



INTRODUCTION

The government's legislation setting up the new Auckland Council requires the preparation of a spatial plan for the region. It is to be prepared under the Local Government Act and is to have a major role in helping to co-ordinate infrastructure investment and stimulate improved urban performance. It may or may not link to the new Regional Policy Statement / District Plan via the Resource Management Act.

Developing the spatial plan will be a major task for the incoming council. Some background on spatial plans can be found in the cabinet paper on spatial planning: <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/cabinet-papers/cab-paper-spatial-planning-options-for-the-auckland-council.html>

The purpose of the seminar was to identify how urban design can be at the core of the Auckland spatial plan (ASP), giving the Urban Design Forum (UDF) a platform from which to advocate to the incoming Auckland Council.

Key questions where:

- How can urban design principles and practices influence large scale spatial planning?
- How can spatial plans deliver better quality, more sustainable urban environments?

This report collates the presentations and discussions that occurred on the day. Preceding this is a short reflection on the history of spatial planning. It concludes with some ideas for ways that urban design can influence the development of the spatial plan.

The seminar was held in the Auckland Town Hall on the 2 September 2010 and attracted over 180 attendees, covering a wide range of urban professionals from the public and private sectors.

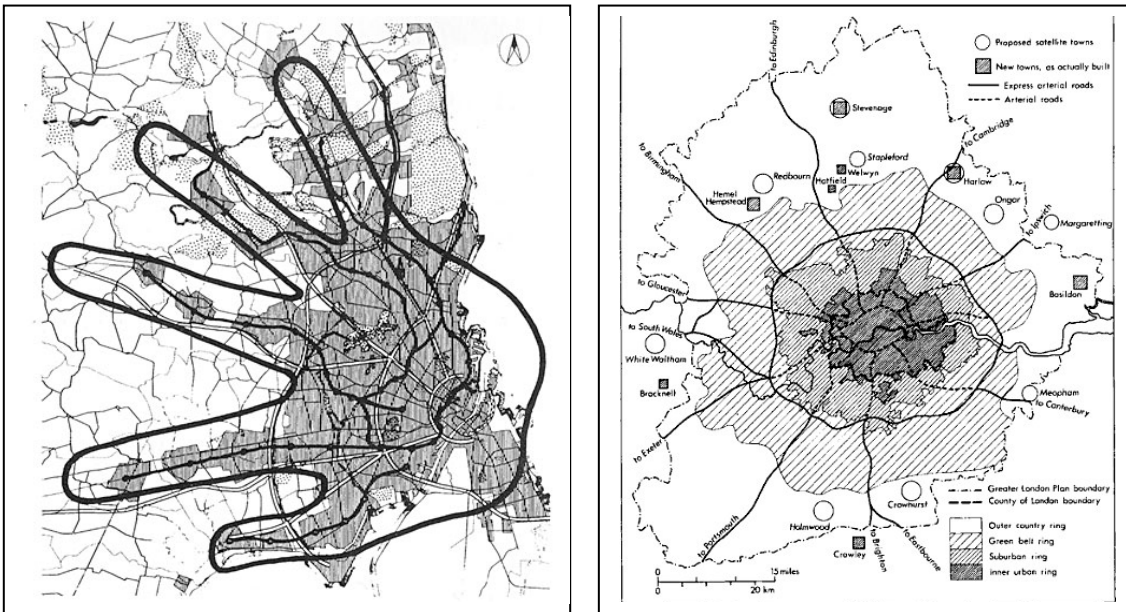
The Ministry for the Environment provided funding for this summary to be prepared.



HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Spatial planning is nothing new. Some spatial plans have had a strong urban design theme running through them, where there is the sense of a city fitting within its regional landscape, but also providing a framework for well designed neighbourhoods and centres to develop.

