

## Draft Auckland Unitary Plan Launched

The Draft Auckland Unitary Plan ("**the Unitary Plan**") was launched on 15 March 2013. The Unitary Plan is a combined resource management plan that includes the Auckland Council's regional policy statement, regional plans (including the regional coastal plan) and combined district plan addressing all aspects of resource management and land use within the Auckland region. Once operative, the Unitary Plan will apply over the whole of the Auckland region and replace the 14 existing district and regional plans with a simpler, more streamlined set of objectives, policies and rules for the management of the built and natural environment.

The Auckland Council will also prepare an Area Plan for each of the 21 Local Board areas. These plans will reflect the Auckland Plan at a Local Board scale and will be incorporated progressively into the Unitary Plan over time. An Auckland Design Manual will also be developed alongside the Unitary Plan that will set out expectations for buildings and public spaces.

### **The effect**

The central aim of the Unitary Plan is to provide objectives, policies and rules to guide the future development and strategic direction of the Auckland region. It intends to provide greater consistency across the region, while still providing appropriate regulation of the region's diversity. The Unitary Plan will have wide ranging effects and impact on, among other things, business, development and residential needs. One significant change will be the major rezoning of Auckland's residential land to accommodate apartments and urban intensification to cope with expected population increase over the next 30 years.

There will also be a shift in rules relating to the location of urban limits, height limits, traffic generation limits, designations, parking rules, limits on the size and location of office or retail space, boundary setbacks and noise limits. These changes will all have implications for future development. If you want to read what the Auckland Council says about the Unitary Plan, go to [www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/unitaryplan](http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/unitaryplan).

### **Process**

The informal consultation period for the Unitary Plan is currently scheduled to take place from March to May 2013. The Auckland Council has indicated the Unitary Plan will be notified in September 2013. Once notified, the formal statutory process of submissions and hearings will begin.

The Resource Management Reform Bill ("**the Reform Bill**") has introduced a new single hearing process for the Unitary Plan. The Reform Bill is currently going through the legislative process. Submissions were called on 28 February 2013 and the Reform Bill is currently being considered by the Local Government and Environment Select Committee, with a report due on 11 June 2013.

Assuming that the provisions relating to the Unitary Plan process remain unchanged, the hearing will be held by Independent Commissioners appointed by the Minister for the Environment. The only grounds to appeal the decision on the Unitary Plan will be on points of law to the High Court, unless the Auckland Council rejects the hearing panel's recommendation, in which case parties will be able to appeal those parts of the decision to the Environment Court. The Government has signalled that it might further amend the Resource Management Act so that all plan processes in the future can choose to follow this route, but for the present, the Unitary Plan process will be unique.

## **Engagement**

If you have an interest in land investment or development in Auckland, the Unitary Plan may have important impacts on zoning or introduce rules relevant to your business or planning needs. We recommend you consider getting involved in the informal consultation process which is your opportunity to engage with the Auckland Council and raise issues around how the Unitary Plan could better accommodate your goals and needs. Once the Unitary Plan is formally notified and the statutory process commences, involvement will still be possible (and is encouraged) but may become more time consuming and expensive.

If you require any further information on the Unitary Plan, please contact our specialist resource management team.