

12. CENTRAL AREA

12.1 Introduction

This section sets out how Council intends to manage development in Wellington City's most intensive urban area to make it a premium centre for working, living, and playing.

The character and functions of the Central Area

The Central Area is the commercial heart of Wellington City and the region, and also the nation's seat of government. It is a vibrant mix of inner city living, entertainment, and commercial activity. It attracts arts, cultural and recreational events of local, national and international repute. The diversity of activities within the Central Area is a successful outcome of the 'first generation' District Plan prepared under the Resource Management Act, and the approach set in that plan will continue.

The harbour and surrounding hills provide a vivid natural setting that will continue to shape the Central Area's urban form. It extends from the railway corridor at the Kaiwharawhara reclamation, along the operational port and waterfront to the Basin Reserve, and is bounded generally by Kent Terrace to the east, Webb and Buckle Streets to the south, and the line of the existing motorway to the west. High rise development is concentrated within the downtown area between Parliament and the Civic Centre.

Major infrastructure and facilities that contribute to the city's economic base are located within the Central Area. Its situation at the heart of a port city and at the end of the main trunk railway line makes the Central Area a strategic transport hub. It is also home to many important institutions – including the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, the Wellington Regional Stadium, and leading tertiary institutions – that attract people to the city and add to its lively bustle.

Historical overview

Māori were the first occupants in and around what is now the Central Area, with pa established at Te Aro, Kumutoto, Pipitea, Pakuao, Tiakiwai and Kaiwharawhara. The city grew significantly after 1840 when early colonists moved from Petone (Pitone) to the deeper and more sheltered waters of Lambton Harbour. Development was initially concentrated along the narrow foreshore area, but spread gradually onto land reclaimed from the harbour. Much of the present central city was built on this reclaimed land.

Throughout its history, the Central Area has experienced periods of rapid change. Between 1996 and 2001, almost 60% of Wellington City's population growth occurred in the central city. In 2006, the residential population of the Central Area reached an estimated 18,000 people, and this number is expected to grow to approximately 23,500¹ by 2016. This is a considerable contrast to 1991, when most of the 58,400 people employed in the city centre commuted from the suburbs or adjoining cities.

¹ Based on Statistics NZ medium projections for Area Units: Thorndon-Tinakori Road, Lambton, Willis Street-Cambridge Terrace (Ref RIS 9283)

The Central Area and the District Plan

Rapid social, economic and technological change is prompting changes in the form and function of the Central Area. Council intends to encourage positive growth that promotes the City's comparative advantages. This process will be guided by strategic planning and by the District Plan.

The District Plan sets a vision for a vibrant, prosperous, liveable city. At its heart is a contained Central Area comprising a commercial core with a mix of related activities. The Plan's Central Area provisions are based on ~~seven~~ eight principles that will guide future development:

12.1.1 Enhance 'sense of place'

Many qualities and characteristics contribute to the 'sense of place' people experience in the Central Area. The underlying topography and landscape, and the adjacent harbour provide a memorable backdrop to the central city. A strong identity is anchored in being the nation's capital and a hive of government activity; both central and local. Complementing this formal role are pockets of distinctive character and activity. The diverse environments of the central city include high-rise towers and offices, classic heritage buildings, 'jinky' character areas, the mix of public and open spaces, and harbour views. A diverse range of people is also attracted to the array of activities on offer in the Central Area, and they add to the flavour of the city in turn.

Enhancing this 'sense of place', and protecting the features that make Wellington special and unique, are essential ingredients of a stimulating and memorable city.

12.1.2 Sustain the physical and economic heart of the Central Area

The city has a natural tendency towards physical containment, with an amphitheatre of hills leading down to the inner harbour. This containment makes the city more accessible, and accentuates its urban feel. Maintaining the strategic role of transport infrastructure leading to and from the city centre is crucial to this goal.