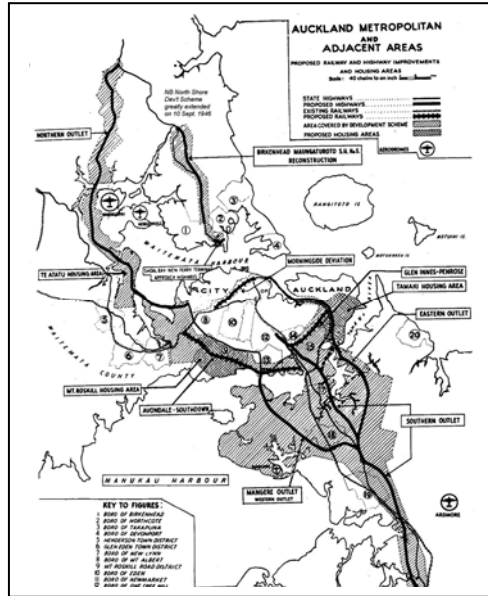
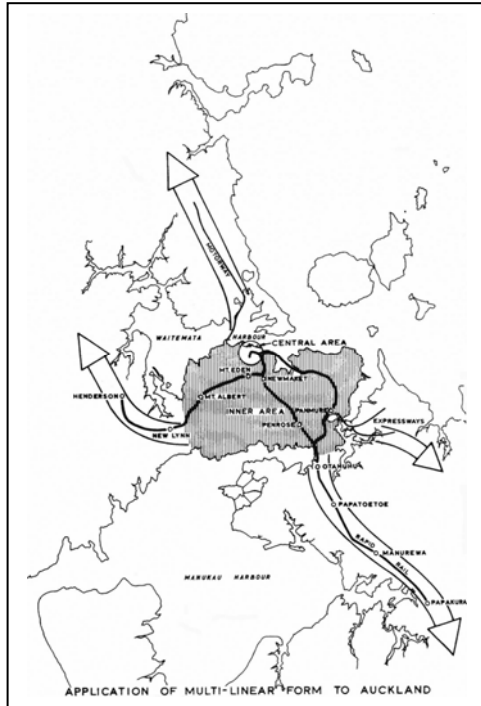
While the detail of each can be debated, some of these plans are enduring, like the Copenhagen Finger Plan of 1947 (left hand side) and the 1943 Abercrombie Plan for London (right hand side),



Why some plans endure and others don't is a matter of debate: was it because they were noble plans, clearly presented; or did they just, by chance, happen to work? Is it because there has been a shift in town planning for more of a design focus in the early part of the 20th century to more of an infrastructure perspective as the century proceeded which has meant that their focus on the quality of the urban environment has been lost somewhat?

We should also not forget that for some plans, we are grateful that they didn't come to pass!

Spatial planning has been underway in the Auckland region since at least the 1950s. The 1999 Auckland Regional Growth Strategy could even be said to have been ahead of its time, preceding as it did spatial plans prepared for other cities like Sydney and Melbourne.



Here are three historical plans for the Auckland Region, courtesy of Chris Harris. These have more of an emphasis on transport and land use.

The first one (top left) explores Auckland's basic corridor form arising from the Isthmus and Waitemata and Manukau harbours, while the second one (top right) is from the Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1946, showing how the principle of transport corridor-based growth might have been applied, pre-harbour bridge and when the airport was still out west, at Whenuapai.

The third plan is from the 1960s and is perhaps closer to reality, although the idea of only four large sub regional centres clearly hasn't materialised.

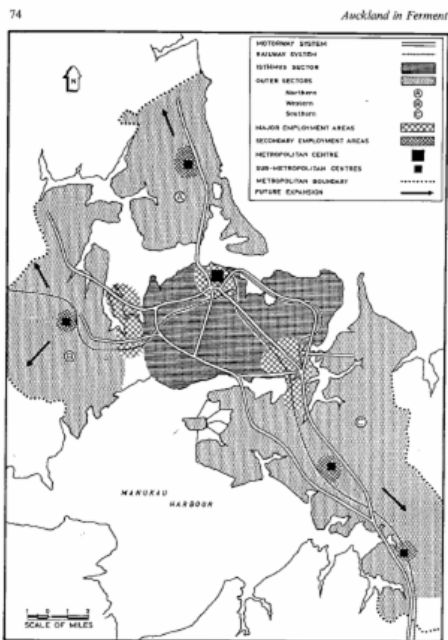


Fig. 6. Employment areas.

