



1. INTRODUCTION

Cities develop character and personality from such factors as their natural setting, historical development, size, functions, and the life style of the people. As with people, the character of a city is no less real for being subjective and immeasurable.

A rich character adds to the enjoyment and fulfilment of the city's population; it attracts growth. It is important in tourism.

Auckland's Central Area has always been the hub of human, civic and commercial interest of the city, and thus is well endowed with existing and potential character. The commercial character of Auckland is most apparent at the present day, and this aspect has developed partly at the expense of other elements of character which could now need conserving and developing.

The major elements of the Central Area character to be discussed are: (1) natural features, (2) activities, (3) open spaces, (4) the history, (5) the built environment: streets and buildings, and (6) the people.

Because of the difference in emphasis of these character elements in various parts of the Central Area, zones of particular character can now be distinguished (see Fig. 14).

2. NATURAL FEATURES AND CHARACTER

2.1 The harbour

The Waitemata is of utmost importance to

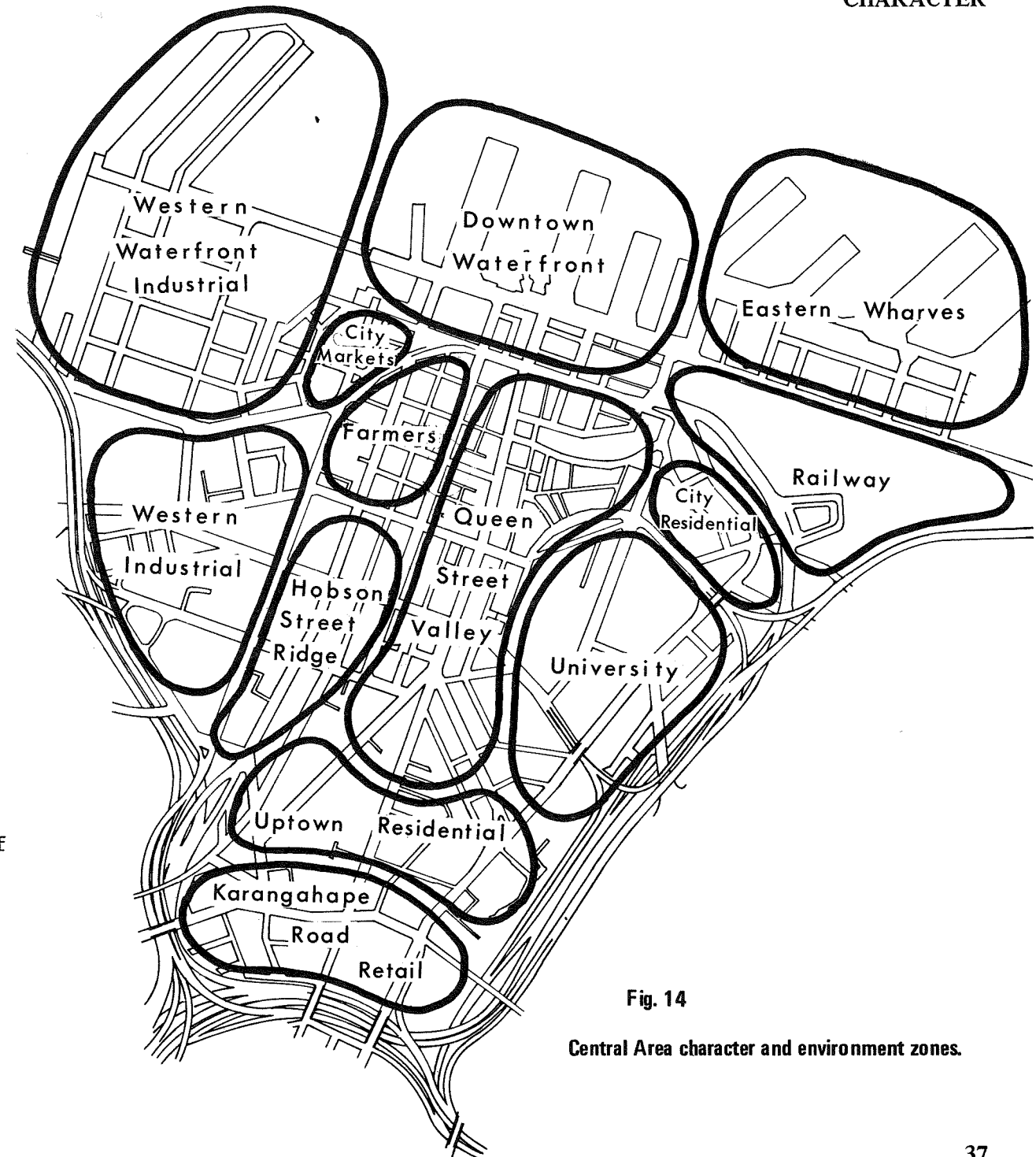
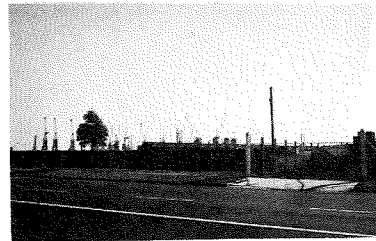
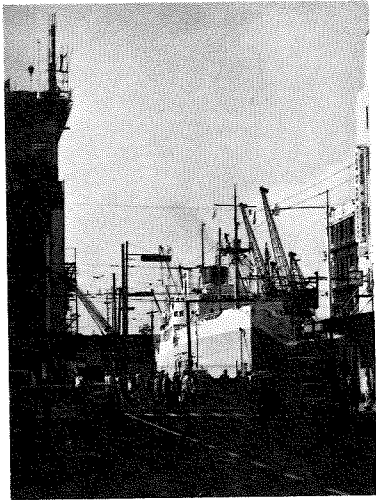


Fig. 14

Central Area character and environment zones.



