AN OVERVIEW OF
THE ABU DHABI URBAN PLANNING COUNCIL

A Brief Introduction to the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council (the UPC):

The UPC was created by Law Number 23 in 2007 to ensure the development throughout the Emirate of Abu Dhabi of professionally designed and well-managed urban environments, complete with world-class transport and infrastructure systems and supported by measured economic growth. The UPC’s priority is to achieve an Emirate-wide distribution of economic activities and associated benefits.

The UPC works with a number of Governmental stakeholders to successfully combine the strategies, plans and initiatives from these stakeholders into comprehensive plans that cover development from many different angles. This helps to ensure that developments are supported by the correct utilities infrastructure, community facilities such as schools, medical centres and mosques, and safe, pedestrian-friendly streets. This then ensures that complete communities are delivered across the Emirate.

The UPC has published:


- This was followed in 2009 by Plan Al Ain City 2030 Urban Structure Framework Plan, which covers the City of Al Ain. Plan Al Ain 2030, comprises the Al Ain City Urban Structure Framework Plan, released in 2009, and the forthcoming Plan Al Ain 2030 Regional Structure Framework Plan, which will cover the region surrounding Al Ain City.

- Plan Al Gharbia 2030 Regional Structure Framework Plan, which covers the western region of the Emirate, is due for release in 2011.
The UPC will deliver on Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Vision 2030 through the utilisation of a number of initiatives that embody the key roles of the UPC. These include the core initiative of Estidama, through to specific guidelines for the public realm and urban street design. These initiatives will be visible throughout all of the comprehensive area plans.

The five key roles of the UPC - in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Vision - are:

1. To develop comprehensive plans for blocks, neighbourhoods, districts and regions across Abu Dhabi Emirate.

2. To assist in the implementation of all plans created by guiding, monitoring and working with the implementation team and other Government bodies.

3. To develop regulations, guidelines and policies that will help guide planning and development in the Emirate.

4. To review and assess major strategic developments so that they comply with the plans, policies, regulations and guidelines of Capital 2030, Al Ain 2030 and Al Gharbia 2030 as well as with external Government requirements.

5. To incorporate and encourage Estidama principles of sustainability into the built environment through the implementation of the Estidama Pearl Rating System.

The successful undertaking of these key roles, along with the use of other supporting initiatives, will ensure phased, appropriate, sustainable and high-quality development across the Emirate. Clearly, though, new developments and revitalisation programmes will not happen overnight and such development will take place over a period of the next two decades. However, the plans are due to be phased and citizens and visitors will start to witness the completion of a number of projects over the coming months and years.
More Background on The Regional Framework Plans of the UPC:

--PLAN CAPITAL 2030—

Plan Capital 2030 Urban Structure Framework Plan was the first framework to be developed by the UPC in 2007 and was groundbreaking in its approach and scale. It covers the area of Abu Dhabi Island and the surrounding mainland (Abu Dhabi Metropolitan Area) and was the result of a large-scale analysis and research process to understand the area.

Highlights of Plan Capital 2030 include its focus on liveability within the city, the provision of two growth centres (in downtown Abu Dhabi and within Capital District), the revitalisation of existing locations across the metropolitan area and the importance of capturing culture and heritage through planning and design. Areas of environmental importance were also given special treatment through the creation of an Environmental Framework Plan that implements National Park systems, Green Gradients and a Sand Belt to prevent urban sprawl.

Since publishing Plan Capital 2030 in late 2007, the UPC has been active in implementing it, with detailed masterplans for communities including North Wathba, Baniyas and South Wathba, Shahama & Bahia. The UPC has also created the Estidama programme and ensured the provision of affordable housing, high quality streetscapes and public realm and a streamlined development review process. Next, the Capital 2030 team will continue to deliver world-class area plans focusing on downtown revitalisation, providing public access to waterfronts, improved public facilities, better connectivity and the provision of public art and access to cultural experiences.
The Capital District Master Plan provides a long-term vision for the development of a global 21st century capital and a model of sustainable living on a triangular 45km² site at the western tip of Abu Dhabi Island. With a projected population of 370,000 residents the district will also provide 450,000 jobs drawn to its centrality, connections to Abu Dhabi Island and developments on the mainland, universities and National stadium as well as its status as a new seat of national government and embassy network. The UPC aims to create a compact, liveable and mixed-use modern capital with connected, complete communities served by a world-class public transportation system.

