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Introduction



Find a site that can accommodate the house you want to build.

Design Toolkit

Understand what a potential site can offer before purchasing

[Land_Purchase_Checklist.pdf](#)

After preparing the Design Brief, you will need to find a site that can accommodate the house you want to build. If you already have land, or are undertaking infill development, the site's

characteristics should already be incorporated into the Design Brief, which should consider any constraints or opportunities the site presents.

A Design Statement is a document that analyses the site and identifies its existing elements and the relationship between them (e.g. trees and a steep hill). It contains three parts:

1. **Site and context analysis:** This records elements, e.g. slopes or heritage features, of the site and adjacent sites that are relevant to the development.
2. **Opportunities and constraints analysis:** Summarises the most important elements that influence the proposed design.
3. **Design response (added to the Design Statement at Stage 6, Concept and Preliminary Design):** Shows how the proposed concept design has considered and responded to the site and context analysis and to the opportunities and constraints analysis. It includes a concept design, site plans and elevations.

Design Statements are a good tool for designers to record their findings about the site (site analysis) and present them to you in a clear and simple way. You can also research the site and contribute to the site analysis. A simple set of drawings can be used to convey understanding of physical characteristics of the site and an 'Opportunities and Constraints Analysis' can summarise key elements that will influence future design decisions.

How site analysis can help achieve your objectives

Ideally, land should be bought after you have defined the needs and requirements of the house you are building. Analysing your site and preparing a Design Statement allows better understanding of the site conditions needed to achieve the best result, and identification of those that may prevent you from achieving your objectives.

Key Activities



Consider access to transport when evaluating potential sites

Consider which procurement option works best for your site

Different procurement options work better on different kinds of **site**. Generally, the more complex a **site** is, the more flexibility you will want in the development of the design.

Custom Design

As you engage a lead designer to design a house specifically to your **site** and brief, this option is particularly well suited to complex sites. As you can engage the designer before you have purchased the land, you can get them to visit the **site** and offer advice before you finalise the purchase of the property. They are also able to do some design work to help assess the cost of development, which could influence land price.

Design & Build

A design and build contract does allow for the house to be specifically designed to fit your **site**, but as you do not pick the designer or have any contractual relationship to them, you may have less influence on the final design. The builder or developer will have building systems and materials they prefer which may have an impact on the design of the building.

It is possible to start a project as a custom design, and at a suitable point (i.e. after getting resource consent) change to a design and build contract to finalise the design and construct the house.

Group Housing

This option uses standard designs, which will work if the **site** is easy to develop but is poorly suited to complex sites. For example, trying to put a standard plan on a steep **site** could result in expensive retaining to modify the land to fit the house. If buying a land and house package this step is likely to have already been completed.

Understand site possibilities and limitations

Understanding what the **site** can offer is essential before making a final decision to purchase. Taking the time to evaluate its possibilities and limitations in terms of context (how it relates or connects to the wider area), public **utilities**, access, physical characteristics and regulations will pay off later. The process of gathering this information is called 'due diligence' and while other people might help during the process, it is ultimately your responsibility to gather all the required information before signing the sale and purchase agreement. Once the offer is finalised you cannot back out of the purchase, even if you find any issues with the **site**.

Due diligence involves understanding the financial implications of buying the **site**, doing some research and gathering documents (such as a Certificate of Title) to understand all **site** conditions, including those that are less obvious.

Resources are available from Auckland Council to assist your research, including **zoning rules**

(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/PLANSPOLICIESPROJECTS/PLANSSTRATEGIES/DISTRICTREGIONALPLANS/Pages/districtplanshome.aspx>), property files and reports

(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/ratesbuildingproperty/propertyinformation/propertyinfo/Pages/Auckland%20City.aspx>), and Land Information Memorandum (LIM) files

(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/ratesbuildingproperty/propertyinformation/Pages/LIMhome.aspx>). Council information will have a great impact on the project in a number of ways, such as how much of the land can be occupied, where the house should go, how high it can be, and whether there are **character** restrictions that will affect the way it looks. Any development that does not comply with the rules in the relevant District Plan or other statutory documents will require a resource consent.

The Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan

(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/planspoliciesprojects/plansstrategies/unitaryplan/Pages/home.aspx>) is currently going through a hearings process. It will not have legal effect until after the conclusion of the hearings and the release of decisions by Auckland Council (or the resolution of any appeals). This is likely to occur in late 2015 or 2016. This will replace the current District Plans and will change the zoning on your **site**. It is worth checking the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan to see what effects it could have.

Some parts of the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan are already in effect, click [here](#)

(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/planspoliciesprojects/plansstrategies/unitaryplan/Pages/rulesthatapplynow.aspx>) for more information.

It can also be useful to look around the neighbourhood at developments on other sites. This may provide some indication of what possibilities there are for development in the area. If the prospective **site** is a vacant one it may be worth asking the seller why it hasn't been developed yet.

Another key factor is the soil quality, which is important in determining what is needed for the house to support itself. A geotechnical report can provide this information.

Site servicing, which refers to the availability and capacity of storm water and sewerage pipes to service new developments, is particularly relevant in older areas where such systems may be combined.

It is very important to let the specific characteristics of the **site** lead the brief for the final design of the house. It is better to design the house to fit the **site**, and not the other way around - this can be a challenge with Group Build procurement options which tend to use a standard design.

Assess site conditions against objectives

Use the Design Brief as a benchmark for assessing potential sites. Consider each objective and aspiration outlined in the Design Brief and look at the **site's** ability to fulfil them. This will be especially relevant for objectives and targets set around energy and comfort and health. For example, if a warm and comfortable environment inside the house is a priority and you would like the house to remain at a certain temperature year round, you should consider which side of the house will have sunny, usable **open space**. You should also be aware that choosing a **site** with limited access to sunlight will prevent you from achieving this objective without investing in heating.

An architect or architectural designer can give you guidance on making these important decisions. A designer will be able to assess a section based on your Design Brief to see if it is feasible. Economic constraints included in the Design Brief should also be considered in order to avoid trade-offs in the design by overspending on the land. The Design Brief will need to be reviewed again and finalised after the land is purchased.

Assess the lifestyle it will give you

Priorities regarding the lifestyles of the people who will live in the house should also be documented in the Design Brief and now is the time to assess possible sites against them. Aspects such as the surrounding community, access to transport and amenities are essential to consider. It is important to find balance between what it will cost to buy the land and the possible lifetime savings resulting from achieving lifestyle objectives.

For example, a plot in a central location might be more expensive than one in the outer suburbs but it may allow the people living in the house to walk or cycle to work every day, saving money and time, and therefore helping them achieve balance over time. This choice could also pay off if their hobbies and activities revolve around city environments, but may not work so well if they are more interested in outdoor activities available at the city fringe.

Consider infill development



An infill development in progress

If you already own land, you could consider the possibility of subdividing to allow for a new house to be built in the vacant space. Relocating an existing house on the **site** may improve the quality of both dwellings and increase the possibility of selling the new house faster and at a better price.

In considering this option you should understand that while the cost of moving a house might seem excessive at first, it can be outweighed by the value added to the new **site**. Factors to consider when undertaking infill developments include providing access to sunlight, privacy, quality private outdoor space and a good relationship with the neighbours. You should ask Auckland Council about the costs involved in **subdivision** and **resource consents**

<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/RATESBUILDINGPROPERTY/CONSENTS/RESOURCECONSENTS/Pages/home.aspx> ,

development contributions (<http://dcestimator.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/>) and zoning regulations

<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/PLANSPOLICIESPROJECTS/PLANSSTRATEGIES/DISTRICTREGIONALPLANS/Pages/districtplanshome.aspx> .

