

Aokautere Structure Plan

Urban Design Statement for Planning Controls



Prepared for
Palmerston North City Council
28 July 2022

1.0 Structure Plan

1.1 The structure plan is derived from the preferred planning and design outcome. It embodies the intentions, principles and strategies identified in the Aokautere Masterplan Report.

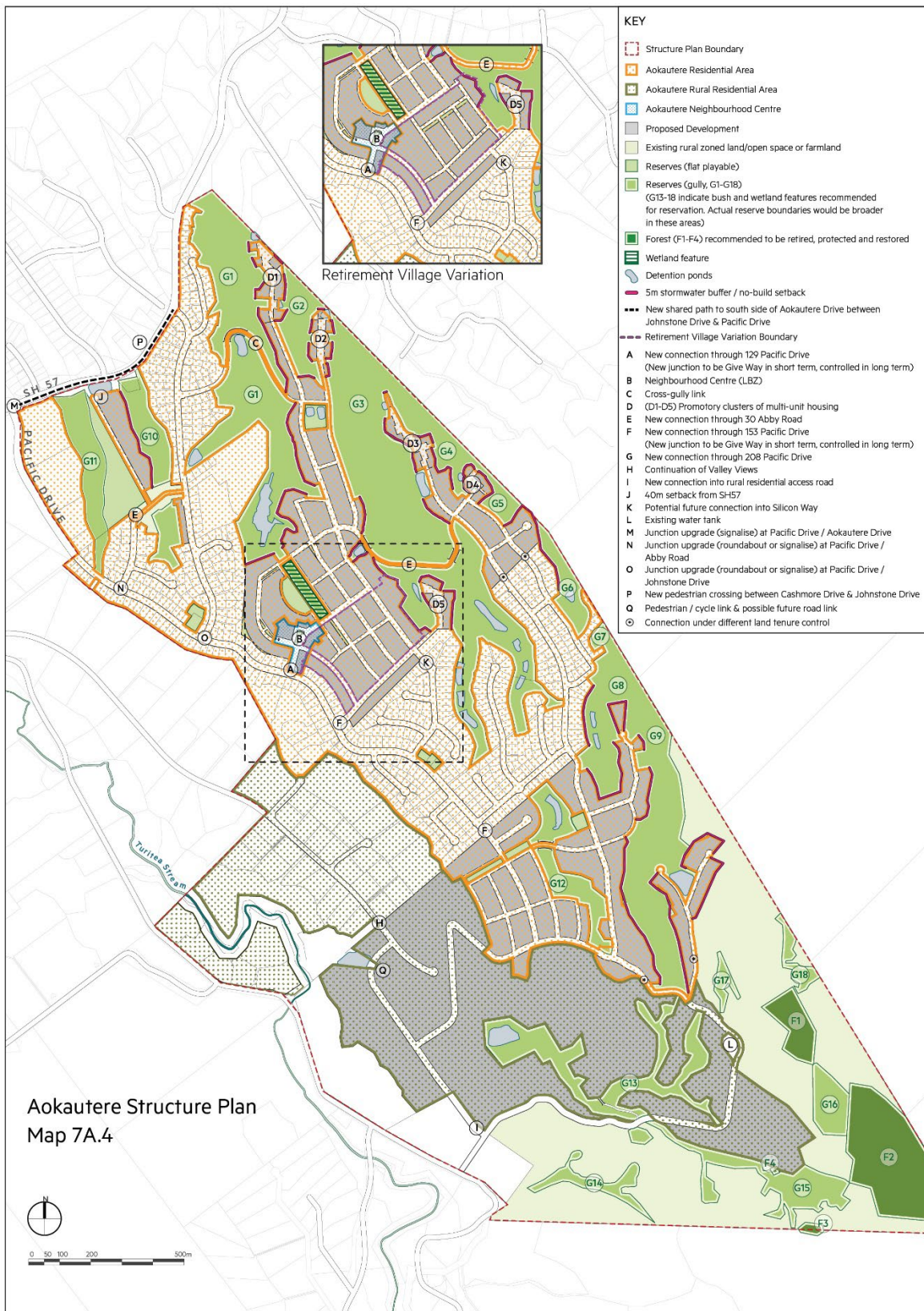


Fig.1 Aokautere Structure Plan

2.0 Relationship to existing planning controls

2.1 In general, PNCC residential zone standards apply within the Aokautere Structure Plan (the Plan). Several Multi-Unit Housing Area overlays (collectively known as Area H) are proposed for parts of the Plan. Specific development objectives require several new or modified standards to be introduced. These are described below.

