



GREEN FIELD SITE TESTS PLANNERS

BY
GLENN COCKERTON
DIRECTOR
HAMES SHARLEY INTERNATIONAL

In the development of the new Albany City Centre the only constraints were the planners' own limitations.

Most planners would relish the opportunity to plan a centre on a green field site. Starting the exercise with a blank piece of paper has some attractions: no existing traffic problems, no land-use conflicts, no interest groups. You can pursue "planning" in its purest form.

However, it becomes rapidly apparent that opportunities such as this present a fresh challenge: how do you develop a set of meaningful parameters or reference points? What structure do you adopt? Most of us practise in very constrained environ-

ments with the constraints themselves forming limits and criteria for what can be done. Remove these and the problem changes considerably.

In 1989 the Housing Corporation appointed Hames Sharley to lead a team of consultants planning a new commercial centre at Albany, to be located on 170 hectares of peri-urban land at the end of the Northern Motorway. The other consultants were Russell Dickson (traffic engineering), DJ Scott & Associates (landscape assessment) and Woodward Clyde (hydrological

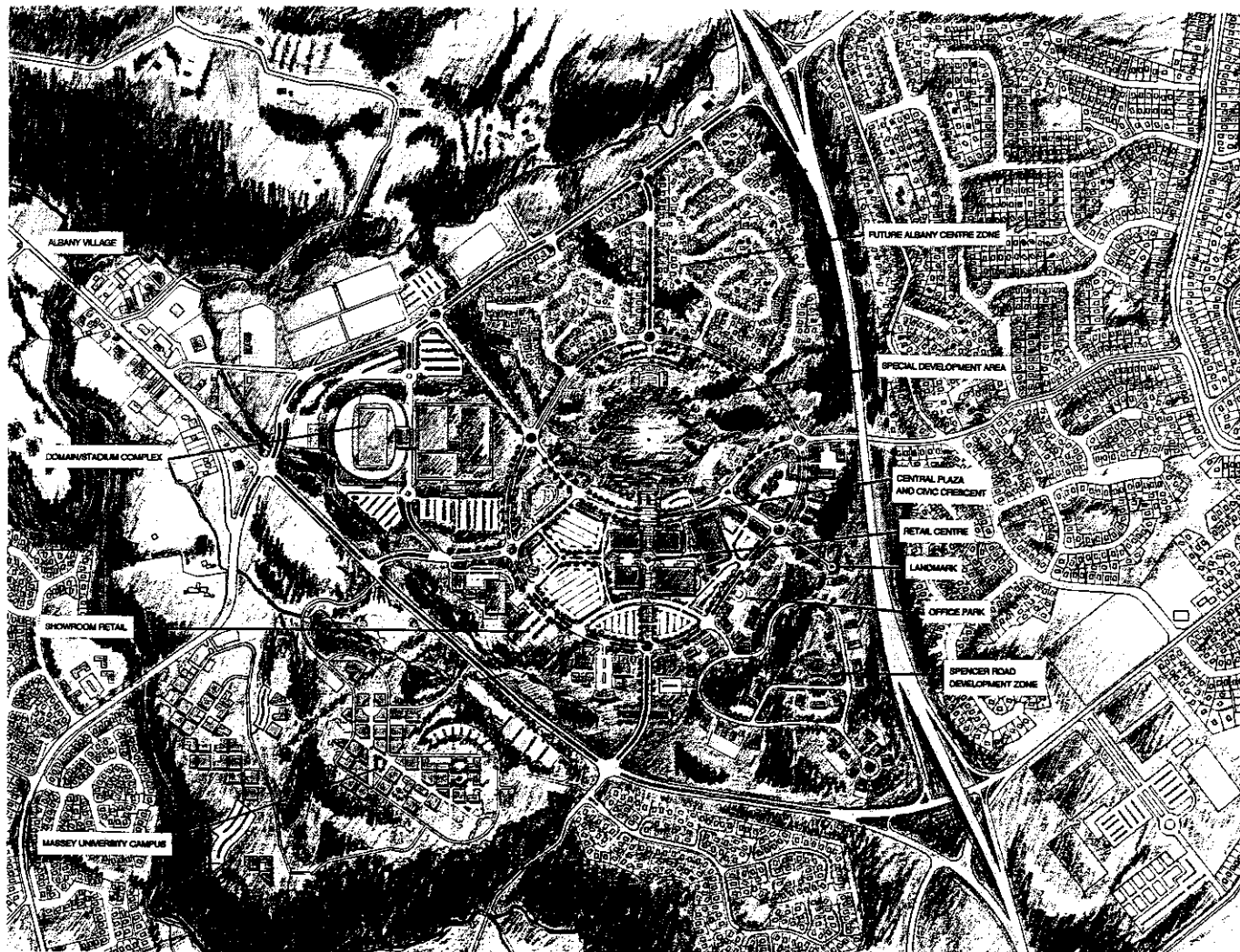
assessment). The centre was to include:

- a regional shopping centre;
- office and general commercial buildings;
- cultural and community services;
- recreation and leisure facilities including a regional sports complex;
- office parks and bulk retailing areas;
- residential development.

In short, we were asked to design a new city centre to service the northern half of Auckland's North Shore and the Hibiscus Coast.

The team adopted a comprehensive approach to the project, embracing assessments of the physical, social, economic and statutory environments.

A series of development zones was identified. This guided placement of activities. Detailed assessments were undertaken of



each major form of activity; the principal land, traffic and servicing requirements for the activity; relationships between activities and the suitability of each zone. The design evolved over an extensive period as key elements emerged and a hierarchy of places, nodes, edges, paths, axes, landmarks and gateways was developed.

Once the general concept was established, a comprehensive process of testing and verification was undertaken to scrutinise each element of the plan. This encompassed:

- detailed evaluations of the potential pattern of sub-division and development, including suitability of sites for the intended uses/buildings forms;
- economic consideration of the amount and nature of commercial land provided;
- detailed studies of traffic movement, intersection design, parking provision and pedestrian movement;
- eventual site formation levels, stormwater and natural drainage systems, retained vegetation and development staging;
- infrastructure connections to utilities, bulk water supplies and the like.

The process yielded a series of outputs: a

Above: Concept plan for a proposed sub-regional centre for Albany.

Opposite: Aerial photograph of the North Shore, showing the Albany Basin.

structure plan, a concept plan and a set of amendments to the Takapuna District Scheme.

The prime purpose of the structure plan was to illustrate the formal and functional layout of the centre, including the desired disposition of land uses. It involved:

- reinforcement of the key site characteristics and development opportunities;
- overlaying the principal physical features with a clearly defined and workable structure of activity;
- establishing key design elements to give the centre a legible character that would become meaningful and memorable for the people of the North Shore.

The resulting plans, built upon Albany's strategic location within the North Shore region, ensure that the centre will serve and benefit existing and planned future urban areas, both on the Shore and northern areas of West Auckland. Given this large area, a

highly accessible centre was created with both excellent motorway (north-south) and east-west access points. Specific provision has also been made for public transport systems. In addition, clear vehicle and pedestrian routes encourage functional efficiency and perceptual legibility for the centre.

SECTOR LAYOUT

The centre is laid out in sectors. The ring road system, which allows a high degree of accessibility, is dissected by axial roads connecting readily identifiable landmarks.

The centre is to be defined both spatially and functionally by an easily recognisable urban core, surrounded by a frame of less intensive, suburban development. To create this core or heart for the centre, development is to be focused to promote the highest building densities and concentrations of activity, decreasing toward peripheral areas.

To foster an urban and vital core, land use areas are to overlap in a series of precincts. Early development of the center will reinforce the focus, ensuring a concentration of activity and a vitality for the centre at all stages, whilst providing for ►

