



WHAKATĀNE DISTRICT OPEN SPACES STRATEGY 2025-35

Te Rautaki Tarawaha o Whakatāne 2025-35

whakatane.govt.nz



MĀ KOUTOU, MĀ TĀTAU
Our People, Our Spaces



WHAKATĀNE
District Council
Kia Whakatāne au i ahau



Mihi

E mihi ana ki ngā maunga whakahī o te rohe nei,
We acknowledge the majestic mountains of the district,

Ki ngā tihi matarau,
To the many sites,

Ki ngā awa e rere nei,
To the flowing rivers,

Ki ngā wai pūngarungaru o Te Moana nui a Toi,
To the rippling ocean of Te Moana nui a Toi,

Ngā mātāpuna o te ora,
The sources of vitality,

Ngā tongarerewa huhua o te rohe,
The abundant treasures of our district,

Ngā pūtake o ngā mahi a te rēhia,
The origins of pleasurable pursuits,

Koia rā ko koutou, tihei mauri ora!
That is all of you, breath of life!

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Whakatāne District Open Space Strategy – Introduction

Te Rautaki Tarawaha o Whakatāne – Whakatakinga

The Whakatāne District is defined by its diverse and striking natural environment – from expansive coastlines to inland forests and urban parks. These open spaces shape the character of the Whakatāne District and play a critical role in the everyday lives of its residents. These spaces are where we live, relax, connect, and explore.

More than simply providing the backdrop, open spaces support health and wellbeing, provide opportunities for recreation, and strengthen community connections. As the district's population grows and its communities evolve, the demand on these spaces will continue to increase.

This is Whakatāne District Council's first Open Spaces Strategy. It sets a clear vision, principles, and strategic direction to guide how Council will plan, protect, develop, and manage its open space network. The strategy is designed to meet the changing needs of communities and ensure open spaces remain accessible, high quality, and fit for purpose.

The purpose of this strategy is clear: to establish a future-focused, resilient, and inclusive open space network that supports a growing district and enhances the wellbeing of all who live and spend time here.

Tangata Whenua, Tangata Taiao

The maunga, awa, and natural beauty of the Eastern Bay of Plenty made it one of the earliest places settled by Māori, with significant arrivals by Mataatua and Te Arawa waka. This rich whakapapa has left an enduring legacy deeply embedded in traditional and cultural values. Early explorers such as Toi Te Huatahi/Toi Kai Rākau exemplified sustainable practices and a harmonious relationship with te taiao, setting a standard for the respect of tapu and the mauri of the land and waters.

Council aims to emulate this connection by integrating modern stewardship with traditional Māori values in managing open spaces. Council's collaboration with iwi, hapū and whānau ensures the protection of taonga and the enhancement of te taiao.

Embracing Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and forming meaningful relationships with mana whenua helps to enhance deep connections to the land, and supports Council's vision for an inclusive and culturally resonant open space network. The Council is committed to honouring Te Tiriti and the objectives of its Māori Relationships Strategy - Te Toi Waka Whakarei. This includes protecting ecological associations and improving scenic and landscape qualities through a bilingual approach that acknowledges the intertwined heritage of the region.

Council will work with mana whenua on key projects to ensure the cultural significance of open spaces are reflected and enhanced. By doing so, Council ensures that both the natural environment and cultural traditions are respected and elevated for future generations. These efforts reflect a commitment to holistic stewardship that sustains biodiversity, celebrates cultural heritage, and fosters a deeper connection between all residents and the landscapes they cherish.



Vision *Matakitenga*

Vision

**As the environment flourishes,
the people thrive**

**Ka ora te taiao,
ka ora te hāpori**

Principles *Ngā mātāpono*

As we plan for the future, we are guided by a set of foundational values that reflect Council's commitment to long-term stewardship, inclusive community outcomes, and meaningful engagement with mana whenua. These ensure that open spaces are protected and enhanced for future generations, remain accessible and relevant to all, and celebrate the unique cultural heritage and natural environment of the Whakatāne District.

Tiaki taiao | Caring for the environment

We care for and protect the natural environment, ensuring the sustainable use of resources and the long-term health of open spaces.

Oranga hāpori | Community wellbeing and inclusion

We design inclusive, accessible open spaces that support physical activity, and enhance social and cultural wellbeing.

Hononga | Connection

We develop and enhance opportunities for people to connect with place, with environment and with one another.

What are open spaces? *He aha ngā tarawaha?*

Open spaces

Places where public can access the natural environment to engage in a variety of activities. Open spaces include 'green space', rivers, lakes and beaches*, civic centres, tracks and trails, cycleways, walkways and cemeteries. They are places which help to establish connections and linkages where people can move through, visit, congregate and offer respite and connection with nature and with each other.

Public open space includes land that is set aside primarily for outdoor recreation (including but not primarily sports), passive outdoor enjoyment and nature conservation and cemeteries. Local examples include the Warren Cole River Walkway where residents enjoy riverside walks, Ōhope Reserves which provides coastal access and natural enjoyment, and Mokoroa/Kohi Point that offers conservation value alongside recreational opportunities.

