

OUTCOME 3 – SUPPORTING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Liveable, vibrant and diverse inner-city neighbourhoods engaging with and supporting the quarter core.

Residential growth, neighbourhood character and amenities

In recent years the trend of converting office space to residential living in the quarter has increased due to vacant commercial space, resulting from the drift of offices north to the waterfront. The Aotea area has also experienced unprecedented growth in the approval and construction of new apartments. The census statistics between 2006 and 2013 estimate 7000 new residents during this period, with many more on their way, given the new apartments planned for Queen Street and sub-areas of the quarter. However, the wider quarter lacks many of the local shops and amenities needed to support a dense resident population. Improving these, particularly in the five identified sub-areas, is a pre-requisite for creating urban neighbourhoods that are highly liveable and support the core.

The five sub-areas or neighbourhoods beyond the quarter core are:

1. Learning Quarter Interface
2. Queen Street East (Airedale Street block)
3. Myers Park
4. Hobson Street Ridgeline (Federal Street block)
5. Engine Room.

Although relatively separated, the quarter core offers a focus for those who live, work and study in the sub-areas – a

relationship that the new Aotea Station will strengthen. The sub-areas in turn provide a good deal of the public life in the core throughout the day and night as residents, workers and students fill the spaces and streets and visit the businesses.

The success of the quarter core is intertwined with that of the sub-areas, each with their own issues and opportunities. Discussions with key stakeholders, residents and local community groups raised a number of tensions:

- Day versus night – safety and occupation by different users, visibility and lighting along many key connections.
- The sense of welcome for visitors and residents – achieving both vibrancy and sanctuary or retreat.
- Showpiece spaces versus more gentle, understated zones.
- Big feature/commercially driven/highly programmed events versus more easygoing, impromptu pop-up/ community events and activities.
- Amenities for students and others living in short-term housing with no or few kitchen facilities, and long-term residents (numerous value-for-money eateries, but a lack of green produce markets or a good bakery).
- Priority of cars over a walkable neighbourhood (the shared spaces are very welcome and supported from a safety perspective, but trying to cross Mayoral Drive is like running the gauntlet).

This chapter reveals the ideas and opportunities that emerged through the engagement process, with 'place propositions' for parts of two sub-areas needing particular attention – the Airedale Street block in Queen Street East and the Federal Street block on the Hobson Street Ridgeline. Other sub-areas received a lighter touch. The chapter ends with a commentary on rough sleeping.

Queen Street East: Airedale place proposition

Sitting on the south-eastern corner of the Aotea Quarter, between Myers Park and the Learning Quarter, this sub-area is bound by Wakefield and Symonds streets, City Road, Queen Street and Mayoral Drive.

Despite lying close to the geographic centre, intriguingly, it is unknown to many. It could be described as a forgotten part of the city centre. Why is this? In part its topography could be to blame. The Airedale Street area sits on a distinct fold in the landform of the city centre. From its highest point, at Symonds Street and City Road in the south, the land falls away towards Mayoral Drive and Aotea Square, forming a steep average gradient of about 1:10.

In contrast to this hidden internal world, the level of activity and energy is much higher on the outer streets that define it, reflecting the fact that these boundary streets are mostly main routes – Queen Street, Karangahape Road and Symonds Street.

Although the Queen Street East area may be off the radar of many Aucklanders, there is a strong community of people who live and work there. It has multiple apartment buildings, some with hundreds of residents. Older character buildings are peppered through streets that are home to a different type of apartment or inner-city dwelling, as well as a diverse mix of workspaces.

The area is adjacent to two universities and includes Whitireia Polytechnic and Edenz College, so it is not surprising that many residents are students, living there only in the short term.

Many commercial offices can also be found in the Queen Street East area, representing a mix of national organisations and small to medium enterprises. They are housed in large, modern commercial buildings and smaller, character and heritage buildings, which often more easily accommodate a mix of uses. Sitting on the southern edge is one of Auckland's premier hotels, the Langham, whose guests walk through the area to the city centre.

Telecommunications and electricity infrastructure owned by Spark and Vector inhabits a number of properties between Airedale Street to the east and White and Liverpool Street to the west. Robust, somewhat impenetrable and constantly humming, these buildings house a tenant that is here to stay – being one of the city's primary telecommunications exchanges, serving half of Auckland from its central position in the Airedale Street area since 1963.

This area has untapped potential. It can benefit from more investment and coordinated management, to capitalise on its premier location. However, it faces several challenges:

- Low quantity and quality of public space with limited, if any, pedestrian amenity on the street

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- network of Airedale, Liverpool, White streets, etc.
 - Narrow, unconnected footpaths (none at all on Marmon Street) combined with wide roadways and the one-way downhill orientation of Liverpool Street, all exacerbating driver speeds and a general dominance of vehicles over people.
 - Many sites underused as surface-level car parking, contributing little to the public realm.
 - Minimal activation of the streets from building edges/activities within, particularly in the western portion. Consequently, very low levels of passive surveillance and pedestrian activity on these inward-facing streets.
 - Conflict and undersupply of on-street parking for residents, customers or drivers parking for other activities further afield.
 - Close to premier public space – Aotea Square – yet access is difficult due to the challenge of crossing Mayoral Drive.
 - Inaccessible steps from the northern side of Mayoral Drive down to Airedale Street north.
 - The important pedestrian link between Liverpool and Airedale street (east-west connection to the Learning Quarter) is steep, narrow and poorly lit steps, attracting anti-social behaviour.
 - Buildings housing telecommunications and electricity infrastructure (the Auckland Exchange) dominate, to the detriment of residential amenity on surrounding streets.
 - Some buildings in poor condition, either empty or degraded, attracting antisocial behaviour, especially at night.
 - The roughly 600m² public space at the corner of Airedale and St Paul streets (next to the surface car park site on the corner of Wakefield and Mayoral Drive) is very outdated and uninviting, resembling a semi-private space.