Proposed Curtis Street District Plan Change
Urban Design Advice

Purpose of document

This document proposes a set of potential District Plan provisions to control the urban design outcomes associated with development on the Curtis Street site.

The provisions recommended respond to the existing values and potential sensitivity of the site to development identified in the Preliminary Urban Design Assessment, the Preliminary Landscape Review and the Landscape Overview.

The site

The Curtis Street site is located in a filled gully between the suburbs of Karori and Northland. The fundamental landform of the gully is still evident with a narrow sloping floor contained by a steep vegetated escarpment to the west and a steep bank below Curtis Street to the east.

The character of the area surrounding the site is suburban with individual dwellings located at various levels on the hillsides and partly screened by vegetation. The dominant feature around the site is the steep, vegetated escarpment which runs uninterrupted between Whitehead Road and Chaytor Street and includes part of the western boundary of the site.

The built form in the vicinity of the site consists predominantly of single and two storey houses. The only larger buildings in the vicinity are a single storey schools and a two storey childcare centre.

The site's topography comprises two distinct areas. The northernmost part of the site matches the level of the adjoining roads (Whitehead Road and Curtis Street) while the southern part of the site is set well below the level of Curtis Street. In places, the lower part of the site is more than 10m below the level of Curtis Street.

The northern part of the site is highly visible to the general public using the road network or Ian Galloway Park. This area has the potential the present the main outward facing or public façade of development on the site as the remainder of the site generally sits below the adjoining road level.

The site is overlooked by residential properties both to the west and east. Many properties to the east (Northland side) sit lower on the hillside compared with the properties on the Karori side and therefore are in closer proximity to development on the site. The vegetated escarpment west of the site forms the main aspect for these properties.

The disused part of the Old Karori Road, along the western boundary of the site, is part of the 'Sanctuary to Sea' recreational walkway linking Zealandia, Otari-Wilton's Bush and Trelissick Park down to the shoreline.

Key urban design considerations

Development on the Curtis Street site needs to sympathetically integrate with its surroundings. In particular, the following landscape and urban design considerations have been identified as being important for this site:

- Protection of the visual amenity of the residential properties overlooking the site
- Protection of the unbuilt, densely vegetated western escarpment
- Respect of local character
- Relationship to the scale of the surrounding buildings
- Interface with the public road network
- Amenity and safety of pedestrian movement around and within the site

Proposed urban design-related provisions

In order to address the above urban design considerations, the following District Plan provisions are suggested.

1. Threshold for Urban Design Assessment

It is recommended that any development on the site resulting in a total gross floor area exceeding 500m² (cumulative) is required to be assessed in terms of urban design outcomes.

This is similar to the threshold which currently applies to Business 1 Areas and is considered to be appropriate for the site.

2. Extent of Discretion

It is recommended that activities resulting in a total gross floor area on the site exceeding 500m² are assessed for:

- Site layout, design and external appearance of buildings
- Location and layout of parking and servicing
- Site access, pedestrian and vehicular
- Landscaping
- The provision and location of facilities for multi-modal transport
- Impact on nearby ecological corridors and habitats
- Sustainable drainage including on-site stormwater management and water-sensitive design

3. Maximum building heights

The site's topography comprises two distinct areas:

- The majority of the site sits well below the level of adjacent roads. The ground level in this part of the site is generally at 102m to 104m AMSL with the level of Curtis Street along the site boundary varying between 111m and 114m AMSL.

- The northern end of the site is levelled with the adjoining roads. In this area, the site and roads generally sit at 112m to 113m AMSL along the Curtis Street frontage, and the remainder of the northern section rises from 113m AMSL to 123m AMSL alongside Whitehead Road.

The visual effects of buildings will vary depending on whether they sit levelled with or below the adjoining road network and landform. For this reason, controls need to be devised that address both the lower and higher parts of the site.

A single maximum height (RL) zone for the whole site is suggested to achieve this. It could work as follows:

- Buildings or structures which do not exceed a relative level (RL) of 114m AMSL would be permitted.
- Buildings or structures between relative levels of 114m and 118m AMSL may be allowed subject to an urban design assessment.

This approach effectively allows buildings approximately 12m high to be built as of right (subject to other provisions being satisfied) on the lower part of the site (generally at 102m AMSL). To discourage excessive earthworks (e.g. the lowering of the existing ground level to maximise development below the RL), the permitted building height could be capped at 12m.

The 118m AMSL RL corresponds to an additional height over the permitted maximum of 33%, bringing the maximum building height including discretion to approximately 16m on the lower part of the site.

On the higher (northern) part of the site, there would be no permitted buildings (as most of this area sits at 112 to 114m AMSL). All buildings would require an urban design assessment as part of the RC process. The 118m RL would enable the development of single storey buildings (4 to 6m high where the ground level is 112 to 114m AMSL).

Under this approach:

- Buildings up to the 114m AMSL RL would protrude over the existing level of Curtis Street by a couple of meters at the most and thus could no be considered to significantly affect the amenity of the Curtis Street and Creswick Cresent properties as these properties (except for one) sit well above the level of Curtis Street.
- Buildings between the 114m and 118m AMSL RL would protrude over the existing level of Curtis Street by 4 to 6m and would be required, through the urban design assessment, to be articulated and broken up in mass so as not to significantly affect the amenity of the Curtis Street and Creswick Cresent properties.
- The discretionary status of all buildings on the higher/northern part of the site reflects the high visibility and visual sensitivity of this area and the expectations associated with its prior Open Space B zoning.

4. Western escarpment

The escarpment along the western boundary of the site has been identified as having a number of values (landscape, amenity, ecology) worthy of protection.

