

# SUBMISSION OF THE ARO VALLEY COMMUNITY COUNCIL INCORPORATED ON THE DRAFT DISTRICT PLAN

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## ARO VALLEY

The steep East-West valley and folded ridgelines that define Aro Valley make it a compact and unusual settlement. Most of its major streets run above significant streams and rivers. It has a high population density and is demographically diverse. It is characterised by a substantially intact and distinct heritage character and, unusually for inner-Wellington, a high proportion of mature green space within the developed area.

More detail about Aro Valley is provided in Appendix 1.

Aro Valley has very “restrictive” rules – 40% site coverage, a 9 or 7.5m height limit and 45 degree recession planes. Renovations as well as new builds usually trigger the need for a resource consent. Despite this, Aro Valley has grown steadily through infill housing, largely without comment or controversy. The Valley has continuously added new dwellings over the last twenty years at a rate similar to other suburbs across Wellington.

Sunlight is a scarce resource in parts of the Aro Valley. In practice, the current rules serve to enable consideration of site specific effects, and open the door to conversations about shading and other relevant issues.

The recently published Government Policy Statement on Housing and Urban Development says on page 14:

*“We will take a place-based approach. Every community has their own housing and urban development challenges and opportunities and a ‘one size fits all’ approach will not work to address them. This is because every place is unique, with different characteristics – including challenges or problems – arising from local history, culture and heritage, geography, economy, and resources. ....”*

This is a Government policy approach that we wholeheartedly support and which needs to be applied as part of developing a proposed District Plan.

## ARO VALLEY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Aro Valley Community Council Incorporated (AVCC) was established in 1978. AVCC is a charitable incorporated society that exists to represent and serve the interests of the Aro Valley community. Its objects include “encouraging the residential use and sense of community” within the Valley and “protecting and enhancing the character of the Aro Valley” with specific reference to both natural features and heritage.

Aro Valley Community Council and the wider Aro Valley community have a long history of activism and collective problem-solving. Aro Valley is a welcoming community. Aro Valley has no history or intention of seeking to exclude people from living in the Valley.

Any planning *changes* need to help create a future in which Aro Valley can remain a welcoming and liveable inner-city suburb for both existing and new residents. This includes the ability to welcome those for whom the Aro Valley has historically been home: mana whenua, the working class, beneficiaries, students, recent migrants, and refugees.

There is a clear role for local and central government to take an active role in providing warm, dry, affordable housing in thriving communities. People without homes and/or without housing security need to be at the centre of this discussion and the heart of any policy. Aro Valley already welcomes a significant amount of public housing and would welcome more public and community housing.

Given the chance to plan for it properly, our community will continue to welcome significant numbers of new people to make their home in the Valley. Our community's preference is that this includes the ability to welcome diverse groups who have historically made Aro Valley home.

AVCC would prefer that the Wellington City Council (WCC) work with the Aro Valley community (and mana whenua to the extent they wish to be involved) to determine how to best provide for more housing in the specific geographic, social and ecological context of the Valley.

Community dialogue can help work out how to use the planning system, along with other tools, to help address questions such as:

- Who can afford to live in a new development?
- Will the long term needs of inhabitants be met?
- Will they be pleasant and healthy places to live?
- Will the architecture of the dwellings allow for an integrated life so that residents are automatically part of the Aro Valley community?

The proposed approach of leaving it largely to the market to redesign communities is unlikely to deliver a good outcome for anyone. Many of those noted above who have historically made Aro Valley their home are likely to be further marginalised by this approach.

## THE DRAFT DISTRICT PLAN AND ARO VALLEY

### OVERVIEW

The draft District Plan proposes significant changes to the planning rules for Aro Valley. These changes are driven by the inclusion of large parts of Aro Valley in the 15 minutes walkable catchment within the Spatial Plan adopted in mid-2021. In addition, a number of provisions which reflect historical errors and inaccuracies have been carried over into the new plan.