Wellington's downtown is the commercial base of the city and region. Encouraging flexible and diverse activities will sustain the economic viability of the city centre. This includes capitalising on cultural and recreational facilities and events the city has to offer, including the Stadium, Te Papa and the waterfront. Ultimately this will lead to an adaptive city centre that encourages positive growth and the city's comparative advantage. Development in the fringes to the Central Area should complement the vitality and viability of downtown Wellington.

Continuing to contain Central Area development will help achieve a compact, viable city centre.

12.1.3 Enhance the role of the 'Golden Mile' and 'Cuba'

The 'Golden Mile' refers to the main retail and commercial strip extending from the Cenotaph near Parliament Buildings, to the eastern end and entertainment hub of Courtenay Place. This 'Golden Mile' concept reflects the natural form of the Central Area, and helps structure people's perceptions of the city and the way they move within it. Cuba Street is a premier pedestrian-based retail promenade that forms an important axis with the 'Golden Mile'.

The 'Golden Mile' and 'Cuba' will be enhanced and supported by reinforcing their key retail function, promoting nearby office location, enhancing the pedestrian environment and improving the roll-out of quality public transport infrastructure.

12.1.4 Enhance the Central Area as a location for high quality inner city living

Increasing the amount and quality of residential dwellings will be encouraged, building on the overall vibrancy of the Central Area and supporting the primary commercial function of downtown Wellington and the 'Golden Mile'.

12.1.5 Enhance the built form of the Central Area

The Central Area's amphitheatre setting is enhanced by the maintenance of the compact 'high city'/'low city' urban form. The 'high city' relates to the downtown area where most of the city's high rise buildings are clustered. The Low City is effectively the balance of the Central Area where the lower buildings spread out north and south. The lower height on the waterfront completes the stepping down from the hills to the harbour.

12.1.6 Enhance the quality of the public environment

The quality of the public environment helps make a city more liveable. A high quality public environment is safe and healthy, easy to move around in, rich in quality urban design that enhances people's experiences, and consistent with appropriate environmental standards. The quality of the public environment is affected by the function, location and character of public space, as well as by the buildings and structures that define the edges of public space.

12.1.7 Enhance city/harbour integration

The city and sea relationship that characterises Wellington makes for a dynamic cityscape. The waterfront is an integral and defining feature of the city. However, accessibility between the city and the waterfront, and access to the water's edge itself, needs to be improved so that the waterfront becomes part of the 'pedestrian flow' that extends across the whole city. Better links are needed, including physical connections and visual links such as views and signage. A promenade that connects the different parts of the waterfront and provides a sequence of changing, rich and interesting experiences would enhance people's ability to move around the waterfront itself.

12.1.8 Enhance the sustainability of the Central Area

Buildings and other forms of development that reduce the consumption of natural and physical resources (including energy consumption), whilst maintaining the reasonable development expectations of landowners will ensure that the goal of a sustainably managed city centre will be achieved. Innovative design and construction of buildings exhibiting new principles of environmental sustainability will be encouraged.

The District Plan sets standards to guide the form of new development. However, it places minimal direct controls over land use and the location of activities. Most activities can take place anywhere within the Central Area, provided they meet performance standards that ensure the city's environmental quality is maintained.

The District Plan requires any new building to enhance the public realm of the Central Area. Design guides describe the urban design outcomes that will enhance public amenity, and provide guidance on achieving those outcomes. Specific rules deal with the siting, design and appearance of new buildings so that the existing urban form is preserved and enhanced. They focus particularly on managing building mass and general urban design guidelines. Other rules protect important public views, ensure sunlight reaches public spaces, and control excessive wind around buildings.

Special areas

Several unique neighbourhoods and precincts crucial to the Central Area's cultural heritage and sense of place are identified in the Plan as heritage and character areas. Rules and design guidance are included to help to maintain and enhance the character of these special neighbourhoods.

