

Urban Design Action Plan

Wanganui District Council

*Strategy and Development
Environmental Policy*

Urban Design Action Plan

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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of the Urban Design Action Plan is to outline Council's urban design aspirations and commitment to promoting and delivering high quality urban design for Wanganui.

This document identifies urban design goals and actions for Wanganui, which will:

- guide council staff and elected representatives to influence their future projects, policies and plans;
- provide clarity to investors, developers and design professionals on Council's urban design direction; and
- inform the public on how urban design can contribute to improving the city's urban structure, form and the experience of living and working in Wanganui.

2.0 What is Urban Design?

Urban design has been described as the art of making places for people. It involves the design of buildings, groups of buildings, spaces and landscapes to create high quality community environments in both urban and rural areas.

Urban design is about making connections between people and places. This includes connections between public and private space, the natural and built environment, movement and urban form. Urban design involves the application of design principles to create lively places with distinctive character, that are safe and easy to move within, that are visually attractive and pleasant to use.

3.0 The Value of Good Urban Design

Good quality urban design not only creates attractive places, it can have many economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits, as outlined in *Appendix 1*. High-quality urban design is a key to creating sustainable cities and is proven to lead to economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing.



4.0 New Zealand Urban Design Protocol

In 2005 the Ministry for the Environment produced the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol as part of the Government's Sustainable Development Programme of Action.

The protocol aims to make New Zealand towns and cities more successful through quality urban design. The protocol aims to help towns and cities become:

- Competitive places that thrive economically and facilitate creativity and innovation
- Liveable places that provide a choice of housing, work and lifestyle options
- A healthy environment that sustains people and nature
- Inclusive places that offer opportunities for all citizens
- Distinctive places that have a strong identity and sense of place
- Well-governed places that have a shared vision and sense of direction.

In order to achieve this, the Urban Design Protocol identifies seven essential design qualities 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.

Signatories to the protocol include central and local government, property developers and investors, consultants involved in planning, design and related fields, professional institutes, educational institutes and a variety of sector organisations.



In August 2007 the Wanganui District Council became a signatory to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol. Being a signatory organisation to the protocol signals a commitment to specific urban design initiatives. Signatories make a commitment to develop action plans for their organisations to put the protocol into effect, and to monitor and report every two years to the Ministry for the Environment on implementation of the actions.

In January 2007 the Ministry for the Environment published a monitoring review of Urban Design Action Plans. The results of this review have informed this action plan to ensure that lessons learned from other action plan implementation can be applied to provide an increased probability of success.

5.0 Urban Design in Wanganui

This action plan shares the overall purpose of the Urban Design Protocol, aiming to help Wanganui become more successful through quality urban design.

The goal is that quality urban design is used to ensure that Wanganui is:

- A competitive place that thrives economically and facilitates creativity and innovation;
- A liveable place that provides a choice of housing, work and lifestyle options;
- A healthy environment that sustains people and nature;
- An inclusive place that offers opportunities for all citizens;
- A distinctive place that has a strong identity and sense of place;
- A place that is well-governed, with a shared vision and sense of direction.

The Wanganui District Council's mission is to make Wanganui an attractive place for families and to ensure a quality of life for all. In keeping with the Council's Family Friendly vision and Wanganui's Future document, the above urban design goals will contribute towards the Wanganui community enjoying:

- economic opportunities
- a good image and sense of identity
- a safe community - Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- connectivity



- community networks
- quality and affordable housing in contemporary family neighbourhoods
- access to recreational and cultural activities

Each relevant decision that is made by Council will be required to consider whether the outcomes will be in keeping with the above goals for Wanganui. The purpose of this action plan is to provide a set of actions for Council to undertake, using quality urban design as a means for achieving the above goals for Wanganui.

6.0 Urban Design Action Points

As part of the Urban Design Protocol, the Ministry for the Environment produced the Urban Design Protocol Action Pack to provide ideas of actions to be utilized by signatories in support the implementation of the protocol. Actions can range across an organisation's activities, from strategy development to decision making, to research and staff training.