Aro Valley's geography means that the context for development is very site specific. The broad brush changes proposed in the draft District Plan lack an evidential foundation grounded in achieving sustainable management within the Aro Valley. The National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) and the Wellington Spatial Plan are national and city-wide instruments that require interpretation in a local context in order to enable sustainable management.

Full use needs to be made of the provisions for qualifying matters within the NPS-UD and the broader statutory framework so as to ensure that intensification occurs within the Aro Valley in ways that maintain and enhance the amenity and environment of the Aro Valley, and the lived experience of existing and new residents.

We note that the WCC has already identified infrastructure issues in Aro Valley; work on these is scheduled for the period 2030-2040. We further note that Aro Valley is included in the second of three periods set out in the Spatial Plan. AVCC suggests that taking the time now to get intensification planning right in the Aro Valley is an investment in the future wellbeing of everyone with an interest in the Aro Valley.

### SUNLIGHT AND SHADING

Light is fundamental to our wellbeing and shading is far more than simply a minor issue. Reductions in sunlight can and do affect:

- Heating and lighting costs
- Dampness
- The ability to
  - dry clothes outside
  - grow food
  - have time and experience outdoors, especially for children
- Mental wellbeing

Removing the ability to address sun and shading issues on a site-specific basis poses real risks to the existing housing stock. Siting a large building to maximise sun for that building may result in a large number of other dwellings being shaded.

The argument is sometimes made that if a house performs poorly once it loses sunlight then it isn't a very good house. This does not bear scrutiny. Houses are generally designed for their site and some expectation about what will happen around them. Houses built over a hundred years ago were built to stay dry through exposure to sun and air movement. Houses today are encouraged to adopt passive solar design and consider solar power. Intrinsic to such dwellings, new and old, is reasonable access to sunlight.

Shading is not a necessary consequence of intensification. However, limiting the ability to manage it means it will become much more likely. Currently, the requirement to assess these effects beforehand is triggered by the need for a resource consent. No consent means no assessment, and problems may arise through thoughtlessness or indifference as much as anything else.

Across much of the Aro Valley, integrated alignment of dwellings is essential. One inappropriately located six storey building could result in several dwellings getting almost no winter sun. This is a situation where a very granular masterplan or some form of integrated planning across multiple sites is essential for upzoning to deliver maximum benefits with minimum adverse effects. While some locations could happily accommodate six or more storeys, one poorly placed development could not only adversely affect existing dwellings but effectively deter other new buildings as well.

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#### SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

There are numerous locations within the Aro Valley where misplacement of new developments would create serious problems. A few examples help to illustrate this:

- In the draft Plan, Numbers 2, 4 and 6 Boston Terrace are all zoned for at least six storeys as of right. Such a height in this location would adversely affect a large number of existing infill dwellings on Boston Terrace, creating shade, dampness and privacy issues for many people. Many of these people will have only recently bought or rented these dwellings based on the fair and reasonable expectation that development would be managed in a way that shares sunlight fairly.
- Aro Park is an intensively used and well-loved community asset which provides an essential open green space that is used by many thousands of people each year. The existing buildings to the north and west of the Aro Park and community centre site do not significantly shade that area.

Under the draft Plan, the site immediately west of Aro Park is zoned “centre”; this zone allows buildings of around 8 storeys as of right. The site that is currently the home of WCC-owned public housing to the north will be zoned “residential” with six storeys allowed as of right.

Development of an 8-storey building to the west of Aro Park would effectively remove a large amount of afternoon sun from a very intensively used park. In winter, the park would get almost no sun after midday. Development to six storeys on the north side would significantly reduce daytime sunlight on the park in the cooler months of the year.