Reflecting the importance of Wellington's waterfront, in 2004 Council adopted the *Wellington Waterfront Framework* to guide waterfront development in a way that makes the most of this unique and special part of the city. The principles and values of the *Framework* underpin the District Plan's objectives and policies for the Lambton Harbour Area. The *Framework* aims to bring coherence along the waterfront and express its connections with the city and the harbour. To this end, the *Framework* is based around several inter-linking themes: historical and contemporary culture, city to water connections, promenade, open space, and diversity. Because the waterfront is predominantly a public area in public ownership, Council is committed to engage fully with the public on decisions relating to waterfront developments. ~~This commitment is further described in the *Framework*, which also proposes governance arrangements requiring ongoing monitoring by a group of both professional and community representatives.~~

The Pipitea Precinct is another important sub area within the Central Area. The Precinct comprises the railway land and the Operational Port Area. This area forms an important entrance to the city centre from the north, and a strategic land corridor for private and public transport.

Pipitea refers to clear water over the pipi beds

Due to its size and location, the Pipitea Precinct is a substantial natural and physical resource capable of providing significant benefits for the people of the Wellington Region. The area is used primarily for port and rail activities with little public infrastructure, roading and few buildings in place. There is potential for future development to occur in the Pipitea Precinct and with appropriate management and control there is an opportunity to create a quality urban environment that enhances the economic viability and vitality of the central business district.

12.2 Central Area Objectives and Policies

OBJECTIVE – LAMBTON HARBOUR AREA

12.2.8 To ensure that the development of the Lambton Harbour Area, and its connections with the remainder of the city's Central Area, maintains and enhances the unique and special components and elements that make up the waterfront.

POLICIES

To achieve this objective, Council will:

12.2.8.1 Maintain and enhance the public environment of the Lambton Harbour Area by guiding the design of new open spaces and where there are buildings, ensuring that these are in sympathy with their associated public spaces.

METHODS

- Rules
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)
- National Standard Access Design Criteria: NZS 4121:2001

The main focus of the Lambton Harbour Area is to reinforce its role as a primary open space on the waterfront. A series of different open spaces - some green some sheltered and some paved - that cater for diverse uses and activities will predominate. Furthermore, there will be a network of paths through the area, including a promenade along the length of the waterfront, predominantly at the water's edge. Buildings will support the open spaces, both in their design and their associated uses and activities. The ground floors of buildings will be predominantly accessible to the public and buildings will have "active edges". Particular consideration will be given to providing for equitable access to the water's edge and all other facilities on the waterfront by older people and all others with mobility restrictions.

12.2.8.2 Ensure that a range of public open spaces, public walkways and through routes for pedestrians and cyclists and opportunities for people, including people with mobility restrictions, to gain access to and from the water are provided and maintained.

METHODS

- Rules
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)

Substantial and varied areas of open space near and adjacent to the water are important to ensure that uninterrupted public access to the water's edge is maintained and enhanced. Some water-based activities (such as rowing) require vehicular access and short term parking. There will be a public walkway/promenade along the length of the waterfront, predominantly at the water's edge. A series of different open spaces that cater for diverse uses and activities will predominate. In addition to Frank Kitts Park there will be a second large green open space at Chaffers.

12.2.8.3 Encourage the enhancement of the overall public and environmental quality and general amenity of the Lambton Harbour Area.

METHODS

- Rules
- Design Guides (The Wellington Waterfront framework) (The Central Area Urban Design Guide)
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)
- Advocacy
- Regional Coastal Plan

The waterfront as a whole is an area of special character that has five distinct areas at:

- Kumutoto/North Queens Wharf
- Queens Wharf
- Frank Kitts Park
- Taranaki Street Wharf / Lagoon
- Chaffers

These areas will each develop their own “sense of place” or local character but collectively contribute to the overall richness and cohesion that makes the waterfront a unique and special part of the city.

The fundamental aim of future development in the Lambton Harbour Area is the achievement of a high quality public environment that provides and supports a range of public spaces and opportunities for vibrant activities, exciting uses and imaginative developments, which in turn encourage an improvement of the amenities of the waterfront for use and enjoyment by the public.

