

**Rodney District Council
Affordable Housing Policy Statement
And Short Term Action Plan**

May 2010

Introduction

Housing Affordability has been identified as a key priority social issue for Rodney District. People need to be able to afford to live in a location that enables them to easily commute to their work, study or to other daily activities. The lack of affordable housing options not only places stress on families but also makes it difficult for businesses to attract and retain skilled workers in a competitive labour market.

Historically, the need for affordable housing has predominantly been addressed through income related rental accommodation provided by Central and Local Government and targeted at those with the greatest need. However, an affordability crisis has emerged since the mid 1990s that has extended beyond those on the lowest incomes to people on middle-range incomes. As this intermediate market has increasingly struggled to access housing, home ownership rates have started to reduce significantly, and the focus has shifted from subsidised housing to the problem of how to constrain house prices in the general housing market. This has inevitably led to an increased scrutiny being placed on the regulatory processes associated with property development and the role that local government has in addressing housing affordability through its planning and regulatory processes.

This policy statement is an acknowledgement of the Council's commitment to addressing the issues of housing affordability and the Action Plan identifies some immediate steps that can be taken as a practical demonstration of that commitment.

Strategic links

Vision Rodney:

The Rodney District Council's Community Outcomes are recorded in the "Vision Rodney" document. When these community outcomes were reviewed in 2008, two foundation concepts were identified that underpinned all the other outcomes and are essential components of how all the other outcomes are achieved. These are:

1. **Sustainability:** *the long term impact and viability of any decisions made by the Council and the community is a key factor in determining what actions we will take.*
2. **Collaboration:** *sustainability is best achieved when communities strongly identify with and share the goals of the Council. Outcomes are maximised when we work together, so collaboration needs to permeate whatever we do.*

These two concepts are also critical when considering the issue of affordable housing. To achieve any significant changes in affordability will require a long term approach and commitment from a wide range of participants working together with a common aim.

Outcomes identified in Vision Rodney that directly relate to housing affordability include:

1) Prosperous: "We will have a growing and resilient economy based on a wide variety of businesses that fit our character."

Business growth is dependent on the availability of a local skilled labour force. If the costs of living in or travelling to a specific location are too oppressive for potential employees then businesses will be discouraged from establishing. As housing unaffordability becomes more acute it also impacts on public sector employees such as teachers, law enforcement and healthcare providers. The impact of this is particularly hard on rural communities on the urban fringe.

2) Vibrant: "We will have a range of recreational and cultural facilities and events across the district and we will encourage creativity and diversity."

One of the major concerns in local communities is the potential loss of cultural capital and heritage as multi-generational families are forced to move out of the district because the young generation cannot afford to purchase property locally. The link between diversity and affordability is also acknowledged in Vision Rodney with the following quote from the community: "We need a more diverse population and that means housing that is affordable too. "

3) Distinctive: "We will maintain and enhance the character of our townships and rural areas through excellent urban and rural planning and the intelligent management of growth."

Lot sizes and allowable residential density are critical components in housing affordability; as is the timely release of land and construction of the infrastructure necessary for development to proceed.

Planning Rodney:

Planning Rodney is a strategic, future focused 'picture' of Rodney based on known growth, economic, social and environmental and cultural factors, that indicates the direction we are heading in. It provides focus and sets out how we will get to this future 'picture'.

It proposes a conceptual future for the district of distinctive towns and villages set in a stable rural landscape and a well protected natural environment.

This plan for the future of the district focuses around four broad concepts:

- **Urban development focused around identifies growth nodes.**
There must be adequate provision for future growth across the district, but this growth will be contained within the defined boundaries of identified urban settlements. The focus will be around urban intensification rather than urban sprawl.
- **Rural areas to be retained and valued.**
Rural areas of Rodney will visually be perceived as rural. Development that does take place in these areas will be carried out in a manner that enhances the rural environment and adds to the perception of being 'in the country'.
- **The natural environment is to be preserved and protected.**
Rodney contains some special environmental areas, some nationally or even internationally significant. It contains large areas of significant bush and large areas that drain into particularly sensitive estuarine and coastal environments. Any future development must not be at the expense of these local treasures.
- **Movement systems to efficiently connect urban centres throughout the district together.**
Rodney District is highly dependent on its roading network for the movement of people and goods. Providing a range of transport options that connect the district's urban centres with each other and with our metropolitan neighbours will remain a priority and challenge for the district in the future.

