

8 November 2023

Witness statement of Julia van Essen before the hearings panel on the matter of Plan Change 14.

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to present today.

Plan change 14 has some significant problems. It is impossible to find a succinct comprehensive summary of what the plan change will entail. According to the Christchurch City Council's website, "Plan Change 14 has been designed to bring the city's District Plan in line with the Government's new national standards to encourage multi-unit housing developments – called the Medium-Density Residential Standards (MDRS) – and to allow greater intensification in and around the Central City and suburban centres.

When the MDRS take legal effect, up to three dwellings of up to three storeys will be able to be developed on a property in Christchurch without needing to apply for a resource consent if all other rules have been met". [Council releases submission on District Plan change : Newline \(ccc.govt.nz\)](#)

This information is not up to date. Recent developments have included changes to plan change 14. I won't go into the new specifications in detail as they have already been covered. However, just to make a short summary. What is now proposed, in Riccarton, Hornby and Papanui, is 10 storeys, not 3 as per the information on the Council's website. What is proposed in the high density residential zones surrounding these centres is 6 or 7 storeys. Double or more than what is being advertised.

A couple of obvious problems with this. Firstly, the changes that have been made are hard to find. They can be found in evidence and submissions presented to the IHP, evidence from planners Lightbody, Kleynbos and Oliver. However, to find this one would have to trawl through the evidence and submissions. However, most residents for whom plan change 14 would have an effect, have not got the time to wade through all of that. For your average person, a search of the Christchurch City Council's Plan change 14 information, yields the wrong, out of date information and is misleading the public about what is being proposed.

Secondly, these are significant changes to Plan Change 14. More than double the number of stories that were originally proposed! There has been no consultation or submission process on them and the changes are not being publicised. This is not right. If changes are made to a plan, then the submission process should be repeated with that new information. Why has this not been done?

I know from my conversations with residents, that many are unaware of plan change 14 and are shocked when it is brought to their attention. Many of these people have busy lives and would not think of joining a Resident's Association or of thoroughly checking the Christchurch City Council information. However, they are horrified at the thought of multi-storey apartment blocks going up around their homes. Many have bought in the suburbs with the expectation that they will have a suburban life, with sunlight and greenery. It is assumed by many residents, that apartments will go up in the central city before the suburbs are intensified and that it is the job of the Christchurch City Council to keep Christchurch a beautiful and liveable city. These are logical assumptions to make. It is clear to me, that the public have not been properly informed.

The point is made on the Christchurch City Council's website, that Plan change 14 has been put into place to comply with new national laws which have been recently passed. "Some of the changes we're making are legal requirements of the new national direction and cannot be influenced by the Council, or community feedback". However, we have since changed governments and it has been noted that our new Prime Minister, Christopher Luxton, has already commented that National going along with the new laws was a mistake. However, he is busy. He is still forming a coalition and will probably not have time to address the laws behind Plan Change 14 for a while. Taking this into consideration, it seems that the best course of action would be to put Plan change 14 on hold, or at least delay its implementation until the problems with it can be addressed. There is absolutely no good reason to rush Plan change 14 through. Bear in mind as well, that it is public money which is being used to fund this whole process. There is a responsibility to the City Council to not waste public funds on a plan that is not urgent and will probably be revised.

Going back to the original quote from The Christchurch City Councils website. "Plan Change 14 has been designed to bring the city's District Plan in line with the Government's new national standards". Unfortunately, "national standards" do not take into account the unique aspects of our city. What works for Auckland and is appropriate for Auckland may not work in the same way here. Christchurch is close to the Alpine fault, which, we are told, is overdue for a seismic event. Christchurch is also built on peaty bog, prone to liquefaction and lateral spread. We don't need to speculate as to what would happen in Christchurch if a big earthquake hit. The residents remember the devastating consequences of the February 2011 quake. Tall, multistorey buildings did not fare well. Most of the lives lost were in multistorey buildings. Christchurch is not an appropriate city for tall residential buildings. There is no housing crisis in Christchurch. The geography of Christchurch is not constrictive in terms of city spread in the same way Wellington is. This one size fits all approach is simply not suitable for Christchurch.

I would also like to talk about the word NIMBY because it is having an effect on this planning process. The word is a slur that has been used against residents who oppose

plan change 14. This has meant that certain members of the community, who, while opposing the plan, are unwilling to speak up because of this bullying. It is bullying and is an unbecoming tactic to use to forward Plan change 14. This has been a long hard battle for residents opposed to Plan change 14 and the supporters of plan change 14 have not been fair to them. It has been mentioned several times that the only people who oppose Plan change 14 are “the grumpy old people, the grey-haired mob with nothing better to do than complain about something.” I would just like to point out today, that most younger people are not able to come to these hearings because they fall during working hours. Most younger people have, in addition to jobs, their families to look after and the extra responsibilities within the community that comes with that. Few have the time to put in the work that opposing Plan Change 14 takes up. Few have time to trawl through all of the difficult to find information and keep up with all the changes. I feel that younger people have effectively been excluded from this process because of the way it has been structured. Therefore, it has fallen on the retired members of our community to take up this challenge. It has taken a lot of people a phenomenal amount of work to oppose Plan change 14. These people do not stand to profit monetarily from their work and they are not part of companies or profit making organisations. They are here because they want the best for Christchurch residents.

As a longtime Christchurch resident, I want Christchurch to be a liveable city with suburban communities, space and gardens. I would not like the suburbs to be interspersed with tenement buildings. I want Christchurch to suit the needs and wants of the residents, not of the property developers. Thank you very much for your time.