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MINISTRY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

NEW ZEALAND URBAN DESIGN PROTOCOL
- Action plan progress report 2006

January 2007

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Highlights

- The first survey of signatories to the *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* has found a strong commitment in many organisations to building awareness and understanding of urban design and to producing good urban design outcomes.

- Design champions have been effective in promoting urban design and the champions' network is important in supporting this role.

- The Protocol has helped to raise the profile of urban design in organisations and communities and to provide a common 'language' for talking about urban design.

- Some signatories are re-evaluating their approach to development projects to integrate urban design principles more fully.

- The Protocol has encouraged signatories to engage in more collaborative processes with other organisations and communities to address urban design issues.

- There is increasing recognition of the benefits of good design.

- Management support, adequate budget and access to urban design skills are seen by signatories as important in making actions successful.

- Signatories using a multidisciplinary approach to urban design projects have found this helps to embed urban design across the organisation.

- Most signatories used resources provided by the Ministry for the Environment to help develop and implement their action plans and half had discussions with Ministry staff.

- Many signatories stressed the importance of continuing government support for the Protocol.

Introduction

The *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* was launched in March 2005 to foster improvement in the quality of New Zealand's towns and cities through urban design. Signatories to the Protocol include central and local government organisations, property developers and investors, consultants involved in planning, design and related fields, professional institutes, educational institutes and a wide variety of sector organisations.

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. The first round of monitoring, carried out in October 2006, provides the signatories' evaluation of their experience and the level of success they have achieved. Further investigation is needed to determine whether this evaluation is consistent with perceptions of other people who have been involved with, or are affected by, the actions being implemented. However, the results indicate that healthy progress is being made towards giving effect to the Protocol.

The monitoring survey

The 104 signatories who had joined to the Protocol before February 2006 were asked to respond to a survey asking for information about progress they are making in implementing their action plans and what impacts their actions are having. Two more recent signatories also chose to take part. Of the full group, 68 submitted responses. As well as evaluating their overall action plans, signatories provided comment on progress being made on 310 specific actions. Nine of the signatories who responded have not yet submitted their action plans; they were asked about the factors that are hindering them from doing this.

Action being taken

There is a high level of commitment in many organisations to building awareness and understanding of urban design and to producing good design outcomes. Some organisations are putting considerable effort into changing internal processes to facilitate better decision-making on urban design issues.

Action plans include a wide range of actions, with signatories generally taking one of two key approaches. Some see their commitment to the Protocol as providing a framework and stronger focus for work they are already carrying out and have used the action plan to pull together and enhance existing projects and processes. Others view the commitment to the Protocol as a challenge to try new ways of doing work. Responses to the survey indicate that the second approach carries the potential for both greater difficulties and greater benefits.

Actions have been divided into four main categories: developing awareness and understanding; improving urban design processes; developing design guidelines; and design projects.

Developing awareness and understanding: Each signatory is required to appoint a design champion to promote urban design within and beyond the organisation and to challenge existing approaches. As well as this, actions that are being taken to develop awareness and understanding of urban design range from providing training for staff to holding public forums or making submissions on urban design issues. Some local authorities (for example Auckland City Council) have set up awards programmes to recognise and celebrate good design in their communities, and others are investigating this. Some consultants are working with clients to encourage them to try new approaches to development. A few organisations are carrying out urban design research and some are promoting tools – such as health impact assessment and community street audits – that are helpful in thinking about urban design.

Improving urban design processes: Organisational processes are being changed to make sure urban design principles are considered early and often during policy and development projects. Some signatories are reviewing their policies and strategies to incorporate urban design. Others are setting up multi-disciplinary project teams to provide a more holistic approach for development projects. Peer review processes are also being used by several signatories in both the public and private sectors to critique major development projects before they are finalised. Collaborative approaches are being taken to involve other organisations and the community in deciding the shape of development. Some councils are also applying a multi-disciplinary "case management" approach and peer review procedures to the way they deal with resource consent applications.

Developing design guidelines: Several signatories are developing and implementing guidelines for various types of development. These include guidelines for subdivision, commercial landscaping, heritage, high density residential development, cellphone networks, and public areas as well as general urban design guides.

Design projects: Signatories are also carrying out physical design projects, ranging from regeneration of urban areas and development of new residential areas to incorporating aesthetic design aspects into utilitarian buildings such as public toilets.

A quarter of the actions reported on have been completed, and by the end of 2007 this will rise to half. Many of the other actions are ongoing, without a defined end date. Of the nine respondents who had not submitted action plans, two thirds indicated they were close to completion and all anticipated submitting their plans before the end of 2007.

Support for implementation

Most signatories who responded to the survey have drawn on support from the Ministry for the Environment in developing and implementing their action plans – three quarters of those who had submitted action plans have used resources provided by the Ministry and half have had discussions with Ministry staff.

A large majority of survey respondents felt that their design champions have been effective in helping to promote urban design both within and beyond the signatory organisations. The champions' network is generally seen as an important forum for maintaining the profile of urban design and building understanding of what it means, although some signatories identified opportunities to spread information more widely.

As well as these sources of support, many signatories have made use of other resources and networks. Discussion and collaboration with other organisations and resources obtained from outside the network of signatories were generally seen as more significant than the champions' network and support from the Ministry for the Environment in developing and implementing the action plans.

Impacts of actions

The signatories who responded to the survey rated two thirds of their actions as having "good" or "excellent" outcomes, with 31 percent assessed as "fair" and only 4 percent as "poor". Although varying degrees of success are being achieved in implementing actions, and some actions need more time to produce results, many signatories are already seeing clear benefits emerging.

Respondents anticipate that most actions will result in achievement of multiple benefits. Over 40 percent have already achieved benefits in increased awareness and understanding, and a similar number are expected to result in benefits in this area over time. Thirty percent of actions have resulted in benefits in terms of improved decision-making and a similar number are perceived to have enhanced skills and knowledge. In each of these areas a further 40 percent of actions are expected to provide benefits in future.

Action plans have been effective in providing signatory organisations with a clearer focus on urban design and in building a strong commitment to urban design. Project managers and staff in policy, regulatory, asset management and development roles are increasingly

considering urban design principles in their work and asking for advice to assist this. Some signatories have allocated extra resources so staff are able to provide urban design input across the organisation.

Developers are recognising the benefits of design-led development in smoothing consent application processes. They are also realising the commercial benefits to be gained from good urban design, as customers are becoming increasingly aware of its importance.

Signatories report that media coverage of urban design issues is increasing and people are demanding better design in their communities. As examples of good design become visible, the organisations responsible are experiencing greater public support and enhanced reputations. Contractors involved in constructing well-designed developments are also reported as gaining a sense of pride in the project, leading to greater efforts to produce work of a high quality. One signatory referred to an experience in which specialist input in project design, as well as resulting in a more attractive building, led to cost savings through use of non-traditional materials.

The Urban Design Protocol is seen by signatories as valuable in articulating what urban design is and providing a common "language" for talking about urban design. It has provided an additional impetus for some organisations and increased the likelihood of action being taken on urban design issues.

Key success factors

Key factors influencing the success of an action are support from management, provision of sufficient resources in the budget, and access to the necessary skills. Signatories also see it as important to have statutory backing to support the approach being taken. Other factors contributing to success include support in the wider organisation, commitments in annual and strategic plans and good working relationships with other key players.

While some actions have encountered specific problems, few signatories identified barriers to overall implementation. The biggest factor hindering progress is a lack of sufficient time to devote to actions. This is especially a problem if commitments to the Urban Design Protocol are responsibilities imposed in addition to a full existing workload.

Signatories have learnt, through implementing their action plans, that it is important to allow sufficient time to embed an understanding of urban design throughout an organisation and to establish new processes. Achieving visible success in early projects can have a positive influence on this. It is critical to get buy-in from key people in the organisation and to make sure sufficient resources are provided to undertake and complete actions.

Future direction

Momentum on urban design is still building, but it is important that this be maintained into the future. Continuing effort on the part of both the Ministry for the Environment and signatories to the Protocol will be needed to build understanding of urban design further and to obtain more consistent levels of success. In particular, attention needs to be given to ways of building the level of urban design skills across the country and to increasing communication and collaboration between signatories.

Specific ways in which the Ministry could support implementation of the Protocol in future include providing further information resources to assist signatories, and encouraging education providers to develop urban design training opportunities. There would be value in developing a process for providing feedback to signatories on whether their actions are the right track. There are also opportunities to develop a more co-ordinated approach to urban design across government, and to find ways of better integrating urban design into strategic policy frameworks.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* ("the Protocol") was introduced by the Government to foster improvement in the quality of New Zealand's towns and cities through urban design. It was launched in March 2005 with 78 initial signatories, and a further 41 organisations had signed up by the time this survey was carried out. Current signatories to the Protocol include central and local government organisations, property developers and investors, consultants involved in planning, design, engineering and related fields, professional institutes, educational institutes and a variety of sector organisations.

Signatories make a commitment to develop action plans for their organisations to put the Protocol into effect, and to submit these plans to the Ministry for the Environment within six months of signing up. They are also required to monitor implementation of the actions and report every two years to the Ministry on this. Monitoring of action plans will assist the Ministry for the Environment to track progress in implementation of actions and to determine the impact signatories are having through implementing the action plans. It will also provide guidance for future direction by identifying lessons learnt and any barriers to implementation of action plans.

