

Ashhurst Domain Reserve Development and Management Plan: Engagement Report 2024.

Introduction

In 1997 the first ever Reserve Management Plan was developed for Ashhurst Domain. From the late 90's through to the early 2000's reserve management planning went off the radar in Palmerston North. This planning activity came back into focus again in 2015/16 and 2 development plans were completed: Ahimate (2017) and Memorial Park (2018) Reserve Development Plans. Officers then spent the next few years - from 2020 to 2023 - working with the Property Group to tidy up the legal titles and status of all reserves in Palmerston North and to identify what needed to be done prior to producing management plans. Titles, legal status etc. on many reserves that remained in the "ownership" of past Council authorities (such as Kairanga County Council) were cleared up and legally placed under the administration of Palmerston North City Council.

All reserve management planning processes are stipulated in the Reserves Act 1977. Currently Council has registered the intention to create a management plan for the reserve, has issued public notice and has begun the consultation process. Stage I of the engagement process is to signal intent and then to receive early feedback prior to the development of a draft plan – with the intention that early feedback will inform the draft.

Once a draft is developed consultation (Phase II) will begin on that draft. This workshop is the last piece (direction setting) of the Phase I engagement process that will inform the draft Ashhurst Domain Reserve Management and Development Plan.

In addition to engagement, Council over the years has engaged the expertise of appropriate consultants to provide information that will guide the development and management process. Council has the following reports to guide management and development:

- Cultural Values Assessment (TMI)
- Ecological Assessment (Viv McGlynn)
- Landscape Character Assessment (WSP)

The early Phase I engagement process has completed the following:

- Internal (PNCC Staff) workshops
- External Stakeholder Workshops (two on-site half-day workshop)
- Partner Workshop – Rangitāne
- Public Engagement – submissions (online and through libraries) and Open Day on site

Rangitāne O Manawatū

A workshop was held with Rangitāne in late December 2023. In that workshop the following was of particular importance:

- Rebranding of the reserve to Otangaki – dual names are fine
- There are two key developmental lines – mahi toi and conservation and wetland development – with an overall theme of wellness through connecting to nature.
- River erosion is a big concern
- Camping (Kainga Koraha) should be opened up across the park and river area in a controlled manner so that the “wana” (peacefulness and sublimity) is not lost.
- Area for Marae set aside as a “wellness centre”.
- Areas for Rongoa medicinal plants and spaces to build “kai resilience” for our community.

Internal Stakeholders

All internal stakeholders believed that the naturalness of the site was the most important value, and that this value should underpin all the others and all work/proposals that may come to Council for this park.

In terms of development, the key themes were to connect with the existing and upcoming Te Apiti (and Te Ahu a Turanga) work, ensure events infrastructure is in place (for food-trucks, future café, etc.) and expansion of the camping ground. All development should occur guided by the “nature” value.

Key risk at this site was the river and flooding/loss of land.

External Stakeholders (workshops on 28 November & 7 December 2023)

Development

In terms of the values that the domain embodies, stakeholders stated that the following were of particular importance:

- The ecology and natural environment
- Family and natural connections
- Whanau centered and culturally/historically expressive (this is currently lacking)

In terms of development of the reserve the following was stated:

- Expansion of the campground – integration into park and particularly down by the river
- Expansion of the ecological sections and wetland areas of the park into existing grazing land
- Natural play should be integrated into the natural areas to create a type of unintentional educational experience for young people
- Signage linking the new developments going on and eco education integrated into the natural play areas, campground areas and bush.
- Open a space for commercial – food trucks, etc. but limited to match the character of the reserve.
- Better access to the river.

In terms of potential concerns around development the main thrust was to ensure that as the highway, Te Apiti Masterplan and general population increases that the reserve maintains its special character and peacefulness.

Management

Community Involvement

Key areas to improve on management that came across strongly were stakeholders would like to develop some kind of “Friends of the Domain”. They wanted to see more management of the park – particularly around weed and pest control done by the local community.

