Hamilton City Council Feedback

Illustrative National Policy Direction – New Zealand's New Planning System

Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport

16 October 2026

Hamilton City Council
Te kaunihera o Kirikiriroa

Strategic Context for this Feedback

Council has endorsed **The Mayor's Plan 2025 - 2028** to inform the projects and services it will deliver to ensure Hamilton has what it needs now and for the future – efficiently, responsibly, and sustainably. The seven guiding themes of The Mayor's Plan are:

- **Sensible, cost-effective infrastructure**
- **Grow with balance**
- **A central city to be proud of**
- **City places and services that work for people**
- **Open for business**
- **A transparent and efficient organisation**
- **Financial responsibility**

Council Approval and Status

This feedback has been prepared on behalf of Hamilton City Council and was circulated to all Elected Members and Maangai Maaori for review and comment prior to lodgement. Feedback received through this process has been considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the final document.

The full Council has not formally considered or adopted this feedback at a Council meeting. It represents Hamilton City Council's feedback for the purposes of this consultation, developed through the review process outlined above and informed by advice and input from relevant Council staff across the subject areas covered.

Given the illustrative and preliminary nature of the National Policy Direction, and the Government's intention to undertake formal statutory consultation on the proposed National Policy Direction in 2027, Council reserves the right to further develop or amend its position as additional detail becomes available and through subsequent consultation processes.

Feedback # 851

Key Messages and Recommendations

1. Hamilton City Council supports the overall direction of the illustrative National Policy Direction (NPD) and the intent to create a clearer, more consistent and enabling planning system. We suggest that further work is needed before the proposed NPD is formally consulted on.
2. In particular, Council considers that the next version of the NPD needs to provide greater clarity about how competing goals are to be reconciled; how existing national direction will transition into the new system; how directives, national standards, regional spatial plans and local plans will work together; and how development and infrastructure enablement will be balanced with environmental limits, natural hazards, Māori interests and important public values. The next version should also provide sufficient implementation detail, definitions, and decision thresholds required for consistent application and understanding.
3. Council's key recommendations are set out below.
4. **Transitioning existing national direction into the new system**: The Government has indicated that existing RMA national direction will be restructured and incorporated into the new planning system. However, it is not yet sufficiently clear how this will happen. **We recommend that the proposed NPD is accompanied by a clear transition framework showing how existing national direction will be incorporated into the new system.**
5. **Clearer direction for resolving competing goals:** The NPD will have an important role in translating and reconciling the goals of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill. **We recommend that the final NPD provide clearer and more consistent policy direction on how competing goals are to be reconciled, including the circumstances in which one outcome may appropriately take priority over another.**
6. **Integrate growth with infrastructure and quality urban outcomes:** Council supports enabling greater housing and business development and creating more competitive urban land markets. However, abundant development capacity alone will not deliver well-functioning urban areas. **We recommend that the housing and development directives place greater emphasis on infrastructure-served and efficiently located growth, and on ensuring intensification contributes to well-functioning urban areas.**
7. **Recognition and protection of infrastructure:** Council supports the strong enabling direction for infrastructure. Infrastructure is often location-constrained and may have a functional or operational need to locate in particular environments or connect particular places. **We recommend stronger integration across the NPD of infrastructure's functional and operational needs, together with consistent protection of existing and planned infrastructure from unreasonable constraints arising from new or intensified sensitive activities.**
8. **Environmental limits and their interaction with development:** Council supports the use of environmental limits as an important safeguard within the Natural Environment Bill framework. However, the illustrative NPD does not yet provide sufficient clarity about how development-enabling directives are intended to operate where environmental limits are approached or breached. **We recommend clearer policy direction on the relationship between development enablement, environmental limits and the mechanisms for responding where limits are breached or at risk of being breached.**

