

Urban Issues – Executive Summary

1.0 Introduction

1.0.1 Southland consists of a number of urban settlements dispersed across the Southland Plains, generally located either around the coastline or close to water bodies, being either rivers or lakes. These settlements range in size from Invercargill at around 48, 000 people down to smaller urban centres as small as 20 dwellings. Additionally a small urban community exists in Oban, on Stewart Island. Concentrations of dwellings in urban areas results in the concentration of environmental effects and both Regional and District Plans need to respond appropriately to this.

1.0.2 The current Regional Policy Statement ('RPS') was written with one of the key issues being the 'built environment'. For the purposes of the RPS review the built environment tag has been shed, with a move to focus on urban and rural environments as separate issues. The Southland District Plan review will also include a review of 'urban issues', within the context of the districts Urban Resource Areas.

2.0 Relevance of existing RPS and District Plan issues – a brief synopsis

2.0.1 The existing RPS contains six issues relating to the 'Built Environment'. In summary they are that:

- Urban environments and expansion of these can have adverse effects on natural and physical resources, including; loss of productive land, loss of amenity values, inefficiencies in the roading network, reduction in water quality, loss of heritage values and archaeological sites of regional significance.
- Patterns of development can constrain future generations from meeting their needs.
- The environmental quality of the built environment should reflect the social, economic and physical needs of the people that undertake activities within it.
- The extent to which the built environment is compatible with existing activities, as health concerns, for example, noise and dust can arise.

- The cumulative adverse effects of components of the built environment can be significant, even if the individual effects appear insignificant.
- Natural hazards can have a significant adverse effect on the built environment.

2.0.2 The following issues are identified in the urban environment section of the existing Southland District Plan:

- The need to provide for the efficient use and development of utility networks whilst avoiding and mitigating adverse environmental effects.
- The need to protect and conserve the District's significant cultural heritage resources including buildings, objects and archaeological sites.
- The need to provide opportunity for housing in a manner that maintains and enhances the quality of the environment.
- The need to monitor development in the peri-urban areas, and take steps to counter any short-term or long-term environmental effects of that development.

2.0.3 Each of these issues have been reviewed to assess whether or not they remain relevant in Southland today. What we have found is that most of the issues are still relevant and indeed some of these have increased in importance including:

- There has been expansion of urban environments in a number of locations across Southland which have brought with them a range of issues such as the provision of infrastructure, loss of productive soil, transportation effects and effects on amenity;
- There is an increasing awareness of the effect land use can have upon infrastructure such as the 'three waters' (drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater) and transportation networks;
- There are issues to be addressed around onsite wastewater disposal in non-reticulated urban areas;
- Advances in technology offer a means to address the cumulative effects of the urban environment; in particular with respect to the effects urban environments can have upon water and air quality; and
- The amenity or environmental quality of the built environment is something that is becoming increasingly important. Issues have arisen around the region with respect to

the level of amenity provided by District Plans – provisions such as maximum permitted height of buildings or density of development have been questioned.

3.0 What has changed and what are the issues now and for the future?

3.0.1 The current international trend in town planning has been a return to traditional ‘master planning methods’. This contrasts with the prevalent trend of ‘reactive’ planning which has relied upon market led development. The growing realisation of the need to move towards a more sustainable society has seen a return in some locations within New Zealand to these more traditional planning methods, albeit through the use of new tools such as:

- Structure Plans - Structure Plans are defined by the Quality Planning Website as a framework to guide the development or redevelopment of a particular area by defining the future development and land use patterns, areas of open space, the layout and nature of infrastructure (including transportation links), and other key features for managing the effects of development. In Southland structure plans could be useful in areas like Invercargill, Winton, Te Anau and Riverton where there is both growth occurring and pressure for further growth.
- Growth Management Strategies – these are generally used to provide a strategic planning direction and a link between the different functions of local government such as planning, infrastructure provision and service delivery.
- Design Guidelines – these are often non statutory documents providing guidance to developers and individuals as to how buildings (in particular) should be designed and sited. In Southland at present these exist with respect to the Te Anau and Riverton townships, and the Invercargill CBD. There could be the potential for the wider application of these; especially given the responsibilities of the Councils in Southland who are signatories to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol.

