

OUR VISION FOR AUCKLAND'S FUTURE - A WAY FORWARD FOR CHARACTER PROTECTION

SAVE OUR ST HELIERS (SOS)

INTRODUCTION

Auckland's development as a "city of 100 villages" has left it with a historically and culturally rich collection of local village service centres that tell the story of how those places came to be, defining residents' sense of place and offering them a tangible link with their past.

Despite efforts to protect the unique character of each of these centres, they are under increasing pressure from inappropriate development which, without a step change in the regulatory environment, will see large parts of them ruined or erased as years pass.

In St Heliers we have already experienced the building of bulky, out-of-scale complexes with the loss of nine character buildings, seven of them dated 1895 to mid-1940s making up one whole side of a street and including the Bay's oldest dwelling.

Auckland's present planning policies and mechanisms have been proved completely inadequate for the task of keeping intact, in conjunction with sympathetic and "inclusive" modern additions, the fabric of this finite built character and heritage resource.

The vision for Auckland as "the world's most liveable city" must include retaining the very individuality and character which defines the city and makes it attractive to live in.

And the purpose of planning regulations is to deliver the vision by providing the right regulatory framework.

In the course of researching this paper, we looked at a city that has worked to deliver planning outcomes that reflect what its people value.

Brisbane, a city with a comparable population and which has also had the Super City experience, has adopted a framework with many advantages over the one Aucklanders live with.

We believe it is a better approach, with a more comprehensive rationale and better-targeted rules that would plug the huge gaps Auckland's built legacy is falling through.

Its baseline position is a desire to keep the look and feel of Brisbane's early suburbs, still allowing for in-character new building in them and also more intensive growth centres elsewhere.

Below are the main mechanisms the Brisbane City Plan 2000 uses to do this.

DEMOLITION CONTROL PRECINCTS

- Introduced in 1995 after dramatic increase in land values following 1988 World Expo, which led to large numbers of older homes on bigger sections being demolished.
- Intent is to maintain character of pre-war streetscapes by controlling full and partial demolition, relocation and removal.
- Designated throughout pre-war suburbs, covering radius of about 8km from centre
- Applies to all structures built 1946 and before, involving entire suburbs, and patches of pre-war housing in other areas.
- All demolitions require consent and must be publicly notified.
- Main reason for allowed demolitions (not many) is decay making building structurally unsound to point where cost of repair outweighs cost of replacement [Source: Tong Town Planning, Newstead, Brisbane].
- Any replacement building, and extensions to existing buildings, must satisfy the **RESIDENTIAL DESIGN-CHARACTER CODE**, requiring in-style design and materials to be used.

LOCAL PLANS

- Long-term feature of Brisbane's planning, engaging communities in determining outcomes for the place where they live.
- Exist for 70 locations, 30 individual plans alone just for the older suburbs.
- Intent is to recognise differing characteristics and issues of each area, ensure private and public sector development proposals are consistent with local aspirations.
- Critically, they override any other part of the City Plan they may conflict with.
- Regarding development proposals, Local Plans can change and raise conditions of compliance, public notification requirements, and other standards.

COMMERCIAL CHARACTER BUILDING CODE

- Applies to pre-war (1946 and before) shops and other commercial buildings that add to the city's character and liveability.

- Intended to facilitate retention and viable reuse (adaptive reuse) of the city's stock of smaller commercial buildings from light industrial to business offices and corner stores/shopping villages.
- Rules for demolition or alteration similar to those for character houses.
- Compliance rules somewhat relaxed for broad range of uses to foster adaptive reuse

HERITAGE CODE

- As a signatory to the ICOMOS charter (a "code" by the International Committee on Monuments and Sites establishing baseline values and policy approaches to heritage), Australia has its own heritage charter – the **Burra Charter**.
- It guides all policy on heritage; Brisbane City uses it as benchmark requiring any development application to be accompanied by a professional report on how it satisfies Burra requirements.
- Brisbane's **Heritage Register** (works in tandem with Queensland state register) has **over 2000 listed sites** – compared to Auckland's 500-odd scheduled items.
- Criteria for heritage listing include: Important to showing evolution or pattern of city or local history; It's uncommon, an example of a particular type or is aesthetically significant; an example of particular technological or creative achievement at the time; is associated with life or work of particular group, person or organisation important to the city or local area.
- **Heritage Precincts** protect groups of buildings and other features that may not individually qualify for heritage listing but have value collectively.
- Strict controls govern demolition, alteration, change of use, nearby development.
- **Heritage Incentive Scheme** to foster retention includes rates relief for owners; grants for maintenance and restoration, awards for owners, grants from a special heritage lottery.

SUMMARY

Outlining a few key differences between the above approach and what currently happens here will help draw a line under the features we think would serve Aucklanders better.

- **Zoning** – Blanket zoning is driving the destruction of Auckland's character and heritage legacy; it allows only one class of property in an area and changes economic

conditions, pushing up the **potential** value of properties in a way that threatens the existence of what's already there, no matter its other merits.

- **Rates evaluation** – Valuing land and therefore rates on a property's potential worth, if what is there were removed and replaced by something else, puts a huge burden on owners, especially in the older suburbs containing our heritage and character building stock. **Spot Zoning** of particular properties in some areas under development pressure would ease this.
- **Recognition/research of enclaves** – Groups of built features in an area which may not all merit individual protection need a method of collective preservation.
- **Demolition/removal onus** – At present, when it comes to decisions about doing away with older building stock the onus is squarely on the argument for retention to prove a case rather than the reverse. That needs to shift, as would happen with the establishment of **Demolition Control Precincts**.
- **Heritage/character evaluation methods** - Auckland's current method involves a quantitative points system assigning a numerical value to a list of features. This skews the value by, for example, failing to take into account that one feature of a building may be particularly important or representative yet forms only a small part of overall evaluation. A **Qualitative evaluation system** must replace it.

If we as a city are serious about plugging the leak that will see a great deal of what's left of Auckland's finite character and heritage resource disappear over time, we must overhaul our classification, research, fostering and protection systems

This will necessitate **new planning mechanisms for an integrated, comprehensive approach** to character and heritage protection to replace our present piecemeal, inadequate systems – very little passes the Scheduling test, the Plan Change 163 protections on properties are arbitrary and few, and after that there's a yawning gap.

Auckland's people want this for their city – in the recent **Council People's Panel on heritage, an overwhelming 88%** of respondents said protection of historic heritage was important. The **highest-ranking proposed Council initiative was to give heritage more protection** in Auckland's plans.

They've made their wishes plain – it's up to the Auckland Council to see they're reflected in policy and regulations.

SOURCES:

Brisbane City Plan 2000

Tong Town Planning Services, Newstead, Brisbane

Saunders Havill Group, Bowen Hills, Brisbane