More recently, open spaces are being seen as 'dual' assets that not only provide recreation but also storm-water catchment areas for storm events and active transport links through 'green corridors'. The many different types of open space and the combination of these spaces make up the open space network. These interconnected spaces deliver value beyond their individual purposes, creating a system that serves both environmental and community needs.

This Strategy relates to Open Spaces managed by Whakatāne District Council and how these spaces link to and contribute to the wider network of open spaces.

* Whilst rivers, lakes and beaches are 'open space', they are not in the scope of this strategy



Types of Open Space | *Ngā momo tarawaha*

Council manages open spaces for different purposes. Council uses eight different categories to explain what it manages and why. The categories also guide decisions on how to invest in each. Collectively these spaces comprise the open space network and help determine how the strategy will be implemented over time. While many open space reserves are multi-use, allocation of a primary purpose category for all open space enables efficient and effective planning.

A full version of these categories*, including where each of the current Council open spaces sit, their levels of service and their ideal volume and size and closeness to residents can be found in the [Supporting Documents](#). The eight categories are:



Premier district reserves

Larger multi-use spaces with a high amenity value and an emphasis on providing for the needs of the wider community. Examples include Whakatāne Rose Gardens and Thornton Beach Park Recreation Reserve.



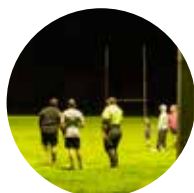
Neighbourhood (local and amenity) reserves

Smaller low-profile spaces often located on a pedestrian/commuting route and typically bordered on several sides by houses. Examples include Mananui Crescent Reserve and Galatea Recreation Reserve.



Local sport and recreation reserves

Spaces for sport and recreation activity for the local area. Small scale and less infrastructure than the Sport and Recreation (District) category. Examples include Waimana Domain and Eivers Park.



District sport and recreation reserves

Parks with the primary purpose of providing for sport and recreation and activity, as well as recreation facilities and buildings. Examples include Rex Morpeth Park and Warren Park.



Cultural and heritage reserves

Localities for protection of built cultural, historical, and archaeological environment to provide for commemoration, understanding, appreciation, and remembrance. Examples include Puketapu Pā and Tāneatua Cemetery.



Natural reserves

Areas for experience and protection of the natural environment. Types of use/value include conservation, education, ecosystem management, low-impact recreation, and landscape protection. Examples include Kōhī Point Scenic Reserve and Port Ōhope Recreation Reserve.



Utility and linkage reserves

Land containing link strips, access ways, drainage, or other service ways where their primary purpose is to support services other than recreation. Examples include Plantation Reserves and Whakatāne Airport Reserve.



Civic amenity open space

Land adjacent to roadways/streets and other civic open space predominantly for pedestrian provision to civic, retail and commercial services in the CBD areas. Examples include Whakatāne CBD and Edgecumbe College Road/Bridge Street.

* Recreation Aotearoa Parks Categories 2017. These categories have established a national model and are due to be updated in 2025/26

Why do we need a Strategy?

He aha mātau e matea ai i tēnei rautaki?

This strategy sets out a clear direction to ensure Whakatāne District's open spaces are well-managed, sustainable, and meet the needs of growing and changing communities. It focuses on three core objectives to enact the underlying principles:

1. Responsible Stewardship

Council will protect and enhance open spaces through enduring relationships, careful management, and future-focused decision-making.

- Build trusted relationships with whānau, hapū, and iwi to reflect shared responsibilities and values
- Manage open spaces in a way that is financially sustainable and aligned with community priorities
- Safeguard land for future generations by preventing irreversible loss and maintaining long-term public benefit

2. Thriving Communities

Council will deliver open spaces that actively improve quality of life and meet the evolving needs of diverse communities.

- Design and maintain spaces that support health, wellbeing, play, and social connection
- Align open space planning with demographic trends and wider strategies such as climate resilience and public health
- Prioritise inclusive, accessible environments that reflect the full diversity of the district

3. Strategic Delivery

Council will plan and invest in open spaces using clear, coordinated strategies that maximise impact over time.

- Embed environmental sustainability into every stage of planning and decision-making
- Use data and forecasting to guide land acquisition, development, and reallocation
- Strengthen delivery through coordinated partnerships, resource sharing, and community involvement

This strategy aligns with the Whakatāne District Council's **Long Term Plan 2024–2034**, relevant Activity Management Plans, Reserve Management Plans, and other policy documents. Together, they form the framework for how Council will protect, enhance, and invest in the district's open spaces.



