

a framework to unlock the potential **PART 3**

A FRAMEWORK TO UNLOCK POTENTIAL

3.1 Place-making approach

This project is aimed at helping the Blenheim Town Centre develop as one with a distinct sense of place. This “place-making” approach integrates the widest range of issues possible in a manner that will distinguish Blenheim from other towns, appeal as a location to live in and visit, deliver a responsive built form and provide a framework for future development opportunities. This approach is aimed at achieving outcomes that:

- have community support;
- achieve ecologically sustainable design objectives;
- respond appropriately to the regional context;
- promote economic and employment benefits;
- stimulate social activity;
- are viable and responsive to market conditions; and
- are practical.

PLACE-MAKING INFLUENCES WELL-BEING

Well-being and quality of life are linked to the ability of people to easily engage in social, economic, cultural, and environmental exchange around them. As all exchange occurs at some point in space, the built environment can play a large role in either facilitating or lessening potential exchange from occurring.

People will generally engage in more exchange when in a space they feel comfortable in. Wellbeing will accordingly be maximised if the city is thriving and provides a distinct environ within which people can strongly associate and readily feel ownership.

The public realm (parks, roads, squares, and public-use buildings) is the main setting for exchange of all sorts. To maximise exchange, the public realm needs to be as convenient, comfortable, and safe as possible. The way in which private activities relate to it is just as critical as the design quality of the public realm itself.

GUIDING DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR “PLACE” CREATION

The following components are factors that can contribute to the creation of high quality ‘places.’ The focus should be on delivering outcomes that provide opportunities for:

Socially active and safe environments

- well-used public spaces which promote social contact, e.g. Market Place, Bythell Place, open spaces near the rivers;
- connected streets where motorists provide surveillance of pedestrians and property;
- parks which are prominent and visible from streets and buildings, e.g. places on Queen Street and by the river; and

- properties and parking areas which are well overlooked to deter property vandalism, burglary and car theft.

Integration with the wider community

- good street links to specific sites and locations, such as Pollard Park, the Hospital, NMIT, Stadium 2000;
- overcoming severance effects generated by State Highways 1 and 6;
- a street network providing safe access through locations with a pedestrian emphasis, such as Market Place, Seymour Square, Bythell Place, the station area, areas around the rivers etc.; and
- a range of house types provided by manipulating market conditions (a revised Council development contributions policy for example) to meet a wide range of needs, e.g. on the periphery of the town centre.

Ecological responsiveness

- the retention and enhancement of natural features, such as viewshafts with the Wither Hills and Richmond Range;
- focusing on the introduction of diverse, native trees and plants when considering new vegetation such as street trees;
- protecting the Taylor and Opawa Rivers and their riparian margins; and
- ensuring the provision of high quality stormwater design.

Cleaner air and reduced car dependency

- creating safe, interesting walkable environments within and around the town centre and the rivers; and
- creating connected street patterns with shorter travel distances, which encourage people to walk or bike to town, rather than travel by car.

Coping with change over time

- a network of streets for flexible traffic management;
- an arrangement of backs and fronts where uses can change over time;
- economically sustainable environments and aiming for flexible buildings; and
- saleable properties in high amenity environments.

Place-making extends beyond simple design techniques aimed at making an area aesthetically pleasing. It is underpinned by several broader objectives, aimed at delivering a holistic design response that enables wellbeing and prosperity.

