



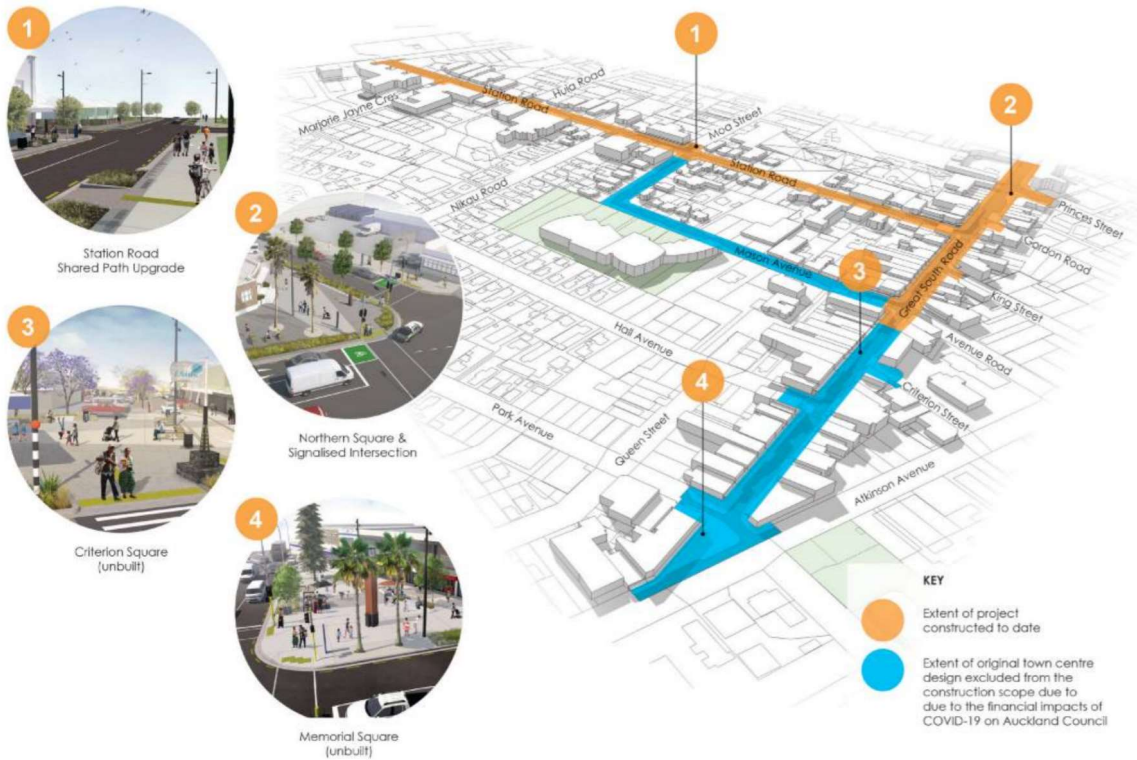
STREETSCAPE UPGRADE PROJECT

AUCKLAND streetscapes

A Town Centre Streetscape Upgrade project has provided the suburb of Otahuhu with a new town centre that reflects its unique character. By **Kathleen Kinney**, Boffa Miskell and photos by Jay Farnworth.



STREETSCAPE UPGRADE PROJECT



In 2014, Auckland Transport and the Auckland Council set a long-term programme of coordinated investment and actions in Otahuhu to bring about transformational social, environmental and physical change in the area.

The Otahuhu Town Centre Streetscape Upgrade project would include physical upgrades of below and above ground infrastructure, along with safety and aesthetic improvements along approximately 1.5 kilometres of streets in the town centre.

Boffa Miskell was appointed to the project in December 2016. The team of landscape architects and urban designers was tasked to lead a design development process involving residents, business owners and community representatives, including those from local iwi. The subsequent design needed to reinforce a sense of place in Otahuhu through a palette of materials, street furniture and planting that tied the streets together and reflected the history and cultural diversity of the old Auckland suburb.

“In order to achieve the principal objectives, we set out six design strategies,” says project lead Yoko Tanaka. “These articulated our approach to the transformation of the town centre and provided us with a set of points of reference.”