3.0 Minimum site area and maximum site coverage

3.1 Suburban Low Density lots occupy the majority of the Plan (Fig.2). Measuring at least 500m², these lots continue established planning and development practices and create a sympathetic relationship to existing built up areas. Maximum site coverage is 40%. Again, this replicates Residential Zone standards. Additional constraints on the size and shape of individual parcels are unnecessary. Instead, improvements to the residential fabric result from careful attention to block size and street layout. The comparatively small number of rear lots is one manifestation of this approach.

3.2 The Plan envisages Medium Density development within North Village and on the promontories that terminate Aokautere's ridges. In these prime locations, the minimum lot size is 150m² per dwelling and site coverage increases to 45%.

3.3 Within North Village, the compact parcels support the familiar suburban pattern of landscaped frontages and private rear yards. At the same time, smaller lots allow more people to enjoy proximity to public transport, shops and public open space. Access to parks and reserves compensates for the reduced size of private gardens. The higher concentration of residents brings greater vitality to Aokautere's Neighbourhood Centre.

3.4 The five promontories are north-facing and surrounded by regenerating native bush. Here, Medium Density Cluster lots combine the benefits of downsizing with the semi-rural experience of a lifestyle block. This format extends housing options not just at Aokautere but within Palmerston North as a whole.

3.5 There is no restriction on lot size within the Local Centre Mixed-Use area. A minimum net site area per dwelling would be inappropriate here because the Plan envisages ground-floor commercial accommodation with residential apartments above.

4.0 Minimum densities

4.1 In addition to minimum lot sizes, the Plan introduces minimum net densities of 25dph in Medium Density areas and 50dph in the Local Centre Mixed-Use area (see Fig.2). This provision ensures that valuable residential land is developed efficiently and delivers outcomes that are consistent with the city's growth strategies.

5.0 Maximum building height

5.1 Most of the Structure Plan area is subject to a conventional 9m height limit. However, a maximum height of 11 metres applies to Medium Density lots within North Village and the promontory Clusters.

5.2 Whereas 9m comfortably accommodates two-storey detached houses, 11m enables the three-storey construction that is commonly associated with semi-detached dwellings and rowhouses on narrow parcels. These dwelling types frequently contain a ground-level garage with two floors of living accommodation

above. In general terms, the additional height encourages compact medium-density development and a wider range of dwelling types.

