

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

According to the District Plan, “inappropriate subdivision and development can result in increased conflict between activities and adverse effects on the amenity, heritage, landscape and other values of an area, diminished ecosystem functioning and increasing conflict between incompatible land uses, as well as placing additional strains upon services and infrastructure.” In rural and coastal areas, subdivision “can result in adverse cumulative effects, such as ribbon development and loss of rural and open space character.”

The question of whether subdivision and development in the district has been “inappropriate”, resulting in the adverse effects mentioned above, can be partially answered by reviewing the data and the discussion presented in this report. The level of development over the past five years has certainly been high overall, and it is likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

This level of development needs to be carefully managed to ensure that effects on the environment are avoided, remedied or mitigated as required under the resource management legislation. It also needs to be managed so as to ensure the orderly and cost effective provision of services and infrastructure. In addition, potentially conflicting land uses need to be separated and existing land owners need to have some surety as to what future neighbouring land uses they can expect.

The density of development maps show some significant results that need to be taken into account by policy-decision makers in Council. Subdivisions are occurring frequently in particular areas (Figure 24), and some of these subdivisions are for large numbers of lots (Figure 28). However, there are also a large number of subdivisions occurring throughout the district, albeit for only a few (less than 6) lots each, which indicates a degree of sporadic development taking place, which may be considered inappropriate under the District Plan, and may create problems in providing services and infrastructure.

Land use consents are being granted most frequently in the urban areas, which is not surprising. A similar trend can be seen with building consents for new dwellings, indicating that, despite

some large subdivisions in other parts of the district (e.g. One Tree Point, Ruakaka), the urban and peri-urban areas are still where a large amount of post-subdivision development is occurring.

Overall, the spatial distribution of development throughout the district shows that whilst development is widespread, particularly in regard to subdivision and building consents granted, there are definite nodes of high development distinguishable. The urban/peri-urban area is most noticeable (and expected) for all indicators. The coastal area has also experienced high levels of development, particularly in regard to subdivision and building activity, and specific areas on the coast can be distinguished. These are the Ngunguru/Tutukaka/Matapouri area; the One Tree Point/Ruakaka area; the South Bream Bay/Waipu area; and, to a lesser extent, Oakura, the North Harbour fringe, Whananaki and Pataua. In the rural areas, three locations stand out – the Maunu/Maungatapere area, the Three Mile Bush Road area and the Glenbervie area. As already mentioned there are, in addition, widespread subdivisions of a smaller nature throughout the rural area, except the most western parts of the district.

The year-by-year analysis of Figures 29 to 32 shows that development is occurring consistently in parts of the district. By and large, much of the development is consistently occurring in the areas mentioned above. However, every so often development intensifies in a particular area. This needs to be monitored in the future – the possibility of rapid development in an area which is not anticipated may result in adverse effects, such as a lack of infrastructure to handle the increase. An example of this is the clustered subdivisions inland of Tutukaka during 2004 (see Figure 29).

The “snap shots” of the future for the three locations chosen are useful for getting a feel of what these areas may look like in the future. As can be readily seen the visual attributes of these areas will be significantly altered from small rural/coastal settlements to much larger semi-urban coastal towns. There will be a consequent loss of natural/open space ambience and a much more pronounced residential/suburban aesthetic. Apart from obvious effects on natural character, open space, visual amenity, ecological values, etc., there are significant implications relating to provision of infrastructure and services. These implications need to be investigated further by the relevant infrastructure and service providers within council.

An important result from this study of development trends in the Whangarei district is that the supply of new lots, stemming from subdivision, is greatly in excess of projected population levels of the district. Presently, without any further subdivision, there are sufficient lots in the district to support an additional 28,000 people. Considering that the population growth over the last five years was 6,318 people, it could easily be 20 to 25 years before these lots are all required.

Additionally, according to Figure 41, in the year 2000 the Whangarei district had an apparent deficit in the number of lots required to accommodate its population – and yet this did not appear to be an issue, suggesting that the average of 2.4 people per household used in Council’s growth model is conservative at best and that a figure of 3 people per household may be more appropriate. It seems fair to say that there are around 10,000 undeveloped residential lots in the district. Taking a figure of 3 persons per lot, this equates to a population increase of 30,000 that could presently be accommodated within the district without any further subdivision.

On the whole, it appears the district has experienced a high level of development over the last five years. This development has been concentrated in certain hotspots with regards to subdivisions, new lots and land use consents. The development has been more spread out with regards to building consents and building consents for new dwellings. On the basis of population projections, the level of land development is in excess of the projected population growth. This has resulted in an oversupply of residential building lots and has specific implications for planning for service and infrastructure provisions.

4.2 Recommendations

This report has presented the first analysis of the state of Whangarei district’s environment in terms of development. The district as a whole has experienced a high level of land development, which appears to have exceeded projected population growth. The issue then becomes how to manage continued development of the district. As there is an apparent oversupply of lots, and this oversupply will not be filled for some time, then any further subdivision development over and above this will increase the oversupply, unless there is a surge in population or non-resident owners. It is recommended that policy-decision makers examine current and future growth strategies on the basis that an oversupply exists, and may need to be managed accordingly in regard to services and infrastructure provisions.

The year-by-year analysis of development shows that, occasionally, development concentrates in areas which are not hotspots. It is recommended that Council continue to monitor all aspects of development within its jurisdiction (that is, subdivisions, land use consents, building consents and new dwellings) to ensure that provision of infrastructure is not over- or under-anticipating the development that may be occurring.

This report has only superficially addressed some of the objectives listed in the District Plan, namely the appropriateness of subdivision. It has not examined the direct effect on natural character, ecosystem values, habitat loss, etc., as well as positive effects such as the creation of covenants and esplanade reserves. It is recommended that the next state of the environment report examine conservation and natural character values in the district in order to address the potential effect that this development has had on the natural character and ecological values in the district.

In addition, this report has not addressed in any depth important issues relating to the provision of infrastructure and services in the future. It is recommended that further analysis of this issue is undertaken by the divisions in Council that create and maintain infrastructure (e.g. Roading, Waste and Drainage, etc.). The orderly and cost effective provision of infrastructure and services is imperative if the present level and spatial distribution of land development is not to result in major problems and future costs for communities and Council.