

5. NEW LARGE RESIDENTIAL SUBDIVISIONS

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The purpose of this report is to elaborate on the issues raised at the inaugural meeting of this Committee in November 2001 relating to the design and composition of new subdivisions.

BACKGROUND

The City Plan process has resulted in approximately 1200 hectares of rural land being rezoned for residential use. The total may increase as Environment Court decisions are released. This land area could support a population in the order of 35,000 – 40,000 representing 10% of the City's population. It is therefore vitally important to ensure that we are establishing the frameworks for sustainable new communities to develop in these areas.

All new subdivisions are controlled through rules in the Proposed Christchurch City Plan. In addition the Plan contains Outline Development Plans for the larger blocks of rezoned land, which the subdivision must be generally in accordance with. Two of the urban growth areas, Aidanfield (at Halswell) and Northwood (at Belfast) include zoning for higher density housing and local commercial centres.

These provisions cannot, by themselves, guarantee that sustainable, well designed communities will be created, rather they ensure that houses can be built on sections of particular sizes, they can be provided with roads, water and sewers, traffic can flow smoothly and stormwater can be disposed of.

CURRENT INITIATIVES

As Bob Nixon, former City Plan Team Leader, advised this Committee on 1 May 2002, Greenfield subdivision controls are one of the priority areas for early review. In this regard, new rules are being drafted using the Awatea Variation as a model and some work has been done on preparing an options paper for an eventual more comprehensive Variation or Change to the City Plan.

In the meantime other methods are relied upon to seek good environmental outcomes. A pre-application subdivision team was set up two years ago. Run by the Environmental Services Unit Subdivision Team, it includes officers from City Streets, Parks & Waterways, Water & Waste and the Urban Design Team. Applicants are encouraged to put proposals to this team at an early stage to ensure that adequate consideration is given to matters such as:

- Pedestrian and cyclist links,
- Roads that are designed to support bus routes,
- Reserves that are placed in strategic and safe locations, and a variety of reserves are created,
- Preservation of existing trees and other landscape features,
- Houses being orientated to take advantage of views and relating well to each other,
- Sensitive interfaces are formed between urban and rural land,
- Sustainable methods of stormwater management.

The team has had mixed success in influencing outcomes, but is generally most successful when developers come in at a very preliminary stage and are open to suggestion.

A Code of Practice for Land and Asset Development is currently being prepared, led by Allan Johnson, Project Management Senior Professional, City Solutions. This document will set out the City Council's requirements for land and assets that will come into its ownership, ie roading network, lighting, reserves, wastewater disposal and water supply infrastructure and surface water management systems. The Code of Practice will also include a chapter on Urban Design Principles.

New Zealand Standards have published a handbook entitled Subdivision for People and the Environment. It provides guidelines for alternative design and use of technologies in land development and subdivision. Council staff encourage exploration of these concepts and can provide advice to potential developers of eco-villages and co-housing.

An advisory development brief has been prepared for one site (Sunnyside Hospital), which sets out the requirements and aspirations of the Council. The use of structure plans and design guides is being pursued in proposed growth areas at the edge of the urban area to address urban development issues in an integrated and comprehensive manner. An Area Plans Team is currently preparing plans for several areas that are subject to references on the Proposed City Plan, for example in the Avonhead area and Cranford Basin. Josie Schröder, a staff member, is currently undertaking a Masters Thesis exploring the design of sustainable subdivisions, using a local case study. This will provide valuable pointers for future planning and design.

Some developers are placing conditions on their sales agreements controlling aspects such as fencing and whether houses can be 2 storey or not and vetting housing designs. At least one developer is exploring more stringent controls.

Good practice can be recognised and encouraged through environmental awards such as the "Our City" Environment Awards. New subdivisions are eligible for the Built Environment category, for which there have been successful subdivision entries.

DISCUSSION

It is important to be clear on the outcomes being sought in promoting sustainable communities. The following requirements would seem to be essential.

New Greenfield developments should:

- Be well connected to community infrastructure like schools, shops, banks, parks, bus routes, places of worship, libraries and health facilities,
- Be designed to facilitate walking, cycling and use of buses,
- Be designed to uphold the garden city image,
- Be designed to help prevent crime by ensuring that people are able to watch out for each other and are not forced into potentially unsafe situations,
- Take advantage of unique features and create new ones and maximise the potential of views,
- Provide variety in road and footpath patterns, types and amount of planting, section and building sizes and orientation, architectural styles and materials.

All of these qualities can work together to encourage a community to develop. The overall aim should be for developments to have a low impact on the environment and be resource efficient, while at the same time provide for consumer choice. There has been mixed success in achieving these outcomes and this will be illustrated through a presentation at the meeting.

There is a need for more research on the extent to which new Greenfield development is meeting the above sustainable development objectives and consumer preferences in general. Views could be canvassed on housing type and design, section size, new methods of dealing with stormwater disposal (swales and retention basins), narrower roads, gated communities etc. Similar research is being currently done for the Council on the effects of infill development and a combined research programme, entitled 'Studies in Human Settlements', between Lincoln and Canterbury Universities is being undertaken.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the next 10-15 years Christchurch can expect Greenfield subdivision at a scale not seen since the 1960's. Its footprint will be a permanent feature in the City's environment for decades and the impact on infrastructure, transport and other resources, as well as local communities will be significant. While there are regulatory controls and other initiatives in place to manage the effects of this development more can be done to ensure that future development incorporates sustainable development principles and design that is sympathetic to surrounding areas. This includes maintaining a monitoring and research programme that will enable the Council to regularly review the extent to which new growth is promoting sustainable development principles. As part of this process it would be useful for elected members to visit some of the developments currently underway.

NATURAL + PEOPLE + ECONOMIC STEP ASSESSMENT

#	CONDITION:	Meets condition ✓✓0*	HOW IT HELPS MEET CONDITION:
The Natural Step			
N1	Reduce non-renewable resource use	✓	
N2	Eliminate emission of harmful substances	✓	
N3	Protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystems	✓	
N4	People needs met fairly and efficiently	NA	NA - See People Step + Economic Step
The People Step			
P1	Basic needs met	✓	Survey to establish needs recommended
P2	Full potential developed	✓	
P3	Social capital enhanced	✓✓	Creating communities
P4	Culture and identity protected	✓	New identity created
P5	Governance and participatory democracy strengthened	0	
The Economic Step			
E1	Effective and efficient use of all resources	✓	Layout & design need to ensure this
E2	Job rich local economy	✓	Construction jobs
E3	Financial sustainability	✓	Manageable maintenance liabilities

Staff

- Recommendation:**
1. That the information be received.
 2. That a survey of residents in the new Greenfield subdivision and other research be carried out to identify issues that can be addressed by the Council in improving the quality of Greenfield development and results brought back to the Council.
 3. That the Urban Planning and Growth Special Committee and the Regulatory and Consents Committee be taken on a tour of some of the recent Greenfield developments.

Chairman's

- Recommendation:**
1. The information be received.
 2. The results of the survey of residents in the new Greenfield subdivision be brought back to the Committee.
 3. The City Plan team report back, outlining the plan and the time frame for an early review of the Greenfield's subdivision controls, including other methods of better managing such controls.
 4. That the completed code of practice for land and assessment development be reported to the Committee when finalised.