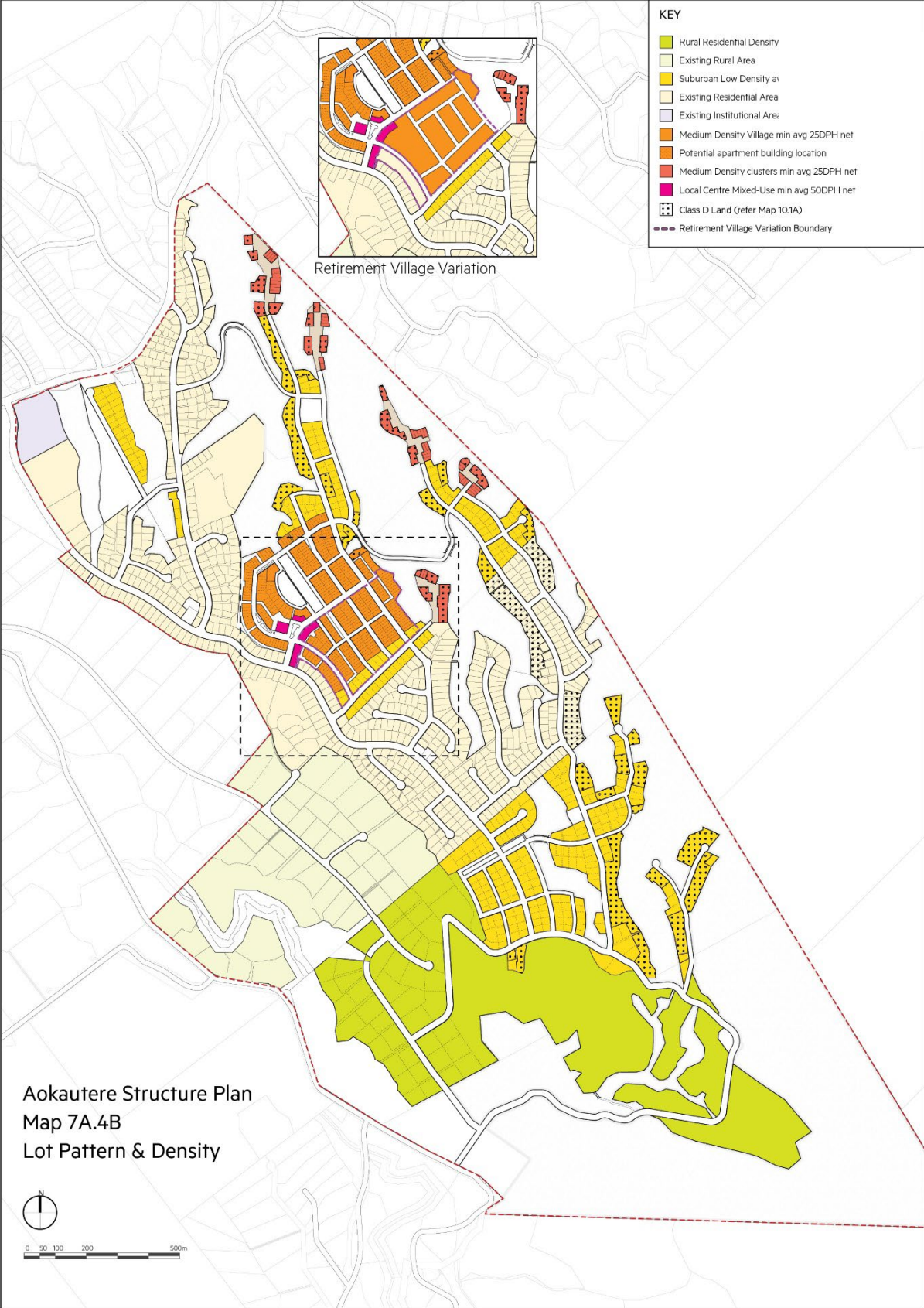


Fig.2 Proposed Density

5.3 Within the Medium Density lots of North Village, the 11m height limit encourages stronger spatial definition of the wetlands reserve and the crescent-shaped green. Also, taller development takes advantage of the exceptional visual quality of these public open spaces.

5.4 On the promontories, clusters of two or three-storey townhouses enclose semi-public courts and frame views of the surrounding landscape. For residents and visitors alike, the spatial containment establishes clear destinations at the ends of the plateaus. However, this quality is mediated by frequent sightlines across the gullies. Because the clusters are visually isolated and surrounded by bush, the impact of additional height is mitigated by distance and vegetation.

5.5 The Local Centre Mixed Use area also has an 11m height limit. This enables three-storey construction with ground-level commercial accommodation and two levels of residential apartments above. These buildings are typologically and functionally different from their neighbours. Additional ground floor height (per existing LBZ standard of 1.3 times upper level) helps to signify this distinction. At 11m, buildings produce a strongly defined street corridor, which helps to identify this location as the community's hub.

6.0 Boundary separation

6.1 The Aokautere Structure Plan employs a range of boundary controls that facilitate the delivery of different densities and dwelling types. Within the Local Centre Mixed Use area, minimum separation distances only apply at the interface with Low Density and Medium Density areas. Within Medium Density areas at North Village and the promontory Clusters, more permissive boundary controls enable semi-detached and fully attached dwellings within comprehensively designed developments. Existing Residential Zone boundary controls apply to the Suburban Low Density lots that comprise the bulk of the Plan.

6.2 The following minimum boundary separations apply to dwellings (including attached or internal garages) within Medium Density areas at North Village and the five promontory Clusters:

- 1.5m from road boundary (additional setback for garages – see below)
- 1.0m from any side yard boundary
- 3.0m from any rear boundary

6.3 1.5m front yards encourage development to be placed forward on the site, producing larger private rear yards and better street-edge definition.

6.4 1.0m side yards provide adequate access and fire separation while also facilitating intensive development in high-amenity locations. Narrow side yards are less conducive to planting trees or other screening vegetation between dwellings. As a result, visual amenity is more dependent on street trees and landscaped front and rear yards.

6.5 To facilitate semi-detached and fully attached dwellings, the Plan permits zero separation distance along shared side boundaries within a coordinated development on multiple adjoining parcels.

6.6 At a minimum of 3.0m, rear yards are deeper than their front and side counterparts. Deep yards are most valuable at the rear of the property. They help to provide amenity at the centre of the block, allowing trees to contribute visual amenity and privacy between dwellings. These qualities become more important with increased site coverage, greater building height and more generous recession planes – all of which permit bulkier development on the forward portion of the lot.

6.7 A further front setback rule applies to the Aokautere Structure Plan area as a whole. Any street-facing garage must be set at least 1.0m back from the primary component of a dwelling's front elevation. This additional setback adds 3D articulation to the street elevation and limits the visual dominance of garages within the streetscape. If there is an on-site parking space in front of a garage, the latter must be at least 5.5m from the front boundary. This minimum dimension ensures that parked vehicles do not intrude into the public right-of-way.

7.0 Height recession planes

7.1 A height recession plane does not apply along a shared side boundary where the zero-separation provision is activated. In effect, a pair of semi-detached dwellings – or a row of fully attached townhouses – is treated as one building. A single development envelope is defined by the maximum building height and height recession planes at each of the outside boundaries of the conjoined lots. A further recession plane also applies at the conjoined site's rear boundary.

