

Recognising and managing special character in our neighbourhoods

Traditionally we've recognised character in our neighbourhoods through special amenity areas (known as SAMs) in Christchurch City and through the Residential Conservation Zone in Banks Peninsula.

Our current (operative) district plans identify and manage the special built and landscape characteristics in these areas. This includes street appearance, landscape features, building style and age, public spaces and private gardens. Combined, these features create the character that people find attractive, and which supports neighbourhood identity.

There is a common misconception that SAMs were created to protect heritage, but this is not the case.



Different rules for different areas

The rules covering character in our current (operative) district plans vary from area to area for SAMs and the Residential Conservation Zone. For example, the Naseby Street SAM has one rule on road setback; while the Fendalton SAM has rules on road setback, residential site density and outdoor living spaces. The Slater Street/Poulton Avenue SAM requires resource consent for new buildings and additions or alterations to existing buildings visible from a public place. There is a similar requirement in the Akaroa and Lyttelton Residential Conservation Zone areas.

Because some rules focus on only one aspect (building height, road setback, outdoor living requirement etc) they do not recognise the combination of qualities that make up character. This has reduced the effectiveness of the rules relating to some SAMs and led to poorly considered new development, or changes to existing buildings and sites which undermined some character areas.

Reviewing what we protect and how we protect it

The district plan review includes a review of the current SAMs, called character areas in the stage two Residential Chapter to be notified on 2 May 2015. With so much change in our urban environment since the earthquakes, areas of special character can be considered of greater significance, as is how these areas are to be managed in future. The Council has reassessed the presence and qualities of special character in each area, including the rules that we use to manage character.

As a resident there are a number of questions for you, your neighbours and the wider community to consider. Ask yourself: do you value having particular areas protected for their character? What physical characteristics do you value about your street and neighbourhood? Is it the extent of landscaping, the low fence heights, or the openness of the street? Do the buildings in your street together create a unique character? Or is it all of these things?

The Christchurch Replacement District Plan (which will replace the City Plan and Banks Peninsula District Plan) will determine whether and how we recognise character areas. If you live in a SAM or a Residential Conservation Zone (the inner residential areas of Lyttelton and Akaroa) this will affect you as these areas are changing. If you are unsure if you are in a SAM, you can find out more about existing SAMs at www.ccc.govt.nz/sams

If you value character areas (regardless of whether or not you live in one), it is important that you find out more about what's proposed and make a submission to the district plan review so that your voice is heard. Your submissions can support or oppose Council proposals.

What happens next?

On the 2 May 2015 the Council will notify most stage two chapters of the District Plan Review and this will include the Council's proposals relating to SAMs/residential character areas (which will be found in the stage two part of the Residential Chapter). It's important to understand the issues and to make a submission at that time supporting or objecting to the proposals.

More information will be available from 2 May 2015 at www.proposeddistrictplan.ccc.govt.nz

A district plan review newsletter (including a copy of the submission form) will be delivered to all households (and out of town property owners) at that time. This will include details of drop in sessions across the district where people can come to ask any questions they may have about proposed changes.

Draft district plan proposals (chapters) have been referred to the Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery and the Minister for the Environment for their comments. Therefore, the current proposals could be modified before being notified. You should refer to the notified proposals (available online and at Council service centres and libraries) before making a submission.

The Council urges you and your neighbours to find out what is proposed on 2 May 2015 and how it might affect you. We want people to get involved now and to make a submission if they agree, or don't agree with the proposals - rather than waiting until it is too late.

What we're proposing

The Council has considered a number of approaches to recognise and manage character areas and proposes to:

- Remove SAMs located in the residential red zone
- Reduce the area boundaries where the special character is no longer apparent across all of the original area of a character area
- Replace the current single SAM category with two categories of character area - one covering the combination of built and landscape character and the other covering just landscape character and amenity
- Retain the Akaroa and Lyttelton Residential Conservation Zone boundaries and a restricted discretionary rule to manage building development and the demolition of existing buildings.