3.2 Urban Design Framework

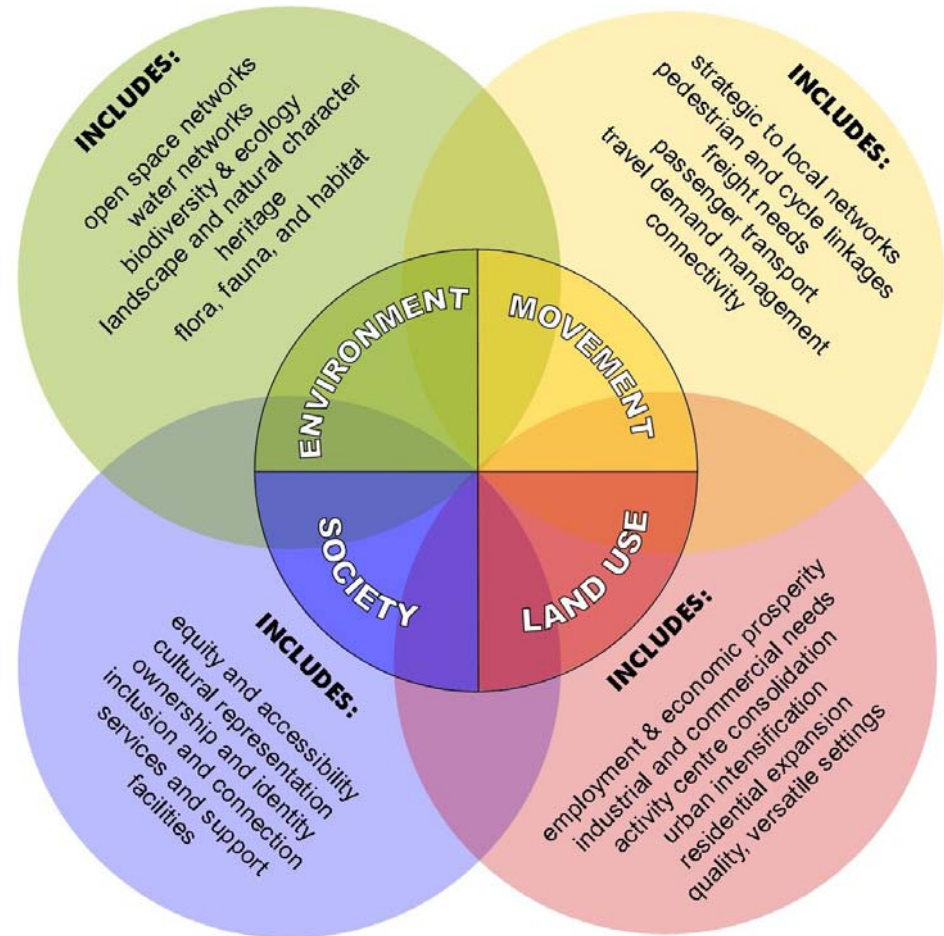
This project is based on an urban design framework which sets out the key assumptions, priorities, and goals for the project. Its purpose is to provide a rationale and focus for what the project should achieve. The use of a framework will ensure that a comprehensive view of Blenheim’s potential is taken.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Ensuring that design is undertaken in a holistic manner to avoid the risks associated with ‘tunnel vision’ or artificial separation of intrinsically inter-related elements. This applies to both:

- The core qualities of the environment (the ‘quadruple bottom line’); and
- The technical disciplines and specialisations that the community uses to apply knowledge.

An integrated approach combines the economic, ecological, cultural, and social components of an area. Intertwined within these key components are sustainability aims, community considerations and implications for existing and future businesses and retailers.



ABOVE: FIG. 3-1: A BALANCED VIEW: Space is finite and it can only be used for one or a few uses. This means that with every action there is an opportunity cost for all other potential uses no longer possible in that space. An integrated approach helps base decisions on the most accurate and informed understanding of exactly what opportunities are being lost as a consequence of specific development choices. Understanding the full range of issues also helps identify the most efficient and effective possible outcomes, directly helping pursue more sustainable ways of urban management.

URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

A 'Principled' approach has been used to drive the process, based on key urban design elements that can best deliver sustainability into a built outcome. This allows a spatially robust, defensible 'bottom line' to be established against which the potential of the town centre can be explored. Key urban design values factored into the project relate to:

- The essential qualities that should guide development of the built environment; and
- The design principles that are necessary to create optimal physical settings that facilitate social and economic exchange.

Good urban design becomes paramount in ensuring that intensifying and developing the city centre contributes to better economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes.

The urban design principles that underpin the Urban Design Framework are in line with the Ministry for the Environment's "People Places Spaces". They are illustrated on this page.