7.2 For the front two-thirds of the relevant side boundary, the recession plane commences 5.0m above ground and inclines upwards at an angle of 45° to the horizontal (Fig. 3 and Appendix A). For the rear third of the boundary, the recession plane commences 2.8m above ground and inclines upwards at 45°. The latter recession plane also applies along the rear boundary.

7.3 The forward side-boundary recession plane (5.0m and 45°) accommodates three-storey development but ensures that the top level is set back from the boundary. This arrangement retains an acceptable amount of sunlight on the neighbouring property. It also reduces visual dominance and encourages more interesting architectural composition. The more restrictive rear side-boundary recession plane (2.8m and 45°) maintains greater openness and amenity in the centre of the block. It also reduces overlooking and visual dominance in more sensitive private rear yards.

7.4 In combination, the two side-boundary recession planes facilitate dwellings being placed forward on the lot. In this location, houses are more likely to define the street edge and address the public realm. The forward position of the dwelling also gives occupants direct visual contact with high-quality streetscape.

7.5 If the relevant side boundary is shared with a Suburban Low Density lot, then the more restrictive height recession plane (2.8m and 45°) applies along the full length of this boundary. This matches the standard height recession plane for the Residential Zone. It minimises visual dominance and maintains a reasonable level of sunlight for neighbouring low-density properties. An example is shown below (Fig. 4).

7.6 Co-ordinated planning and careful design are required to mitigate effects on neighbouring sites and restricted discretionary Assessment Criteria (R10.6.3.3 and R10.6.3.1) will also apply.

7.7 Within the Local Centre Mixed Use area, separation distances and recession planes are only required at the interface with residential areas. This allows formation of a continuously built-up street frontage. It also reinforces the more substantial character of buildings within Aokautere’s Neighbourhood Centre.

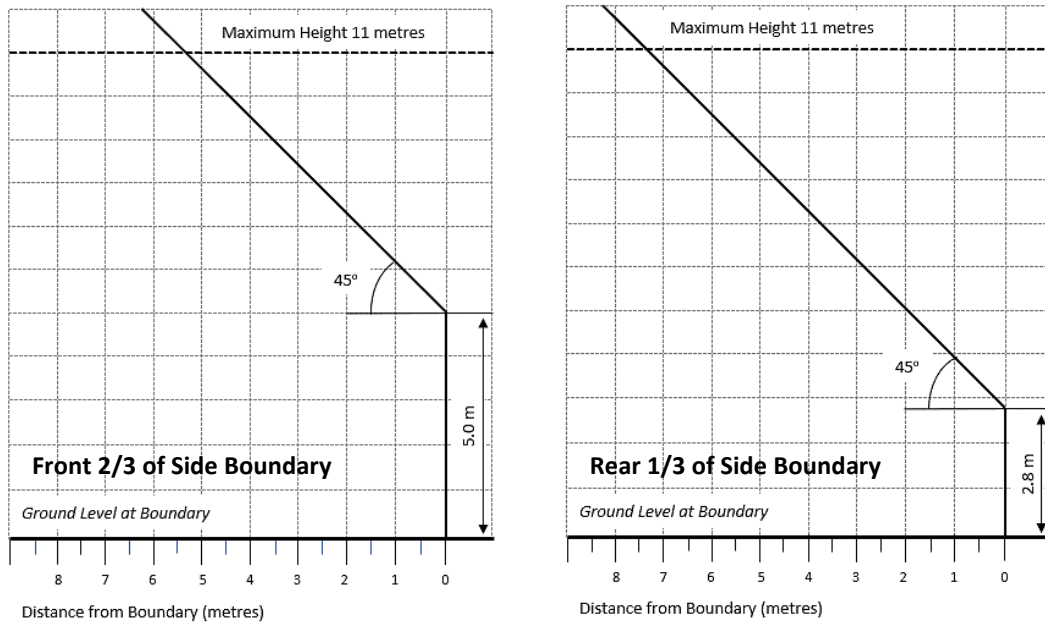


Fig.3 Medium Density Area Height Recession Planes (see also Appendix A).

