

Auckland's spatial plan for a quality compact city

STUART RYAN BARRISTER | www.stuartryan.co.nz



The single most important policy development to date in the life of the “super city” Auckland Council is the release (on 29 May 2012) of the Auckland plan, otherwise known as the Auckland spatial plan (“the Plan”). As required by section 79 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009, the Plan exists to create an effective long-term (20 to 30 year) strategy for Auckland’s growth and development.¹

The Plan is supported in this aim by three separate documents. These are:

- The City Centre Masterplan;
- A Waterfront Plan; and
- An Economic Development Strategy.

The Plan is as a precursor to the proposed Unitary Plan. The proposed Unitary Plan will replace the seven legacy district plans made under the Resource Management Act 1991 and which control land use in the Auckland area. The Unitary Plan is planned for release in the first quarter of 2013.²

Auckland's Challenges

The Plan sets out several challenges that must be addressed to accommodate Auckland’s planned growth.

Firstly, medium to high growth scenarios forecast an additional 700,000 to 1 million new Aucklanders by 2040.³ These people and their businesses will need to be accommodated alongside nearly 1.5 million current residents.

Secondly, the plan articulates the competing challenge of preserving the rural and natural elements of Auckland’s environment in the face of this growth. New people have to live somewhere, but the city’s periphery is vulnerable to urban sprawl.

The third challenge involves improving the quality of urban living. The plan describes problems of inadequate planning, poor architecture and congested transport infrastructure.⁴

Finally, Auckland City may be New Zealand’s economic powerhouse, but it is also home to many who suffer from high unemployment, low education and inadequate housing.⁵ The plan describes a housing affordability crisis in Auckland. The plan states that remedying these issues are matters of social and economic necessity.

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The Plan's Solutions

I. Expansion within a Rural Urban Boundary (RUB)

Auckland is growing. The question is: where? One measure taken by the former Auckland Regional Council and territorial land authorities was to curb expansion through the use of Metropolitan Urban Limits (MUL). Although used as a planning tool for over fifty years, the MUL has been subject to debate over its effectiveness.⁶

The Plan aims to build upon the MUL with the imposition of a Rural Urban Boundary, or RUB. Unlike the MUL (which has been extended eight times since 1999) the Rural Urban Boundary will be fixed. The objective is to ensure that growth over the Plan’s 30 year life occurs predominately within the boundaries of the RUB. The targets for intensification of development within the RUB were relaxed following public submissions to the draft plan. The draft plan provided for a 75:25 split for intensification within the boundaries of the RUB (i.e. 75% within the RUB, 25% outside of the RUB).⁷ The final version of the plan sets an intensification target within the RUB of 70:30, with leeway for a margin of up to 60:40.⁸ The RUB gives effect to the model of a “quality, compact city” which foresees a mixture of growing Auckland both upward and outward.

Greater outward growth is anticipated during a Plan’s first decade, with a gradual shift toward intensification over its 30 year lifespan. This is due to two factors: the current priority of increasing housing

supply, and the perception that the building and construction sector is not yet prepared for supplying large amounts of high quality, intensified developments.⁹

Growth beyond the baseline 2010 MUL and inside the RUB is intended to occur as follows:

1. Greenfield areas identified in the Plan will be investigated for development potential. The areas include the South and West of Silverdale; North of Westgate; South of Papakura; and land surrounding Kumeu. The Plan also identifies two satellite towns – Warkworth and Pukekohe – around which development could occur.¹⁰
2. The 2040 RUB will be confirmed through the Unitary Plan process. It will encompass all significant urban areas. This includes the urban core, both satellite towns, rural and coastal towns. It will additionally include lands subject to pre-existing application processes under the Resource Management Act, provided that they receive consent for urban development.
3. All land within the RUB will be for future urban use.
4. In stages, portions of greenfield land will be zoned for urban use (residential, business, mixed-use, etc), serviced with bulk infrastructure, then released for development. Due to a perceived lack of industrial land, industrial areas will be given priority for zoning.
5. Each portion will be subdivided and built upon as released over the next 30 years.¹¹

The staged release of greenfield land is expected to occur approximately every ten years. This is intended to ensure that there is at all times a 20 year forward supply of development capacity and an average of seven years unconstrained “ready to go” land supply – meaning that operative zoning and bulk services infrastructure are in place.¹²

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The Plan provides for “future urban areas”. This is land within the 2010 MUL that either is:

- a) in the development pipeline – that is, in the process of planning and servicing with bulk infrastructure but not yet ready for final use; or
- b) under development.

The Plan favours realising the capacity of these future urban areas – around 30,000 new dwellings – before new greenfield areas are released for development.¹³

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II. Intensification

Over time, the plan provides for the emphasis to shift away from outward growth of the city in favour of both high rise and high quality infill development. This intensification is not targeted toward a uniform level of density but spans a spectrum.¹⁴ The highest level of intensification is targeted at two types of areas: along transit corridors and within urban centres. A centre is defined by the Plan as:¹⁵

a concentrated mix of public and private activities in a defined area, including shopping, offices, public transport nodes and community facilities.

The greatest growth is meant to occur within a centre’s walkable catchment, i.e. the area in which people can be expected to easily walk to access a centre’s focal point.