This report presents the results of the first round of monitoring carried out in October 2006. Only the 104 organisations who had signed up before 1 February 2006 were required to monitor their action plans for this first report-back as these signatories should have submitted action plans by the time monitoring was undertaken. More recent signatories will be incorporated in the next review in 2008.

# 2. THE MONITORING SURVEY

2.1 Survey methodology

In October 2006, all organisations that had signed up to the Protocol before 1 February 2006, as well as two more recent signatories who also chose to take part in monitoring, were given the opportunity to complete an electronic survey. The survey comprised two parts: a questionnaire on overall experience in implementing action plans (to be completed by all respondents); and a questionnaire to be completed on progress for each action undertaken (this was not required to be completed by respondents who had not yet submitted action plans). The questionnaires asked for information about progress made in implementing the action plans, evaluation of the level of success achieved, factors contributing to or hindering progress, and any lessons learnt from the experience. A copy of the questionnaires is attached as Appendix 1. Signatories were given two weeks to submit their responses, and a reminder was sent to them three days before this time had elapsed.

After initial analysis of responses, a cross-section of respondents was invited to participate in a follow-up interview to focus in more detail on aspects of their experience. Matters canvassed included respondents' views on the impact of the action plan on urban design processes (particularly organisational processes and decision-making), as well as their thoughts about the future direction that should be taken by the Ministry for the Environment to assist signatories to achieve the objectives of the Protocol. Twelve interviews were carried out with signatories representing the range of sectors and geographic locations. They included large and small organisations, and both those that are nationally focused and those that work in a more local context.

This monitoring report provides the signatories' own evaluation of their experience and the level of success they have achieved. Further investigation, including discussion with other stakeholders, would be required to determine whether this evaluation is consistent with perceptions of other people who have been involved with, or are affected by, the actions being implemented by signatories.

2.2 Overview of responses

Of the 106 signatories who were sent the survey, only 68 (or 64 percent) submitted responses. A breakdown of response rates from different types of organisation is shown in Figure 1. While half of the respondents are based in either Auckland or Wellington, organisations in centres from Kaikohe to Invercargill were represented.
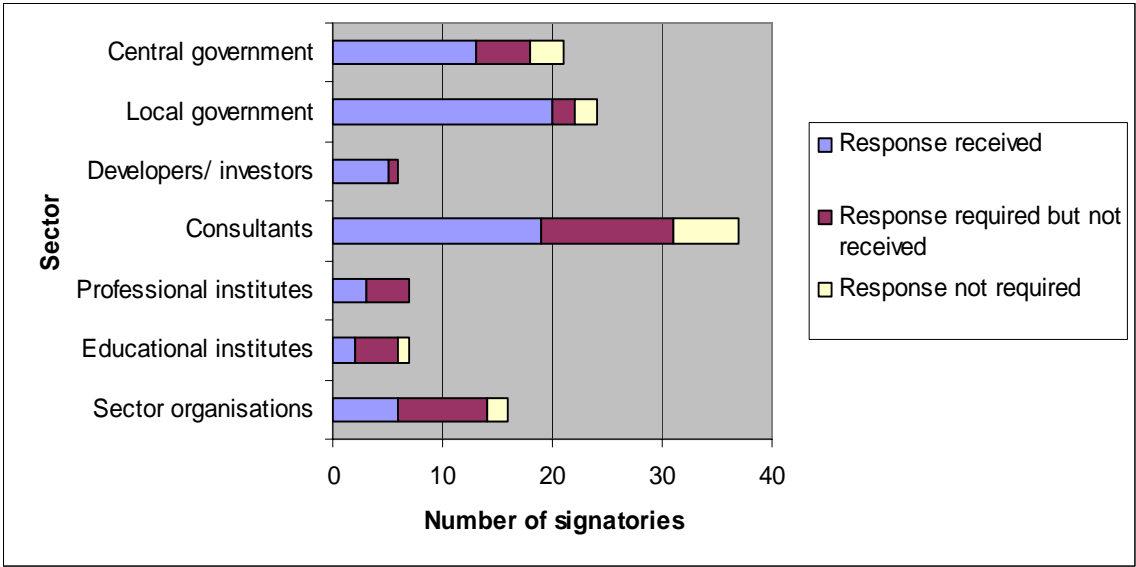
Figure 1: Survey responses

The highest response rates were obtained from the developer/investor and local government sectors, and the lowest from educational and professional institutes and sector organisations. While it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the reason for this, the relative extent to which respondents see themselves as dealing with urban design issues as a core part of their day-to-day work might be a contributing factor. In the case of sector organisations and professional institutes, some respondents are carrying out their roles in addition to other fulltime employment.

Of the 68 signatories who responded to the survey, 59 (87 percent) had submitted action plans to the Ministry for the Environment. Of the nine who had not submitted action plans, two thirds indicated that they were close to completion and all anticipated submitting their plans before the end of 2007. The factors hindering completion of action plans are discussed later in this report.

All respondents except one completed the questionnaire on overall experience in implementing action plans, with the remaining respondent completing only the part of the survey seeking information about individual actions. However, 16 respondents who had submitted action plans did not complete the questionnaire on individual actions. In some

cases these respondents had only recently begun to implement actions; in others it is not clear why this part of the survey was not completed.

No professional institutes and only one developer completed the questionnaire on individual actions. However, signatories in these sectors did provide some information about individual actions in their responses on overall experience. In the other sectors, respondents reporting on individual actions were representative of both the geographic spread of signatories and the range of large and small organisations.

3. IMPLEMENTING ACTION PLANS

3.1 Overview of action plans

The scale of actions and the approach taken in action plans varies widely, reflecting the diversity of signatories to the Protocol. A few respondents commented on the limitations of the action plan as a tool to accommodate some types of actions. For example, one signatory found it difficult to fit some projects, particularly physical design works, into the categories provided. This signatory also felt that the action plan approach does not provide an adequate means of measuring achievements in ongoing, complex processes – particularly where the way the process is carried out, rather than its outputs, is most important. Another respondent felt that the approach does not easily fit the role of some sector organisations who are involved in advocacy on specific matters related to urban design rather than directly affecting current practice.

While there is a wide range of actions included in action plans, signatories appeared to take one of two key approaches to developing the plans. In the first approach, signatories see their commitment to the Protocol as providing a framework and stronger focus for work they are already carrying out and have used the action plan to pull together and enhance existing projects and processes. With the second approach, signatories view the commitment to the Protocol as a challenge to try new ways of doing work. Organisations adopting the second approach have developed action plans that include new projects and new approaches to existing processes. Responses to the survey indicate that the second approach carries the potential for both greater difficulties and greater benefits.

Half of the plans reported on by respondents contain fewer than 10 actions. However, five respondents are each working towards implementing more than 20, with one respondent having a plan that includes 31 actions. Some respondents only completed the part of the survey on the overall action plan, but individual survey forms were completed for 310 actions. This represents 52 percent of all the respondents' actions and 37 percent of the total number of actions included in action plans submitted by the time of the survey.

It is difficult to get a full picture of progress made in implementing actions, as some respondents did not submit questionnaires on actions which have not yet been started. However, an indication of progress made can be obtained from the anticipated completion dates reported for individual actions. Figure 2 indicates the anticipated time for completion of the 310 actions reported on. A quarter of these actions (77) have been completed. Of the others, a further 73 are expected to be completed by the end of 2007. Ninety actions (29 percent) were recorded as being ongoing; these included half of the actions which have been commenced but not completed.
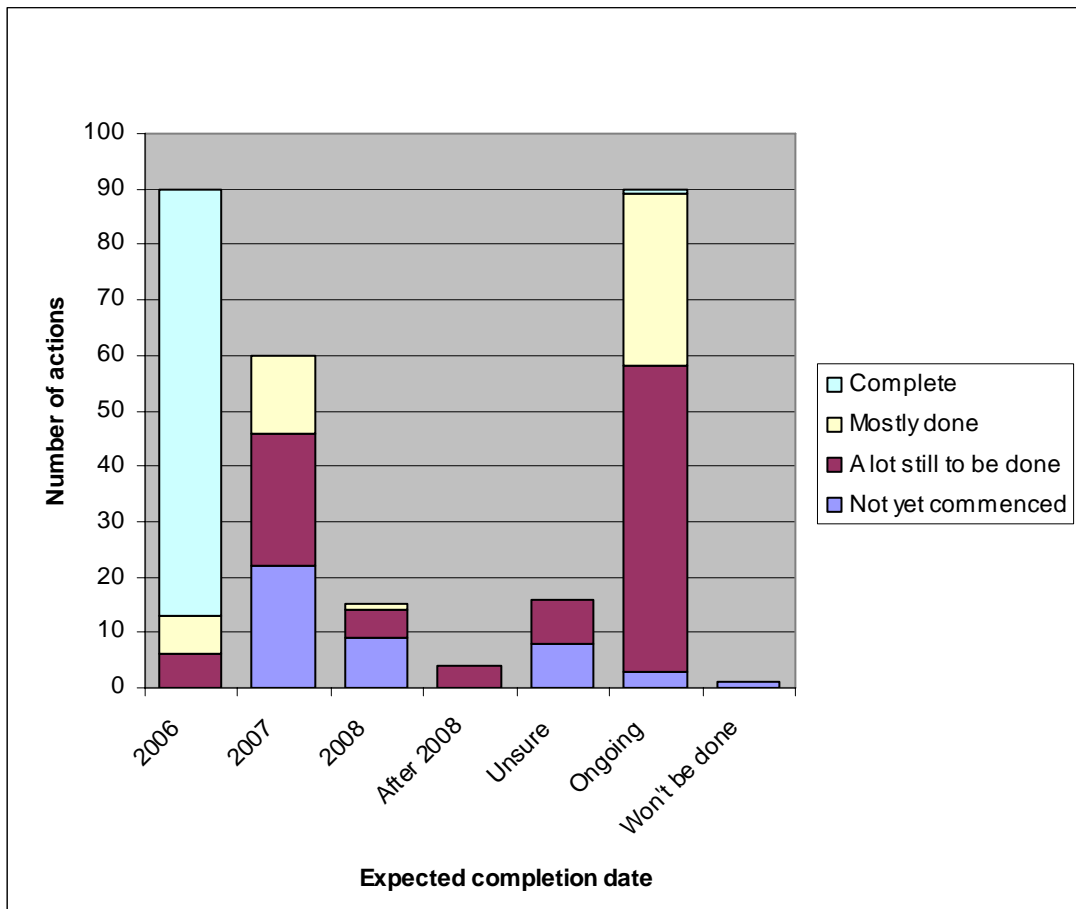
Figure 2: Timeframes for completion of actions

