

Living Streets Aotearoa



Submission to Hutt Council on the proposed change to the District Plan that will allow for higher and denser housing across Lower Hutt

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Key submission messages

- Higher and denser building needs to include requirements to provide safe walking and recreational spaces for people of all ages and ability.
- High intensity housing must not compromise the comfort and safety of footpaths and the people using these; particularly for children and people with disabilities.
- There need to be more comfortable and safe routes to other destinations such as schools, shops, bus stops and railway stations. This is essential infrastructure that needs to be put in place alongside the high and denser housing developments.
- High density housing areas must include high quality public spaces in terms of lighting, surface, seats, shelter, shade, wayfinding and access to green space.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft District Plan. Living Streets Aotearoa recognises the need for housing for everyone and the benefits of compact urban forms close to public transport and key amenities. This needs to ensure people friendly, walkable streets and routes as integral to the development.

Living Streets Aotearoa urges that the District Plan changes set out the key requirements for a walkable Lower Hutt in the long term and that there are a number of important matters that need to be included to achieve this. Our comments relate to the matters of interest from the perspective of pedestrians of all ages and abilities being able to safely use footpaths and cross streets. WE support the vision that residential streets become walking areas safe for children to play, and where other forms of transport are 'visitors' and kept to minimum numbers and speed.

Issues and aspirations

Our aspiration for Hutt City is that it is a joy to get around on foot, with public spaces that are attractive and meet people's needs, and an urban form that encourages people to feel a sense of belonging and get to know their neighbours.

This will be a city that provides quality public places and living space at a human scale and is accessible to all of us. This is particularly important as the city becomes denser and more people live in multi-unit buildings with limited private outdoor space, and as houses become smaller. People in these urban environments need quality public spaces where they can relax, do exercise, get sunshine, meet neighbours, socialise with friends, and so on. Cafes, libraries and other places are also critical places for people to enjoy a sense of community.

The city is not currently delivering that, and there is little incentive or ability for an individual developer to create or contribute to public spaces. Issues we notice currently and that need to be addressed in the new plan include:

Safe people-friendly spaces

Higher and denser building needs to have well defined guidelines that developments need to adhere to in order to provide safe walking and recreational spaces for people of all ages and ability.

Too many high and dense residential buildings have blank walls, high and solid fences by the footpath, or their frontages are dominated by spaces such as car parks. These make the footpaths far less attractive, and often reduces access to the point of making the space feel unsafe. High and solid structures between adjoining properties can also reduce safety and a sense of community.

The same problem is walk ways between these buildings where there are no obvious exits (because of high and solid property boundaries) and no surveillance. The result is that these are less likely to feel safe for vulnerable walkers, particularly at night. There is good research showing that use of these spaces is far lower than spaces that are adjacent to properties with low or open boundary structures.

The street space along these high and dense building areas needs to discourage car traffic, and should feel safe enough for children and older people to be out on the street. The design must naturally force traffic to travel at a minimum speed, and needs to discourage through-traffic.

Protected footpaths

High intensity housing must not compromise the comfort and safety of footpaths and the people using these; particularly for children and people with disabilities.

Footpaths around the Hutt are already badly compromised by people turning into driveways at speed and parking over the footpath. In addition, the ongoing tolerance to people riding electric scooters and bikes on footpaths makes these more of a hostile rather than an inviting space.

During construction, it tends to be the footpath that is lost, and the Council is not ensuring that effective pedestrian provision is maintained through the construction stage.

With increased residence numbers there is a need to not only protect footpaths but also improve the state of these, which is often poor and already a risk for people who have trouble walking or are on a mobility scooter.

Connected pedestrian routes

There need to be more comfortable and safe routes to other destinations such as schools, shops, bus stops and railway stations. This is essential infrastructure that needs to be put in place alongside the high and denser housing developments.

More housing needs to go hand in hand with encouraging more pleasant walking infrastructure. One of the most important features of a well designed city is a complete pedestrian grid, with small block sizes and public access ways that connect to a network of routes to destinations. This makes walking a much more interesting and fun experience by providing alternative shortcuts and routes, particularly when these are enhanced with greenery and artwork. The district plan must ensure a pedestrian grid and network that is enhanced as part of the housing intensification.

Public access around these housing intensification areas must be a priority over privacy and private access. Private vehicle use on pedestrian access ways must be avoided and where possible be stopped through the use of bollards. Limited cul-de-sac car parking should avoid the need for private driveways.

The pedestrian network should connect seamlessly across sidestreet intersections where currently priority is given to drivers. Intersection design must be changed to focus on ensuring safe pedestrian routes. Pedestrian crossings must be on the desired lines at these intersections, at roundabouts, and at driveways for supermarkets and other busy shops.

Public Amenity

High density housing areas must have high quality public spaces in terms of lighting, surface, seats, shelter, shade and wayfinding.

It is important that the overall public space around high density housing delivers amenity, rather than there just being reliance on a few spaces that get focused design work. Every available public space must be treated as valuable and made usable. Even a tiny space can accommodate a seat or plant or artwork.

Six story buildings will create shade and wind problems that impact on public spaces. In any future developments the effect on adjacent public spaces needs to be addressed. Where this is not possible, this should be compensated by creating nearby green spaces / neighbourhood garden areas that have good sun and that can provide play equipment for children as well as community vegetable gardens and fruit trees.

Many public spaces are cluttered by poles, signs, café tables, bike parking infrastructure, and so on. It is vital that the District Plan changes ensure an adequate uncluttered width of footpath. New infrastructure should not be located in footpath space.

Recommended Planning

We encourage the District Plan to prepare for improved walking facilities in the residential areas including those around shops.