Key principles of sustainable urban design		
Principle	Elements	Purpose
Consolidation and Dispersal	DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS AND INTENSITY	To promote higher intensity development in the town centre and lower density around the periphery of Blenheim. This allows local communities, businesses and public transport to be strengthened and resource efficiencies to be achieved, whilst reducing environmental impacts on peripheral areas. It also means maximising the potential of the existing centre to provide logical, high-quality development intensity and 'energy' around a coherent, high-quality public realm. An example of a specific challenge for the town centre would be the consolidation of car parks in car parking structures, to utilise land more efficiently and help local retailers attract
Integration and Connectivity	MOVEMENT NETWORKS; BUILDING INTERFACES	To promote development that is integrated and connected with its surrounding environment and other existing or future communities. This facilitates ease of access, economy of movement, and improved social interaction. It also means supporting and improving local networks and pedestrian links that enable better connectivity to the destination points in the town centre and beyond: Stadium 2000; the train station; Pollard Park; the hospital, Landsdowne Park, NMIT and between other locations that offer employment, growth or recreational opportunities.
Diversity and Adaptability	RANGE OF DENSITIES; MIX OF USES; FLEXIBILITY OF BUILDINGS	To promote choice through the provision of a diverse mix of compatible activities and uses in and around the town centre. These built environments can better adapt over time. This facilitates the ability to respond efficiently to social needs, provides for a range of market demands, and allows for changes in lifestyle. It also means understanding the many different uses already present within the environment and how these may best accommodate natural changes over time. As an example for business uses this includes how lower-value uses, e.g. around Sinclair and Auckland Streets, Grove Road and Park Terrace convert into higher value premises over time.
Legibility and Identity	TOWN FORM; VISUAL CHARACTER; SPECIAL PLACES	To promote places and a streetscape that are easily understood by their users, display a strong local identity, and create appropriate visual character, typical for Blenheim as the capital of Marlborough District. This facilitates an enhanced usage, enjoyment, and pride in Blenheim. It also means enhancing the visual and physical connections with the two rivers and the hills to the north and south of the town.
Environmental Responsiveness	ECO-SYSTEMS; GREEN NETWORK; URBAN WATER; WASTE; ENERGY	To promote urban environments that are responsive to natural features, eco-systems, water quality issues, reduced energy usage and waste production, and balance the spatial needs to achieve this with that required for urbanisation. This facilitates improved ecological outcomes. It also relates to initiatives that will enhance the existing open space network and associated waterways, particularly the Taylor and Opawa Rivers. Additionally, it is about creating safe and attractive environments that encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport.

3.3 Connecting with other Marlborough District strategies

In undertaking this project, other Council Plans, policies, projects as well as other statutory documents, previous studies, and local expertise were canvassed. These helped provide a full and detailed background to the issues affecting the Blenheim Town Centre.

Principal references include:

General Planning

- Annual Plan 2007-2008
- LTCCP 2006-2016
- Marlborough Regional Policy Statement Review: Discussion Paper 1 - Quality of Life in Marlborough, 2007
- Marlborough Regional Policy Statement Review: Discussion Paper 2 - Marlborough Townships & Small Settlements, 2007
- Marlborough Regional Policy Statement Review: Discussion Paper 9 - Energy Management, 2007
- Marlborough Regional Policy Statement Review: Discussion Paper 10 - Transport & Access, 2007
- Notes: Generic Blenheim Urban Issues, 2006
- Plan Variations: 42, 49 and 50; including scope of variation and s.32 analysis

Transport

- Improving Walkability In Blenheim, Rodney Tolley, 2009
- Marlborough Walking & Cycling Strategy, 2005
- Blenheim and Wairau Plains Strategic Study: Final Report, New Zealand Transport Agency & Marlborough District Council, 2008
- Cycle Route Network Philosophy Discussion Document, ViaStrada Ltd, 2009
- Blenheim Parking Study, TDG, December 2005

