

## **Activity Planning -2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Strong Communities - Parks and Reserves**

### **The main matter that the Council is being asked to consider is....**

- Maintaining the current levels of service for the Parks and Reserves activity.

### **1. Council direction**

The direction provided to staff by the Council in December 2010 was that to:

- Retain existing levels of service.
- Transition from sole recreational facility provider to partner/advocate.
- Support a range of recreation and leisure opportunities that this activity offers.
- Implementation of co-management regimes.
- Strengthen significant stakeholder relationships.
- Look at options for rationalising the asset base.

### **2. What the activity does**

The primary role of the Parks and Reserves activity is to provide land for recreational and leisure purposes. This is through providing parks for a variety of activities, including community activities, active recreation, amenity value, casual use and a limited degree of conservation. Some may also contain playgrounds, toilets and picnic areas.

### **3. What the legislations says**

The management of assets located on the reserves must be consistent with the Council's Reserve Management Plans, a requirement of the Reserves Act 1977.

Apart from being a statutory requirement under the Reserves Act, The Reserves Management Plan provides a framework for detail on how the reserve is to be managed.

The Reserves Act includes a requirement for customer consultation in development of a management plan and sets requirements for leasing, classification, use of land, and application of funds. Reserve Management Plans have been adopted by Council for most of the reserves in the District.

Complimentary policies include the District Tree Policy and tree master plans for every community.

Key principles in the strategy that influence this activity plan are:

- Greater emphasis on co-location and shared facilities replacing dispersed and duplicated facilities.
- Greater emphasis on establishing partnerships to maximize community benefits.
- Targeted renewal and refurbishment funding.
- Improved communication and co-ordination between stakeholders.
- Redevelopment of compromise facilities to improve functional performance.

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### 4. Proposed activity objective

The proposed activity objective for the Parks and Reserves activity is:

*To provide of a mix of park and reserve facilities in keeping with the natural character of the District.*

NB: this is the same as the objective stated in the 2009-2019 Ten Year Plan.

### 5. How this activity currently would contribute to the Council Outcomes

The activity will contribute to the achievement of the Council Outcomes as follows:

Council Outcome	The Parks and Reserves activity...
A prosperous district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps maximise economic opportunities (e.g. tourism) from the Peninsula's natural setting.</li> </ul>
A liveable district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports a range of recreation and leisure opportunities, and contributes to community health.</li> <li>• Contributes to community and cultural amenities and opportunities by providing spaces and facilities.</li> <li>• Promotes a local sense of place through provision of local spaces for recreation and relaxation.</li> </ul>
A clean and green district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balances environmental protection with accessibility.</li> <li>• Provides for recreation and enjoyment of the Peninsula.</li> </ul>

The Coromandel Peninsula Blueprint places expectations on the Parks and Reserves Activity to develop a district wide open space network with emphasis on degraded coastal access being improved and new coastal access secured ahead of development pressures. The Activity is expected to align funding and service provision with the preferred settlement pattern in the Blueprint, which is primarily focused on the three main hubs of Thames, Whitianga and Whangamata.

### 6. Things to be aware of

Service Delivery mechanism review and possible separation between Parks and Reserves and Leisure facilities, including integrated multisport facilities.

- Long-term option to look at the disposal of surplus assets - greater efficiencies.
- Parks and Reserves are noted as strategic assets in the Council's current Significant Policy.
- The significant Department of Conservation administered land holding within the District and the role that plays in providing for more passive and remote type recreational activities (eg tramping).
- The role Crown forests play in providing for recreational activities (eg mountain biking) and that the future ownership of this land is likely to change as part of the Treaty Settlement process.
- The level of parks and reserves provision (both land and assets) varies greatly between communities.

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### **7. A word from our community....**

- The 2010 community prioritisation survey shows that "providing and looking after Parks and Reserves sits within the top five priority activities as determined by the community.
- In the 2010 community survey, overall 87% of residents and non-resident ratepayers were satisfied with the Parks and Reserves in the District.
- The Parkcheck Satisfaction Survey results from the last 4 years indicate that the importance of parks and reserves is only slightly higher than the satisfaction rating. This indicates that there is a slight under-delivery of the service, but not significant enough to raise the service level standard. Some components (e.g. shading) have shown to have had much higher importance than satisfaction, meaning that there is possibly an under-delivery of that item. However, overall the service levels for each component are being delivered at or slightly above expectations, which means that service levels are largely adequate.