- In the draft Plan, most of both sides of Aro Street to the west of the Aro Valley centre (as well as Adams Terrace, and lower Durham Street) is zoned for at least six storeys. The exception is a very small number of heritage-listed buildings. While six storeys may be appropriate for structures tucked into the escarpment below Landcross Street or Durham Street, one poorly-placed building towards the front of a site (e.g. on a site directly fronting Aro Street) could have catastrophic effects on winter sunlight for many dwellings, including a large amount of recent infill housing.
- For the last 30 years, a specialist residential community home operated by the Argo Trust has been located at number 95A Aro Street. This facility provides a residential and vocational service for six men and women with profound physical and intellectual disabilities. Its permanent inhabitants live in a flatting-type situation with each person supported by paid staff. The dwelling has been designed for maximum wellbeing.

Those living there have north-facing bedrooms overlooking Aro Valley. Immediately in front of these bedrooms is a vacant site that, as per the draft Plan, will be zoned for at least six storeys. In addition to this, the properties immediately to the east will also be zoned for at least six storeys. The impact of the loss of sunlight and any outlook on the wellbeing of those living at Argo, and the shade cast across their home making the internal and external spaces much darker, would be severe.

- Palmer Street is identified in the draft Plan as a “character precinct” with an 11m height limit for new buildings, but, as per the plan, is surrounded on four sides by permitted heights of between six and eight storeys. Palmer Street already experiences significant shading from the existing high rise located between Palmer and Abel Smith Streets.

## HERITAGE AND CHARACTER

The District Plan needs to protect what is already good about Wellington, and ensure we evolve together, rather than exacerbating conflicts that have been artificially created and benefit no one, least of all those most impacted by the current housing crisis.

Wellington's liveability, and its character and heritage, can be protected at the same time as new housing is added. It's not an either/or situation, and to present it thus is a false dichotomy that further marginalises those who should be at the heart of the planning process and mischaracterises many of those who see the value of heritage protections. Not every old building needs to be retained, but it's important to remember that people's sense of connection and place are not disposable commodities.

Rather than wholesale deregulation and the widespread removal of protections, AVCC wants heritage and character to continue to be considered as part of community dialogue, for the benefit of all inhabitants, both existing and new.

Leaving decisions about new developments up to the market is unlikely to address the core issues of unaffordability and inequality head on, or deal appropriately with issues of heritage and character. Discussions about the location and form on new developments need to focus on the quality of the development, who they will serve, and the quality of life and sense of community connection of those who live there.

In line with these considerations, it's logical that new construction first takes place on under-utilised land in our suburb and is developed as part of a cohesive community planning process. This approach is consistent with the timing for infrastructure investment set out in the Spatial Plan.

As set out in Appendix 1, Aro Valley has a unique heritage and character which makes a significant contribution to overall wellbeing. This manifests not simply as a static preservation of buildings but as a gradual co-evolution of people and structures which enables visitors, long-term residents and new arrivals to orientate, locate and thrive.

AVCC supports "living heritage" which values character and heritage and sees them evolving as our communities evolve. Experiences that matter can be shared across generations while creating space for our city's many stories to be told and new stories to be conceived along the way.

The proposals in the draft Plan lack consideration of the coherence of experience of the Aro Valley from the perspective of people within it, now and in the future. Rather, the Plan provides for isolated clumps of "character", the definition of which is detached from the heritage of the Valley, and its cultural and physical landscapes.

Current Council policy and plans recognise the heritage value of the Valley within the wider story of Wellington. The current design guide states:

*“Aro Valley is one of the city's oldest suburbs, and is one of the most architecturally distinctive and historically consistent built areas in Wellington.”*

The draft District Plan needs to be revised to create a more coherent and connected set of sites covered by character protections.

The overall coherence of the Valley is also a key reason for retaining a coherent overall design guide for the Valley, irrespective of whether sites are covered by demolition controls. Aro Valley is a relatively coherent whole. Infill housing to date has by and large supported that coherence. Even a six-storey building can be designed to support and reflect its natural and built surroundings. Aro Valley could welcome such buildings as the outcome of a coherent community-based planning exercise.

