



**November
2025**



Proposed Plan Change 120 Information Sheet #17

Maunga Viewshafts and Height and Building Sensitive Areas QM

From 3 November to 19 December 2025, Auckland Council invites submissions on Proposed Plan Change 120: Housing Intensification and Resilience (PC120) - a change to the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) (our city's planning rulebook) that proposes to rezone areas of residential land for greater intensification, to enable greater building heights and densities in many parts of urban Auckland, and to strengthen management of natural hazard risks.

Submissions are now open until 5pm on Friday 19 December 2025.

This information sheet explains the Maunga Viewshafts and Height and Building Sensitive Areas Qualifying Matter (QM).

Background to Proposed Plan Change 120

PC78 was Auckland's former intensification plan change as required by the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD). It incorporated the Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) which was legally required at the time. This generally allowed three dwellings of up to three storeys to be built on most residential sites without resource consent.

In August 2025, the government amended the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) which enabled PC78 to be withdrawn. Auckland Council withdrew PC78 (in part) and notified PC120 to improve Auckland's resilience to natural hazards and focus intensification around centres and transport nodes.

PC78 was withdrawn in part from 5pm on 9 October 2025, and included withdrawal of the MDRS in PC78.

PC120 addresses central government requirements to:

- contribute to the same level of housing capacity in the AUP as was to be enabled by PC78
- enable building heights and densities within and around town and local centres which reflect the level of commercial and community activity these centres offer
- enable building heights of at least 6-storeys within walkable catchments from the edge of the city centre zone, the edge of metropolitan centre zones and around existing and planned rapid transit stops (train and busway stations) and
- enable building heights of at least 10- and 15- storeys around certain train stations listed in the RMA.

These heights and densities must be enabled unless a ‘qualifying matter’ applies to a site (see Information Sheet #13) which makes that level of development inappropriate.

PC120 also strengthens provisions that manage natural hazard risks. Areas potentially affected by flooding, land instability, coastal erosion or coastal inundation now and in the future are targeted with stronger rules and other planning measures. This approach is to improve Auckland’s resilience to severe weather events and natural hazards, following the storms in early 2023 which resulted in widespread flooding, landslips, and coastal inundation across the region.

The Maunga of Tāmaki Makarau / Auckland

Auckland’s maunga are valued landmarks with deep cultural, spiritual and historic significance.

Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland’s volcanic field covers about 100 square kilometres and originally contained 53 explosion craters, which formed the well-known scoria cones (mountains or maunga) that are present across the city.

Some of these maunga have been lost due to historic quarrying and development. Many of the remaining maunga are of regional or national significance, while others are of local significance, or help shape the overall volcanic landscape and character of the region.

In te ao Māori (the Māori worldview), the maunga are seen as ancestors or tūpuna (often referred to as “Tūpuna Maunga”) — sacred places that connect people to their whakapapa (genealogy), mauri (life force), and mana (spiritual strength). They are believed to be created by the gods - Mataaho, the guardian of the Earth’s secrets, and Ruaumoko, the god of earthquakes and volcanoes. Historically, the maunga across Auckland were central to Māori life – serving as hubs for settlement, growing food, ceremonies and everyday life.

Remains, such as, pā (fortified villages), terracing, kumara storage pits and other archaeological features reflect this rich history of Māori communities on the maunga. Many Aucklanders and visitors to the city may not fully realise the deeper cultural meaning of the Tūpuna Maunga. Despite this, the visibility, profile, and interconnections of the maunga reinforce and maintain the cultural identity for Mana Whenua and all Aucklanders.

Today, the values associated with most of the maunga across Auckland are protected through the Volcanic / Maunga Viewshafts and Height Sensitive Areas Overlay (Chapter D14) of the AUP.

There are also 14 of Auckland’s Tūpuna Maunga managed by the Tūpuna Maunga Authority (“Maunga Authority”), which was established under the Ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau Collective Redress Act 2014.

The Maunga Authority has created plans and policies to help care for the Tūpuna Maunga in Auckland now and in the future. These include the Tūpuna Maunga Integrated Management Plan, its supporting strategies, and an Operational Plan.

Maunga Viewshafts

Maunga Viewshafts—previously known as Volcanic Viewshafts—are protected sightlines to and from Auckland’s volcanic cones. These viewshafts restrict the height of buildings and structures within their mapped extent to preserve views of the maunga.

