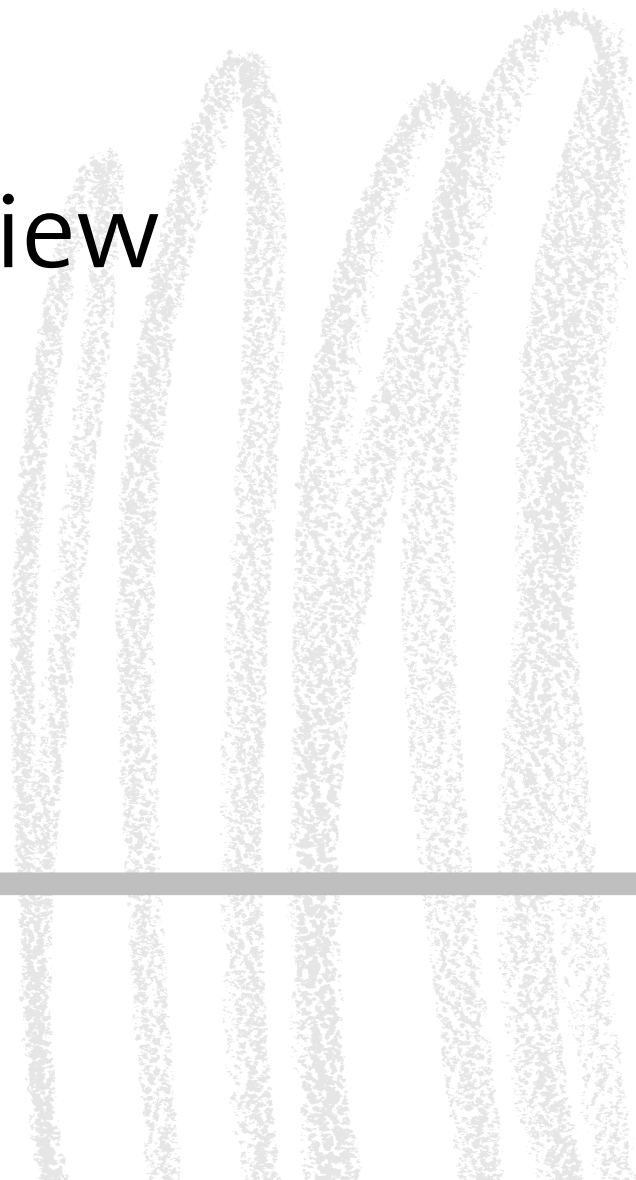




Urban Design Action Plan Review



N Z URBAN DESIGN PROTOCOL



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Contents

Introduction	1
Summary	2
Urban design champions	2
Range of actions	2
Collaboration	4
The sectors	5
Central government	5
Local government	5
Developers and investors	6
Consultants	7
Professional institutes	7
Sector organisations	8
Educational institutes	8
Where to from here?	9

Introduction

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 is supported by a network of signatory organisations who have committed to implement quality urban design through their work. As at January 2006, 107 stakeholders across both the public and private sectors had become signatories. This is a significant outcome considering that their commitment to the Protocol is voluntary.

The Protocol is unique in that, through the requirement of signatories to develop ‘action plans’, it encourages action-specific commitments to achieving a better quality urban environment. The ability of the Protocol to make a difference to our urban environment essentially depends on the implementation and success of these action plans. All signatories are required to submit an action plan six months after signing up to the Protocol.

As more organisations continue to become signatories, the Ministry for the Environment continues to receive action plans. The following review reports on the action plans received by the end of 2005. In the context of this report, ‘signatories’ is used to refer to those whose action plans are involved in this review.