9. **Effective protection of important public values:** Council supports a proportionate approach to protecting public values and recognises the Government's intention to provide regulatory relief where protective provisions significantly constrain the reasonable use of private land. **We recommend that the final NPD clearly articulate the relationship between regulatory relief and the continued achievement of the relevant Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill goals; retain effective pathways for identifying and protecting locally significant historic heritage, historic heritage areas, sites of significance to Maaori, indigenous biodiversity, wetlands, high natural character and outstanding natural features and landscapes; and include clear necessity, alternatives, effects-management and residual-effects tests where development may affect those matters.**
10. **Recognition of Maaori interests and Te Ture Whaimana:** Council supports the system-wide direction to protect and provide for Maaori interests, including enabling land and protecting sites of significance. **We recommend that the final NPD more clearly reflect the protections for Maaori interests contained in the Bills, including Treaty settlement arrangements and the statutory precedence of Te Ture Whaimana where applicable, and clearly explain how these protections interact with other development-enabling directives for avoidance of doubt.**
11. **Retain the important elements of existing natural hazard direction:** Council supports the proposed proportionate, risk-based approach to natural hazards and the intention to manage natural hazard risk consistently across the planning system, which carries forward the intent of the National Policy Statement for Natural Hazards 2025 (NPS-NH). **We recommend that the core elements of the NPS-NH are retained within the future NPD and national standards including the risk matrix, consideration of risk created for other sites, use of the best available information where information is uncertain or incomplete, and assessment of climate change effects over at least 100 years.**
12. **Clearly distinguish policy direction from national standards:** The illustrative NPD contains a mixture of high-level policy direction and detailed requirements that in some cases read more like rules or standards. A clearer distinction would make the system easier to understand and reduce the risk of duplication or inconsistency between instruments. **We recommend that the final NPD focus on clear national policy outcomes and principles for resolving competing goals, with detailed methodologies, thresholds, rules and standardised plan provisions addressed through national standards where appropriate.**

Introduction

13. Hamilton City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport's consultation document, **Illustrative National Policy Direction – New Zealand's New Planning System.** The document has been developed by the Government to support discussion and testing of the proposed approach before formal statutory consultation on the proposed NPD occurs in 2027.

14. The Government has asked for feedback on clarity of thematic structure, whether the illustrative NPD could work in practice, any important gaps or trade-offs not adequately reflected, and how the illustrative NPD could be more useful and effective.

15. Council has endorsed The Mayor's Plan 2025–2028 to guide the projects and services it will deliver efficiently, responsibly and sustainably. This feedback is particularly informed by the Plan's priorities for sensible, cost-effective infrastructure, balanced growth, a strong central city, places and services that work for people, an open-for-business approach, organisational efficiency and financial responsibility. These priorities support an enabling planning system, provided growth is coordinated with infrastructure, protects important environmental and cultural values, and does not transfer unreasonable costs or risks to existing communities.

16. Council's review and feedback raise questions around clarity, consistency, transition of existing national policy documents, and the balance between development enablement, environmental protection and providing for Maaori interests. Feedback and suggested improvements are discussed below. Hamilton City Council reserves the right to change its position during the formal statutory consultation.

General Feedback

17. We consider the role of the National Policy Direction (NPD) within the new planning system is not currently clear in relation to existing National Policy Statements (NPSs). The Government has indicated that existing RMA national direction will be restructured and incorporated into the new planning system. However, the illustrative NPD does not provide a sufficiently clear crosswalk showing which provisions of existing National Policy Statements will be retained, amended or discontinued, or whether retained provisions will sit within the NPD, national standards or other instruments.

18. The final transition pathway for existing NPSs is not yet fully shown. Hamilton City Council seeks a clear mapping of which NPS provisions will be retained, amended, consolidated or discontinued, and whether each will sit in NPD, national standards or another instrument. Providing this information would assist councils to understand the intended transition and provide more informed and targeted feedback.

19. We recommend in terms of general drafting language, to remove phrasing like 'at a minimum' and 'as much as possible' to improve readability and provide clearer, more precise direction.

Proposed Thematic Structure

20. We consider the drafting approach used throughout the directives to be inconsistent. Some directives are framed as high-level policy direction, while others read more like rules or standards. Similarly, the language varies, with some directives expressed as statements of intent and others as requirements or requests. Greater consistency in drafting style would improve clarity and assist in understanding the intended role within the planning framework.