3.0.2 The principal issue for consideration in Southland is whether or not the RPS and District Plans are providing for quality urban environments. The District Plans for Invercargill, Southland and Gore were prepared in a time of economic decline. Growth has placed pressure on these plans and as mentioned above some provisions of these, including those relating to amenity, and amenity protection, have been called into question.

3.0.3 Additionally, the 2005 Resource Management Act Amendments require Environment Southland undertake the strategic integration of infrastructure with land use through objectives, policies and methods.

4.0 Options for addressing issues

- 4.0.1 Internationally and in New Zealand, there has been a return to more traditional planning methods—This is an influence the Regional Policy Statement process needs to assess across all of the spheres it encompasses and determine what is an appropriate response through the policy framework of the RPS.
- 4.0.2 It certainly may have some merit in terms of urban environments to give local territorial authorities direction to use certain tools to address the issues they are facing. It also seems that in the urban areas of Southland there may be an upcoming period of growth in certain places. Given the potential for these ‘growth spurts’ the need to ensure robust planning frameworks are in place giving some direction to where growth or development occurs, and to some extent, what form it will take is essential. The relationship of this to a number of sectors, particularly transportation planning is also an important consideration.
- 4.0.3 Associated with this are issues around infrastructure related to the urban environment that need to be addressed. As a part of the urban environment infrastructure and network utilities are necessary for growth. As infrastructure is renewed or extended there are opportunities to utilise certain new technologies than can offer improvements over current systems. An example of this is in improvements to the quality of stormwater through primary treatment methods. There is also the need to address the issue of urban environments where there is no, or limited reticulated infrastructure and the effects this brings with it.
- 4.0.4 If there is to be a period of growth in Southland around certain industries, providing quality urban environments for people to work, live and play in order to attract a workforce to the region is important. The Regional Policy Statement will give local territorial authorities a policy direction as to how to further shape this environment. The current Regional Policy Statement is ‘close to the mark’ in terms of the issues identified within it; however some adjustments may be required to provide clearer direction including the use of more traditional planning methods to achieve a sustainable urban environment in Southland.

5.0 Questions for your comment

- 5.0.1 Below are a number of questions to stimulate comment. The first set relate to the review of the RPS, whilst the second set relate to the Southland District Plan Review. There is also a

degree of ‘cross – over’ between the questions and the RPS questions could be of significance for the SDC plan review process and vice versa. It is also noted that what is an issue for SDC in the context of their District Plan review may be an issue for ICC or GDC in the context of the RPS review – comments to this effect are welcomed.

5.1 **Regional Policy Statement Review**

1. What role should Environment Southland as the regional council have with respect to issues of urban form and settlement location? What are your views about Environment Southland becoming a signatory to the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol? Will this in your view assist in ensuring the urban environments of Southland are quality environments?
2. Are the Seven C’s, outlined in The New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (section 1.1 of the full urban issues paper) with respect to characterising quality urban design, demonstrated in current urban centres throughout Southland. If not, should they and how?
3. Is there a need for District Plans to provide a range of performance standards for different types of residential development? Additionally should Councils be providing for ‘serviced’ rural residential development?
4. Are there character neighbourhoods in Southland that need heritage protection, or at least some recognition?
5. What existing amenity values should be protected in District Plans and what amenity values should be provided for into the future?
6. Should the RPS promote planning mechanisms such as cluster zoning in rural areas to facilitate ‘lifestyle’ development in a more controlled manner?
7. Should the RPS give direction to Councils to investigate different sets of rules for different communities to address competing demands and pressures? i.e. are the same set of rules appropriate in a settlement where rapid growth is occurring, against a settlement that may be in decline?

5.2 **Southland District Plan Review**

1. Should the Southland District Council take a more proactive approach to the issue of limiting urban sprawl and look to consolidate growth within existing urban areas?

2. Where there is significant scope for residential development in existing consented subdivisions (for example Te Anau) should the Southland District Council look to formulate policy and rules that encourages the construction of new dwellings in these areas rather approving new subdivisions and adding more capacity?
3. How should demand for rural lifestyle properties of the fringes of the Southland District's existing urban areas be managed?
4. Has the use of non-regulatory guidelines been a useful approach in terms of addressing urban growth issues that have arisen in Riverton and Te Anau in recent years?
5. Should the Southland District Council examine options for the greater protection of high value soils and productive land on the rural/urban fringe from urban development?