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

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Overall Position:

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)

Notes
Removal of height restrictions Many of the recommendations within the National Discussion Document ‘Planning for Successful Cities’ would (as far as I can tell) help to better co-ordinate development by providing more consistent and sensible rules. I fully support densification along bus routes and close to the centre of the city, but somewhere within the discussion document (under ‘more directive intervention’) there is a suggestion that it might be a good idea to remove a Council’s ability to restrict the height of any development. If the result in Christchurch, intended or otherwise, is to be a ‘pepper-potting’ of extremely high buildings scattered about the city this could well be an aesthetic and amenity disaster.

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?

Notes
Removal of Parking I am also surprised and somewhat worried to read in the discussion document a suggestion that, for new developments in high density areas, the City Council would not be able to insist on the inclusion of any car parkingspaces at all. It is extremely rare for there to be any available parking on our, or any nearby, street, and removing all visitor car parks would worsen this problem. My wife and I moved to the Christchurch Central City just over a year ago to a complex of ten two-bedroom apartments with only 2 car parks for visitors; we have found that our social life has been curtailed because somewhere else or otherwise vulnerable friends have felt unwilling to drive some distance only to find it impossible to park. Many people find that to visit us a car is the only viable option, if they are coming from an area off a bus route, or they are (e.g.) on their way to a supermarket. We are not near enough to any public parking building for anyone to be able to use such a facility to access our home. I think it certain that for the foreseeable future, around Christchurch, some people will be dependent on cars (maybe they will eventually be electric), unless there’s a massively expanded and completely different sort of public transport system. (The sort of infrastructure planned for Auckland and Wellington, maybe.) Perhaps I’m just about to hear about the planning and funding of such a system. I’ll also be interested to learn of any sensible way of providing necessary parking near to every resident’s home other than requiring a few visitor parks with each development. We feel that we need more than the two our block of flats currently has! Christchurch would benefit from an increased number of residents in the central city, but if one of the consequences of moving there is that people become isolated from some friends and family, they may consider it a (mistaken) step too far. I think it is important that any innovative parking initiatives are considered, consulted upon, and implemented before apartments without even visitor parking are allowed.

Clause
Question 11. Do you think that central government should consider more directive intervention in local authority plans?

Notes
Removal of height restrictions Many of the recommendations within the National Discussion Document ‘Planning for Successful Cities’ would (as far as I can tell) help to better co-ordinate development by providing more consistent and sensible rules. I fully support densification along bus routes and close to the centre of the city, but somewhere within the discussion document (under ‘more directive intervention’) there is a suggestion that it might be a good idea to remove a Council’s ability to restrict the height of any development. If the result in Christchurch, intended or otherwise, is to be a ‘pepper-potting’ of extremely high buildings scattered about the city this could well be an aesthetic and amenity disaster. If unnecessarily tall commercial or housing blocks are allowed in inappropriate places, outside the Council’s consulted planning rules, it’s more likely to interfere with the design of a successful Christchurch. We might well end up with a few tall buildings interspersed with empty, earthquake...
wrecked areas! Within the Central City there are already a number of 2, 3 and 4 storey residential complexes, many of them terraced, built or under construction which seem to be adequately catering for the residential demand. Walking around the city, I also see a number of empty offices advertised ‘for lease’. There are also a number of commercial developments under construction. After the earthquakes, many empty sections in the CBD are awaiting development, so I find it difficult to imagine that there might be a shortage any time soon. Given that the residents of Christchurch, in consultations after the earthquakes, expressed a clear preference for a development limit of seven stories, and that there seems to be an oversupply of apartments and office space in the central city at the moment, I cannot see the need for such a drastic interference in the existing planning procedures. We have, in the past, had serious deleterious effects on (e.g.) Cathedral Square when very high office buildings were allowed to block sun from previously well used amenity areas. These buildings also tended to funnel cold winds directly into these areas, an effect exacerbated by the removal of some of the trees. Christchurch’s ArtCentre and other heritage areas, greatly appreciated by locals and tourists alike, could also lose some of their appeal if surrounded by taller structures. Checking Christchurch real estate advertisements seems to indicate that there are also, in the suburbs here, a number of properties for sale at prices under the government’s definition of ‘affordable’; and first class, brand-new ‘entry-level’ 1-bedroom flats are at the moment for sale in the Central City between $3 and $400,000. So I cannot see why, in Central Christchurch, we might need or want to remove the Council’s ability to control the height of residential or commercial buildings. I notice within the discussion document there is the comment that home unaffordability contributes greatly to social inequality, and I can see that this is true in Auckland and probably some places elsewhere. However, I think it likely that in Christchurch, it may well be the other way around. An increasing proportion of the population here cannot afford to buy a home because of serious inequalities, nationally, in the distribution of incomes. Any reduction in the price of homes would be welcome, if quality weren’t unduly compromised, but doing away completely with height limits in Central Christchurch or the suburbs isn’t the way forward. We seem to be managing well without such interference. Some cities may have problems that call for a drastic measure like this, but I don’t think Christchurch does at all.