Land use

- Residential Land Availability Blenheim & Renwick, December 2007

- Marlborough Townships and Small Settlements Growth Study, 2008
- Blenheim Retail Land Demand Assessment, Market Economics, 2006
- Discussion Document: Proposed plan variations for Business and Industrial Zones, September 2005
- Blenheim Business Land Study - April 2006
- Economic and Demographic Analysis of the Marlborough District - 1997
- Progress Marlborough Economic Development Strategy - July 2008
- Commercial, Industrial and Business Activities in the Wairau / Awatere Area - July 2005

Landscape and Ecology

- Marlborough's Freshwater Bathing Water Quality, F S Tiernan, Environmental Science and Monitoring & Marlborough District Council, 2006-2007
- Source Apportionment of PM10 in Blenheim, Environet Ltd & GNS Science, 2007
- Annual Air Quality Monitoring, Environet Ltd, 2007
- Blenheim Air Emission Inventory, Environet Ltd, 2005
- Management options for reducing PM10 concentrations in Blenheim – Update, Environet Ltd, 2007
- Ecological Assessments of Spring-fed streams on the Wairau Plain, Cawthron Institute, 2002
- Seddon Landscaping Initiative - State Highway 1, Opus & Marlborough District Council, 2006
- Blenheim Landscaping Initiative – Main Street, Opus & Marlborough District Council, 2005
- Blenheim Landscaping Initiative – Sinclair Street, Opus & Marlborough District Council, 2005
- Blenheim Landscaping Initiative – Grove Road, Opus & Marlborough District Council, 2005
- Open Space Strategy: Reserves Management Strategy, Marlborough District Council, 2008
- Tui To Town, Eric Spur, 2008
- State of the Environment report 2003-2004

The project work will build on, not repeat, the substantial amount of work undertaken in previous CBD studies that canvassed a wide range of issues.

3.4 From principles to Blenheim-based solutions

Simply collating strategic ambitions, albeit based on good principles and values, is unlikely to make the town centre a better place. What Blenheim needs is a set of actions and steps that are practical, realistic, affordable, understandable and well-accepted.

ANALYSIS

Fundamental to this urban design-led vision for the town centre are:

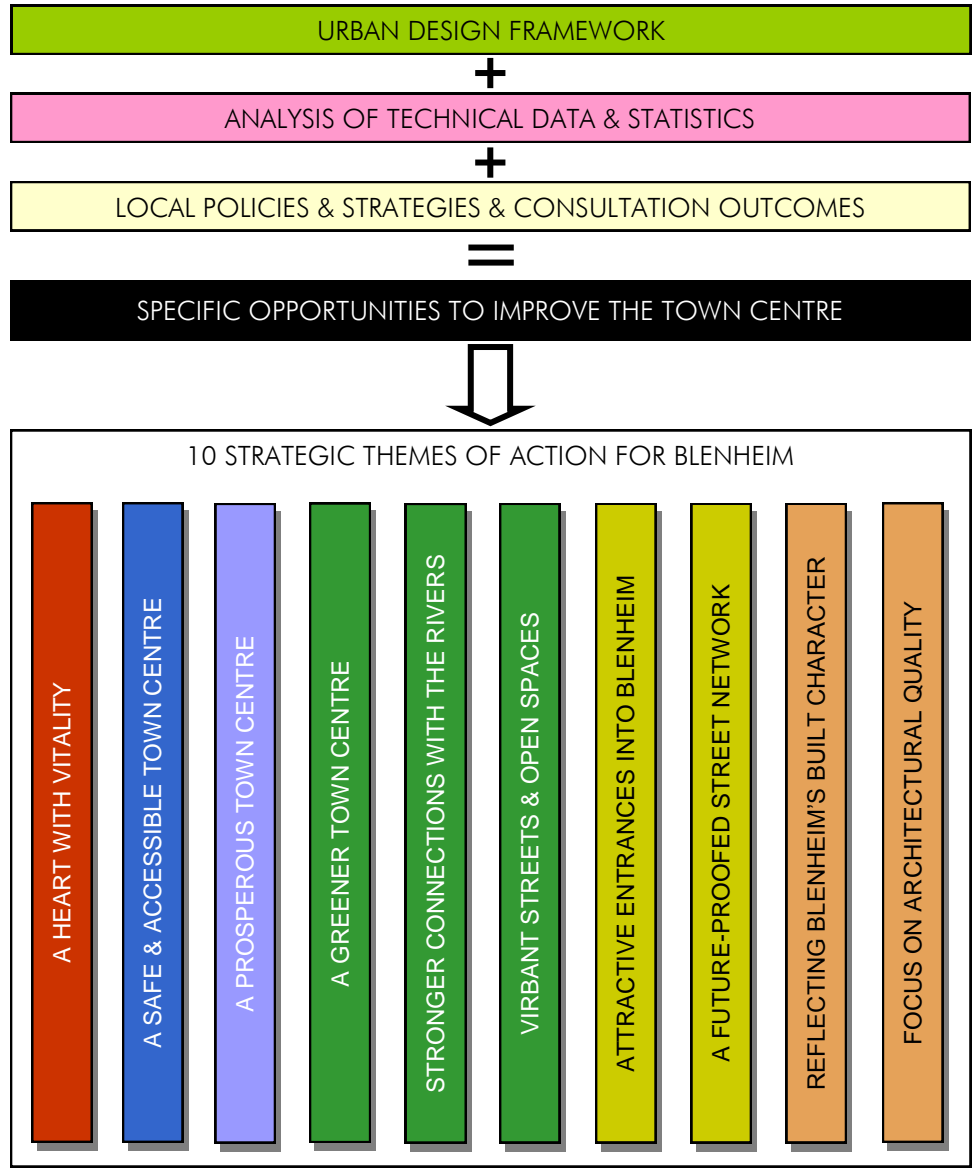
- A framework of broad and generic urban design principles and values, based on best practice and experience gained over time and in a wide range of places worldwide.
- Analysis to gain a full understanding of specific Marlborough and Blenheim-based technical data, growth projections, traffic flows, retail performance figures, ecological indicators etc.
- Analysis of Council policies and strategies and knowledge of local (sometimes conflicting) aspirations and visions of the Marlborough community and other stakeholders.

This has led to compilation of a full picture of the current state of the town centre in the form of a range of issues, opportunities and constraints.

ACTION

To ensure that a fully balanced view and understanding of the issues associated with the town centre was taken, ten *Strategic Themes* have been formulated, loosely associated with particular disciplines such as: environment; community; employment; retail; tourism; movement; and regulatory planning.

Within each of these themes, a number of specific *Strategic Priorities* are identified. Each objective is designed to be mutually reinforcing to the other objectives to ensure that multiple advantages for the CBZ are gained from every proposed investment decision. For example, if focus is placed on changes to the roading network within the CBD under the Strategic Priority of 'efficient movement', benefits are also tried to be gained in other priority areas. The road design for instance could incorporate street trees to help with local character, sense of place, amenity in the form of shelter from the heat (community) and stormwater functioning (environment) and so on.



STRATEGIC THEMES AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Each of the 10 *Strategic Themes* forms the umbrella for the *Strategic Priorities*, a group of concrete actions and initiatives that together form the Vision and guide the identification, prioritisation and measurement of detailed physical works and administrative interventions found within specific initiatives. These are described in greater detail in **Part 5**.