CHARACTER



Auckland as a whole. It was important to the Maoris, and was the major factor in the choice of the site for European settlement. Besides its significance as a port, the harbour can be considered as Auckland's greatest amenity. It is enjoyed for bathing and boating, or just for the beauty of its visual relationship to the land.

The Central Area's relationship to the harbour is changing. Originally the city and the port were closely related. Photographs of Queens Wharf in the 1890's show it to be very much a part of Queen Street and an important place for promenading, meeting people, and relaxing. The Central Area (the part of the city with the highest concentration of daytime population) is becoming increasingly alienated from the harbour; by distance, with increasing reclamations; visually, by office, warehouse and industrial buildings; by regulation (a pass can be necessary to get onto Queens Wharf); and by large volumes of traffic along Quay Street. The only contact between the people and the water is on the Ferry wharf.

The port is an integral part of the Central Area, but as discussed already in the proposals for future port development, expansion of the cargo-handling part of the port would best be achieved outside the Central Area (page 22). There is relatively little goods distribution in the Central Area still tied to the cargo-handling part of the port which would not better be located in a less congested and less highly valued part of the city.

The following proposals for Council policy, previously made in the section on

Activities, have particular relevance to the character of the Central Area (page 22).

- (a) The Princes/Queens/Captain Cook basins be retained with their close proximity to the city, as a public amenity.
- (b) The passenger terminals, ferries and launch facilities be retained close to Queen Street.
- (c) The Lighter Basin be retained.
- (d) The Ferry Building be retained.
- (e) Queens Wharf be developed as an amenity area freely accessible to people wishing to relax near the water's edge and observe other port activities. Facilities for relaxation and recreation could be provided (Fig. 44).

These proposals, in association with the activity to be created by the Harbour Board's downtown redevelopment project and the possible closing of Queen Street between Quay Street and Customs Street, would reunite the city and the port and re-emphasize the harbour as an important element in the character of the Central Area.

2.2 The topography

The Central Area is a natural basin, surrounded by ridges in a U-shape. Originally there was a sizeable stream in the valley (now piped under Queen Street), a cliff and headland where Britomart Place now is, and sandy coves where Customs Street, Beach Road, and the southern edge

of Victoria Park are today.

Although the original configuration has partly disappeared, the physical form is one of the most important elements giving character and unity to the Central Area. It is considered that, ideally, the form of the Central Area should be emphasized by building development. Tall buildings on the ridges would be landmarks from the sea and the rest of the city, and would make the Central Area more legible from within. (Fig. 15)

Present development - largely a reflection of historical development and centralising economic influences - has had the opposite effect. Only on the Princes Street ridge has building development emphasized the topography of the city. The two and three storeyed buildings on the remainder of the ridges give the impression of being at the same level as the taller buildings in the valleys. Building development has made the Central Area appear almost flat.

In considering the distribution of development, (page 28) it was concluded that it was impossible to reconcile the desirability of locating all high buildings on the ridges with what already exists, with natural growth patterns, and the need to locate the greatest concentration of development in the most accessible part of the Central Area. It appears that loss of the natural form of the Central Area, and with it some of the city's character, is inevitable in view of past development and proposals for the future.