The Urban Design Action Plan for Wanganui groups actions into the following categories:

1. Education, training and information
2. Partnerships and participation
3. Internal process changes
4. Urban Design Policy for Wanganui District Council

A detailed outline of the actions included in this Action Plan are attached as *Appendix 2*. The detail identifies the following for each action:

- What are we going to do?
- Why are we going to do it?
- Who will be responsible for undertaking the action?
- What resources are required (time, cost, personnel)?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we monitor progress?



6.1 Education, training and the provision of information

Education, training and information on urban design issues is important for raising awareness of urban design and providing people with the knowledge and tools to make good urban design decisions. This is acknowledged in the Urban Design Protocol, which notes that an important step to achieving good urban design is raising awareness of the benefits and challenging existing approaches where they do not result in good outcomes.

Appointing a Design Champion is a requirement of signatories to the Urban Design Protocol. The role of a design champion is to promote and champion quality design, and to challenge existing approaches throughout organisations. Champions are effective as a mechanism for bringing about change, especially when they hold senior level positions within an organisation. It is recommended that the Urban Design Champion is a senior, influential person who can promote quality urban design in all areas of the organisation. In the case of a local authority, it is recommended that the Urban Design Champion be either:

- a councillor
- the chief executive
- a senior manager.

Council has appointed the Principal Planner to act as the Urban Design Champion.

The NZUDP Action Plan progress report produced by the Ministry for the Environment, notes that access to the necessary skills was one of the key success factors for implementation of the plans. Education and training can be used to provide the necessary information and skills to people both internally and externally.

It is important that everyone who contribute to the management of the built environment have some understanding of their role in shaping and influencing the urban design of a city, building or space. This includes councillors, managers, resource managers, planners, architects, engineers, landscape architects, surveyors and the community.

As quality urban design is required at all levels of decision making – development proposals, internal assessments, through to major Council projects - it is important that education and training reflects the variety of people involved in shaping the future of Wanganui.



Raising awareness and promoting quality urban design processes and projects both within Council and the community has a number of important benefits including:

- Knowledge of design possibilities and understanding processes can help people to participate in the future of their towns and cities;
- An understanding of urban design principles can allow decision makers to contribute towards creating higher quality urban environments through their decisions and actions;
- As expectations increase, investors, developers and central and local government are encouraged to provide high quality urban environments;
- The community take responsibility and gain ownership over 'their' place;
- An informed community are more likely to insist on high-quality design initiatives.

Given the value of urban design education, training and information, this plan includes the following actions:

- Education and training sessions for Councillors
- Education and training for staff including Senior Management Team, Policy and Planning, Parks and Property, Infrastructure.
- Urban design workshop with external professionals such as architects, planners, developers.
- Information provided to the Wanganui community.
- Access to specialist advice for Council decision-makers.

As already stated, a more informed community is more likely to insist on high-quality design initiatives. It is important for Council to ensure that quality urban design information is provided to the community. This includes the general public as well as those people who work closely with Council on development within the district. Information can be provided in a number of ways including: Council website, brochures and best practice advice for developers, including how urban design can influence place.

Actions based around education, training and the provision of information will fulfill the purpose of the Urban Design Action Plan, which is to:

- guide council staff and elected representatives to influence their future projects, policies and plans;
- provide clarity to investors, developers and design professionals on Council's urban design direction; and
- inform the public on how urban design can contribute to improving the city's urban structure, form and the experience of living and working in Wanganui.



6.2 Partnerships and participation

Partnerships and participation play an important role in ensuring that quality urban design is utilised. Adopting a partnership approach with external professionals and stakeholders provides the base for a good working relationship. Part of the purpose of this document is to provide clarity to investors, developers and design professionals on Council's urban design direction. Working with developers and design professionals at pre-application stage will allow for Council to work with applicants to include quality urban design principles at the design stage. This allows for proactive involvement working with applicants and developers, rather than the traditional reactive adversarial role of developer versus Council.