- Widening of footpaths. This is vital to allow these to handle likely increased pedestrian numbers, use of devices (e.g. mobility scooters), social distancing, and use of footpaths as

meeting and socialising spaces. In the short term, tactical urbanism can be used to create more walking space until the budget allows a proper footpath to be created. For example, that will allow a fit walker to step out of the way of a mobility scooter or person with a pushchair.

- Removal of footpath clutter, a well-signalled tougher line on footpath parking, and utilisation of roadside parking for outdoors seating can all be used to immediately increase the formed footpath space available. The District Plan and bylaws and enforcement need to work together to deliver a walkable city.
- Repurposing of non-disability parking for outdoor seating. This would have the triple benefit of increasing capacity for businesses, highlighting to businesses in practice that short-term car parking is not essential for business success, and maintaining the footpath space required for pedestrians and other footpath users. There also needs to be work to increase parking availability while reducing parking footprint.

Proposed District Plan Changes

We support in principle the provision of high density housing zones, but it is vital that the design rules work well to ensure that these continue to provide quality private and public spaces. We can no longer allow individual developers to impose their particular vision on the community, although we also need to allow for good ideas to be supported.

Section	LSA Feedback
<p>Amendment 3: Objective - A well-functioning urban environment that enables all people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural wellbeing, and for their health and safety, now and into the future</p>	<p>Supported. This objective reflects our focus that walkability is a critical aspect of a well-functioning urban environment that enables health and safety.</p>
<p>Amendment 4: Policy 1 - Provide for building height and density of urban form. (b) building heights of at least 6 storeys. (ii) within a walkable catchment of the Central Commercial and Petone Commercial Activity Areas,</p>	<p>Partially supported. Residential housing of 6 storeys and higher will have a very significant impact on the character of the Hutt and the street space that they border on, and should be allowed only in the CBD and suburban centres along main routes, and not for residential areas / streets.</p>
<p>Amendment 5: Policy 2 - The building heights and density of urban form in Policy 1 are modified only to the extent necessary to provide for the following qualifying matters. (e) protect the purpose of open space provided for public use, but only in relation to land that is open space.</p>	<p>Partially supported. As per our earlier feedback, the protection of open space for public use is important. We recommend that this policy is changed to enforce public space / walking access around high density building as a design requirement that developers need to adhere to regardless whether the land is open space or not.</p>
<p>Amendment 6: Policy 3 - Encourage development to achieve attractive and safe streets and public open spaces, including by providing for passive surveillance.</p>	<p>Partially supported. We very much welcome this policy but ask that “Encourage” is changed to “Require”. Reality is that developers will not be encouraged to follow this policy. It needs to be a commitment by the developers and the Council.</p>

<p>Amendment 8: Policy 4 - Enable housing to be designed to meet the day-to-day needs of residents.</p>	<p>Partially supported. This goes without saying for housing design. We recommend that this policy enforces the inclusion of community facilities and spaces as part of development of buildings 6 storeys and higher; both inside (e.g. meeting areas, shared laundry facilities) as well as outside as per our earlier feedback.</p>
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Proposed Amendment and Policy

As per our feedback, we recommend the following further District Plan amendment and policy statement:

Requirement that essential walking and public space infrastructure is designed and committed to as part of design planning and resource consents for any higher and denser housing development, in order to encourage walking and discourage private car use.

- (a) Street design
 - (i) Reduction of vehicle traffic and driving speeds.
 - (ii) Minimising on and off street car parking (with the exception of disability and care-share parking).
- (b) Footpaths
 - (i) Protect and improve safety and comfort for footpaths.
 - (ii) Measures to stop footpaths being used for vehicle parking, and to ensure the protection and right of way of footpath users at driveways.
- (c) Public access ways and spaces
 - (i) Provide public access walkways around higher residential buildings and across high density residential housing blocks.
 - (ii) Provide public spaces for high density residential housing blocks that act as inviting, community meeting points and children play areas.
 - (iii) Measures to ensure safety and comfort of these public access ways and spaces; lighting, greenery, artwork, community meeting points, seating.
- (d) Connected pedestrian network.
 - (i) Ensure that higher and denser housing areas provide walking routes that are part of a wider pedestrian network that enables ease of access to neighbourhood destinations; in particular schools, shops, public transport facilities.
 - (ii) Provide wayfinding signage.
 - (iii) Pedestrian crossings must ensure safety of pedestrians and for people on mobility scooters at intersections, roundabouts, and at driveways for supermarkets and other car parking areas.

Closing Note

Our submission covers high level matters for the proposed District Plan changes. We trust that our submission is sufficient to highlight the need to treat safe and pleasurable footpaths, access ways, open spaces and pedestrian networks as essential infrastructure that needs to be implemented as part of high density residential building. We would like to work actively with the Council to ensure that this is done in a successful way so that our current and future generations can enjoy the Hutt as a fantastic place to live and play.

We would like to be heard in support of this submission.

About Living Streets

Living Streets Aotearoa is New Zealand's national walking and pedestrian organisation, providing a positive voice for people on foot and working to promote walking-friendly planning and development around the country. Our vision is "More people choosing to walk more often and enjoying public places".

The objectives of Living Streets Aotearoa are:

- to promote walking as a healthy, environmentally friendly and universal means of transport and recreation
- to promote the social and economic benefits of pedestrian-friendly communities
- to work for improved access and conditions for walkers, pedestrians and runners, including walking surfaces, traffic flows, speed and safety
- to advocate for greater representation of pedestrian concerns in national, regional and urban land use and transport planning.

For more information, please see www.livingstreets.org.nz.