



The Future of Open Spaces

Open Spaces make a major contribution to the quality of life in Central Hawke's Bay and is integral to achieving our community's vision of Project Thrive! There is a growing understanding about the importance of the relationship between green space and wellbeing, the interdependence of people and their surroundings, and how connections to vibrant open spaces and streets supports the economic and social wellbeing of business and people.

We're doing some work planning ahead for the future of our open spaces and want to check in with you on some key points before we get too far ahead.

Why are open spaces important?

Open spaces are all our parks and reserves that the community and visitors are able to enjoy. From the Ruahine Ranges through to small local parks, streets and civic spaces, river margins and the Tukituki Trails through to our coastal reserves and beaches, we have access to an amazing diversity of experiences in Tamatea – Central Hawke's Bay that significantly enhance our social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing.

The Central Hawke's Bay Open Space network is comprised of 62 parks, reserves, or domains totalling over 160 hectares. These parks provide our community space for play, sport, and both active and passive recreation. Some contain native bush and foster biodiversity offering a connection to nature.

Recognition of our cultural values is emerging through our open space network with Ngā Ara Tipuna presenting traditional stories as mana whenua know them. Multiple platforms are being used to make this knowledge available including carving, illustration and sculptural features at Pā sites around the district, many of which are part of the open space network.

Our [Environmental and Sustainability Strategy](#) seeks to raise awareness of our natural environment and how to care for it. An important role of open space is to enhance environmental quality by providing natural filters for stormwater and green parks and corridors that provide habitat for our unique flora and fauna.

Many sites provide basic amenities such as public toilets and access to the beach while others provide both indoor and outdoor community gathering spaces for socialising and celebrating family or community events.

Why are we having this conversation?

Through the [2021 – 2031 Long Term Plan](#), fixing our three waters – our wastewater, drinking water and stormwater was our big focus. As we look ahead, we know that, like our three waters, we've got some significant investment to make; resolving long-term deferred maintenance requiring urgent investment in the renewal of many assets located on open space. A silver lining of COVID-19 lockdowns has been an increased awareness of the opportunities provided by, and use of, local neighbourhood open spaces, walkways and cycleways.

Amongst our existing investment priorities for three waters, we need to further understand what the future demand and need is for Central Hawke's Bay and how open spaces reflect and supports a thriving and growing Central Hawke's Bay. With the growth we are experiencing, we need to make sure that we are thinking ahead and planning for walkway connections and parks and open spaces for our District identified in the [Central Hawke's Bay Integrated Spatial Plan 2050](#). We want to better understand and continue to support those organisations and groups doing amazing voluntary work in these spaces.

We also need to understand what rural investment looks like and how we ensure that investment is equitably shared and paid for across the district. Currently we pay for open spaces through the general rate, meaning those that pay the most

rates for open spaces often don't receive a higher value from these assets. We're also going to have to make some tough decisions around what we prioritise investment in – as we simply can't afford to do it all.

We have created this discussion document to start the conversation about the future of open spaces across our district. This conversation will take many forms over the next few months, and we hope that together we can all create a shared vision for the future of our open spaces that will guide our community investment in these important spaces.

How open space contributes to our Project Thrive outcomes

Connected Citizens	Our open space network provides places where people connect and enjoy activities.
Proud District	Our open space network contributes to our local identity and is part of our local history. It provides great places for people, attractions and opportunities that make our patch of paradise an outstanding lifestyle location to live and raise a family.
Strong Communities	Our open space network connects and supports strong communities.
Durable Infrastructure	Our open space network meets the needs of our community today and into the future.
Smart Growth	Our open space network responds to our growth needs through ensuring that the accessibility, quality and quantity of our open space network provides for our existing and future community. Open spaces contribute to building the liveability of our district of the future.
Environmentally Responsible	Our open space network helps us to protect our environment and ensure we continue to provide a unique and beautiful landscape.
Prosperous District	Our open space network provides opportunities for our community to actively engage in through planning, design and use, and contributes to the lifestyle and experience of living, working and playing in our district.

Our open space network now

Council's current direction on open space is to "provide a range of parks and reserves that are affordable, well-maintained, safe and provide for the recreational (play & sport), cultural, and environmental well-being of the community."