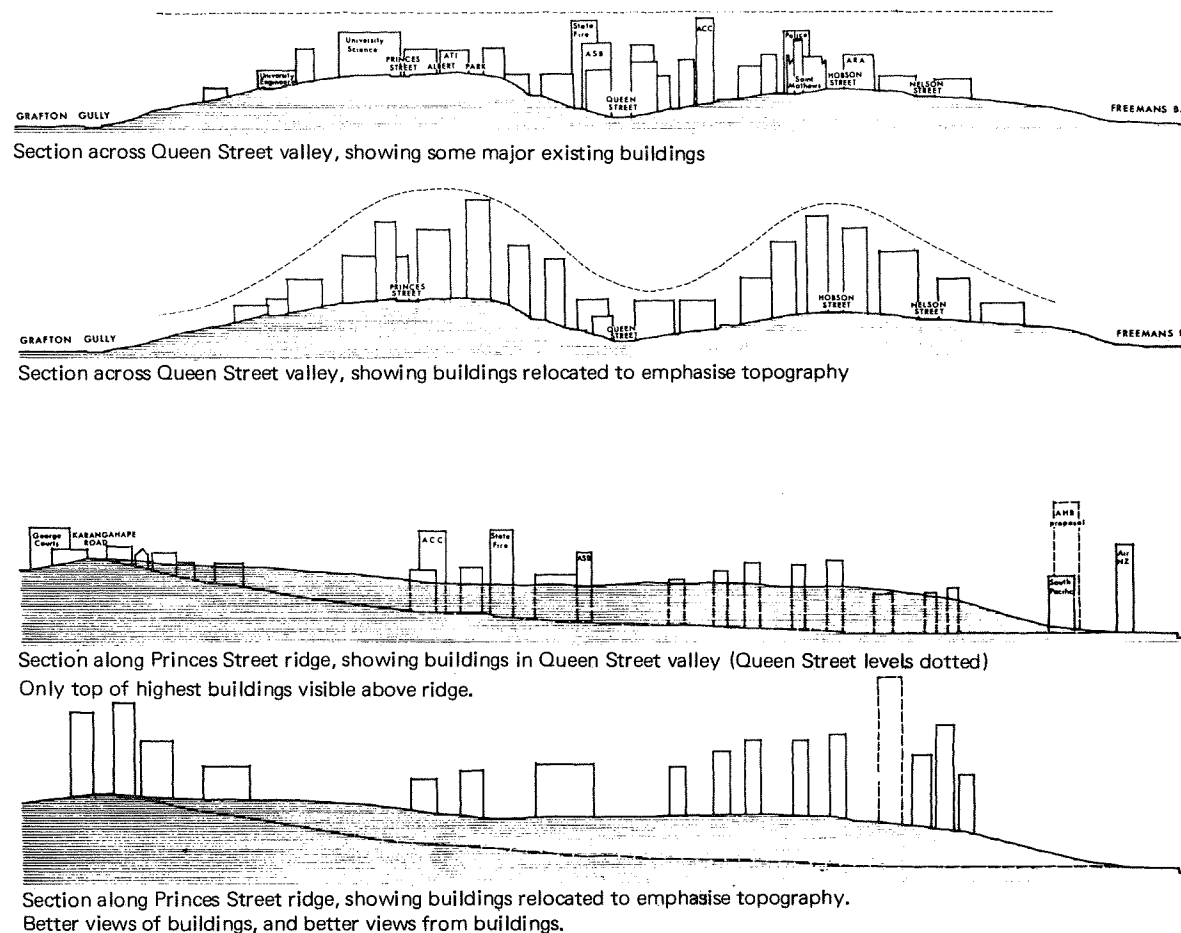


Fig. 15 Building development and topography.

3. ACTIVITIES AND CHARACTER

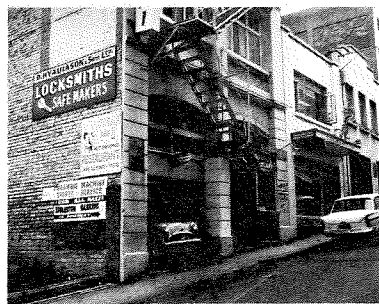
Much of the Central Area's character derives from the fact that it is the "commercial heart" of New Zealand. The predominant activities are associated with bustle, liveliness, variety and vitality, to a degree which is found nowhere else in the city.

The maintenance of this kind of character in this part of the city is very much the purpose of the whole Central Area plan. Proposals in all other sections are closely related to the basic activities of the Central Area, and should effectively strengthen its commercial character and yet still retain the variety of the Central Area today.

As discussed previously (page 12), it is a matter of concern that some of the activities which add a great deal of life and character to the Central Area (e.g. galleries, cinemas, antique dealers, coffee bars and restaurants) may leave if land values and rents become too high, as has happened in large cities overseas. Many redevelopments in the heart of the city have resulted in the replacement of activities which had charm and character by ones of less interest and variety.

It is difficult to retain certain activities in the heart of the city by planning means, but the exclusion of certain desirable activities in new developments from plot ratio calculations has already been proposed as an incentive (page 19).

Further research is necessary into the importance of certain activities to the



character of the city, to discover those desirable activities which could be forced out of the Central Area, and to find ways to retain them.

4. OPEN SPACE

The Central Area has 66.5 acres of parks. These are Albert Park (16 acres), Victoria Park (22 acres), Myers Park (5 acres plus), Symonds Street Cemeteries and Reserve (approximately 22 acres), Emily Place (less than one acre) and the Civic Square. With few exceptions these parks are remote from the areas of high daytime population concentration.

The layout and amenities of each park in the Central Area are different, and each adds character to the city. Parks provide relief from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the Central Area.

Proposals for existing parks include:

- (a) Retaining Albert Park and Emily Place as much as possible in their present state.
- (b) Improvements to Myers Park, including better integration with development backing onto the park (with visual links, if possible), and with the Civic Square through a well-designed pedestrian system. A reduction in the road space in Myers Park and the provision of play furniture more in keeping with the atmosphere of the park is desirable. It may also be possible to develop a pedestrian link, segregated from traffic, with

Albert Park.

(c) Victoria Park layout to be retained, but improvements to the children's playground, including some shelter and seclusion and possible provision of play sculptures.

There is a major need for an area of public open space on the Hobson Street ridge in the vicinity or south of St. Matthews. This area has a high density of employment and is poorly served at present. It is proposed that land be acquired in this area for provision of a public park or parks.

There is also a lack of public open space in the Queen Street valley. It is considered that this would be best overcome by closing parts of Queen Street to traffic and developing pedestrian areas. Such proposals are discussed in the following section, together with proposals to develop small open resting spaces, or malls, such as Vulcan Lane and the proposed St. Patricks Square and Freyberg Place redevelopment schemes.

