

Verbal Submission proposed District Plan – Hearing Stream #2.

26 May 2026, Fiona Christeller

Good afternoon Commissioners, officers, and fellow submitters.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Fiona Christeller. I have lived in the Hutt Valley for most of my life and, until recently, ran an architectural practice working across the Wellington region including schools, civic projects, and design guides for character city areas.

A core principle of our practice was that well-designed public places help strengthen communities. Therefore, today I want to speak about the importance of urban design leadership and ensuring that the public realm remains front and centre as Hutt City develops.

I appreciate that aspects of my submission may now sit outside the formal scope of this hearing due to proposed RMA reforms and possible Council amalgamation. However, I believe a discussion about the role of good urban design remains relevant because the decisions we make now will shape the long-term quality and identity of the city.

While I recommend promotion of inspirational design principles across both suburban and central city areas, I want now, to focus on the riverbank and city centre redevelopment area. Hutt City has a unique opportunity to provide not only a stunning new environment but also be seen as an exemplar of urban design leadership.

Very few New Zealand cities have such a significant natural landscape feature directly adjacent to their commercial centre. Redevelopment represents one of the city's greatest long-term urban opportunities with the potential to redefine Hutt City's identity for generations.

Council has already undertaken substantial work in this area and had extensive consultation, including river corridor planning, public realm strategies, improvements, landscape concepts, and city centre revitalisation studies. Collectively, these documents recognise the importance of:

- walkability,
- high-quality public space,
- climate resilience,
- ecological restoration,
- and stronger connections between the CBD and the river.

- Key
- Possible Public Building (Library?)
 - Riverfront Residential Development
 - Arts Precinct / Creative Edge
 - Community Services / Youth Amenities
 - CBD "East Access Route"
 - Public Transport Spine
 - Major Riverfront Pathway (Stopbank)
 - Minor Riverfront Pathway (Lower level)
 - Heritage "Garden" Streetscape
 - High-Priority Street Tree Planting
 - Medium-Priority Street Tree Planting
 - Low-Priority Street Tree Planting
 - Market
 - River Edge Open Space Opportunity
 - Open Space Opportunity
 - Waterway / Wetland Opportunity
 - Public Art Opportunity
 - Relocated Melling Station
 - Signalisation of Roundabouts
 - Technology facade
 - Landmarks

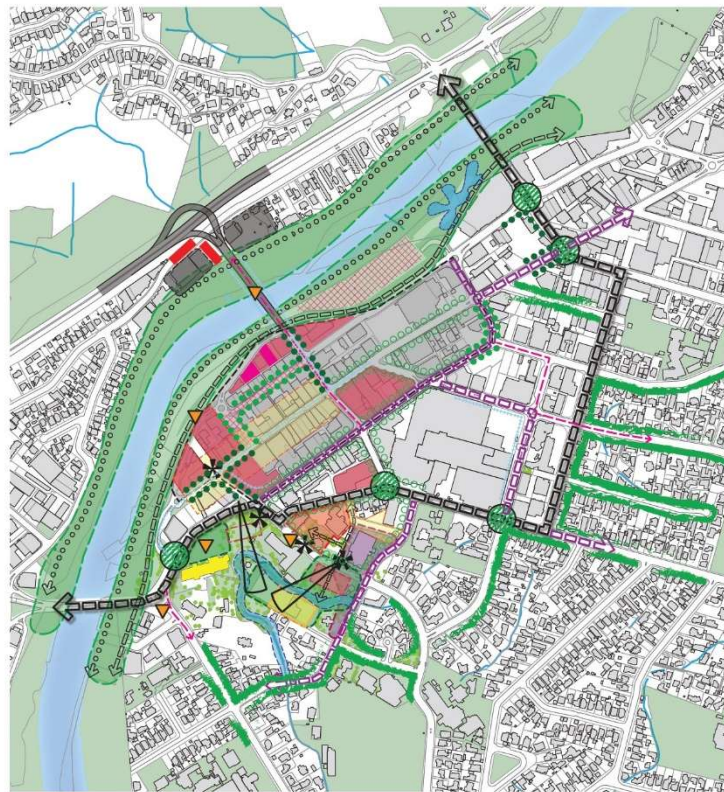


Figure 61 Making Places - simplified projects diagram

(Greater Wellington report - Hutt River City Centre Upgrade Report, 2014)

This image illustrates the proposed development framework for the riverbank precinct, conceived a decade ago.