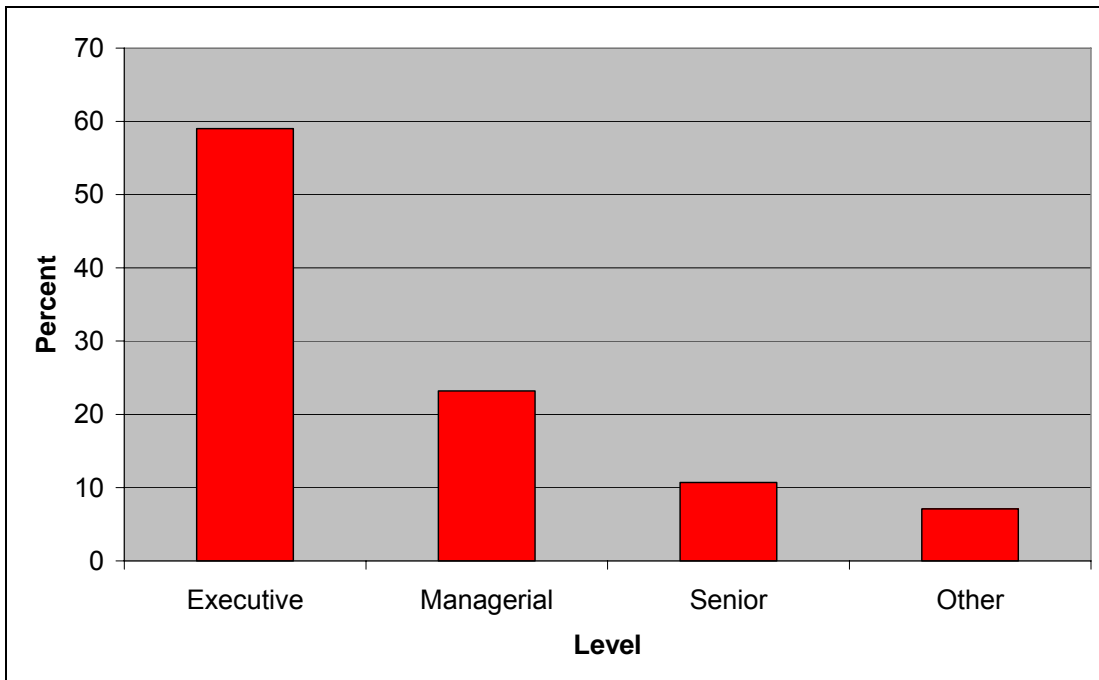


Summary

Urban design champions

The one mandatory action in the Protocol is for each signatory to appoint an [urban design champion](#). All signatory organisations are required to make this appointment on sign up. It is intended that the urban design champion be a senior, influential person within an organisation who can promote quality urban design in all areas. As can be seen in Figure 1, over 80 percent of the champions are in executive or managerial positions.

Figure 1: Level of urban design champions as at December 2005



Range of actions

Upon signing up to the Protocol, all signatories are issued with an 'Action Pack'. This provides ideas for actions that could form part of their commitments to the Protocol. Actions can range across all aspects of an organisation's activities, from strategy development and decision making to research and staff training. To reflect this, the proposed actions have been grouped into the eight categories outlined in the Action Pack:

- championing urban design and raising awareness
- developing strategy and policy
- planning futures
- being a good client

- making decisions
- exchanging information and research
- integrating management
- building capacity.