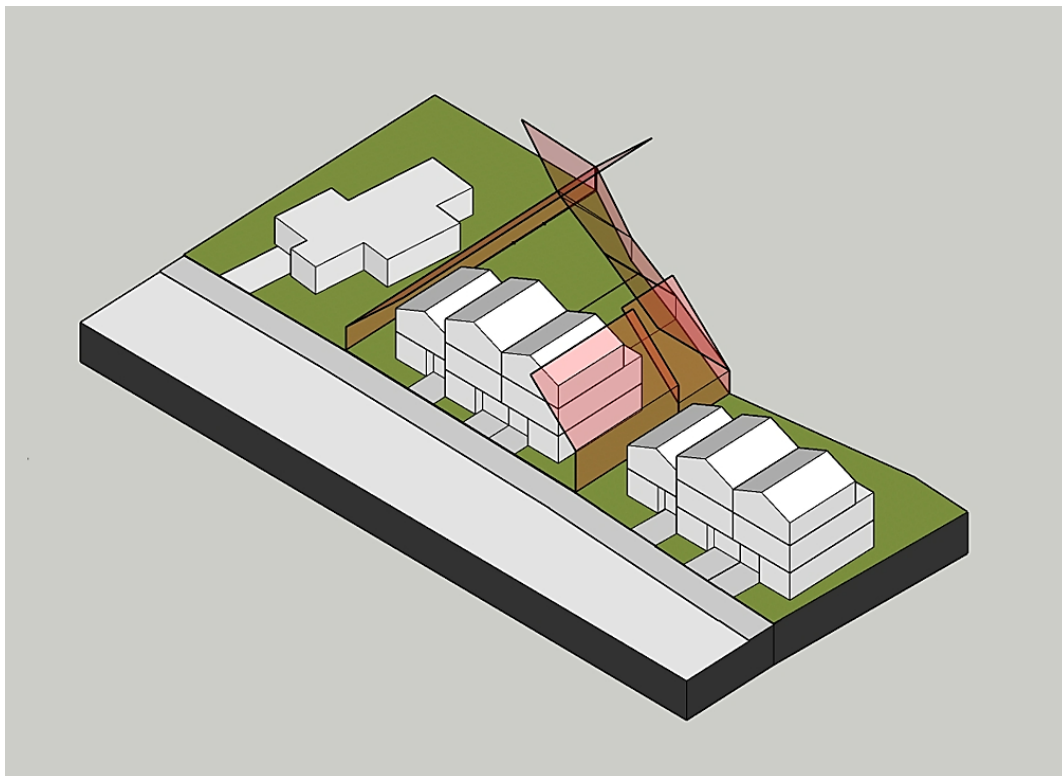


Fig.4 Medium Density recession planes at interface with Suburban Low Density area.

8.0 Frontage activation

8.1 Higher residential densities typically produce a greater sense of inhabitation than the traditional suburb. However, as the intensity of development increases, care must be taken to activate building frontages e.g., by avoiding long lines of garage doors. The following development standards promote visual interest and support public/private engagement at the edges of streets and lanes:

- i. Main entrances are located within ground-level street-facing elevations. Alternatively, entrances may be located within the forward half of a side elevation. In either case, entrances must be signalled by architectural and/or landscape features that are clearly visible from the street.
- ii. Street (or park) elevations should have at least one window at ground level and at least one more opening at first-floor level. Each of these openings should provide a direct view of the public domain. Each opening should serve a living room, dining room, kitchen or other habitable space within the dwelling.
- iii. An internal or attached garage should occupy no more than half the width of a dwelling's street elevation. As already noted, garages should be setback at least 1.0m from the rest of the dwelling's front elevation. These parameters ensure that garages do not become visually intrusive elements in the streetscape. They also facilitate the inclusion of a prominent habitable space within the ground-floor of the dwelling.
- iv. Where an accessory building (including a detached garage) adjoins a public thoroughfare, the structure should occupy no more than half the frontage. This provision preserves visual access to private gardens and the front elevations of associated dwellings.
- v. In Suburban Low Density areas, street-facing garden walls and fences should be no more than 1.0m high within 3.0m of a front boundary. They help to create an open streetscape with good visual connectivity between public and private domains.
- vi. In Medium Density areas, street-facing garden walls or fences up to 1.8m may occupy no more than one-third of the lot frontage. The remainder of the frontage may have a wall or fence no more than 1.0m high. This provision maintains visual connectivity between public and private realms. It also allows a private open space to be screened from passers-by.
- vii. Front setbacks should contain at least one significant tree.

9.0 Private outdoor amenity areas

9.1 Within Medium Density and Local Centre Mixed-Use areas, private outdoor amenity areas may be elevated above ground level. The 11m height limit anticipates three-storey dwellings with first-floor living spaces. In this case, a well-oriented generously proportioned deck or balcony may provide more outdoor amenity than a garden. An elevated outdoor area can also deliver better views and support passive surveillance of adjacent public space.



Recessed garages.

9.2 Owing to their constructed nature, balconies and raised decks may be smaller than their ground-level counterparts. For townhouses and apartments with two or more bedrooms, these outdoor amenity areas should measure at least 8m². For dwellings with fewer than two bedrooms, these areas should measure at least 5m². In all cases, decks or balconies should have a minimum plan dimension of 2m and be accessed directly from living, dining or kitchen areas.

