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**PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESEARCH  
RELATING TO RESIDENTIAL INTENSIFICATION  
- THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH -**

*Research report prepared for  
Hutt City Council*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This research report has been prepared to complement the results of the Quantitative Survey that was previously undertaken and presented as part of the Public Consultation Research into Residential Intensification proposed for the Waterloo, Epuni and the CBD edge. The qualitative findings presented in this report are intended to provide further insight to the attitudes and opinions of the local community.

## **2. THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The overall objectives that were set for the two research projects (the Quantitative Survey and the Qualitative Investigation) were defined as follows:

- (a) To measure the extent to which local residents, in the target catchment area, are aware of, and understand, the proposed changes to the District Plan relating to residential intensification
- (b) To benchmark the public's attitudes toward the proposed changes
- (c) To identify any concerns that local residents have with regard to the changes
- (d) To explore residents' preferences with regard to communication, to enable them to feel informed and consulted with, regarding the decisions that are made

## **3. METHOD**

The qualitative research was undertaken among a sample of thirty-seven respondents, recruited from within the primary catchment of Waterloo, Epuni and the CBD edge. The sample consisted of a mix of residential householders from each of the three areas.

A mix of focus group discussion and individual interviews was used for the investigation. Group discussion enable the research participants to build on the thoughts and ideas of others, whilst individual interviews provide a broader spread of opinion.

Respondents were recruited by using a combination of face-to-face contact and random telephone recruitment. After discussion with client, the final sample comprised twenty-seven residents recruited from the '*general public*' and a further ten residents who had placed a submission with Hutt City Council on the topic and/or had participated in the follow-up workshop.

A Discussion Guide was developed for the study, a copy of which is attached in Section 6 of this report.

## **4. TIMING**

Fieldwork for the research was undertaken from December 2014 to early-March 2015.

## **5. THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS**

### **5.1. AWARENESS OF THE DISCUSSION DOCUMENT**

The research participants were initially asked the question:

*“Are you aware of the Discussion Document, relating to possible changes to planning rules, to allow for residential growth in the areas of Epuni, Waterloo and the CBD edge?”*

Consistent with the results of the quantitative survey, approximately half of the residents interviewed indicated that they were aware of the document, prior to participating in the research. However, it can be noted that awareness of the proposed changes may have been higher than this, with some respondents giving replies such as:

*“I am not aware of a Discussion Document, but I have heard they (the Council) want more housing in the area.”*

*“I have heard they are going to build on the riverbanks, but I wasn’t aware of a Discussion Document.”*

The residents who were randomly selected from the general public mentioned, on average, 1.1 different sources of information about the proposed changes to planning rules. Residents who were recruited from the list of submitters/participants in the workshops named a greater number of sources of information (1.8 on average).

The main sources of information, in order of frequency of mention, were:

- Hutt News
- A flyer/note in the letterbox
- A workshop/public meeting/open day
- Word-of-mouth (neighbours, friends, colleagues)
- Hutt City Council/HCC website
- Saw the Discussion Document in the library
- Saw it in last year’s LTP Document (as part of the Urban Growth Strategy)

## **5.2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES**

The research participants were asked to outline what they understood the proposed changes to be and the reasons for the changes.

Most of the residents had a general understanding that the proposal related to intensification/higher density housing in Epuni, Waterloo and the CBD edge. Many recalled that it involved changes to planning rules, especially with regard to height regulations to allow for multi-level dwellings (up to three-storeys) and site coverage.

Typical comments included:

*“They are proposing changes to allow for three storey dwellings/apartments.”*

*“The changes are to allow for 50% coverage of site and multi-levels on site.”*

*“The changes are to allow for increased housing density and high-density intensification around the train stations.”*

*“The changes are to allow for more houses – growth in the area.”*

*“To have new housing in certain areas and close to the transport system (rail).”*

*“The changes are about rezoning for growth.”*

*“There is a proposed change of rules relating to increased densities in parts of the central area. There are two proposed zones. The changes relate to building heights and minimum site areas.”*

*“The changes allow for more housing in the area/more infill housing.”*

*“More apartments are proposed for the city and the changes to the planning rules allow for that.”*

Respondents were further questioned about the reasons for the proposed changes to planning rules. Approximately one-third of the residents interviewed stated that they *did not know*, or *did not understand* the reasons for the changes.