The opportunities offered by the overlaying of the suburbs’ Maori and European history with the very visible and vibrant cultural expression of the strong Pasifika community, and the more recent infusion from south-east Asia all contribute to Otahuhu’s rich and culturally diverse community.

Kathleen Wilson (from local Auckland iwi Te Akitai Waiohau) sat on the design team.

“We’ve worked with Yoko on other projects, so we began with the knowledge that she and her team shared the desire to partner in a meaningful way,” Kathleen says.

“We saw the results of our korero [discussions] as each updated version of the design was brought to the table, and that evolution of shared ideas is what genuine engagement looks like. It was clear the agencies involved in that early co-design process were committed to partnership.”

At the start of the project, existing streets were vehicular-dominant with wide carriageways and minimal or unsafe pedestrian crossing opportunities. Narrow footpaths, just enough for one person to walk on right next to heavy vehicles, typified much of the pedestrian environment of Station Road.

The design team reviewed various criteria required against the available width of the Station Road corridor and reserve to improve the walking and cycling experience on the street. A shared path was the preferred design as it met Auckland Transport project aspirations and was a balanced solution that overcame competing demands.

Elsewhere, widened footpaths, increased public amenity, safer crossing facilities and revised traffic signal phasing improve connectivity and legibility through the town centre.

The existing palm trees had on-going maintenance issues and health and safety concerns, although they contributed to strengthening the Pasifika culture in the area. Selective removals were discussed with the Auckland Council arborist. A total of 44 native trees were planted to increase the overall number of trees in the town centre. The design team investigated underground service locations against proposed tree planting in order to minimise present and future conflicts.

A stormwater catchment study was carried out to identify the requirement of below-ground infrastructure upgrade and suitability of various water-sensitive design techniques including increased permeable surfaces, gross pollutant





traps, bio-filtration gardens, geocellular tree pit systems and proprietary filtration devices.

“From a mana whenua [local Maori territorial interest] perspective, in an urban environment, stormwater solutions are constrained by the spaces we don’t have,” says Wilson. “We can’t have swales and wetlands, so we need to work with technology and be innovative. Replacing like-for-like is pointless, so we questioned existing thinking and we challenged the team to find the best solution within the opportunities that existed.”

The design team explored various options and collaborated with Auckland Council’s Healthy Waters, council maintenance and design teams. The Auckland-first prototype bio-filtration garden forebay catch pit design was developed and installed in Otahuhu Town Centre.

“We developed an improved bio-filtration garden forebay design that would filter the bulk of floating rubbish and sediment out of incoming water from the road before it entered the garden, thus reducing the maintenance requirements,” says Boffa Miskell landscape architect Alex Smith.

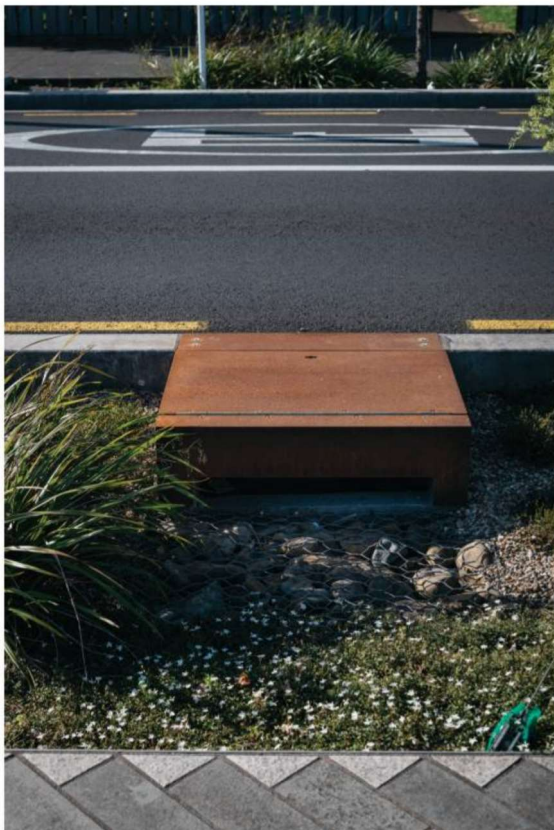
“From Day One of installation, the units have been effective in their job of catching rubbish and sediment. The ongoing success of these units will continue to be monitored with Healthy Waters to see if they can be implemented elsewhere.”