9.3 These dimensions and relationships ensure that decks and balconies can function effectively as outdoor living spaces. The measurements also ensure that these elements can be successfully incorporated in the overall architectural composition. Additionally, undercroft spaces will be more manageable if decks and projecting balconies are limited in extent.



Well-integrated outdoor spaces & optimised aesthetics for higher density housing.

10.0 Provision for multi-unit housing (MUHA overlay)

10.1 Several medium density areas are identified as suitable for Multi-Unit Housing Area (MUHA) overlays. Specifically, these are North Village and the five promontory Clusters. It is proposed that these locations be collectively referred to as 'Area H' with MUHA provisions. Here, multi-unit development is supported by walkable access to one or more of the following: shops and other local centre facilities, public transport, recreational trails and high-amenity landscape settings.

10.2 Comprehensive planning provides a further justification for medium-density multi-unit housing. The majority of the Plan area is comprised of large parcels with relatively few owners. In combination with the Structure Plan, these land banks allow a coordinated development with better public and private outcomes.

10.3 Significant areas remain outside the MUHA, and these generally occur where the Structure Plan interfaces with established housing. In these locations, conventional detached dwellings on standard lots provide a transition to existing traditional residential fabric.

11.0 Ground-floor frontages within the Neighbourhood Centre

11.1 Neighbouring frontages should be visually distinct, and architectural treatments should be specific to individual buildings. High quality materials and finishes are sought as a discretionary matter (Fig.5). Large areas of bright/garish/vivid colours should be avoided, particularly on shiny surfaces.

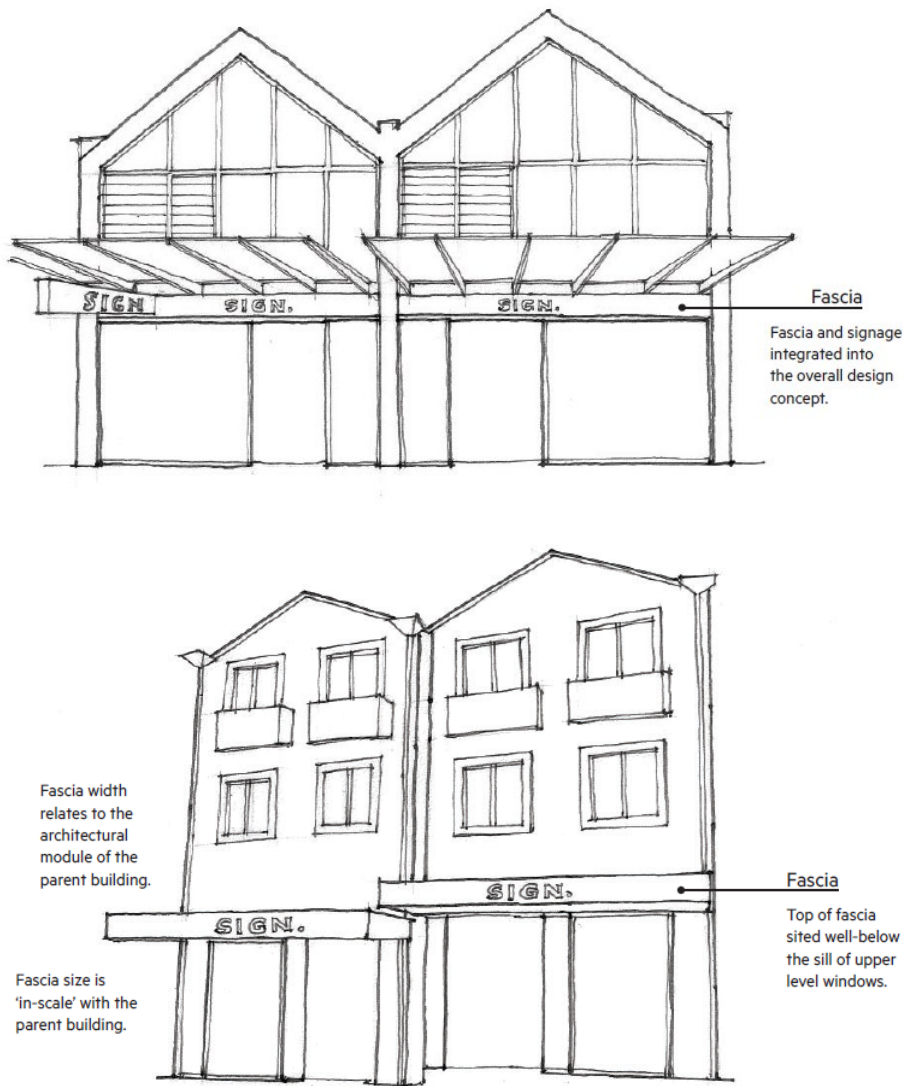


Fig.5 Frontages within the Neighbourhood Centre (indicative sketches).

