

Wellington Fault Hazard Management

A case study in hazard information dissemination to the community

*Liz Clark
District Plan Team
Wellington City Council*

Background: current hazard management in the Wellington District Plan – pre-July 2004

- District plan maps have illustrated the fault hazard zone in some form since 1979
- Current fault hazard zone in District Plan based on information from 1970-80s (problems with accuracy of data due to scale distortions)
- Rules in the plan state that you can build up to 8 metres as a permitted activity and you must build in accordance with the NZ Std 4203:1992
- Multi-unit developments (2 or more houses) would require a resource consent

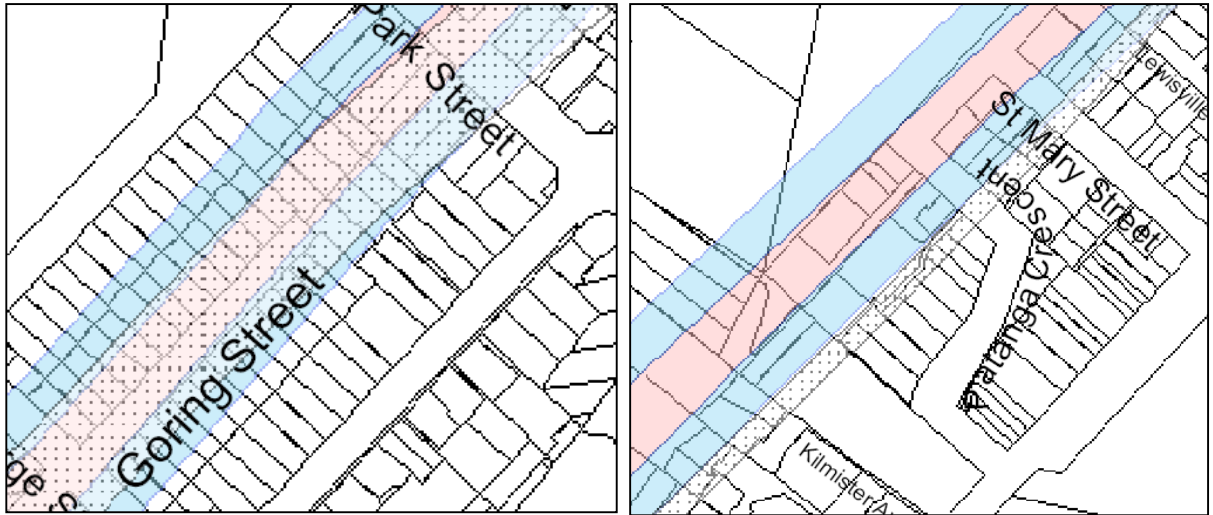
Need for a plan change

- GNS work in 2001 revealed errors in mapped hazard zones. This prompted further work to clarify where zones should be changed (report finalised in 2003).
- Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment report in 2000 recommended change too
- Ministry for the Environment interim guidelines also provided guidance to Councils on active fault hazard management
- Greater guidance required in the Plan to assist processing of resource consent applications

Proposed re-alignment of hazard zone

- The GNS report shows the *likely fault rupture hazard area* is different in some locations to what is shown on the District Plan maps. GNS also recommend including a buffer zone.
- The Council has a moral and legal obligation to update the District Plan maps to record accurate information
- Proposed that a district plan change would be notified to amend the hazard zone in the District Plan maps

Two examples of the existing and new hazard zones



Communicating this information to the public

- Our concerns about community reaction to GNS report resulted in a communications plan being prepared.
- Concerns about how to release the information without ‘scaring’ people. It was important to keep the hazard risks in perspective with other risks faced by people on a daily basis.
- Concerns also based on a history of public concerns relating to development (or restriction of development) along the fault line.

Communications Plan involved

- Media briefing timed to co-incide with date that residents would receive letters about GNS report.
- Letters to all occupiers and landowners of land affected by the current and proposed hazard zones.
- Information drop-in centre set up in vacant shop on Tinakori Road, incl. large scale hazard zone maps with copies to take away, copies of GNS report, information sheet about faults and earthquakes, WEMO information.
- Staff on hand to answer questions about what it all means...

Issues raised at the Information Centre

- About 70 people came into the centre. Most came into follow up on the letter received, but some passer-bys also came in.

- The majority of people who came to the Centre accepted the risk of living on the fault in order to live in Thorndon/Kelburn.
- But, there were some concerns raised about this work:
 - Arbitrary nature of buffer zone - was there scope to change this?
 - Concern about information recorded on LIMs
 - Concerns about more building restrictions v calls for no further development along the fault
- Impact on house values, insurance premiums and rates
- Expectations for compensation because fault hazard zone is now over their property
- Unsure about whether people were now required to strengthen their buildings *so, most people more concerned about the regulatory and financial effect from a hazard zones over their property, rather than the actual hazard risk posed by the fault*
- Letter to residents had also outlined details of a public meeting (held in local hall) where the GNS report writers could answer questions.
- Presentation from council planner about proposed plan change.
- Extensive Q & A session following presentations.

The Communications Plan involved

- Many questions came out of meeting that required follow up by Council staff. This was made a priority, and generally everyone had responses to their questions within 2 days of the public meeting.
- Policy work began on developing the plan change. Plan change evolved to also review the rules associated with the hazard zones.
- Plan change notified in Sept 2003, ie. 6 months later

Plan Change Outcome

- 11 submissions received on the plan change, despite over 1000 letters being sent to affected parties.
- Have assumed that this reflects amount of work put into communication/consultation at start of plan change work.
- About 5 submitters attended the hearing, one submitter brought along their own expert evidence on the location of the hazard zones in the vicinity of his property. This resulted in some change to the hazard lines in two places.
- Decision made to approve plan change as proposed with some amendments.

In hindsight...

- Was crucial to take time over the communication of hazard information, to avoid 'scare tactics' but to ensure people understood the actual risks.

- But it wasn't all just about the community... the effort that went into communications was crucial from the Council perspective too, ie. we were keen to try to avoid a backlash against the GNS report because that may affect the likelihood of getting plan change through the Council.
- In some ways this consultation is standard textbook stuff taught in university, but reality of Council is that it doesn't always happen this way.
- Since this plan change, we've been able to use it as a good example of what happens when time is spent on communications and consultation at an early stage of policy process. ie. theory that proper consultation up front reduces submissions later on.