

Draft Unitary Plan : Feedback Points from SOS

(1.) Issue: 12.5m Height Allowance in St Heliers Village

Feedback: Reduce from 12.5m to 9m (or maximum of 2 commercial storeys).

Reasoning:

- The St Heliers community has consistently stated they place high value on the unique qualities that define St Heliers local centre and its immediate environs.
- Council has undertaken to “retain and enhance the character of St Heliers” (see Character Statement, App 12.1 Draft Unitary Plan). It states on pg 1, “Surviving early buildings are an important asset”; on pg 3, “The character and scale of the surviving early buildings establish a seaside character that is a primary asset of St Heliers”.
- At 12.5m the allowed height contradicts the aims of the character statement because it provides an overwhelming economic incentive to demolish the built environment that has created St Heliers’ character.
- The Draft Unitary Plan is defined as an “outcomes-based” document. But, the St Heliers Character Statement cannot deliver on its aims and intentions while a 12.5 metre height allowance stands.
- 12.5m buildings lining the Tamaki Dr face of the village will create a barrier between people and the sea on the foreshore, and a canyon effect when combined with 12.5m buildings lining the village’s narrow streets.

(2.) Issue: Extension of St Heliers Commercial Area to Goldie St and Lombard St. at 16.5m in height.

Feedback: Do not extend the commercial zone to Goldie and Lombard Streets. Keep them residential at 8m.

Reasoning:

- The 16.5m height in Goldie and Lombard Streets was identified as a mistake by Auckland Regional planner Penny Pirrit at April 8th meeting in St Heliers.
- Vellenoweth Green, which borders Goldie St, is an open space enshrined in statute that is both a neighbourhood park and an important recreation area for many high-profile sporting and cultural events (including Round the Bays) for all of Auckland.
- The Green is acknowledged as a defining feature of St Heliers (Character Statement, page 2). Commercial zoning proposed for adjacent sites on Goldie Street is incompatible as it will change the essential nature of the Green and its surrounds.
- Extended commercial activity is likely to be restaurants and bars, not local service shops (and any duplication of local shops would be unsustainable as the same size cake would be split between two businesses).
- Negative effects will include noise, parking pressure, and late-night activity, and will be felt by residents and the sports clubs that operate within and on the Vellenoweth Green precinct.
- Lombard St is a very small, narrow, dead-end residential street with restricted access. The plan map shows it as connected to Polygon Rd. This is also an error. Commercial zoning in such a restricted area is unworkable.
- The size of St Heliers’ natural catchment area and its location at the end of Tamaki Drive, put limitations on the opportunities for more viable businesses of the local service centre type.
- Parking is already an issue in St Heliers and a greater level of commercial intensification will only exacerbate existing problems.

(3.) Issue: Design Rules : Proposed Auckland Design Manual (ADM) is Non-Statutory

Feedback: ADM must be statutory (legally enforceable) with community input before it is finalised.

Reasoning:

- The ability of Council to deliver quality buildings of appropriate bulk, scale, and design within the intent of the St Heliers character overlay has a history of failure. Non-statutory guidelines will not resolve this.
- A detailed set of enforceable design regulations is needed.
- They must fit the purpose of ensuring the character is preserved.
- Orakei Local Board involvement in compliance with design regulations will ensure appropriate local input.

(4.) Issue: Village Mix of Services Under Threat

Feedback: Section 3.2.3.5 of the draft plan sets out requirements for the type of service businesses that support Local Centre Zones. The Council must integrate these requirements with its other regulations concerning the St Heliers commercial centre, particularly the 12.5 metre height allowance which directly compromises the survival of small local service businesses by encouraging demolition of the current village and replacement with large new buildings with higher rents.

Reasoning:

- In section 3.2.3.5 of the Unitary Plan are the following policies:

1. Enable activities for local convenience needs of the surrounding residential area, including local retail, commercial services, office, food and beverage and small scale supermarkets.

