

Council Briefing

Notice of Briefing

Briefing to be held in the Council Chamber, Forum North, Whangarei on:

**Thursday
21 April 2016
12.30pm**

Her Worship the Mayor (Chairperson)
Cr S J Bell
Cr S J Bretherton
Cr C B Christie
Cr P A Cutforth
Cr S J Deeming
Cr S M Glen
Cr P R Halse
Cr C M Hermon
Cr G C Innes
Cr G M Martin
Cr B L McLachlan
Cr S L Morgan
Cr J D T Williamson

1. Draft Blue/Green Network Strategy

Reporting officer: Joanna Wilson (State of the Environment Coordinator)
Date of meeting: 21 April 2016

1 Purpose

The purpose of the briefing is to present the Draft Blue/Green Network Strategy to Councillors and provide an opportunity for questions to be answered prior to taking the document to the Planning Committee to be received and approved for public consultation.

2 Background

The original Whangarei 20/20 Central Area Concept Plan (adopted by council in 1996) identified the Waiarohia Stream as having low amenity but potential to be an attractive green corridor at the entrance to Whangarei. Consultation at the time showed widespread support for increased green space and trees within the City centre and in particular for rehabilitating the City waterways. The concept plan recommended rehabilitating the Waiarohia Stream banks to create a green corridor around the southern perimeter of the City centre.

The reviewed Whangarei 20/20 Plus document (adopted by council in 2006) identified a 'green' or 'emerald' necklace concept for enhancing the central City. It proposed extending improvements to the riparian margins of the central city streams to provide continuous public pedestrian access along the rivers' edges connecting the harbour back to the surrounding hills stating "*the rivers edge will feature pathways, boardwalks and redeveloped parks with enhanced plantings.*"

The Whangarei District Growth Strategy: Sustainable Futures 30/50 (adopted by council in 2010) also identified the potential of the waterways in the City. "*These waterways should be an asset to the City but at present they are largely ignored except as a drainage network... The streams flowing through the City should act as 'green/blue corridors' through the urban fabric*". Actions to create a Blue/Green Network were then outlined in the Whangarei District Growth Strategy Implementation Plan (adopted by council in 2012).

The Blue/Green Network was further mentioned and additional actions identified in the Biodiversity Strategy (adopted by council in 2012). A network of linkages, both ecological and recreational, is also identified in the Open Spaces Strategy (adopted by council 2001). Riparian areas are identified as important for both ecological and recreational enhancement. Linkages are further identified through proposed shared use recreational pathways in the Walking and Cycling Strategy (adopted by council in 2012), many of which rely on using the riparian margins to make connections across the City and out to the suburbs.

Initial information on the strategy was received at the meeting of the 20/20 Inner City Revitalisation Committee on 5 August 2015 where Councillors were supportive of the work. The Blue/Green Network Strategy has been developed with input from numerous staff across Whangarei District Council and Northland Regional Council. Input has also been sought from iwi and hapu, through Te Huinga and consultation with Te Parawhau.

3 Discussion

Background

Urbanisation has led to a disconnect between humans and nature. As cities have increased in size and extent, natural systems and ecosystem processes have been disrupted, with natural habitat cleared and waterways channelized or filled in entirely. This has created a number of issues for cities including increased flooding, urban heat islands, biodiversity loss and cultural disconnection for indigenous peoples.

Blue/green networks are a holistic way of planning based on two elements. Blue water-based elements – watercourses including rivers, stormwater drains and irrigation channels – and Green vegetation-based elements –including parks and reserves, forests, gardens, riparian strips and amenity planting. By connecting and managing the two elements in conjunction as a blue/green network, while recognising their relationship to urban grey space, a number of benefits can be achieved for communities through sustainable development.

Whangarei's harbourside location between two areas of native bush, with numerous water courses throughout the built area, makes it an ideal candidate for a blue/green network management approach. By adopting a Blue/Green Network for Whangarei City a number of issues can be addressed simultaneously to provide multiple benefits over time. Benefits include reduced risk of flooding, enhanced ecological corridors and riparian margins, improved water quality, increased amenity and sense of place, better connectivity, extended walkways/cycleways/shared use paths, increased tourism and migration, and protection of cultural and spiritual values of Maori.