It is recommended that earthworks controls limit disturbance on the escarpment. For example, any earthworks within10m of the western boundary of the site could require an urban design assessment.

Vegetation removal should be permitted along the escarpment provided replacement vegetation (preferably native species suitable for the location and conditions) is planted within [6] months of the removal so that a reasonable level of amenity is maintained for the Curtis Street and Creswick Cresent properties which overlook the escarpment.

5. Earthworks controls

In addition to the above controls on the western escarpment, I recommend that the following rules apply to the site:

Earthworks in Business (Curtis Street) Areas must comply with the following conditions:

- maximum height of cut or fill does not exceed **1.5m**, and
- slope of cut or fill does not exceed 34 degrees, and
- the earthworks are not closer to the site boundary than the height of the cut or fill; and
- the area to be cut or filled does not exceed **250 m2**.

Or, in the case of **retaining walls**:

- maximum height of cut or fill does not exceed **1.5m**, and
- the earthworks is retained by a consented building or structure; and
- the area to be cut or filled does not exceed **250 m2**.

Earthworks not complying with the above conditions require Consent. Any application for Consent must be accompanied by the following information:

- An earthworks plan showing proposed cut and fill areas.
- An assessment of effects including visual effects, erosion and sedimentation effects, effects on adjacent watercourse (if and where relevant), related geotechnical effects (if and where relevant) and mitigation measures to address the effects.
- A Transport Assessment for the moving of fill on or off site.
- Details of how cut faces or constructed slope faces will be treated e.g. retaining structures, including materials and/or landscaping details. No cut face should be visible above any building roofline. Constructed slopes should be planted or grassed.
- Any erosion and sediment control measures

- Identification of any relevant geotechnical issues. A full geotechnical report may be required from an appropriately qualified and experienced person.

6. Signage controls

It is recommended that the following signage policies, rules and standards be applied.

Policy:
Ensure that signs in the Business (Curtis Street) Area do not adversely affect the amenities of nearby Residential Areas.

METHOD
- Rule making third party advertising a non-complying activity
- Signs Standards
- Design Guide for Signs

Signs Standards

Any sign that is illuminated must not flash, or must not contain moving images, moving text or moving lights.

Any sign located on a building:
- that is affixed to the underneath of a verandah must provide at least 2.5 metres clearance directly above the footpath or ground level
- must be displayed only on plain wall surfaces
- must not obscure windows or architectural features
- must not project above the parapet level or the highest part of the elevation of the building on which the sign is attached.
- must not project above the verandah level or the shopfront facia.
- must not be more than a maximum area of 10m2

For any free-standing sign or any sign located on a structure:
- the maximum area is 6m2
- the maximum height is 6m
- only one sign is permitted on any site frontage

The above are adapted from the existing signage provisions in the District Plan for Business Areas. They have been adjusted to reflect the residential context of the site.

7. Lighting controls

It is recommended that the following lighting standards be applied:

Any activity which requires outdoor areas to be lit shall ensure that direct or indirect illumination does not exceed 8 lux at the windows of residential buildings in any Residential Area.

8. Landscape controls

It is recommended that the following landscape standards be applied:

Any area of car parking greater than 700 m2 or containing more than 35 car parking spaces must be broken up by trees and landscape planting.

The use of vegetated roofs (or 'green roofs') will be considered favourably both in terms of sustainable drainage benefits and as a visual mitigation measure for large roof planes.

Also, as stated under the Western Escarpment provisions:

Vegetation removal is permitted along the western escarpment provided replacement vegetation (preferably native species suitable for the location and conditions) is planted within [6] months of the removal.

9. Urban Design Assessment Criteria

It is recommended that Assessment Criteria be provided to guide both applicants and Council Resource Consent officers appropriately assess the urban design aspects of development on the site.

The Assessment Criteria are a guide only and not intend to provide a comprehensive list of all aspects of urban design. Good practice should be relied on for any urban design issue which falls outside the scope of these criteria.

The Assessment Criteria could be as follows:

- How the development maintains the **visual amenity** of the residential properties overlooking the site. This should include consideration of:
    - Visual impact of new buildings including roof design and colour
    - Scale of new buildings
    - Articulation of building and roof volumes
    - Visual impact of car parking and other paved areas
    - On-site landscaping
    - Visual impact of exterior strorage and servicing areas
- How the development protects the unbuilt, densely vegetated **western escarpment**. This should include consideration of:
    - Visual impact of earthworks, including treatment of cut faces and retaining structures
    - Location of new buildings
    - Visual impact of vegetation removal and replacement vegetation
- How the development respects the **local character**. This should include consideration of:
    - Building scale, form, bulk and articulation
    - Façades design
    - Building materials, including their reflectivity and colours
    - Size, location and design of signage

    - Location and intensity of external lighting
- How the development interfaces with the **public realm**. This should include consideration of:
    - Location of building entrances and windows at street level
    - Human scale at street level
    - Landscape planting along the road reserves
    - Overlooking of the public realm from buildings
    - Avoidance of featureless façades visible from the public realm
- How the development caters for the **amenity and safety of pedestrians** around and within the site. This should include consideration of:
    - Vehicular and pedestrian routes, including pedestrian crossing points
    - Provision of pedestrian pathways through car parking areas
    - Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles

It is recommended that assessment criteria related to the environmental sustainability of the development be included in addition to the urban design criteria. These could cover aspects of on-site stormwater management, water-sensitive design, use of green roofs, access to public transport, provision of cycle facilities, use of native plant species and interface with nearby ecological habitats. Whilst these are not urban design criteria in the narrow sense of the term, they do contribute to wider urban design outcomes and may help mitigate potential adverse effects from development on the site and render such effects more acceptable to the surrounding community.