21. The directives have the potential to provide a clear framework for implementing the goals of the new planning system in practice. However, there should be a clearer distinction between policy direction and national standards. For example, HD-Directive 2.2 could direct land use plans to enable appropriate building heights and intensification in relevant locations, consistent with national standards. The national standards could then provide detailed requirements, such as expected building heights and development outcomes for specific zones.

22. The thematic structure of the document is logical and generally easy to follow. However, there is substantial repetition of content already contained within the legislation. We suggest outlining the goals at the beginning of the document and using an identifying nomenclature that can be easily referenced in each chapter, rather than repeating the text of each section of the legislation numerous times. The document would also benefit from stronger integration across themes.

Content and Recommendations

NPD Cross-cutting Directives

23. We support the overall intent of the cross-cutting directives and acknowledge they are giving effect to the Bills. However, as noted previously, some directives are drafted at a level of detail that may be more appropriately addressed through national standards. For example:

- CC-Directive 4(b) is highly prescriptive and may be better suited to inclusion within the standards framework rather than the policy direction document.
- CC-Directive 3 should also recognise the need to protect established urban activities and maintain well-functioning urban environments, including addressing reverse sensitivity effects.

24. We support the recognition of Te Ture Whaimana as the primary direction-setting document for the Waikato and Waipaa Rivers. This appropriately acknowledges its significance and role in the region.

Theme 1: Housing and Development

25. We generally support the policy intent of ensuring that new development is enabled in appropriate locations, particularly where there is existing infrastructure capacity and where people have convenient access to employment, services, amenities, and open spaces.

26. The directives in this section would benefit from design principles that support well-functioning urban environments. The policy intent or directives should recognise housing quality, accessibility, legible neighbourhoods, a high-quality public realm, healthy communities and a healthy environment.

27. We support the intended approach around growth and the demand for affordable housing, regarding spatial planning, integrated infrastructure investment, intensification and mixed-use development and meeting market demand. However, achieving quality design outcomes is essential and must be embedded for the future success of our cities and towns.

28. We recommend that HD-Directive 1.1 be more explicitly aligned with the stated policy intent. Hamilton City Council supports enabling capacity, but recommends that final NPD or supporting national standards distinguish theoretical development capacity from that which is infrastructure-served, commercially feasible and capable of staged delivery. This would provide clearer direction and support the Planning Bill goals by better enabling the use and development of land and for infrastructure to be provided to meet demand.

29. HD-Directive 1.5 would preclude any form of growth boundary or requirement for development to be connected to existing urban areas. It appears the purpose of this directive is to explicitly enable developments in locations non-contiguous to urban areas and available infrastructure networks.

30. We are concerned HD Directive 1.5 is overly prescriptive and could lead to development that is disconnected from existing urban areas, and that there are risks of inefficient infrastructure investments generating poor financial outcomes, increased long-term maintenance and servicing costs, reduced accessibility to employment and services, and a greater reliance on private vehicles. These outcomes are inconsistent with the objectives of creating efficient, well-functioning urban environments. To address this, we recommend removing HD-1.5 and relying on CC-Directives 5-6 (which already address these matters with respect to regional spatial plans). If HD Directive 1.5 is retained, then we recommend including express requirement for infrastructure sequencing, funding feasibility or consistency with an agreed urban growth (e.g., spatial plan) programme to mitigate the risks we have highlighted.

31. Hamilton City Council is concerned that HD-Directive 1.6 may insufficiently address Planning Bill clause 11(1)(g)(iii), which seeks to protect significant historic heritage from inappropriate development. The final NPD should expressly state how development is to be reconciled with that goal.

32. We recommend that stronger linkages be established between the directives in Theme 1 and those in Theme 5, as aspects of the current drafting are inconsistent or potentially contradictory.

33. With respect to Sub-theme 2 Well-functioning urban areas, we support increased density where it contributes to well-functioning urban areas. The directives should provide greater recognition of the quality of the wider urban environment created through intensification, while recognising that some matters relating solely to on-site residential amenity are outside the scope of the Planning Bill. This should extend to streetscape effects. Cumulatively, individual developments have a large impact on the appearance and functionality of the public environment, which can enable economic development or hinder it when improperly managed.