Current view – open spaces *Ngā tarawaha ināiane*

Approximately 1,440 hectares or 330 public open spaces



37 Playgrounds



6 Cemeteries and
a crematorium



2
Campgrounds



2
Aquatic centres



15 Sports
reserves



Open spaces and facilities like parks, sports fields, cemeteries, courts and nature reserves are highly valued by communities and visitors to the district. They provide places to play, relax, or simply enjoy being outdoors. They are where community life happens. A map and analysis of open spaces by town is available in the [Supporting Documents](#).

Future view – open spaces

Ngā tarawaha anamata

So, what can Council do to ensure a smooth transition between the current state and its future vision? Understanding how communities may change, identifying emerging trends, and knowing Council's role and available tools are all important steps.

Council's vision is that open space continues to offer opportunities for communities to connect and support wellbeing, while working in partnership to protect and enhance the health of the natural environment. Investment in open spaces delivers wide-reaching benefits, even if some of those benefits take time to be realised.

Over the next 10 years, the district will change and grow. As communities evolve, pressure on open spaces will increase—whether from population growth, greater use, or external impacts. Council will need to invest in new spaces and activities to meet these changing needs,

while also maintaining and improving existing spaces so they continue to serve those who live, work, and play in the district.

Recent data shows that 66% of New Zealand households are using more free or low-cost activities than they were a year ago (2024)*. This includes walking, running, and spontaneous play in council-managed open spaces.

A long-term strategy must also be flexible. While we are beginning to understand the impacts of climate change and are planning for adaptation and decarbonisation, we don't yet fully know how these challenges will affect open space demand or location. Council is also developing a Local Growth Strategy. The amount and location of future open spaces will be influenced by this plan.

As communities continue to change, Council's focus must also expand to include emerging priorities like food systems and food security (sometimes referred to as food sovereignty)**, which could shape future open space needs and uses.

New recreation trends—such as the growing popularity of e-bikes—are enabling more people to stay active for longer. This reinforces the need for more green corridors for active transport and for integrating technology that supports active recreation in our open spaces.

All of these, and other changes, will require Council to be flexible, to manage and create spaces that are multi-use or are re-purposed in the intervening years until they are needed.

* Sport NZ FutureFit Conference presentation: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa, March 2025

** The term 'food sovereignty' refers to a food system in which the people who produce, distribute, and consume food also control the approach to and means of food production and distribution. Māori food sovereignty "empowers whānau and hapū driven food production" (Hutchings, 2015). *Food Sovereignty and Equitable Food Systems. A report for the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors in Aotearoa.* Centre for Social Impact. April 2023

In a not-too-distant future, residents are likely to use green open spaces in diverse ways that emphasise sustainability, community and well-being, reflecting the evolving relationship between residents and te taiao/nature. Some potential uses that will assume more importance and daily use in future years include:

- Recreational and well-being activities:
 - » Residents may engage in more outdoor fitness activities like yoga, meditation, cycling, or walking, with a focus on mental health and relaxation. Open spaces will likely include smart exercise equipment, nature trails, and areas for relaxation, promoting holistic wellness.
- Urban farming and community gardens:
 - » As the push for sustainability grows, green spaces could feature urban farms, vertical gardens, or community plots where residents can grow their own food. These spaces could help combat food deserts and foster a sense of community ownership.
- Biodiversity and education:
 - » Many parks and open spaces could be designed as eco-zones that support local biodiversity. They may serve educational purposes, with interactive displays or augmented reality (AR) experiences, teaching residents about ecology, sustainability, and climate change.
- Social and cultural gatherings:
 - » Parks and open spaces will likely become hubs for socialising, hosting events like concerts, festivals, outdoor movies, or cultural programmes. These areas might be digitally enhanced with smart lighting or sound systems integrated into the landscape.
- Sustainable infrastructure and energy:
 - » Open spaces could double as environmental infrastructure, incorporating solar panels, rainwater collection systems, or wind turbines. Residents might contribute to energy generation or engage in interactive systems that show real-time environmental data, blending nature with technology.
- Work and study environments:
 - » As remote work and flexible jobs remain the norm, open spaces might offer outdoor co-working zones, equipped with park-wide Wi-Fi and charging stations. Residents may choose to work or study in nature to improve creativity and focus.
- Climate resilience and adaptation:
 - » Open spaces and particularly green space and canopy cover will likely be designed to mitigate urban heat, manage stormwater, and provide cooling areas during extreme weather events. They will offer residents a refuge during heatwaves or floods, contributing to urban climate resilience.
- The changing nature of structured sports in the future may not need all the open space currently provided for Saturday sport.* An increased focus on individual activities and spontaneous play may change the entire concept of dedicated sports fields and will free up open space for other uses (the space is fit-for-purpose to whoever is using it at that time).

Whakatāne District's open spaces are crucial for enhancing te taiao/environmental health and quality of life for residents. Council's strategic priorities and the Strategy's principles will be the foundations encompassing this future view.

* Active Recreation for Rangitahi Plan, 2011-24. Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa. 2021

Note: This section contains AI generated content. AI generated content has been reviewed by the author for accuracy and edited/revised where necessary. The author is an accredited member of the Association of Professional Futurists (APF).