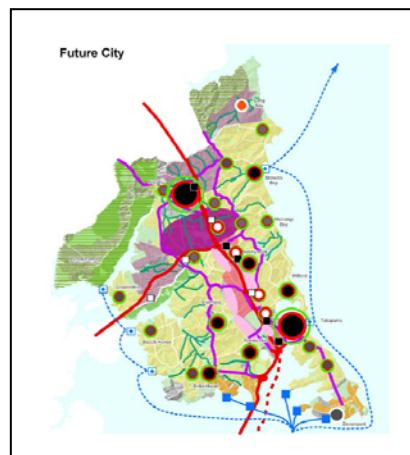
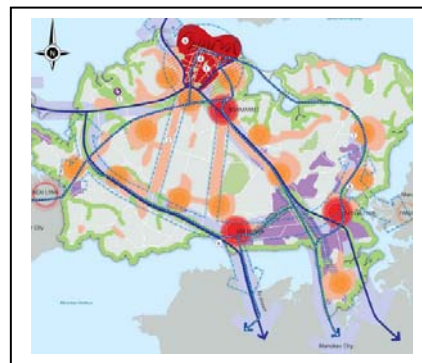
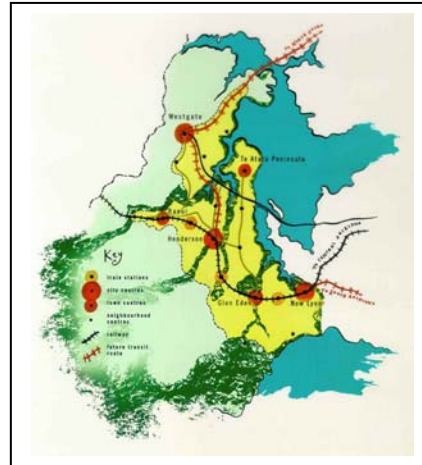
Recently, spatial planning in the region has become more place-based and a bit more “grounded”.

To the left is Waitakere City’s plan from the mid 1990s, emphasising the idea of a poly-centric city; rail and motorway-based nodes and the green network extending up into the Waitakere Ranges.

Auckland City’s recently undertaken “It’s my back yard” planning process (middle picture) emphasises key centres and corridors.

North Shore’s Blueprint (lower picture) presents a layered view of the city, with a range of suburbs and different sized centres, natural environments and business areas.

So is a top down, or bottom up process better, or do you need both?



SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

Ludo Campbell-Reid – Auckland City Council

Ludo noted the key role that urban design has to play in invigorating the city and asked that the professions 'step up' with regard to Auckland's future. He identified the ASP as one of the three big issues for the new city – governance, organizational stability, the spatial plan.

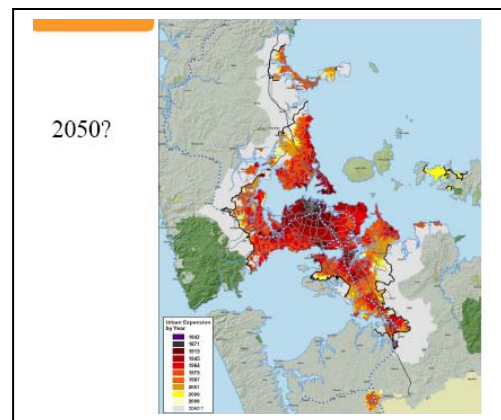
Key features he identified for the ASP were:

- People first
- Enduring
- Priorities
- Process.

Peter Winder – Chief Executive, ARC

Peter provided a retrospective look at the Regional Council's achievements in strategic planning. He led the audience through the successive decisions and issues in relation to the region's growth, infrastructure and investment.

A lack of central government agreement to Auckland's plans has been a constant weakness of regional plan implementation, often he felt because central government underestimated the scale of the task facing Auckland and resisted calls for Auckland-specific tools and funding.



Key issues he identified for the ASP were:

- Sensitivity of the natural environment to change (and peoples values)
- The amount of growth to be accommodated (2 x Wellington Region by 2050)
- Natural constraints to growth that were often ignored (eg river systems, productive rural land)
- Importance of aligning planning with regional infrastructure and investment
- Achieving redevelopment and intensification (while making it 'look nice')
- Aligning government and Auckland thinking and budgets – finding a shared vision (eg public transport, schools, hospitals, prisons)

Discussion points from seminar participants:

- On-going debate around protecting rural land and accommodating urban growth
- Differing opinion about the need for MUL

- How to sequence development (to avoid fragmentation of rural land/enable amalgamation of urban land)
- Need for timely decision-making and problems with the RMA eg plan changes
- How to engage central government.

Hon. Nick Smith – Minister for the Environment

The Minister talked of how new processes were required to deliver government's 'blue and green principles' and the 'clean green' brand with economic development. He outlined the outcomes he/government expect from the ASP process and the objectives of the RMA reforms, including a streamlined process for land supply and transport with crisper, more timely decisions.

