



**April
2022**



Information Sheet #9

Special Character Areas

In April 2022, Auckland Council will be asking Aucklanders for feedback on potential changes to the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) – our city’s planning rulebook – to allow for more housing at greater heights and density.

This information sheet explains what special character areas are and how they will be managed through changes to the Auckland Unitary Plan.

The government’s approach to more housing

The government’s National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) came into force in August 2020. The NPS-UD directs Auckland Council to enable more building height and housing density within and around Auckland’s city centre, metropolitan centres and rapid transit stops such as train and busway stations.

In December 2021, the government also made amendments to the Resource Management Act. The legislation now requires the councils of New Zealand’s largest and rapidly growing cities – Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch – to apply new Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS).

Through the use of MDRS the government requires the council to enable medium-density housing across most of Auckland’s suburbs. Three dwellings of up to three-storeys, including terrace housing and low-rise apartments, must be permitted on most residential properties. Four dwellings or more dwellings must be enabled through a non-notified resource consent.

To deliver the NPS-UD and the MDRS, the council is required to publicly notify changes to the AUP by 20 August 2022.

Special Character

The NPS-UD will enable more growth and development in Auckland. It requires council to make changes to the AUP to allow for more building height and housing density in our residential zones.

The government has also required councils to change their district plans to apply the MDRS (for more information on MDRS, please see Information Sheet #5). If a qualifying matter applies to a site, the MDRS can be changed so that parts of the development are restricted.

The NPS-UD and the MDRS (within residential zones) will effectively remove the Special Character Areas Overlay from the AUP unless it is identified as a qualifying matter. The council has chosen to identify coherent areas of residential and business special character value as a qualifying matter to ensure these areas and their values are protected.

What is special character?

Special character areas are identified as an overlay in the AUP. They are older established areas and places which may be whole settlements or parts of suburbs or a particular rural, institutional, maritime, commercial or industrial area. They are areas and places of special architectural or other built character value, that have a collective importance, relevance and interest to a local area or to the region.¹

Special character areas physically link Aucklanders to the past development of the city. These areas illustrate the history of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland by showing how, when and why the city expanded during different eras and in response to different pressures and influences. In illustrating the history of our city's growth, special character areas also show past social values, influences, fashions and philosophies that have shaped Auckland over time. Because these areas illustrate the history of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, they have relevance beyond their immediate locality, and have importance to people beyond those who live there.

Special character areas are identified in the AUP planning maps and Schedule 15.

How and why was the quality of special character areas reviewed?

The NPS-UD requires a site-specific analysis of the additional qualifying matters that the council has chosen, including special character areas. This is required to ensure that there is a robust justification for limiting heights or densities on properties in these areas.

Both the residential and business special character areas were reviewed in a process which involved data collection, review, and analysis². Field surveys were carried out until the national

¹ Auckland Unitary Plan, Regional Policy Statement B5.4

² The methodologies for the survey of residential and business special character areas are available by request.

COVID-19 alert levels no longer allowed this, with the site-specific data then collected through a desk-top based survey.

All special character areas were surveyed, being over 21000 special character residential properties and 1600 special character business properties. The records were analysed and mapped for each area. A summary report was prepared for each area explaining the special character values, the data collected, and provided an overall recommendation on the quality of the area.

How the results of the review are proposed to be implemented

The survey results will inform decision-making about any changes to special character areas. Identified special character areas are proposed to be a qualifying matter. They will be subject to the AUP Special Character Area Overlay and managed in a way which will help maintain their special character values. These areas are identified in blue in the NPS-UD and MDRS preliminary response map viewer.

Special character areas that have not been identified as a qualifying matter are proposed to not be subject to the AUP Special Character Areas Overlay and will have their zoning modified to enable greater development capacity. These areas are identified in red in the NPS-UD and MDRS preliminary response map viewer.

For the purpose of public consultation, special character residential areas are identified as a qualifying matter where:

- in walkable catchments around larger centres and rapid transit stops, areas are considered to be of high-quality special character, being where 75% or more of individual properties strongly contribute to the special character values of the area
- outside of walkable catchments, areas are considered to be of special character, being where 66% or more of individual properties strongly contribute to the special character values of the area.

This approach enables more development to happen in walkable catchments, as directed by the government. It results in approximately 75% of properties (or 70% of the land area) within the existing residential Special Character Areas Overlay being identified as a qualifying matter.

For business special character areas, the areas identified as a qualifying matter are:

Balmoral Shopping Centre, Devonport, Eden Valley, Grey Lynn, Helensville, Howick, Kingsland, Lower Hinemoa Street, Mount Eden Village, Newmarket, Onehunga, Ōtāhuhu, Parnell, Ponsonby Road, Sandringham, West Lynn and Upper Symonds Street.

Some of these business special character areas are subject to a reduced extent, as shown in the viewer.

What about historic heritage?

Historic heritage is defined in the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) and is recognised as a matter of national importance (section 6 of the RMA). The RMA requires that historic heritage

be protected from inappropriate subdivision, use, and development. The AUP achieves this through the identification of historic heritage places and associated provisions.

Historic heritage (along with all RMA matters of national importance under section 6) has been included in the NPS-UD as a qualifying matter required by the government, whereas special character (as an “Other matter” under section 7 of the RMA) was not.

The council has chosen to include identified areas of special character value as a qualifying matter, as described above. Special character can be derived from the history of a place or area, but these areas are different to historic heritage as identified in the RMA and AUP.

Further information:

- To read more about the consultation on the council’s preliminary response to NPS-UD and the changes to the Resource Management Act, and to give feedback, visit akhaveyoursay.nz/housing
- To learn more about how Auckland Council is planning for growth and development, visit ourauckland.nz/growingtogether
- For detailed information about the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) visit the [Ministry for the Environment website](https://www.mta.govt.nz/ministry-for-the-environment).
- For more information on the Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2021 and the Medium Density Residential Standards visit the [Ministry of Housing and Urban Development website](https://www.mta.govt.nz/ministry-of-housing-and-urban-development).
- Visit the council’s NPS-UD and MDRS preliminary response map viewer at akhaveyoursay.nz/housing to view the proposed planning maps.

Please note:

This information sheet is a summary document to assist with consultation during April and May 2022 on the council’s preliminary response to the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and the Resource Management Act as amended.

The proposed plan change to the Auckland Unitary Plan to be publicly notified by Auckland Council on or before 20 August 2022 may contain information that is different to or inconsistent with council’s preliminary response. This may be for a number of reasons, including to address feedback received through consultation.

All information provided in this information sheet should be considered as being illustrative and indicative only.

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