What you have told us so far

He aha tā koutou i kī mai

Feedback from people across the district, along with an analysis of how open spaces are used, has played a key role in shaping this strategy. Community input from the Long-Term Plan 2024–2034, the Rex Morpeth Recreation Hub Master Plan, Arts, Culture and Creativity Strategy, and Annual Resident Satisfaction Surveys have also informed its development.

These insights have helped shape the vision, principles, and strategic direction for action and delivery.

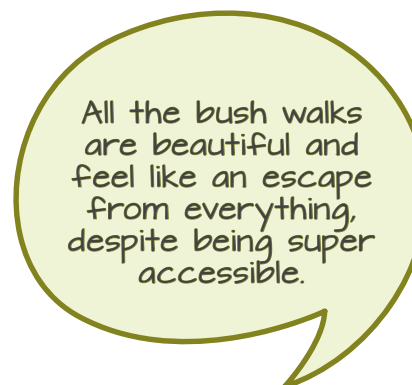
While there is general agreement that the district has plenty of open space, feedback highlighted the need for more equitable access, consistent quality across townships, and more high-quality, accessible playgrounds.*

Our open spaces are easy to access, we can bike and walk to access the activities we want to (if you live in town).

The way our parks are cared for makes accessing these spaces easier and accentuates their beauty and useability.

I value connection to te ao Māori and to te taiao.

Lots of open spaces and parks around our rohe that are multi use and not restricted in their purpose. Love it!



I love the natural beauty of our spaces. We have everything here. Rivers, beaches, forests, parks, lagoons.

There's heaps of space - we have lots of spaces and we need to keep them.

Maintenance and management of parks and reserves should be a priority.

Large spaces for whānau and friends to come together.

Add food sovereignty and climate change action into our spaces, e.g., bee pollinating areas, don't mow where you don't need to, create food forests.

Consider which spaces need high attention and which don't e.g., are there areas that could be planted in high carbon capture / low maintenance plants rather than regular mowing.

Green space promotes mental health and our community's mental health.

* A goal also targeted in Sport Bay of Plenty 'Spaces and Places Strategy' 2024



Council's role in Open Spaces

Te mahi a te Kaunihera i ngā tarawaha

Council's aim is to support the wellbeing of both the environment and communities, while delivering services that are financially responsible. Open spaces play a key role in achieving this, making their management an important responsibility for Council. Six key roles that Council should play have been identified in supporting open space outcomes now and over the life of this strategy.





Long Term Plan 2024–34

Te Mahere Pae Tawhiti 2024–34

The Council's Long-Term Plan 2024-2034 (LTP) sets out the Council's strategic direction including the vision of 'More life in life'. The Community Outcomes and the Strategic Priorities (below) together with the Strategy Principles, underpin the LTP and drive the priorities and projects the Council is proposing over the next 10 years.

The LTP to 2034 notes the following in relation to Parks and Reserves and Community Facilities:

Parks and reserves

Activities in this group

- ▲ Parks, Reserves and Gardens
- ▶ Cemeteries

LEVELS OF SERVICE KEY	
▲	Increase
▶	Maintain

The level of service for Parks, Reserves and Gardens will increase.
The level of service for Cemeteries will be maintained.

What we do and how we do it

This group of activities provides and maintains spaces and facilities for community use, recreation, and amenities. Additionally, it manages the planning, operation, and upkeep of five Council-owned cemeteries and one crematorium. Through these efforts, we aim to enhance the quality of life and wellbeing for both residents and visitors.

Key projects

- Awatapu Lagoon Wetland construction
- Cemetery expansion and site development for a new cemetery
- Accessible play spaces

Contribution to community outcomes



Strong, connected, interdependent, diverse communities



Integrating nature into our decision making



Constructively and collaboratively engaging with iwi, hapū and whānau

Significant negative effects

There are no significant negative effects associated with the activities in this activity group.

Challenges

- Ensuring communities are safe when using parks and reserves is a key challenge for Council, addressed by effective public messaging and community partnerships.
- Vandalism is an ongoing challenge that impacts on Social and environmental wellbeing. Council tries to address this problem with education and outreach where possible, and enforcement/penalties where necessary.
- The availability of land for a new cemetery in the district is an ongoing challenge and Council continues to consider all possibilities for an effective solution.

Alignment with strategic priorities



Enhancing the safety, wellbeing, and vibrancy of communities – *Me mātua whakanui i te marutau, te oranga, me te wana o ngā hapori*

- Invest wisely in recreation, events, and the arts to have a broader range of ‘things to do’ (especially for our youth).



Shaping a green District – *Kia toitū te rohe*

- Ensure Council’s decision-making and operations reflect our environmental priorities.



Strengthening relationships with iwi, hapū and whānau – *Me mātua whakawhanake i ngā kōtuituinga ā-iwi, ā-hapū, ā-whānau anō hoki*

- Work with iwi, hapū and whānau, to improve equity and wellbeing outcomes.

