

Reserves and Open Space

Anticipated environmental outcomes

Reserves Management

- To gather further information on the location and status of council managed land in the district. Efficient provision of reserves generally in accordance with the New Zealand Recreation Association level of service guidelines
- Contribution to the whole parks and reserves network in providing an adequate range of park values and uses across the district
- Developing a strategic approach to open space acquisition, development, management, use and determine programs of work.
- Systematically developing reserve management plans to guide the development and management of council reserves.

Executive Summary

Council actively manages a range of reserves land throughout the district. These vary from multi use sports parks to coastal, river and lakeside reserves.

The Reserves Act 1977 sets the basis for the management of reserves and stipulates that all reserves vested under the act (with the exception those held for a Local Purpose) will have a relevant reserve management plan guiding their management and development. The Act further stipulates that reserves be administered in regards to their vested classification and establishes a framework for approving private and commercial use of reserve land.

Reserve management in the district is also guided by formal policy which is currently being reviewed and updated in line with best practice, as recognised by the New Zealand Recreation Association.

The district plan separately zones a portion of the councils reserve stock and the subsequent provisions are based on the assumption that there are up to date Reserve Management Plans for reserves which council administers. The common expectation is that an activity on a reserve will be permitted if covered in the respective Reserve Management Plan. However, most council reserves do not have a current Reserve Management Plan.

Background

Council provides open space for a range of purposes including for both active and passive pursuits. Open space in the district ranges from our destination reserves like Wainui Reserve to urban esplanade reserves acquired through subdivision and sports parks. Assets on council reserves provide for enhanced community use and enjoyment. Reserves assets vary from toilet blocks to play grounds and community halls.

Council has come to manage reserves in a range of ways. Council through time has actively pursued purchasing land in the district for a range of purposes, including recreation. Council has often pursued particular land in known growth areas. Alternatively some people subdividing choose to vest land with council for a range of purposes from providing amenity to housing what become council storm water assets. Some of this land remains in fee simple, owned by the Council. However, it is estimated that the majority of this land is vested under the Reserves Act and thus recognised for a particular purpose.

Council also acquires esplanade reserve when land owners subdivide titles alongside water bodies and the coast. The general presumption under both the Resource Management Act 1991 is that when a lot of less than 4ha is created beside a water body or the coast, that an esplanade strip or reserve of 20m is created. Whilst esplanade reserves are vested as a separate title with council, esplanade strips are simply recognised by an instrument on the certificate of title of the underlying lot and thus remain in private ownership, with various likely requirements relating to public access, fencing and so on.

Council also, formally and informally, manages and administers Crown owned and Crown derived land. This land is typically held as Recreation Reserve. Much of this land was originally confiscated from Waikato-Tainui and as such is subject to the rights of first refusal.

Councils Joint Management Agreement with Waikato-Tainui further recognises these rights of first refusal. Notably Schedule D requires that crown derived land is reported on. As such Council has engaged LINZ registered property experts to investigate known council administered land in the district and determine the underlying status of that land.

This process will also identify a more complete stock of council administered land. Currently council has not systematically identified land it administers and owns, and in particular has not differentiated between these two categories. Subsequently, at this point in time, Council does not have a single, or robust, inventory of land and reserves it owns or administers.

Pressure

Population growth

Over the next ten years the projected population growth for the Waikato district is estimated to be 18.6 per cent or 1.7 per cent per annum. Over the past 20 years the population growth has averaged 1.2 per cent, with the past five years being at 2 per cent. This latter increase has been in the non-urban areas consistent with higher demand for countryside living and rural residential sections, following the trend of people moving away from the cities such as Auckland and Hamilton. As detailed below, this trend is likely to remain relatively constant.

	2012	2022	Change
Estimated population	65,114	77,331	12,217
Estimated dwellings	23,240	27,975	4,735
Estimated urban/rural mix	47/53	49/51	

Note: These growth estimates are from our detailed population modeling prepared in conjunction with the National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis and includes base information from the 2006 census. The 2010 census was postponed because of the Canterbury earthquakes.