For all actions they had started to implement, signatories were asked to assess the overall success of the action. Two thirds of the actions were rated as having "good" or "excellent" outcomes, with 31 percent assessed as "fair" and only 4 percent as "poor". A breakdown of the way respondents in each sector rated their actions is shown in Figure 3 (for sectors reporting on more than one action).
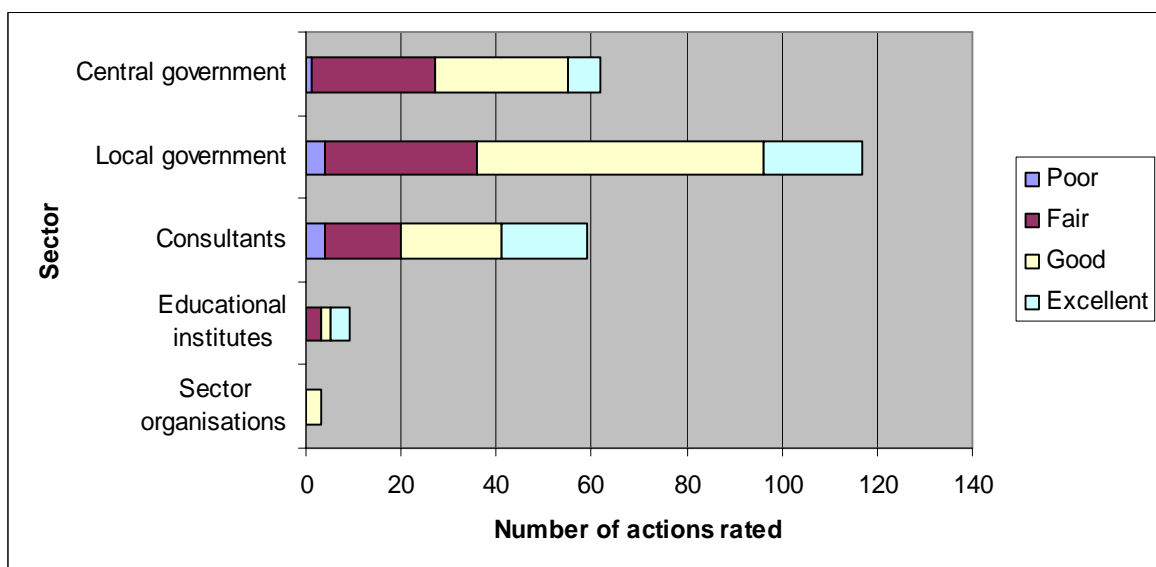
Figure 3: Rating by respondents of success of individual actions

Respondents provided some tips for making action plans successful. Several stressed the need to keep the plan small, simple and achievable within the resources available to the organisation; however, one signatory felt that it is important to be ambitious and raise expectations in developing the plan and then seek to get the resources to make sure expectations can be met. The need to choose actions that can be monitored, and to include qualitative assessment of outcomes as well as completion of actions, was also identified. Some signatories also urged that action plans should be viewed as an ongoing, open-ended programme rather than a group of finite actions to be "ticked off".

An integrated approach to developing a successful plan

A central government agency, faced with the need to develop a plan reflecting and integrating both its policy and provider roles, decided to involve people from across the organisation in developing its action plan. A cross-disciplinary team was drawn together, including policy, operational and human resources staff. The extra time required to develop the plan in this way has paid off in obtaining buy-in across the organisation. To further embed the action plan and ensure successful implementation, incorporation of urban design has been made a performance indicator for relevant staff. Education has been provided throughout the organisation to support this approach.

3.2 The range of actions

Respondents were asked to categorise each action in relation to one or more of the action types described in the *Action Pack*[1] provided by the Ministry for the Environment to all signatories. The categorisation of actions by signatories is shown in Figure 4, and differs in several ways from the breakdown provided in the *Urban Design Action Plan Review*[2] carried out by the Ministry in March 2006. Differences include the following:

- The breakdown only includes actions reported on specifically in the survey, rather than all actions of all signatories.

- The breakdown shows the proportion of actions in each category, rather than the proportion of signatories submitting actions in each category.

- The categorisation of actions in Figure 4 reflects the perception of signatories as to the appropriate categories for actions.

- Signatories were given the option of identifying more than one category for each action, and many actions were assigned multiple categories.

Actions aimed at championing urban design and raising awareness have a strong emphasis similar to that apparent in the *Urban Design Action Plan Review* breakdown. However, actions aimed at developing strategy to increase the quality of the built environment and those concerned with being a good client have less prominence. Conversely, actions aimed at making better urban design decisions are given much greater emphasis. This emphasis, as

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[1] *Action Pack*. Ministry for the Environment, March 2005.
[2] *Urban Design Action Plan Review*. Ministry for the Environment, March 2006.

well as the strong focus on awareness-raising actions, is apparent in comments made by respondents about changes they have seen in their organisations as a result of involvement with the Protocol.
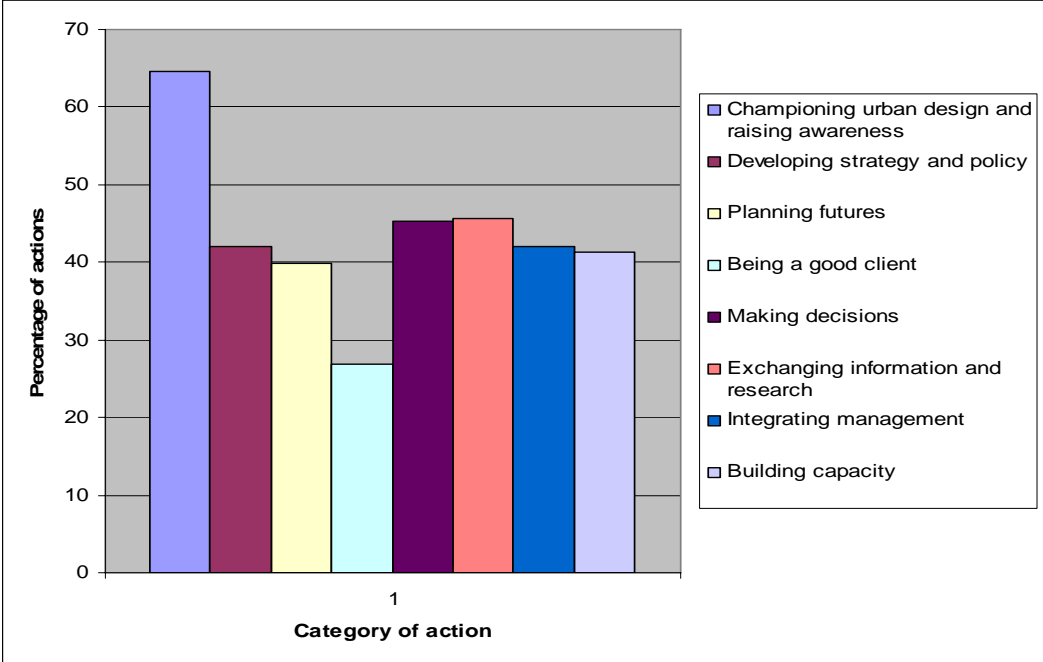
Figure 4: Proportion of actions contributing to Action Pack categories

As many of the actions do not clearly fall into a single category, they have been broken down in a different way to assist analysis in this report. Objectives of the survey include assessing the influence of action plans on awareness of urban design, on urban design processes and on design outcomes. To facilitate this assessment it is useful to group the actions according to their focus on one of the following:

- developing awareness and understanding

- improving urban design processes

- developing design guidelines (this group falls between actions concerned with processes and those concerned with outcomes)

- design projects.

The actions reported on in each of these groups are described below.

(a) Developing awareness and understanding

Actions aimed at developing awareness and understanding include both those focusing on internal understanding of urban design and those seeking to increase awareness beyond the organisation.