While these perspectives demonstrate the scale of opportunity available to the city if development is approached in an integrated and coordinated way.



Looking south. Placing the river at the heart of the city. Revegetation of the river corridor to deliver environmental, social and cultural benefits.

(Isthmus: Te Awa Kairangi - Riverlink Urban and Landscape Design Framework 2021)



Figure 8.5 Illustrations of Riverlink concept (HCC supplied)



Figure 8.6 Concept landscape design (HCC supplied)

The challenge now is ensuring these aspirations are consistently carried through into actual development outcomes.

The way people use cities is changing.

Increasingly, people are not coming into centres solely for traditional office work or retail. They come for experiences, events, recreation, hospitality, social connection, and public life.

That means our cities must increasingly succeed as places for people. I believe Council has the responsibility to not only encourage a high and innovative standard of building type and construction, but also to complement private development with an amazing public realm.

There are many examples internationally and within New Zealand where investment in the public realm has transformed city centres. One example is the Christchurch Avon River precinct, where public space investment has worked alongside quality private development to create a vibrant urban environment.



What makes these places successful is not simply the individual buildings, but their neighbourliness.



Both along the riverbank and in nearby streets (here the Riverside Market), it is the quality of the spaces between buildings which make spaces for people:

- active frontages,
- pedestrian comfort,
- landscaping,
- sunlight and shelter,
- public gathering spaces,
- and strong connections between public and private development.

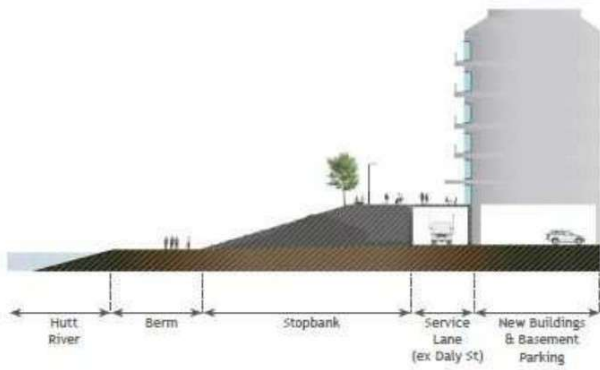


Figure 2.1 Daly Street Promenade Interface

(Greater Wellington report - Hutt River City Centre Upgrade Report, 2014)



Figure 2.2 Daly Street Promenade Steps and access to River

Back to Hutt City.

Look at how similar these ideas for the Riverbank development are to the Christchurch outcome. Mixed use buildings relating directly to landscaped areas and car-parking at basement level (in many countries commercial basement car-parks are designed to act as stormwater surge reservoirs).



Sebel Hotel, High Street.

And my final slide, the Sebel Hotel in High Street is the first new building in the Riverbank precinct. Its design achieves many of these qualities, including a possible future laneway down one side, shared with an adjacent development.

To conclude, my concern is whether the Proposed District Plan, as currently drafted, provides sufficient assurance that these kinds of outcomes will consistently occur, not only in strategically important locations such as the Riverbank precinct and city centre interfaces, but also across Hutt City's diverse commercial areas.

In my view, the plan framework could be strengthened through:

- clearer building and urban design expectations,

- stronger public realm guidance, with advisory documents and early in the process consultation
- and ongoing design leadership throughout implementation.

As part of this I recommend a formal urban design review process using a regional urban design panel.

Many successful councils use design review panels as collaborative tools to improve development quality. These are not intended to create unnecessary barriers, but to provide greater consistency, certainty, and better long-term outcomes for both developers and the community.

This becomes increasingly important as cities intensify and as climate adaptation challenges grow.

The river corridor is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Hutt City to create a distinctive and resilient urban environment — one that successfully integrates ecology, recreation, housing, commercial activity, and civic life into a coherent public landscape.

District plans are enabling documents, but ultimately the success of cities is measured by the quality of the places they create.

I encourage Council to continue strengthening the urban design tools, processes, and expectations that will help deliver that outcome.

Thank you for your time.