



**April
2022**



Proposed Plan Change 78 Information Sheet #9

Special character areas

In August and September 2022, Auckland Council is inviting submissions on changes to the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) – our city’s planning rulebook – to allow for greater building heights and densities in urban Auckland. This is known as Proposed Plan Change 78 - Intensification.

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

Submissions are now invited on the proposed plan change. The period for submissions closes on 29 September 2022.

The government’s approach to more housing

The government’s National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) came into force in August 2020 and was updated in May 2022. 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. The NPS-UD also requires more building height and housing density within and around neighbourhood, local and town centres.

In December 2021, the government also made amendments to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). The RMA now requires the councils of New Zealand’s largest and rapidly growing cities – Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch – to incorporate new Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) in relevant residential zones.

Through the use of MDRS the government requires the council to enable medium-density housing across most of Auckland’s residential suburbs. Three dwellings of up to three storeys, including terrace housing and low-rise apartments, are to be permitted on most residential

properties unless a ‘qualifying matter’ applies (see information sheets #7 and #8). Four or more dwellings are to 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 Tāmaki Makaurau 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 #4). 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 are special character areas?

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 residential 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.

¹ Auckland Unitary Plan, Regional Policy Statement B5.4

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 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, which include over 21,000 special character residential properties and 1600 special character business properties. The records were analysed and mapped for each area. An area findings report was prepared for each area explaining the special character values, the data collected, and an overall recommendation on the quality of the area.

In April 2022 the review of special character areas was released for public feedback. Following this feedback, some areas that were originally subject to a desk-top based survey were re-surveyed in the field. This re-survey and additional information received through feedback has resulted in some amendments to the spatial extent of the overlay released in April. No amendments were made to the criteria or the guidance for survey.

How the results of the review are proposed to be implemented

The updated 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 the Proposed Plan Change 78 map viewer.

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

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 70% of properties (or 65% of the land area) within the existing residential Special Character Areas Overlay being identified as a qualifying matter.

In June 2022 Auckland's Planning Committee resolved³ to delay implementation of the NPS-UD and MDRS in the Auckland Light Rail corridor because the final route and station locations are

² The guidance for the survey of residential and business special character areas is available on the council's PC78 webpages.

³ PLA/2022/78

yet to be confirmed. For special character areas within the indicative Auckland Light Rail corridor, the spatial extent of the overlay and provisions in the AUP will remain unchanged. Both the NPS-UD and MDRS will be implemented within this corridor through a separate process at a later date.

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

Devonport, Grey Lynn, Helensville, Howick, Lower Hinemoa Street, Mount Eden Village (with the exception of one property), Newmarket, Ōtāhuhu, Parnell, Ponsonby Road, West Lynn and Upper Symonds Street (in part). Some of these business special character areas are subject to a reduced extent. The proposed extents are shown in the Plan Change 78 GIS map viewer.

A number of business special character areas are within the indicative Auckland Light Rail corridor. As stated, the NPS-UD will be implemented in these areas through a separate process at a later date.

Are there changes to the provisions for special character?

To ensure appropriate management of the values of special character areas that are a qualifying matter, the demolition, removal and relocation rule, which had previously only applied to some properties in the overlay, is proposed to be amended.

Properties that have been identified to define or support the special character of an area are proposed to be subject to the demolition, removal and relocation rule, meaning a resource consent will be required for this activity as well as any replacement building. Properties that are not identified as defining or supporting will not be subject to the demolition, removal and relocation rule, however resource consent will still be required for any replacement building.

Information on whether a property in the residential character area is subject to the demolition, removal and relocation rule is available in the map viewer by searching for an address and reading the property summary.

Information on whether a property in the business special character area is a character-supporting or character-defining building is identified in the special character area map within the AUP.

What about historic heritage?

Historic heritage is defined in the 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 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](#).
- For more information on the RMA and the amendments made to it in 2021 including the MDRS requirements [visit the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development website](#).

Please note:

This information sheet is a summary document to assist with understanding Proposed Plan Change 78 - Intensification, the Council's intensification planning instrument, which gives effect to Policies 3 and 4 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and incorporates the medium density residential standards into relevant residential zones as required by the Resource Management Act 1991.

The proposed plan change to the Auckland Unitary Plan was publicly notified by Auckland Council on 18 August 2022.

All information provided in this information sheet should be considered as being illustrative and indicative only. Users should take specific advice from qualified professional people before undertaking any action as a result of information obtained from this information sheet. The user waives and releases Auckland Council from any claims arising from use of the information provided in this information sheet.