Key performance indicator

For this group, we have set the following performance measures and targets. We will report on these measures in our annual reports each year to show you how we are performing against the levels of service we have said you can expect from us.

Level of Service (What you can expect from us)	Performance Measures	Results for 2022/23	TARGET - Year 1 (2024/2025)	TARGET - Year 2 (2025/2026)	TARGET - Year 3 (2026/2027)	TARGET - Year 4+ (2027-34)
We provide a variety of quality recreational and community facilities that meet community needs.	User satisfaction with cemeteries and crematorium facilities.	New measure*	77%	77%	77%	77%
	User satisfaction with recreation facilities in the Whakatāne District (sports fields, park and reserves, playgrounds).	New measure*	77%	77%	77%	77%

*This is a new measure for the Long-Term Plan 2024-34. Therefore, we do not have results from previous years to compare our targets to.



Community Facilities

Activities in this group

- ▲ Halls
- ▶ Public Conveniences

LEVELS OF SERVICE KEY

▲	Increase
▶	Maintain

The level of service for Halls will increase.

The level of service for Public Conveniences will be maintained.

What we do and how we do it*

This group of activities provides the community with access to great venues and ensures public conveniences are always available and well maintained.

* Although facilities are not in the strategy scope, it is important to note the inter-connectedness of spaces and facilities as one experience across the district.

Key projects

- Renewal work for our rural and urban halls.
- Rex Morpeth Park and War Memorial Hall redevelopment
- Public conveniences upgrade programme

Who will be using our open spaces in the future

Mā wai ngā tarawaha e whai take

The Long-Term Plan 2024–2034 assumes that Whakatāne District’s population will grow to around 42,400 people by 2034, and that the median age will continue to rise. This Strategy is based on those assumptions.

Like other parts of New Zealand, Whakatāne District has seen faster-than-expected population growth. However, this growth varies across the district—some areas are growing, others are stable, and some are declining.

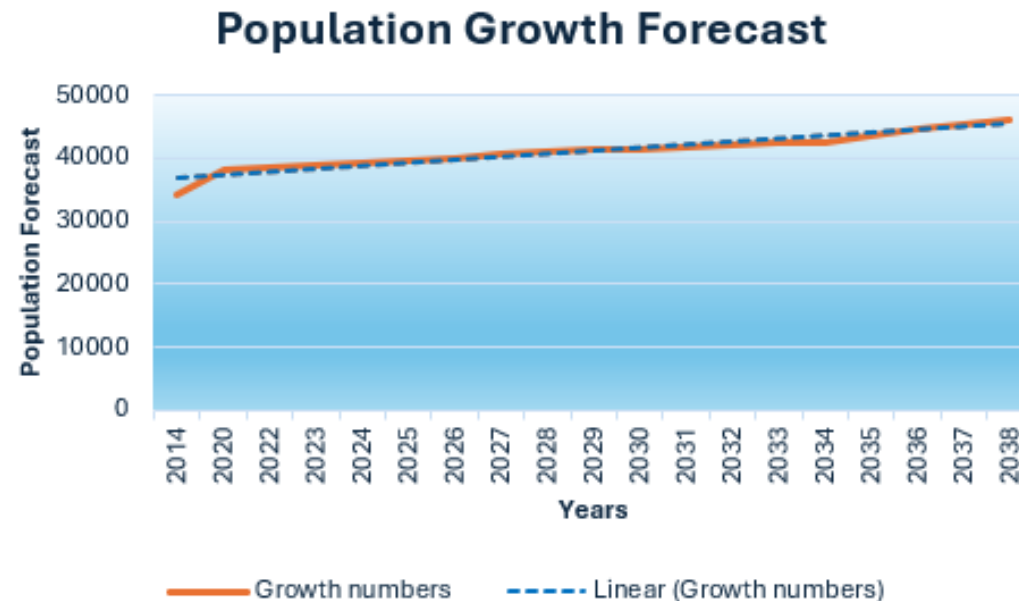
The proportion of older people in the district is expected to keep increasing, while younger age groups are expected to decline. By 2043, people aged 65 and over are expected to make up 30% of the population. This ageing population will affect demand for Council services, housing, healthcare, and aged care. It will also influence how open spaces are used, highlighting the need for accessible green corridors that support daily life and promote sustainability.

In contrast, the median age of Māori in the district is much younger i.e. 26.3 years compared to 39.8 years for the overall population. Nearly half of the Māori population is aged 14 and under, which creates demand for more housing and open spaces that support recreation and community connection. Ensuring access to quality open spaces in these areas is essential.

Work on the Whakatāne District Local Growth Strategy has identified areas with higher concentrations of either older or younger people. These insights will help Council plan open spaces that meet local needs, for example, green corridors for older residents, or playgrounds and basketball courts for younger people in the appropriate locations.