However, the two-thirds of residents who could express a reason for the changes gave a few different perspectives. Some clearly had an understanding that the changes were related to the Council’s growth strategy. This was illustrated in comments such as:

*“The main reason Hutt City Council is doing this is to encourage growth, a more vibrant inner-city and a safer city (in that it won’t be deserted or under-populated). Wellington is an example of this, where they introduced apartment living and the area has become vibrant after 5pm. There is shopping, cafes, the place is buzzing.”*

*“The changes are to fit with their growth strategy and to attract people down to Wellington and the Hutt. People are being encouraged to move out of Auckland, as the infrastructure is stressed and lots of provincial cities are dying. With housing so expensive in Auckland and it being so comparatively cheap in other areas, this is a solution for Auckland and an opportunity for the Hutt and Wellington.”*

*“Council wishes to increase the population of the Hutt, to lead to better development of the Hutt and make it more attractive to live here. They can improve facilities because they will have a greater population base.”*

*“It is about growth, to inject life into the city of Lower Hutt and some businesses may grow and benefit as well.”*

Others simply expressed the view that more housing/housing options were needed to cater for more residents. For example:

*“More houses are needed for more people to live in.”*

*“The council want more people to come and live here, so more houses are needed to accommodate them.”*

*“Demand for housing is changing. There is a demand for smaller developments, not big plots like there used to be.”*

*“There is a need for more housing and more types of housing, to meet the needs of a changing population.”*

*“To broaden the housing options through intensification.”*

Other reasons that residents felt were behind the proposed changes to the planning rules were expressed as:

*“To get rid of the boarded-up, empty houses that back on to Epuni School and are around the Epuni Station area. The plan is to knock them down and, I hope, improve the area with decent houses.”*

*“Council wants more rates money.”*

*“It is so that people can walk to the trains. But they do this now, from where I live.”*

*“To plan for the future – a larger population in the years ahead.”*

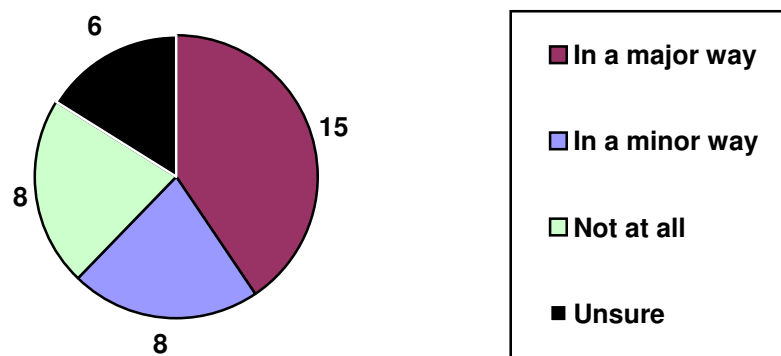
### **5.3. HOW DO RESIDENTS SEE THE CHANGES AFFECTING THEM?**

The research participants were asked to consider how they thought the proposed changes would affect them. They were then asked to indicate whether the changes would affect them in a major way, a minor way, or not at all.

Approximately 50% of the general public sample felt that they would be affected in some way, as did most of the respondents selected from the submitters/participants in the workshops.

The overall rating given by the research participants can be summarised as follows:

#### **THE PROPOSED CHANGES WILL AFFECT ME:**



The respondents who thought they would not be affected by the changes mainly reasoned that their neighbourhoods had largely been intensified/subdivided and so there was little room for further development. For example:

*“Our area is already built out.”*

*“The infill has happened.”*

*“The street is fully occupied and there are no big gardens for development.”*

*“Intensification has already taken place in our street. Sections have been subdivided and I can’t see how more housing could be built.”*

Some respondents, who felt that they would not be affected or that the changes would have minimal impact on them, considered that the Council’s growth strategy could lead to positive benefits. Their views included:

*“It is a far-sighted approach, taking notice of future trends. I am aware residents close to the CBD have larger sections and are unhappy. But there will come a time when they will move on and changes will occur. A couple of generations down the track, they will take advantages of these proposed opportunities.”*

*“I support high-density intensification around train stations. This type of building is appropriate for public transport environments.”*



*“I support the intensification that is planned near the train stations. Lower Hutt is a satellite and provides workers for Wellington. If done right, this plan from HCC could provide changes in housing and that should attract younger people to come and live here.”*

*“More population should mean more business and more jobs.”*

*“It will be good for the construction industry.”*

*“The bus service will probably improve with a bigger population.”*

The research participants who believed that they would be affected in some way by the proposed changes expressed a variety of concerns and these are covered in the next section of this report.