As decision makers for the community, Council consults with stakeholders and the community on a regular basis. Community participation is crucial for generating buy-in and working towards ensuring that quality urban design is used to ensure that Wanganui is:

- A competitive place that thrives economically and facilitates creativity and innovation;
- A liveable place that provides a choice of housing, work and lifestyle options;
- A healthy environment that sustains people and nature;
- An inclusive place that offers opportunities for all citizens;
- A distinctive place that has a strong identity and sense of place;
- A place that is well-governed, with a shared vision and sense of direction.

Actions relating to partnerships and participation include:

- Develop a good working relationship with developers, applicants and other stakeholders to include quality urban design in Wanganui development
- Involve the community and key stakeholders (including the arts and education sectors) in key decisions relating to urban design for Wanganui
- Meet with key developers and local professionals to outline Council's stance on urban design and establish a means for pre-application development discussions
- Utilise the Urban Design Champion as the first contact at Council for any enquiries or concerns relating to urban design in Wanganui
- Identify how quality urban design can be used to provide for a family friendly Wanganui.



6.3 Internal coordination

Urban areas are complex systems that require integrated management. Council influences many aspects of urban areas, through issuing consents, managing parks, constructing roads and other infrastructure, providing services and community facilities, encouraging investment, and marketing and branding. It is important that councils integrate their management of these functions and co-ordinate delivery on the ground to achieve better urban design outcomes.

Communication across Council departments is critical for the efficient and effective incorporation of quality urban design in Council decision making. Communication between Policy and Planning, Infrastructure, and Parks and Property is especially important as many Council decisions require input from all of these areas. The successful development of Wanganui will require a multi-disciplinary approach to managing the built environment.

Adequate forward planning is essential to guide the future development of areas where major urban change is anticipated. This includes town centres, major infrastructure projects, areas of major change on the edge of towns and cities, or areas where the urban population is declining. Planning for change might include:

- development of detailed policies and objectives for specific local areas
- integrated urban planning with key external stakeholders (including landowners)
- forward planning of major urban infrastructure to support future land uses
- proactive guidance to encourage appropriate future urban development
- guidance on appropriate management of town and city centres.

The Wanganui Growth Strategy addresses planning for infrastructure and takes into account urban design principles. The completion of the Growth Strategy is an important action associated with this Urban Design Action Plan.

Actions relating to internal coordination include:

- Establish a group from across council departments (notably and Planning, Infrastructure, and Parks and Property) to consider the role of quality urban design in Council projects and developments
- Review existing policy documents to include quality urban design initiatives where appropriate
- Ensure that new policy documents use of quality urban design to achieve policy outcomes where applicable
- Incorporate quality urban design principles into the District Plan through the District Plan Review process
- Prepare urban design guidelines to sit alongside the District Plan



- Incorporate quality urban design principles into the Growth Strategy
- Prepare an Urban Design Policy for Council to ensure that urban design principles are incorporated into Council documents, decisions and Council projects.

7.0 Monitoring Progress and Measuring Success

Monitoring the actions included in this action plan will allow Council to identify best practice, learn from any mistakes, and improve the overall progress towards ensuring that quality urban design is used to make Wanganui a better place. Details for how, when and who will monitor specific actions are included with the details for each action (*Appendix 2*).

As a signatory to the Urban Design Protocol Council is required to provide monitoring data to the Ministry for the Environment every 2 years. Information gathered by Council for internal monitoring will reflect the monitoring requirements as a signatory to ensure that monitoring is conducted in an efficient and effective manner.

A review of the Urban Design Action Plan shall be undertaken annually to ensure that the action plan is up to date both with current urban design best practice, and to ensure the actions are in line with the community and Council vision for Wanganui.



