Japanese zoning

Benefits / Strengths

Japanese zoning moves the main distributional decision to the plan-making stage. Once the map assigns an envelope, a complying project can proceed without asking nearby owners to approve development in principle. That shift is political, not neutral. It reduces repeated objections on individual sites and puts more weight on the earlier debate over the map. Existing owners are present and organised, while households that might live in future homes are not. I cannot assume the map-making process will represent them well, but at least their interests can be debated before consent rights settle around each parcel (Cheshire, 2023; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 2003; Paetz, 2026b).

I would use that certainty quite assertively in Grey Lynn. Great North Road and New North Road could reach twelve storeys. Heights would then step through eight and six, reaching four before the two-storey interior. This 12-8-6-4-2 transect is a local proposal, not a Japanese rule. It responds to what I saw: apartments on the corridor, then internal streets dominated by renovated detached houses. Added garages were common. Terraces were almost absent. By-right capacity could make a wider range of homes ordinary proposals rather than exceptions (author's site observations, 30 July 2026; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 2003). Twelve storeys may prove too much on some sites. Even so, an accessible inner suburb should probably carry more growth than peripheral places with weaker services. The step-down recognises scale, though it does not treat the existing form as something future residents must justify disturbing.

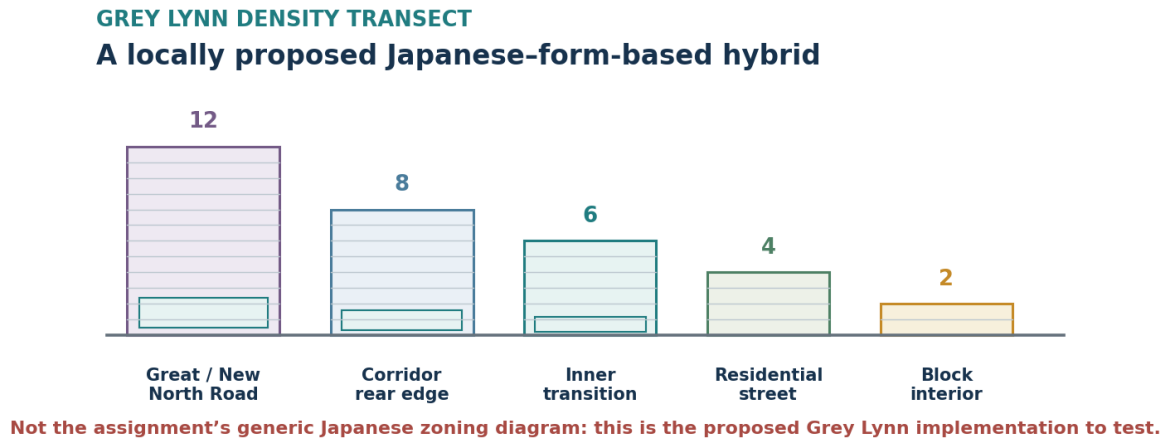

Figure 2. ***The proposed 12-8-6-4-2 transect deliberately gives the corridors a much larger share of Grey Lynn's housing capacity.*** **Note. Author's proposal informed by the assignment zoning scenario, the official Japanese planning guide, course material and field observations (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 2003; Paetz, 2026a, 2026b).**

Costs / Weaknesses

A right to build does not create a right to occupy the finished home. More capacity may reduce scarcity over time, but Grey Lynn land is already expensive. New dwellings could remain beyond lower-income households. The tenure evidence is a warning rather than proof: 45.2 per cent of households reporting tenure in 2023 were non-owners. Permissive zoning may improve feasibility without protecting those renters. It may do little to enable former working-class or Pacific households to return. Public land could help, while a community housing provider would still need finance and a durable tenure arrangement. That task sits beyond the zoning map (Friesen, 2009; Garnett, 2017; Joynt, 2019; Stats NZ, 2024b).

The map also distributes protection unevenly. If the block interior stays low rise while the corridors take nearly all the change, owners inside gain stability partly because other sites absorb the disruption. The simplified controls cannot ensure that a ground floor is active. They may not retain a significant tree, and they say little about a steep park edge. I still rank Japanese zoning first because it makes capacity explicit and reduces an incumbent veto. I am less certain about the exact map. It would need regular review, and renters should have some real route into plan-making. A short form code is probably needed for the public edge. Certainty only remains defensible if the rights being made certain can later be questioned through politics (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 2003; Paetz, 2026a).

