

## 5.5 Residential Coherence

A key driver of this project is the extent to which the current HDR zone is protecting residential coherence and whether the mixing of visitor accommodation and residential activities, as is possible under the QLDC District Plan, is conducive, in the long run, to promoting sustainable residential areas.

A paper was prepared by Hill Young Cooper on residential coherence (March 2008) as there is no accepted definition on what this means or how to determine whether this has been maintained within the neighbourhoods. This section provides a summary of this paper.

Although there are no accepted definitions of residential coherence, the District Plan uses the term to mean an intact neighbourhood that is not eroded by non-residential activities. While emphasising the role of residential zones in providing for a stable residential environment, the District Plan focuses on protecting the cohesion of residential activity and the sense of community within the LDR zone. The District Plan does not address residential coherence within the HDR zone.

Residential coherence can be seen as one aspect of what makes a socially sustainable community. A number of physical elements support or foster a healthy social environment, along with equitable access to services and facilities.

The physical dimensions of stability, sense of place and safety are important aspects of residential coherence, and strongly relate to people knowing who lives next door, and not experiencing a constant flow of strangers (such as tourists or visitors). In neighbourhoods where informal contact between residents who know each other is high, streets tend to be safer and people are happier with their surroundings, providing stronger networks.

To be effective, stability needs to be provided at both the site and neighbourhood level. It is not just the neighbouring site which is important to feelings of coherence; people also need to feel that they are part of a wider neighbourhood that is stable and liveable.

Relevant physical factors that contribute to coherence and liveability include:

- Some sense of “boundedness” or edges to the neighbourhood, whether these be formed by topography or busy main roads, and where there is some common focus, such as orientation to a view or proximity to an open space. This helps to create a sense of place; a neighbourhood with some sense of identity and legibility to it.
- A domestic built form whereby each unit has its own sense of address, even if it is part of a larger complex, such as front doors and porches orientated to streets, and where individuality is expressed through varying adornments, landscaping and paint finishes, and there is access to open space (both private gardens as well as public reserves), as well as daylight and sunlight. These factors also help to promote identity, informal interaction, and safety through providing ‘eyes on the street’.

In the context of the HDR zone, a change to the density and scale of development is anticipated, and across the zone stand-alone houses will be replaced by town houses, terrace houses and apartment type complexes. While building forms will change, this does not mean that residents will seek a less coherent residential environment. In fact, if anything a more cohesive environment needs to be offered to attract permanent residents to more intensive living environments.

Experience from Queenstown, as well as larger metropolitan areas suggests that higher density residential environments are likely to be much more sensitive to the negative aspects of close living than first thought, particularly for residents looking for permanent residential opportunities. Numerous surveys of residents of more intensive inner city neighbourhoods have shown that the benefits of close proximity to services can be quickly outweighed by the impacts of poor design, particularly a lack of green space, limited private outdoor space, conflicts over parking, maintenance and noise, and high levels of churn in the development (ie. people not staying for long).

Inter mixing of visitor accommodation with residential development tends to reduce the benefits and increase the negative aspects viewed from the residents’ perspective. Community cohesion is reduced, noise and parking issues tend to increase, and there is a reduced feeling of safety.

While any discussion of residential coherence is subjective and a matter of judgement, this project requires the identification of those parts of the HDR zone that are likely to offer stable residential areas with a high degree of coherence.

Residential coherence principles can be measured by a number of indicators, including:

- **Stability** – the % of owner occupiers within a neighbourhood and the % of units or sites already devoted to visitor accommodation developments.
- **Built form / character** – the extent to which the current character of the area presents a non-domestic appearance as referenced by the character study.
- **Neighbourhood identity** – whether the neighbourhood offers features which will attract permanent residents such as not being on a main road; traffic speeds and volumes that are controlled by the road layout; a relationship to open space and/or views; and adequate levels of sunlight and daylight.

#### **Box 4: Residential coherence principles**

- **Stability** – where the rate and scale of the incursion of non-residential activities is limited so that the majority of residents have other permanent residents as neighbours (owner occupiers or longer term renters)
- **Character** – more domestic forms of development prevail, even if they are at a higher density, clear signs of permanent occupation, and an integration of the built and open spaces (gardens, trees and open spaces)
- **Identity** – there is a sense of containment to the neighbourhood, such as not being cut in two by a busy main road, and where there is some sense of common identity in terms of relationship to views, open spaces and orientation which offer reasonable access to daylight and sunlight.