions, decision-makers must recognise that amenity values a) increase a sense of identity and well-being; b) vary among individuals and communities; and c) change over time.” The proposed objective and policies could undermine existing heritage and urban design rules, given the apparent promotion of development rather than quality development. As currently drafted, they lack a forward looking and aspirational focus.

Clause
Question 6. Do you support the addition of direction to provide development capacity that is both feasible and likely to be taken up? Will this result in development opportunities that more accurately reflect demand? Why/why not? (see questions A1 - A5 at the end of the form for more questions on policies for Housing and Business Development Capacity Assessments)
Position
Somewhat
Notes
It is important to recognise that some sites may be zoned for a particular use but cannot realistically be developed due to other constraints such as lack of infrastructure provision, natural hazard constraints, or fragmented ownership. So the recognition of the difference between “theoretical development capacity” and “development ready” (or feasible) is welcomed. However, the inclusion of a further additional element of “likely to be taken up” is potentially a step too far. Assessing the amount of development that is likely to be taken up in particular locations will be difficult. It is impossible for councils to have certainty regarding the eventual housing typology and price points at which dwellings are constructed. There are a number of influences outside of councils’ control (including global economics, market forces, and land banking) that affect take-up. It is difficult to predict development take-up, as this fluctuates over time, or to link this to affordability. There is also the argument that if land is zoned, and development ready, then other mechanisms could be used to encourage or enable development to happen. But simply zoning more land because some land-owners refuse to develop potentially defeats the point of strategic planning.

Clause
Question 7. Do you support proposals requiring objectives, policies, rules, and assessment criteria to enable the development anticipated by the zone description? Why/why not?
Position
No
Notes
The proposal is not clear as to whether the existing zone descriptions must be amended to be the same ones in the National
Planning Standards or not, but this appears the intention. This would appear to create a generic one size fits all approach and will not be sufficiently articulate to ensure the development desired is actually built. Further this approach potentially removes community interests in the development of their neighbourhoods, and the opportunity for a place based development/design approach.

Clause
Question 8. Do you support policies to enable intensification in the locations where its benefits can best be achieved? Why/why not? (for more detail on the timing for these policies see discussion document, page 53)
Position
Somewhat
Notes
The UDF supports intensification policies where they drive quality urban outcomes and address big ticket matters such as climate change, for example locating intensification to deliver transit oriented development. However a prescriptive approach will not necessarily lead to quality outcomes, and could potentially work against intensity in the right locations at the right time that support a wide range of imperatives, for example staging intensification to achieve full rather than partial take up. In addition, one size does not fit all.

Clause
Question 9. Do you support inclusion of a policy providing for plan changes for out of sequence greenfield development and/or greenfield development in locations not currently identified for development?
Position
No
Notes
This would be contrary to the otherwise good intent of the NPS to deliver well-integrated new urban areas supported through appropriate infrastructure provision. It will also be inverse to achieving consolidated and intensified high-quality urban centres supported by appropriate transport provision.

Clause
Are the criteria sufficiently robust to manage environmental effects to ensure a quality urban environment, while providing for this type of development? (see example policy in discussion document, page 37)
Notes
No

Clause
To what extent should developers be required to meet the costs of development, including the costs of infrastructure and wider impacts on network infrastructure, and environmental and social costs (recognising that these are likely to be passed on to future homeowners/beneficiaries of the development)? What impacts will this have on the uptake of development opportunities?
Notes
Developers should largely meet the costs. If this is passed onto homeowners and this then makes the development unattractive to market and/or un-affordable, this simply points to the fact that this development is not feasible. The current approach is effectively subsidising otherwise un-feasible development, pay paying the true costs for the developer.

Clause
What improvements could be made to this policy to make development more responsive to demand in suitable locations beyond areas already identified for urban development?
Notes
If additional locations are suitable, then they should already have been identified. If they have not been identified, then there is probably good reason. Additional sites should only be considered in absolute exceptional circumstances.

Clause
Question 10. Do you support limiting the ability for local authorities in major urban centres to regulate the number of car parks required for development? Why/why not?
Position
Yes
Notes
The UDF see the move to more sustainable transport as being highly positive. However it recognises that while this may support a long term goal, there would be short and medium term management of matters such as on street parking.

Clause
Which proposed option could best contribute to achieving quality urban environments?
Position
Option 2: removing the ability for local authorities to set minimum car park requirements
Notes
Providing that overall parking and transportation needs are able to be properly factored in and addressed.

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<tr>
<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 11. Do you think that central government should consider more directive intervention in local authority plans?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>The UDF supports more directive intervention in local authority plans to the extent that the current model of the separation of subdivision and land use requires reconsideration to fully integrate the two processes to ensure better quality outcomes. The UDF does not support minimums without full acknowledgement of context and community outcomes intended.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 12. Do you support requirements for all urban environments to assess demand and supply of development capacity, and monitor a range of market indicators? Why/why not?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
<td>The UDF agree that it is appropriate to monitor key indicators. This requirement already exists under the NPS on Urban Development Capacity, although not every council has completed their first report. But it is already having a positive effect on how councils plan. However, half yearly monitoring would be sufficient to indicate trends, rather than the proposed quarterly basis.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 13. Do you support inclusion of policies to improve how local government works with iwi, hapū and whānau to reflect their values and interests in urban planning? Why/why not?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
<td>The UDF understands that most Councils already consult with iwi during and after the preparation of plan reviews and plan changes and must take iwi management plans into account. It is therefore questioned whether this adds anything.</td>
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<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 14. Do you support amendments to existing NPS-UDC 2016 policies to include working with providers of development and other infrastructure, and local authorities cooperating to work with iwi/hapū?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
<td>Interest from other providers can be patchy. Every additional requirement requires time and resources. If this cannot be shown to add real value to the process, then it should not be required.</td>
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<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 15. What impact will the proposed timing for implementation of policies have?</th>
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<td>Notes</td>
<td>The timescales proposed are reasonable. Better alignment with the LTP process is a desirable outcome. There appears no reason to delay with the prescriptive requirements about inserting or forbidding particular policies, objectives, and rules in district plans.</td>
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<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 16. What kind of guidance or support do you think would help with the successful implementation of the proposed NPS-UD?</th>
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<td>Notes</td>
<td>Very clear guidance and definitions. In particular, as stated in earlier questions, the UDF consider it vital that a clear understanding is provided on what constitutes “quality” and “successful” urban environments.</td>
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<th>Clause</th>
<th>Question 17. Do you think there are potential areas of tension or confusion between any of these proposals and other national direction? If so, please identify these areas below and include any suggestions you have for addressing these issues.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Yes - the proposed policy around “further greenfield development” sits at odds with the rest of the NPS and there is also a clear inconsistency between this element and the draft NPS on Highly Productive Land. The thrust of the NPS is generally towards more sustainable urban outcomes, yet the policy around “out-of-sequence further greenfield development” and appears to be a concession to greenfield land-owners or developers that their proposals will still be considered, thus undermining much of</td>
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the rest of the NPS and otherwise well-considered growth strategies. This is disappointing.

**Clause**

Question 18. Do you think a national planning standard is needed to support the consistent implementation of proposals in this document? If so, please state which specific provisions you think could be delivered effectively using a national planning standard?

**Position**

No

**Notes**

No. A one-size fits-all standard for how urban development should be managed would be completely inappropriate.

**Clause**

Unless you select one of the options below, the Ministry will consider that you have agreed to have your submission and your name posted on its website.

**Position**

Please do not include my name in the published summary of submissions.

**Notes**