8.0 Conclusion

- Council recognises that quality urban design will play a crucial role in shaping the future of Wanganui.
- Urban design principles will be considered in conjunction with all relevant Council decisions that affect the built environment.
- The actions outlined in this Urban Design Action Plan will be undertaken, monitored and reviewed by Council to ensure that Wanganui develops in a way that follows Council's Family Friendly vision.
- Urban design actions will ensure that quality urban design is used to ensure that Wanganui is:
 - A competitive place that thrives economically and facilitates creativity and innovation;
 - A liveable place that provides a choice of housing, work and lifestyle options;
 - A healthy environment that sustains people and nature;
 - An inclusive place that offers opportunities for all citizens;
 - A distinctive place that has a strong identity and sense of place;
 - A place that is well-governed, with a shared vision and sense of direction.



Appendix 1. Summary of findings about the key urban design elements. From MfE (2005) The Value of Urban Design. The economic, environmental and social benefits of urban design. (Table 2. p13)

	Economic Value Findings	Social/Cultural Value Findings	Environmental Value Findings
Local Character	<p>Attracts highly skilled workers and new economy enterprises.*</p> <p>Assists the promotion and 'branding' of cities and regions*</p> <p>Contributes a competitive edge by providing a 'point of difference.'*</p> <p>Potentially adds a premium to the value of housing.*</p>	<p>Reinforces a sense of identity among the residents of a neighbourhood.*</p> <p>Encourages people to become actively involved in managing their neighbourhood.*</p> <p>Offers choice among a wide range of distinct places and experiences.*</p>	<p>Supports conservation of non-renewable resources.*</p>
Connectivity	<p>Increases viability of local service shops and facilities.**</p> <p>Increases a site or area's accessibility, thereby enhancing land value.**</p>	<p>Enhances natural surveillance and security.***</p> <p>Encourages walking and cycling, mainly for non-work trips, leading to health benefits.**</p> <p>Shortens walking distances, encouraging people to walk.**</p>	<p>Reduces vehicle emissions through fewer non-work trips.**</p>
Density	<p>Provides land savings.***</p> <p>Provides infrastructure and energy savings.**</p> <p>Reduces the economic cost of time allocated to mobility.**</p> <p>Is associated with concentration of knowledge and innovative activity in</p>	<p>Is difficult to disentangle from the benefits of mixed use and other factors.**</p> <p>Can contribute to social cohesion.**</p> <p>Tends to promote health through encouraging greater physical activity.**</p> <p>Can be associated with lower crime and</p>	<p>Reinforces green space preservation if linked into clustered form.***</p> <p>Reduces run-off from vehicles to water.***</p> <p>Reduces emissions to air and atmosphere.**</p> <p>May conflict with micro/local green</p>



	urban cores.*	greater safety.* Enhances vitality.*	space needs.**
Mixed Use	Enhances value for those preferring a mixed use neighbourhood.*** Utilises parking and transport infrastructure more efficiently.*** Increases viability of local service shops and facilities.** Significantly lowers household expenditure on transportation.**	Improves access to essential facilities and activities.*** Provides convenience.** Encourages walking and cycling, leading to health benefits.** Reduces the need to own a car.** Increases personal safety.** Can enhance social equity.*	Reduces car use for local trips (but minor impact on commuting) and hence emissions.***
Adaptability	Contributes to economic success over time.** Extends useful economic life by delaying the loss of vitality and functionality.*	Increases diversity and duration of use for public space.*** Gives ability to resist functional obsolescence.**	Supports conservation of non-renewable resources.*
High Quality Public Realm	Attracts people and activity, leading to enhanced economic performance.** Public art contributes to enhanced economic activity.**	Higher participation in community and cultural activities.*** Increased use of public space.*** Gives greater sense of personal safety.** Attracts social engagement, pride and commitment to further achievements.** Public art contributes to greater community engagement with public	



		space.**	
Integrated Decision-making	Co-ordinates physical design and policy in related areas to ensure benefits of good urban design are realised or enhanced.**	Encourages people to take advantage of opportunities presented by good urban design.** Provides equity of opportunity for a range of people to benefit from good urban design.*	
User Participation	Makes more effective use of resources.*** Offers process cost savings by encouraging user support for positive change.**	Improves fit between design and user needs.*** Develops user ownership of positive change.** Enhances sense of community.** Enhances sense of well-being.* Legitimises user interests.* Enhances democracy.*	