Work on the Capital District will commence at the end of 2011 with the Emirati neighbourhood and site-wide utility networks, followed in 2012 by the construction of roads and work on the Federal Precinct. This will be followed by the completion of infrastructure work for the first major phase, which includes the Emirati Neighbourhood, CBD, the Federal Ministries area and the first half of the North Spine. Work on the Abu Dhabi Metro will follow, along with infrastructure works in the Federal Mosque District, a highway interchange adjacent to Zayed University and the balance of the Capital District, which will be complete by 2030.
This is an ongoing development programme designed to create a world-class waterfront for the city of Abu Dhabi. The existing 4km Corniche Beach site is located at the North West end of Abu Dhabi Island opposite Lulu Island and Heritage Pier, stretching from the hospitality hub around the Hilton Hotel to the Central Business District. The project aims to integrate the Corniche with the City and adjacent neighbourhoods and create vibrant, active and dynamic destinations, which can be enjoyed all year round while celebrating Abu Dhabi’s culture and heritage.
Plan Al Ain 2030 comprises a regional and an urban structure framework plan.

Al Ain City 2030 Urban Structure Framework Plan, released in 2009, covers the City of Al Ain. Known as the ‘garden city’ of Abu Dhabi, Al Ain is the ancestral home of the ruling Al Nahyan family. The key directions for the project lie on the reconnection of the oases to its surroundings, the revitalisation of the city and its downtown, ‘Wasat Madinat Al Ain’, and the maintenance of Al Ain’s architecture and local culture and heritage.

Plan Al Ain Region 2030 Regional Structure Framework Plan covers the 20 settlements of the Al Ain Region, outside of Al Ain City, and is due to for release in 2011.
Plan Al Gharbia 2030 Regional Structure Framework Plan will cover the seven key settlements of the Western Region – Liwa, Madinat Zayed, Mirfa, Delma, Sila’a, Ruwais and Ghayathi. Al Gharbia is the largest region of the Emirate and holds the majority of the Emirate’s oil and gas reserves while being recognised in the Emirate for its diverse agriculture and animal husbandry along with its beautiful natural coastline. The key directions for Plan Al Gharbia 2030 are to increase the quality of life for residents through sustainable, measured growth, the provision of community amenities and a network of transportation options. The Plan aims to support Al Gharbia’s oil and gas sectors while diversifying the economy and reducing out migration through the provision of high-quality employment opportunities. Furthermore, the stunning natural environment of the region will be enhanced and protected, and the utmost respect will be shown to Al Gharbia’s rich culture and heritage.
Ensuring Sustainable Development in Abu Dhabi Emirate:

--ESTIDAMA--

Launched in May 2008, Estidama - which means ‘sustainability’ in Arabic - is Abu Dhabi’s contribution to the global discussion on how to create more sustainable communities, cities and global enterprises while preserving and enriching the physical and cultural identity of the people. It is the result of a clear political vision that is built on the four pillars of Estidama - the environment, economy, society and culture - in pursuit of a higher quality of life for all living things. Estidama is more than just a sustainability programme; it is the symbol of an inspired vision for governance and community development.