Council owns/administers over 62 parks that total over 160 hectares. These are made up of:

Park Category	Purpose and use	Examples
Sport and Recreation Parks	Often large areas used for organised sport and recreation activities, often multiple use, providing for a range of community activities and facilities.	Russell Park White Domain
Community Parks	Local parks typically provided in urban and town centres. Designed for use mainly by local community but catchment may be wider.	Nelly Jull Park Otane Playground
Nature Parks – Bush	Experience and protection of natural environment, native bush, wetlands, riparian areas.	Ōtaia/Tukituki Scenic Reserve (Lindsay Bush) Waikareao Bush Reserve
Nature Parks – Coastal	Experience and protection of natural environment, native bush, coastal margins, wetlands, riparian areas.	Ouepoto Domain Mangakuri Reserve

Cultural Heritage	Protect cultural and historical environment, education, commemoration and celebration.	Paul Hunter Memorial Park/Pukekaihai Ongaonga Historic Village All our Cemeteries
Civic space and street gardens	Open areas in town centres, space for social gatherings, amenity, meeting places, events, enjoyment.	Bogle Brothers rest area Otane Town Hall Reserve
Recreation and Ecological linkages	Linear spaces that provide pedestrian connectivity, wildlife corridors, our rivers, environmental protection and access to water margins.	Many of our rural esplanades The Tukituki Trails located in road reserve (adjacent Mt. Herbert Road and Tapairu Road)
Streetscapes	As well as being the way we all drive around, the streets in our towns and villages can also be meeting points, places that provide some interest and a play space for kids on bikes and skateboards	Ruataniwha Street gardens High Street gardens Future opportunities in other sites?

Department of Conservation administered land within our district includes:

- Te Angiangi Marine Reserve (access from Aramoana and Blackhead Beaches)
- Elsthorpe and Mohi Bush Scenic Reserves
- A'Deanes Bush and Monckton Scenic Reserves
- Ruahine Ranges

Hawke's Bay Regional Council owned/managed land within our district includes:

- Tukituki River Corridor (berm, stopbanks, and access points)
- Waipawa River Corridor (berm, stopbanks, and access points)
- Gum Tree Mountain Bike Park (plantation)

There are also areas of open space that contribute to the categories above and that are owned by other organisations such as Central Park, home of CHB Rugby in Waipukurau.

Council provides a maintenance grant to the CHB chapter of Forest and Bird for the Otaia Reserve and a mowing grant to the Forest Gate Domain Committee

Earlier this year we received submissions to our Long-Term Plan on open spaces with the following requests:

- Work with Central Government and Hawke's Bay Regional Council to restore areas of natural habitat in the district, and expand these areas. Undertake restoration work of wetlands for biodiversity, habitat, flood protection, water retention and groundwater recharge, and as a carbon sink.
- Improve entranceways for Waipawa and Waipukurau.
- As funding opportunities present themselves, seal Lindsay Road to Otaia Scenic Reserve (Lindsay Bush), seal the carpark area, and provide shelter and picnic amenities at the bush entrance.

Some national trends around the future of open spaces include:

As our climate changes, people are becoming more aware of their impact on the environment. Our district is likely to face changes to temperature and rainfall, have more frequent droughts, flooding and storms, and sea-levels are modelled to rise. The health of our ecosystems and freshwater quality are under pressure. The way we develop and care for open spaces will play a part in addressing our environmental challenges.

Māori participation in our parks and open spaces will become more influential as we seek stronger relationships and co-governance/co-management partnerships. Māori cultural activities will be celebrated and Tikanga Māori and customary activities will influence how open spaces are planned, developed and managed.

Our lives are getting busier, so making the most of our leisure time is important. Concerns about obesity and physical inactivity mean there is an increasing focus on healthy living. People want opportunities to be active that are affordable, convenient and close to home. Open spaces are the venue for many play, active recreation and sport activities. They also provide active ways to get around by bike, scooters or on foot. As we grow, it is essential that people have access to quality recreation facilities and a connected open space network that allows communities to live healthy lifestyles.

There is an increased awareness of the benefits of being outdoors, playing outdoors and interacting with nature as demonstrated by increasing demand for 'natural play' areas within parks. During the COVID-19 lockdown more people walked in their neighborhoods or accessed parks and natural areas. Cycling also increased. Increased usage of the river berm areas and Tukituki Trails is evidence of this occurring in Central Hawke's Bay.

Family play is another growing concept. Parks are not just swings and a slide but areas the whole family can engage in play and stay longer. This also means that facilities should be inclusive and welcoming by being both physically accessible and providing non-threatening environments. Novelty is another aspect whereby parks are not all the same and playgrounds are not all the same and this encourages visits wider than just the closest park. The provision of unique programmes and events will also foster more family involvement. Open space where a range of activities can occur is future-proofing the area for continued use and engagement.

Our population is ageing fast. By 2030, about 1 million New Zealanders will be over 65 years. In Central Hawke's Bay, the percentage of our population over 65 years of age is projected to increase from 20% in 2019 to 29% in 2051. We know that older people would like to do more active recreation and that the provision of inter-generational opportunities are of particular value as it can reduce the sense of isolation and increase physical, mental and creative activity levels. We also know that equity is an issue for this age group (including having little or no income) and that people's recreation preferences are diverse so one size does not fit all.