Planning Rodney identifies housing affordability as one of the drivers that influences the Council's plans for the future. It observes that if housing affordability continues to decline existing older residents, who are often capital rich but cash poor, may be displaced. Working people at the lower end of the income scale or young people may not be able to enter the housing market or be able to afford to live in some parts of the district, impacting on the viability of local business. In future an increasing range of alternative housing-unit options are likely to be sought across the district and planning must be responsive to this.

Policy Statement

Rodney District Council acknowledges that housing affordability is strongly influenced by international and national economic and demographic factors that individual councils generally have little or no control over.

The Council emphasises that central government has the principal responsibility for interventions that provide housing options for individuals who do not have the financial capacity to engage in the private housing market unassisted.

Central Government also has a key role in the establishment of national regulatory standards that both directly and indirectly impact on housing affordability.

However, the Council acknowledges that the local regulatory environment does have an influence on the total supply of housing and on the spectrum of housing types that are developed within its jurisdiction.

It also acknowledges that delays in the planning and consenting processes can result in increased holding costs for the developers which will ultimately be passed on to the consumer through increased housing costs. Delays in properties entering the market can also result in an under-supply of housing units in the market, creating a more contested environment which in turn drives up prices.

There is also a direct link between the timely development of essential infrastructure assets and the rate of housing development. Any delays in the development or upgrade of these infrastructure assets will also contribute to supply pressures on housing and impact on price.

Land use planning, consenting and infrastructure development are all core services of local government. They are also services that are directly linked to the availability of affordable housing, particularly in high growth residential markets such as Rodney District.

Rodney District Council therefore acknowledge that it does have an important role in addressing the issue of housing affordability locally and makes the following commitments as part of this policy statement.

The Council will:

- **ensure that there is sufficient residentially zoned land available to accommodate future population and housing growth across the district**
- **take into consideration the potential impact that the decisions it makes in planning and resource prioritisation may have on local housing affordability**
- **continue to look for ways to streamline the resource and building consenting processes to minimise the delays and costs to developers without compromising the quality of its services**
- **proactively work with Housing New Zealand, the Department of Building and Housing and other key Government departments to address housing affordability**
- **seek opportunities to work with Third Sector Housing providers to expand the provision of sustainable affordable housing within the district.**

Action Plan

Areas of Potential influence:

District Planning

The majority of appeals to the District Plan 2000 have now been resolved. As more chapters become fully operative, the resource consent process becomes less complicated, time consuming and costly for both developers and the Council.

Regional Spatial Plan and emerging Auckland Council Planning Documents

As we move towards the new Auckland Council there will be opportunities to influence the regional spatial plan while it is in its formative state. There will also be critical decisions made about the future planning frameworks for the region and the Council may have opportunities to have input into this process as well.

While this is unlikely to bring immediately tangible results to the local housing market, the potential long term impact of influencing the discussions and decisions made at this formative stage should not be underestimated.

Resource Consent Processes

Rodney District Council is already recognised for its timeliness in processing resource consents; 97% of all applications are completed within the statutory timeframe. Closer working relationships with developers, including the option of case management of larger scale and sensitive projects, contribute to these positive outcomes. Early engagement through this case management, and initiatives such as valued client meetings, also create opportunities for the Council to influence future projects and encourage outcome-focused project designs that are rule compliant and standardised when appropriate.

Building Consent Processes

Consistent application of rules and standards results in faster and better outcomes for the developer and the home owner. New national initiatives such as “Multi-Proof”¹ and local equivalents that enable the consenting of multiple buildings through the use of standardised plans have the potential to further streamline and simplify the building consent process when developers buy into these concepts.

