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## **NEWLANDS LOCAL CENTRE CONTEXT STUDY**

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

This report examines the future development potential of Newlands Local Centre and proposes that Wellington City Council take a lead role in achieving change over the short to medium term.

### **2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. *Note the report and the findings of the context study.*
2. *Agree to public consultation on the identified constraints and opportunities, draft principles and long-term development concept.*
3. *Note that further work will be undertaken on a Newlands Local Centre implementation plan, including options for disposal of Council assets and costings for proposed capital works, and that this will be reported back to SPC by the end February 2007 for further consideration.*
4. *Note the recommendations arising from this study for the development of the Newlands Community Centre.*

### **3. Background**

In considering the proposed development of the Newlands Community Centre, Council asked for a context study to be undertaken to identify how best to integrate the community centre into the wider environment and to examine the potential for redevelopment in the Newlands Local Centre. SPC Minutes (13 April 2006 082/06P):

8. *Agree to the development of a Centre Plan that examines the future development of the Newlands Centre as a whole, to be reported back to SPC in July as a draft for further consideration.*

A report was subsequently commissioned to examine Newlands Local Centre and its future potential. This examined:

- the strategic policy direction for the City, the northern suburbs and Newlands
- the history of initiatives to address problems in Newlands
- population and economic growth projections, including future retail viability
- the urban design context of the Centre and its surrounds
- an assessment of Council land and other assets
- land ownership and land use patterns
- current development proposals in the Centre and surrounds.

As part of the preparation of the background report, meetings were held with key stakeholders, including:

- ward councillors
- Council officers responsible for district plan, parks and gardens, roading, transport strategy, urban development, community services and urban design
- property and business owners
- Newlands Paparangi Progressive Association
- community organisations
- project manager and architect for the proposed Newlands Community Centre.

There has been a considerable recent history of attempted intervention in Newlands to address the problems identified within the suburban centre. These include:

- Urban Design Strategy 1994
- Newlands Mainstreet Project 1996
- Newlands Heart Project 1997
- Newlands Community Centre 2002 onwards.

The outcomes arising so far from these projects appear to have been piecemeal and limited to the construction of the glazed canopy and paving adjacent to the shops, and some landscaping around the edges of the Centre.

The Northern Growth Management Framework (2003) also outlines a number of principles that are relevant to the future development of Newlands Local Centre. These include:

- building on existing communities
- strengthening town centres
- developing attractive, diverse and liveable neighbourhoods that offer housing choice, promote walkability and allow for intensification over time
- promoting a strong sense of identity
- providing attractive public open spaces within neighbourhoods
- using innovative and creative approaches to economic growth and working in partnership with stakeholders.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 *Current Condition*

Newlands Local Centre is one of the less successful centres in Wellington City. Whilst it has significant potential, currently the physical environment is not as attractive as it could be and there a number of areas of land that are underutilised. The Centre is divided into three distinct areas, each of which has its own mix of activities and character. These are described below:

- (a) **Newlands Road** – this strip of buildings fronting Newlands Road forms the main ‘gateway’ to the suburb and Centre. The activities are dominated by ITM Building Supplies which occupies over half of the space; there are also a number of light industrial/service activities and service station. The buildings are not in good condition and the street edge and areas of car parking are unattractive and poorly formed. This area is physically separated from the remainder of the Centre by a steep bank which runs alongside the rear service lane.
- (b) **McMillan Court** – these buildings developed in the 1960’s contain the main retail uses of the Centre. There are 16 separate premises used for a variety of convenience shopping, local service facilities, takeaway food establishments and a wholesale bakery. Fronting these buildings are 89 car parks. There is a small attractive area of public space with a glazed canopy, which includes a small children’s playground. The public toilets are located on the edge of the car park and are of poor quality. Overall there has been a lack of investment in the buildings over several years and a number of businesses, including a supermarket, have moved out of the centre.
- (c) **Batchelor Street** – to the rear of McMillan Court there are number of large community facilities including a Hindu temple, a medical centre and a tavern. There are large areas of vacant/unformed land which are temporarily used for car parking. Access to the retail premises in McMillan Court is poorly defined, and there are a number of unattractive rear service areas that are not well maintained. Currently, this area appears dislocated and not well-connected to the rest of the Centre.