Estidama is the first programme of its kind that is tailored to the Middle East region. It is intended to promote the concept of living in harmony with Abu Dhabi’s culture and environment while conserving the Emirati way of life so that future generations can benefit from the wise choices made today.
--THE ESTIDAMA PEARL RATING SYSTEM--

The Estidama Pearl Rating System (PRS) assesses the sustainability performance of communities, buildings and villas. It is the Arab World’s first sustainability rating system and is specifically tailored to the hot climate and arid environment of Abu Dhabi. The PRS has been designed to support sustainable development, from design to construction to operational accountability, and provides guidance and requirements to rate a project’s potential performance in relation to the four pillars of Estidama. The program encompasses The Pearl Community Rating System, The Pearl Rating System and The Pearl Villa System.

**Key Initiatives by the UPC:**

--DEVELOPMENT REVIEW--

Abu Dhabi has an ambitious vision to be one of the most sustainable cities of the 21st century. The UPC and the development community are working together to make this vision a reality. The UPC plans and regulates strategic development across the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Development proposals are subject to rigorous assessment to ensure that the city makes the most of the current climate of economic and cultural growth. Some of the technical development reviews for infrastructure, transportation, environmental and cultural issues are done by up to 20 other Government agencies in the Emirate. The UPC coordinates this agency input on behalf of developers to ensure all the necessary parties are involved meaning that infrastructure and community services are provided as development takes place. All decisions are ultimately made by the UPC but they informed by detailed assessment and recommendations from a range of planning officials.
The UPC aims to create neighbourhoods that are built to stand the ‘test of time’ by responding to the context and climate of Abu Dhabi and the wider UAE. The UPC’s vision is to create neighbourhoods that mix residences, shopping, services, recreation and workplaces to create liveable and convenient places and promote a variety of community values. The Council also bestows great importance on conserving the unique heritage, culture and customs of the people and places of Abu Dhabi and aims to interpret and incorporate these local elements into contemporary buildings and structures to facilitate in the creation of an authentic Arab capital.

In a number of cases, the UPC has been working on the creation of complete communities using a ‘fareej’ design, the traditional neighbourhood system used for centuries across a number of Arab countries. Courtyard-style homes are built to the edge of the plot to maximise the use of land and define the public realm. Small paths, known as ‘Sikkak’, strategically connect the homes to neighbouring homes, community facilities and intimate public spaces known as ‘Barahaat’, as well as larger gathering spaces known as ‘Meyadeen’. The UPC is actively working with a number of developers to incorporate ‘fareej’ design elements into their projects.
World-class public spaces are an integral part of the UPC’s vision for the Emirate. Streets are one of the most important and common types of public space in a city and they need to be designed not just as thoroughfares, but as beautiful and interesting spaces for people as well. The UPC has identified that an efficient and safe network of streets and pathways are critical to the growth of Abu Dhabi and in response, has developed the Abu Dhabi Urban Street Design Manual (USDM). The USDM is a practical new tool, developed by the UPC in coordination with the Department of Transport, the Department of Municipal Affairs, the Traffic Police and other relevant agencies. It will apply to all urban streets in the Emirate including those scheduled for urbanisation by 2030. The main elements within the manual include enhanced connectivity between streets, the creation of a connected street hierarchy serving all modes of travel, provisions for well designed open space, innovative shading and cooling solutions, more managed parking spaces and an overall pedestrian-friendly orientation. The new street design will provide a genuine choice of movement from private motor vehicles to walking, cycling and public transport modes.
A network of parks, plazas, bridges, nodes, squares, transportation hubs, waterfronts, natural features, landmarks, streets and sidewalks will be located across Abu Dhabi Emirate to create attractive outdoor spaces. These spaces, known collectively as the public realm, will connect residences to the town centre and community facilities, amenities and services, as well as adjacent communities, thereby providing the context for public life.