Appendix 2. Action Details

- What are we going to do?
- Why are we going to do it?
- Who will be responsible for undertaking the action?
- What resources are required (time, cost, personnel)?
- What is the timeline for completion?
- How will we monitor progress?

Education, training and the provision of information

Training sessions on quality urban design for staff and councillors.

What	Urban design training sessions for staff
Why	To provide Council staff involved in development and decision making with an understanding of how to encourage quality urban design decisions
Who	External trainer to present to Policy and Planning, Senior Management Team, Infrastructure, Parks and Property sections of council Urban Design Champion to coordinate
Resources	External trainer at cost Teams involved in training for 1-2 days (estimated cost \$3,500)
Timeline	December 2008
Monitoring	Urban Design Champion to monitor urban design trends to determine whether further training is needed in future
What	Urban design training session for Councillors
Why	As decision makers, Councillors should be aware of the importance of quality urban design and the positive outcomes that it creates
Who	Planning and Policy team members to run information session for Councillors, once internal urban design training sessions have been undertaken. Urban Design Champion to manage.
Resources	2 staff (32 hours preparation and 4 hours training – estimated cost \$1,500)



Timeline February 2009
Monitoring Urban Design Champion to ensure ongoing monitoring of Councillors training needs are assessed in conjunction with new urban design trends and changes in Council.

Incorporate an educative component in the council's communication material to raise the community's understanding of urban design issues and solutions.

What Provide information on urban design issues and solutions (website and hard copy)
Why To raise the community's understanding of urban design issues and solutions
Who Urban Design Champion or person appointed by the champion to determine the information to be included. Champion to manage.
Resources 12 hours for information gathering and preparing information
IT to put the information on the website (estimated cost \$350)
Timeline February 2009
Monitoring The Urban Design Champion or person appointed by the champion will monitor the information on the website to ensure it is up to date with current urban design practice.

What Develop urban design guides specifically for developers
Why To guide those involved directly with development, and provide more certainty for developers as to what Council is trying to achieve
Who Urban Design Champion or person appointed by the champion to determine the information to be included in the guides. Urban Design Champion to manage.
Resources 32 hours for information gathering, linking to District Plan information, draft and review of guides (estimated cost \$1,000)
Timeline February 2009
Monitoring The Urban Design Champion or person appointed by the champion will monitor the information in the guides to ensure they are up to date with current urban design practice.



Access to specialist advice for Council decision-makers.

What	Access to specialist advice for Council decision makers
Why	To aid in complex urban design developments
Who	External urban design expert
Resources	External expert at cost
Timeline	As required
Monitoring	

Appoint an Urban Design Champion

What	Urban Design Champion
Why	Proven as an effective means for influencing decisions and bringing about change
Who	Principal Planner
Resources	Dependant on other urban design actions that will involve the champion (No additional cost. Urban design concepts part of the review of the District Plan)
Timeline	Completed in conjunction with becoming signatory
Monitoring	May require ensuring that other staff have an understanding of the role to cover potential future changes

Partnerships and participation

Work with external professionals and stakeholders

What	Meet with key developers and local professionals to outline Council's stance on urban design and establish a means for pre-application development discussions Urban design workshop with external professionals such as architects, planners, developers.
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	Develop a good working relationship with developers, applicants and other stakeholders to include quality urban design in Wanganui development
Why	Partnerships and participation to create good working relationships
Who	Urban Design Champion, Council officers
Resources	(No additional cost. Urban design concepts part of the review of the District Plan)
Timeline	Ongoing
Monitoring	

Utilise the Urban Design Champion as the first contact at Council for any enquiries or concerns relating to urban design in Wanganui

Included in Urban Design Policy and urban design information documents created for the community and developers

Identify how quality urban design can be used to provide for a family friendly Wanganui.