#### **5.4. CONCERNS/DISLIKES ABOUT THE PROPOSED CHANGES**

The main area of concern that emerged in this qualitative research project was about property values. Approximately one-quarter of the residents interviewed felt that the changes could potentially lead to a less attractive environment in which to live, with multi-level and lower-cost housing. These views were expressed in comments such as:

*“I am concerned about property values. We have just put \$10k of carpet down, to add value to our house. Are we going to lose value? Should we continue to renovate? My concern is that if my neighbour sells and a developer buys it, then I try and sell and my value goes down, like a roller effect. We bought in the area ten years ago and saw it as an investment. This is our retirement money. We wanted a big section while our kids were growing and we wanted to get them into HVHS.”*

*“If more people come here to more houses, then I see that as possibly devaluing our homes – through lower cost housing and not having a pleasant environment in which to live.”*

*“I don’t think the changes will add value. The Council says that they want quality dwellings, but really, how much control will they have over this? I think it could lead to a less attractive area and lower property values.”*

*“Possible effects on property values. It is a huge opportunity for property developers to make money and people alongside it will be affected. It will impact our values and ability to sell if we want to.”*

*“I do not want to see two or three-storey buildings around here. What type of people will come to live in such developments anyway? I think a lot of people in a smaller space will be most unpleasant and crowded. It will not be appealing and it will affect property values.”*

*“There is a danger of creating low-cost housing and a stigma with estate type living.”*

*“My QV is about \$600k. If new places and multi-storey buildings begin nearby, that will drop without doubt. I am devastated that the Council can even contemplate this.”*

*“I am concerned about apartments and the quality of apartments. If they want to build apartments, keep it to the CBD. Put shops at the bottom and make apartments with parking behind. You would not destroy the fabric of the area, but you would if you built apartments here (in this neighbourhood).”*

*“It concerns me that large developers will change the character of the neighbourhood. Townhouses could be a good thing, but it depends on the quality of the housing that will go up. It could improve property values, or seriously undermine them. I suspect and fear the latter.”*

Some of the comments outlined above allude to the fact that some residents show an element of distrust toward developers. This was also raised by other respondents who commented:

*“My concern is about controlling the developers. Can the Council effectively do this? The developers will be in it for the short-term gain and not the good of city and its residents.”*

*“It is well known that developers want the land in this area. They remove the house and put two or three units on the property. It is not the type of environment we or others want to live in.”*

*“Developers will buy land and demolish the houses. They will then replace them with high-density monstrosities.”*

Approximately 20% of the residents interviewed felt that increased growth and intensification would lead to more:

*“traffic and traffic congestion”*

and *“more noise”*

It is interesting to note, however, that residents who commented on traffic and noise had mainly indicated that changes to policy would be likely to impact them in ‘a minor way’.

14% of respondents specifically mentioned concerns about building heights and three-storey buildings, especially with regard to sunlight and privacy. For example:

*“I am worried about ugly tall buildings that would block out the sun.”*

*“I am concerned that people will overlook us and we will lose our privacy, even with good fencing. We could also be blocked for sun.”*

*“We all need our privacy and sunshine for Vitamin D.”*

*“Lack of sun and lack of privacy. Shadows over existing and new buildings.”*

Other concerns that were expressed by the research participants included:

*“How will infrastructure stand to having more housing? I am thinking specifically about sewerage, drainage, etc.”*

*“It’s not just housing that needs to be planned for, but also parking, shared community green spaces, jobs, schools and shops, to support the increased population.”*