The census Usually Resident Population (URP) counts show that Waikato district is in the top ten territorial authority areas with an increase of population from 2006 to 2013 of 10.1% (Statistics New Zealand). The URP counts as detailed below show that the estimated population count for the district in 2013 is below the 2012 estimate and would not have taken into account the boundary change with the creation of Auckland Super City (incorporation of Franklin District).

	2001	2006	2013
Usually Resident Population	51,843	57,585	63,378

State

Current information and strategy

Historically, council has not collected quantitative information on reserve usage or monitored district wide reserve provision against industry standard levels of service. Information on reserves has often been gathered in an ad hoc manner, for instance when a particular activity or use is proposed or when council prepares a Reserve Management Plan. Likewise operational planning of reserves, asset renewal and development have been ad hoc and largely reactive due to a lack of guiding policy and management planning.

Council is now taking a more strategic approach towards reserve provision. Council has recently developed a Playground Strategy which assesses each of council's playgrounds against recognised industry standards. This strategy is the first in a suite of strategies which will assist in understanding the current context and aid in planning for, and managing, reserves both day to day and over the long term. The leading strategy in this suite of documents will be the Parks Strategy which will provide a stocktake of existing reserves along with a comparative assessment of these areas against the industry recognised NZRA Level of Service provisions. Currently reserves across the district are being categorized based on the NZRA categories for ease of analysis and future management. Classification exercises for reserves in the Waikato District will be done at the time new reserves are acquired, when reserve management plans are prepared and will further be considered when reviewing the district plan.

Council is also beginning to understand more in regards to underlying reserve land status through working towards reporting on the Joint Management Agreement (JMA) and looks to strengthen this relationship with Waikato-Tainui in regards to open space management. (Refer to section 6.0 Cultural Wellbeing for further information on the JMA).

Reserves & Open space use and management

Reserves and open space in the district are utilized by a range of active and passive pursuits. Council maintains reserves to a general standard across the district. However the overall provision of reserves to date has not been considered in a strategic manner or spatially across the district. Current reserve policy, with the exception of those inherited from the Franklin District, is not yet spatial in nature.

Use and management of Esplanade Reserves

Currently Waikato District Council does not actively manage and restore all esplanades reserves acquired through subdivision. Over time if esplanade reserves are not suitably fenced, planted and managed pest plants can spread and prevent natural regeneration.

If an esplanade reserve is not fenced and restored, then adjoining landowners often assume stewardship of this land. In other cases they may graze or build on this land with the prior approval of council. Encroachment of structures on reserves often makes future council led restoration efforts, problematic. Conversely in some cases private land owners may restore esplanade reserve.

It is difficult to offer estimates of area currently restored and not restored however the current state offers much room for improvement and funding initiatives available such as Community Conservation Partnerships Fund and the Waikato River Authority.

Council works in partnership with community groups and organisations such as Waikato RiverCare on council administered esplanade reserves to retire and restore margins of the Waikato River and some tributaries (Refer to section 1 of the Report for more information). Council intends to review the current strategy and management for Council administered esplanade reserves to ensure that such land acquired through subdivision can be actively managed, restored and enhanced at the earliest opportunity.

Reserve Assets

Council is developing a better understanding of the reserve assets across the district. Such reserve assets ranges from rubbish bins to fencing, play equipment, toilets and reserve buildings. Maintaining this reserve asset information is paramount to guide operational upgrades, maintenance, and planning. Damage to reserve assets, both human induced and from natural events will forever pose issues. In particular assets in the coastal environment and along river margins are often under threat from erosion.

Response

- To gather further quantitative and qualitative information relating to reserve use, preferences for different activities and levels of service provision across the district.
- Reserves described by category as a useful non-statutory guide to the primary purpose of each reserve.
- Establish the asset database and capture condition data and maintenance programs for playgrounds, walkways/cycle ways, parks and reserves.
- To develop and review strategies relevant to reserves and openspace to provide a strategic response to issues and pressures.
- To integrate open space and reserves planning with the District Plan review and assess the appropriateness of the current district plan provisions in relation to provisions relevant to reserves.
- To prepare reserve management plans to guide reserve development and provision.
- To further encourage the retiring, restoration and active management of esplanade reserves through partnerships, education and proactive open space management
- To engage with inter-agency cooperation and coordination work for providing better spaces