Whakatāne District population – forecasting assumption



Growth and demand planning allows for the identification and quantification of areas within the district that are likely to experience significant pressures. To assist in the development of this section a number of sources have provided important information around growth and demand drivers, which are considered key for the district's progression.*

Growth vs. demand *Whakatipuranga ki te tonotono*

Although Growth and Demand are considered together in the District Reserves Management Plan (DRMP) and this draft strategy, it is worth noting that they do have different implications regarding the ongoing function/delivery of those spaces.

Growth in relation to recreational activity, mainly refers to the growth in population, or areas that are growing due to new residential developments. These changes create a demand for new spaces, cemeteries, playgrounds and camping grounds etc. and it will be possible to determine where in the district these changes may occur.

Demand for facilities/services can be influenced by change in attitudes or in trends (e.g. more people want to ride their e-bike along green corridors, play ultimate-frisbee or do tai chi), seasonal fluctuations, changes in demographics etc. or moves towards using open spaces for environmental sustainability purposes and responses to climate change impacts.

Outcomes of the Regional Spatial Plan and the Local Growth Strategy will inform both growth and demand functions and therefore future provision.

* Source : for 2022 and 23: Subnational population estimates (TA, SA2), by age and sex, at 30 June 1996-2023 (2023 boundaries) (stats.govt.nz)

Key focus: Mahi tahi – working together

Arotahinga matua: Te mahi tahi

Community Plans

Ngā Mahere Hapori

Planning over a long timeframe is best considered in the context of local knowledge, local aspirations and local sweat. Whilst an agency such as the Council can provide support, oversight and professional expertise, it is the local community that know best what is required, where and often how. Council's role becomes one of facilitator and that of ensuring equity across the district – equity of access and equity of quality experiences. Locally developed Community Plans such as those in Awatapu, Matatā and Edgumbe should be used as a touchstone of future open space development. To a large extent, this is already recognised in the Council's District Reserve Management Plan which states:

'To a large degree the direction for the future development of open space is based on the views expressed by the general public'.

A Community Plan, a mechanism that Council endorse and facilitate, is a way to capture and prioritise the aspirations of area-based communities and provides a pathway forward to achieve those goals for open spaces. These plans are curated by the community, for the community through collective action, engagement and planning. Although each plan relies on a group of committed members to volunteer their time to keep the momentum going, community plans are a way of mobilising the sense of autonomy and ownership for a community to get things done for themselves, creating resilience. The process is designed to ensure that whatever planning process the community takes, it's a successful one.

Community Plans are an avenue for Council to partner with communities and help assist in supporting them towards achieving their goals. As part of this Strategy, Council commits to working with Community Plans and the process in ensuring open spaces are relevant to communities and are fit-for-purpose for those communities.

Key focus: Sustainability

Arotahinga matua: Toitūtanga

Climate Change and Open Spaces

Te Huringa Āhuarangi me ngā tarawaha

In 2024, Council adopted the Whakatāne District Climate Change Pathway – a strategy to help understand, reduce, and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Climate change is about more than just weather. It affects many of the things we value in this district – like swimming in rivers, protecting cultural and historic sites, enjoying the bush, fishing, growing food, and even the safety of our homes. It influences our way of life, our economy, our health, and our environment – and it will have a direct impact on how we plan and manage open spaces.

What we know for sure is that the climate of the future will be very different from what we experience today.



Climate Change Pathway Principles | Ngā Kaupapa Take Āhuarangi



Act with urgency

Ka mahi nonoi



Listen, learn and adapt

Ka whakarongo, ka ako, ka urutau



Acknowledge, care for, and support those most affected

*Ka taunaki i a rātou kua pā mārika
i ngā take huringa āhuarangi*



Be part of the solution

Ka āwhina i te whakautu



Care for and protect the environment

Ka manaaki, ka tiaki i te taiao



Build resilience to a changing climate

*Ka whakakaha i te aumangea
ki te huringa o te āhuarangi*



Think and act long term

*Ka whakaaro pae tawhiti,
ka mahi pae tawhiti*

The adopted Whakatāne District Tree Strategy* clearly highlights the vital role that open spaces and trees play in our response to climate change. As the strategy notes, future climate conditions are expected to bring more extreme temperatures and weather events, placing greater stress on both existing trees and new plantings. To ensure long-term resilience, it is essential that climate impacts are factored into decisions about where and how we plant. Well-planned tree planting can help offset many of the negative effects of climate change—by cooling urban areas, absorbing excess stormwater, supporting biodiversity, and capturing carbon. In this way, the district's open spaces and the trees within them are not just environmental assets—they are critical infrastructure for a more climate-resilient district.

* Whakatāne District Tree Strategy Ngā Taonga a Tāne. Whakatāne DC. 2024



Key Projects: A 10-year plan *Ngā Waitara matua: Mahere ia tekau tau*

The key projects and priority actions outlined below represent targeted, high-impact investments that go beyond Council’s day-to-day management of open spaces. While many operational activities continue to support and maintain the district’s parks, reserves, and recreation areas, these projects are strategic in nature — directly aligned with the objectives of this strategy and Council’s Long Term Plan 2024-34. They are designed to unlock long-term value, address identified community needs, and enhance the quality, accessibility, and resilience of Council’s open space network.