11.2 The size, shape and style of ground-floor openings should match the scale and proportion of the shop front and the building as a whole. Large unbroken areas of glazing should be avoided, because these appear as voids that are difficult to integrate visually with upper elevations. Instead, ground-floor glazing should be organised as a series of vertically proportioned façade modules. These can be separated by structural elements, applied pilasters or short sections of opaque wall.

For additional visual interest, glazing modules can be subdivided by mullions, glazing bars and stall risers.

11.3 A building or tenancy entrance must be easily distinguishable in the street façade. This can be achieved by recessing the entrance and using distinctive colours, materials and details.

11.4 Canopies, awnings and fascias should not detract from the style of the shop front, the overall character of the building or the wider street scene (Fig.5). Oversized or visually dominant canopies and fascias are inappropriate and detract from a balanced architectural composition. In particular, a single canopy or fascia should not continue uninterrupted across a number of distinct buildings or primary units of architectural composition.

11.5 The top of a canopy or fascia should be sited well below the sills of first-floor windows. This ensures a clear distinction between floors and avoids the severance of upper and lower elevations. Common visual modules and matching horizontal rhythms can unify the upper and lower floors. The composition is more coherent if some of these modules also occur as articulations in the canopy.

11.6 Signs, lighting and security apparatus should be integrated into the design concept and the overall visual composition. Signs should be proportional to the architectural module on which they are mounted.

11.7 Regardless of whether they are illuminated, box signs detract from the appearance of shop fronts and can be visually dominant within the streetscape. Visual dominance can be avoided by limiting the extent to which a sign projects from the face of a building.

11.8 Fascia lettering should be minimal and should not dominate the canopy area. The size and style of the lettering should be co-ordinated with the design of the canopy and the shop front as a whole.

11.9 Window stickers and posters are often unsympathetic to the character of a building. They also reduce visual connectivity between interior and exterior. Therefore, ground-floor glazing should remain unobstructed.

12.0 Retirement Village Option

12.1 The Retirement Village Option provides an alternative outcome for the southern half of North Village. Additional development objectives apply to this component of the Plan. These are described in sections 12.2 to 12.4 below.

12.2 The following objectives apply to the layout of streets and other open spaces within the Retirement Village Option:

- a) On-site circulation creates a joined-up path network that accommodates vehicles and active modes;
- b) Paths are organised as a modified orthogonal grid that generally aligns with the North Village street layout;
- c) The on-site circulation network has at least five, well-distributed connections to the surrounding public street system;
- d) Two circulation routes have distinctive landscape treatments. These create axes with nominally north-south and east-west orientations;
- e) The north-south axis continues the corridor of Local Street E, creating direct visual and physical links to the Wetland Park;

- f) The east-west axis provides a legible, high-amenity connection to the neighbouring gully reserve; and,
- g) The axes meet at right angles near a cluster of communal buildings and open spaces (see also 12.4 below).

12.3 The following objectives apply to the layout and design of ground-level dwellings within the Retirement Village Option:

- a) Terraces, duplexes and fully detached houses are organised with consistent front-to-front and back-to-back relationships among the units;
- b) Within the site, dwellings face circulation routes;
- c) Where the site is bounded by a public street, individual perimeter dwellings face out towards this thoroughfare;
- d) In all locations, dwelling entrances are clearly visible to passers-by and front elevations contain at least one opening that serves a habitable space; and,
- e) Street-facing garages are set back from the primary component of a dwelling's front elevation.

12.4 The potential exists for a low-rise apartment building located along the gully edge on the eastern margin of the retirement village. This possible building will benefit from outlook over the revegetated gully to the east whilst to the west will address an internal street.

12.4 The following objectives apply to the layout and design of administration offices, communal facilities, residential apartments, rest home and dementia care accommodation within the Retirement Village Option. These facilities are jointly referred to as 'communal buildings':

- a) Communal buildings are co-located in the north-west corner of the site;
- b) Co-ordinated design of communal buildings and open spaces creates a campus-like environment;
- c) Communal buildings produce a coherent built edge along the Activity Street within the Neighbourhood Centre;
- d) The horizontal and vertical scale of the communal buildings complements that of mixed-use development within the Neighbourhood Centre;
- e) The street-facing elevations of communal buildings are visually interesting and convey a sense of inhabitation;
- f) On the Activity Street, the community buildings' ground-floor accommodation produces a street-facing active edge; and,
- g) At the corner of the Activity Street and the Local Street, the community buildings' ground-floor accommodation includes a publicly accessible commercial activity.

