



14-15 May 2018  
TSB Bank Auditorium- Shed 6  
Wellington

## Statement on New Zealand Urbanism

### *Urbanism New Zealand 2018 Conference Positioning Paper*

The conference theme was 'joining the dots.'

The 220 participants were not from a single profession, but represented a wide range of disciplines and included some of the country's leading urban thinkers.

A group of 22 delegates representing central government, local authorities, private practice and universities, participated in a workshop the following day to synthesise the conference discussion into a statement that could be useful for central government.

### **Executive Summary.**

Cities and towns in New Zealand do not match the quality of our famed natural landscapes.

All built places and spaces have come about through some form of design process. However, current development practices and poor design are negatively affecting the natural environment, the economy and public health. Tens of billions of dollars are going to be spent on housing, infrastructure and public amenities in the coming decades. As a country we need to ensure this money is spent in an intelligent manner to deliver the best possible outcomes.

Good design adds economic, social, cultural and environmental value and is the key to creating healthy and vibrant places. Value is maximised through processes of collective and careful decision making, involving the right professions and communities at the right time. City-making professionals such as architects, landscape architects, planners, urban designers and other associated disciplines can make a vital contribution to realising the enormous potential of New Zealand's towns and cities.

### **New Zealand has six main problems produced by poor planning and urban management:**

1. Our cities and towns are becoming increasingly unaffordable and this is producing multigenerational problems for housing, health, and productivity. Equality and accessibility for all is becoming more difficult .
2. Our cities and towns are suffering from a lack of medium and long term spatial planning and as a result are becoming increasingly vulnerable to shocks from weather, earthquakes, impacts of climate change, growth pressures, economic changes and energy shortages.
3. Our cities and towns are unhealthy. Poor planning and urban design is increasing the number of deaths from traffic accidents and obesity-related illnesses. Physical connectedness remains central to social cohesion which in turn supports mental health outcomes. Walkability is a pre-condition for good public health and a strong sense of community.

4. The economy is suffering because of poor planning and urban design. Costs are increased by inefficient public transport systems, subsidised infrastructure on greenfield sites and lost productivity owing to longer travel times.
5. Many of our towns and cities are modelled on global prototypes and images. Yet, we have an obligation to use the urban environment to tell stories about our own part of the world. This history can be sourced from tikanga Māori, pākehā heritage and the integration of other migrant cultures.
6. Our planning systems are too complex and have become dependent on legalistic language and consultation that is slow, expensive and makes public participation difficult.

**To address these issues, we propose the following:**

- An improved and fully aligned policy framework addressing urban matters.
- A national Policy Statement on Urban Form (Urban Design) incorporated within the RMA (this could avoid rewriting the RMA and the associated need to create new case law).
- A national design review process including monitoring of critical and sensitive projects and programmes such as Kiwibuild.
- Better evidence-based decision making backed by measurements of value.
- A coherent, integrated and ambitious design response to climate change.

To undertake that above we suggest the following process:

1. A cross discipline meeting hosted by the Minister of Housing and Urban Development that would include officials from government agencies such as Treasury, Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the new Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to investigate the desirability of establishing a national programme of making better places through design. It would discuss the value of good design and the cost of poor design. The outcome could be an agreed terms of reference for a national urban design committee.
2. The national urban design committee would provide leadership and could serve as a technical advisory group to relevant ministers and the public. It should lead local, regional and national conversations and become a formalised sounding board on urban issues. It could provide input into the creation of a permanent government design agency.
3. The design agency could be an Independent Crown entity to advocate for the effective planning and design of New Zealand (Aotearoa's) cities, towns and landscape. Overseas, good quality design and built environments are advocated by the U.K.'s Design Council's CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) and in Australia by the respective state government architects who have an important role advocating better built environments. There is no New Zealand equivalent. Models for an agency in the New Zealand context include EECA (Energy Efficient Conservation Authority) or the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. The role should not be captured as part of a single Ministry or profession.

The Treaty must be at the core of this agency's mandate and approach, especially as the country moves to a post-settlement phase of partnership. This body is not a development agency. Instead, it provides advocacy, policy and governance advice to central government and local authorities.

## These initiatives will lead to the following better outcomes:

Good urban design will:

- greatly improve health outcomes for the country,
- address inequality issues,
- help reinstate the importance of the Treaty and
- save money on long-term health budgets.

New Zealand can be a world leader in the development of resilient cities and towns and pioneer just and fair responses to the impacts of climate change. The proposals above will lead to more equal access to jobs, health, housing and education. Good cities and towns are shaped by the unique cultures and history of New Zealand and, at their best, they reflect our deepest values of care, justice and equality. The recommendations in this statement will help 'join the dots' that best practices in design can deliver.

Workshop Attendees:

Gerald Blunt	Wellington City Council
Alistair Ray	Jasmax
Hayley Fitchett	HLC (Homes. Land. Community.)
Ceciel DelaRue	Christchurch City Council
Chris McDonald	Victoria University of Wellington
Morten Gjerde	Victoria University of Wellington
Duncan Ecob	Isthmus
Marc Baily	Boffa Miskell
Ben van Bruggen	Auckland Council
Graeme Scott	ASC Architects / Urban Design Forum
Jeanette Ward	Abley Transportation
Barnaby Bennett	
Rebecca Kiddle	Victoria University of Wellington
Darren Baars	NZ Transport Agency
Natalie Allen	The Urban Advisory
Andrew Burns	McIndoe Urban
Tim Robinson	Jasmax
Errol Haarhoff	University of Auckland
Lee Beattie	University of Auckland
Nick Rae	Transurban
Paki Maaka	Hutt City Council
Ellen Ashenden	HLC (Homes. Land. Community.)

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