In particular, he sought integration of infrastructure and land development, future-proofing, and simplification of policy (including more national NPSs and NESs).

Key features he expected from the ASP were:

- Longterm vision
- Multi-party collaborative mechanism
- Value rather than growth alone
- Strategic plan (high level) covering all functions
- Structure that works for Auckland that can be used elsewhere.

Discussion points from seminar participants:

- Whether or not Auckland's issues are unique, and
- Whether Auckland requires a different statutory framework
- How central and local government need to work together at a political level
- How commercial interest are to be accommodated within the RMA reforms
- The need for more scrutiny around cost / benefits – in the form of 'evidence'
- The conflict between 'idealistic' infrastructure proposals v. financially robust proposals
- How landscape issues will be tackled – by Auckland Council, not central government
- Whether a more fundamental rethink of the RMA is necessary to better cater for the discretionary nature of urban design.

- Relies on other instruments for delivery
- Needs to fit available timeframes
- Place-based policy to drive competitiveness for the city
- Uses multiple policy levers in addition to or instead of land use regulation and transport investment
- Better value for money
- Timing of investment linking development and infrastructure
- Agreed evidence base
- Cements existing collaborations (eg One Plan)

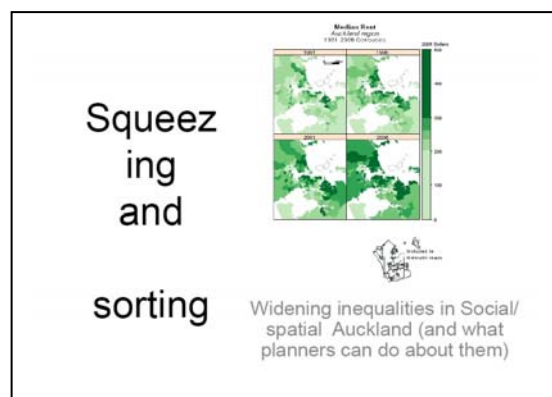
Discussion points from seminar participants:

- Why/how should central government communicate its objectives (for the ASP) to Auckland?
- Should the ASP replace the RPS and RLTS?
- How can the local community/Maori participate?
- What degree of influence should the ASP have on designations and regulatory systems?
- Timing of ASP – completion within 1 year (before LTCCP)?
- How to connect the ASP with RMA plans (when there is no direct legislative link)?
- How to scope for 3D rather than a broad strategic plan (need to visualise as a jigsaw?)
- How to get the ASP to embrace urban design practice?
- Is there/can there be a common/shared vision for Auckland?
- Potential for the ASP to deliver unintended consequences
- Tension between certainty and flexibility
- Need to avoid the ASP being ‘captured’ by large scale infrastructure
- Need to avoid self-interest over public good.

David Craig – Dept. of Sociology, University of Auckland

David questioned how the ASP would deal with the big picture inequalities in housing and location of poorer groups; dislocation from employment centres; ghettoisation on the periphery of the city; squeezing out/gentrification of ‘improving’/intensified areas; transience and homelessness.

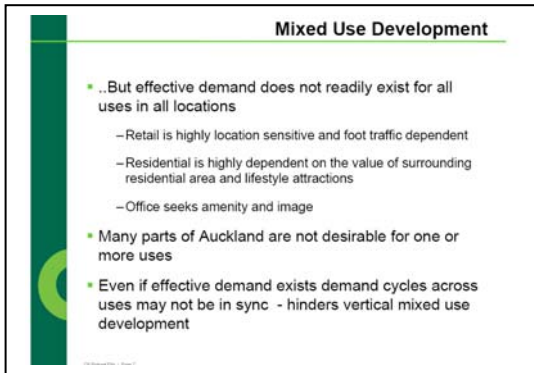
Central government policies relating to taxation, social welfare reform and macro-economic changes have had a bigger impact on the urban region than any spatial



plan. He felt that engagement with central government was crucial to address these issues.

