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AUCKLAND BRANCH

AUCKLAND UNLEASHED_ the Auckland Plan Discussion Document

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NZIA congratulates Auckland Council on 'Auckland Unleashed'. Our various specialist groups focussing on architecture, urban design, heritage, Maori issues, technical and environmental matters have considered the document and the questions posed and offer the following commentary in reply. We look forward to reviewing the draft Auckland Plan later in the year and to participating in the development of the Unitary Plan following that.

The NZIA believes that the quality of Auckland's environment, both urban and rural can and must be improved. It further believes that a better quality environment will be of demonstrable benefit to the social, cultural and commercial wellbeing of the city. The development of a spatial plan is a unique opportunity to redefine the extent and quality of Auckland's built environment and to put in place the mechanisms to achieve a sustainable, more vibrant, inclusive and prosperous city. We are firmly of the view that these goals can be achieved by:

- A robust analysis and redefinition of the way the city's built environment grows, and
- The identification and promotion of specific strategies to achieve a better built environment – in particular in relation to the integration of land use and infrastructure development.

The NZIA further believes that existing regulatory mechanisms will not achieve the quality of environment for its people that this most benign of locations makes possible. To address this we believe the writing of the Unitary Plan offers the opportunity to develop an urban design and planning process that has at its centre the promotion of better quality design, be it of settlement patterns, public open space or individual buildings that give effect to the goals of the Auckland Plan.

The NZIA recognises that Auckland's historic communities and their current built forms are distinctive responses to local topographical phenomena including harbours, bays, ridgelines and volcanic cones and the city's social history of migration and settlement. The Auckland Plan must take all such criteria into consideration in determining where and how growth can occur, and if growth is required beyond the current MUL. Urban intensification and growth opportunities within the current boundaries should be targeted in the first instance with finely grained analysis of the suitability of existing urban centres to grow.

Critical to the analysis and categorisation of existing centres is the place of each centre within the infrastructure network and we urge Auckland Council to play an active role in the development of models of increased density of land occupation to optimise the efficient use of social, servicing and transport infrastructure. Such models will require innovative design and assessment criteria to ensure that developments, be they of individual buildings, urban space or new settlement centres are:

- Designed to the highest standards of utility, function and construction
- Contributing to a varied, interesting and attractive built environment
- Located to form new or build on existing centres to form sustainable communities
- Located to form outstanding new public spaces or to improve existing spaces that are accessible and inclusive
- Appropriately scaled to suit the evolving demographic mix of Auckland
- Supported by social and physical infrastructure
- Located with recognition of tangata whenua and their whakapapa to that site

If the current boundaries of the MUL are found to require reconfiguration this should be based on sustainable growth calculated on the basis of full long term household cost including transport and infrastructural costs. Reconfiguration, if required, should maximise the city's perimeter to facilitate closer relationships between the built environment and open space and reflect the desire of many people to be close to the edge of the city, be it coastal, pastoral or bush.

Critical to any growth of the city must be:

- the creation of a sense of place, of Auckland as a unique, identifiable city
- the creation of varied, interesting and attractive architecture
- the quality of the public domain including open rural, heritage and urban space
- the preservation of natural environments, flora and fauna,
- the creation of a safe, easily traversed and human scaled environment
- the long term economic and environmental sustainability of the urban environment
- mindful of the special place Maori have in Aotearoa
- the inclusion of Maori and Pacific people and others whose needs are often marginalised in planning yet who create much of Auckland's unique character.

The NZIA affirms that an attractive, vibrant and safe city with its own unique character will attract people and add to the social and commercial life of the city. We urge Council to recognise that it is the quality of the city as a whole that is important and that Council has a special role to play in the identification of qualities and values to guide the promotion and assessment of future growth. Such qualities and values should be applied at the scale of land use planning, just as they are to individual buildings and public open spaces.