Of the respondents who reported on individual actions, a majority are implementing at least one action aimed at increasing awareness and understanding in their organisation, and some have identified several. Most of these internally directed actions can be generally described as capacity-building initiatives. They include providing opportunities for exposure to the

experience of others by way of access to urban design resources and attendance at seminars and workshops, as well as seeking opportunities for more formal training. A few signatories have restructured internal teams or employed specialist urban designers to increase the overall skills and capacity of the organisation. Some (for example, the University of Otago) are carrying out research to improve their understanding of urban design issues. In addition to capacity-building there are also some actions aimed at spreading awareness among specific parts of the organisation (for example, by holding councillor workshops) or more broadly (for example, by means of newsletters or internal seminars).

The range of actions being implemented to build awareness and understanding of urban design outside the organisation is much wider. It includes:

- developing presentations and training for specific groups

- holding public forums to raise general awareness

- publicising examples of good design (including setting up awards programmes)

- promoting and discussing urban design in existing sectoral forums

- establishing urban design interest groups to share experience

- encouraging other organisations to become signatories

- advocacy by way of submissions on particular issues or projects

- using consultation on specific projects to influence peers, clients and other agencies involved to consider alternative approaches

- gathering information and carrying out research on urban design issues and disseminating the results

- promoting the use of tools which are helpful in thinking about urban design (for example, health impact assessment and community street audits).

Using new tools to build understanding of development impacts

Health impact assessment is being promoted by the Ministry of Health as a tool to assist decision-making at a policy and project level in creating healthy communities through sustainable urban design. Some initiatives it has been applied to recently include Mangere's *Let's Beat Diabetes* campaign (to highlight aspects of urban design that might contribute to a reduction of obesity levels in the district), assessing the health and wellbeing impacts of the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy, the impacts of future urban intensification in Avondale, and assisting the transport sector to meet public health objectives of the New Zealand Transport Strategy 2002. A Health Impact Assessment Support Unit is to be set up within the Ministry of Health by mid-2007 to work across central and local government.

(b) Improving urban design processes

Many signatories are implementing actions that involve taking a fresh look at the strategic direction of their organisation, including the content of key strategy and policy documents, to determine whether there are ways in which urban design can be given greater weight. A few have focused on incorporating urban design into strategic plans and long-term council community plans, or securing greater provision for urban design in organisational budgets. However, most are concentrating on particular strategies which have urban design implications. As would be expected, these include strategies addressing transport, growth, urban form and heritage, but there are also actions that look at issues of social behaviour, safety and public art. While most of the signatories undertaking these actions are local authorities, some are being implemented by central government agencies.

Many local authorities are investigating whether provisions of regional policy statements, regional plans and district plans should be amended to provide a stronger direction or better guidance on urban design. Both local authorities and central government agencies, as well as a few consultants, have also identified actions to review policies, procedures and development projects across the organisation to determine whether urban design principles should be incorporated. Two central government agencies are intending to review policies for funding capital construction projects to incorporate urban design considerations.

The action plan has been used by some signatories as an impetus to re-evaluating their approach to development projects. These organisations have identified actions which aim to facilitate consideration of urban design principles much earlier in the process than has typically been the case in the past, and to ensure that consideration continues through the life of the project. Actions include:

- increasing emphasis on forward planning and master planning

- establishing multidisciplinary (and multi-organisation) project teams from the conceptual stage of a project

- formal internal or external peer review processes for major projects

- increased consultation with stakeholders and the community in development of projects

- seeking specialist urban design advice.

Similar actions have been implemented by some local authorities in dealing with proposals that require resource consent. These include integrated "case management" approaches introduced by two councils to facilitate the process for consent applicants. Auckland and Manukau City Councils and Hastings District Council have established specialist urban design panels to assess proposals and provide advice about incorporating urban design principles, and two other councils intending to investigate doing this.

As well as actions focusing on internal processes, several signatories have identified actions involving collaboration with other organisations. These include participation in whole-of-government initiatives, council planning initiatives and joint strategic projects such as the Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy and the Auckland Regional Growth Forum.

Two signatories have identified monitoring and evaluation of actions as a specific action in itself, providing a useful reminder about the need to do this.

(c) Developing design guidelines

Design guidelines are an important tool for interpreting policies in a way that can be incorporated into design projects. Several signatories are undertaking, or intend to undertake, actions to prepare and implement guidelines for various types of development. Some examples of these are:

- preparation of subdivision and development principles and requirements prepared by Kapiti Coast District Council to encourage innovative and sustainable development

- Policy and Guidelines for Responsible Network Deployment developed by Vodafone New Zealand to minimise visual and other environmental impacts of mobile phone sites

- public realm guidelines to be developed by Manukau City Council.

(d) Design projects

A few signatories have actions that seek broadly to deliver high quality design in all development projects, for example by applying an "urban design checklist" or streetscape requirements to all projects. Some others have focused on enhancing the quality specifications that apply to contractors engaged in a project – these provide for quality criteria in tender procedures and incorporation of urban design elements into contracts and construction briefs.

A greater proportion of actions are more directly focused on the design of projects. One group of these, identified by local government signatories, includes broad scale planning projects such as frameworks for redevelopment of particular urban areas. The other group, which is being implemented by both public and private sector signatories, includes specific physical projects ranging in scale from residential developments and public buildings to new paving and graffiti minimisation.

While most actions are concerned with design projects initiated by signatory organisations or their clients, Far North District Council also provides grant funding to assist communities to initiate community improvement projects.

A collaborative approach to design

Auckland City Council held an international competition for the design of Matiatia, the coastal and wetland gateway to Waiheke Island. Workshops were held with the community to agree the urban design principles. These were used to set the competition brief and some members of the community have been included in the judging team. The public have also had the opportunity for input on the range of designs submitted.

3.3 Support for implementation

Signatories have the scope to develop and implement action plans in the way that best suits their roles and the way their organisations work. However, there are two "foundation stones" that all signatories have in common. The first is access to urban design resources and advice from the Ministry for the Environment. The second is the appointment of a Design Champion within each signatory organisation and, through this appointment, access to a network of other Design Champions. As well as these sources of support, many signatories have made use of other resources and networks. The survey sought to gauge the degree to which these have been helpful in developing and implementing action plans.

(a) Support from the Ministry for the Environment

The majority of respondents have drawn on support from the Ministry for the Environment in developing and implementing their action plans. Overall, three quarters of those who had submitted action plans indicated that they used resources provided by the Ministry and half had discussions with Ministry staff. Table 1 shows the number of respondents from each sector who used the support available from the Ministry. Signatories in the local government sector made the most use of the resources, with 94 percent of all local government respondents referring to these. On the other hand, central government agencies were more likely than signatories in any other sector to talk directly with Ministry for the Environment staff, with 9 out of the 11 of them doing this. This may be a reflection of existing relationships between central government agencies.

Table 1: Use of support from Ministry for the Environment

Sector	Use of MfE resources				Discussions with MfE staff			
	Yes	No	Unsure	Total	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
Central government	8	3	0	11	9	2	0	11
Local government	15	1	0	16	9	4	2	15
Developer/investor	2	2	0	4	1	3	0	4
Consultant	14	3	0	17	4	10	1	15
Professional institute	2	1	0	3	2	1	0	3
Educational institute	1	1	0	2	1	1	0	2
Sector organisation	3	0	1	4	4	0	0	4
Total[3]	**45**	**11**	**1**	**57**	**30**	**21**	**3**	**54**

Of the urban design resources made available by the Ministry, the Urban Design Toolkit and the *Action Pack* were used most. While two thirds of respondents used the Toolkit, people had mixed views about its value to them. Some ranked it as the most useful resource, but several felt it was pitched at too high a level for their use. In follow-up interviews, three people identified a need for more specific technical guidance about how to apply urban design principles in practice – one referred to the UK Urban Design Compendium as an example of

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[3] Totals vary because not all respondents answered each question.

such guidance. Two signatories also identified a need for more information about integrating urban design and transport systems.

The *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* itself was also identified by a significant number of signatories as a useful resource. Two signatories in follow-up interviews highlighted the value of the document in articulating what urban design is and providing a common "language" for talking about urban design.

Besides these key documents, signatories also used a variety of other resources. These included:

- other Protocol supporting documents (*The Value of Urban Design*[4] and *Urban Design Case Studies*)

- *People, Places, Spaces*[5]

- champions' network newsletters, e-mails and workshops

- resources on the Ministry for the Environment and Quality Planning websites.

One respondent was frustrated that *The Value of Urban Design* was not available in hard copy for distribution to interested people (although a summary of this document was produced in hard copy). This signatory and one other thought it would also be helpful to have further resources evaluating the costs and benefits of approaches to urban design.

(b) The role of the Design Champion

The one action required of all signatories is to appoint a Design Champion at a senior level in the organisation to promote and champion urban design and challenge existing approaches in the organisation. Champions are given support and encouragement to carry out this role through the Urban Design Champions' Network.

A large majority of survey respondents felt that their Design Champions have been effective in helping to promote urban design both within and beyond the signatory organisations, and in networking with others through the champions' network. For example, champions in local government have persuaded councillors and managers of the importance of urban design. They have also supported staff in seeking improvements in urban design. Outside the organisation, champions have been active in leading forums, making presentations to their peers and advocating for good urban design in relation to specific issues. Champions in the private sector have also worked to encourage clients to seek specialist advice on urban design to improve the quality of their projects. One local government respondent stated that the champion's strong leadership "is enabling significant and fundamental changes to occur both internally and externally in the city".