Zoltan Moricz – CBRE

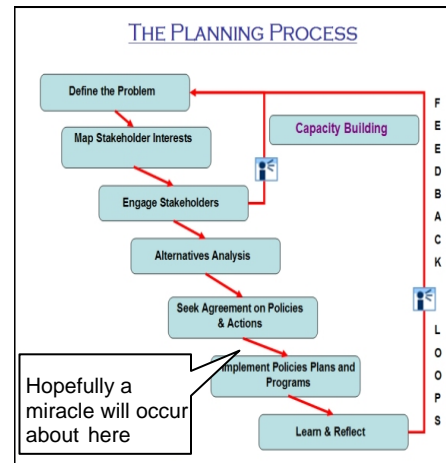
Zoltan urged urban designers to ensure they understood the market when developing the ASP. He pointed out the different drivers for development – user demand, input costs, realization value and risk. He identified mixed use development as being commonly specified, but with poor understanding of where it will work in market terms.



He suggested that planners / urban designers need to identify areas where demand exists for the types of environments sought. Where demand does not exist, then incentives will be needed (not prohibitions); including conventional (market-based policies and plan incentives) and unconventional (often requiring long term time horizons, partnerships, and public capital).

Lee Beattie – School of Architecture and Planning, University of Auckland

Lee opined that existing policy and plans may adequate and that the problem was one of delivery and ‘making things happen’, rather than having a whole new plan. In particular, he considered that councils had a poor track record in effecting and evaluating policy and questioned whether a spatial plan would be better than anything already in place.



Spot the obvious flaw in the planning process?

Note :UDF graphic, not Lee Beattie.

Key questions he raised for the ASP were:

- Time frame – whether a spatial plan could be delivered in 1 year?
- What would be the expectation of local communities?
- What is the relationship between the ASP and RPS & DP?
- How can the ASP have teeth if it does not go through a statutory process and has limited community involvement?

DISCUSSION

By way of introduction to general discussion, David Mead (Chairman UDF) posed some challenges for the ASP, for example:

- How do we avoid the ASP reinforcing social inequalities? How can we use development to unlock social issue potentials?
- Where are the points of intervention? And how do you get support to include them in the ASP?
- How do we overcome the limitations of the RMA and avoid Local Boards acting as brokers with developers?

Main topics of discussion were:

- How to get local community input into the ASP? (Should they design their own plans?)
- Role of central government – unclear (similar process/conversation with 2002 Local Government Act?). Will central government sign off the ASP?
- Need for political leadership, commitment and participation
- Role of developers – partnering to help shape market trends (especially for large-scale redevelopment but also avoiding alienating/leaving out smaller developers)
- What useful tools/models can we take from spatial plans in other centres/cities?
- Need for a collaborative process and vision
- Role of the urban design profession and advocacy
- How the ASP would link to an implementation plan (Tauranga Smart Growth Plan cited as example)

As a wrap up, the audience was asked to identify three things the UDF should focus on. There was no consensus with a number of things suggested:

- Getting local politicians to speak to the local community
- Ensuring a collaborative process and vision (ownership at all levels)
- Ensuring a vision-led process with spatial content
- Urban design advocacy
- UDF to offer to work with Council.

WAY FORWARD

Based on the seminar, the Urban Design Forum has identified some urban design parameters that we regard as essential to a successful spatial plan. The following section provides an outline of these parameters as a basis for on-going discussion.

Resources on urban design and spatial planning

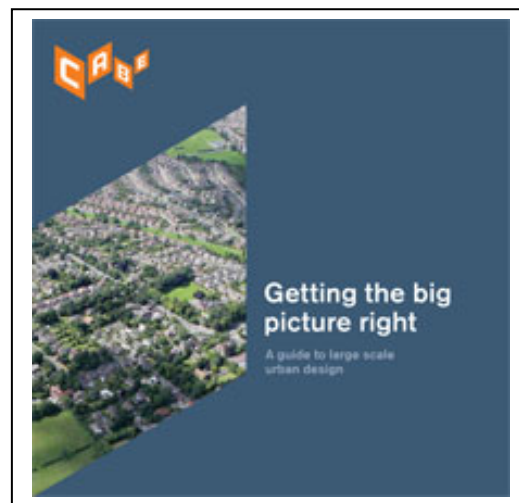
There are few guides or resources on spatial planning and urban design. One of the more recent is the CUBE report: “Getting the big picture right, a guide to large scale urban design”.

This guide sets out six distinctive features of what it calls “large scale urban design”:

1. It is selective in its interests
2. It is spatially led, three dimensional and visually rich
3. It is an integrated approach to analysis and design
4. It is an engaging and inclusive process
5. It is focused on delivery
6. It is flexible.