We think that the key principles guiding the future of our open space network could be to:

- Support community health and wellbeing through physical and emotional connections to a diverse range of experiences from our open, park-like spaces through to the bush and our dramatic coastline.
- Maximise community partnerships in the provision, design, use and care of our open spaces.
- Provide safe, inclusive, welcoming and accessible open spaces for all our community to enjoy.
- Protect and reflect our local identity, history and culture.
- Protect and enhance the environmental values and benefits of our open space network.
- Create a resilient, open space network that responds to environmental and growth challenges.

The opportunities we have identified so far include:

- Our [Central Hawke's Bay Integrated Spatial Plan 2050](#) provides us with a good starting point in identifying open space needs within Waipukurau, Waipawa and Otane. This includes improvements to existing parks, and new parks and green links along waterways and streets.
- Ngā Ara Tīpuna has signalled a step change in how we work in partnership to acknowledge and understand our culture and history, creating unique, visible and engaging places for our community and visitors to the district to connect and experience.
- Council has set aside funding to improve access to the margins of rivers and lakes identified in the district as having important recreational values. This includes provision of esplanade reserves and strips required through the District Plan.

- Continuing to partner with passionate community volunteer groups on the protection, development and management of open spaces, and improve our understanding of the role of open spaces not within local or central government ownership.
- This process provides the opportunity to better understand our community aspirations for our open spaces so that we can establish provision, development and maintenance service levels that respond to these needs. This is not intended as a one size fits all approach, it will need to be reflective of the distinct communities and local characteristics across our district.
- The Department of Conservation estate contains a number of high quality experiences in our district that could be further enhanced, including Monckton Scenic Reserve, the Ruahine Ranges (including Sunrise Track and Hut), and Te Angiangi Marine Reserve.
- Central Hawke's Bay is built on the backdrop of rural open spaces, mountain ranges and coastal areas that contribute to the uniqueness of our district.
- Increased promotion and understanding of the open space opportunities within our district.
- Promote ways to increase use of open spaces that are not well utilised through initiatives like pop-up play opportunities and provision of accessible playgrounds.
- Physically connect communities to open spaces through the use of trails, streets and walkways.
- Emotionally connect communities to open spaces through the use of stories of our history and culture and environment.
- Utilise all available means to continue to build our open space network such as marginal strips, easements and unformed legal road.

The challenges we have identified so far include:

- Significant long-term underfunding and deferred maintenance requiring urgent investment in the renewal of many assets located on open space, in particular playgrounds and public toilets. Tough decisions are needed on what we prioritise investment in as we can't afford to do it all.
- No strategic or tactical documents to help guide Council investment in open spaces. The combination of new actions identified through recent planning processes (eg. park upgrades) and deferred maintenance will require a robust prioritisation process to determine areas of highest need and allocation of funding across the district.
- Open space has not been provided for in new growth areas and in the past, no growth funding has been collected to improve existing open spaces or develop new ones.
- Rural communities often note that there are play facilities and 'more things to do' in our larger urban centres and that there is limited provision in more rural areas. This creates a demand for similar levels of service and feedback of not being provided for adequately compared to urban areas. How do we ensure that investment is equitably shared and paid for across the district?
- The distribution, use and management of our open space network varies across the district. Council recognises that Central Hawke's Bay is made of towns and villages each with its unique set of characteristics. It is important to Council that local issues are addressed by local solutions, rather than a one size fits all approach.
- There are growing expectations of the quality and type of experience open spaces provide, and there will be greater use of open spaces as we continue to grow.
- We have natural assets that are not currently being leveraged for their visitor potential. Our Tourism Destination Plan identifies the need to further investigate and address identified infrastructure gaps and challenges in priority areas including coastal settlements, Waipukurau, Monckton's Bush and the Ruahine Ranges. Opportunities include working together with the Department of Conservation to increase awareness of these natural assets, encouraging people to stay longer in our district and contribute more to our economy. Conversely there is the potential for population growth and increased visitors to have a negative impact on the natural characteristics of these areas (e.g. rubbish, noise, wear and tear, expectations of a higher level of service in terms of built infrastructure).

Let us know your ideas?

We're still in the early phases of this work, however we are keen to hear your ideas to support open spaces in Tamatea - Central Hawke's Bay. You can do this by completing our online survey at www.chbdc.govt.nz/thriving-places-and-spaces or emailing us on thrivingplacesandspace@chbdc.govt.nz