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Effects-based planning

Benefits / Strengths

Effects-based planning initially looks restrained. It does not assume that a home or a small service is out of place because of its label. The question is whether the activity creates an effect that crosses a stated limit. This matters in Grey Lynn because its social history did not follow a neat separation between domestic life and local work. Older buildings have also changed use repeatedly. Their value may lie in continued public use rather than in keeping the activity they were built for. I think the method handles that kind of change reasonably well, at least where the effect can be identified without inventing a very broad proxy (Friesen, 2009; Memon & Gleeson, 1995; Paetz, 2026a).

Some thresholds are still necessary. Building on a steep site can destabilise land, and excessive shadow may reduce the usefulness of a park. Construction also imposes disruption on people who are already there. These problems can probably be stated with enough precision to monitor them. I am less convinced that the same tool can decide how much housing Grey Lynn should accept. It also says little about whether a new building meets the street well. Those choices need to be made earlier and more openly (Counsell, 2023; Resource Management Review Panel, 2020). Narrowing the method in this way is not the same as abandoning it. More housing does not justify ignoring a flood path or imposing unlimited construction disturbance. It does mean those effects should not quietly determine the suburb's overall capacity.

Table 1. Where each method places power and risk

Method	Main decision	Easiest to overlook
Effects-based	Whether a measurable threshold is exceeded	Future households and cumulative scarcity
Japanese	How development rights are allocated on the map	Renters and access to completed homes
Form-based	Which physical relationships count as public value	The cost and social meaning of the chosen aesthetic
English	Whose evidence persuades the decision-maker	Absent residents and less-resourced participants

Note. Author's comparison of decision-making power and risk, based on the method literature and Grey Lynn evidence cited in each section.

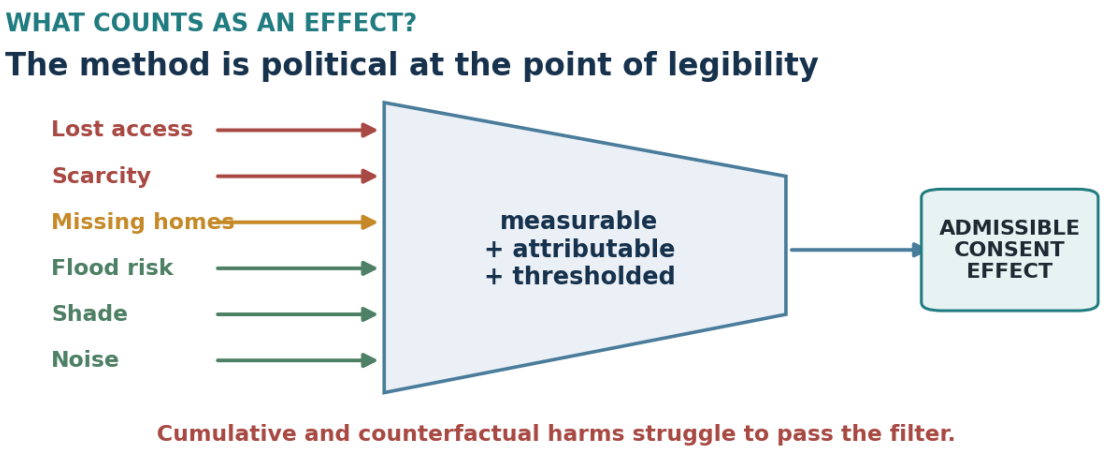

Figure 1. ***The method admits measurable harm more readily than cumulative scarcity or a home that was never built.*** **Note. Author's analysis based on Counsell (2023), Memon and Gleeson (1995), the Resource Management Review Panel (2020), and Stats NZ (2024a, 2024b, 2024c).**

Costs / Weaknesses

The claim to neutrality becomes doubtful once the plan chooses which effects count. Shade falling on an existing house is visible and can be measured. A home that is never built is different. The household excluded by its absence will not appear in a consent report. This seems important in a suburb where gentrification is mature, although I would not say it is socially complete. In 2023, all four local SA2s had median household incomes above the Auckland median. Yet 45.2 per cent of households stating tenure did not own their dwelling. That does not prove displacement. It does suggest that protecting present amenity may be easier than accounting for future access (author's calculations from Stats NZ, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Friesen, 2009).

