



A small piece of open land on Whangaparaoa Peninsula, north of Auckland, serves the very different needs of a community, ecologists and council's stormwater management responsibilities.

It isn't always easy to balance a growing city's need for increased housing density with the desire to provide recreational amenities for those new residents – and be mindful of the ecological imperatives.

But when public and private stakeholders from all sides work together, the results speak for themselves. And, with a bit of creative thinking, a relatively small plot of land can deliver tremendous outcomes on all fronts.

A 2700 square metre piece of open space on Whangaparaoa Peninsula, north of Auckland, is a case in point.

To residents of the nearby Mariner Rise residential development, it's a pretty bit of wetland greenspace just outside the windows, and a pleasant walk through to the nearby bus stop. For the neighbourhood children, it's the opportunity for natural outdoor play.

It's also a flood and stormwater retention basin, and part of a larger stream restoration project that will bring ongoing ecological and community benefits.

"It's the gift that keeps on giving," says Julia Parfitt, chairperson of the Hibiscus and Bays Local Board.

The land, just off Whangaparaoa Road above Arkles Bay on the southern side of the peninsula, had long been mown as an ad-hoc reserve, and was zoned for residential use. There were two stormwater drains running through the space to deal with nearby road and residential run-off.

In 2009, the then-Rodney District Council approved the

land for sale subject to further public consultation; and in 2014 options for the layout of the development were presented to the local community, iwi and Hibiscus and Bays Local Board.

Auckland Council Property (now Panuku Development Auckland) received feedback from the local community about what they wanted to see and what they were concerned about. This was incorporated into a plan that – along with residential development – resulted in the creation of a reserve with an adjacent wetland to address stormwater management.

"A big piece of the puzzle was a desire expressed by mana whenua for fauna to be protected and relocated as part of the project development outcomes. They wanted to be confident that the quality of water moving through the area would be improved," says Allan Young, development director at Panuku.

In July 2016, resource consent was granted to McConnell Property to deliver 60 two-, three-, and four-bedroom homes, along with the wetland reserve and playground.

The site presented challenges, as it sits at a confluence of streams where flooding needs to be managed to protect the nearby homes. The project included retention of the two existing streams (one permanent and one intermittent), as well as a new stream diversion within the reserve, which also functions as a flood retention basin.

"In many ways, the reserve site was a hole in the ground," says landscape architect Mark Lewis, of Boffa Miskell. "But there are views of the distant ocean from the top edges; and



at the bottom, the two streams come together and create an island. So, it presented an opportunity to make something quite interesting, in terms of an outdoor area where kids could explore and interact with the wetland and stream environment.”

It was important to Julia Parfitt that, along with water management, the site delivered some form of open space.

“The community perceived that, although it was good to have the greater housing options that development brings, there was an overall loss of greenspace.”

Transforming the reserve from a grass slope with streams and a few mature trees to an amenity for the community first involved dealing with the ecology. As part of the stream restoration, fish and lizards were surveyed and relocated, and the wetlands were planted to bring birds into the reserve and provide habitat for insects and lizards. Stream-margin sedges and wetland rushes were used along the water’s edge.

Where the streams meet, they form an island which can be seen from the banks on either side. The space can be also viewed from the surrounding houses, a community building and bus stop; as well as by children walking to and from school.

Julia wanted to be sure the playground catered to the children who passed through the space on their way to the bus and to school.

“My experience has been that playground designs tend to cater for very young children. So, they often are a space that older primary- and intermediate-school-aged children find boring. I like the way the designers looked at the demographics – which showed that most of the kids were eight years old, and up – and they made a place for them.”

This recreation space uses the water as a feature to cater to those slightly older kids – it allows them to use their imagination and to interact with nature. Play items were placed on the island to draw children into the space, with many differently challenging ways for adults and children to reach the island: across boardwalks, or scrambling over logs and stepping stones.

“Not long after the playground opened, a concerned neighbour rang our office and reported that the local kids were playing in the stream and moving some of the rocks,” says

McConnell Property’s development manager Matt Anderson.

Far from being concerned, Matt took the call as a positive sign. “It was always the intention that this would be a place where kids can get their feet wet and their hands dirty. If they’re playing in the stream, that tells me that we’ve got it right – the kids feel like it’s their space to explore.”

Allan Young has another story that underlines the unexpected benefits of the project’s successful integration of ecological considerations.

“One of the best outcomes of the project we noticed while on a site visit. A civil contractor found an eel on another part of the site. With part of the stream restored, he was able to collect the eel and move it to a place where it was out of harm’s way.”

The retention of the streams and the diversion at Mariner Rise form part of a mitigation transaction that will result in the daylighting of a waterway at nearby Stanmore Bay.

An historical stream running through D’Oyly Reserve will be returned from an underground pipe to a more natural state. This will support plant life, provide a haven for birds, improve the passage for fish, and act as a natural filter to prevent pollutants from reaching the sea.

D’Oyly Reserve backs onto Stanmore Bay School so potential for future development exists within this project such as outdoor classrooms, cycle- and walkways, and additional play areas.

Mark Lewis says, “It’s quite a long stream connecting various communities, so rather than doing these mitigation and remediation projects piecemeal, there’s substantially more ecological benefit by treating it holistically.”

Along with the recreational and ecological benefits, the professional and cross-community relationships that have come out of this project have carried through to other aspects of the community.

“Procuring the plants locally, and using local vendors and contractors has been very important,” says Julia. “The project is an example of the benefits that can come from various parts of Auckland Council working together with a private business. Channels have opened up – quite literally, in terms of the waterways – but also between stakeholders, community groups and the companies that have helped make this happen. **LG**