5. HISTORY AND CHARACTER

A sense of history identifies a city. It has been said that "a city without old buildings is like a man without a memory."

Public awareness in the historical development and role of a city leads to civic pride and can add to the tourist attraction of a city. Similarly, fine examples of past and present architecture and things of natural beauty (trees and park layouts,

etc.) are a source of pleasure and pride. In the society of the future, such things are likely to be considered even more valuable and farsightedness is necessary in preserving and publicizing the best of the past and the present in the interests of the future.

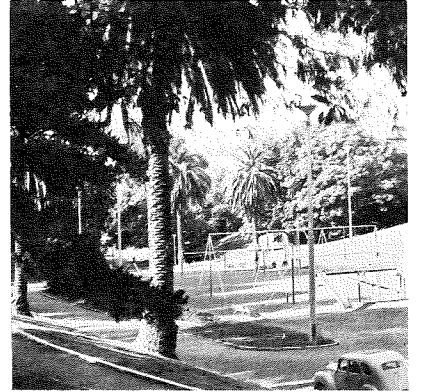
Historical character, especially if integrated with other amenities such as pedestrian walks, public spaces, and interesting landscape design, can help to retain the strength of the central business district in competition with developing suburban centres.

5.1 Present situation

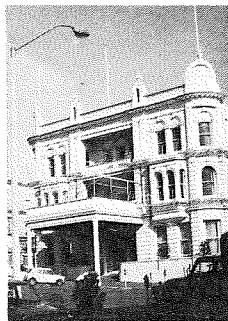
The Central Area has a large number of buildings of both architectural and historic importance, but only three of them (the Supreme Court, St. Andrews Church and St. Matthews Church), along with the remnant of the old Barracks Wall, and several fine trees in the University grounds, are listed in the Council's register of Places of Historic or Scientific Interest or Natural Beauty.

The Central Area has long been the focus of public activity in the city and the location of many important past events and occasions of wide public interest are known (e.g. the location of the old gallows, the place of sitting of the first City Council meeting), but unmarked.

Some locales of particular historic character remain almost intact in the Central Area. They have a character and charm of their own which is not to be



CHARACTER



found in modern "olde worlde" imitations, and least of all in new Central Area building developments.

Various lists of buildings of historic importance and of buildings of outstanding architectural interest have been prepared. Because of the possible rate of building change in the Central Area and the fact that many are old and are earthquake risks, it is likely that most of those listed will disappear within the next 30 years unless action is taken to retain them.

5.2 Problems and proposals

The major problems in the Central Area with regard to preservation of places of historic and scientific interest or natural beauty are in reconciling the need for preservation of a part of our heritage with the need for redevelopment. A large number of properties with historical importance are in private hands and owners may wish to redevelop in the near future. Others are structurally unsound by today's standards and costs of strengthening them would be considerable. Still others are costly to maintain or to restore to their original condition.

Preservation is largely in the hands of the Historic Places Trust which gets irregular and insubstantial grants from the Government. It is likely, in view of the present situation, that there will be little financial assistance from the Historic Places Trust for preservation of Central Area historic buildings.

It is proposed that there should be a policy of moral and financial commitment to the preservation of places of historic and architectural significance, and of natural beauty, and that three steps should be taken to achieve this:

- (a) A full inventory of all existing places of historic, architectural or scientific interest or natural beauty in the Central Area should be made. A grading system could be used in the inventory to assess the need for public financial commitment. Most important places could then be incorporated in the City's Register of Places of Historic and Scientific Interest and Natural Beauty.
- (b) Because the *context* of objects and places of historical and scientific importance is important, and because many Central Area buildings have lost their context due to changing urban conditions and other redevelopments close by, it is desirable that at least one "Conservation Area" be set up. The area shown on Fig.16 is isolated as a suitable area for conservation. This area is particularly rich in historic association and contains many fine buildings worthy of preservation, both old and new. In addition, it has an atmosphere which is distinctly different from that of the rest of the Central Area. Much of the possible scope for conservation has been lost through University redevelopment. However, once completed, the University complex itself is expected to be worthy of conservation. At present, the Albert Park layout and

the Caretaker's cottage, the Library complex, the old Jewish Synagogue and the group of Princes Street merchants' homes at present used by the University, Government House, the University Arts Block and precinct, Emily Place, the Northern Club area, Constitution Hill, the Supreme Court area, the complex of early high density residential apartments facing Waterloo Quadrant, and the St. Andrews Church area, all offer opportunities for conservation. It is desirable that, as far as possible, the buildings should be retained for their original use (i.e. houses remain houses, etc.) but careful modification could allow other uses (e.g. houses altered to offices) as long as the atmosphere and character are not lost.