*“Where are the jobs coming from to support the increased population?”*

*“The rights of existing residents.”*

*“The Hutt needs more focus on the vision for growth – a slogan, promote ourselves as a destination to live in and work here, market our differences, etc.”*

*“We need a new paradigm in city living and it needs our Mayor to take leadership on it. Zoning is killing our cities. We need to change the approach we are using and I have communicated that to Council in my submission.”*

*“Will some people be displaced from their existing homes? If so, that would concern me greatly.”*

*“Timeframes – there has been poor advertising of meetings, there is lack of awareness of the topic and consultations.”*

## **5.5. WHAT WOULD THE RESIDENTS ASK HUTT CITY COUNCIL ABOUT THE PROPOSED CHANGES?**

The question was asked:

*“If you could ask Hutt City Council anything about the proposed changes, what would you ask?”*

Approximately half of the research participants were able to freely formulate a question that they would ask the Council. Some replied with more than one question. Their areas of interest can be summarised under the following headings, using examples of their verbatim comments.

### **HOW SOUND IS THE GROWTH STRATEGY? WHAT IS COUNCIL GOING TO DO TO ATTRACT MORE PEOPLE TO THE HUTT?**

*“It is a big vision to bring people to live here. I wonder how much advertising of the Hutt and Wellington is in Auckland?”*

*“What are they specifically going to be doing to draw more people to live here?”*

*“How do they (the HCC) propose attracting more people to the Hutt? It is an important question, because it is at the heart of the growth strategy and the policy changes that are proposed.”*

### **HOW WILL THE COUNCIL PROTECT PROPERTY VALUES?**

*“What are they going to do to protect property values in the area?”*

*“How can I, as a resident with a substantial investment in my property, be assured that these changes will not adversely affect my property value?”*

*“What are they going to do to ensure that the environment is not comprised and that quality housing is retained in the area? This is important because it affects property values.”*

### **HOW WILL THEY ENFORCE THE CHANGES/CONTROL THE DEVELOPERS?**

*“How are they going to control the changes and, specifically, the developers? I am not talking about the policy, but in practical terms as well. Developers are notorious for manipulating outcomes to suit themselves.”*

*“How can they enforce these changes? The more complex they make it, the more people will try and bend situations to meet their own criteria.”*

WHAT FOCUS WILL BE PLACED ON QUALITY DESIGN?

*“What sort of quality design are they going to use? Is it going to fit the character of the area?”*

*“What are they going to do to stop ugly houses? Even new houses can be ugly. For example, there is an ugly house in Nile Street, which has a corrugated exterior. It looks out of place with the area and other houses around it.”*

WHAT IS THE CONSULTATION PROCESS?

*“What is the process they (the Council) will be following, before a full decision is made? I don’t want decisions to be made by just officials and councillors. I want them to be balanced and informed of the pros and cons.”*

*“What is the process and how quick is this happening? Are they going to tell us?”*

OTHER QUESTIONS/CONCERNS

*“Is the sewerage and drainage systems up to it?”*

*“What provisions are being made for car parking, school pickup and drop off zones?”*

*“Do Council plan on buying properties in our street?”*

*“Are other areas going to be considered? I am thinking about where there is more space, so that more residents can be accommodated. Why load just one area?”*

*“Are they going to review how rates are set? More rateable properties should logically reduce the burden on existing ratepayers.”*

*“How will the proposed changes affect where I live now?”*

*“Can you please provide us with more detail? We need to know all the rules before we can comment fully.”*

*“Developer UrbanPlus is an arm of the Council. There is a conflict of goals/interests. It is therefore difficult to take the plan seriously. Can you please explain?”*

*“The Fire Station is empty in Waterloo Road. Is it Maori land? Could that be earmarked for housing?”*

*“Can I please have the full detail in a printed discussion document, rather than email? A hard copy is good, because you can flick back to previous sections. It needs maps and diagrams and these need to be clearer.”*

