

Q&A: Wellington Housing Accord

1. What is a Housing Accord?

A Housing Accord is an agreement between the Government and a council to work together to address housing supply and affordability issues in a city or district. The Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act 2013 states that a Housing Accord must be in writing, set out agreed targets, set out how the parties will work together to achieve the purposes of the Act, and provide for either party to terminate the agreement with no less than three months' notice.

2. What has been the process for developing the Wellington Housing Accord?

The Minister of Housing and the Mayor of Wellington discussed the potential for an Accord earlier this year. This followed Cabinet's agreement in January to add Wellington City to the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act 2013. Government and council officials have met regularly since to work out the details of the Accord. Cabinet agreed to the Accord on 23 June 2014 and the Council will discuss it at their next meeting.

3. How long will the Accord be in place?

It is expected the Accord will remain in place until late 2016, when the repeal provisions in the Housing Accords and Special Housing Areas Act 2013 take effect.

4. What are Special Housing Areas?

Upon commencement of the Accord, Wellington City Council will have the ability to recommend Special Housing Areas (SHAs) to the Minister of Housing. SHAs are discrete geographic areas within which the more permissive resource consenting powers of the Act can be used. SHAs will be formally declared by Order-in-Council on the recommendation of the Minister of Housing.

When recommending SHAs, Wellington City Council (and then the Minister) may include criteria for 'qualifying developments' within the SHAs (i.e. developments that can use the fast-tracked and more permissive planning and consenting processes outlined below). These criteria can include height limitations, a minimum number of dwellings and a percentage of affordable dwellings.

5. How will Special Housing Areas be selected?

These areas will be selected by the Wellington City Council. These are areas where there is clear demand for housing, and where there is already suitable infrastructure or there are plans for it to be built.

6. How would a resource consent for a qualifying development be approved?

Qualifying developments must be predominantly residential and must meet any height or affordability criteria that the council specifies for the SHA they are in. Applications for resource consents for qualifying developments can only be made for developments in SHAs. The application would be considered by the council and the consents would need to be processed within 60 working days, except for excluded time periods as defined in section 88C of the Resource Management Act 1991.

If the resource consent application is combined with a plan change (or variation) request, the application must be processed within 130 working days.

7. What else is the Government doing to improve housing supply and affordability?

The Accord is just part of the Government's wider programme to support housing supply and affordability. The Government also has work underway on the cost of building materials, development contributions, building productivity and compliance costs to improve affordability nationwide.