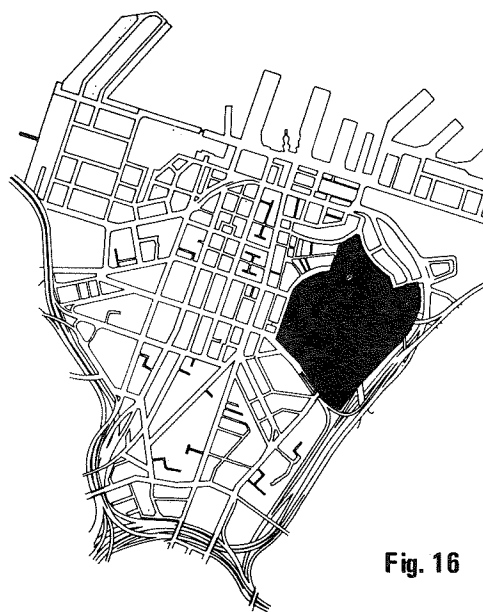


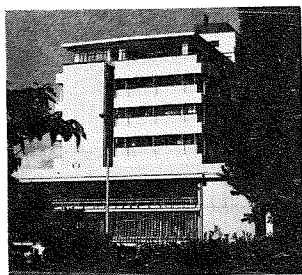
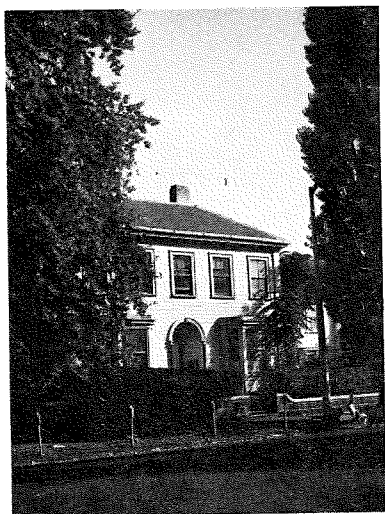
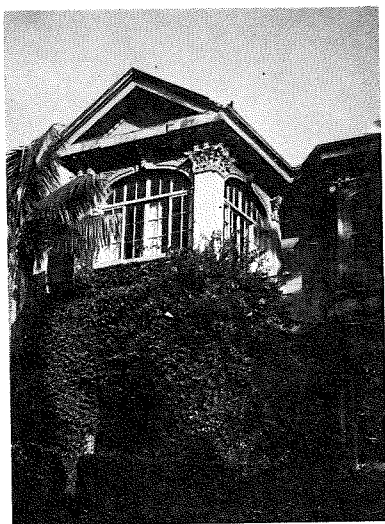
Fig. 16 Proposed Conservation Area

KEY

- Proposed conservation area
- ▭ Existing buildings
- ▬ Key building
- ▬ Barrack wall
- ▨ Steep slopes



CHARACTER



It is proposed that an area on the Princes Street/Symonds Street ridge, as outlined in Fig. 16, be made a "Conservation Area" where demolitions, tree felling, major alterations and earthworks be minimized, and any proposals for changes made open for public comment. It is further proposed that the old merchants' houses owned by the Council in Princes Street, backing onto Albert Park, should be retained, as far as possible in their original form.

- (c) Publicity is necessary to make people actively aware of the character of the city. Aucklanders are proud of their city, and this pride is based upon the unique things about Auckland - the harbour, the volcanic cones, the Museum, Queen Street. Apart from these obviously unique things about Auckland, there are many smaller, but just as fascinating elements of the city which would be further sources of pride (both the owner and passer-by) if publicized.

Two types of publicity are proposed for objects and places of historic and scientific interest and natural beauty within the Central Area:

- (1) Plaques be used to identify:

- (i) buildings of historical or architectural interest;
- (ii) places where important past events took place, or where important early buildings or objects were sited (e.g. first market place, Vulcan foundry);

- (iii) fine specimens of trees, particularly native trees, where they occur in places frequented by pedestrians.

- (2) Publications:

- (i) Pamphlets for visitors to the city are being prepared as part of the Centennial Year activities to show places of particular interest, and suggesting possible tourist walks. The Central Area has many features of note within walking distance of the main tourist hotels.
- (ii) A history of Auckland, called "Auckland's Historical Background", has been published by the Council for sale to the public.

6. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: BUILDINGS, STREETS AND CHARACTER

6.1 Buildings

The character of a building derives from its age, size, function, style of detailing, materials and colouring. Only in certain parts of the Central Area are buildings similar enough in all of these factors to actively lend character to the area (e.g. Vulcan Lane, Elliott Street).

Many of the Central Area's new buildings have been out of sympathy with the surrounding area and thus have detracted from the potential character of the Central

Area. Comprehensive redevelopments can create the character of the area which they cover (e.g. the University), but in most situations it is desirable that individual new buildings do not intrude unfavourably in an area of already established building character.

It is considered undesirable to place any restraints on buildings in the Central Area, other than those outlined in the section on development, and the existing provisions of Ordinance 104 which give the Council some control over the appearance of buildings.

However, it is proposed that consideration should be given to the role of material and colour of buildings in relation to the character of the Central Area, with a view to providing guidelines for Central Area developers who wish to contribute in a positive way to the character of the city.

6.2 Directional signs

The Central Area can be extremely confusing to a stranger, and even people who have been in Auckland for some time are unaware of the existence or whereabouts of many public amenities (e.g. public conveniences, the Creche, Myers Park, the Police Station, etc.).

While a proliferation of directional signs can be distracting and unsatisfactory, confusion arising from lack of directional signposting, particularly in the built-up heart of the city, can give an initial adverse impression of the Central Area which may persist for some time.