12.2.8.4 Maintain and enhance the heritage values associated with the waterfront.

METHODS

- Rules
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)
- Advocacy
- Conservation Plans

Heritage and the history of the waterfront are important parts of the identity of the waterfront. There is a range of aspects to the pre and post-colonial history of the waterfront, including maritime, social and economic aspects, and all these stories need to be told. Heritage buildings are an important aspect of the history of the waterfront and should be restored and reused. Heritage buildings are an important aspect of the history of the waterfront and should be restored and reused under the guidance of a Conservation Plan.

12.2.8.5 Recognise and provide for developments and activities that reinforce the importance of the waterfront’s Maori history and cultural heritage.

METHODS

- Design Guides (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework) (The Central Area Urban Design Guide)
- Information and advocacy

Maori cultural heritage will have a strong presence on the waterfront and play a key role in identifying the special and unique role that the waterfront has to play in the city. Also refer Objective 12.2.16 and associated policies.

12.2.8.6 Provide for new **building development which adds to the waterfront character and quality of design within the area and acknowledges relationships between the city and the sea.**

12.2.8.6A Manage the site planning and design of new buildings and related public spaces within identified areas to ensure quality design outcomes.

METHODS

- Rules
- Design Guides (The Wellington Waterfront Framework) (The Central Area Urban Design Guide)
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)

For a long period of time buildings and a range of port related structures have played an important role in the functioning and public use of the waterfront. They will continue to do so. Some buildings and structures may be new and some may be adapted and altered.

The waterfront is somewhere to live, work and play. The waterfront will meet the needs of a diverse range of people. There will be an allowance for recreational, cultural and civic uses, and also an allowance for some commercial development. Any development should be of a high quality. Any new buildings will be generally complementary, and in a scale appropriate to, the existing buildings around them. In the Kumutoto/North Queens Wharf area buildings will be in scale with heritage buildings.

Buildings are modified over time, particularly when they are re-furbished to accommodate new activities and uses.

Any minor addition or alteration to an existing building will be assessed to ensure that there is no significant adverse effect on the overall character of the building, or on the environment of adjacent open spaces, and that the building remains in character with the waterfront as a whole.

*The following **general** matters will be considered in relation to any application for a new building or structure on the waterfront:*

16. the principles and objectives of the Wellington Waterfront Framework.

17. For building works within the Queens Wharf Special Height Area shown in Appendix 4 the extent to which additions or alterations have regard to the principles and objectives of the Wellington Waterfront Framework and are designed to complement the existing buildings. Particular consideration will be given to ensuring that the pitch of roofs generally match existing roof slopes (other than any gable windows or other minor roof features) and that all new work is strongly modelled and well integrated into the existing design and that any additional floors are clearly articulated in their external appearance.

18. whether the ground floor of the building has an 'active edge' that supports the public use of the space and which is predominantly accessible to the public.

19. whether the addition or alteration will result in a building that will be complementary to, and of a scale appropriate to, other existing buildings adjacent and nearby.

20. *whether the addition or alteration respects the form and scale of the existing building.*
21. *whether the addition or alterations will have a material effect on sunlight access to any open space.*
22. *whether the addition or alteration will intrude on an identified viewshaft.*
23. *whether the addition or alteration adversely affects the heritage values or significance of the heritage building.*
24. *the adverse effects of the building work on wind, views, shading and sunlight on adjacent properties in the Central Area.*

- *the relevant provisions of the Central Area Urban Design Guide.*
- *the principles and objectives of the Wellington Waterfront Framework.*
- *whether the ground floor of the building has an 'active edge' that supports the public use of the space and which is predominantly accessible to the public.*
- *whether the addition or alteration building work will result in a building that will be complementary to, and of a scale appropriate to, other existing buildings adjacent and nearby.*
- *whether the addition or alterations building work will have a material effect on sunlight access to any open space.*
- *whether the addition or alteration building work will intrude on an identified viewshaft.*
- *the adverse effects of the building work on wind, views, shading and sunlight on adjacent properties in the Central Area.*
- *The amount of vehicle parking and the extent to which any parking (and associated access and manoeuvring spaces) will ensure the protection of the pedestrian environment on the waterfront and the public use of ground floor building space.*

