



## Structure Planning

### Description

Structure planning is a process resulting in plans that typically show how broad scale development or change in the landscape will be physically arranged on the ground. It is intended to provide a broad structure for intended changes, which provides more certainty for stakeholders as to the bigger picture physical environment to be created but leaves some flexibility for detail and the design of the constituent pieces so they can evolve over time. The process of preparing a structure plan is typically mapping-based (see [spatially-based planning and GIS](#) 🌿) and involves a holistic understanding of the environmental parameters for the type of change proposed (see [environmental impact assessment](#) 🌿 tools) including community interests and aspirations (see Collaboration and Structured Participation tools).

It is particularly useful as it enables more certainty than broad land use zoning tools under district plans or other [Resource Management Act Framework](#) 🌿 (RMA) processes as to, for example, the linkages between ecological systems, the pattern of roading, or the density of development. This can overcome the issue of incremental development in large areas that produces environments where critical linkages are not made. It also provides for better infrastructure planning, as the likely capacity requirements and connections are known in advance, and can enable community expectations to be better incorporated and met.

Key phases in developing a structure plan generally include:

- Project scoping and programming
- [Stakeholder Identification](#) 🌿 and identification of communities of identification, and consultation/participation with them
- Research and information analysis - e.g. demographic projections, community/social profiles, constraints, policy background etc.
- Mapping and base information application
- Identification of key principles (e.g. urban design, environmental values, etc.)
- Generation and evaluation of alternatives and identification of preferred options
- Finalisation of plan
- Implementation through various actions: District Plans, development/construction, ownership changes, reserves planning and management, etc.

### How and when the tool is used

Structure planning can be used at any geographic level - site, local, regional. The level of details may vary depending on the scale. For example, areas of protection for natural values may be larger for a regional scale application than on a site by site basis.

A New Zealand tourism-related example of the use of structure plans was at Marahau, Tasman District, a sensitive landscape at the gateway to Abel Tasman National Park. To resolve conflicts between different land uses and owner/agency aspirations, a simple structure plan was produced that identified development areas belonging to a major landowner (Wakatu Incorporation), new road connections, open spaces and protection areas. This was undertaken as a joint venture between Tasman District Council and Wakatu Incorporation and imbedded in the expression of a Tourism Zone in the District Plan.

A further example was the preparation of a Structure Plan for sections of the Northland coastal environment as part of the Whangarei Coastal Management Strategy in 2003. A key outcome for one specific area was the creation of a recreation and tourism hub centred around the Tutukaka marina and supported by a passive recreation area in the surrounding bays. Specific elements were identified for the Structure Plan to achieve this outcome.

### Application

A major advantage with structure plans is their ability to provide linkages and spatial definition to the way a landscape will change. Whether that is a tourism resort in a natural area or a greenfields growth area at the edge of an urban area the process is similar. The benefit of this approach is that, over time, development is 'joined up' in its implementation and therefore efficiencies in design as well as effectiveness in function can result. In New Zealand, the structure plan has seen a resurgence in use, particularly in response to ad hoc planning and implementation in development in urban areas.



The tool is effective as a way of documenting outcomes from a community [visioning process](#) which may then lead to its implementation through a series of other tools including statutory ones such as District Plans, or non-statutory tools such as growth strategies. Alternatively a structure plan may be prepared by a landowner wanting to understand the opportunities for a site for change and/or as a tool for communicating those opportunities to others. It is important for all stakeholders to start with a set of agreed principles, as these will inform the structure plan options, but also underlie the evaluation of any changes that may be required to the plan in the future.

A negative aspect of structure plans is the lack of ability to secure their application over time to the subject area. There is no mandate to prepare a structure plan embodied in RMA or other legislation and they do not have any explicit legal status or statutory effect unless they are provided for as part of a statutory planning document (as occurred in the Marahau example). Unless the structure plan is advanced to a secure statutory document it may not gain the traction required over time to achieve its benefits of coordinated change. A response to this difficulty is for structure plans (including those prepared jointly by developers and local authorities) to be incorporated with land use re-zonings in District Plans. The structure plan then sits within the District Plan's suite of maps and new rules are applied that requires development in the subject area to be consistent with the structure plan. It can then be administered under the RMA.

A further challenge with a structure plan is to obtain the agreement of all the constituent landowners to the plan. Although the embodiment of the structure plan in the District Plan is a statutory process that will decide the outcome of this with respect to where the lines on the plan go, it is beneficial to the process that the landowners (and communities of interest) are in agreement as far as possible. This can take time (typically several years) from the start to conclusion in statutory process.

There is no set [monitoring](#) process for structure plans. Rather, the nature and degree of any monitoring carried out is dependent on the nature of implementation prescribed for the plan. Where structure plans are embodied in statutory plans, general monitoring responsibilities under RMA s 35 will apply. In the case of District Plans, for example, effective monitoring will ensure that the relevant territorial authority and other providers of infrastructure, facilities, and services in the structure planning area are fulfilling their commitments toward implementation of the structure plan. In the case of a statutory application under the District Plan those structures plans must be consistent with the RMA and corresponding documents.

### **Our evaluation**

In a tourism context, structure plans will be of most value in broader spatial planning situations where there are different ownerships and interests and change is occurring. Typically that change may require planning spatially for a range of physical features to be protected in conjunction with enabling sequential development of tourism facilities and infrastructure, be that accommodation, facilities, parking, access etc. Such plans will have the greatest potential to realise their benefits where they have had some successful community of interest participation and the plans are embodied within a statutory planning vehicle such as a District Plan.