

Waitangi Park Design Quality Audit

14 June 2007

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INTRODUCTION

This design review was carried out by the Technical Advisory Group from September 2006 to June 2007, after construction of most areas of the park was completed. The interface sites of the Transition Building, Cultural Grounds, the Wardle Building and areas east of Chaffers Dock are temporary. During this period the park operated through different seasons on an every-day basis and hosted a range of events.

The audit follows the structure of the Waitangi Park Design Review 2003, undertaken by TAG for Resource Consent. The background material for the review has been collated in the Waitangi Park Design Quality Audit Table. This table is intended as a living document which can be added to and used to frame later comment.

The scope of this review is limited to design issues and intended to form one component of a more wide-ranging review of the Waitangi Park Project. This document is intended to sit beside other review documents such as the User Survey 2007, commissioned by Wellington Waterfront Ltd.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Waitangi Park Design Quality Audit reveals:

- A sophisticated design with a contemporary, memorable and distinctive identity.
 - The park is receiving national and international design awards
 - It creates a new domain for Wellington - and is being used to promote the city
 - Provides multiple routes to the waterfront as well as the CBD.
- Intelligent layout enables diverse activities in adjacent spaces.
 - The field provides a large open space previously unavailable in the CBD
 - It is sought-after for events and addresses the needs and expectations of people of different ages, interests and cultures
 - The layout and integration of various landscape elements allows spatial separation of diverse activities as required.
 - Inbuilt flexibility allows spaces to be used by different people in different ways.
- Innovatively layered and multifaceted cultural, aesthetic, functional and ecological systems.
 - The majority of elements play multiple roles and sensitively maximise the limited space available
 - The Graving Dock structures the park by way of an authentic historical device. The specific geometry improves space, views and pattern. The division into wet and dry halves expands the park's ecological and aesthetic diversity.
- A functioning urban ecological system which explores contemporary technology in urban hydrology.
 - Waitangi Stream is revealed to daylight, and water quality is improved through a sequence of cleansing processes, and reused for irrigation
 - Processes such as the reedbeds for sedimentation and filtration give a distinctive contemporary aesthetic that is central to the park's identity
 - 'Daylighting' the water courses is culturally significant, ecologically important and of significant environmental benefit.
- Accommodation of diverse park users reflects complex cultural communities.
 - Diverse users are attracted by a range of specifically-designed sites in the Activity Zone including the particularly popular skate park and play areas
 - Universal access is embedded as a principle in the park design - providing access for all levels of ability.
 - Multiple routes are provided to the waterfront and other spaces with at least one route to experience each space available to all users. The subtle approach of indication through detailed design and materials is used, rather than prescriptive signage.
 - High visibility of Maori cultural elements including the waharoa and proposed pou, areas for powhiri and waka landing, all signal the bicultural social context.
- Skilled application of materials gives rich robustness at the detail level
 - The park is characterised by an innovative and memorable approach to design in a harsh environment, for example the Wind Garden and city-edge activity zones.
 - Concrete, asphalt and timber decking are robust and durable and interact at suitable scales in different locations.
- Rich contribution to the civic life of Wellington that warrants the resources required for ongoing maintenance
 - Ensure resources and systems of delivery achieve the high standard of maintenance deserving of a park of high local and national significance.
 - Replacement of any plants should be in keeping with design intentions.

The Audit indicates the following issues for consideration:

- Curatorial management approach
 - Future management should be undertaken by a body with a curatorial role and approach.
 - An Operating Manual to convey essential information for future management is required.
 - Commitment to the design integrity of the park is important to avoid individual decisions eroding the design intentions.
 - Regular assessment by personnel familiar with the design intentions, and clear responsibility for action, should be established.
 - The park is a living system requiring ongoing monitoring and resource commitment. Understanding soft and hard landscape issues and a fast response to defects and damage is needed.
 - Design issues and any changes should be referred to the original design team or a person with curatorial design overview, and undergo a design review process.
- Management of events.
 - Clear guidelines for the type and location of temporary facilities and the protection of vulnerable areas should be developed to minimise unusable periods and maintenance expenses.
 - Any 'privatisation' of public space over a sustained period may alienate the local community.
 - Education and communication is needed to ensure the inherent flexibility of the park design is understood and used.
 - The field is a living system. High demand raises issues about limits of use that have to be factored into management. Events that would damage the turf should be encouraged to use the hard flat surfaces.
- Vulnerability of less-used areas of the park.
 - Planned edge development is yet to contribute to critical mass of activity on the park's edges.
 - Opportunities for different uses of the existing facilities should remain open.
 - The value of non-active spaces should be considered.
- Time is needed for the full structure and facility of the park to develop
 - The park has way-finding devices inherent in its form. Clarity of main routes will increase as plants grow and increase definition. Plant health and replacement is important to the evolving clarity of structure.
 - Redevelopment of adjacent sites, the Transition Building, the Wardle Building, Chaffers Dock and the Overseas Terminal, will continue to animate the park.
 - The 'cultural grounds' associated with the Transition Building are yet to be developed. The 'Pacific Gardens' may have to be reconsidered in context of the UN Studio building and relocation of the Chinese Garden.
 - Consider a temporary facility providing shade, toilets, food and water supply in the south-west corner.
- There is a risk of a proliferation of added elements eg signs, artworks and interpretive elements
 - Ongoing commitment to the park's design integrity is important. There is a risk that unco-ordinated incremental change will degrade the park's appearance.
 - A signage and interpretation strategy is required to ensure a holistic approach to these elements and activities. Interpretation should be either fully integrated with the landscape or artworks or use existing vocabulary of elements as far as possible.
 - To continue a high standard of design, any proposal for additional elements should be assessed under an established design review process.
- A layer of fine detail remains incomplete - with some artworks on hold.
 - Artworks yet to be implemented will add a rich layer of information and detail that will enhance interpretation.
 - The Shoreline Artwork, Stepping Planks, Wind Screens and Archaeological Boxes need site-specific briefs to be written to consolidate work to date.
 - Consideration needs to be given to the possibility of future implementation. A public art strategy for the park should be developed to guide future works.
- The site is a harsh maritime environment
 - Within reason, the climate and microclimate of Wellington should be accepted as having periods of inclement weather which affects outside activities.
 - Prioritise horticultural requirements in the establishment period to maximise opportunity for successful plant growth and minimise ongoing costs.

Relevance of findings of this Design Audit

The design of Waitangi Park has occurred in a particular physical environment, cultural context, design process, and administrative structure. While some design aspects of the project are unique to this site, other aspects offer valuable experience relevant to future projects.

Unique to the project is:

- The physical site
- Contamination impacts
- The specific hydrological system of Waitangi Stream
- Interaction with the community in the process
- Cultural expectations of a park
- Wellington Waterfront Ltd's role as developer
- Resource allocation to development, construction and management.

Common to other projects is:

- Designing for a diverse community
- Involvement of design team
- Development by one organisation for handover to another
- Creation of a new park in an urban context
- Landscapes in extreme conditions of salt and wind exposure
- Results of 'value engineering'.

The relevance of specific issues and solutions should be taken into consideration in relating the design audit to other projects.

END