Figure 2: Categorical breakdown of action plans as at December 2005

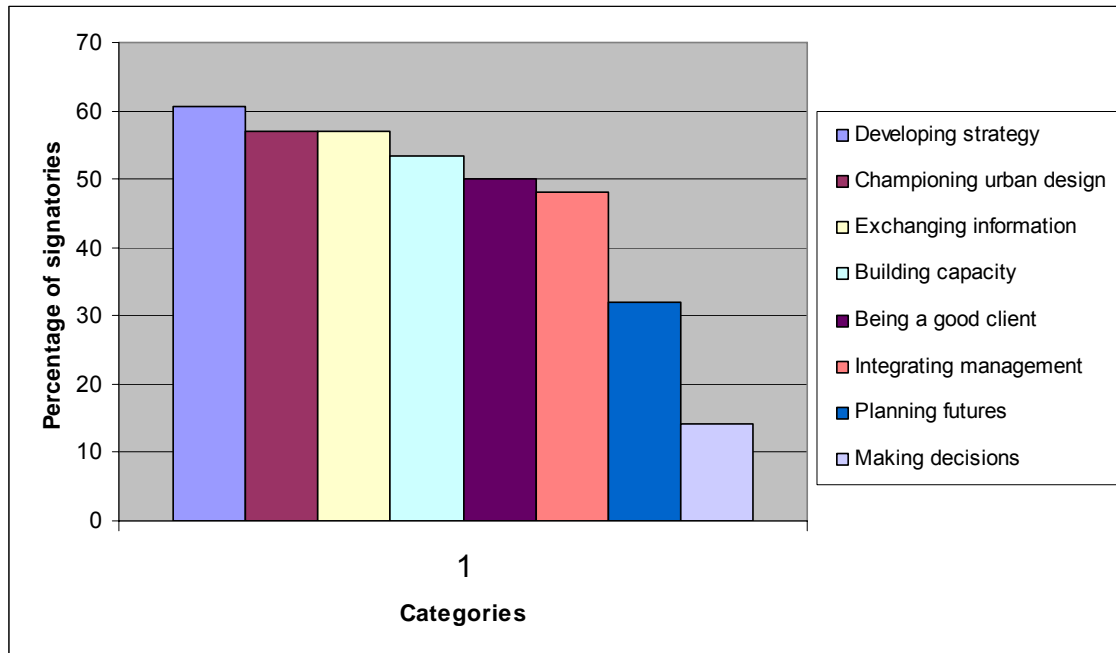


Figure 2 shows that over 60 percent of the signatories submitted actions that aim to develop strategies to increase the quality of the built environment. Over half of the signatories submitted actions that focus on exchanging information, building capacity, increasing their ability to be a good client and champion or advocate urban design (the urban design champion action has been omitted from this figure so as not to skew the results). These are positive trends at this early stage of the Protocol's existence and show that there is a strong desire to increase urban design awareness and quality throughout the country, as well as a desire to put the required systems in place to achieve this.

It is also evident in Figure 2 that less than half of the signatories are committed to actions that would include integrating management, making better urban design decisions and considering urban design in future planning. It is possible that these areas will be better covered in future action plans as signatories increase their knowledge of urban design and capacity to apply it.

Collaboration

Most of the signatories have not emphasised how they collaborate within their sector. This may be because it is often facilitated through professional institutes or carried out on a daily basis. Those signatories who have focused on collaboration are generally looking at ways of exchanging information that will increase the understanding of urban design within their sector.

However, one thing that has become evident throughout the review of the action plans, is the willingness of many signatories to work with other sectors in order to share knowledge and increase their understanding of urban design. At this early stage, a quarter of the signatories (mainly central and local government and professional institutes) have already committed to cross-sector collaboration with up to three other sectors. For example:

- Christchurch City Council has committed to establishing an urban design website that will include access to all relevant brochures and publications and act as a point of contact between staff and the public.
- The Kitchener Group of Companies Ltd has committed to developing a multi-disciplinary team approach to urban development schemes and to ensuring that there is effective interaction across professional boundaries.
- Franklin District Council has committed to developing a ‘partnering’ approach between clients, designers and contractors as an alternative to a standard contractor relationship in order to ensure quality urban design at all stages of each project.

The potential for other signatories to work together to achieve better urban design and share information on various projects has also been identified. The Ministry for the Environment will contact these signatories regarding such cross-sector collaboration. The list below highlights several of these cross-sector possibilities:

- Seven signatories have committed to developing strategies to enhance the quality of the urban environment. These range from a public arts strategy, regional land transport strategy and graffiti response strategy to various urban growth strategies.
- Various signatories have said that they plan to develop urban design awards specific to their sectors and/or organisations.
- The potential for cross-sector groupings has also been identified, particularly in the areas of health and transport.
- Over half of the signatories have advocacy and training actions.
- Over one-third of the signatories have included collaboration, exchanging information, internal expertise and review actions in their action plan.

The sectors

Central government

- Total 16 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have 88.8 percent of their champions in executive (for example, directors, chairs and so on) or managerial positions and the remainder in senior level positions.
- Have proposed over 85 actions.

The majority of central government signatories to the Protocol have provided action plans to the Ministry for the Environment. These include both policy agencies and those responsible for planning and delivering infrastructure and buildings.

Three governmental agencies have appointed urban design champions at a deputy-secretary or director level or above.

