

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT AND GROWTH

The Auranga story

*Steve Thorne, Director of
Design Urban Pty Ltd, urban designer
and master planner of Auranga*

AURANGA IS A LARGE, NEW URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE SOUTH OF AUCKLAND, NEAR DRURY. IT WILL BE HOME TO MORE THAN 37,000 RESIDENTS.

The developer, Made Group, is setting out to make the development a sustainable development in the fullest sense of this well-used term. However, the most difficult aspect of sustainable development to achieve is local employment in new growth areas on the fringe of the city. As Ram Nidumolu et al reminded us in a 2009 publication of the *Harvard Business Review*, “sustainability has become the key driver of innovation”, and in this respect the approach taken at Auranga is all about using innovative techniques to achieve the desirable sustainability outcomes, particularly with reference to employment.

Achieving a high level of employment containment in the Drury area is critical for Auckland as we simply can't continue to force more and more car-based commuters onto the motorway as they head for the airport, Manukau and Auckland to jobs. Long commutes are wasteful of energy, of time, and have damaging effects on both the environment and family and community life. In this knowledge, a key driver in the planning for Auranga was to use innovative strategies for achieving local employment. One of the prime objectives of the project is to “turn the city around” and create an employment destination. Two independent economists agree that the strategies followed will achieve more than 100 per cent job containment. In other words, there is the potential for every new resident worker to have an opportunity for local employment.

So where are the employment growth sectors? According to the NZ Ministry of Business Projections, the highest growth in employment by occupation group is for managers (+7.8% growth), professionals (12.1% growth), and community and personal service workers (19.2% growth).



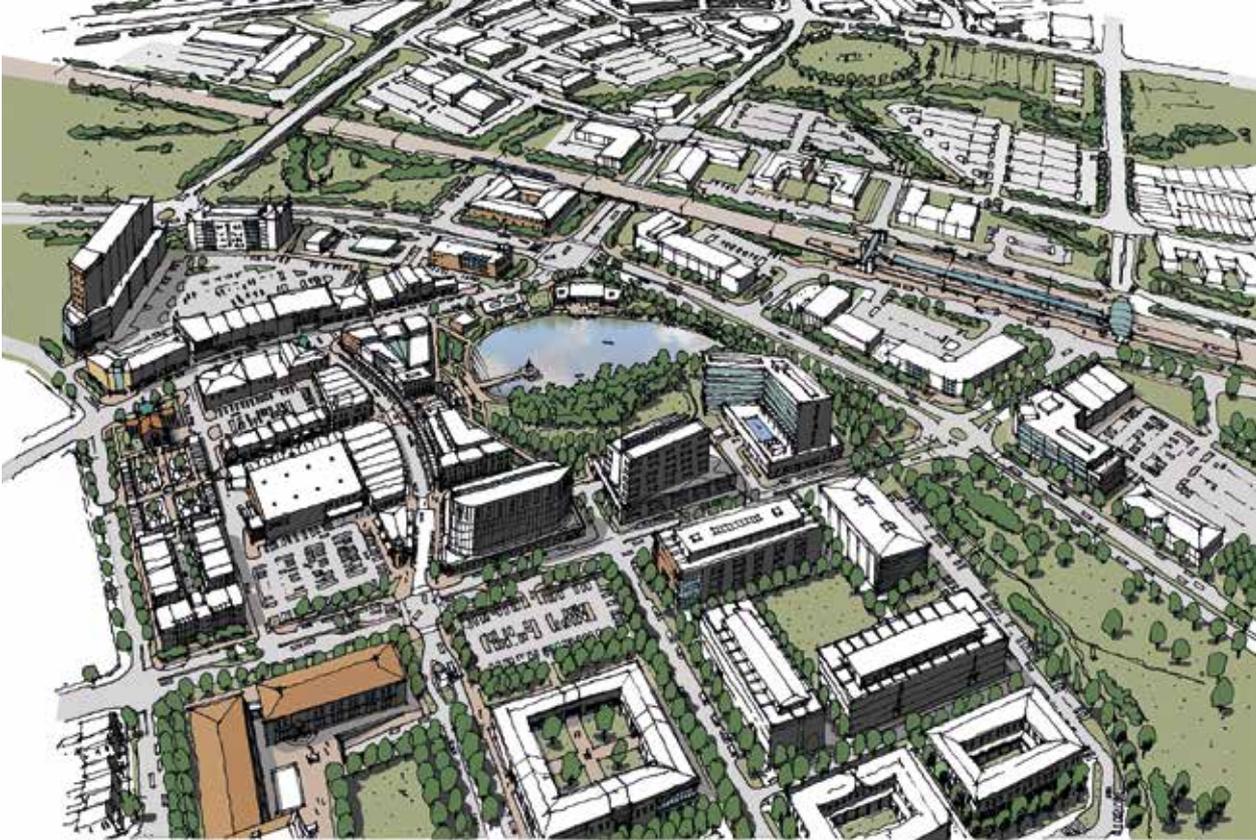
Auranga Master Plan

If this is the case, then what are the settings to attract these types of jobs?

Traditionally jobs were focused on either industrial areas for manufacturing and town and city centres. Over the past decades, manufacturing in New Zealand has been in steep decline as this capacity shifted offshore.