The guide states that the end product should include:

- an overarching 'story of change' - a clear description of the transformation to be brought about by a package of interventions and investments in the built and natural fabric of the wider area, based on its identity and potential.
- a creative and inspiring visual expression of this 'story of change' that can be communicated easily to a wide range of interest groups
- a database of quantitative and qualitative information which can be analysed spatially, and through multi-layered analysis. This allows a whole range of issues to be considered together, to identify conflicts, synergies and priorities, develop effective proposals and coordinate their delivery
- a distillation of this analysis into key areas of interest which need to be addressed at this scale or which require greater coordination
- an agreed set of proposals which define the type and location of priority projects under key themes,
- a set of design and sustainability principles, standards and tools to guide masterplans and more detailed urban design and building proposals.



The CABE guide provides many useful pointers. What can urban design specifically offer that will help shape the spatial plan to our local context?

Identifying the “grain of the city”

Crucial to allowing a successful city to develop must be finding the “grain” of the city, and working with this grain, rather than against it.

Urban design usually starts with a thorough appreciation of the wider context of the site or location where development is proposed. It is common for a series of layers to be built up, with each layer looking at current conditions related to one aspect of the environment within which the development area sits, like the natural environment and open spaces, transport and movement, and the built environment. The basis of a spatial plan therefore needs to be a thorough understanding and mapping of the functional layers of the city – those things that make Auckland and its different places distinctive – landscape/topography, ecology, economic, social, cultural, community, for example.

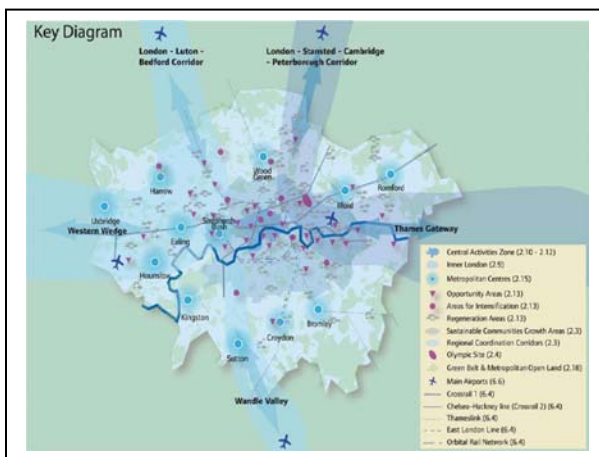


Auckland is a coastal city, it's geography concentrates people and businesses.

Auckland is a coastal city; it is also a city of ridgelines and volcanic cones. What does this mean for our urban form – where do people want to live, play and interact with their fellow citizens?

Understanding the layers that make up the city

The next step after compiling the layers is to undertake some analysis of each layer:



how could the resource in question be improved / enhanced? Are there new connections or linkages that should be made, additional areas protected, or areas to be enhanced or improved?

Writ large, designing for the big picture will require attention to more than where housing development will go, and what infrastructure and investment is needed. Ultimately infrastructure systems (like transport) are there to support the lifestyle that we like, not the other way around.

London's plan: go east.

The plan will need to address long run challenges like adapting to climate change, achieving sustainable economic

development while protecting and capitalizing on Auckland's natural landscape assets, and redressing the balance between advantaged and disadvantaged communities.

Urban design principles help to identify deficiencies and opportunities in terms of each layer. Increasing choice and diversity in the urban environment, expanding connectivity, creating a more legible and inclusive urban environment; these are all important principles no matter what the scale.

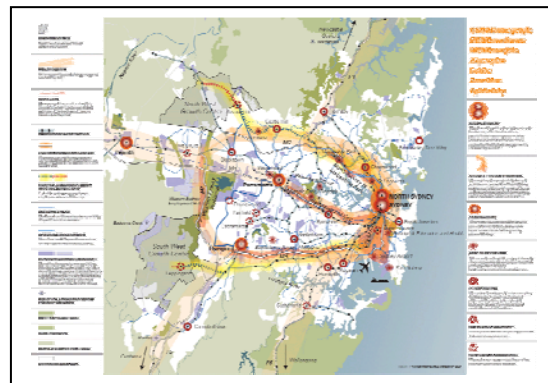
Importantly, urban design principles help to see the city as a dynamic system of many interconnecting and overlapping parts in a constant state of flux. This helps to overcome the often fairly simplistic, static approaches that have been used to think about cities in the past. Cities are organised, complex systems. If anything, the spatial plan should seek to increase the degree of organised complexity, not reduce it.