Integrated Management

Management should also allow for more multi-use spaces – camping across variety of areas, fire pits along the river (like at Ahimate) for Iwi and Scout Groups, cross country horse circuit that is integrated into the park (like in Auckland) and natural play into conservation and river areas.

General

Cleanliness of toilets and bins, etc. Pest management an ongoing issue as is maintenance on buildings and structures. Limestone paths need extra work in winter.

Public Engagement

The public engagement process for the Ashhurst Domain went for 4 weeks - from January 15 through to February 29. Public notice was issued, the PNCC Website was utilized with survey forms and the Ashhurst Library was also used to promote the plan. In addition, an Open Day was held in February.

7 questions were asked, and these questions were the same ones asked to stakeholders and internal staff. They are:

- What are the values specific to Ashhurst Domain that should guide all development?
- What types of activities should we look to develop further in the domain?
- Do you have any concerns about development at Ashhurst Domain?
- What are the values specific to Ashhurst Domain that should guide how we manage all activities?
- What activities should be managed in the Ashhurst Domain? How so?
- Are there any activities in the domain that are currently not well managed? How so?
- Is there anything else you would like us to consider as we plan the future of Ashhurst Domain?

The total number of responses and interactions was:

- Online surveys 39
- Ashhurst Library surveys – 6 surveys
- Open Day – 150 people attended

Ashhurst Domain Open Day

The Ashhurst Domain Open Day featured an free BBQ and the YMCA Play Trailer. Council and Waka Kotahi attended the event and guided people through future plans for the Domain and surrounds.

At the Ashhurst Domain Open Day around 150 people turned out to fill out submissions, talk about the park and also future events – particularly regarding the new pedestrian/cycleway bridge.

The Main Themes

Main themes that emerged from the open day were the following:

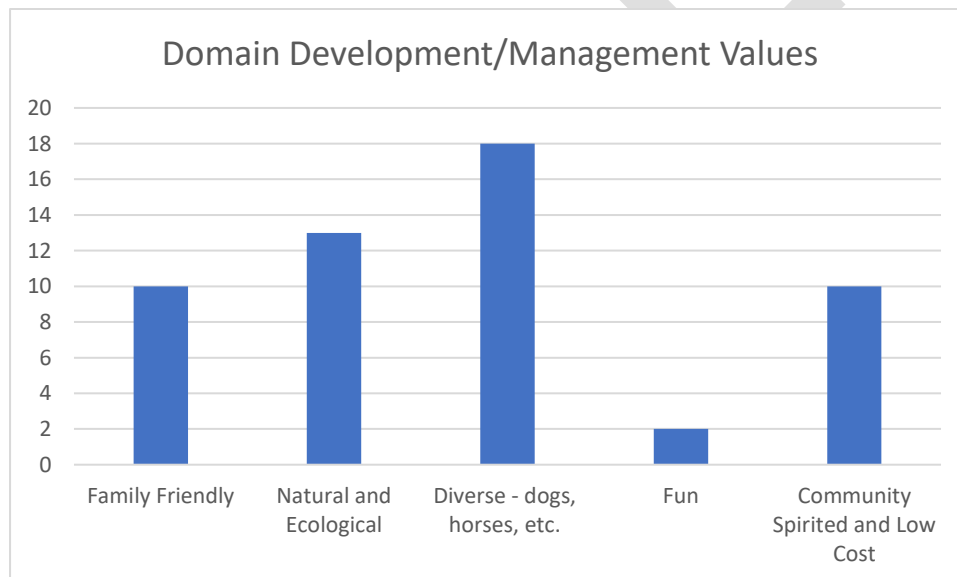
1. A light touch and please keep the trees and keep it natural
2. Family friendly and accessible park
3. Any development should be mainly around developing nature, or in line with the natural look and feel of the reserve.