Key projects (KP) – 10 years	Long Term Plan activity area
Awatapu Lagoon Wetland (KP) Restoring the lagoon to support water quality and biodiversity through new wetland features.	Parks and Reserves
New Cemetery – Site Development (KP) Developing a new cemetery to meet future community needs.	Parks and Reserves
Accessible Play Spaces – Across The District Improving and creating play spaces that are inclusive and accessible for all children.	Parks and Reserves
Rex Morpeth Recreation Hub Redevelopment (KP) Enhancing and upgrading facilities to improve sports, culture and recreational offerings.	Community Facilities
Eve Rimmer Carpark (PA) Improving carpark layout and access at this key sports facility.	Parks and Reserves
Murupara Parks Improvements (PA) Upgrading parks in Murupara to better serve local needs.	Parks and Reserves
Maraetōtara Improvements (PA) Enhancing park facilities to support greater access and use.	Parks and Reserves
Southern Regeneration – Murupara (PA) Revitalising open spaces as part of wider community regeneration.	Parks and Reserves
Southern Regeneration – Minginui (PA) Improving local open spaces to support wellbeing and connection.	Parks and Reserves
Wairaka Park Upgrade (PA) Upgrading this well-used park to improve access, play, and community use.	Parks and Reserves
Tāneatua Cemetery Expansion (PA) Expanding the cemetery to ensure future capacity.	Parks and Reserves

Turning strategy into action

Ka huri tēnei rautaki hei mahi

This Strategy sets a bold and future-focused vision for Whakatāne District’s open space network. To make this vision real and measurable, Council must now translate it into a targeted, deliverable programme of projects, partnerships, and actions.

This section sets out how the Strategy will be implemented, monitored, and adapted over time. It includes a clear planning and prioritisation framework, defines the three delivery phases over the next decade, and outlines how Council will track progress to ensure open spaces continue to meet the needs of our people, environment, and place.

From strategic priorities to project pipeline

Council will use the vision, principles, and strategic priorities in this Strategy to develop a consistent and structured project pipeline. This will allow for clear alignment between community outcomes and the way open spaces are delivered and managed.

What this will involve *Ngā mahi e whai ake nei*

Audit and baseline review (2026–2027)

Council will complete a full district-wide review of all open space assets. This will assess the condition, function, classification, and accessibility of each site, building a comprehensive picture of current supply and performance.

Strategic alignment review

Each project and investment will be assessed against the Strategy’s core principles, focusing on:

- Environmental resilience and biodiversity
- Social inclusion and accessibility
- Cultural connection and place-based identity
- Climate responsiveness and low-carbon design
- Dual-purpose functionality (e.g. flood protection and recreation)

Understanding community need

By integrating spatial population and demographic data (e.g. age, deprivation, household makeup), Council will identify where new, or improved open space provision is needed most. Particular attention will be given to future growth areas, intense population distribution, and ageing communities.

Spatial analysis to support decisions

Spatial tools will provide an evidence base to guide investment and delivery. These tools include:

Tool	Purpose
Provision mapping	Identify areas that lack sufficient access to open space, based on a 500m or 10-minute walk threshold.
Equity heatmaps	Combine demographic and socio-economic data to identify areas of low service or historical underinvestment.
Demand forecasting	Use growth and trend data to anticipate future needs across the district.
Environmental overlays	Map sensitive areas or opportunities for nature-based infrastructure and dual-purpose spaces.
Usage data	Capture actual use through digital tools, community surveys, and observational studies to ensure planning reflects lived experience.

Prioritisation framework

An investment and prioritisation framework will be applied to guide the Long Term Plan, Annual Plan, and supporting Asset Management Plans. Each open space project will be ranked according to:

- Strategic fit
- Community impact
- Climate and environmental value
- Deliverability and readiness
- Co-investment or partnership potential

This framework will create a live and adaptable project pipeline that ensures Council is always delivering where the need, opportunity and alignment is strongest.

Implementation phases

Ngā whakahaerenga o tēnei mahi

To manage delivery over the 10-year horizon, Council will adopt a phased approach aligned to long-term planning and monitoring cycles.

PHASE ONE: Foundations (2025–2027)

WĀHANGA TUATAHI: Ngā Tūāpapa

Goal: Establish the foundation for strategic delivery, monitoring, and spatial planning.

Focus areas:

- Develop the Open Spaces Provision and Action Plan by 2026
- Complete district-wide spatial mapping and baseline assessment
- Embed open space provision targets in the District Plan and Reserve Management Plans
- Strengthen relationships with mana whenua through co-design

- Initiate targeted pilot projects for nature-based design, food sovereignty, or accessibility improvements.