Themes

Four themes have been developed in the Strategy in line with the concept of sustainable development including socio-cultural, environment, economic and flood management elements.

Theme 1. Enhancing and connecting our communities

This theme looks at the socio-cultural issues facing urban communities, considering the effects that a blue/green network approach could have on engaging communities with nature, increasing connectivity throughout the City and improving mental and physical health outcomes. Benefits could include:

- Increased amenity in the urban and rural environments.
- Increased greenspace and off road cycleways/walkways/shared use paths promoting physical recreation and increasing a sense of wellbeing.
- Increased connectivity between neighbourhoods and parks.
- Connecting destinations for commuters and visitors.
- Maintaining and protecting the cultural and spiritual values tangata whenua attach to water bodies – mauri, mahinga kai, waahi tapu, taonga, etc.

Theme 2. Enhancing ecosystem services and ecological connectivity

This theme looks at the environmental issues facing our City and considers the effects that a blue/green network approach could have on restoring biodiversity and improving water quality in the City. Benefits could include:

- Improved biodiversity outcomes through increased areas of native planting, increasing habitat and corridors between habitat for fauna.
- Improved water quality by using vegetation or filtration devices to filter stormwater before it enters rivers/streams.

- Improved ecological processes and services in an urban environment.
- Enhanced in-stream biodiversity by improving access and shading for fish, including indigenous species such as eel as inanga (whitebait).

Theme 3. Providing opportunities for economic development

This theme looks at the economic benefits of improving the waterways and enhancing the urban area under a blue/green network approach. Benefits could include:

- Increase in foot traffic through business areas along the network with high amenity values.
- Increased land value of properties overlooking greenspace/attractive waterways.
- Possible residential development along restored waterways.
- Potential tourism/migration increase as the City becomes a more attractive environment to live/work/play.

Theme 4. Protecting our communities from natural hazards

This theme looks specifically at flood mitigation through surface water, overland flow (stormwater) and the potential for more frequent events under climate change predictions. Taking a blue/green network approach combines modern flood protection with ecological and amenity values, and could include the following benefits:

- Greenway flood corridors provide increased capacity for water during flooding events.
- Reduced overland flow to stormwater from vegetated areas.
- Reduce the costs of major flooding events through increased water retention in the network.
- The cost of flood mitigation works can be partially offset by opportunities for multiple benefits e.g. shared use pathways, ecological corridors, socio-cultural values and increased land values.
- Future-proof the City against the effects of climate change.

Blue/Green Network Plans

This section of the Strategy highlights the options raised in the Themes section for each of the City waterways. The Hatea River and Waiarohia Stream are broken down further into sections for ease of analysis. The major waterways will act as primary recreational corridors, where recreation, connectivity and community engagement is prioritised and enhanced. These waterways will also provide the greatest opportunity for economic development. Minor waterways will focus on ecological corridors and amenity values. Additionally, cross city connections are included, where key pathways will connect suburban areas, away from the riparian corridors. Implementation diagrams and maps are presented for each pathway or waterway and are intended to provide a quick reference guide for users.

Implementation

The creation of a Blue/Green Network in the City will create an attractive and environmentally sustainable urban environment where people want to live, work, play and visit. This section of the Strategy outlines potential management actions and strategic opportunities that could be taken to assist staff with implementing the recommendations made in the Strategy.

There are a number of issues that will need to be considered when projects are designed and budgeted for. These are anticipated in this section of the document, to ensure that consideration is taken by all parties involved at the planning stage. Collaboration and communication will be key to ensuring that these issues are dealt with promptly at the beginning of the process to ensure that implementation runs smoothly.

5 Summary

The project is a long term strategy and will be implemented over an extended period of time (i.e. 50 years) as funding becomes available and opportunities arise. Putting a strategy in place ensures that as various initiatives are undertaken (e.g. flood works, walkway/cycleway/shared use path extensions, infrastructure planning, policy etc.), the Blue/Green Network Strategy will act as an overarching framework that will ensure multiple benefits are realised over time. By adopting this approach, all four themes can be integrated in a holistic manner that will ensure more effective and efficient outcomes for the Whangarei community and its environment.

Attachment

Under separate cover (available on request – contact Senior Meeting Co ordinator)

Draft Blue/Green Network Strategy