At this point, it is usual for urban design to undertake a simple sieve mapping type exercise of the layers: where do the various layers and the proposals to improve them align and where are there discontinuities that need to be addressed (where do outcomes need to be integrated?) Some big picture problems will start to emerge.

Developing and testing responses through iterative, interactive processes (enquiry by design)

Here the critical, integration phase begins to take place. Typically, a range of options are explored, with a number of coherent scenarios developed and drawn up, as is usual in the planning process. But rather than region-wide options (like compact versus spread versus satellite development), it is usual for urban design to start to tackle the bigger picture issues first at a smaller, more local scale. This is to ensure that proposals and concepts are "place-based". A number of appropriate sub areas of the regional environment may be identified, with each sub area looked at in terms of all of the relevant layers and the attendant issues, each involving multi-disciplinary teams.

Possible outcomes for each sub area are drawn up, then compared in terms of their performance, both as a separate entity, but also in relation to other areas. This testing process may mean that there is a need to dive into the detail for sub areas, so that options are place-based and realistic, but never in isolation from that which surrounds it. Once a workable solution for an area is identified, then there is a need to "go back up" the spatial scale.



Sydney's strategy: go west

There is no set formula for how much time is involved and how many iterations are needed. This process is neither a purely design-based exercise or a technical weighing up of pros and cons of three or four options. It is an evolving process where each step builds on the last step, and work in each sub area informs the work on other sub areas.

This process may involve, intensive, multi-day design-based workshop type processes, interspersed with periods of more formal, analytical analysis.

Integrating outcomes

In looking at sub areas, urban design approaches are likely to be particularly relevant in how two resolve two key sets of issues that have often been at the core of past regional plans:

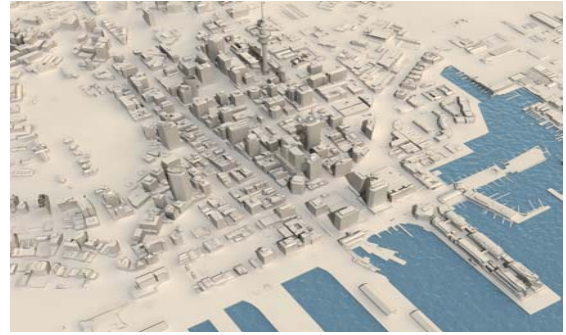
- Firstly is how the urban and natural environments can live side-by-side. Past plans have been founded on a simple dichotomy of urban/rural - the protection of the natural environment is achieved by avoiding urban development in these areas, within the urban area, the natural environment should be downplayed in favour of maximising development. Increasingly, as environmental management techniques relating to earthworks, stormwater and restoration of the natural environment improve, then urban development can occur in more sensitive environments. But will the need to protect the natural environment (retain streams and bush areas, limit earthworks in some areas) mean that a messy, patchy urbanism results which lacks the critical mass needed for urban environments to prosper? Urban design offers ways for the urban and natural environments to work together “hand in glove”. By understanding the natural and urban systems at play, there is the ability to work with them to protect their functioning and attributes, in a mutually beneficial way.
- Secondly, how urban, rather than just suburban, environments work and the benefits that they can offer, if well designed. Past plans have sought to promote a more urban environment so as to protect the natural environment, but they have founded on fears about the quality of such environments and a miss-reading of the ingredients needed to make them work. Urban design tells us that above all, increased urban density needs to be associated with enhanced public amenity. In the case of Auckland, that amenity is open spaces, green spaces and places for recreation.



Auckland has many good examples of urban environments where the natural and built environment work well together

Expressing a future

Plans have also not been able to communicate the scale of change needed. Increasingly, the development of more intensive, urban type environments will be driven by various social and economic trends, rather than a simplistic desire for a more contained urban area. The quality of the resulting built environment will be critical to many long run outcomes associated with climate change, resource use and economic efficiency.



Nextspace image, sourced from article in National Business Review: A 3D view of the city, October 4, 2009.

A range of urban environments are likely to emerge from this process, rather than a pre-ordained structure or classification of centres. There is a need to have a strong 3D modeling component to understanding possible futures / urban combinations. The plan has to offer a sense of the **vertical** and **horizontal** scale of the city.