Included in Urban Design Policy and assessment of existing Council documents

Internal coordination

Establish a group from across council departments (notably Policy, Planning, Infrastructure, and Parks and Property) to consider the role of quality urban design in Council projects and developments

What	Establish a group from across council departments (notably Policy, Planning, Infrastructure, and Parks and Property) to consider the role of quality urban design in Council projects and developments
Why	To provide a multidisciplinary approach for integrated decision making and idea sharing
Who	Representatives from across council departments
Resources	Members as above, meeting as required (Part of normal officer time)
Timeline	Ongoing
Monitoring	Urban Design Champion to monitor



Review existing policy documents to include quality urban design initiatives where appropriate

What	Review existing policy documents to include quality urban design initiatives where appropriate
Why	To incorporate urban design into existing policies
Who	Strategy and Development Team
Resources	As above
Timeline	In conjunction with policy review timetable
Monitoring	Not required

Ensure that new policy documents use of quality urban design to achieve policy outcomes where applicable

Included in Urban Design Policy

Incorporate quality urban design principles into the District Plan through the District Plan Review process

What	Review the District Plan to include explicit urban design outcomes. Ensure that collectively the rules support these outcomes. Plan changes developed where necessary.
Why	The District Plan is the primary regulatory tool for development within the district. Ensuring that the rules and standards reflect quality urban design outcomes is therefore a means for guiding development to provide quality urban design outcomes.
Who	Environmental Policy team
Resources	Environmental Policy team, in conjunction with District Plan review (No additional costs)
Timeline	2009/2010 District Plan review
Monitoring	Will be reviewed in conjunction with subsequent District Plan reviews
What	Develop and adopt urban design guidelines that promote the qualities of the seven C's (as outlined in the Urban Design Protocol) as part of the district plan.



Why	The District Plan is the primary regulatory tool for development within the District. Guidelines are a softer approach to guiding development to provide quality urban design outcomes.
Who	Environmental Policy team
Resources	Environmental Policy team, in conjunction with District Plan review
Timeline	2009/2010 District Plan review
Monitoring	Will be reviewed in conjunction with subsequent District Plan reviews

Incorporate quality urban design principles into the Growth Strategy

What	Incorporate quality urban design principles into the Growth Strategy
Why	The Growth Strategy is a key document relating to the urban areas of Wanganui and therefore urban design principles should be taken into account
Who	Environmental Policy team
Resources	Environmental Policy team in conjunction with growth Strategy development (No additional cost)
Timeline	September 2008
Monitoring	Not required

Prepare an Urban Design Policy for Council to ensure that urban design principles are incorporated into Council documents, decisions and Council projects.

What	Before publication of any relevant draft council policy, consider the urban design implications of that policy. This includes all policy, not just resource management policies. Policies relating to economic development, transport and traffic management, car parking management, engineering standards, procurement, reserve management, accommodation, infrastructure provision and many others, all have significant implications on the urban design of towns and cities.
Why	Involve the community and key stakeholders in key decisions relating to urban design for Wanganui To encourage integrated and coordinated Council decision making on any policy that has urban design implications.



The strong link between urban design and sustainability is outlined in the Sustainable Wanganui Strategy, which encourages integrated Council decision making. Urban design will be included in this Sustainable Wanganui Document.

Who Environmental Policy team to produce Sustainable Wanganui Strategy.

Decision making and process implications for all of Council.

Resources Sustainable Wanganui Strategy to outline detail for Council processes. Each department affected will then work with the Policy and Planning team to ensure processes are put in place to achieve this action, and the desired outcomes from the SWS.

Timeline

Monitoring

