

Housing and Urban Design – Executive Summary

Guiding Principles

Good housing and urban design is not just concerned with sheltering people but the wider context in which they live, in particular the interconnections between people (human relationships) and between people and places (environment).

Key Outcomes

Opportunity

HNZC creates opportunities that will enable local communities to recognise existing capacities and to develop new ones.

True Sustainability

The establishment and maintenance of sustainable communities demands equal consideration of economic, environmental, social and cultural factors.

Flexibility

Housing and urban design meets present needs and can accommodate future needs.

Coordination of Infrastructure

Infrastructure is provided to enable the community to thrive.

Safety

Housing and urban design is based on the establishment and maintenance of safe communities.

Commitment to Best Practice

HNZC influences and educates all stakeholders by demonstrating best practice urban design principles.

Inclusive Process

Communities fully participate in decision-making.

Key Issues

Architectural Design

With respect to the architectural design of individual houses, participants felt that the designs should ensure that the home is flexible and adaptable to take into account the dynamic and diverse needs of its current occupants and possible future occupants. Designs need to be culturally appropriate and ensure that the occupants are afforded a certain amount of privacy from neighbouring homes. Houses shouldn't look alike – they need identity and individualism. 'HNZC houses can be identifiable – but identifiable as quality houses' (working party participant).

Also where cheap building materials can be used, the design of the house must be appropriate and aesthetically pleasing. Design tools such as zero lot lines are also useful in order to make the most of urban space.

In the quest for good design for social housing, John Byrne, Professor of Urban Design and Architecture, suggests a tax subsidy to the architectural firms involved in work on low income housing schemes.

Designs must also take into account security considerations.

Environmental Design

The relationship between the physical environment and the people that inhabit that environment was important to participants. Amenities should be within easy access which may mean not accepting cheap land on the urban fringe on which to build social housing. Again, participants stressed the need for diversity; of use and aesthetic of social housing. Simple things like colour can improve the landscape in which houses sit. Design, according to participants is particularly important in higher density building.

Participants also stressed the need to take into account flood plains, climatic change, future climatic risk, overheating, in both new and old developments as weather extremes in an absolute sense will increase.

Transport

Decisions on the location of social housing need to take into account the occupants ability to access transport, including both public and private transport. As previously mentioned, people need to be able to access amenities such as schools, shops and health services.

Community Development

Participants felt that good housing and urban design should reflect the wants and needs of neighbourhoods and the communities within those neighbourhoods. Participants stressed that design should not only reflect the requirements of the geographical community, but also the religious, cultural and recreational layers of communities. Cultural groups may desire to live in a village or papakainga setting, whilst older people may like to live within walking distance to provide each other with support. However, in this regard, any development must be careful to avoid segregation.

Communities are created when people have a vested interest in maintaining both their physical, community and relationships which foster those communities. In order to help promote this interest and pride in the community, participants suggested that HNZC could look for opportunities to provide local employment; for example maintaining houses, gardens and grounds in shared spaces and providing apprenticeships on building sites.

They asserted that stability was very important in creating a sense of community. In order to foster stability, participants asserted the need for 'mixed' neighbourhoods, that is neighbourhoods of diverse kinds of housing (for example boarding houses, community care for mental health consumers and one – five bedroom homes); a range of age groups from youth to kaumatua; and people in a range of income groups and occupations. For instance, if there are people home during the day in a community this can serve to discourage crime. Those in higher income brackets can also contribute to the local community's economy.

In addition, urban design needs to balance the need for privacy, whilst allowing people opportunities to connect with one another. When people have no choice as to where they live, they are more vulnerable and therefore require enough of their own space to feel comfortable in order to connect with others in their communities. Examples of current social housing and urban design successes include Rowena Crescent in Glen Innes, Auckland and the three star blocks in Upper Hutt.

HNZC Service Provision

Participants felt that HNZC could have a facilitation role beyond just providing housing. Because HNZC pays such a large rates bill, HNZC could advocate on behalf of communities in order to obtain services and amenities that those communities desire from the local council. Because of its purchasing power, HNZC could also form partnerships with industry and companies which provide products such as plants and amenities such as energy and telecommunications, to lower costs for tenants.

With respect to HNZC houses, participants asserted that it was much more important to concentrate on bettering HNZC's 60,000 existing houses rather than new acquisitions.

Affordability

Affordable housing was a priority for participants. The need for low-cost HNZC housing has to be balanced against the need to ensure tenants can afford to live in them. For instance, houses which are well located, that are close to schools, health services, employment and transport services may be more affordable. A better social cost benefit analysis is required in order to examine this more closely. Also, triple bottom line reporting is required in order to assess the environmental, social and fiscal impacts of current and future social housing provision.

Research and Analysis

Participants felt that research needed to be undertaken looking at case studies of good urban design in New Zealand in order to effect good social housing design. We need to look at why some urban landscapes work and some don't.

Goals

The establishment, maintenance and enhancement of housing and communities in which people thrive, where access to their day to day needs and activities is facilitated by the infrastructure and in which they can feel safe and secure.

Objectives and Action Plans

At this time the housing and urban design working party has not had the opportunity to develop detailed objectives or to recommend appropriate plans of action to achieve the medium and long term goals. It is envisaged that this will be an outcome of the next meeting of the working party.