AVCC can envisage a situation where the underlying zoning may allow appropriately designed and sited six storey buildings on parts of a site, while character controls apply to the existing building on other parts of a site. This type of granularity is exactly what the AVCC believes is needed to intensify well in the Aro Valley. Some sites are, for example, capable of holding appropriately designed and orientated six storey buildings to the rear, while also having buildings at the front of a site which are worthy of character protections. Retaining the ability to negotiate good outcomes for density, design quality, heritage and shading effects through the resource consent process is critical in this situation.

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#### SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

- There are a number of obvious areas of character that have not been identified in the draft District Plan. Most of these are identified within the earlier Boffa Miskoll study undertaken prior to the Spatial Plan process. These include:
  - the north side of Aro Street, west of the suburban centre as far as the start of the new dwellings, and then from the new dwellings opposite the bottom of Durham Street, west across Adams Terrace to the end of the housing on Aro Street, adjacent to the Town Belt.
  - the small area covering 1-10 Mortimer Terrace, 1-9 Durham Crescent, and 1-22 Durham Street in the character precinct (covering buildings which may appear to be on or very close to Aro or Epuni Streets but have different physical addresses)
  - The south side of Aro Street, west of the suburban centre, across Durham St as far as the former Wellesley Church at the end of Aro Street adjacent to Polhill Gully.



- Adams Terrace – especially the lower reaches on both sides and the West side
  - Landcross Street – which is functionally part of Aro Valley, visually and aesthetically coherent, and whose rear elevations define a key visual experience within Aro Valley.
  - Abel Smith St – which is part of Aro Valley on the south side. A coherent character area would include 139-167 (odd), 166-186 (even) Abel Smith Street and St John Street steps (this is the small area at the top of Abel Smith Street, adjacent to Aro Park).
- The exclusion of the lower part of Mortimer Terrace below Durham St, and the inclusion of the upper part of Durham Street appear to be simply errors that have been carried over from the initial draft Spatial Plan.
  - Holloway Road – Holloway Road is within the suburb of Aro Valley and is an area of unique heritage and character. The Boffa Miskoll assessment does not appear to have considered the fabric of this area or referenced the descriptions in the current operative design guide.

These areas are all of high character value, reflecting the overall coherence of Aro Valley, and need to be included as areas where demolition controls apply. Many of these were included in the revised character areas for Aro Valley which were included in the Draft Spatial Plan proposed by Council Officers.

#### URBAN TREE COVER AND GREENSPACE

Auckland provides a graphic example of how intensification can lead to wholesale loss of urban tree cover. Aro Valley is recognised for the significant presence of vegetation around and within its urban fabric. This natural heritage is a defining characteristic of modern Aro Valley along with the built environment.

The draft Plan can be strengthened in respect of provision of green space and the planting of trees. There is also a need to identify and protect areas of existing green space, especially in locations where significant intensification may occur.

WCC needs to make creative use of the planning tools at its disposal in order to protect vegetation, rather than stepping back from this responsibility. Significant Natural Areas are only one tool, many others are available. For example, creative use can be made of design controls which recognise the value of green space and enable design conversations about its retention

## SPECIFIC LEGACY ISSUES AND ADJUSTMENTS

There are a number of specific boundary issues and omissions in the draft District Plan which ought to be remedied before a proposed Plan is released.

- Reclassify the sites on the west side of Willis Street between Aro Street and Abel Smith Street from City Centre zone to Aro Valley medium density residential. These sites are only included in the City Centre zone due to an historical mapping error repeatedly acknowledged but unaddressed by WCC. In essence this area was covered by the 1960s designation for the Te Aro motorway, but when that designation was removed the boundary was not adjusted. Ten storeys over 100% of the site is not appropriate for this location. These sites would still be zoned up to six storeys once rezoned.
- Adjust the boundary of the character precinct on Devon Street to 30 Devon Street (to coincide with the start of properties below road level in Devon Gully). This may originally have been a mapping error in the draft Spatial Plan. The current boundary makes no sense in terms of the actual streetscape, as it omits three properties at street level which are intimately related to the other sites within the character precinct.
- Adjust the zone boundary along the top of the ridge between Waimāpihi (nee Polhill) reserve and Holloway Road to reflect actual use. Historically, land on the Holloway Road side of the ridgeline has been excluded from open space zoning due to public ownership. This no longer applies.

