



Master Planning

Description

Master planning is a planning process that provides for the detailed planning and design of a specific area. It is intended to provide a purposeful, integrated approach to elements such as cultural values, layout, servicing, special values, access, public realms and density of uses, and the specific nature and location of activities. It is particularly useful in presenting an opportunity to specifically address an area's development in detail and to avoid or mitigate adverse effects through planning and design.

How and when the tool is used

In respect of tourism, master planning is commonly used for creating specific tourist destinations, such as resorts or visitor precincts, and includes the planning and provision of transportation, accommodation, visitor activities and all services required for visitors and employees.

Master Plans are usually prepared for a site or a limited number of sites, rather than at a larger scale such as District or Regional scale. This is because they are relatively prescriptive and specialised in their application. In sensitive sites, master plans can include careful attention to protection of environmental qualities. A New Zealand example of tourism use is at Wharekauhau in South Wairarapa. A 1997 Master Plan identified appropriate locations for structures within significant landscape including framework planting, farm operations, revegetation, stormwater management and access. This plan has determined the subsequent development path for the resort.

Master plans predominantly provide for a specific range of activities within a specific area and provide a reasonable level of detail about the factors considered and the spatial arrangement proposed. Because the plan usually represents the interests of the landowner, the ability to broaden the extent of the area to which it applies is less than other plans with less specificity (e.g. [structure plans](#) ❄️).

Application

A major advantage of the master planning process is that it enables a very high level of planning and design to be undertaken for the subject site. Where the implementation of that plan is the responsibility of a small group or even one body then it will often produce very high quality environmental outcomes. Well known New Zealand tourism destinations such as Wharekauhau, Millbrook, Clearwater and Huka Lodge all have been the result of master planning processes.

A negative aspect of master planning is that the area that can be covered by it is usually limited by the level of control of the area. Because of their prescriptive nature master plans are not as successful where there are multiple ownerships of an area and where there is the risk of different aspirations emerging over time such that the master plan is unrealisable in its entirety.

The investment in master planning is usually predominantly private but may involve public funding for a joint planning development. For example, if the planning involved is based around an existing settlement, then an interest in the public realm of streets and open spaces may be retained by a local authority and their interest reflected in the master planning process through some funding of the plan preparation. There is also local authority involvement in infrastructure. For example, some developers pay costs of services which are of benefit to the existing host community. The sharing of costs may be one consequence of joint public/private planning leading to master development, typically a publicly-funded master plan for an area or region, followed by private investment in an identified location or activity.

There is no established methodology for specific ongoing monitoring for and of master planning - largely because it is a technique which is not prescribed in New Zealand legislation. However, if the area was established through a consent or permit process, there are likely to be ongoing monitoring conditions attached through the implementation phase, e.g. resource consents under the [Resource Management Act framework](#) ❄️ in New Zealand. Master plans may also be linked to [regional or district tourism strategies](#) ❄️ through monitoring processes.



PLANS AND PLANNING

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Due to the prescriptive nature of master plans (ie who they are targeted at providing for, the cost of implementation, the access points etc) a change to one element of the plan can render the plan as unworkable. There are strategies that can be applied to reduce this risk, but master plans are vulnerable to change over time, and that risk is increased the more parties are required to achieve the plan.

Our evaluation

Master planning has been successfully used for the planning and design of specific locations which have become iconic particularly at the top end of New Zealand's tourism industry. The ability to very carefully apply social, environmental, architectural and engineering specialists to the development of a location has enabled some development to succeed in particularly sensitive natural areas. However, it tends to require a relatively high level of upfront resourcing to achieve, and a limited number of landowners for success.