STRATEGIC THEME	STRATEGIC PRIORITIES INCLUDE (refer to Part 5 for more)	GO TO PAGE:
1. A Heart with Vitality	<i>Locations for new civic buildings; Parking and Retail development; i-Site location; Markets in town; Town centre management</i>	28
2. A Safe and Accessible Town Centre	<i>Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design; Lighting, Wayfinding, Catering for the elderly and visually impaired; Footpath assessment</i>	41
3. A Prosperous Town Centre	<i>Development opportunities, Employment opportunities; Community opportunities; Tourism opportunities</i>	50
4. A Greener Town Centre	<i>Biodiversity; Urban Parks; Street trees</i>	62
5. Stronger Connections with the Rivers	<i>Riverside parks; Changes to river area; Pedestrian connections with the river</i>	68
6. Vibrant Streets and Open Spaces	<i>Market Place; Bythell Place; Streetscape upgrade Scott Street; Street furniture</i>	75
7. Attractive entrances into Town	<i>Development opportunities for highly visual locations; Entrance features; Sinclair Street</i>	81
8. A Future-proofed Street Network	<i>Traffic lights; Local re-routing of State Highway 1; Walking and cycling plan; Ring road considerations</i>	86
9. Reflecting Blenheim's Built Character	<i>Heritage and character buildings and places</i>	94
10. Focus on Architectural Quality	<i>Changes to the District Plan, Urban Design panel</i>	100

3.5 Making it happen

Actions identified under the respective headings of the Strategic Themes are summarised in tables. For each of these actions, a rough order cost estimate has been provided by Council officers. A summary of the primary funder; the projected timeframe; and the priority are also supplied.

The actions can be broadly divided into three types of implementation:

1. DIRECT PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Many of the initiatives detailed within the strategy require direct physical project implementation e.g. acquire a site, reconfigure a road, construct a building.

2. ANCILLARY ORGANISATIONAL / ADMINISTRATIVE ADJUSTMENT

This may include:

- **MDC Town Centre Champion**, the appointment of someone from within Council to be responsible for driving the project forward.
- **Blenheim Town Centre Steering Committee**. This 'executive' committee is made up of representatives who monitor the progress of the project. Consideration could be given to the invitation of Blenheim ward Councillors, Marlborough District Urban Design Champions, Senior Leadership Team members and Divisional Managers into the group.
- **Urban Design Panel** to help improve the standard of urban planning and design outcomes within the town centre.
- **Development trust**: the establishment of a local authority private trust or agency that undertakes the development, management and operations of large scale development projects.
- **Town Centre Management Organisation**
- **New forms of consultation**. This Urban Design Project could be an appropriate project under which to undertake alternative forms of public consultation which focus on more narrowly defining areas where community feedback is desired.
- **Opportunities to streamline** the execution of functions under several Acts should be explored. For example, ways to undertake the same consultation for a proposed project activity under both the Local Government Act and Resource Management Act. It is also important that the staging, funding and implementation of all work is integrated with the Long Term Council Community Plan.

3. CONSEQUENTIAL CHANGES TO OTHER ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES / PRACTICE TO ENSURE CONSISTENT AND MUTUALLY REINFORCING OUTCOMES

This may include:

- **Regional Policy Statement and Regional Strategies**. The Town Centre Urban Design project may inform future revisions to the Marlborough Regional Policy Statement and other regional strategies e.g. growth, transport, economic development.
- **District Plan and regulatory framework**. This plan recommends changes pertaining to the Central Business Zone and Primary Shopping Area of the Wairau/ Awatere Resource Management Plan (the District Plan). This will have to inform a Council led Plan Change for the CBD that will include a significant revision of objectives, policies, rules, methods and assessment criteria to guide all types of development.
- **Design guidelines**. It is recommended that the District Plan is supported by a non-statutory design guide which advocates quality design responses to typical development challenges in the town centre. This should include specific focus on best practice responses to mixed use, heritage, employment activities, riverside and lane and alley way development. Guidelines are an effective way of informing developers on ways to improve subjective issues such as visual quality and façade design.
- **Review of development contribution policies**. Council could consider the revision of its current development contribution system. Although it has many advantages, the current system may not send a satisfactorily aligned price signal or allocation of community facility demand, that reflects the sustainability benefits of intensification in and around centres, relative to other residential development choices.
- **Council landowner policies on open space and parks**. Supporting actions may need to be undertaken including revisions to the access, use and maintenance policy of park and reserve assets.
- **External policy adjustment**. Other major governmental institutions, such as the New Zealand Transport Agency may need to complete their own amendments to policies, plans and projects to reflect the outcomes (works, staging and funding) of various initiatives in this plan for which they are a major partner.