The existing bush covered “reserve” above properties on Holloway Road to the south of Carey St can be reclassified as natural open space and ought eventually to be reincorporated into the Waimāpihi Reserve. Some Holloway Road residents have expressed concern about Significant Natural Areas. This is a distinct issue from the point being made here, which is simply to adjust the zoning of the land currently functioning as natural open space reserve land to reflect that reality.

- Return the zoning of 72-82 Aro Street to residential zoning. This section of the North side of Aro Street was zoned to reflect its residential nature until rezoned around a decade ago as a result of a further submission by a single land owner (the owner of the Garage Project site). Other affected residents were not even aware of this change until the decision was announced. Subsequent Environment Court case law would have seen this change rejected.

There is no resource management reason to zone this residential section of Aro Street as “centre”. The reason given at the time was to allow for the expansion of the Aro Valley centre. This is not coherent or well-founded. The former service station site (currently leased to Garage Project) is a stand-alone site. An element of mixed use and working from home are permitted under residential rules. There is presently no shortage of capacity in the Aro Valley Centre for commercial space. Indeed, there are at least two shops currently used as flats, one vacant shop, and one shop operating as a ground floor office.

## SUBMISSIONS

AVCC **submits** that the draft District Plan needs modification so as to provide a far more nuanced and careful consideration of issues such as light, shading, wind, privacy, design quality, retention of green areas, character and heritage within the Aro Valley.

AVCC **submits** that the draft District Plan must be amended to carefully provide for enhanced sunlight access to outdoor and indoor living areas, the addition and extension of new green space to balance increased residential densities, and take a more sophisticated and nuanced approach to design guidance.

AVCC **submits** that the housing aspirations of the draft District Plan must be centred around providing homes for those most in need. Leaving the wellbeing of the most marginalised and vulnerable up to the market has not worked, and there is no evidence or reason to believe it will in this instance. Rather, the Plan must focus on supporting warm, dry, affordable housing within thriving communities for existing and new residents.

In particular, the WCC needs to:

- Retain the capacity within Aro Valley for site-by-site consideration of each development by ensuring that most developments triggers the need for a resource consent, as is currently the case.
- Develop design guides and relevant standards to enable a more granular approach to local character; access to sunlight and shade; the maintenance of personal privacy; the variety and location of green spaces; the location and scale of exterior space and development; the control of heat island effects and the look and feel of the streets we inhabit.
- Modify height limits, site coverage, height in relation to boundary and setbacks for side and rear boundaries so as to trigger the need for a resource consent to enable the management of effects where new developments have a more than minor impact on local character, sunlight, shading and outdoor recreation space.
- Modify building location and bulk standards so as to trigger a resource consent related to the location of buildings on sites and issues of personal privacy and shading within and between multiple developments on a single site so to enable management of these design quality issues.

- Retain existing provisions relating to minimum sunlight in the Operative Plan rather than replace them with the minimum daylight provisions of the draft Plan.

AVCC further **submits** that the draft District Plan needs to better recognise and provide for the protection of Aro Valley's natural and built heritage from inappropriate development and better take into account the need to maintain and enhance amenity values. In particular:

- Rather than undertake broad upzoning and removal of demolition controls across much of Aro Valley, amend the draft Plan to:
  - identify underutilised sites and locations within Aro Valley that are not subject to demolition controls and are suitable for intensification within the existing character areas (as defined in the Operative Plan);
  - identify sites and areas within Aro Valley where more intensive development could occur without adverse effects on sunlight, privacy, heritage and local character.
- Amend the draft Plan to recognise that character is in part derived from heritage (as set out in the Operative Plan) in pre-1930s character areas (as defined in the Operative Plan), and use a comprehensive, holistic definition of character as a qualifying matter under the National Policy Statement-Urban Development.
- Retain demolition controls in the Aro Valley pre-1930s character areas (as defined in the Operative Plan) while identifying areas of particular character within these (for example as recommended in the revised Draft Spatial Plan with the addition of points noted above) to enable a more granular level of control over demolition and redevelopment.
- Retain an Aro Valley specific design guide which applies to all new developments within the existing character areas (as identified in the Operative Plan).
- Clearly identify community-based planning for intensification as a method for increasing housing supply within areas subject to the revised demolition controls set out above, and provide for this planning to occur so as to be complete prior to significant infrastructure investment.