One of the key project objectives was ‘Celebrating Culture’: to integrate and ensure the celebration of diversity in the public realm and restore those aspects of cultural history in the landscape.

In a historical context, it is widely known that Paa on Otahuhu Pa (Mt Richmond), Te Apunga o Tainui (McLennan Hills) were intensely occupied and the rich abundance of natural resources in the surrounding area helped ensure the survival of successive generations of historic Maori settlements.

The upgrade has made an incredible difference, says Richette Rodger, Otahuhu Business Association manager.

“That stretch of Station Road wasn’t nice at all,” she says. “The pavement was broken, the lighting was poor; it wasn’t a place you wanted to walk along. And, because of that, the





interchange and the town centre were effectively separated.

“But now it looks lovely. It’s great for the residents and has made a big difference in the perception of Otahuhu Town Centre; and that’s been a real benefit for local businesses.”

Richette says that those businesses and landlords along the upgraded stretch of street, have taken notice and looked at themselves. “They’ve looked at their own premises and done some painting or street-front renovations; and have really taken ownership of the area outside their building, as far as maintenance goes.”

That ripple-effect was an intended outcome of the project, and although it has manifested along the portion of the project that has been completed, it hasn’t happened in those areas that were excluded from the construction scope in 2020, due to the pandemic and reprioritisation of funding.

For both Richette Rodger and Kathleen Wilson, there’s a sense of frustration.

“Some amazing features were planned but haven’t eventuated,” says Richette. “The last investment in upgrading Otahuhu was in 1993, so this was a long time coming; and seeing the positive impact of the parts that have been completed ... I would love to see this project finished the way it was meant to be.”

Kathleen agrees. “The front end of the project was awesome. But the back end? Not so much; because it hasn’t been completely finished. So, although it’s much better than it was, the outcome isn’t 100 percent what we envisioned.”

For now, the Otahuhu community, led by the business association, continue to be the guardian of the upgrade and the feeling of pride and renewal that helped lighten the on-going effects of Covid on the local economy.

Yoko Tanaka says she is looking to the future. “There is overwhelming support from the Local Board, the Business Association and the community, which has been submitted.

“The ‘blueprint’, which is what we’ve learned from the community engagement, and the resulting designs and construction elements is all in place to quickly re-start; so we are hopeful that the project will be completed.” **LG**

INNOVATIONS

A unique (and award-winning) shift in effective pre-treatment and management of gross pollutants was achieved in the stormwater improvements within the Otahuhu Town Centre upgrade project.

A number of bio-filtration gardens were installed along the newly-refurbished streets to that were a unique shift in effective gross pollutant pre-treatment and management.

During the design phase, the client (Auckland Council) challenged the design team to develop an improved rain garden forebay design that would filter the bulk of floating rubbish and sediment out of the incoming water from the road before it entered the rain garden and reduce maintenance. A catchpit type forebay design is the first prototype to be installed in Auckland. Surface water enters the catchpit via a precast concrete kerb entry unit and flows under a plastic baffle within a concrete catch pit; trapping floating rubbish and allowing sediment to settle. The catchpit is secured with a hinged steel lid and will be maintained by opening the lid and the use of a vacuum truck. This involves less maintenance time, and is more effective than collecting rubbish once it is within the raingarden.

Precast concrete was used for the catch pit structure; and Corten steel was used for the cover and kerb lintel. Precast concrete was chosen for its durability and low maintenance requirements. These precast units were paired with the Corten steel covers for safety and to conceal the rubbish and water. The tinted concrete finishes and Corten steel of the units blend well into the material palette of the overall upgrade, in which a range of Firth concrete mixes and finishes were used.

From day one of installation the units have been effective in their job of catching rubbish and sediment. The ongoing success of these units will continue to be monitored with Healthy Waters to see if they can be implemented elsewhere.

The catchpit concrete mould was made in steel so Auckland Council can produce more quantities for future projects.