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## **NEW ZEALAND URBAN DESIGN PROTOCOL**

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

To seek Council's agreement to become signatories to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol and to appoint the Design Champion.

### **2. Executive Summary**

The Ministry for the Environment has produced the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol as part of the Government's *Sustainable Development Programme of Action*. It is an acknowledgment that New Zealand is a significantly urbanised country and that we need to design towns and cities that are successful in meeting people's needs as well as being safe, accessible and prosperous.

The Urban Design Protocol proposes a commitment by central government in partnership with local government, developers, investors, design professionals and other groups to undertake initiatives to deliver key urban design objectives to improve the quality of towns and cities. This voluntary commitment is made by parties becoming signatories to the Urban Design Protocol. By becoming a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol, parties will be demonstrating their commitment to improving the quality of the urban environment.

In order to assist with improving the quality of the urban environment, signatory organisations will have access to information and resources and opportunities to participate in training, awards and funding and support programmes. Central government will be taking a leading role by providing supporting resources and a programme of action. There is one mandatory action required by the Urban Design Protocol which is the appointment of a Design Champion by each signatory. This person will be someone influential at a senior level within the organisation who can promote and advocate urban design.

Wellington City Council is well positioned to be a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol. The Council has long been a leader in the field of urban design with high quality public spaces and resources allocated to the improvement of the public built environment as well as giving direction through the District Plan in terms of the quality of private development. WCC also has a special relationship with central government being the capital city and strengthening the city's role as capital is important to its competitive advantage over other cities. Working more closely with central government to achieve high quality public buildings and spaces is important to supporting the work Council already does to improve the city. This will be demonstrated by the Government Centre Precinct which is currently being developed by the Council and central government agencies. This project will provide a model of best practice in urban design which demonstrates the practical application of the Urban Design Protocol.

### 3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Agree that Wellington City Council become a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol.*

### 4. Background

The Urban Design Protocol is a significant development in the recognition of the importance of cities and the role of urban design in creating high quality urban environments.

Urban design involves the design of cities, towns, their buildings and spaces and how people use them. It is concerned with the environmental, economic, social and cultural effects of design as well as the physical appearance of buildings and spaces.

The Urban Design Protocol proposes a range of strategies and initiatives for delivering on key urban design qualities. It proposes a partnership between central government, local government, property developers and professionals working in the area of urban development. It demonstrates a commitment by central government to improve the delivery of urban design across the country and draws on the commitment of signatories to implement urban design initiatives, with the assistance of central government.

Seven key design qualities are identified that together create quality urban design:

- **Context:** seeing buildings, places and spaces as part of whole towns and cities
- **Character:** reflecting and enhancing the distinctive character, heritage and identity of our urban environment
- **Choice:** ensuring diversity and choice for people
- **Connections:** enhancing how different networks link together for people
- **Creativity:** encouraging innovative and imaginative solutions
- **Custodianship:** ensuring design is environmentally sustainable, safe and healthy
- **Collaboration:** communicating and sharing knowledge across sectors, professions and with communities.

To deliver on these qualities, the protocol outlines the contribution different groups can make. The role of central government and local government is outlined as:

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Central government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead at a national level</li> <li>• Demonstrate quality urban design through its own development and activities</li> <li>• Co-ordinate policies and actions across whole of government</li> <li>• Develop appropriate legislation and policy guidance</li> <li>• Set appropriate national standards and policy statements</li> <li>• Promote national awareness of urban design</li> <li>• Support local government</li> <li>• Co-ordinate urban design research</li> <li>• Work with education institutes to improve urban design education</li> </ul>
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Local government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead at a regional/local level</li> <li>• Demonstrate quality urban design through its own development and activities</li> <li>• Develop appropriate statutory policies, rules and guidance</li> <li>• Manage statutory decision-making processes to ensure quality urban design outcomes</li> <li>• Promote regional/local awareness of urban design</li> <li>• Share research and ‘best practice’</li> <li>• Integrate urban management</li> <li>• Work collaboratively with the private sector</li> </ul>
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## 5. Discussion

Why should Wellington City Council be a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol?