AVCC **supports** Anga Whakamua within the draft District Plan. AVCC would also like to see more specific provisions relating to the protection and increased recognition of Māori physical, social and cultural heritage within Wellington City, explicit provision for papakāinga projects, and the integration of tikanga Maori into design guides to ensure that mana whenua values are recognised and provided for in new developments to the extent mana whenua deem appropriate.

Finally, AVCC **welcomes** the opportunity to discuss the unique circumstances and requirements of Aro Valley further with WCC as part of the next phase of this process. As part of this we are keen to constructively address the need for accommodation in our city in ways that also provide a strong, safe community and a healthy environment into which new arrivals are welcomed.

Aro Valley is located on the floor and walls of a relatively narrow East-West valley. The eastern end – which meets Wellington’s central business district at the south-west corner is relatively open to the North. The western end of the Valley by contrast, consists of very steep narrow side valleys, with extensive bush coverage.

The area has a rich and complex social history and a story of habitation stretching back hundreds of years prior to the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Stories from older residents, now deceased, suggest that at least in the early 1800s it was primarily used for food-growing on the rich sunlit slopes to the south of the Waimāpihi stream. The still-present terraces cut into the hillside support those stories. Aro Valley is one of the oldest areas of colonial settlement in Wellington and has historically been predominantly a working class settlement. Despite this long and distinct identity, it was only formally recognised as a suburb at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Aro Valley has traditionally had a cohesive and dynamic community life as well as serving as the home for a diverse range of people. Buried under the base of a eucalyptus tree in Aro Park is a plaque which says “Aro Park exists because the people of Aro Valley fought long and hard for it”. At various times over the last sixty years, Wellington City Council has sought to minimise and devalue Aro Valley the place, and Aro Valley the community.

In the early 1970s a draft Comprehensive Urban Renewal Area sought to replace the “dilapidated” housing stock with concrete high rise buildings (that would no doubt be filled with asbestos and deemed a quake hazard today) lining a four-lane motorway to Karori and the new suburbs in the Ohariu Valley beyond. By the mid-late 1970s, community resistance and the first oil shock put paid to those plans. Instead of demolition, the “decrepit” buildings deemed at the end of their life were actively restored by the community, in a first of its kind project for New Zealand.

Out of this grew the Aro Valley Community Council and the demands for a park, which was created by locals ripping up asphalt and planting trees on the old, disused, school site now known as Aro Park. The then Mayor, Michael Fowler, commented that he had learned the limits of power from this experience.

Piped streams, some closer to small rivers, are a major feature of Aro Valley. Currently there is a grating by the western entrance to Aro Park through which one can hear the waters of the Waimāpihi stream as it flows through 2 metre diameter pipes under Aro Park. Sometimes it is quiet and sometimes it is loud, but it is always present. Achieving this took many years of persistence by Aro Valley residents in the face of sometimes ridiculous arguments from Wellington City Council.

Aro Valley is a classic example of living heritage. Physically, its largely intact Victorian and Edwardian housing stock has been supplemented by more modern development<sup>1</sup>that is largely in keeping with the overall character of the area.