New development must respond to values derived from an understanding of those characteristics to which our best buildings and places already respond. These include the blend of old and new and topographic, climatic, cultural and social conditions which lend the City its unique character. A built response which recognises, celebrates and interprets these conditions will create a unique and successful city.

The Auckland Plan must recognize the value of our tāngata whenua, leveraging the contribution of culture for the benefit of Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland and Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the principles of kaitiakitanga and tikanga in the development of Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland as one of the world's premier eco cities.

This involves understanding that tāngata whenua provide access to knowledge that distinguishes Auckland from other international destinations and which will make Auckland more attractive to visitors. It is from this place of matauranga, of knowledge and understanding, of looking back before moving forward that we will create a unique city and will help make Auckland more internationally competitive.

The Plan must recognize that Māori, Pacific, and Asian populations in Auckland will increase in the future and that it is important to develop new housing typologies that embrace the concept of whānau and extended family which are shared by many cultures who live in Auckland.

Greater involvement of tangata whenua will be facilitated by:

- the inclusion of tāngata whenua design professionals into Design Review Boards.
- Utilising tangata whenua knowledge to develop new models for housing that respond to a wider range of needs
- Incentives such as faster consent processing for those who choose to engage with tāngata whenua issues or who take advantage of the research provided by tertiary institutions in relation to cultural concepts

The indifferent state of Auckland's built environment suggests that the regulatory processes used to shape development in the past need to be overhauled to provide new tools to create a better built environment for the new city. The NZIA strongly believes that a better quality built environment will have positive benefits to the social, cultural and commercial life of the city and advocates a design-led approach to both the spatial and the unitary plans to facilitate these goals. Such an approach would focus on the active identification, promotion and incentivisation of specific outcomes for individual

projects, precincts and sites within the city and isthmus, rather than the application of generalised regulatory controls.

Strategies to promote and incentivise better built outcomes would include:

- fast tracking of approvals for those projects meeting the city's qualitative goals
- the extension of underlying bulk and location constraints for outstanding projects
- mandatory design competitions for all public projects,
- the public acknowledgement of successful outcomes,
- the benchmarking of Auckland against other cities of similar makeup and similar aspirations,
- the appointment of an architect as an adviser offering commentary and advice to the Mayor,
- the expansion of the the existing Urban Design Panels into a 'Design Review Board' system

Central to these strategies is the appreciation of the city as an ever changing three dimensional construct overlaid on a complex topography. To assist in the better understanding and assessment of projects within the city we urge the deployment of the latest digitally based graphical information and modelling technologies.

Greater Auckland is a place of great beauty and wonderful potential. Auckland's future needs to be directed with deliberate intention, so it has a future arising from design, rather than from perfunctory accretion. The NZIA Auckland Branch would like to thank Auckland Council for this opportunity and looks forward to participating in the development of the Auckland Plan and of the Unitary Plan and further explaining and developing the ideas contained in this summary.

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APPENDIX

The following are specific answers to specific questions posed in 'Auckland Unleashed'

Q 1: - Do you think we have the proposed "Big Picture" ideas right?

The NZIA recognises that existing distinctive complexities and intimacies of Auckland lend it particular qualities that have arisen in response to locally specific values. Today these unique values form the starting point for informing successful big picture thinking. The generators of Auckland's historic communities and built form, both Maori and Pakeha, were distinctive responses to local topographical phenomenon such as its unique harbours, bays, ridgelines and volcanic cones. These historical responses should be better understood in order to form a structure upon which unique or distinctive Auckland qualities can be conserved, celebrated, adapted and enhanced and from where appropriate intensification can be generated.

Q 20 (part): - Through the Auckland Plan, how can we celebrate and further protect our distinctive natural and rural environment?

Auckland's distinctive natural and rural environment provides the city with values linked directly to some of its most unique aspects: its harbours, islands, bays and edges. This richness reinforces the unique character of Auckland and its distinctive sense of place. The city, framed by two oceans and three harbours, is a significant contributing factor in the City's culture, its heritage and (collectively) its special story. Every opportunity to bring the story of Auckland and its harbours to people, and to ensure the accessibility and maintenance of values associated with these values, should be exploited in the consideration of the city's future.