13.0 Conclusions

13.1 The overarching conclusion is that residential development is feasible and desirable. The site is suitable for neighbourhood centre activities and a combination of conventional suburban dwellings and multi-unit medium-density housing.

13.2 Comprehensive planning produces a high-quality public realm with improved visual and physical connections to Aokautere's waterways and natural gullies. The local street system is complemented by a network of off-road trails, which link residential properties to extensive open space corridors.

13.3 A comprehensively planned development incorporates medium-density housing with a range of lot sizes and dwelling types.

13.4 The effects of taller, denser buildings can be managed because the whole area of Aokautere is subject to a unified spatial plan and targeted development standards.

13.5 In general, PNCC's existing development controls can deliver a high-quality outcome at Aokautere especially in Suburban Low Density areas.

13.6 Site-specific standards include 150m² minimum lot sizes in Medium Density areas; minimum average net densities of 25dph and 50dph in some locations; some reduced separation distances; and the relaxation of some height recession planes. These provisions encourage long narrow lots with street-facing housing placed forward on the lot. The standards also accommodate a range of housing types.

13.7 An 11m maximum building height is proposed in high-amenity Medium Density areas. This provision accommodates three-storey buildings, which make better use of the most favourable locations.

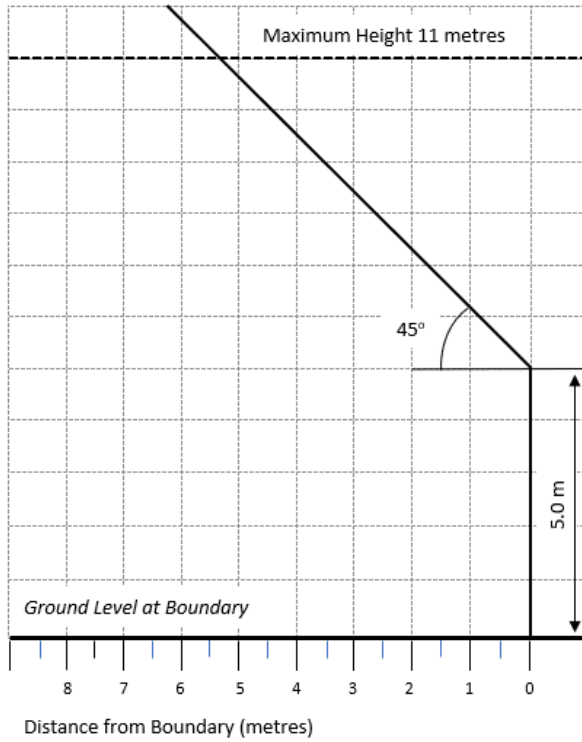
13.8 Aokautere's Neighbourhood Centre will provide a mixed-use local hub with: quality commercial and community buildings; active frontages; a stronger sense of spatial enclosure; and direct access to a range of public open spaces.

13.9 The Retirement Village Option provides an appropriate alternative development outcome for the southern half of North Village.

Appendix A: Height Recession Planes

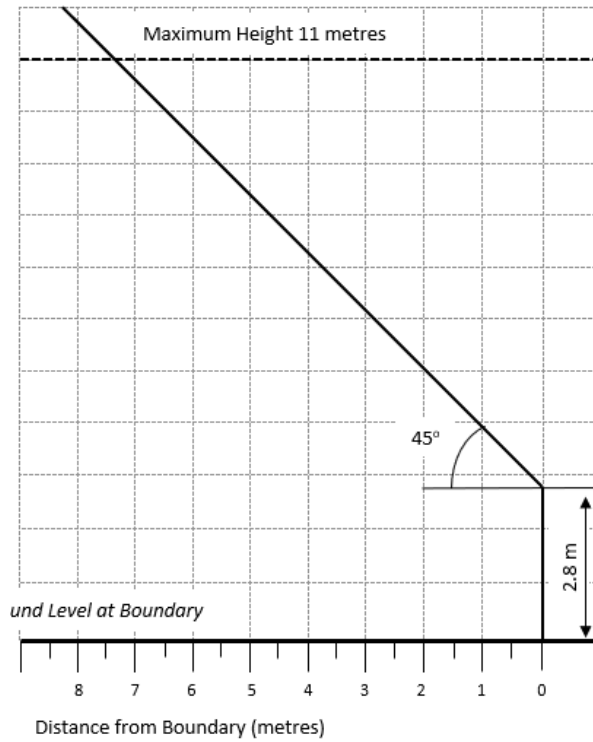
Medium Density Height Recession Plane

Front 2/3 of Side Boundary



Medium Density Height Recession Plane

Rear 1/3 of Side Boundary & Rear Boundary



Not to scale