Traffic signposting (from the motorist's point of view) is adequate for most of the Central Area, and problems which exist are essentially related to the pedestrian environment.

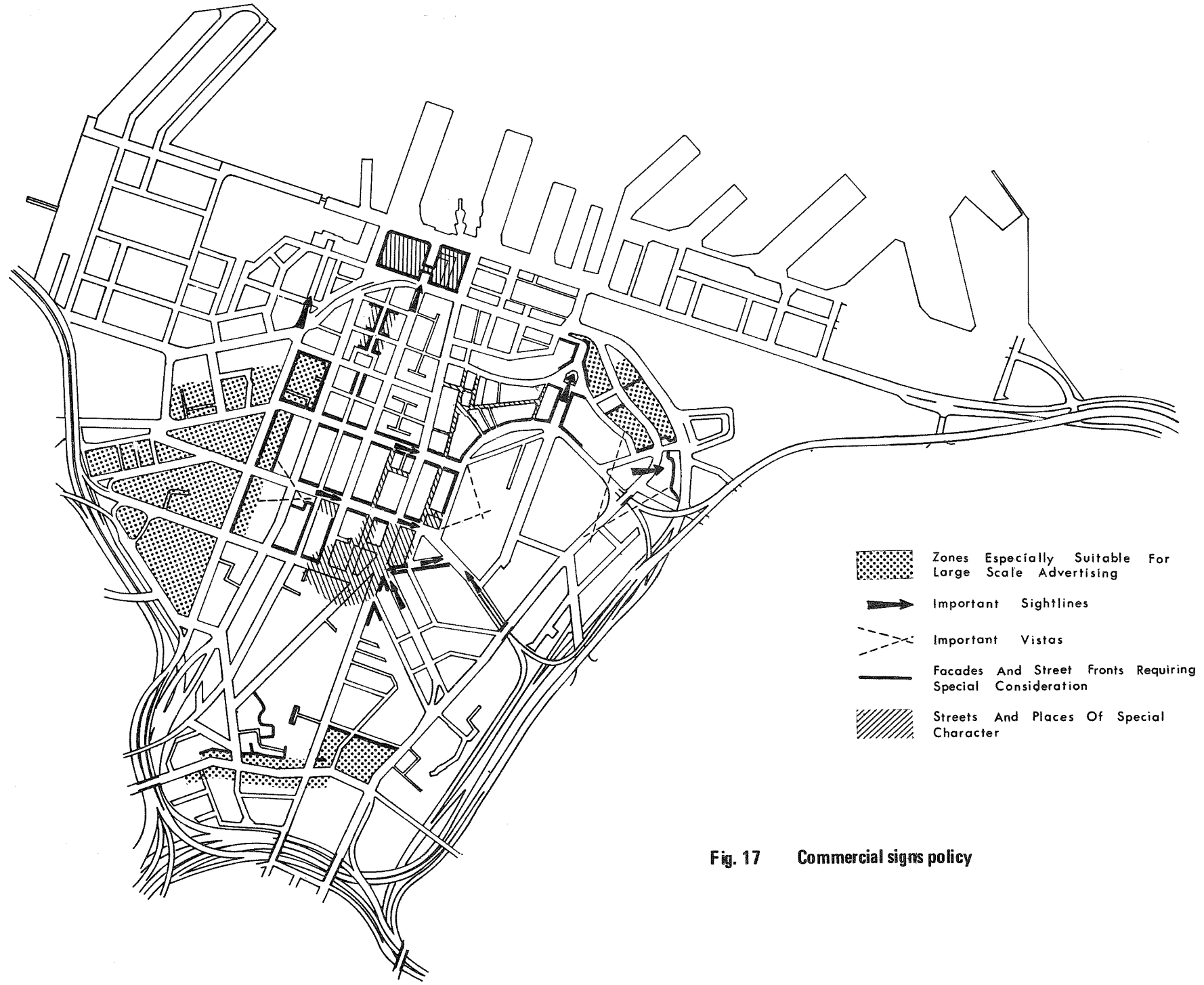
It is proposed that a policy of signposting be developed to make the city more legible to the pedestrian (particularly the stranger) which should (a) single out public amenities (parks, major civic and public buildings, bus stops and resting places, conveniences and possibly views, etc.), (b) identify best locations for these signs, and (c) discover a suitable legible, identifiable and directional design for signs. These signs, while adding to the amenities and legibility of the Central Area, could, if well designed, become an important element in the character of the Central Area.

6.3 Commercial signs (Fig. 17)

Commercial signs are one of the secondary, but nevertheless important, elements in a city's character. If planned for as carefully as roads and buildings, signs can contribute greatly to the interest of the Central Area, but they can make or mar a view or vista, or an area of particular character.

The Central Area is an area of special nature. With its high daytime population and a large volume of traffic passing through, it provides an ideal location for advertisers to reach a wide range of people through the medium of signs; it has a large number of commercial premises and businesses which wish to identify them-










-  Zones Especially Suitable For Large Scale Advertising
-  Important Sightlines
-  Important Vistas
-  Facades And Street Fronts Requiring Special Consideration
-  Streets And Places Of Special Character

Fig. 17 Commercial signs policy

selves; and it has a large number of traffic signs and lights. Also, it is a place where working and recreation conditions must be protected against undue interference of distracting signs.