Q 21: - What aspects of Auckland's built environment, or the way it is managed, would you most like to see changed and how?

The promotion of architectural excellence will ensure that development will respond to the city's old and new built environment in ways that enhance the city's unique values. As with natural landscapes, the city's built heritage helps to provide a distinctive sense of place whose heritage is of local, national and international value. The built heritage also makes a significant contribution to the city's culture by providing a visible link to the city's unique history.

Should Council apply the same level of protection to character neighbourhoods as it does to unique and scarce heritage items?

No - these are distinctly different issues and the discussion document recognises this. Character neighbourhoods need to be assessed, the character articulated and those values expressed in responsive contextual design excellence.

The recognition and management of Auckland's individual heritage assets should be managed in conjunction with promotion of the highest standards of modern architectural excellence. It is the blending of old and new that gives the city its character and this should be seen in conjunction with the distinctive character of city precincts. Development in conservation areas should meet the highest levels of architectural excellence and urban design, and be responsive to local context and character. Fundamental to the protection of character is the informed acknowledgement of locally distinctive scale, materiality, and form. Development within that context must be sympathetic to those elements.

What could Council do to help owners of properties in character neighbourhoods retain and enhance their buildings and properties?

Character neighbourhoods need to be assessed, the character articulated, and those values expressed through responsive contextual design excellence. Unlike the finite resource of specific heritage assets, the evolution of distinctive local character should be informed by issues of local scale, materiality, and form which are characteristic of the area.

Q 22: - How do you think the Auckland Plan should promote and support high quality development in Auckland?

The sensitive and innovative use of the city's distinctive heritage should be encouraged and incentivised. Regeneration or adaptive reuse schemes should make use of heritage assets and enhance those values for which the asset has been recognised as being significant. New development which engages architectural excellence can play an important role in fostering the regeneration of historic areas, promoting the conservation and management of heritage and enhancing the community's regard for the evolving city.

Q 23 - What tools could the Auckland Plan incorporate to achieve quality urban buildings, streets and living environments?

Better quality buildings will result from a more detailed definition of required outcomes and recognising that the characteristics of attractiveness, good functionality and comfort create quality buildings and spaces. These are characteristics that attract people to cities and help retain them and explicitly defining these characteristics will give the Auckland Council tools to measure the quality of buildings by. This in turn creates a tool to reward achievement by creating supportive planning and building control approval processes.

The aims of a better quality built environment will also be aided by recognising that it is the quality of the city as a whole that is important rather than the focus on single buildings and spaces thought to be significant to Auckland. This allows the positive effects of good design to be a tool for influencing the lives of all social groups through strategies such as low cost housing and community education facility design.

Developing a process to foster an awareness of Auckland as a unique local place will assist in the creation of a better quality built environment- a look and spatial experience that is recognisable and desirable. Tools to achieve this are engagement with local design professionals, local communities and tangata whenua. The plan should also unleash the contribution of groups in society that are often under represented in responses to documents like the Auckland Plan discussion document. These groups include Maori and Pacific people and it is important their voice is heard as they create much of Auckland's unique character and hence hold a lot of value. The engagement of design professionals from under-represented groups to participate in the design and review process will assist this.

The built environment can also be improved by assessing buildings and spaces in terms of attractiveness, functionality and comfort in consultation with local design professionals and community groups. Criteria for assessment should include such things as making Auckland more child, aged and disabled-friendly. Criteria should also recognise the value of variation in the buildings and spaces in the making of a vibrant and stimulating city, and the consequent need to assess a design on its specific merits rather than general rules.

Acknowledging the special place of tāngata whenua through the engagement of tāngata whenua design professionals in the design and review process will facilitate a greater realisation of the city's unique Maori culture. New development should also respond to values derived from understanding the physical context, and the way in which successful precedents have responded to the topographic, historic and heritage elements, including those of open space.