34. We support the policy intent of managing natural hazard risk through a proportionate and risk-based approach, and the higher test for housing and development outlined in Sub-theme 4: Natural hazards.

Theme 2: Infrastructure

35. We support the overarching policy intent of the infrastructure section, including the requirement for infrastructure to be enabled where it needs to go to meet demand, provided effects on the natural environment and historic heritage values are managed.

36. While Theme 2 is generally enabling of infrastructure, we consider the policy direction should provide stronger and more consistent protection for the functional and operational needs of infrastructure, including from reverse sensitivity and incompatible land uses. We recommend that the NPD:

- More clearly integrate INFR-Directives 1.2 and 1.7 with the cross-cutting directives on reverse sensitivity;
- Make clear that where infrastructure has a functional or operational need to locate in a particular environment, this is a relevant consideration in determining how competing outcomes are to be managed.

37. The directives could be strengthened by providing clearer direction on how infrastructure is to be enabled while ensuring environmental limits are appropriately managed, and how natural hazard risk can be addressed through a proportionate risk-based approach.

38. Sub-theme 3: natural hazards should ensure that infrastructure locational decisions in land use plans apply a risk-based approach to natural hazards. Recognising the key role of asset management and design for resiliency outcomes, there are infrastructure assets that have lower adaptive capacity than others and INFR-Directive 3.1 should be tempered to require consideration of natural hazards when making decisions about locating new infrastructure.

Theme 3: Primary Production and the Rural Economy

39. We generally support the policy intent and directives of Theme 3, acknowledging that Hamilton City does not have any rural zones but has a strong interest in the broader economic performance of the related primary sectors. The directives need to ensure that the enablement of agriculture continues to protect environmental limits, the Waikato River and considers hazard risks.

40. The illustrative NPD indicates that current NPS-HPL content may be distributed across Theme 3, other directives and national standards. Hamilton City Council seeks a detailed crosswalk identifying which operative protections, definitions and pathways are proposed to be retained, amended or discontinued.

41. HD-Directive 1.6 and 3.1 appear to permit conversion of high-value growing land where other development or infrastructure directives are engaged. Hamilton City Council seeks clearer tests governing when those competing priorities prevail.

42. We note that the directives address constructed wetlands, and suggest they should provide integrated direction for identification and protection of existing wetlands and significant natural areas.

43. PP-Directive 1.6 only refers to Land Use Plans. We recommend referencing Natural Environment Plans as well due to the management of odour, discharge to land, and discharge to air and water.

Theme 4: Resources – Quarrying, Mining and Waste

44. We support the policy intent of making waste and recovery infrastructure accessible and able to meet community and business needs while supporting safe disposal and being integrated with other infrastructure.

45. Theme 4 gives substantial weight to mineral, aggregate and waste-resource activities. Hamilton City Council seeks explicit conflict-resolution criteria demonstrating how those directives interact with environmental limits, Maaori interests, identified protected values, and potential reverse sensitivity issues.

Theme 5: Public Values

46. We support the intent of the directives to provide guidance on how conflicts between the goals and outcomes of the Bills should be resolved. However, there appears to be limited integration between the directives in Theme 1 and those in Theme 5, which may create uncertainty when balancing competing interests. Generally, we recommend strengthening the connections between Themes 1 and 5 to ensure the directives provide a clear and coherent framework for achieving planning outcomes.

47. Sub-theme 1 directs planning decisions to safeguard environmental values and human health but then indicates that environmental limits may be exceeded in certain circumstances in accordance with national standards. Hamilton City Council acknowledges that the Natural Environment Bill

assigns human-health limits to national standards and ecosystem-health limits to natural-environment plans. It nevertheless seeks clearer NPD direction on methodologies, consistency, integration and decision-making where limits are approached or breached.