In addition to the above the following shall also apply:

Additions and alterations

- *whether the addition or alteration adversely affects the heritage values or significance of the heritage building.*
- *whether the addition or alteration respects the form and scale of the existing building.*

Building works within the Queens Wharf Special Height Area

- *for building works within the Queens Wharf Special Height Area shown in Appendix 4 the extent to which additions or alterations have regard to the principles and objectives of the Wellington Waterfront Framework and are designed to complement the existing buildings. Particular consideration will be given to ensuring that the pitch of roofs generally match existing roof slopes (other than any gable windows or other minor roof features) and that all new work is strongly modelled and well integrated into the existing design and that any additional floors are clearly articulated in their external appearance.*

Building works and associated open space within identified areas

1. North Kumutoto area

In the North Kumutoto area new buildings within the identified footprints are a Discretionary Activity (Restricted). Larger new buildings and

additions and alterations to any existing building that extend beyond the footprint areas (where the height limit is zero), or exceed the specified building height limits will be considered as a Discretionary Activity (Unrestricted). In order to avoid argument that the zero height limit outside the footprint areas imposes a permitted baseline of zero it is specifically recorded that this is not the case. The requirement is to trigger a Discretionary Activity (Unrestricted) application to ensure that there is the opportunity for public involvement and that all relevant effects can be assessed. In all cases consideration will be given to the extent to which ~~For~~ buildings and related public spaces within the North Kumutoto area the extent to which proposals accord with the North Kumutoto provisions in Appendix 4 of the Central Area Urban Design Guide.

12.2.8.6B Ensure that significant buildings in the North Kumutoto area and related public spaces display design excellence.

METHODS

- Rules
- Design Guides - The Central Area Urban Design Guide –including North Kumutoto provisions

The Wellington Waterfront is a special public space where there is an expectation that any development will be of a high quality. This is expressed in the Principles of the Waterfront Framework where there is an acknowledgement that the quality of architecture and design is an important element of achieving a waterfront that is distinctly “Wellington”.

In the North Kumutoto area building ‘sites’ have been identified and the associated Plan provisions provide for an appropriate level of development as a Discretionary Activity (Restricted). Through the implementation of the rules which include additional design guide requirements the Council will seek a level of design excellence for buildings and the development of open space that will significantly enhance the waterfront. Careful assessment will also be given to development proposals that might exceed the specified building height and footprint requirements as it is the Council’s view that the issue of design quality is even more important in such cases.

When processing a consent application Council will consider the proposals in relation to their immediate surroundings and the extent to which they will make a positive contribution to the waterfront environment, and deliver design excellence. Particular consideration will be given to the relationship of new buildings with adjacent listed heritage buildings, the maintenance of viewshafts, the protection of pedestrian access through the area and the shading of open space areas including lanes.

12.2.8.6C To ensure that the ground floor of buildings be predominantly accessible to the public and have active edges to significant adjacent public spaces.

METHODS

- Rules
- Design Guides (The Central Area Design Guide)

- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)

The waterfront is one of the City's prime public spaces. It is important that the entire Waterfront area, including the ground floor of buildings, be predominantly accessible to the public.

To support this principle, specific rule provisions have been included that require the ground floor of buildings to be predominantly accessible to the public and also have active edges to significant adjacent public spaces. The application of these provisions will work to achieve a high quality public environment.

The following matters will be considered in respect of applications for proposals that do not comply with the requirements.