Policies already recommended for the Central Area provide a means of rationalising amenity and traffic safety with the desires of advertisers and Central Area businesses. Thus they permit advertising and commercial signs to become a desirable part of the character of the Central Area.

In essence, in the Central Area

- (a) signs visible from recreation and residential zones (including the University) should be controlled so as not to be obtrusively visible;
- (b) buildings of civic, historical or architectural significance should not be despoiled by inappropriate surrounding advertising; and advertising should not detract from their importance as landmarks in specific vistas;
- (c) visual links with the harbour from places such as Symonds Street, Anzac Avenue and Lower Albert Street should not be unreasonably intruded upon by signs;
- (d) in streets and places of special character (see Fig. 17) *appropriateness* is to be considered, with particular regard to scale and the relationship between signs and facades;
- (e) some buildings and facades require special consideration with regard to

(a), (b) and (d) above. These are shown on the map ;

- (f) some areas are particularly appropriate for large-scale advertising.

The criteria for acceptance of signs (which are at present being used for a trial period) in conjunction with the special considerations for the Central Area outlined above, appear to provide an adequate guide for Council decision-making and should result in a reasonably desirable form of advertising and identification through signs in this part of the city.

6.4 Streets and street furniture

Streets cover 26% of the Central Area space. The design, materials and markings of roads is primarily a matter of traffic flow and safety; however the pedestrian part of the streets allows greater flexibility of design and material and has an important role in the character of the Central Area. Paving slabs, colour and texture variation could be used to great effect in some parts of the Central Area.

Street furniture is as important as any other streetscape element. At present, street furniture is a hotch-potch of types and styles. It is proposed that seats, litter bins, post boxes, newspaper boxes, telephone boxes, traffic signs, and noticeboards should all be carefully re-designed. Design criteria would include:

- (a) Comfortable and/or convenient to use.



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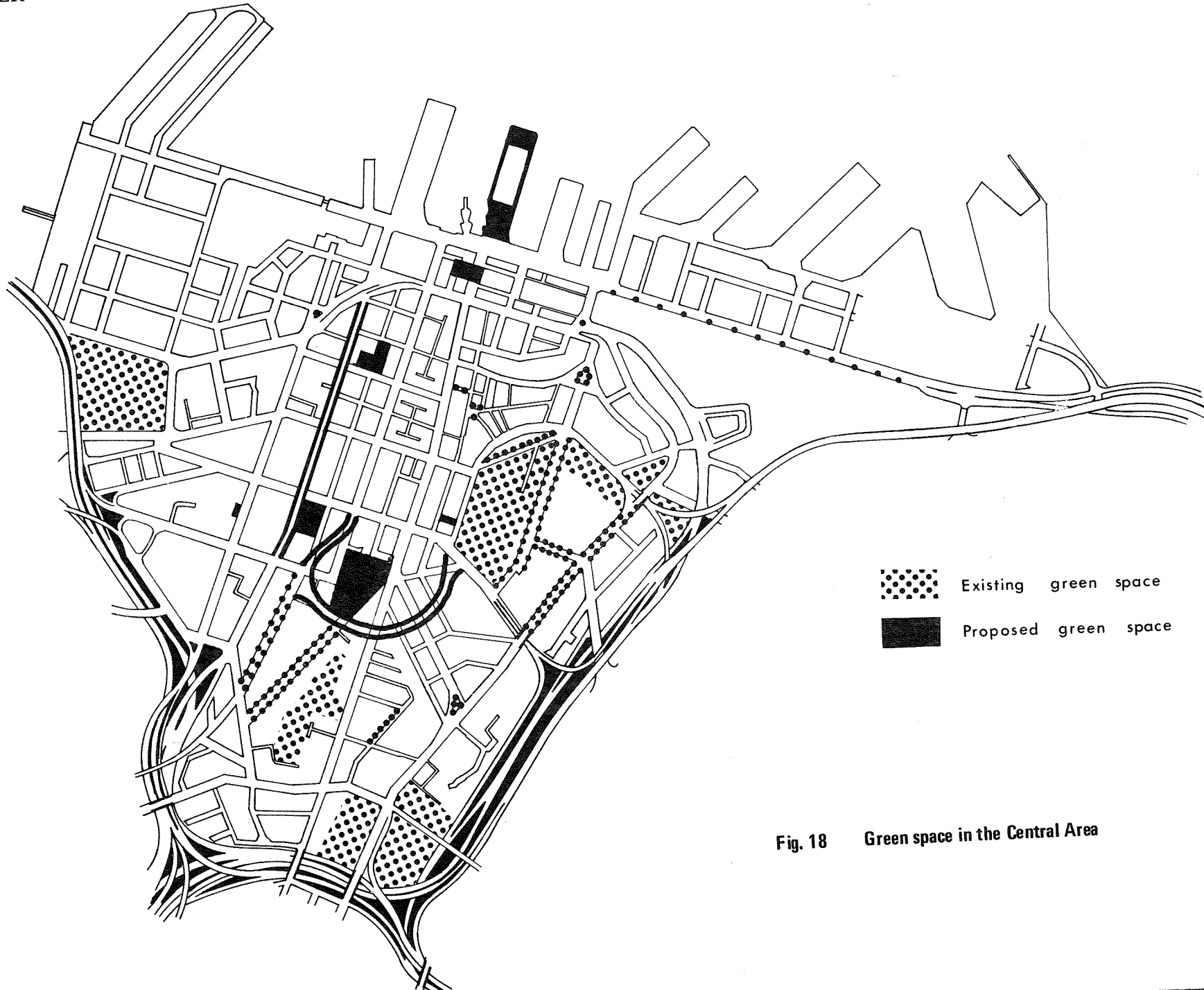