102 urban centres are identified throughout the Auckland region. Each urban centre is placed in a hierarchy that reflects its development potential and role within Auckland. For example, the city centre is at the top of the hierarchy and aims for high rise development, 24 hour economic activity and an employment to residential ratio of 4:1. This is followed in ranking by metropolitan centres, town centres and then local centres. In contrast to the CBD, the hierarchy states that a local centre, such as Long Bay should feature low to medium rise development, day and evening economic activity with a ratio of 0.5:1.¹⁶ Rural centres are also identified under a separate hierarchy.¹⁷

The urban hierarchy of urban centres includes an emerging centre overlay. To illustrate this, although Long Bay is listed as a local centre, it is also marked with an (E). This indicates that it is either at a formative stage of development or requires significant change through redevelopment to support a transition towards a more intensive, mixed use centre.¹⁸

Each urban centre will receive a specific planning framework through the Unitary Plan.¹⁹ Some centres are described as regeneration centres, requiring mixed public sector actions to address economic, social or physical inequalities. Others are market-attractive centres in which there is strong market growth potential requiring limited public sector support. Where an area’s character, environment or heritage is risked, growth is deprioritised.²⁰ Nine areas are prioritised for growth during the first three years. These are:²¹

1. The City Centre including the waterfront;
2. The Southern Initiative area;
3. Hobsonville;
4. New Lynn Metropolitan Centre;

5. Onehunga Town Centre and suburban area;
6. Tamaki – Town Centre and suburban area;
7. Takapuna Metropolitan Centre;
8. Warkworth Satellite; and
9. Pukekohe Satellite.

III. Better urban design

The Plan asserts that Auckland's intensification and expansion must include good design.²² To achieve this, any public or private development proposals are expected to incorporate the following principles:

- a. **Identity:** recognise and respond to landscape, ecology, heritage, built form, peoples and communities which establish the context for Auckland's unique sense of place;
- b. **Adaptability:** allow Auckland to accommodate a rich mix of uses, activities, urban form and architecture;
- c. **Integration:** support uses, activity centres, energy systems and movement networks that are well connected; and
- d. **Efficiency:** optimise the full potential of a site's intrinsic qualities.

These principles will be expanded upon in an Auckland Design Manual developed by Council. Both the Design Manual and environmental design principles will then form best practice guidelines. These are to apply to a broad spectrum of developments, ranging from an individual section, to a city block, to a neighbourhood, to the city.²³

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IV. The Southern Initiative

While much of Auckland fares well in terms of educational achievement, levels of employment and quality of housing, South Auckland is an area with relative social deprivation, including:²⁴

- **Low educational achievement:** 60% of school leavers have at least NCEA Level 2, compared to 74% for all of Auckland.
- **Youth unemployment:** 36% compared to 31% for the region.
- **Housing:** the highest overcrowding rate in the country at 20%.

The Plan's solution is The Southern Initiative. It is intended to cover the four local board areas of Mangere–Otahuhu, Otara–Papatoetoe, Manurewa and Papakura – areas comprising a combined population of just under 300,000.²⁵ There are four major ways in which the plan seeks to assist this population:

1. EDUCATION

The Plan aims to tackle attitudes toward schooling at a young age. This is to be achieved through developing effective models for early intervention, with priority given to vulnerable children.²⁶ Examples of initiatives for the later years of schooling (years 7 and onward) include ensuring that all young people from the area develop a career plan early and that they are prioritised in cadetships and similar schemes.

2. JOB OPPORTUNITIES

New opportunities will be identified and existing ones built upon. The latter most notably includes Auckland Airport which as of 2007 added \$10.7 billion to Auckland's economy and sustained 153,000 full-time jobs. Other existing opportunities identified include the Mangere Gateway project, Manukau Centre, and the Takanini and Papakura business centres.²⁷

3. TRANSPORT

While the Council considers many parts of the southern area are well served by public transport, a redesign of the bus service is planned during 2012. A new bus service between the airport and Onehunga is expected within the next twelve months.²⁸

4. HOUSING

Auckland's housing affordability crisis is most keenly felt within the Southern Initiative area. The Council intends to enter into development partnerships to increase the supply, quality and affordability of housing. The quality of the state housing stock (primarily concentrated in Mangere and Manurewa) is also to be improved through working with Housing New Zealand and the Department of Building and Housing. Targeted areas for early housing development include Papatoetoe Town Centre and Mangere town centre, in conjunction with the staged release of greenfield land.²⁹

¹ s 79(2) Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009

² Brown, Len, Draft Auckland Plan, p.1.

³ Auckland Council, Draft Auckland Plan summary, p.4.

⁴ Ibid., p.6.

⁵ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, p.53.

⁶ Hill, Greg, The Effectiveness of the Auckland Metropolitan Urban Limit – Ring Fencing Urban Development (2008), p.1.

⁷ Auckland Council, Draft Auckland Plan summary, p.8.

⁸ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, p.30.

⁹ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, p.38.

¹⁰ See pp.36–37 of The Plan which contain Development Strategy Maps D1 and D2.

¹¹ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, p.31.

¹² Ibid., p.32.

¹³ Auckland Council, Draft Auckland Plan summary, p.8.

¹⁴ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, p.169.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.176.

¹⁶ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, pp.176–183.

¹⁷ For a complete list of urban and rural centres, see pp.166, 181 of The Plan.

¹⁸ Auckland Council, The Auckland Plan, pp.177, 181.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.183.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.33, 177.

²¹ Ibid., p.177.

²² Ibid., p.170.

²³ Ibid., pp.170–174.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.49–53.

²⁵ Ibid., p.63.

²⁶ Ibid., p.66.

²⁷ Ibid., p.64.

²⁸ Ibid. p.67

²⁹ Ibid., pp.67–68.