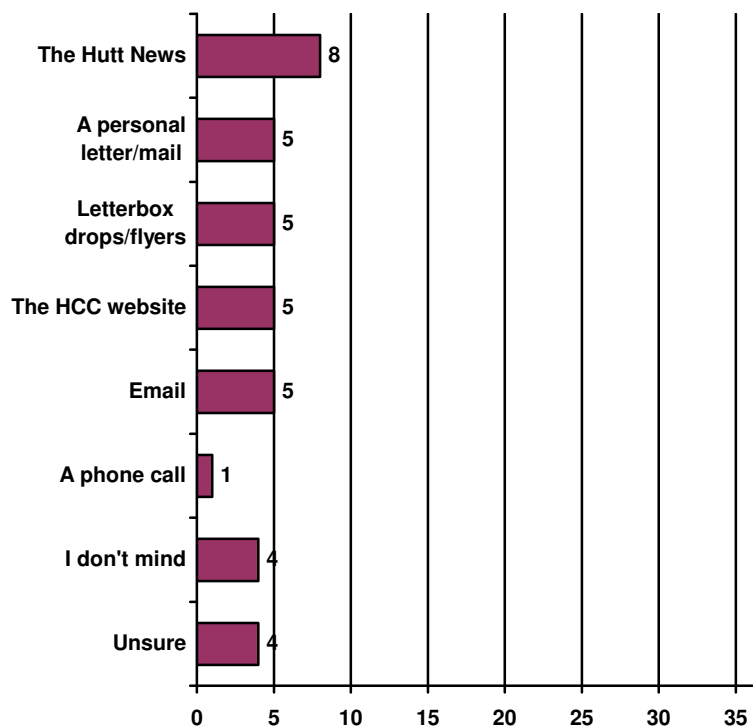
## **5.6. DO RESIDENTS HAVE SUFFICIENT INFORMATION?**

Approximately two-thirds of the residents interviewed felt they had sufficient information for now, but indicated that they would like to be kept informed as developments with the proposed policy change progresses. Those who sought more information generally indicated that they would like answers to the questions they had asked in the previous section.

The respondents selected from the list of submitters/participants in the workshops noted that they had been promised a summary of the paper that was being prepared in response to the group consultation they had attended. They had been informed that the paper would, after review, be presented to Council for feedback. Residents would then have a further chance to respond.

## **5.7. RESIDENTS' THOUGHTS ABOUT COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION**

The research participants were asked how they would like to be kept informed about progress and decisions relating to the proposed changes. A variety of communication channels were mentioned, as indicated in the graph below:



This suggests that a combination of communication approaches may be required to keep residents informed about progress.

Respondents were also asked for their suggestions regarding how Council could communicate with local residents, to help them feel informed and connected with decisions relating to the proposed changes to planning rules. They were informed that this could be helpful, not just for this project, but in future consultation with the public.

Several research participants reiterated that the **Hutt News** is an effective means of keeping the public informed. For example:

*“The Hutt News is a good source of information about council.”*

*“I would suggest the Hutt News. Most people around here read it. I know I do.”*

*“Council do communicate now, even if it is in the Hutt News.”*

*“The Hutt News is a good place for information. I know I can often get information there about what the council is doing. It comes out regularly and there is a need to give regular updates on a topic like this. People get concerned when there is no information and they feel in the dark.”*

Other respondents mentioned that a **special letter or personal letter** to residents would be appropriate. For example:

*“I think they should distribute a personal letter to all residents in the area concerned. A personal letter is better than a flyer, as it helps to communicate that someone cares.”*

*“I think a subject like this requires a special letter to residents, informing them of the consultation and proposed changes.”*

*“A flyer in the letterbox, as per this consultation, is a good starting point, but a personal letter would be even better.”*

**Consultation meetings and public meetings** were also mentioned by several respondents, especially those who had attended the group consultation. Example comments included:

*“Consultation meetings are good. This is a way that council could build a framework. Listen to what people are saying and come up with a plan that would probably satisfy everybody.”*

*“Consultation meetings are useful. I was impressed with the people who attended and what was covered at the meeting. I felt involved.”*

*“Public meetings are worthwhile, but they need to get people along to them. For an important matter like this, I thought there would be more people there. Council has a challenge to break through the public indifference or apathy.”*

Other suggestions offered were as follows:

*“Be open-minded when holding workshops with the public. Don’t try to direct and steer the meeting to suit themselves.”*

*“It is not good if you get the feeling decisions have already been made and they are simply window-dressing.”*