2. Enable residential activity above street level.

3. Discourage large-scale commercial activity that would adversely affect the:

a. retention and establishment of a mix of activities within the local centre

b. function, vitality or amenity of the City Centre, Metropolitan and Town Centre zones

c. safe and efficient operation of the transport network

- Retention of the local service centre for the Eastern Bays is necessary. The regulations must provide an environment in which it's possible for small-scale, local service shops to survive.

A building height of 12.5m will be contrary to the above policies as it will not provide for the retention of the current mix of activities in the St Heliers local centre. It will ensure the demise of most, if not all, of what stands in the Village now and replacement with new and inherently more expensive buildings.

- The new buildings, with higher rentals, will be unlikely to accommodate the small businesses (fruit and veges, butcher, hardware, bakery/lunch bar, dairy/superette etc...) that currently make St Heliers Village a local service centre.

- The area currently supports two distinct commercial/retail precincts with entertainment in Mission Bay and retail and services in St Heliers. This distinction provides a valuable point of difference for residents and visitors alike, and should be identified in the Unitary Plan and actively encouraged.

(5.) Issue: Location of Terraced Housing and Apartment Building zones in St Heliers and Kohimarama

Feedback: These need to be reassigned. Their positioning is crucial. The Orakei Local Board is best placed to oversee a local consultative process to reposition the terraced and apartment housing.

Reasoning:

- These residential intensification blocks, combined with the height of the St Heliers local centre, will create a barrier between people and the sea.

- In the proposed positions, they directly impinge on the character of the village.

- Placement of the highest buildings in front, on the foreshore and cliff edge, is contrary to best planning practice, compromising people's experience of the natural environment. It also fails to consider the topography of the area.

- These areas are important visitor and recreational destinations, well used by tourists and Aucklanders. The proposed location of these zones detracts from the value of this unique seaside environment.

- Tamaki Drive has road status; it is not classified as an arterial route like Kapa Road where other apartment/ Terraced housing intensification is planned.

- The Kohimarama zones are not located near a local centre, contrary to Draft Unitary Plan guidelines.

- Alternative placement should be undertaken by the Orakei Local Board between June and September 2013. The Board is best positioned to work with Council planners, consult with the community and affected parties, and to ensure a more appropriate placement of the allocation.

(6.) Issue: Tamaki Drive Master Plan (TDMP) is not included in provisions of the Draft Unitary Plan

Feedback: The TDMP should be included in the Draft Unitary Plan and have statutory weight. The Orakei Local Board should be identified as the primary decision-makers in all projects involving the TDMP.

Reasoning:

- This important, current document had extensive community consultation.

- The TDMP contains consensus recommendations on this highly prized regional asset, including the immediate built landscape. It has critically important implications for the Draft Unitary Plan Eastern Bays region.

(7.) Issue: Lack of Planning for Infrastructure

Feedback: Infrastructure needs must be assessed and dealt with prior to intensification.

Reasoning:

- Drains, stormwater runoff and sewerage are all current concerns in the Eastern Bays. It is vital that the harbour is protected now and in the future. Infrastructure planning must come first.
- Parking, traffic and public transport needs assessments and plans should be completed and submitted for public scrutiny, prior to notification of the Unitary Plan.
- No plans are evident for new educational and sports facilities or vital green spaces around intensified zones.

(8.) Issue: Existing planning processes will not protect the character of St Heliers and the surrounding area.

Feedback: A robust model of bottom-up local planning, including compulsory public notification of demolitions, removals and major alteration, should be part of the Unitary Plan.

Reasoning:

- The Unitary Plan is not well conceived in its approach to small individual centres like St Heliers, Mission Bay and Kohimarama.
- The plan has too few land use zones and centre classifications and is too top-down, with little regard for local circumstances – it's too "one size fits all".
- The plan contains too many errors and has not been sufficiently well communicated to stakeholders. The process is too rushed. More consultation and time is required for ratepayers to digest such a complex, multi-layered document, and have their say on what will be the single biggest change Auckland has seen.
 - We applaud the Council developing individual plans for other local centres and we want that applied to St Heliers. This could be done under the Orakei Local Board, using the "special character zone" approach proposed by consultant Ben Ross for St Heliers and other similar centres which do not fit the standardised Unitary Plan approach. Other models could also be considered, as outlined by the Character Coalition.
 - In addition, criticism of past planning decisions and their results in St Heliers, and of the draft Unitary Plan itself, show an urgent need to ensure the intent of documents like the St. Heliers Character Statement are legally binding and cannot be overridden by officials or developers.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Save Our St Heliers was formed in late 2010 during the loss of a major part of the village's historical character and heritage, when seven buildings were demolished in Turua St to make way for a non-notified development which is not in keeping with local character.