Views on the effectiveness of champions in challenging the way their organisations approach urban design were more mixed; however, 60 percent felt they had had some effect. Examples of the way this role has been carried out include advocating for design review on major projects, identifying opportunities for the organisation to become more involved in urban design issues and promoting strong relationships with agencies who can contribute their experience.

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[4] *The Value of Urban Design: The economic, environmental and social benefits of urban design.* Ministry for the Environment, June 2005.
[5] *People, Places, Spaces: A design guide for urban New Zealand.* Ministry for the Environment, June 2001.

Overall, the role was seen as most helpful in promoting urban design within the organisation, with less achieved through networking and challenging existing approaches. Some signatories commented that the ability for their champions to be effective was hindered by a lack of resources to support their role. While most champions have participated in the champions' network, involvement of some has been limited by competing demands on their time. The lack of both time and other resources (including resources to provide adequate staff support) has also hindered some champions' ability to promote urban design externally.

In general, signatories see the champions' network as an important forum for maintaining the profile of urban design and building understanding of what it means. However, some felt that there is a need to spread the benefits more widely, both geographically and throughout signatory organisations. Because of other demands on their time, some champions find it difficult to get the opportunity to disseminate what they have learnt in champions' workshops throughout their organisations. Several from outside the main centres, and in the South Island generally, were also frustrated by the lack of workshop opportunities close to where they work. The time required to get to and from workshops in distant centres was seen as a significant obstacle to their participation. Two respondents, one from the central government and one from the private sector, commented that they would benefit from more opportunities in workshops to hear the experience of others working in their sectors.

Some signatories commented on the influence that the level of seniority of champions within their organisations has had on their effectiveness. Most comments supported the need to have signatories at a leadership level, and two were taking steps to appoint champions at a higher level. However, some respondents noted that such people often have multiple responsibilities and that this can limit the time they are able to devote to the champion role. A solution that some signatories, particularly in the local government sector, have adopted is to have two champions – one at a leadership level and one involved in management or implementation. One respondent commented that the variety of levels at which different champions operate is not easily catered for by the champions network. This respondent suggested there is a need for workshops pitched at each level, with "big picture" workshops on promoting the benefits of urban design for the leadership level and technical workshops for the management/ operational level.

(c) Working with others

While the support available from the Ministry for the Environment and the champions' network were important, discussion and collaboration with other organisations and resources obtained from outside the network of signatories were generally seen as more significant in developing and implementing the action plans.

The way in which respondents are working with others takes many forms. Some are working with others in the same sector to share information, promote urban design more widely and learn together. Many are also using their involvement with organisations in other sectors in relation to specific projects as an opportunity for shared learning. Urban design interest groups have been initiated in some sectors and localities to provide additional forums for discussion and advocacy – for example, Land Transport New Zealand has established a transport sector urban design group with other central government agencies. A few signatories are also building relationships with international experts and networks to benefit from their experience.

There are also many examples of more intensive collaboration. These include developing joint seminars and training programmes, and joint initiatives to develop research and guidance or achieve particular design outcomes. Some organisations have gone further and developed mechanisms and structures for collaborative input into decision-making. One mechanism being used by several respondents is the formation of specialist urban design panels or review committees, drawing in experts from outside the organisation to help make decisions about design projects. The best known of these forums are the urban design panels established by some local authorities to guide decisions on resource consents. However, similar peer review groups are also being used in other settings. For example, the University of Otago has set up a Campus Planning and Design Subcommittee involving architects from local government and the private sector to review its development proposals. Another signatory uses multi-agency design teams to ensure other organisations involved in a project can contribute from the design phase.

4. IMPACT OF THE ACTIONS

4.1 Overview

A key objective of the survey was to find out what benefits signatories are experiencing as a result of developing and implementing their action plans. Respondents were asked whether each action had resulted, or was expected to result, in increased awareness of urban design, enhanced skills and knowledge, or improved decision-making on urban design issues. The overall results of this assessment are shown in Figure 5.
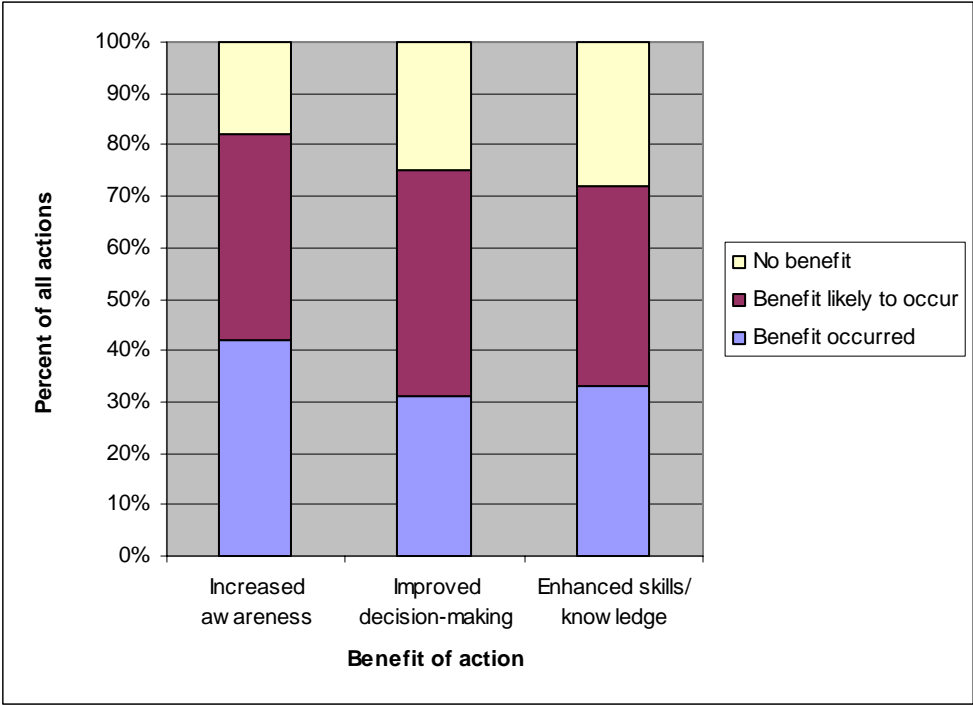
Figure 5: Benefits resulting from actions

Respondents anticipate that most actions will result in achievement of multiple benefits. While slightly more actions are expected to result in increased awareness than in improved decision-making or enhanced skills and knowledge, benefits are anticipated in each of these areas from 70 to 80 percent of actions reported on. In each case, benefits are reported as having already occurred as a result of 30 to 40 percent of actions.

There are some differences in the patterns of benefits expected to be achieved by different types of actions. Unsurprisingly, more actions targeted at increasing awareness have resulted in benefits in this area than in other areas. Design projects are more commonly seen as contributing to increased awareness than to improved decision-making or enhanced skills. Conversely, more actions concerned with developing guidance are perceived by respondents to improve decision-making and enhance skills and knowledge than to increase awareness of urban design. Most actions focused on urban design processes are expected to contribute to improved decision-making and increased awareness, but many of these benefits are still in the future (as is the case with actions to develop guidelines).

Signatories were also asked to describe how awareness, urban design processes and design outcomes had changed or were expected to change as a result of development and implementation of action plans. The responses were wide-ranging and are discussed below. In regard to these responses, it should be noted that some signatories commented that it is not always possible to attribute the changes solely to implementation of action plans. This is particularly the case where action plans reflect a direction that was already being taken by the organisation, rather than a new approach.

4.2 Developing awareness and understanding

Survey respondents were asked to describe ways in which development and implementation of their action plans had increased awareness of the principles and benefits of urban design within their organisations, amongst specific stakeholders and amongst the wider public.

(a) Internal awareness

Action plans have been effective in some signatory organisations in raising awareness of urban design amongst senior management and local government politicians, in providing a clearer focus on urban design and in building a strong commitment to urban design at staff level. The increased focus has provided staff with better access to key decision-makers in the organisation. In a few cases it has led to structural changes such as establishing an urban design team or integrating urban designers throughout the organisation. Two professional institutes reported that more space is now being devoted to urban design in seminars, conferences and publications.

Project managers and staff in policy, regulatory, asset management and development roles are increasingly considering urban design principles in their work and asking for advice to assist this. One consultant noted that employing a specialist urban designer has led to much more discussion about urban design generally in the organisation because of ready access to advice. In some organisations the action plan has fostered new opportunities for training on urban design related issues, by means of internal seminars or attendance at seminars and workshops run by others. One respondent commented that internal seminars had stimulated one staff member to think about enrolling in a Masters course in urban design.

Signatories using a multidisciplinary approach to projects have found that this has led to development of new skills and wider advocacy for urban design across the organisation (one respondent highlighted development of skills in teams working in the areas of transport and infrastructure, economic development and tourism strategy). Other actions that have increased awareness and understanding include:

- development of guidelines for staff to use

- completion of design projects that provide visible examples of good design

- collaboration with professionals from other organisations (for example, through participation in a design review panel).

Some respondents reported a greater perception of the benefits of urban design within their organisation – both in terms of the competitive advantage gained, and in the discovery that specialist input in project design can lead to cost savings.

A few signatories commented that, because of the nature of their work, there was already a high level of awareness within their organisations. They felt that the contribution of the action plan was to formalise and highlight what they are doing, rather than to add to it. Some noted that it had also contributed towards enhancing their reputation.