48. We acknowledge that the illustrative NPD proposes a nationally consistent regulatory relief framework where provisions protecting terrestrial indigenous biodiversity, significant historic heritage, high natural character, and outstanding natural features and landscapes significantly constrain the reasonable use of land. However, the detail of that framework is proposed to be established through national standards or regulations and is not included in the illustrative NPD. This makes it difficult to assess how regulatory relief will interact with the directives for protecting these public values or whether it could affect their effective implementation. We recommend that the proposed NPD provide clearer policy direction on the purpose and intended application of regulatory relief, including the relationship between relief and the continued achievement of the relevant Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill goals.

49. We support the policy intent of protecting and maintaining public access to lakes, rivers and the coastal marine area.

50. We are concerned that the directives relating to compatibility and conflict resolution for high natural character and outstanding natural features, and landscapes (Sub-theme 4) prioritise the goals of the Planning Bill over environmental protection outcomes. HD-Directive 1.6 expressly creates a significant-public-benefit pathway for development within areas of high natural character and ONFLs. Hamilton considers the proposed threshold too broad and seeks defined necessity, alternatives, effects management and residual effect tests.

51. We consider the policy intent in Sub-theme 5 requires stronger phrasing. Significant historic heritage more than supports understanding of New Zealand's history. The use of "targeted" and "proportionate" are concerning when this Sub-theme includes non-renewable resources and irreplaceable taonga. Emphasis should be on the identification, protection and conservation of significant historic heritage (including adaptive re-use, long-term viability, etc.), rather than what is not intended (e.g. housing or development constraints).

52. PV-Directive 5.2 does not address relocation, demolition (partial or full), alterations or additions that do not support long-term viability, new construction, subdivision, earthworks or other existing consent triggers that are very important for managing built heritage. PV-Directive 5.2 states "buildings and structures" (which would relate to individually scheduled built heritage places), but not areas (e.g. historic heritage areas).

53. We consider it is not clear how PV-Directive 5.3 will operate, both in practice and during the scheduling process of significant historic heritage sites and sites of significance to Maaori. National standards must allow recognition and protection of locally significant historic heritage.

System-wide Directives

System-wide Māori Interests Directives

54. We support the policy intent that infrastructure use and development, and environmental management must be planned and undertaken in ways that protect and provide for Maaori interests.

55. Both Bills protect treaty settlement redress and provide that Te Ture Whaimana prevails over inconsistent national instruments and plans. The proposed NPD should reproduce that position more clearly and explain how SW-Directive 1.6 applies to other Māori interests.

56. We recommend a stronger link between the policy intent and the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill goals of providing for Maaori interests and protecting sites of significance to Maaori.

System-wide Natural Hazards Directives

57. We generally support the policy intent of natural hazard risk being managed consistently across all National Policy Direction themes using a proportionate, risk-based approach towards development. However, if the system-wide natural hazards directives are replacing the NPS-NH, we note areas that would benefit from clarification. Below are our recommendations to improve clarity:

- Reference the risk matrix within these directives as it is included in NPS-NH Policy 1.
- Include reference to subdivision, use or development where it may increase significant natural hazard risk to other sites, that the risk must be avoided or mitigated using an approach proportionate to the level of natural hazard risk as included in NPS-NH policy 4.
- Include reference to natural hazard risk assessment and decisions being based on the best available information, even when the information is uncertain or incomplete, as included in NPS-NH Policy 5.
- Include directive that the potential impacts of climate change of at least 100 years into the future must be considered as included in NPS-NH Policy 6.
- SW-Directive 2.2 and SW-Directive 2.5 need refinement to improve readability.
- SW-Directive 2.1 should refer to efficient or affordable mitigation, rather than simply mitigation.

Further Information and Opportunity to Discuss our Feedback

58. Should the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport require clarification of the feedback from Hamilton City Council, or additional information, please contact **Dr Juliana Reu Junqueira** (Urban and Spatial Planning Unit Director), on **07 245 0013**, or **022 850 2226**, or email **Juliana.ReuJunqueira@hcc.govt.nz** in the first instance.

59. Hamilton City Council representatives would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this feedback in more detail with the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport.

Yours faithfully

Lance Vervoort
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

FURTHER INFORMATION
Hamilton City Council
Garden Place, Private Bag 3010, Hamilton

/hamiltoncitycouncil
@hamiltoncitycouncil
07 838 6699

hamilton.govt.nz