Many of the central government actions are predictably aligned with governmental roles that focus on developing strategy and exchanging information. In particular, signatories in this sector have focused on developing policy position statements on urban design, amending internal policies to include urban design criteria, as well as collating and disseminating data relevant to their area of expertise and its relationship to urban design.

Only some of the central government departments have looked at building internal capacity in order to provide accurate policy advice on complex urban issues. Similarly, only a small number of departments are considering, at this stage, the urban design implications of any decisions made in relation to providing and funding quality urban infrastructure.

Some of the more innovative and ambitious central government actions have been to:

- incorporate into the terms of reference for design proposals a condition that proposals must demonstrate how they will meet the requirements of the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol – Ministry of Culture and Heritage
- develop a best practice design guide to achieve urban design principles on state highways – Transit New Zealand.

Local government

- Total 23 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have 77 percent of their champions in executive positions (for example, mayors, councillors and so on), 15.4 percent in managerial positions and 7.6 percent in senior level positions.
- Have proposed over 240 actions.

Local government signatories have produced some of the most wide-ranging action plans, with particular emphasis being placed on championing urban design within their communities and strategy development. Almost half of the local government signatories have committed to reviewing their district plans for opportunities to incorporate urban design outcomes.

As with central government, only a small number of the local government signatories have looked at making changes to their decision-making procedures in order to place more emphasis on the consideration of urban design issues. It is hoped that this area will strengthen as each signatory gains further internal knowledge and expertise.

An important distinction can be made between the larger (+75,000 people) and smaller council's action plans.

The larger councils, such as Auckland City and Environment Waikato, have tended to take a strategic approach in their plans. They focus on actions such as championing urban design, developing strategy and exchanging information in order to learn from past experiences and increase effectiveness.

The action plans of the smaller councils, such as Kapiti Coast and Papakura District Council, have tended to take a community approach. They concentrate not only on championing urban design and developing strategy, but also on building internal urban design capacity and delivering high-quality urban design in all relevant council projects. This approach is very positive for these councils, because it will strengthen their resources and help them to make a real commitment to implementing better urban design.

Some of the innovative and ambitious local government actions have been to:

- develop a public art strategy that encourages the incorporation of ideas into new developments – Kapiti Coast District Council
- empower and upskill their organisation to say 'no' to bad design and to resource themselves with sufficient expertise to enact this change – Auckland City Council
- investigate apartment design guidelines – North Shore City Council
- organise a conference session on the practice of applying a sustainable development approach – Local Government New Zealand

Developers and investors

- Total 5 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have all their champions in managerial positions.
- Have proposed over 40 actions.

The developers and investors are the only sector group that have placed the most emphasis on guiding the future quality of major development areas or schemes. This is a particularly positive step because it shows that this sector is committed to putting in place tools to help guide future urban development. However, few in this group have indicated a desire to increase their own urban design expertise, to document their urban design related research, or make decisions that influence the quality of design outcomes through their actions.

Some of the more innovative and ambitious developer and investor actions have been to:

- raise awareness of the principles of urban design in the market place by including urban design appropriate reference material in their project marketing and advertising literature – McConnell Property Ltd
- ensure that all briefs for construction are clear, well thought out and consider urban design at all stages of a project – Kitchener Group of Companies Ltd.

Consultants

- Total 31 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have 59 percent of their champions in executive positions, 17.7 percent in managerial positions, 11.8 percent at senior level and 11.8 percent at other levels in their organisations.
- Have proposed over 130 actions.

The action plans for this sector group have placed particular importance on the role of consultants in influencing a client's understanding of the need for quality urban design. The consultants also showed a commitment to sharing information and research as well as developing internal and external expertise in the urban design field. However, only some of the consultants were committed to incorporating urban design into their own decision making or to adequate forward-planning mechanisms that could improve development outcomes.

Some of the more innovative and ambitious consultant actions have been to:

- undertake a company-wide training workshop on the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol – Boffa Miskell
- put emphasis on 'master planning' for large-scale projects – Davis Ogilvie & Partners Ltd
- where possible, assist local government clients to create enabling frameworks in their district plans to encourage genuine mixed-use environments – Beca.