The areas surrounding the Local Centre are predominately residential, although there are also several churches. Newlands Park, Skatepark and Newlands School are located to the east of Newlands Road. The character of the residential development is mixed, with single family housing, medium-density flats and a large area of City Housing comprising some 29 bedsits and two one-bed flats.

### 4.2 *Constraints and Opportunities*

Investigation and analysis has shown that there are a number of constraints affecting the future development prospects of Newlands Local Centre, these include the following:

- (a) **Disparate land ownership** – there is a very dispersed pattern of land ownership in the Centre, with some 20 landowners and lessees for what is a relatively small area. The freehold title for at least 7 properties is also held separately to the lessee. This provides a particular constraint to future redevelopment, firstly as it will be more difficult to amalgamate sufficient land to enable schemes to proceed, and secondly as investors may be reluctant to commit to schemes where freehold title is not held.
- (b) **Dislocation of activities within the Centre and poor urban design** – the current layout of buildings and activities within the Centre results in the perception of three separate sub-areas, which are poorly connected. This reduces the overall sense of vibrancy and works against the creation of a focal point for the community. The quality of the buildings and spaces is not high and there are areas of ‘vacant’ or underutilised land. This overall lack of quality and the poor definition of spaces and activities present an unattractive investment opportunity and will increase the perception of ‘risk’ that any private investor will have to weigh up. It also may be a key factor behind the current low performance of the retail areas.
- (c) **Large areas of legal road** – the existing car park, the vehicular accessways, the service lanes and the area of public space are all classified as legal road. This presents little problem if no changes are proposed to these areas, however due to the extent of these areas, any significant redevelopment proposal may require the legal road status to be removed. This is potentially a lengthy and costly process, especially where there are significant objections.
- (d) **Retail viability** – as part of the investigations a report was commissioned into the economic viability of retail activities in Newlands. This concluded that the role of Newlands is as a local centre, primarily for convenience shopping (i.e. dairy, takeaway food, and other local service functions like a hairdresser), and that the current level of retail floorspace is unlikely to be increased significantly over the short-medium term. One of the key considerations in this conclusion is the continuing growth of Johnsonville as a centre serving the whole of the northern suburbs.
- (e) **Need for leadership** – the current condition of the Local Centre has resulted from a lack of investment over a long period of time. Given the constraints to redevelopment that exist there is a clear need for leadership to guide and facilitate the improvement of this area for the benefit of the local community and the City. There is currently no organisation actively undertaking this role.

There are also a number of significant opportunities that could be used to kick-start change and improvement in Newlands Local Centre. These include:

- (a) **Proposed Community Centre** – the proposed community centre offers a significant opportunity to regenerate part of the Newlands Local Centre, bring more activity and life into the ‘Batchelor Street’ part of the area, and to

improve connections between different areas of the Local Centre. Concept plans have been drawn up, budget is available and there is considerable support from the community.

- (b) **Other Council assets** – Council owns several assets in and around the Centre including the City Housing and reserve on Batchelor Street, the public toilets and areas of legal road. There are a number of opportunities to improve or redevelop these or indeed to dispose of assets and reinvest into more appropriate areas.
- (c) **Private Sector Investment** – there are several proposals for redevelopment being considered by landowners, lessees and other parties within the Centre. These include proposals for retail, residential and community facilities and services. Despite the overall assessment of retail viability there does appear to be strong interest in a new supermarket in this location. There is also strong demand for residential properties in the Newlands area, which has seen strong growth over the last five years. The ‘Suburban Centre Zone’ under the District Plan allows residential development and this would be in line with Council’s Urban Development Strategy.