This happened while a Centre Plan for St Heliers created to protect the village's character was in force.

Since then, the organisation's 500-plus members have strived to stop that happening again, representing the community's long-established views on protecting their unique, small-scale village built to the sea which services local needs.

As far back as 2003/04 during extensive consultation for the initial Centre Plan and character overlay, and as recently as the 2011 professional survey on local opinion (copy given to Council), this community's message to the Council has remained the same – foster and protect the unique character of St Heliers' seaside village.

Acting on this local mandate, SOS has worked towards a strengthened Centre Plan through the Orakei Local Board.

INHERENT CONFLICT

But despite their best efforts, the result of that process, the Character Statement for St Heliers in the draft Unitary Plan (Appendix 12.1), cannot lead to better protection of the village's character.

The statement reads well on paper, describing and supporting protection of its unique qualities and features. But another section of the Plan contains an inherent conflict and ensures the aims of the Character Statement can never be realised.

HEIGHT

The 12.5 metre height allowance in the St Heliers commercial centre creates an economic imperative for the (very few) owners to get rid of almost the entire existing built form and replace it with new three-storey commercial buildings.

None of the character of St Heliers represented in its built form, which has been established over generations and reflects its history, can survive while that 12.5 metre allowance stands.

Further, a building height of 12.5m will drastically change the current function of the village taking away from its designated role in the draft Plan as a Local Centre.

Rents in the new buildings will be higher and the small businesses which service the population's shopping needs (fruit and veges, butcher, hardware, bakery/lunchbar, dairy/superette etc...) will struggle to survive.

We see a solution in changing the draft Plan's hierarchy of Centres (Metropolitan to Local), by adding another tier which would allow the Auckland region's many village centres to be local commercial service centres but retain their unique village character.

Reducing the height in St Heliers commercial centre to 9m (and not extending the commercial zone either side of Village as proposed) will promote a scale of activity conducive to a viable, local retail service centre.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

We also see the issue of public notification of demolition / removal / alteration of the Village's built fabric as key – it is the only way to ensure the community has a say in how the Village develops. St Heliers' experience with the results of non-notified development has made notification a cornerstone requirement of the community.

We congratulate the Council on its “pre-1944 provision” in the draft Plan requiring resource consent for demolitions etc... of pre-war buildings. But leaving the decisions as a discretionary matter for planners, cuts out the very people who will be most affected by the outcome – the community.

DESIGN CONTROLS

Stronger, more detailed design controls with the weight of legal requirement, not recommendation, must be devised. The new Auckland Design Manual must be capable of delivering buildings of appropriate quality and aesthetics.

The designs of the bulky Maheke St concrete tilt slab building and the inappropriate Turua St development, which passed Urban Design scrutiny at the time, should not be allowed under the Auckland Design Manual.

The Auckland Design Manual should have been completed in time for inclusion in the draft Unitary Plan so communities could give feedback.

LOCAL PLANS

Plans for local areas (across Auckland) written from the bottom up after extensive community consultation are the only way to create a regulatory framework that reflects and preserves the best of the regions differing localities.

This type of grassroots planning, especially in a place like St Heliers where previous outcomes continue to have so much community opposition, is the only way to ensure community buy-in to planning initiatives.

Local plans:

- are inclusive and create community buy-in
- avoid a “one size fits all” application of regulations that can compromise the very qualities that make an area attractive and liveable
- are a source of local solutions to regional problems, like where to fit a growing population
- and without the traditional hearings and appeals process become even more important if communities are to have a real say in their development.