*“Give people a chance to feel listened to, even if it is by answering their emails.”*

*“Provide written feedback on submissions/meetings. If residents have gone to the trouble to express their views or attend a meeting, it deserves a reply. It is all a waste of time, if people don’t feel they are listened to.”*

*“Involve all age groups at the design stage, including children. We need to make the dwellings and environment suitable for all age groups, not just the elderly or professionals.”*

*“I want the Council to listen to individual submissions and consider requests. I am not sure of the process they follow. I don’t want decisions to be made by just officials or councillors. I want them to be balanced and informed of the pros and cons.”*

*“All developments need to have buy-in from the public. The council have a responsibility to create vitality and excitement about their projects.”*

*“It is very vague how council interprets and applies the law regarding the District Plan. There is some discretionary power. There needs to be an explanation of which rules are immovable and which ones are discretionary and how council staff exercise that discretion in favour of what criteria. Our council is supposed to be our gatekeeper for our interests.”*

*“The Urban Growth Plan should be seen by residents. They need to deliver it (that is, the updates) so people will see it.”*



## **5.8. CONCLUSION**

As mentioned in the opening paragraph to this report, the qualitative research has been undertaken to provide further insight to the results of the Quantitative Survey into residential intensification proposed for the Waterloo, Epuni and the CBD edge. It is strongly advised that the reports are read in conjunction with each other, as they provide different insights into public opinion.

The quantitative survey revealed that 70% of the residents surveyed support the concept of possible changes to planning rules, but a majority of these householders felt that some changes or revisions would be required to the initial proposal. That report also provided an overview of how residents view specific aspects of the proposed policy e.g. regarding site coverage, dormer windows and gable ends, comparative opinions about new standalone housing, semi-detached dwellings and two-storey townhouses.

The qualitative research has provided insight to residents' understanding of the proposed changes, how they see it affecting them, their concerns and dislikes about the proposed changes, and their thoughts on future consultation.

There are strong indications in the qualitative research that a significant proportion of residents (approximately one-quarter) have underlying concerns about property values and the potential impact of multi-level and lower-cost housing on their investment. It would seem that there is a need for some further consultation with residents about specific aspects of the proposed policy changes and how they may affect property owners. Reassurance may also be required regarding how Council will manage the implementation of policy, especially with regard to developers.

Residents offered their views on how on-going communication should be handled relating to this and future consultations. The Hutt News is seen as an important channel of communication on Council matters, but that it should be supported by various other channels, including letterbox drops, personal letters and emails to residents who become engaged on the subject, together with information on the HCC website. Consultation meetings with the public are also considered a good idea, but effort is needed to encourage residents to become (more) involved. Various other suggestions were offered about communication/community engagement and these may be useful for developing future communications strategy.

## **6. DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESEARCH  
RELATING TO RESIDENTIAL GROWTH**

Note that the following questions are simply starting points for discussion. We will ensure that the broad content outlined below is covered during the course of the interview. However, it is important to gather the information in a context that is relevant to the respondent and to explore other issues that arise.

- (1) Is the research participant aware of the Discussion Document on Residential Growth for the areas of Epuni, Waterloo and the CBD edge?
- (2) If the respondent is aware of the document, how were they made aware of it and/or from what sources did they receive information?
- (3) What do they understand are the proposed changes? Can they specifically recall the types of changes that were mentioned in the Discussion Document?
- (4) What do they understand are the reasons for the proposed changes?
- (5) How does the respondent see the proposed changes affecting them, as a local resident? Do they consider it will affect them in a major way, a minor way, or not at all? Why?
- (6) Does the respondent have any concerns, or particular dislikes, about the proposed changes? If so, what?
- (7) If they could ask Hutt City Council anything about the proposed changes, what would they ask?
- (8) Does the respondent feel they have sufficient information about the proposed changes to the District Plan? If not, what information would they like to receive? How should the information be provided?
- (9) How would the respondent like to be kept informed about progress and decisions relating to the proposed changes?
- (10) What suggestions do the research participants have, regarding how the Council could communicate with local residents, to help them feel informed and connected with decisions relating to the proposed changes?
- (11) Other relevant points that may emerge during the course of the research.