Public accessibility to ground floors

- *Whether the depth of the building footprint is such that the interior space is unsuitable for uses to which the public should otherwise have access.*
- *Whether the publicly accessible space from the building frontage is of a reasonably usable depth (a minimum depth of approximately 10m will generally be expected).*
- *Whether the use or uses within the building are visible and will provide 'an experience' for the public on a continuing basis.*
- *Whether it is appropriate for space to be used for a specified period of time without compliance.*

Entrance ways and display windows

- *Whether the nature of the adjacent public space is such that compliance with the entrance way and/or display window provisions should be reduced or waived.*
- *Whether it can be demonstrated that frontages are readily capable of modification to comply with the entrance way and/or display window provisions in future.*

12.2.8.7 Maintain and enhance the Lambton Harbour Area as an integral part of the working port of Wellington.

METHODS

- Rules
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)

Parts of the Lambton Harbour Area remain a working port and the area draws much of its character and present activity from port related functions, structures and open space. These functions, including the use of wharves by cruise ships, fishing boats, pleasure boats and other vessels, will be encouraged to continue. Design which relates to the maritime location and port functions will also be encouraged.

12.2.8.8 To provide for and facilitate public involvement in the waterfront planning process.

METHODS

- \Rules

- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)

The waterfront is predominantly a public area, a place owned by all Wellingtonians.

Governance arrangements for the waterfront include a broadly based group consisting of both professional and community representatives. This group will have primary responsibility for the on-going planning and development of the waterfront, as well as responsibility for monitoring all proposed developments. The group will actively engage the public in waterfront decision making.

Thus, the public will be consulted the development of plans for the waterfront (Stage 2 of the waterfront planning process) and enabled to participate through the statutory planning process about any proposed new buildings and any significant changes to existing buildings.

The statutory requirements under the Resource Management Act provide for public participation with respect to the development of plans in identified areas or via the resource consent process for specific development proposals outside those areas.

In addition, governance arrangements for the waterfront include a Waterfront Development Plan process which reviews and reflects the on-going planning and development of the waterfront. This is undertaken on an annual basis and confirms the direction of waterfront development over the following year.

The approval process for the Waterfront Development Plan will provide for public submissions, into the decision making process undertaken by the Council in its capacity as land owner.

12.2.8.9 Encourage and provide for consistency in the administration of resource management matters across the line of mean high water springs (MHWS).

METHODS

- Rules
- Operational activities (The Wellington Waterfront Framework)
- Other mechanisms (New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement, Regional Policy Statement, Regional Coastal Plan).

Parts of the waterfront that are below mean high water springs (such as the Outer Tee at Queens Wharf and the Overseas Passenger Terminal) are administered by Greater Wellington – The Regional Council. These areas fall within the jurisdiction of the Regional Coastal Plan for the Wellington Region.

Both the Wellington City Council and Greater Wellington - The Regional Council are committed to working closely together to ensure consistency in administration of the coastal edge.

Policy 4.2.46 of the Regional Coastal Plan signals Greater Wellington - The Regional Council's intention to align the provisions of the Regional Coastal Plan with those of the District Plan. This policy reads:

“To vary or change the Plan, if necessary, as soon as practicable after the Wellington City District Plan becomes operative, to align rules in the Lambton Harbour Area (for activities and structures on wharves on the seaward side of the coastal maritime area boundary) with the rules in Wellington City Council's District

Plan for the Lambton Harbour Area (for activities and structures on the landward side of the coastal marine area boundary)”.

In explanation of this Regional Coastal Plan policy Greater Wellington – The Regional Council has stated that:

“The Lambton Harbour Area has special characteristics that need to be recognised and provided for in the Regional Coastal Plan. At the time of writing the Plan and Committee deliberations, the provisions of the Wellington City District

Plan for the Lambton Harbour Area were subject to alteration through submission, decision making and appeal process. In order to establish a consistent set of provisions across the line of mean high water springs within the Lambton Harbour Area, Greater Wellington - The Regional Council will undertake a variation/change to the Coastal Plan to align the provisions of the coastal plan with those developed by the City Council for the landward side of the coastal marine area boundary. This will achieve a consistent set of provisions for the Lambton Harbour Area”.

[...]