#### ***4.3 Recommended Role of Council***

The recommended approach is that Council takes an active role in providing leadership to facilitate and kick-start the redevelopment and positive improvement of Newlands Local Centre. The unique mix of constraints and the current low level of investment in the Centre mean that it is unlikely that change of a sufficient scale and quality will happen without such intervention.

A coordinated and long-term approach will be required to deliver the required change. The lack of this long-term framework and insufficient investment has been the cause of the limited outcomes from previous initiatives.

Whilst much of the investment will need to come from the private sector, there is already considerable latent interest. A clear long-term vision and a strong commitment from Council should enable investors to bring forward schemes much earlier than is likely otherwise and with greater confidence.

Subject to further detailed investigation, it is recommended that Council’s role should encompass a range of activities:

- developing a long-term future vision for Newlands Local Centre in conjunction with the local community, and actively communicating this vision to potential investors
- direct investment through the development of the proposed community centre and the upgrading of the public toilets
- possible District Plan changes to maximise an appropriate level of intensification and ensure quality urban design outcomes
- capital works to improve selected transport infrastructure, enhance vehicle and pedestrian connections and improve parking areas

- investigating the potential to redevelop existing Council assets
- actively engaging with the local community
- facilitating private sector investment through information provision, assistance, brokering and partnering.

Achieving the required change in Newlands Local Centre will be a long-term project over the next five to ten years, and action by Council can be staged over a number of years as resources allow. Further investigation will be required to determine an implementation plan, provisional costings and how this might fit into Council's broader programmes and priorities.

#### ***4.4 Recommendations for Proposed Community Centre***

The study identified a number of recommendations to ensure that the development of the community centre is integrated into its wider environment. These have been communicated to the project management team for the community centre, and are as follows:

- ensuring that the building has active edges to all its street frontages
- formalising public rights of way to enhance connections through the Local Centre.

It should be noted that there is a separate report on progress with the development of the community centre.

#### ***4.5 Draft Principles and Development Concept***

To guide the future development of Newlands Local Centre, some draft principles have been developed:

1. Encourage and facilitate redevelopment within and around the Centre for mixed-uses.
2. Improve the integration of the Centre through better and safer connections.
3. Improve amenity by ensuring high quality urban design of new buildings and spaces.
4. Use the proposed community centre to enhance the integration of activities and spaces.
5. Provide a focal point for the Centre and enhance its sense of place.

These principles, and the identified opportunities, are encapsulated in a draft long-term development concept (Appendix 1).

#### ***4.6 Next Steps***

It is proposed to undertake consultation with the local community on the identified issues, the draft principles and draft vision. This would occur over the period October to November. The consultation plan envisages a media release, leaflet mail drop and local drop-in sessions, targeting the Newlands community and key stakeholders.

Further work will also be undertaken to develop a draft implementation plan, including proposed costings for capital works, scheduling of activities and other

resource requirements. It is proposed to report back to SPC by the end of February 2007. Any proposed additional funding would be subject to LTCCP processes.

## **5. Conclusion**

This report recommends that Council take an active leadership role in transforming Newlands Local Centre to a quality centre that better meets the needs of the local community and better utilises the considerable development potential of this area in line with Council's Northern Growth Management Framework.

*Contact Officer: Luke Troy, Principal Advisor Urban Development*

## Supporting Information

### **1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome**

*The proposed actions support Council's Urban Development Strategy and Northern Growth Management Framework.*

### **2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact**

*There will be implications for future capital and operational expenditure. These will require further investigation, and will be the subject of a further report to the Committee.*

### **3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations**

*There are no known considerations.*

### **4) Decision-Making**

*This is not a significant decision.*

### **5) Consultation**

#### **a) General Consultation**

*Consultation has been carried out with key stakeholders to develop this report. Approval is sought for wider public consultation in this report. We propose a leaflet drop and drop-in meetings.*

#### **b) Consultation with Maori**

*There are no particular consultation requirements for Maori.*

### **6) Legal Implications**

*There are no legal implications at this stage.*

### **7) Consistency with existing policy**

*This report is consistent with Council policy.*

## **APPENDIX ONE**