Deliverables



A vacant site near a bus stop

Sale and Purchase Agreement

This document has legal implications and contains agreed terms and conditions for purchasing the land. There are comprehensive standard forms created by the Auckland District Law Society (<http://www.adls.org.nz/adlsi-store/legal-documents/hard-copy-forms/agreement-for-sale-and-purchase-of-real-estate-9th-edition-2012-%282%29/>) and Real Estate Institute of New Zealand that are available to purchasers. It is recommended that you appoint real estate agents and lawyers to check agreements before they are signed.

Geotechnical report

A chartered professional geotechnical engineer can be engaged to produce a report that identifies possible stability issues and the presence of soft layers in the site's soil. In order to take samples, holes need to be drilled on site. Results from this report indicate the best option for laying foundations and might suggest stability measures appropriate to the soil quality. These factors have important economic implications during construction and it is important to take them into account before finalising the purchase.

The report may also be necessary for resource consent applications if the project involves earthworks or subdivision, and for building consent applications to ensure the proposed development proceeds without stability issues.

Who should you be talking to?

Auckland Council

At this stage, advice from the council's Planning Department is helpful to understand any planning restrictions on the site. Additionally, various documents can be requested that provide useful information regarding sites you are considering, and can influence final selection:

- District Plans
(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/PLANSPOLICIESPROJECTS/PLANSSTRATEGIES/DISTRICTREGIONALPLANS/Pages/districtplanshome.aspx>) contain key information regarding zoning rules that may affect the planned development.
- a Land Information Memorandum (LIM)
(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/ratesbuildingproperty/propertyinformation/Pages/LIMhome.aspx>) report summarises information the council holds on a property. It includes special conditions such as Historic Places listings and also indicates what can be built and any potential hazards. It is important to remember that a LIM is not a guarantee and only contains the information held by the council.
- Property files
(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/ratesbuildingproperty/propertyinformation/propertyinfo/Pages/Auckland%20City.aspx>) contain additional information that is not contained in the LIM such as plans and past correspondence.
- the council's GIS system (<http://maps.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/aucklandcouncilviewer/>) can be used to show zoning, topography, aerial photos, service locations and other useful information.
- The Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan
(<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/planspoliciesprojects/plansstrategies/unitaryplan/Pages/home.aspx>) shows what the future zoning of your site may be. The Plan is still to be finalised through the hearings process.

Land Information New Zealand (LINZ)

LINZ is a government department responsible for land titles. You can request a copy of a Computer Register (Certificate of Title) for a site that proves the ownership of the land and contains information about restrictions that may apply to it. Use it to check for covenants, easements and notices.

Planner

The District Plan, Regional Plan and Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan may all have an impact on your **site**. Each one of these documents can be hard to understand, and while Council can help, it is recommended you engage a planner on complicated sites.

A planner can carry out a planning assessment to help you understand the District Plan rules and what impact they have on your **site**. They can also look at the Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan and see what may be possible in the future.

Property valuer

A valuation can be useful to understand how much a property is worth and whether the price you are offering is competitive. It might also be needed for mortgage purposes.

Valuers can also give you an indication of what your new property would be worth when it is finished.

Others

Professionals in the following fields can be useful throughout the land selection process. Independent advice on the **site's** limitations and possibilities can be obtained from:

- ◆ estate agents
- ◆ architects/architectural designers
- ◆ sustainability consultants including Eco-Design Advisors
- ◆ geotechnical engineers
- ◆ lawyers
- ◆ finance experts
- ◆ surveyors.

What to look out for?



An aerial view of a neighbourhood

Not understanding all aspects of the site

Uninformed decision making at this stage can have significant consequences later on, and prevent you from attaining your initial aims and goals. Common pitfalls include:

- failing to enquire about regulations, purchasing land where the planned development can't take place or where great efforts will be required to make it happen
- ineffective site analysis, resulting in a house that cannot achieve the required level of performance
- poor understanding of external factors such as wind, flooding, trees and ground conditions, which can have major impacts on future costs.

Leaving too little in the budget for design and construction

Additionally, failing to balance the cost of land against the overall budget may limit the amount destined for the design and construction of the house, compromising the requirements and objectives set in the Design Brief.