Fig. 18 Green space in the Central Area

- (b) Identifiable.
- (c) Applicable throughout the Central Area where possible. There is little reason not to have, for example, a standardized litter bin (in shape, material and colour) for the Central Area.
- (d) Appropriate, in terms of other elements of Central Area character.

6.5 Trees

In recent years few trees have been planted in the Central Area, but many have been lost with redevelopment, road works and disease or old age. The small trees in their movable pots have done much to relieve the greyness of the Central Area, but wherever services permit, trees of a suitable urban character should be planted in the ground, and left to grow to their natural height.

It is proposed that there should be a full scale programme to plant trees in the Central Area, with particular attention given to the greyest parts of the area, such as Hobson, Nelson and Albert Streets. (Fig. 18)

In addition, it is proposed that, on major traffic streets in the more "grey" parts of the Central Area with few pedestrians, some of the pedestrian street space be given over to grass. That in Vincent Street is particularly effective.

6.6 Overhead wires

Overhead wires intrude upon the buildings from the street, and thus detract from the visual character of the built environment. The authorities concerned (the Power Board, the Post Office and the Auckland Regional Authority) all have policies which involve removal of overhead wires in much of the Central Area, and it is proposed that the undergrounding of overhead services be completed.

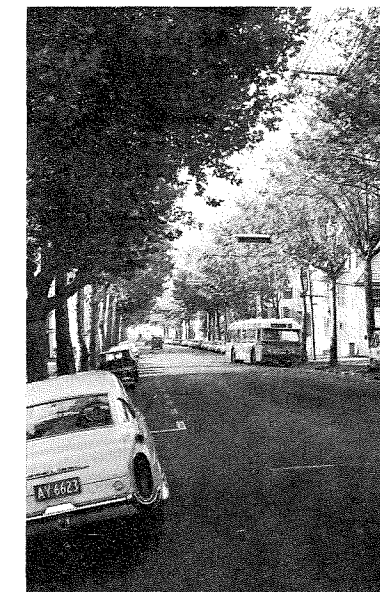
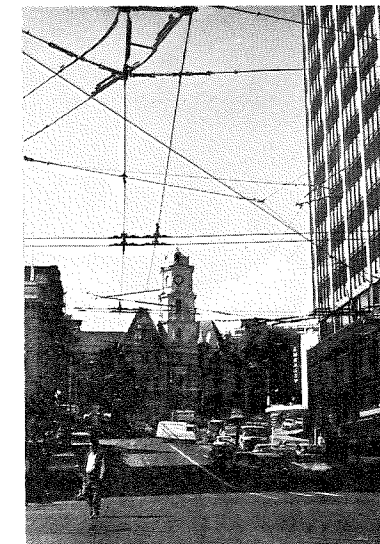
7. THE PEOPLE AND CHARACTER

Auckland is the city with the largest Polynesian population in the world and within 15 years it is estimated that one quarter of the population will be non-European in origin.

In the future, with higher standards of education and higher aspirations, it can be expected that a larger proportion of Central Area employment (at present largely a European population) will be Polynesian or Asian in origin.

Auckland is unique in that its people and its climate (the torrential rain, the brilliant sunshine and the clarity of the air) offer potential character which has been largely ignored. Auckland has developed in the manner of many other cities in the Western World and the only evidence of Polynesian elements in the Central Area are the Maori Warrior statue in Lower Queen Street, a few cabbage and pohutukawa trees, and some of the people.

It is proposed that means be found to discreetly make something of the Polynesian character of the city within the Central



CHARACTER

Area. The following are suggested:

(a) Use of colour - particularly the white, sienna and black, of traditional Maori

designs in paving and buildings.

(b) Use of Maori/Polynesian colour and motif in designing signs and plaques.

(c) Encouragement for modern Polynesian design in interior decoration of public buildings; layout and furniture of public open space; statues, etc.

(d) Liaison with various elders from Polynesian groups when spending public money on elements of a Polynesian nature which add to the character of the Central Area.



8. SPECIAL FUND FOR CENTRAL AREA AMENITIES

Throughout this section, and also in the section on pedestrians and environment, numerous projects have been touched upon. Each requires careful study, design, money and action, and it is necessary to find means to ensure continued progress in making such civic improvements.

A proposal is already before the Council for a fixed sum to be set aside in the annual budget for such improvements, and for a Committee of Council to be made responsible for its expenditure.

It is proposed that the sum should not be for major works, such as developing a street as a pedestrian mall, but should be for minor works, such as fountains, drinking fountains, sculpture, murals, street furniture, rehabilitating historic buildings, plaques, special signposting, publicity and other environmental improvements.

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