The Williamson Avenue e-grocery site exposes another gap. Its non-public edge was obvious during fieldwork, but it is hard to express as one excessive effect on one neighbour. The near absence of terraces on well-located internal streets is harder again. Neither observation has a single cause, and a site visit cannot establish the planning history behind it. Still, both are cumulative outcomes. Effects-based planning tends to hear harms that are immediate and attached to somebody already present. Missing access is quieter. I would retain the method for technical protection, but it ranks last as a way of allocating growth or describing the public interest in Grey Lynn (author's site observations, 30 July 2026; Counsell, 2023; Resource Management Review Panel, 2020).

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English policy-led planning

Benefits / Strengths

English policy-led planning can notice a social loss that a simple zoning map may miss. At Ivanhoe Road, the issue is not only the eventual building envelope. Current reporting describes fears of displacement linked to Te Ara Hauāuru, the Northwest Busway. A decision-maker could test a different alignment or require affordable homes to be replaced. Relocation would need funding. A right of return might matter, although it would be difficult to make meaningful if construction takes years. Treating every site in the same way could overlook the concentrated burden carried by a remaining community (NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, n.d.; Rivers, 2026). This does not prove the English model would protect residents. It does give the decision a place to recognise them.

There is also a possible route to non-market housing. Auckland research shows how high land cost and uncertain consenting can constrain community housing providers. A Grey Lynn programme might use Council or Crown land and retain public ownership through a long lease. A registered provider could then deliver homes under published conditions. This seems more credible than expecting market supply by itself to recreate the former social mix, although the scale may remain small (Ferm & Raco, 2020; Joynt, 2019; London Borough of Islington, 2023; Waitematā Local Board, 2023). The approach is strongest when the public authority controls the land. Without that leverage, the social outcome can dissolve into negotiation and may not survive a later viability argument.

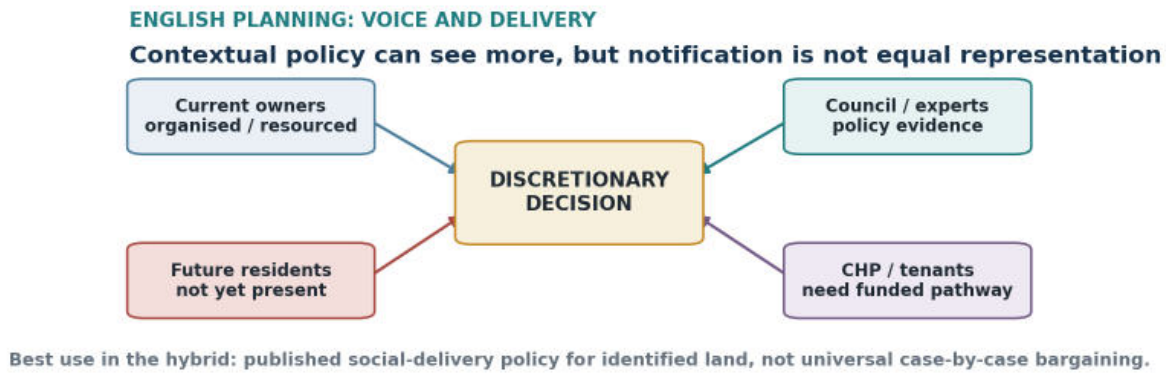

Figure 4. ***A policy-led decision can recognise social context while still giving unequal weight to present, future and well-resourced voices.*** **Note. Author's analysis informed by research on discretion, delay and community-housing delivery, together with reporting on Ivanhoe Road (Dembski & O'Brien, 2023; Joynt, 2019; Rivers, 2026).**

Costs / Weaknesses

Contextual judgement also decides whose context matters. Under the assignment's routinely notified system, existing owners are named and present. Some can pay for professional advice. Future residents are absent, while households displaced years earlier may not even know a decision is being made. Renters and community groups can submit, but their time or housing security may be limited. A process described as participatory could therefore repeat the social pattern produced by gentrification. It might not, but more discussion does not necessarily mean broader representation. A zoning debate held once may account for absent households more effectively than a new neighbour hearing at every site (Dembski & O'Brien, 2023; Paetz, 2026a).

Discretion brings delay and holding cost. It also leaves room for negotiated obligations to shrink when a project is said to be unviable. Community housing providers still require land and stable funding, whatever the policy says. I would confine the English method to decisions where public authority can identify and monitor a social outcome. Public-land housing is one case. Transport displacement is another, and scheduled heritage may justify a separate route. Routine capacity should remain by right under the Japanese map. This would make the subsidy decision visible to elected members instead of burying it in a private consent negotiation. I am not sure the boundary between routine and exceptional cases would stay neat. Still, English planning seems more useful as a targeted social layer than as Grey Lynn's default development pathway (Ball, 2011; Ferm & Raco, 2020; Joynt, 2019).