Key deliverables:

- Action Plan adopted
- Embed open space criteria in Activity Management Plans
- Provision maps publicly available
- Advance Rex Morpeth Recreation Hub project in alignment with Long Term Plan
- Support Sport Bay of Plenty-aligned sub-regional facility upgrades e.g. lighting, to support active recreation
- Pilots launched in at least three locations

PHASE TWO: Expansion and activation (2027–2031)

WĀHANGA TUARUA: Whakawhānui me te whakamahi

Goal: Scale up investment and respond to demand in growth and equity-priority areas.

Focus areas:

- Deliver open space improvements in high-growth and underserved communities
- Expand play infrastructure, green corridors, and shade planting
- Upgrade underused sites to better reflect local needs (e.g. informal play, exercise, cultural connection)
- Embed dual-purpose functions into open space redevelopment
- Formalise collaborative delivery models with sports groups, schools, and trusts
- Align funding applications to Sport BOP's hierarchy framework to secure external contributions

Key deliverables:

- 70% of key projects from the Long Term Plan delivered or under construction
- Demonstrated increase in equitable open space access
- Deliver dual-purpose infrastructure (e.g. stormwater and play)
- Unlock matched-funding opportunities with Sport BOP and central government for recreation investment

PHASE THREE: Optimisation and innovation (2031–2035)

WĀHANGA TUATORU: Āhuatanga me te auahatanga

Goal: Refine the network, remove duplication or inefficiencies, and embed innovation into design and delivery.

Focus areas:

- Reassess provision standards in light of use trends, population shifts, and climate pressures
- Evaluate LTP and Sport BOP outcomes to repurpose or divest surplus facilities based on regional value, where they no longer serve a clear community or environmental function
- Scale up digital tools to track use, temperature, and ecological performance
- Pilot new models for community stewardship (e.g. community leases or guardianship agreements)
- Apply regenerative design and blue-green infrastructure at a district-wide scale

Key deliverables:

- 60% of open space network meets provision and quality targets and 90% within 30-years
- Smart infrastructure e.g. sensor lighting, in use in at least 30% of open spaces
- Strategy formally reviewed and updated for next planning cycle

Supporting key focus areas: working together and sustainability E taunaki ana i ngā take matua: mahi tahi me te toitūtanga

This implementation framework is designed not just to deliver physical outputs but to fully embody the Strategy's two key focus areas: **mahi tahi (working together)** and **toitūtanga (sustainability)**.

Mahi tahi | Working together

Successful delivery of this Strategy will rely on genuine, place-based relationships that reflect shared ownership, trust, and co-design. Council will:

- **Work with mana whenua** early in project development, including through cultural landscape planning, shared decision-making, and co-design opportunities
- **Support community-led planning and delivery**, especially through endorsed Community Plans, encouraging local input into design, use, and maintenance
- **Convene cross-sector partners** — including schools, NGOs, health providers, and sports organisations — to leverage funding, share resources, and create multifunctional spaces that serve a wider purpose

- **Enable volunteer and community stewardship**, by creating clearer pathways for locals to contribute to the care and enhancement of open spaces.

By embedding these approaches across all stages — from strategy to design, to delivery — Council will ensure open spaces reflect the values, stories, and aspirations of the people who use and care for them.

Toitūtanga | Sustainability

Toitūtanga is embedded throughout this implementation approach — from how we plan, to what we prioritise, to how we deliver. Council will:

- **Prioritise nature-based and climate-resilient designs** in all new projects, including urban greening, canopy enhancement, and water-sensitive infrastructure
- **Apply a carbon lens** to decision-making, favouring low-carbon materials, low-maintenance landscapes, and designs that support active transport
- **Enable biodiversity and ecological recovery** by repurposing underutilised land for habitat restoration, native planting, and green corridors
- **Incentivise dual-purpose infrastructure**, such as stormwater parks, food forests, or renewable energy integrated into open space networks

Every project will be assessed not just for its function or form, but for its contribution to a more resilient, climate-conscious, and intergenerationally valuable open space system.

Monitoring and adaptive management

Aroturuki me te whakahaere urutau

Delivering this Strategy is not a one-off task, but an ongoing commitment to learning, adjusting, and improving. To support this, Council will track progress annually and review the Strategy every three years.

Performance will be monitored using the following indicators:

- **Quantity:** amount and distribution of open space per resident
- **Quality:** community satisfaction, maintenance levels, and amenity value
- **Accessibility and equity:** proximity and inclusiveness of spaces for all communities
- **Use and functionality:** actual use across different groups and activities
- **Climate and environmental resilience:** tree canopy, stormwater management, biodiversity indicators

An *implementation dashboard* will be maintained and shared with elected members, partners, and the community to track tangible progress.

After each formal review (every three years), Council will update the project pipeline, adjust priorities, and reallocate funding where necessary to respond to:

- Emerging needs
- New development
- Climate or environmental events
- Partnership opportunities

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