(b) Stakeholder awareness

Signatories in the local government and consultant sectors in several different centres reported a greater awareness of urban design issues amongst developers, in part because of requirements they are facing from councils (such as scrutiny of projects by an urban design panel and stronger provisions in district plans). They reported that some developers have seen this as an opportunity, and are actively seeking advice or looking for ways to work together with councils to improve the private-public interface. Such approaches are being recognised as having benefits in smoothing the consent application process, and one respondent noted that developers are competing with each other to produce the best development.

Developers are also realising the commercial benefits to be gained from good urban design. One developer also commented that customers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of urban design, with sales and marketing strategies contributing to this. Signatories involved in promoting sustainable building reported a raised awareness of this issue in the property and construction sectors.

Local authority respondents identified increased awareness amongst landowners and other stakeholders in areas where urban design principles had been used in the development of new district plan zones, and one noted that community based organisations are increasingly seeking design input into initiatives such as arts strategies.

Increased awareness of urban design principles in councils was reported by some signatories, with one commenting that they are more likely to approve sustainable subdivision designs.

Other stakeholders identified as having greater awareness of urban design due to the existence of action plans include:

- contractors working on development projects which incorporate urban design elements (awareness is evident in increased interest in the project and effort in producing high quality work)

- a local Chamber of Commerce

- Surveying and highway technology students (as a result of input to degree courses by signatories)
- government departments (through involvement in collaborative projects)
- Cabinet Ministers (through actions undertaken by central government agencies).

Respondents reported increased discussion and networking generally as a result of the Protocol. Greater awareness of urban design is also apparent in interest by new parties in signing up to the Protocol.

(c) Public awareness

While many signatories have actions directed at increasing public awareness of urban design, the effect of these actions is not as easy to gauge as impacts on colleagues and stakeholders. One respondent noted that more use of post-project evaluation would assist in this.

Local authorities often have a greater interface with the public than other sectors. Some respondents in this sector commented that communities are requesting more information and support from councils in achieving good urban design in their areas, and are becoming more demanding in asking for better design in commercial areas. Some are also suggesting ideas for urban design initiatives. Contributors to increased awareness have been consultation associated with plan changes providing for residential development and publicity about the activities and role of urban design panels.

Both local authorities and respondents from other sectors involved in development projects identified positive feedback from the public on the results of design-led projects, ranging from town centre visioning exercises to visible examples of good design in built outcomes.

Several respondents noted that media coverage of urban design issues has been increasing. This is seen as both an indicator of public awareness and a contributor to developing awareness further. One respondent also pointed to community outcomes in many long-term council community plans seeking healthy environments and communities as an indicator of interest in urban design.

4.3 Improving urban design processes

Respondents were asked to identify how development and implementation of their action plans had changed the way their organisations undertake projects related to urban design. Responses highlighting increased awareness and design outcomes are discussed in other sections of this report; this section discusses impacts on the processes signatory organisations use to make decisions affecting urban design. It is important to note, however, that awareness, process and outcomes are closely linked. For example, many signatories have commented that increased awareness and understanding of urban design in their organisation has stimulated changes to the processes used, and some improved design outcomes are attributed to changes that have been made to processes.

As identified in section 3 of the report, signatories in the local government and central government sectors are acting to incorporate urban design into development of strategies and policies (including district plan reviews). Some have found that this has been helpful in adding to the case for a particular policy or strategic approach.

A significant number of respondents have seen changes in the way their organisation undertakes development projects. In particular:

- urban design input is being seen as a necessary part of all projects

- consideration of urban design is being applied at the outset of projects – rather than as a "bolt-on" later on – and continued throughout the life of the project

- projects are incorporating greater collaboration, including the use of cross-disciplinary teams to provide a more holistic approach

- peer review processes have been incorporated into project development to allow for assessment of project design at an early stage.

Some signatories have reported that they now have clearer design objectives in project planning and focused targets for implementation. Others are using a master planning approach for all projects. One signatory noted that more research is now being carried out to ensure decisions are based on appropriate information. Another has instituted a project evaluation process to provide learning from completed projects to guide future improvement.

Changes being made to the way local authorities carry out resource consent processes are similar to those highlighted for development projects. These include working more closely with applicants, use of urban design criteria in assessing applications and provision for expert peer review by means of urban design panels. One local authority respondent commented that resource consent planners are gaining greater confidence in providing advice to applicants about aspects of urban design as a result of their involvement with the urban design panel. As well as learning from the experts on the panel, they are also getting confirmation from the panel about the extent of their existing understanding of the issues.

Integration of urban design across organisational functions is increasing – for example, one signatory noted that urban design principles were now being considered in asset maintenance policies. Some local authorities have reported that the action plan has provided a "big picture" of urban design projects across the organisation for councillors and provided a framework for them to review projects and discuss urban design issues and directions regularly. Additional resources have been applied in some organisations to increase staff capacity to provide input across the organisation. In a few cases urban design considerations are being incorporated into corporate funding and performance monitoring processes.

As well as increased collaboration between parts of organisations, some signatories have commented that they are engaging in more collaborative processes with other organisations and communities to address urban design issues. One respondent noted that this has led to benefits in terms of the way the organisation is perceived by the community.

A greater proportion of actions directed at adapting decision-making processes and developing guidelines are incomplete than actions focused on design projects or developing awareness and understanding. Such actions can take a long time to establish and complete because of their complexity, the need for consultation, and the need to provide for multiple objectives. As a result, the impacts of some actions have not yet been felt.

Nine respondents had not seen any changes in the way they carried out urban design processes. Most of these respondents commented that their action plans did not anticipate changes, but reflected what their organisations were already seeking to achieve.

4.4 Achieving higher quality design outcomes

Many signatories felt that it is too early yet to see visible design outcomes, although they expect that these will result from actions they are currently undertaking (such as development of design frameworks, guidelines and structure plans and providing advice on resource consents).

In spite of comments made about timeframes for seeing results, respondents identified a wide range of projects they felt had improved the quality of the built environment. These included:

- construction or upgrading of public assets (for example, public toilets, sewage pump stations and CBD upgrades) in a way which incorporates aesthetic goals rather than purely functional ones

- changes to design of the Auckland Art Gallery redevelopment to provide better connections with surrounding areas

- a project integrating urban form with rail and roading proposals

- implementation of neighbourhood accessibility plans

- new mobile phone cell sites in urban areas which are shrouded and mounted on existing infrastructure rather than the initial proposed monopoles

- new housing developments

- landscaping and building design including higher quality materials

- projects involving heritage buildings that incorporate urban design principles

- implementation of the Healthy Housing Programme in Auckland and Northland, resulting in reduced overcrowding and increased access to primary health care for tenants.

Some respondents commented on the benefits they have seen as a result of visible examples of good design including:

- increased public approval and support for projects contributes to a better reputation for the organisation responsible

- a sense of pride among contractors involved in a well-designed development leads to increased efforts to produce work of a high quality

- "Clients recognise the economic benefits of creating better places – not just the bare minimum allowed or required".

> **Realising the benefits of good design**
>
> The Hastings District Council urban design team challenged engineers to consult an architect when designing a sewage pump station. The architect's input made the engineers re-evaluate their design needs and the types of materials that could be used. This resulted in a building which was sufficiently attractive that the council received an enquiry about purchase for use as a house. The engineers also discovered that it was cheaper to build. This has led to an appreciation by the engineers of the real benefits that can be obtained from specialist design advice, and an increasing trend for them to seek such advice.

## 5. LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE

5.1 Success factors

The survey sought to identify the factors that had either contributed to the success of actions or hindered their implementation. Respondents who had not submitted an action plan were also asked to identify factors that had made it difficult for them to do this.

(a) Contributors to achievement of actions

A checklist of possible success factors was provided for signatories to respond to (see Individual Actions form, Appendix 1). There was also opportunity to identify factors that were not included in the list. Respondents were also asked to rank the three most important success factors.

Figure 6 shows the total number of actions to which each success factor contributed. Support from managers was identified as contributing to the achievement of two thirds of actions reported on. While inclusion of resources in the organisation's budget was not identified as a contributor to so many actions, it was ranked as most important by more people than any other factor. Support from the Ministry for the Environment contributed to less than a third of actions and received the smallest number of importance rankings. However, central government respondents identified this support as important in achievement of nearly three quarters of the actions they reported on.

