

1. Purpose

The purpose of this practice note is to provide clarity and guidance in relation to natural light and visual awareness requirements for residential buildings, specifically where buildings are constructed on boundaries, which are likely to be impacted on by the future construction of other buildings on the adjoining property.

The Building Act and the Building Code are silent on the need to consider the impact of future development on the adjoining property.

There have been instances, particularly in the central business district, where residential apartment buildings (not hotels) have been constructed on or very close to the boundary of adjoining properties. The building consent plans relating to these buildings clearly display that natural light to some habitable rooms within the proposed building and/or apartments provided by windows facing onto these adjoining boundaries.

The zoning relating to inner city properties, as well as the wider isthmus, permits the construction of buildings on the boundary, particularly in the central business district. This potentially means that an office building can be constructed on the boundary alongside an apartment building.

The impact of not considering future development of the adjoining property means that the requirements of clause G7 (natural light), may not be met in the future. Habitable spaces may therefore become non-compliant with this clause of the Building Code when the adjoining property is developed.

In the majority of instances where this has occurred, these rooms have been bedrooms. Property owners who once had a visual amenity and natural light may now face viewing, what at times, could be a blank concrete wall, reducing natural light and visual amenity.

Visual awareness is not well defined or explained in the Building Code. Council's interpretation of what visual awareness means in terms of G7, is that it does not require a habitable space to have a view of the city street or landscape when looking out the window. Rather that visual awareness is the ability to differentiate between day and night, a dark cloudy day or a sunlit day, or a dry day as opposed to a rainy day.

When considering G7 one needs to consider the requirements for natural light and required lux factors and visual awareness within a habitable room by considering both and one can get a sense of what in reality is required to meet compliance with the requirements of the Building Code.

2. Policy

This practice note provides clear guidance on what we need at all times to consider when we process and approve a building consent.

- at all times, natural lighting requirements need to be met for residential buildings as per the Building Code
- these requirements can be met by verification and calculation based on provision of natural light and reflectance values

- natural light calculations must be provide to ensure that lux factors can be met
- consideration must be given to the location and impact of mixed zoning of the property and potential for future development on the property next door
- in mixed use zones an office building may well be constructed on the boundary; when this occurs the new building may block out natural light and visual awareness to the existing building
- consideration must also be given to the impacts on natural light through proposed future development
- visual awareness is not related to great views of the city, rather it is about being able to realise night and day, sun and rain and an appreciation of the outside environment
- sufficient space must exist between the proposed residential building and the boundary to provide for natural light and visual awareness in the future
- when there is doubt natural light calculations need to be based on the property next door having a building constructed on the boundary
- if there are no windows facing onto the adjoining property boundary, then this requirement need not be considered; borrowed light provisions in this situation must be considered in accordance with the Acceptable Solutions

3. References

New Zealand Building Code, clause G7 Natural Light

Objective

- to safeguard people from illness or loss of amenity due to isolation from natural light and the outside environment

Functional requirement

- habitable spaces shall provide adequate openings for natural light and for visual awareness of the outside environment
- these requirements apply only to housing, old peoples homes and early childhood centres

Performance criteria

- natural light shall provide an illuminance of no less than 30 lux at floor level for 75 percent of the standard year
- openings are to give awareness of the outside shall be transparent and provided in suitable locations