These protections were originally established over 50 years ago through a landmark decision in 1973 by the (then) Planning Appeal Board to safeguard the cultural, visual, and landscape significance of Auckland’s volcanic features.

There are eleven maunga (including two islands) that have Maunga Viewshaft protections:

- Mt Eden / Maungawhau
- Mt Hobson / Ōhinerau
- Big King / Te Tātua a Riukiuta
- One Tree Hill / Maungakiekie
- Mt Wellington / Maungarei
- Mt Albert / Ōwairaka
- Mt Roskill / Puketāpapa
- Mt Victoria / Takarunga
- Māngere Mountain
- Browns Island / Motukorea
- Rangitoto

As part of PC78 affecting the City Centre and Metropolitan Centre Zone, updates to Maunga Viewshafts included:

- A new rule in Chapter D14 (City Centre Zone only) allowing temporary construction and safety-related activities for up to 24 months
- Amendments to Chapter D19 (Museum Viewshaft), introducing a new requirement for a landscape assessment of views between Takarunga / Mount Victoria and Maungawhau / Mount Eden for any non-complying activity application

Height Sensitive Areas

Height Sensitive Areas (HSAs) refer to the areas very close to the base of some of Auckland’s maunga, where building and structure heights are restricted. These limits help protect public views to the maunga and preserve their visual significance and amenity values in the local landscape.

Height Sensitive Areas are mapped as overlays that can be seen on the AUP and Auckland Council GIS viewer under the ‘Natural Heritage’ layer. The rules for buildings and development affected by HSAs are set out in Chapter D14 of the AUP.

Nine maunga with Maunga Viewshafts also have an HSA around their sides or slopes. Rangitoto and Browns Island / Motukorea do not have HSAs. For Rangitoto and Browns Island / Motukorea, HSAs are instead identified across parts of Bucklands Beach to give reasonable development rights to landowners affected by the low-lying viewshafts to these maunga. Since these HSAs are not close to a maunga, they do not provide the same function as the other HSAs.

As part of PC120, HSAs are proposed to be renamed to Height and Building Sensitive Areas (HBSAs) to recognise the proposed upzoning within their extents and introduce new controls in Chapter D14 to manage earthworks, building coverage and landscaped areas. These are the same amendments that were proposed as part of PC78.

Maunga Viewshafts and Height Sensitive Areas as Qualifying Matters

Through the previous PC78, Maunga Viewshafts, HSAs and the relevant provisions in the AUP Chapter D14 were recognised as qualifying matters.

All of Auckland’s maunga with Maunga Viewshafts and HSAs are recognised as Outstanding Natural Features, holding exceptional value due to their:

- Scientific or geological importance
- Cultural or spiritual significance
- Historical relevance
- Visual or aesthetic qualities.

While Maunga Viewshafts and Height Sensitive Areas extend outside of the maunga itself, they play an important role in protecting it as an Outstanding Natural Feature and contribute their unique character to Auckland’s natural heritage.

Because of this, the council decided that allowing taller buildings and higher density development in Maunga Viewshafts and HBSAs would not be appropriate. These areas are recognised as matters of national importance and support and align with laws that ensure iwi participation in decision-making.

This approach to Maunga Viewshafts and HBSAs established under PC78 has been retained as part of PC120.

Are there changes to the provisions for Maunga Viewshafts and Height and Building Sensitive Areas?

A precautionary approach has been adopted for the Maunga Viewshafts and Height and Building Sensitive Areas that has guided the changes proposed in PC120. These changes are:

- Keeping all Maunga Viewshafts and Height and Building Sensitive Areas in their current locations and extents, along with retaining all existing height limits
- Updating the objectives and policies in Chapter D14 of the AUP to better reflect and address the cultural values associated with Maunga Viewshafts and HBSAs
- Avoiding Terrace Housing and Apartment Buildings (THAB) zones within HBSAs, except in a few cases where the HBSA affects only part of a large site
- Adding new rules in Chapter D14 for HBSAs in relation to building coverage, landscaped area and earthworks.

Many of these changes were also proposed in PC78.

Further information

- For detailed information about the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)
- For more information on the amendments to the RMA [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)

Please note:

This information sheet is a summary document to assist with understanding Proposed Plan Change 120 – Housing Intensification and Resilience, which gives effect to Policies 3 and 4 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and addresses the requirements of Schedule 3C of the Resource Management Act 1991.

Proposed Plan Change 120 to the Auckland Unitary Plan was publicly notified by Auckland Council on 3 November 2025.

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