All the factors except for support from the Ministry appear most significant for design projects. This is particularly so for managerial support, which was identified as important in contributing to achievement of 80 percent of these actions. There are few distinctions between other types of actions in terms of their requirements for success, although actions concerned with raising awareness are less dependent on political support than other actions.
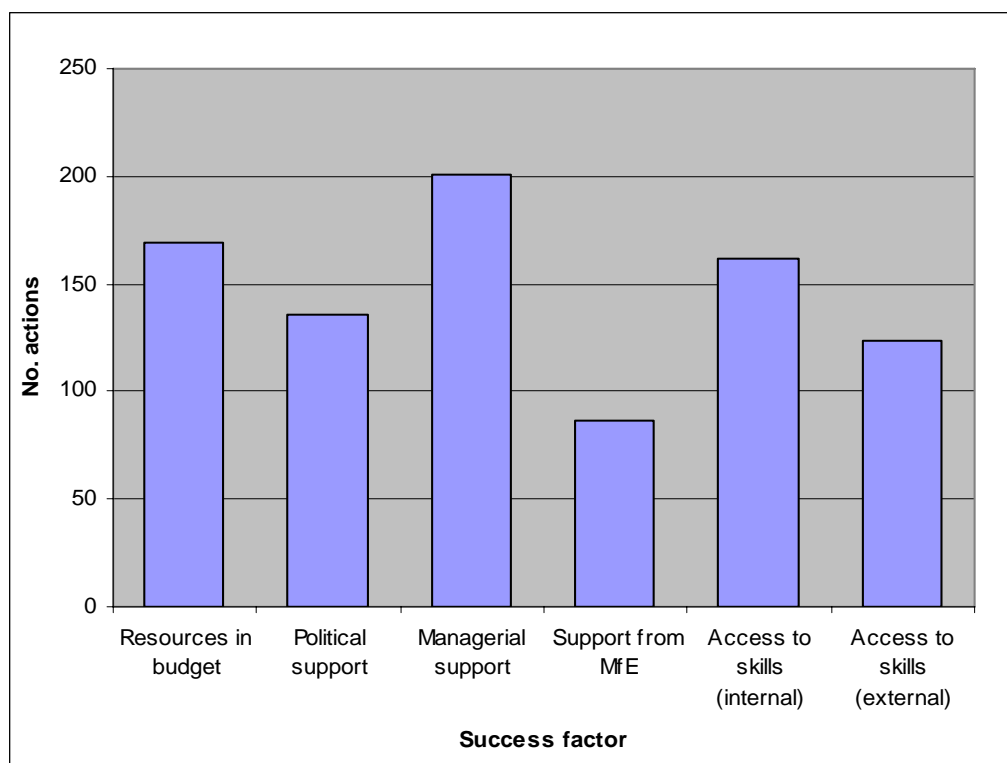
**Figure 6: Factors contributing to achievement of actions**

Several other factors were identified by respondents as important in achieving actions. Of these, the factor mentioned most often was statutory requirements. Others included:

- commitments in annual and strategic plans

- awareness and support in the wider organisation

- a supportive and creative communications team

- good working relationships with key organisations (including territorial authorities)

- input and support from stakeholders and the community

- information sharing and networks

- resolution of Environment Court appeals

- "pure determination".

(b) Factors hindering achievement of actions

The survey also included a checklist of potential hindrances to achievement of actions (see Appendix 1). Figure 7 shows the overall pattern of responses to this. The total number of times factors were identified as hindrances was much less that in the list of contributors to achievement. Only insufficient time and insufficient resources in the budget were identified for a significant number of actions. Lack of time because of other work priorities, as well as

being cited most often, was ranked as a more important factor than lack of resources. Lack of time was most significant for actions concerned with urban design processes and developing guidelines, whereas design projects and actions aiming to increase awareness and understanding were most likely to be hindered by lack of resources in the budget.
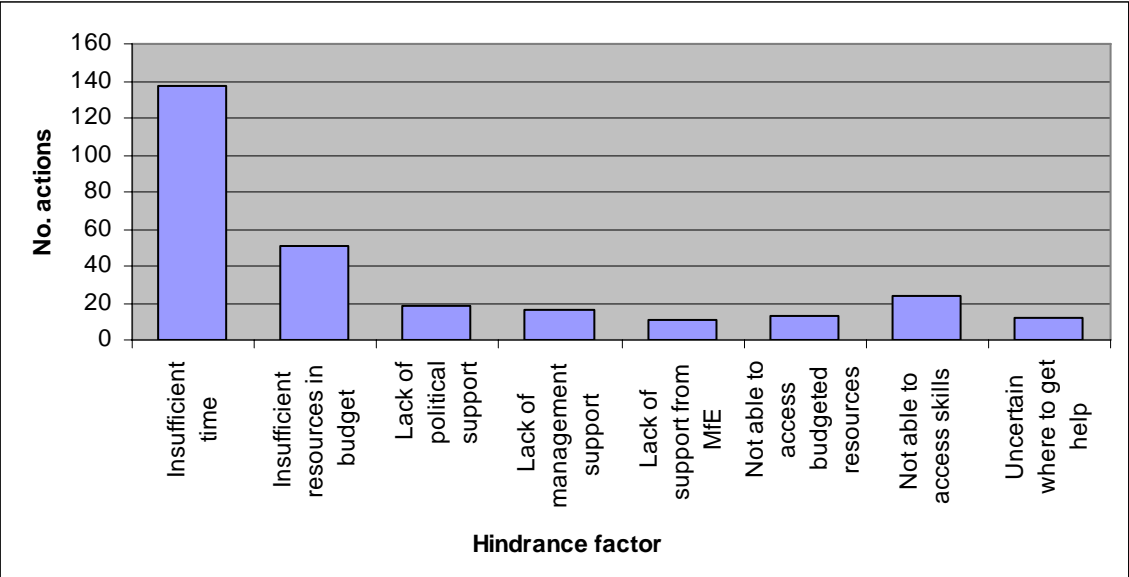
Figure 7: Factors hindering achievement of actions

While the numbers of listed factors identified by people as hindrances was low, many respondents identified other factors.

Several people identified factors to do with the nature of the action being implemented. These included complexity of issues, changes in the scope of the action while it is being implemented, and requirements for related policies or strategies to be put in place before the action can be implemented.

Hindrances related to organisational structures and processes were also identified. These ranged from internal communication problems and a lack of integrated approach across teams to delay pending restructuring. Some actions had also been deferred due to changing work patterns and priorities.

A lack of interest or commitment by clients or other organisations hindered some actions. Two respondents referred to the absence of a common understanding of urban design, with one commenting: "Everyone agrees to the idea, but everyone is allowed a different interpretation of how to do it".

One signatory identified economic drivers for development as a factor hindering design-led development: "The built form, in the context of a new residential 'average' subdivision is very difficult to control without discouraging the spec builder market and threatening the economics of the development".

Other factors mentioned included:

- regulatory requirements and Environment Court appeals
- lengthy consultation processes

- the absence of New Zealand models for comparison (in the case of new approaches to subdivision design)

- project delays beyond the control of the respondent

- vandalism.

(b) Factors hindering development of action plans

As noted earlier in this report, there were nine survey respondents who had not yet submitted action plans. These signatories were asked to identify factors that had made it difficult for them to develop their plans. All identified insufficient time to spend on the plan as a factor, with five also identifying it as the most significant. Three respondents also identified that insufficient resources were included in the organisation's budget, and two were not able to access resources even though they had been included in the budget. As well as the listed factors, two people said that changes in staff had hindered progress.

This group was also asked whether the Ministry for the Environment or their own organisation could have done anything to help develop the action plan. One respondent suggested that provision of a template by the Ministry could have helped, although another commented that the Ministry had helped by providing a copy of another signatory's action plan. Two respondents felt that their organisation could have dedicated more resources to the task.

5.2 Lessons learnt

Signatories highlighted a variety of lessons that have been learnt through their involvement with the *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol*.

For some, developing the action plan has allowed their organisation to better maintain focus on urban design issues, increasing the likelihood of action being taken on these. A greater sense of design cohesion and direction has also resulted in more innovation. One respondent who admitted to being sceptical about the broad framework of the Protocol to start with, now sees the value of such an overarching policy document in raising the profile of urban design, providing a framework for discussion and a basis for arguing the case for urban design.

While involvement has increased awareness and understanding of the importance of urban design, a number of signatories have learnt that it is not always easy to embed this throughout the organisation. Time needs to be allowed for this to happen, and it can take constant effort to challenge ways of doing things and to establish new processes. Achieving visible success in early projects was seen as important in promoting urban design approaches and influencing wider organisational policy. Getting buy-in from key people and from the organisation as a whole was identified as critical in achieving success. For one signatory, it was important that the action plan was not seen as extra work, but rather part of the way this work is done. Recognising the Protocol and action plan in strategic plans can be helpful in this.

Some signatories commented on the resourcing needed to develop and implement action plans – including both financial and human resources. It was noted that if the role of developing the plan is additional to existing roles, it needs to be recognised that it will take longer for effective action to occur. The need to maintain resourcing over time was also mentioned. Several respondents commented on the need for development of skills in urban design, and

one noted that it can sometimes be difficult to link conceptual principles to everyday work environments and decisions.

The importance of dialogue and collaboration was emphasised by several respondents, and one commented: "Don't underestimate the importance of creating a forum for urban design issues to be discussed from a national perspective".

5.3 Future direction

(a) The role of the Ministry for the Environment

Respondents were very positive about the proactive role that the Ministry for the Environment has played in initiating the *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* and supporting signatories in implementing it. Survey respondents stressed the need for this support to continue in order to ensure implementation and ongoing renewal of commitments on the part of signatories. One respondent suggested that direct presentations to councillors and other key decision-makers, with a focus on marketing the benefits to the city or organisation of good urban design, would assist with this.

As part of its support role, some signatories would also like the Ministry to provide feedback to them on their action plans so they can be more confident they are working in the right direction. One suggested that an urban design peer review service would be helpful for organisations without easy access to urban design expertise.

As discussed earlier in this report, many people found the urban design resources made available by the Ministry helpful. Consideration could be given to extending the range of resources to provide for some of the additional needs identified. These include:

- guidance at the technical design level

- More research into the value of good urban design and information to help signatories decide what actions will be cost-effective

- research, or compilation of existing research, into social and economic issues contributing to poor urban design (for example, affordability, poor construction design, transportation issues, and social ghettoing)

- documentation of a wider range of case studies (for example small residential subdivisions).