Professional institutes

- Total 9 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have 80 percent of their champions at executive level and 20 percent at other levels within their organisations.
- Have proposed over 50 actions.

The emphasis in the action plans from the professional institutes is mainly on championing urban design and building internal capacity. While this trend is to be expected, the focus of the professional institutes generally is on exchanging information with and building capacity throughout its members, and it is encouraging that urban design is being included in their existing structures.

Some of the more innovative and ambitious professional institute actions have been to:

- form an urban design virtual network or interest group – Institute of Professional Engineers
- review the urban design component in university courses accredited by the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) by first reviewing the NZPI accreditation policy to ensure urban design is incorporated in an appropriate way – New Zealand Planning Institute.

Sector organisations

- Total 11 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have 66.6 percent of their champions at an executive level, 16.7 percent at a managerial level and 16.7 percent at other levels.
- Have proposed over 30 actions.

Signatories from the sector organisations form a diverse, issues-based group, ranging from the Building Research Association, the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand to the Cycling Advocates Network. Sector organisations have tended to focus on using their roles to advocate urban design within their specific fields.

Some of the more innovative and ambitious sector actions have been to:

- raise the importance of the natural night-time environment in the urban design context through identification and dissemination of information leading to efficient and effective outdoor lighting that has minimal impact on the night time sky – Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand
- continue promotion of sustainable building and good urban design generally to bodies such as the Construction Industry Council, the Building Industry Federation and the construction sector generally – Building Research Association.

Educational institutes

- Total 5 percent of the reviewed signatories.
- Have the bulk of their champions at senior level (66.7 percent), with the remainder in executive level positions.
- Have proposed over 10 actions.

The action plans from the educational institutes focus on championing urban design and exchanging information. While none have actions that cover being a good client, integrating management, making decisions and planning futures, this trend is probably because the signatories are not universities as a whole, but are departments within the universities, and thereby have restricted ability to perform these other actions.

One of the more innovative and ambitious educational institute actions have been to:

- adopt the principles of the Protocol in the design and development of campuses in Albany, Palmerston North and Wellington – Massey University.

Where to from here?

Because all signatories are required to report their chosen actions within six months of signing up to the Protocol, the Ministry for the Environment expects to continue to receive action plans, both from those who have recently signed and from new signatories. These new action plans will be added to the Ministry's database and the Ministry will continue to make cross-sector links (with the consent of those involved) where actions between signatories are similar or compatible.

The champions will also continue to receive an e-newsletter informing them of upcoming urban design events and news. The role of the e-newsletter is to act as a point of contact between the signatories and their organisations and to give the Ministry the opportunity to address any issues that signatories require help with, for example, reporting and monitoring of action plans.

The Ministry will continue to run workshops and facilitate other useful ways of exchanging ideas and learning for the design champions. This will include encouraging signatories to contribute 'show and tell' examples of urban design successes, and the hosting of related site visits and tours as an additional part of the workshops. It is anticipated that the workshops will continue to provide an avenue through which the champions can increase their urban design knowledge and experience, and meet high-level representatives from both their own and other sectors.

As detailed in the Action Pack, monitoring of submitted action plans will begin in August 2006, 18 months after the first signatories signed up to the Protocol. The Ministry will contact all signatories prior to this time with a detailed template that will outline what information will be needed, when it will be required, how the Ministry will collect the information, and what the final product will be used for. It is anticipated that the monitoring of action plans will play an important part by:

- reviewing how the action plans contribute to the seven Cs outlined in the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol
- highlighting what signatories have learnt by taking part in this process
- highlighting what the barriers have been to implementing action plans (and thus allow consideration of ways these can be removed)
- highlighting gaps in capacity and policy
- outlining any actions that may be written up as case studies
- giving the Ministry a sense of what impact the Protocol is actually having; and
- recommending next steps, such as potential roles and directions for the signatories, champions and Ministry for the Environment.

Following the initial review in August, signatories:

- may be asked to complete a written questionnaire every two years to help monitor the Protocol
- will need to continue their commitment to the built environment by updating their action plans (ticking off those completed and adding new ones) regularly as actions are achieved.

For more information on the Urban Design Protocol action plans, go to www.mfe.govt.nz or contact:

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