Online Surveys

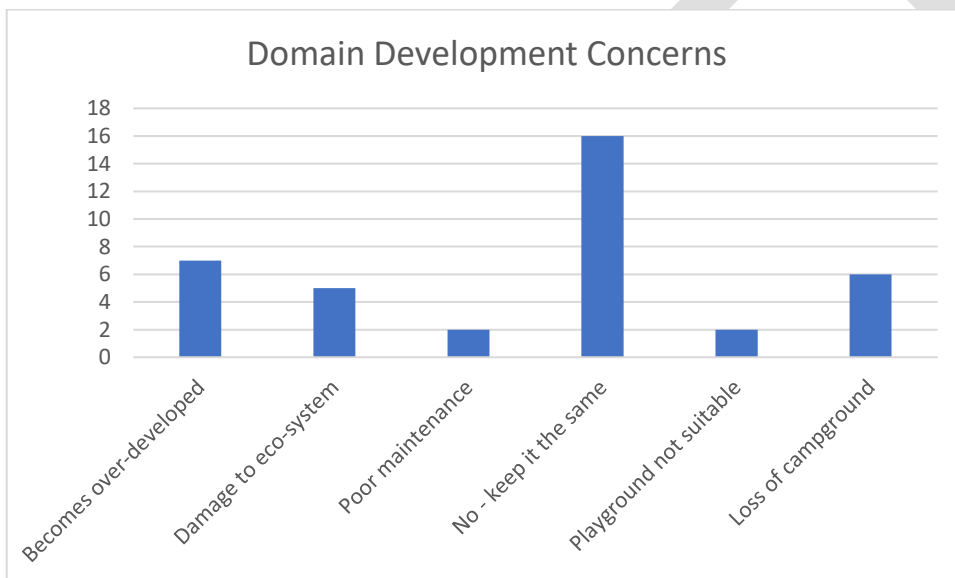
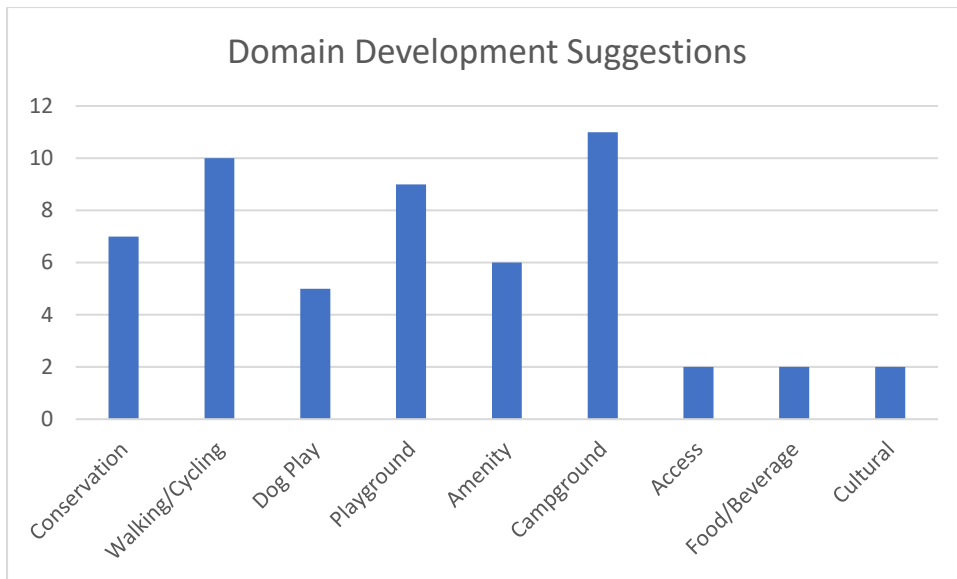
39 people filled out survey forms online. The questions across the board had very similar answers that were ranged around the themes that emerged with stakeholders and at the Open Day.