Some respondents suggested that a web-based forum for signatories (beyond the champions' network) would be valuable in improving communication and sharing of experience between signatories. This could also be used as a vehicle by the Ministry to disseminate information.

Respondents identified problems faced in accessing resources to fund training, cross-disciplinary dialogue, local awareness-raising initiatives and audit or review of their actions. It is not clear what role the Ministry could have in relation to some of these matters, but there may be opportunities for facilitating access to funding or identifying cost-effective ways to address these needs.

Some suggestions were made about potential next steps in regard to taking the Protocol further and improving the effectiveness of implementation. Potential areas of focus identified are:

- greater co-ordination of implementation between signatories to make progress less uneven

- developing more sophisticated approaches to improving urban design

- helping councils build urban design into "second generation" district plans to provide a solid framework for improvement.

(b) The future of the champions' network

As discussed earlier, signatories have generally found the champions' network a useful forum for learning and sharing experience. One commented that the champions' workshops "keep the Protocol alive". The Ministry for the Environment's goal for the network is that it becomes more self-sustaining; however, some comments made by signatories suggest that support will be needed for some time. There were some suggestions that not all champions are yet clear or confident about their role into the future, and that personal follow-up might be needed with some. One respondent felt that it would add to the profile and kudos attached to the role if Ministers were involved in some way (for example, speaking at some workshops).

Consideration could also be given to ways of ensuring that workshops provide for the full range of signatory organisations, including the different sectors and organisations outside the main centres. It might be possible, for example, to make use of professional institutes to facilitate local or sectoral meetings.

(c) Building capacity

One of the biggest problems identified in building capacity to improve the quality of urban environments is a lack of training opportunities. Signatories felt it would be helpful for the Ministry for the Environment to look for ways to facilitate greater opportunities. A particular need was identified for part-time or extramural courses for people who are working with urban design issues but have not had formal training in this area. It was suggested that the Ministry could work with universities to encourage them to develop such courses.

Some respondents felt that, because there is limited urban design expertise available in New Zealand, consideration should be given to ways of drawing more on international experts. One respondent suggested this would be helpful in developing a better understanding of the science behind urban design.

One signatory was concerned that the variability in expertise in urban design among consultants carries a risk for organisations seeking input on development projects. It was suggested that an accreditation process, with a database of approved practitioners, would help reduce this risk.

Several other suggestions were made about possible approaches to building capacity, including:

- greater focus on developing understanding of urban design principles among the general public to build support for change

- making training available for new local authority politicians early in their first term
- looking for creative ways to stimulate cross-disciplinary dialogue and debate.

(d) Integration across government

While the Ministry for the Environment has a highly visible role in promoting the Protocol, signatories were less clear about the role played by other central government agencies. Some people felt that there is a lack of co-ordination and consistency between agencies in the way they approach issues with urban design implications. Although a range of central government agencies are signatories to the Protocol, the profile of this is not always very high. One respondent suggested that it would be helpful to compile a summary statement of each agency's role in relation to urban design, and how they are approaching that role.

It was suggested that the Ministry for the Environment could play a role in reminding other government agencies of their commitment to the Protocol and facilitate more interaction and development of a common strategic vision for urban design across government. Potential for integration of urban design into Govt[3] programmes and better co-ordination between health, transport, climate change, building and housing, and environmental policy could also be explored.

(e) The policy framework

Respondents identified several concerns about the way in which current policy frameworks hinder achievement of good urban design.

Several people felt there is a need to make progress in developing a national policy statement to provide stronger direction for regional policy statements and regional and district plans. In particular this was seen as important to get greater national consistency in the way local authorities approach urban design. Two specific matters identified in this regard were a lack of consistency in approaches to new design solutions, and a lack of clarity about how design guidelines (as opposed to rules) should be used in the context of district plans. A need for greater statutory weight to be given to urban design was also seen by one signatory as important to avoid the frustration of Environment Court decisions overturning council decisions made on the basis of urban design effects.

Other parts of the policy framework identified as acting against the objectives of the Protocol included:

- transportation and energy policy – one respondent commented that there needs to be more interaction between the transportation sector and urban designers
- Building Code requirements in relation to earthquake strengthening and fire safety, and gaps in requirements concerning noise insulation, ventilation and living space
- the designation process in the Resource Management Act – the lack of any requirement to comply with an outline plan was seen as limiting the ability to improve design of works such as airport facilities.

Some signatories also stressed the need to integrate urban design into key government strategic issues such as economic transformation, national identity, families and health.

6. CONCLUSION

The first round of monitoring on progress in implementing the *New Zealand Urban Design Protocol* provides an evaluation by signatories of their experience and the level of success they have achieved. This indicates that healthy progress is being made. There is a high level of commitment in many organisations to building awareness and understanding of urban design and to producing good design outcomes. Some organisations are putting considerable effort into changing internal processes to facilitate better decision-making on urban design issues.

Although varying degrees of success are being achieved in implementing actions, and some actions need more time to produce results, many signatories are already seeing clear benefits emerging. While it is too early to see many visible design outcomes, respondents have reported an increasing profile for urban design and greater recognition of the benefits it can bring. Collaboration both within and between organisations involved in urban design projects is increasing and urban design is becoming more integrated across the different aspects of work that organisations are involved in.

Key factors identified as contributing to the success of actions are support from management and the inclusion of sufficient resources to implement the actions. Resources provided by the Ministry for the Environment have been helpful, but discussion and collaboration with other organisations is seen as more important. Some actions have encountered specific problems, but few signatories identified barriers to overall implementation.

However, continuing effort will be needed to build understanding of urban design further and to obtain more consistent levels of success. It is important for the Ministry for the Environment to continue to support the Protocol and its implementation so that signatories will maintain their commitment. The need to build the level of urban design skills across the country was highlighted in survey responses. Roles for the Ministry in this could include:

- extending the range of resources available to assist signatories (particularly guidance at the technical design level, documentation of case studies, and compilation of research on the costs and benefits of particular approaches and the social and economic drivers of poor urban design)

- encouraging universities to develop formal training opportunities for people working with urban design issues.

A continuing role for the Ministry in facilitating communication and collaboration between signatories would also be helpful. While the design champions' network is generally seen as effective in promoting urban design, it may take some time before it has developed sufficiently to become self-sustaining. Until then, ongoing support and encouragement from the Ministry is important. Some attention should be given to ways of catering for the wide range of members (both geographically and across different sectors) to ensure champions remain engaged and effective.

There is currently no clear means of assessing whether the evaluation by signatories of their experience is consistent with perceptions of other people who have been involved with, or are affected by, the actions being implemented. There would be value in undertaking some further assessment of this, perhaps by way of detailed case studies. Some signatories have also indicated that they would like feedback from the Ministry on whether their action plans are "on the right track".

As well as continuing support for signatories, there are opportunities for the Ministry for the Environment to take a lead in developing a more co-ordinated approach to urban design across government, and in promoting better integration of urban design into strategic policy frameworks.

Ministry for the Environment's Comment

The New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (the Protocol) has provided a platform for central and local government, property developers and investors, design professionals, educational institutes and other groups to commit to quality urban design. The Protocol, through the requirement of signatories to develop 'action plans', encourages action-specific commitments to achieving a better quality urban environment. The Ministry for the Environment would like to thank signatories to the Protocol for their commitment and hard work to date.

This initial round of monitoring provides the Ministry for the Environment and signatories to the Protocol with baseline information on the implementation of the Protocol. It is clear from results of this monitoring survey that the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol is helping to lift the understanding and profile of urban design in New Zealand.

This report provides a sound set of information from which the Ministry can identify successes and develop more targeted support for all signatories. In particular, the survey findings will be fed into the following key Ministry activities and projects:

1. **Urban Design Champions' network.** The Ministry will continue to maintain and build the champions' network to facilitate the exchange of information and raise the level of commitment in signatory organisations. This will include organising workshops, circulating an urban design newsletter and administering the champions' webspace. The dialogue between councils, surveyors, planners, designers, engineers, policy planners and developers will also continue to be strengthened.

2. **Action Plans.** The Ministry plans to increase the level of support given to signatories developing action plans by reviewing all plans on receipt, progressively holding one-on-one meetings with signatories and by ultimately making action plans available to all other signatories.

3. **Sector Groups.** The Ministry will continue to support emerging sector groups and networks such as transport and health achieve their actions. Work will also continue with other sectors such as housing to raise the awareness of urban design and to facilitate communication and collaboration.

4. **Urban Design National Policy Statement.** The Ministry recognises the need to create stronger links between planning practice under the Resource Management Act and the principles of quality urban design. Many councils looking to embed urban design within their district plans are seeking clearer guidance and support from legislation. The Ministry is currently investigating a national policy statement on urban design under the RMA.

5. **Development of Tools and Resources.** The Ministry will continue to provide guidance and support to signatories promoting urban design best practice by producing case studies, working on joint urban design initiatives and by keeping the *Urban Design Toolkit* up-to-date.

6. **Addressing Skills Shortages.** The Ministry for the Environments' 2006 Local Government Urban Design Skills and Capacity survey showed that there is a lack of urban design capacity in New Zealand. The Ministry will work with educational and professional institutes to try to address gaps and shortfalls in the current system

highlighted by this survey and to investigate other training opportunities there may be in terms of urban design.

Contact details

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APPENDIX 1

Survey forms

A copy of the survey forms is available on the Ministry for the Environment's website at: www.mfe/govt/publications/urban