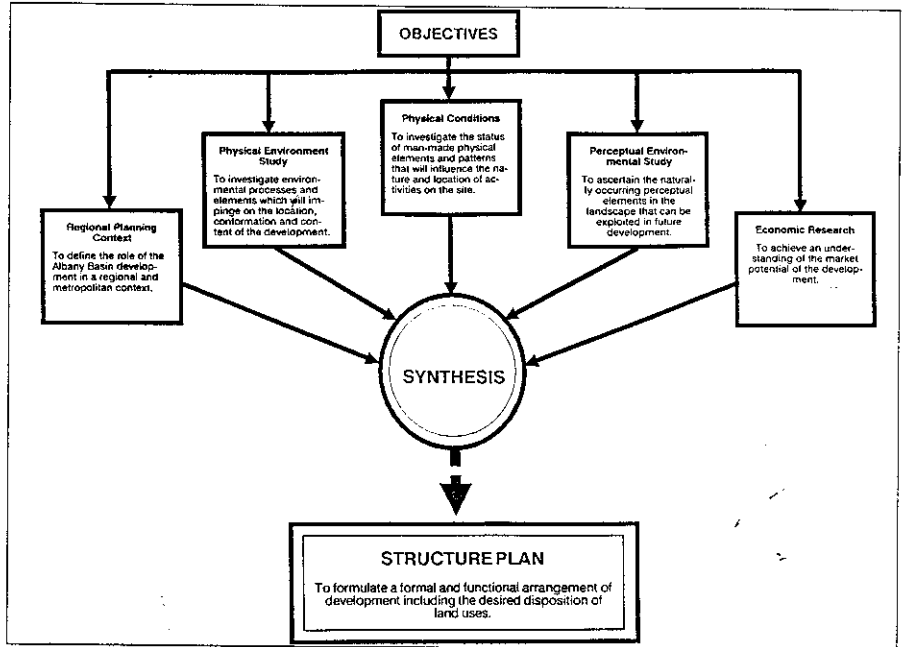
◀ future expansion. In addition, the plan means that the regional needs of the North Shore will be met well into the future.

A "sense of place" is achieved by reinforcing the character of the location and by providing clear definition to the city through the use of design elements such as edges, paths, axes, nodes and landmarks.

Edges represent the change between elements and are an important organising feature, particularly in the role of defining areas and relating them to their surroundings. Paths and axes are represented by channels or corridors along which people move and by vistas or views. A series of vehicular and pedestrian paths is required through and around the centre. To facilitate access and control of traffic, a series of formal axes connect landmarks and give the centre visual clarity, effectively tying the different activity areas together.

Nodes and landmarks represent concentrations of activity and foci which give cues for recognition and image of a place. The Spencer Road Ridge provides an existing natural landmark in the greater regional context, while the strong basin-shaped topography forms a distinct large-scale node for the concentration of the centre. The natural ridge/edges and the basin topography are reinforced by the layout of the centre. The central parkland and civic square is conceived as a primary but internal node. A regional landmark has been identified for the peak of the Spencer Road Ridge.

Separate nodes have been created within each activity area to maintain vitality and continuity of the landscape theme. Other landmarks, such as the sports stadium and the retail centre entry, have been established



Above: Flow diagram of the process of forming the structure plan.

Below: Structure plan, showing zoning.

along the main axes. These enhance the overall structure and promote identity and a sense of place. Points of entry into the public activity zones, are denoted by gateways and give distinction to activity areas.

The concept plan combines the design elements and results in a clear and coherent structure. Using a simple, visual language of paths, axes, gateways, nodes and landmarks, pedestrians or drivers will become readily familiar with the centre.

Amendments to the district plan seek to minimise constraints on development. Specific goals are established and a broad range

of potential solutions can be pursued. Performance-based controls have been used wherever possible, tied to a comprehensive development plan framework. This ensures development is integrated and achieves the overall design objectives for the centre.

From the challenging beginnings, an order emerged which reflected the principal physical features of the site and the nature of activities to be accommodated. A simple, clear and strong structure has been adopted to ensure easy recognition by all who will use the centre.

Glenn Cockerton is a director of Hames Sharley, a multi-disciplinary consultancy offering services in research, planning, architecture, interior design and urban design.

Traffic Design Group

Traffic and Transportation Engineers providing expert consultation in

- Resource Management
- District Plan Preparation
- Town Centre Traffic Studies
- Transportation Planning
- Traffic Impact Studies
- Traffic Management Studies
- Parking Policy and Design

WELLINGTON
6 Raroa Road, Lower Hutt
PO Box 30-721, Lower Hutt
Tel: 0-4-569 8497, Fax: 0-4-569 2398

AUCKLAND
156 Vincent Street, Auckland
PO Box 2592, Auckland
Tel: 0-9-302 0901, Fax: 0-9-373 3539

*Traffic engineering design,
investigation and advisory services*

28320