Values: development and management

Both development and management values came through predominantly the same for both questions. Diversity was first and foremost for respondents, but was used in a specific manner for this park. The key park activities (dog walking, natural wilderness, camping, equestrian, cycling/walking and playground activities) should be integrated in a more diverse manner throughout the park. This lines up with stakeholder comments and also the development actions in later questions



The activities described in the graph below, for some type of action, tended to describe a type of development that was dispersed throughout the park rather than growing the existing areas to simply make them bigger versions of what they currently are – with the exception of ecological/conservation. This tended to be the base area for growth, with other activities carefully and respectfully dispersed through it.



The main development concern was that the park should be kept primarily as it is. This implies, given the previous answers to development questions, that to maintain the park in its current state or balance is desirable, and all other development activity should be integrated into that overarching look and feel of how this park is now.

In terms of management of the park there was little difference in terms of answers given with regards activity and concerns (and low numbers of respondents answering these questions).

However, there were a few concerns that should be separated out and taken into account:

- Cars on the park
- Privacy between cemetery and campground (for small family remembrance ceremonies, etc.)
- Keep prices low at campground
- Limit exclusive use of areas – even if they are not-for-profits
- General maintenance - upkeep of bush tracks, better signage

Library Submissions

There were 6 submissions that came through at the library. Numbers for the library submissions were added to the above graphs. There were some different suggestions from the library . They were:

- Build an international level cricket ground
- Fruit orchard to build local food resilience
- Communicate the dangers of tradescantia on the Lower Terrace

CONCLUSION

There is little difference to the overall thrust of the submissions, the stakeholder workshops and the discussions held during the Open Day at the Domain. While the odd person asked for a splash pad like the one at Memorial Park – these comments were outliers.

Respondents were focused on the protection of the existing activities – particularly the bush areas, and that development or growth was desired for current activities but should be approached as something carefully integrated into the existing area. Significant, exclusive areas set aside for commercial activities or non-profit activities were not considered desirable, and any future proposal of this type of activity should evaluate its “fit” to the Domain.

People had concerns that over-development might exclude the local community, and the Domain should keep its character as it is regardless of growth – either growth of surrounding infrastructure or population growth in general.

One key theme was to develop and build existing activities into the Domain in a manner that integrates complimentary activity. Such examples might be – camping along the river flat – fire pits for scouts, Kainga Koraha and campers. Have a horse cross country circuit through the park that can be used for events that park users can watch as they play/eat/walk, etc. Have natural play kit through bush areas with signage to promote education of biodiversity care - teach in a playful manner, etc. It was understood that this should be carefully managed.

More community involvement in the upkeep and care of the park was also desired. People preferred no development and leave the park alone rather than poor =development that saw changes to the look and feel and character of the existing Domain space.

Appendix I: Stakeholder Attendance Lists

November 28th 9am-12pm.	
Organisation	Attendee(s)
Consultant (and others)	Viv McGlynn
Equestrian	Arthur Yeo
Geological	Keith Joblin
Sport Manawatu	Victor Romero
Ashhurst Senior Citizens	Terry and Colleen Carr
Horizons Regional Council	Sian Cass
Ashhurst Pony Club	Kim Couper-Smartt and Debbie Ward
Ashhurst Scouts	Paul Snaith
n/a	Michael Shepherd
Waka Kotahi	Malcolm Chiles
NZ Police	Phil Robinson

December 7th 9am-12pm.	
Organisation	Attendee(s)
Ashhurst Scouts	Julie Gillam-Hill
Ashhurst Canine Club	Peter Russell
Geological	Vince Neil
Ashhurst Community Trust	Richard Tankersley
Village Voice	Lyvonne Barber
NZ Military Heritage	John Annabell
RECAP	Harvey Jones
Waka Kotahi	
NZMCA	Joe Wolfgram
Environment Network	Helen King
Forest and Bird	Anthea McClelland
Ashhurst Legend	Tom Shannon & Amy Anderson