Grounding the City in Neighbourhoods: Assessing the Sustainability of the Built Environment of Neighbourhoods

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and its supporting assessment tools. The Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework is designed to assist local authorities, planners, developers and communities to improve the sustainability of the residential built environment in the context of both planning and developing new neighbourhoods and in renewing and retrofitting existing neighbourhoods.

The Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework reflects international research around the characteristics of resilient and adaptable neighbourhoods. Two of its main strengths are that it:

- It is designed to be used by practitioners confronted with real decisions about the positioning, design, building and renewing of neighbourhoods.
- It goes beyond amorphous definitions of sustainability and articulates specific qualities and dimensions of sustainability in relation to neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework includes fuzzy notions of cohesion, resilience and adaptability, but does so in away that can be measured empirically through two assessment tools: an observational assessment tool and a resident self-report tool.

The tools are in the process of refinement and have been tested on a series of nine case study New Zealand neighbourhoods. The application of the tools have shown how critical the location and connectivity of neighbourhoods to the wider city system are. The tools also provide a method by which the relative priorities for social and community development compared to reshaping the built environment can be identified and balanced.

Key Words: neighbourhoods sustainability measurement