

Perspective

New landscape requires flexibility

AMANDA WILLIAMS looks at the plight of homeowners in the eastern suburbs and calls for a rethink in the Christchurch City Council's Urban Development Strategy.

Where are the people in the eastern suburbs now going to live? It is a question I am asked time and again as I move around my area, but there is no simple answer.

While we don't have the exact details yet, we do know there has been a huge amount of devastation to buildings and land in the eastern suburbs. Some houses will be able to be built again and some will be repaired.

However, we know for certain there are also some areas where it will not be possible to rebuild houses.

You only have to look at the accompanying liquefaction map to understand the widespread damage caused to homes and infrastructure. People I talk to are concerned. They are uncertain about what will happen to them.

Those who are displaced from their houses and their land will want to find somewhere nearby to build their new home.

People who live on this side of town do so because they enjoy living here. Real estate statistics show people are very territorial about where they prefer to live. Most people only move a few kilometres when they move house.

For those in the eastern suburbs, this will not be easy. Further development is only possible to the north, due to

the barriers of the beach and the Port Hills. Unfortunately, land with good potential for urban development to the north is located outside the city council's allocated areas for the future expansion of Christchurch. These are detailed in the Urban Development Strategy (UDS) and Policy Change 1 to the ECan Regional Policy Statement (PC1), or "the red line" as it is commonly referred to, where inside the line is good and outside the line is bad.

However, given the change in circumstances we face there must be potential for this to change. The UDS' guiding principle is for the city council to work in partnership with the community towards "sustainable prosperity", where decisions are based on the concepts of resilience, adaptability to change and the need for innovation to find creative solutions for problems.

The UDS authors never envisaged having to relocate existing suburbs when they created their plan for the city's growth.

It seems they also failed to consider liquefaction, as it was not mentioned as a hazard in either the UDS or PC1.

Surprisingly, even after the September earthquake, ECan lodged evidence in the Environment Court stating that it did not consider liquefaction to be an issue

that would cause previously identified PC1 development areas to be reconsidered.

Surely that must have changed after the events of February 22.

Importantly, the UDS and the red line were based on a desire for significant residential intensification inside the four avenues and the central business district.

The goal was to increase the number of households living inside the four avenues by 3000 before 2016 and by as many as 14,000 by 2041.

This must now be reconsidered given the psychological barriers many people now face even entering low-rise buildings.

There are also changes in the UDS' preferred areas for growth that will require reconsideration.