Prioritising of Infrastructure projects

Infrastructure spending over the medium to long term has been largely determined already through the LTCCP process, which was in turn influenced by Planning Rodney. There is little opportunity to influence these in the short term. However, there may be opportunities to contribute to the development of the processes and criteria that will be used to prioritise future resource allocations in the new Auckland Council. Including affordable housing objectives into the early planning stages of the regional spatial plan and into the statement of intents of relevant Council Controlled Organisations could have significant long term impacts not only for Rodney, but for the whole Auckland Region.

Central Government Collaboration and Engagement

The Council continues to work closely with a range of Government departments including Housing New Zealand, the Department of Building and Housing, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Waitemata District Health Board. Highlighting local needs and issues with these organisations can influence levels of local service delivery and contribute to national policy development.

Third Sector Engagement and Development

Social housing providers are relatively new to the New Zealand housing sector, but there are numerous international models and examples of social housing providers making significant long term contributions to the provision of affordable housing options. Supporting the emergence of a third sector could have a substantial impact on housing affordability and accessibility in the long term.

Council’s actions to date:

One of the most important contributions that councils can make to housing affordability is to ensure that there is adequate land available to meet the current and future growth needs of the area. Over the past year Rodney District Council has:

- Resolved the majority of appeals to the District Plan 2000 including all the appeals relevant to the residential zones.
- Worked with developers to bring forward land at Silverdale North, Orewa East and Warkworth and initiated plan changes in Huapai North and Orewa West.
- Integrated funding for infrastructure into the LTCCP with the funding allocations that have been committed to aligned to land use planning.

The Council has also reviewed all of its consenting processes to streamline the customer service experience. Changes introduced include:

- Case management for resource consents for large or sensitive development projects.

¹ “Multi-Proof” is a new streamlined National Multiple-use Approval Service for volume builders, that was launched by the Building and Construction Minister, Hon Maurice Williamson in February 2010. Volume builders can obtain a Multi-Proof or National Multiple-Use Approval for standardised building designs that are intended to be replicated several times. Multi-Proof approvals will create time and cost savings for volume builders by removing the need for the same or substantially similar building designs to be assessed repeatedly by individual building consent authorities for Building Code compliance.

- Valued client evenings for regular applicants for resource consent and building consent. During these events clients are encouraged to engage with the Council early in their planning process; as a small investment of time and cost up front can potentially prevent significant time delays and consenting costs throughout the project. These events are also used to promote the Council's design guidelines and encourage compliant developments and outcome-focused project designs.
- Improved integration between the building and resource consenting teams is also delivering improved efficiencies for the client. This includes resource and building consent staff meeting together with developers and a new fast track process that enables some small and simple projects to combine their resource and building consent applications.
- Bulk consenting for projects involving multiple buildings that use standardised plans.
- Incorporation of Multi-Proof scheme into building consent processes.

Council's commitment to further action:

Within these areas of influence, Rodney District Council commits to undertake and/or continue with the following activities and initiatives:

- Continue to prioritise getting the District Plan 2000 fully operative.
- Advocate for housing affordability to be included as a driver for spatial planning and future urban planning in the Auckland Region.
- Advocate for housing affordability to be included as a criteria for the prioritising of future infrastructure planning.
- Continue to progress plan changes, and pursue MUL shifts where appropriate, to ensure the ongoing availability of future Greenfield and Brownfield development to meet future growth needs of the district in a timely fashion.
- Continue to promote design guidelines to developers and encourage them to work within the specified criteria of the District Plan to avoid the need for private plan changes and/or resource consent hearings.
- Promote standard housing design programmes such as Multi-Proof to local developers.
- Continue to offer and promote bulk consenting for standardised plans to reduce the compliance costs and time delays for large developments.
- Continue to offer case management to third sector developers to assist them through the resource and building consent processes within the Council.
- Work with family and community services to establish a Community Housing Network to support and encourage community and social housing initiatives.
- Lobby Central Government to increase the level direct provision of housing and funding for community housing initiatives within the district.