Q 24 - What do you think about the idea to recategorise our centres as suggested?

The principle of centre classifications is supported, but there needs to be more finely grained analysis of the existing structure to guide the shape of future growth. Infrastructural strengths may occur in a number of settlements and there is merit in considering how these would accommodate change. Critical to analysis and categorisation is the place of each centre within the transportation network as that relationship will affect the ability of a centre to become a compact centres.

Q 25 - What controls are needed to manage and achieve intensification with high quality outcomes?

The overall quality of design of the neighbourhood and, in particular, of the public realm including streets and public open space is an important part of making neighbourhoods of increased density and vitality.

The section on housing typologies omits residential towers which have their place in the appropriate location- the building failures of a previous generation's inappropriately scaled, leaky and poorly supported intensive housing should not be used as an argument to push affordable housing to the city's periphery.

We urge the Auckland Council to promote the development of a new generation of affordable housing catering for the range of housing configurations needed by the city's cultural and demographic mix. Such promotion should involve public-private partnerships to develop prototypical housing in which higher density residential use is supported by either existing or new open recreational space, public transport links and appropriately scaled community retail centres and institutional infrastructure such as schools and libraries.

As part of the development of the Unitary Plan, consideration should be given to the assessment of residential dwellings qualitative assessment ahead of rules so as to allow for innovation and variety and building form more suited to the scale of multi unit developments. The bulk and location of developments, the numbers of units etc might be considered according to specific criteria including the type and size of dwellings, their relationship to the sun, to each other and to the street rather than hard and fast rules.

Limiting the number of studio dwellings within a development may be appropriate as well as limiting the number of single aspect south facing apartments, but as a general approach, assessment should be determined by design excellence in building form and contextual response. Guidelines such as the Good Solutions for Apartments (North Shore City) and the NSW Flat Design Guide provide guidance for quality development, but pattern books risk stifling innovation and creativity.

Controls relating to parking require review with consideration of maximums for multi unit developments and encouragement for non allocation of parks to dwellings.

Q 26 – Accommodating growth

The process of spatial planning should determine where growth can occur in all sectors of the isthmus and if growth is required outside the current MUL. Urban intensification and growth within the current boundaries should be a first priority based on demand, suitability of existing urban centres to grow with public sector investment in the public realm to support increased density. Development may be directed through incentivisation by Council for proposals that contribute toward the stated goals of quality connected compact communities.

It is important to that any consideration of the release of land supply outside the MUL includes the true cost of infrastructure and the household costs for transport over a period of time. If the current boundaries of the MUL are reviewed and growth outside of the MUL found to be necessary growth should be planned for and designed so that communities are developed along principles of sustainability in terms of employment, transport, energy and waste management.

In accommodating growth, it is important that the values behind the idea of papakainga are applied broadly across developments. The designation of Maori Purpose zones incorporating new papakainga based developments will lead to isolation from adjacent communities. This approach also implies that the principles on which papakainga are based apply solely to Maori, whereas the values upon which papakainga operate hold value for many cultures.

Q 26 (part): - Do you think there should be specific “no-go” urban areas where new development should not be allowed, and what should be the nature of such “no-go” areas – what should be allowed in them and what not?

No - design excellence with informed reference to topography, history, form, scale and context will ensure that the evolution urban areas retains values for which they are respected.

How do we accommodate growth while supporting the vision of a high standard of urban and rural design and heritage protection

The NZIA recognises that Auckland’s distinctive local heritage lies across the whole of city as elements of a unique legacy, heritage and story of its people. This is found in all built typologies and periods and is an active and evolving phenomenon. Auckland’s heritage includes landscapes and a range of other heritage asset forms such as public art, monuments, etc. Recognition of a more representational recognition of that heritage, more telling of those distinctly Auckland stories, need to be recognised, celebrated and interpreted. Standards in urban and rural design and heritage protection can be significantly raised by acknowledging physical and cultural aspects of the city more particular to Auckland.