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Form-based planning

Benefits / Strengths

Form-based planning begins from a point that zoning can miss: a private building helps produce a public place. An entrance changes how a footpath feels. A garage door can dominate it. Grey Lynn Park made the issue visible. People were using it and it did not feel isolated, but steep banks meant most nearby houses could not overlook the space directly. A code drawn in section might support a split-level building that responds better to the slope. It could add surveillance where that is practical, although the landform means a complete active edge may be unrealistic (author's site observations, 30 July 2026; Talen, 2009).

The method could define character more carefully. Grey Lynn has genuine heritage. During fieldwork, I also saw older houses that had been renovated or lifted above garages. A form code could protect a significant building without freezing nearby dwelling numbers. Auckland's Unitary Plan already describes streetscape and landscape qualities as character objectives, but those qualities do not necessarily require blanket low density (Auckland Council, n.d.; author's site observations, 30 July 2026; Talen, 2009). Age alone is weak evidence. The question is what is significant and what people experience from public space. I suspect ordinary repetition can be recorded without preventing redevelopment, though that judgement would need site-level heritage evidence.

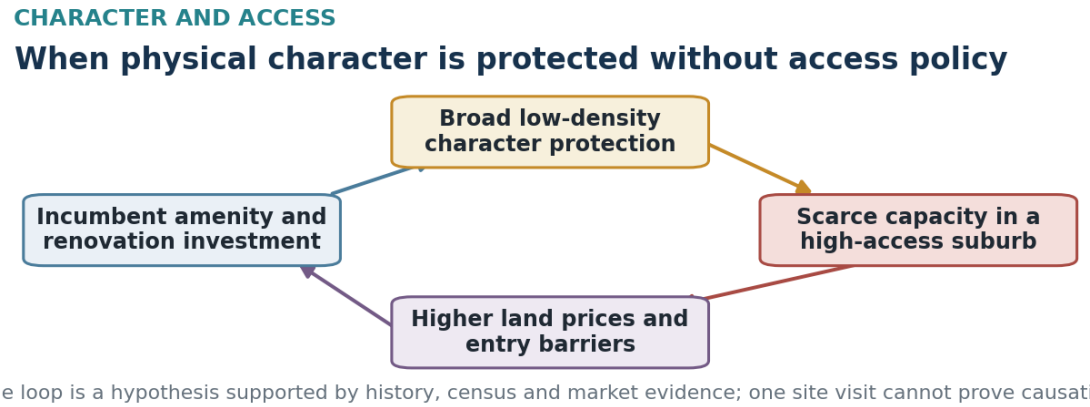

Figure 3. ***Once gentrification is mature, blanket low-density character protection can reinforce scarcity more clearly than social continuity.*** **Note. Author's analytical hypothesis based on Grey Lynn's demographic history, Auckland character research and field observations (Bade et al., 2020; Friesen, 2009; Rossiter & Gu, 2023).**

Costs / Weaknesses

Design control is never entirely socially neutral. Someone chooses which roof form represents Grey Lynn and which setback looks correct. After decades of gentrification, that choice may preserve the architectural shell of a working-class and Pacific past while comparable households

struggle to live there. Auckland research has identified property premiums and benefits to homeowners associated with heritage or special-character protection. It does not prove those controls caused displacement, and I would not use it that way. It still raises a harder question about who receives the value created by preservation. International research is similarly wary of treating attractive, streamlined development as automatically equitable (Bade et al., 2020; Friesen, 2009; Rossiter & Gu, 2023; Tagtachian et al., 2019; Talen, 2021).

I would not abandon urban design. I would narrow its legal reach. The code should address how a building meets the street, and it should protect sunlight where a public space clearly depends on it. Slope needs a workable response. Scheduled heritage can be handled separately. The document should remain short enough that a complying project is genuinely predictable. Even then, form cannot finance community housing, protect an acquired tenant or ensure a below-market rent. Those tasks belong in housing and land policy. It ranks second because it may help substantial development fit Grey Lynn. It could also become another barrier if aesthetic preferences keep expanding after zoning has granted capacity (Tagtachian et al., 2019; Talen, 2009, 2021). Rules that repeatedly consume capacity without a visible public gain should probably be removed.

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