



Newtown Residents' Association
Submission on **Our City Tomorrow: Planning for Growth**

Introduction

The Newtown Residents' Association is the Incorporated Society representing Newtown and the surrounding suburbs. We are an active local group of residents and businesspeople, concerned with maintaining and improving our area's liveability, connectedness and sustainability and working to make our community a thriving, diverse, great place to live.

Submission

The Wellington City Council website says that this consultation is the start of a conversation to develop a model for the City's growth and change over the next 30 years. We welcome this approach and this submission is designed as an initial contribution to the conversation. We are primarily concentrating on the opportunities and risks that growth might bring to our Newtown community, but we have also considered the wider concerns for Wellington as a whole.

We have chosen to make the Association's submission in this written form as the points we want to make don't fit neatly into the 'approve-disapprove' format of the survey.

Building up or building out?

In general terms we agree that as Wellington grows the 'zero carbon Capital' goals will be best met by avoiding urban sprawl and increasing housing density in the existing city and suburbs. In the future, electrified public and private transport might well reduce the emissions involved with commuting, but even so, rural land is best used for open space, food production or tree planting. We also value the vitality of a compact well connected city.

The character of Newtown

A key focus of the consultation documents is whether or not to keep the current protections on pre-1930s housing. In Newtown the character area includes most of the suburb, excluding only Riddiford St and a few adjacent streets. A network of narrow streets is tightly packed with houses, the majority of which are indeed pre-1930s. The implication in the scenarios is that if the pre-1930s protections are removed this opens the way for replacing these houses with apartment blocks of up to six storeys. Our observation is that the character of Newtown isn't just about the age of the buildings, but also depends on the human scale of the residential streetscape. Keeping or removing the protections isn't the only consideration.

A vision for Newtown's future

We support intensification but want to see developments which strengthen the character of our suburb. With thoughtful attention to the District Plan review this could be an opportunity for Newtown to be a resilient, affordable and attractive place to live. We agree that increasing the number of residents supports local shops and services, and hopefully it will spur investments in transport and council services.

Development along our Suburban Centre mainstreets - Riddiford St and Adelaide Road

We are in favour of increasing density along the 'growth spine' of Adelaide Rd and Riddiford St. High-quality multi-use developments in Riddiford Street would bring vibrancy and opportunities with trade, commerce, hospitality and entertainment at street level and apartments above. Our observation is that buildings at a four storey height would retain the character of Newtown and its human scale and reduce shading and other adverse effects on

neighbours. An example is the apartment building on the corner of Riddiford and Hall Streets which is four storeys on Riddiford Street but steps down as Hall Street rises and it joins the residential zoning. It is also the same height as the buildings on the opposite side of Hall Street and in scale with the neighbourhood. Another is the apartment building under construction in Constable Street, which also fits the scale of neighbouring buildings.

Height causes shading which makes neighbouring residences cold and damp, and their solar panels dysfunctional. Our pedestrian friendly narrow main street corridor would become a shady canyon at more than four storeys. The exception to the four storey limit is along Adelaide Road between Basin Reserve and John Street which could be six storeyed or higher, but stepped down on their western side as a transition to the residential built form of Mt Cook. (two or three storeys of often Victorian stud height). More than four storey height might also be possible where Riddiford Street is wider, as it is in front of the hospital, or where the terrain behind the main street growth spine is elevated, as it is in the vicinity of the Newtown Park flats. Local fine grain fit is required to tailor potential growth to our physical setting.

The future of the Newtown Character Area

We appreciate the heritage of character commercial buildings in Newtown, and would want the character respected, retained and made earthquake safe. The tapestry of age contributes to Newtown's identity, our local sense of place, and is celebrated by the whole city and the region once a year as the setting for our legendary Newtown Festival. District Plan rules and Newtown Suburban Centre Design guide provisions need to be crafted to encourage working with this character, preserving significant facades, while adding height and occupancy density. New builds should read as of their time, but have the grain and human scale as documented in the current Newtown Suburban Centre Design Guide.

The proposed Lets Get Wellington Moving mass transit public transport spine needs to track through, matching the growth spine of planned increased density. Aligning dense living with the convenience of easy access to the mass transit is crucial to a viable sustainable city. Tracked lightrail type mass transit is ideal for its ability to cope with a big increase in population numbers overtime at the same time as providing the certainty of a fixed route. Certainty of the planned route encourages investment in building the increased density, which may well happen in advance of the mass transit roll out. Certainty of mass transit route also allows comprehensive planning and establishment of a linking network of walkways, cycleways and shared space streets that support our greater population density.

When we move out of the area surrounding the Riddiford St mainstreet corridor we are much more cautious. A single minded emphasis on increasing housing density risks losing the very qualities that make Newtown a great place to live. Tall apartment buildings lining our residential narrow streets would turn them into sunless concrete canyons, however sympathetic the design. The energy efficiency of the dense existing housing would be reduced by the lack of sun. Tall buildings would also cause significant wind issues, wind being deflected off the sides of the buildings down into neighbouring houses. If such buildings were next to existing family homes the effect would be devastating.

We would rather strengthen the protections around some character homes than get rid of them. Large character houses can be retrofitted into apartments to house more people while still retaining their character and existing houses can be made more comfortable, warmer and healthier. Many character homes have been lovingly restored and should be preserved and protected.

We observe some owners letting properties run down until demolition seems inevitable and we would like to see some mechanism to prevent this. In some cases this is too late and all character has disappeared over time. An assessment of character homes on their merits, which is what the consultants appear to have been doing, is warranted, but ideally those not worth saving would not automatically be replaced with apartment blocks.

Instead we would like to see new buildings designed so they fit the human scale and established character of Newtown, with District Planning rules that ensure quality of design, as currently the District Plan's Mount Cook, Newtown & Berhampore Design Guide for multi unit developments does. Sites should be assessed on a case by case basis. There are some areas where buildings of three or four stories can be tolerated without damaging effects on their neighbours, but this isn't the norm. In many places increased density could well be achieved by increasing the site coverage but not the height. Tailoring growth potential with local fine grain fit to each neighbourhood's physical setting with good community consultation is the best way to plan for growth.

Ancillary considerations

As mentioned earlier, to support higher density living there need to be walkways and cycle lanes and shared space streets. Planned growth should also include places where electric cars can recharge, sites for shared cars, cycle parks, e-scooter parks as well as excellent public transport.

Providing for parking is already contentious. We wouldn't like open space taken up with car-parks, but there may be an argument for a community/resident car-parking building that could be financed through a range of mechanisms. It would have to be balanced by removing some on-street parking and making streets more slower speed shared spaces and multi-use environments with street trees to compensate for the loss of trees due to intensification. Our streets should improve people's lives rather than their current limited role of moving vehicles through the suburb.

With higher density there will be a need for quality green open space. Currently most houses have their own gardens but when density is increased via increased site coverage or increased height then more and more people will have little or no outdoor space on their own properties. We have parks for sports in the suburb – Newtown Park, Rugby League Park and Basin Reserve, with Prince of Wales Park in Mt Cook and Wakefield Park in Berhampore, and we have the trees, open spaces, tracks and recreational opportunities in the Town Belt. But we will need more neighbourhood reserves, commons like Carrara Park, that are close to people's homes where people can relax, enjoy the green space, play backyard-type games with their kids, grow community vegies, socialise and hold local outdoor events and gatherings. The Council target is a 10 minute walk or 600 metres to a neighbourhood reserve.

In Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with WCC Councillors and Officers.

Rhona Carson
President
Newtown Residents' Association
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