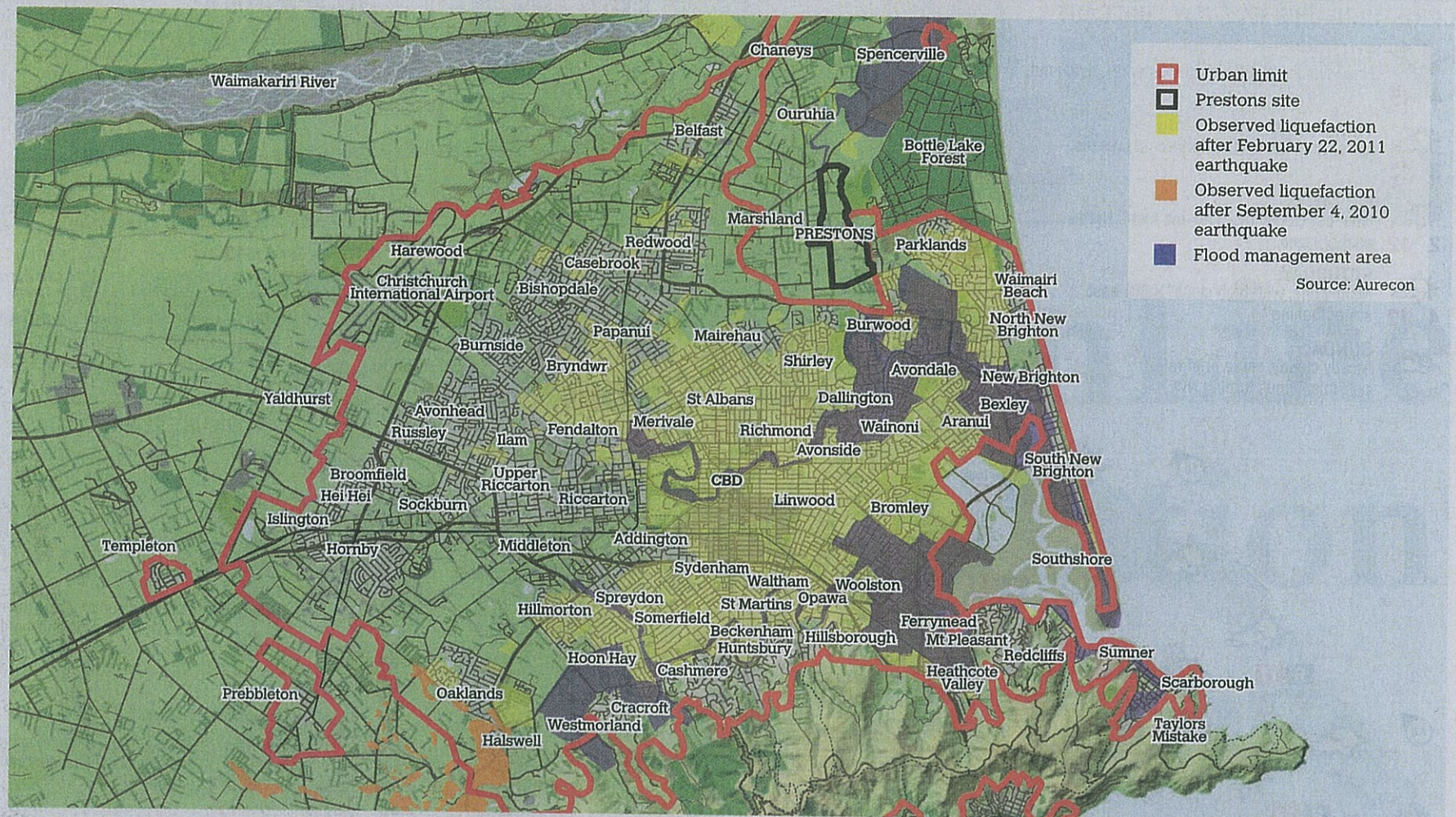
There have been significant changes to water levels and the consequent flood plain areas since the September and February earthquakes, especially around Halswell and Belfast, two areas originally favoured in the UDS, as well as all of the eastern suburbs.

Now is a time of opportunity.

Christchurch will never be the same, we know that.

Whatever the council's thinking was when it put together the UDS, it needs to take time and go back and review the reasoning behind those decisions.

It is of particular concern that the existing UDS does not



Source: Aurecon

provide for any new development areas in the eastern part of the city. There are wonderful development opportunities here, although they are currently outside the red line.

New land will need to be made available to cater for the existing housing demand in Christchurch and to provide additional capacity to replace homes which have been or will be condemned.

It is imperative that any land developments be fully assessed and that they have

sound geotechnical data.

If you consider the Prestons development as an example, it has room for 2500 new houses.

The land was not subject to liquefaction following the September or February earthquakes. It is adjacent to major infrastructure including the Belfast sewer. It will be self-supporting, with plans to build a shopping centre and a much needed primary school. It is just over 5 kilometres from the city centre and easily links into

the existing road network and bus routes.

The only factor stopping Prestons from being the perfect future home for many of our displaced eastern suburb families is that it is located outside the "red line", so the area is not earmarked by the council for residential development for another 35 years.

It's time to start with a clean sheet and to consider all options.

We must be innovative to find solutions for this new

domestic landscape. We need to take a wide view and consider proposed developments including Prestons, but also encompassing land in Mills and Hills roads, be they inside or outside the red line.

There is now a strong and immediate need for affordable residential land.

I ask the city council (and/or Cera) on behalf of all homeowners in the eastern suburbs to look at all practical and feasible options for rehousing those affected by

the earthquake.

The UDS and PC1 were conceived for an environment that was vastly different than what we have today. I am confident that innovative thinking will enable us to build strong communities, where people can relax and create a new home.

■ Amanda Williams is vice-president of the Parklands Residents Association and chairs the Christchurch North East Secondary Education Committee.