The Operative Plan Residential Design Guide for Aro Valley states as follows:

*The Aro Valley is a largely untouched remnant of old Wellington, with the majority of its dwellings dating from the first two decades of the twentieth century, and a significant number from the nineteenth.... Strongly defined by its topography, the Aro Valley is also a distinctive community with several features of recognized value:*

#### *Heritage Significance*

*This derives from the Aro Valley being a reasonably complete concentration of buildings from the early years of the city's establishment. The majority of buildings are Victorian and Edwardian in style and these have remained relatively unchanged. With the exception of some apartment development in the lower valley area, particularly around Abel Smith Street, there is little redevelopment and infill.*

*Aro Valley is one of the city's oldest suburbs, and is one of the most architecturally distinctive and historically consistent built areas in Wellington; standing as a notable example of the city's early twentieth century urban fabric. Aro Valley contains two recognised heritage areas - the Aro Valley Shopping Centre Heritage Area and the Aro Valley Cottages Heritage Area.*

#### *Historical continuity*

*Development began during the nineteenth century. Construction was most intense between 1900 and 1920 when dwellings began to spread up into the hills above Aro Street. Around half of the buildings in the Aro Valley date from this period, and while these are spread throughout, concentrations can be found in Devon Street, on the city side of Epuni Street and in lower Aro Street. Pre-1900 buildings are found primarily along upper Aro Street and in Maarama Crescent*

- *Distinctive Character*

*The Aro Valley projects a strong sense of place due to its geographical separation from other parts of the city, the enclosure of the valley walls and the relative consistency of development within.*

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<sup>1</sup> These additions include everything from Art Deco buildings and 1930s bungalows through to mid-century architectural gems and more contemporary and equally aesthetically pleasing buildings from the last few decades.

*Buildings are of generally consistent type and similar domestic scale. This gives a fine and relatively even grain of development to the area as a whole. Further aesthetic coherence arises from the limited range of typical buildings and a limited palette of forms and materials.*

*At the same time, there is visual intricacy and richness. These qualities derive from variations (within closely defined limits) in siting, roofscape, the size of primary building forms, and the way planting reflects the contours of the valley walls. The skyline as viewed from the street also shows a distinctive fine-grained richness.*

There has been extensive adaptive re-use of buildings and ongoing minor renovations and restoration work on both rental and owner-occupied properties. The housing stock has grown through infill housing at a similar rate to other suburbs taken as a whole.

Lot sizes are small and buildings close together leading to a very dense pattern of settlement characteristic of working class suburbs from the pre-automotive era. Overall population density is high for Wellington and certainly for New Zealand. Most buildings are one or two storeys tall and orientated so as to receive sunlight on at least one face. In some locations winter sun is largely blocked by the surrounding hills and houses receive direct daylight for only a few hours at the start or end of the day.

In many ways, Aro Valley represents the dense, walkable and socially connected communities to which people aspire when they speak of “15 minute communities”. Climate changing emissions from transport are very low in the Aro Valley.

Demographically the area is notable for its youthful population and the relatively high number of “other” ethnicities. The former reflects the number of students renting in the Valley which is close to both Massey and Victoria campuses. The latter reflects the former refugee population in social housing in the Valley. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Aro Valley remained one of the poorer areas of Wellington and still contains mesh blocks that sit in the lowest quintile of the NZ Deprivation Index.

Although there has been some gentrification since the late 1980s, this has largely reflected changes in Wellington City as a whole, and the growing inequality in wider New Zealand society. The relative affluence of the Valley compared with other parts of Wellington has not changed in two decades, and nor has the amount of rental housing. The relative affluence ranking holds for both people who rent their homes and people who own a home.

Aro Valley has a long and proud history of welcoming all comers. The Valley includes a permanent residence for people with profound intellectual and physical disabilities, half-way houses, university-owned student accommodation, and a large amount of social housing. Aro Valley was the only community in Wellington to volunteer to host a wet house when the City Council was considering such a facility.



In summary, the steep East-West valley and folded ridgelines that define Aro Valley make it a compact and unusual settlement. Most of its major streets run above significant streams and rivers. It has a high population density and is demographically diverse. It is characterised by a substantially intact heritage character and, unusually for inner-Wellington, a high proportion of mature green space within the developed area. It is a diverse community and desires to remain one.