As far as centres go, there are broadly speaking two types of centres outside of the city's central business districts, these are shopping centres (malls) such as Sylvia Park and Albany, or street-oriented centres (town centres) such as Ponsonby and Takapuna. During the past 100 years, only shopping centres or malls have been built in New Zealand and Australia. Recently a few “hybrid” centres have been built in places such as Rouse Hill in Sydney and Point Cook in Melbourne, but these are essentially shopping centres minus the roof. No street-oriented town centres such as Newmarket, Parnell, Petone and the like have been developed for many, many decades. So why does this matter?

Shopping malls tend to be “drive-to” centres where internalised shops are surrounded by large parking lots, making walking access both difficult and unpleasant. They mainly provide retail and food and beverage jobs which are the lowest waged jobs in the New Zealand economy. If we continue to build only shopping malls, we could be entrenching relatively low incomes and car dependence.



Auranga Town Centre

Mike Cullen, of Urbacity Pty Ltd, using data from Statistics NZ identified that the average income for employees in shopping malls was \$620 a week, while in town centres it was \$1087 a week, clearly showing a stark difference between these centre types.

Street-oriented centres are different because the street provides a distinctive address, and this is attractive to businesses. The streets also provide more a comfortable and convenient walking and cycling environment if designed well. This offers people more choice when it comes to access, and enables the young, the elderly and those without private transport to gain easy and affordable access to services, jobs and material goods.

Research into how centres perform in terms of employment and income profile was undertaken by Mike Cullen of Urbacity Pty Ltd in 2014. This work studied centres across New Zealand and Australia and identified the following averages: in shopping malls there was one non-retail job to every two retail jobs, in mall-dominated towns there were 2.4 non-retail jobs to every two retail jobs, and in street-oriented town centres there were 5.2 non-retail jobs to every two retail jobs.

These non-retail jobs are the type where there is the most growth, yet we have limited the locations for these businesses and jobs to take root, especially in newer parts of our cities. For this reason, Auranga plans a street-oriented town centre, near a railway station and accessible by an interconnected network of streets with footpaths on both sides, and dedicated bike paths on major connecting streets. In addition the centre is planned to service a business innovation park and connects directly to the already approved Stevensons' light and heavy industrial development. By co-locating these land uses in an opportunistic

manner, the synergies between each are optimised and agglomeration benefits accrue.

In addition to creating employment destinations the development strategy was also to allow safe ease of access for people on foot, on bikes and on scooters. On all major connecting streets, there are dedicated and separate bike paths as well as wide, safe footpaths. These link directly to the town centre, neighbourhood centres and to employment opportunities. In all streets, all houses are required to have a front porch facing the street. These are raised so that people sitting on the porch have their eye level slightly above that of passers-by. This is critical to ensure that the porches are well used and that people feel comfortable sitting out. It is hoped that this will improve safety and a sense of safety in the streets, as well as engender a strong sense of connection and community.

Rather than just accept the potential for a good employment result, the developers embarked upon innovative evidence-based research. They engaged Space Syntax Ltd to test whether the centre would be viable using unique techniques. These involve creating a spatial model of the proposal and locating it within its context. Rather than leave much to chance, the consultants created a spatial model of the whole of New Zealand and inserted the proposal into that model to determine its potential performance. Their evidence-based approach quantifies key urban performance characteristics, including accessibility, sustainability, social cohesion, health and safety. The methods forecast future outcomes, allowing urban planning and design strategies to be optimised towards desired objectives.

It turns out that the street-oriented town centre at Auranga is likely to succeed as it will enjoy the same level



Auranga Town Square

of spatial integration as centres such as Ponsonby and Parnell. The real challenge now is gaining consent for frequent intersections on well-connected streets, such as we find in the older parts of our cities. There has been a fundamental shift in the range of street types available to planners and urban designers. Their potential performance as social and economic “machines” has been fundamentally changed. In the past, we had three types of street, the local street, the “High Street”, and the regional road. Today we still have the local street, but we have lost the ability to deliver “High Streets”, we have introduced the collector street, which limits access and land-use mix, and we have no-access arterials and motorways.

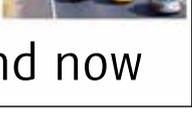
One then has to ask, where is the street that provides the address that businesses seek? This presents a real challenge, and one which Auranga has taken on. The master plan connects industrial areas, business parks, railway stations, retail and mixed-use areas and commercial areas to residential areas in a direct and seamless way. Gone are the single use zones in favour of a more mixed and responsive pattern of use.

Auranga raises some challenges for planners and transport engineers. A number of questions arise from the approach to create a contemporary version of a traditional town. These are:

- Can we move away from restrictive zoning of land uses, especially in centres?
- Can we change the way we view streets and movement? Are we able

to view movement as a social and economic resource and allow land uses to respond to this resource?

- Can we achieve closer integration of places of work, shopping and living so that we reduce the distances people have to travel?
- Can we prioritise walking and cycling in the design of streets, and the buildings facing streets?
- Can we develop metrics to evaluate walking and cycling so that a fair comparison with traffic numbers can be made
- Can we fairly evaluate the qualities of “place” so that movement and place are balanced when decisions are made about design?

Local Street		Local Street	
High Street		Collector Road	
Regional Road		High Street	
		Limited Access Arterial	
		Regional Road	
		Motorway	

Road hierarchies – then and now