As the number of design iterations progresses, then a strategy will start to emerge, built up from the analysis of layers, and the various spatial scales looked at.

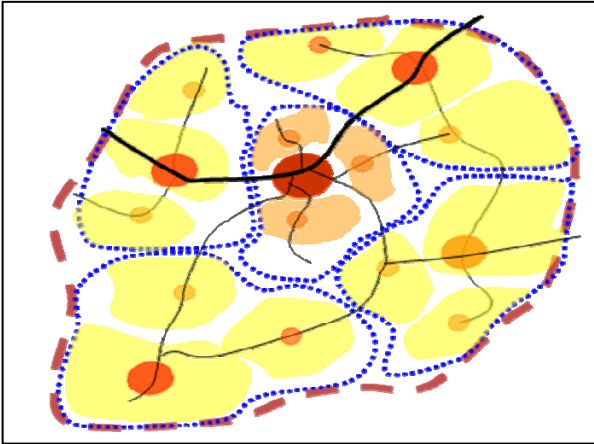
There is the need for a process of “alignment”, where inconsistencies are ironed out and local needs are balanced with regional imperatives. Trade offs are inherent in this process, as they are with all planning processes. Increasingly, the focus will shift from the local area back up to the regional picture and the development of a coherent picture of the future at this larger scale.

As set out in the CUBE report, this future needs to be expressed as more of a journey towards a destination, rather than as a fixed end state.

Challenges

The timescale needs to be realistic. Developing a strategy that will be successful at multiple scales should take as long as is needed, particularly if there is to be ownership at all levels. The expectation that the plan will be finished within 1 year seems unrealistic without a massive and expensive plan process (giant portable charrette?) Without ownership at all levels, it is likely that the plan will fail.

Analysis tools need to be prepared and developed. Our understanding of urban environments, how they work and what influences them, is only modest. Past plans have



often focused on transport as being a key shaper of urban form, for example. This is true to an extent, but as transport costs have declined, then businesses and households have based location decisions on an ever wider range of factors. Equally, we do not fully understand all of the externalities of urban development (both positive and negative), and how current price signals do or do not reflect these externalities, and from this how people make decisions about where to live and work.

Urban design sees the city as a complex system

The search for a simple “grand idea”. The complexity of urban environments means that people often seek reduction of that environment into a few key ideas. “A world class city” is perhaps one such construct, another may be the designation on the map of a transformational technology hub or economic growth corridor, or similar. The process of developing a strategy outlined above may lead to a simple grand idea like the Copenhagen finger plan to emerge out of the context of the city; but it may just as well lead to a much more complex plan that cannot be easily shoe horned into a simple slogan. There is no right answer here between a simple vision and a complex mix of proposals; it has to emerge out of the design process to be coherent.

Implementation / delivery of the spatial plan have to shape the strategy, not be a response to the strategy (here’s the vision, now find a way of implementing it). If the plan ignores the political context for change and the associated funding and implementation process then it will be a weak plan, as all previous plans have been. At the same time, if the plan accepts current implementation settings as “givens”, then the plan is likely to just replicate the status quo. Urban design can help to understand the “implementation gap” - the gap between vision and reality and what tools will be needed to bridge that gap. The placed-based work on sub areas is likely to be very relevant here in helping to identify the gap and the tools required.

Possible Areas for Central Government Guidance

The Ministry for the Environment has requested some consideration of where it could provide guidance and advice on spatial planning. Some possible areas, from an urban design viewpoint are:

- **How to engage with central government departments** in the spatial planning process. The location and design of infrastructure like transport, schools and social delivery agencies have a big impact on urban form and quality. There are many government departments and agencies involved in place making. What are positive ways in co-coordinating their involvement?
- **Evidence-base.** What type of evidence needs to be gathered to support the spatial plan and how might it be used in the planning process, particularly evidence that will help to support better quality urban environments? What are the benefits of using more sophisticated urban analysis techniques like Space Syntax analysis, crowd sourced information (GPS data) and the role of urban economics?
- **Tackling national-level issues.** How should regional spatial plans deal with national-level issues like climate change, improving economic productivity and raising living standards? Are there are particular ways that regional spatial plans should respond to this issues?
- **Design resources.** A local version of the CABI report listed in this report would be very beneficial in raising the profile of urban design input into the spatial planning process, helping to dispel the impression that spatial planning is the imposition of a pre-set idea or construct on an area.