Wellington City Council continues to be a leader in urban design in New Zealand. In 1994 it established an urban design unit which produced the 1994 Urban Design Strategy for Wellington. This has been developed and built on over the last 10 years and now the Council commits significant resources to the improvement and enhancement of the public environment and guidance to private development through a series of design guides in the District Plan.

With the completion of the Civic Square in 1991, Council demonstrated the importance it placed on high quality public spaces. This work continues with investment in central city areas – the waterfront, Courtenay Place, Blair and Allen Streets, Cuba Street, Manners Street and Lambton Quay. This has resulted in Wellington being the vibrant and prosperous city envied by other major cities. Council also invests in its local centres, (with recent work including Miramar and Johnsonville and current work being undertaken in Karori) while still retaining the focus on the central city as its key retail, commercial and entertainment centre.

There are proven economic benefits of urban design and Council has undertaken research to demonstrate this. In 1996, Council carried out an Economic Impact Assessment of the urban design work that had been done in Blair and Allen and Woodward Streets. This showed that there was a significant increase in capital values in these streets following the work. While not solely the result of the work, Council's investment, particularly on Blair and Allen Streets, changed building owners' perceptions of the potential of the area and led to investment in their buildings.

This exercise was repeated with similar results in Cuba Street and is now carried out for all major public environment enhancement projects. The Ministry of the Environment is researching the economic benefits of urban design with the initial findings endorsing the positive economic benefits of good urban design. This information along with other studies will be available to Council as a signatory but there is already clear evidence that the Council's investment in good urban design is of benefit to all ratepayers including property owners.

In recent years Council officers have been working to incorporate urban design principles into traffic and roading projects and balancing the sometimes conflicting objectives of vehicle movement with urban design objectives of creating a high quality public environment. Examples of this are the concept design for Lambton Quay and the safer roads project. Ensuring that urban design is incorporated into roading and traffic projects needs to take place at central government as well. For example, funding for the safer roads project comes from Land Transport New Zealand. Additional resources may be required to ensure that urban design is incorporated into single purpose engineering derived solutions so that they reflect the sense of place of the environments in which they are built. As signatories to the Urban Design Protocol, Council will be able to work in partnership with central government to influence its agencies and government departments to address these issues.

Officers are currently working with central government to develop a Government Centre Precinct to strengthen our role as capital and to provide tangible demonstration of the Urban Design Protocol's application. Other central government/Wellington City Council partnerships that reflect Council's leadership in urban design include several Year of the Built Environment initiatives such as the launch of the Urban Design Protocol on March 8.

The Urban Design Protocol requires that signatories appoint a Design Champion to lead and promote quality urban design processes and outcomes. This person needs to be at a senior level within the organisation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Council has the opportunity to demonstrate its strong and on-going leadership in urban design by becoming a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol and working in partnership to improve urban environments generally and also to achieve some tangible improvements in urban design outcomes for Wellington.

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## **Supporting Information**

### **1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome**

*Example: The Urban Design Protocol supports Council's overall vision of Creative Wellington – Innovation Capital. It delivers on one of Council's key principles – Sense of Place.*

*It supports the Strategic outcomes of Liveable City, Network city, Memorable City, Compact City, Beautiful City.*

### **2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact**

*The Urban Design Protocols support the Built Environment Annual Plan projects.*

### **3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations**

*N/A*

### **4) Decision-Making**

*Becoming a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol is a voluntary commitment and supports the work Council currently carries out in urban design.*

### **5) Consultation**

*There has been internal consultation in the development of this report.*

### **6) Legal Implications**

*N/A*

### **7) Consistency with existing policy**

*It is consistent with current policy. Draft Urban Development Strategy; Urban Design Principles; Public Space and Centre Upgrade Program.*