The Public Realm Design Manual (PRDM) will facilitate the design of such outdoor spaces, ensuring that function is combined with memorable and unique places. It will serve as a tool that can be used by municipalities, developers and consultants as they begin to design and construct the public realm. It includes specific components that can be used to assess, evaluate and construct the public realm through a range of policies, typologies, guidelines and programming recommendations, along with a Public Realm Framework Plan and Public Realm Hierarchy. The Public Realm Design Manual currently covers Abu Dhabi Metropolitan Area and the City of Al Ain, but will evolve to cover the entire Emirate.
The UPC has in close collaboration with the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) - unveiled the Coastal Development Guidelines for the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The Coastal Development Guidelines are one of the first initiatives resulting from the earlier introduced Natural and Cultural Heritage Strategy, and is an integral aspect of Plan Abu Dhabi 2030’s Environment Framework Plan. The guidelines provide direction for development in the major coastal basins extending from the Al Dhaiba island to the boundary with Dubai Emirate.
The Abu Dhabi Development Code (The Code) has been created to respond to the need to guide and regulate development across Abu Dhabi. This detailed code offers an impressive and extensive set of regulations and guidelines that will help the Emirate realise the vision for Abu Dhabi by guiding responsible development in a manner that encourages certainty, fairness and Government transparency. The Code provides a practical tool to deliver on the fourth key role of the UPC – ‘to develop regulations, guidelines and policies that will help guide planning and development in the Emirate.’

The code covers elements such as building heights, floor to area ratios, setbacks, lot coverage and allowable uses. The Code will support the UPC’s other key role of Development Review by providing a clear set of regulations and guidelines that developers need to meet in order to receive planning approval. This promotes transparency in the decisions made to approve or reject planning applications, thereby creating a fair and open system.

The Code currently covers the Abu Dhabi Metropolitan Area, as covered by the Capital 2030 Urban Structure Framework Plan. However, in future, two new codes will be rolled out to cover Al Ain and Al Gharbia to ensure consistency of the quality and sustainability of development throughout the whole Emirate of Abu Dhabi.
The GIS Department at the UPC is committed to supporting the UPC planning team throughout all phases of the urban planning process through the provision of the most relevant and up-to-date data analysis and products available. The GIS team plays an active role in forming linkages and standards with external agencies to ensure the best data sources are referenced for decision making and they play many crucial roles throughout the planning process. Not only does the GIS team assist in the coordination between the UPC planners and various external agencies, it also assists in the coordination between planning groups across the UPC.
‘Style Your Life’ – Enhancing the Lives of Abu Dhabi’s People:

The UPC continues to focus on seven key themes to communicate the work and progress it is making throughout the Emirate on improving the lives and lifestyles of the residents of Abu Dhabi. The themes work together to create a complete picture for Abu Dhabi’s evolution.

1. **Mixed-used & Community Development:** The UPC is working to create ‘Complete Communities.’ The vision is to create neighbourhoods that mix residences, shopping, services, recreation, and workplaces to create liveable and convenient places and promote a variety of community values including open space, community vitality, housing choice, air quality, and walkable, transit-orientated development.

2. **Culture & Heritage:** The UPC bestows great importance in conserving the unique culture, heritage and customs of the people and places of Abu Dhabi. Through interpreting and incorporating these Arab and Emirati elements into contemporary forms the UPC is helping to create an authentic Arab capital.

3. **Natural Environment:** Abu Dhabi has a wealth of marine and land-based environmental assets that the UPC is working to protect, preserve and enhance.

4. **Multi-modal Transit Infrastructure:** The Abu Dhabi Department of Transport, in close conjunction with the UPC, has created a Surface Transportation Masterplan to improve connectivity throughout the Emirate and the UAE. It aims to reduce the Emirate’s reliance on personal motorised vehicles by implementing a network of public transit to include high speed rail and rapid transit options such as trams and buses.

5. **Revitalisation Strategies:** A key objective for the UPC is to revitalize the existing communities of Abu Dhabi Emirate. The developments of the revitalization strategies are well underway for both downtown areas of Abu Dhabi City and Al Ain City.

6. **Waterfront:** Abu Dhabi’s unique location- where the desert converges with the sea - has created an exceptional marine waterfront, which the UPC is working hard to protect and revitalize.

7. **World-Class Sporting Venue:** Abu Dhabi is quickly becoming recognised as an international player on a number of sporting circuits.