### **8. Strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats**

- A strength is that the parks and reserves assets are provided using standardised specifications. This means that maintenance has been streamlined, as has depreciation of assets.
- Parks/ open spaces and Leisure Facilities can all be considered community facilities. However, a weakness is that Indoor leisure facilities are being considered for management as part of the Parks activity. Leisure Facilities such as indoor recreation centres and gyms require specialist management techniques which have little in common with managing an "open space" parks asset. The Parks and Reserves activity should be thought of as the management of mostly outdoor amenity space leisure facilities, on the other hand, are predominantly "buildings" based assets. The "coalface" skill and knowledge requirements to successfully manage both types of asset are, for the main, mutually exclusive. Leisure facility management skills more closely align with those required to manage halls, libraries, and civic centres. This will become an important consideration as the leisure facilities are implemented in coming years.
- There is also weakness in that it has still not been decided at what level will maintenance and depreciation be costed and charged - are Leisure Facilities District or Local facilities? Good cases can be made both ways and in the case of the Thames Library it is partially District wide funded. Levels of service have also not been set for leisure facilities.
- There is an issue with perceived versus actual service level standards for maintenance. At present the maintenance service levels are standard across the district, and have been annually proven to be correct through the Parkcheck visitor / reserve user survey. For some time now, some communities for some locations have been indicating that maintenance service levels should be improved (eg Buffalo beach cleaning / grooming). Improvements can be enacted, however, with improvement of maintenance will come an associated cost. There is also some perception that local contractors could be used. This may be the case, however the cost of health and safety compliance, provision of maintenance systems, and the significant investment to obtain plant items may prove to be out of reach for most. It should also be noted that the current contracts employ a totally local work force, service all plant locally, and use local sub-contractors.
- There could be revenue opportunities regarding concessions and camping on reserves. Reserves currently operate 4 different types of concessions as

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defined in the Reserves Act - Leases, Licenses, Permits, and Easements. All concessions must be in accordance with the purpose of the reserve. There are currently around 100 leases on reserves. Most are with Community Groups and generate comparatively little revenue. Growth has occurred in Licenses and Permits. Permits are issued for events and are charged. Seven years ago, no permits were issued, now there are approximately 400 issued per year. This is likely to continue to rise as the economy improves. There are currently around 30 licences for businesses to operate on reserves. Capacity is partly driven by demand and partly by what is permitted in reserve management plans. With regard to camping on reserves, it should be noted that all reserve management plans currently prohibit camping on reserves (except designated camp grounds), or allow for it and are awaiting some reserves to be identified. Despite the ban on camping. Many clubs take the opportunity to obtain permits for visitors to camp adjacent to club rooms when they have tournaments and events (for example, Mercury Bay Bowling Club, Thames Small Gauge Railway). Clubs should be encouraged to do this, especially during the Rugby World Cup period.

- Opportunity to reduce maintenance with removal of solid waste bins. Bins are supplied in many reserves, and are funded through the Solid Waste activity, not the reserves activity. There may be an opportunity to save costs by removing bins or reducing other levels of service from neighbourhood reserves in total or for part of the year. It is likely, however, that the saving may not be that great. There is often demand from customers to increase bin numbers in open space areas, and there would be some risk associated with removing some, with regard to increased litter levels. Most bin management is completed in conjunction with another task in the field, so the "other task" would still need to be undertaken.
- There is an issue that the Blueprint LABs and the Reserve Management Plans are not entirely consistent. The reserve management plans have in some cases not been included in the LAB's. Because the reserve management plans are statutory, the priority should be given to those projects and in cases where the LAB's directions are not covered by Reserve Management Plans then the Reserve Management plans will need to be amended (depending on the change it may be only a partial amendment).
- An opportunity exists to work with other agencies (eg DOC) and community groups to provide further efficiencies in delivering services.

### 9. Proposed levels of service options

The proposed level of service for the Parks and Reserves activity are as follows:

Level of Service	This means...
I enjoy using the parks and reserves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfied Parks users.</li> </ul>
My parks are maintained to standards which are fit for purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well presented and attractive parks and reserves.</li> </ul>
I have access to parks to use for any occasion or purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable variety and quantity of parks are provided.</li> </ul>

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### 10. How is this activity managed?

Parks and reserves are managed and controlled at the District level with input via the local community boards. Management is completed by Council staff, with minimal input from contractors.

Maintenance services are provided by way of contract with specific maintenance requirements set in accordance with the level of service statement for the particular community board area.

### 11. What do we currently spend on this activity?

As a proportion of Council's annual budget for the 2011/2012 year, the Parks and Reserves activity represents approximately 8.48% of total spend.

<b>2011/2012 Draft Annual Plan</b>	
Operating Expenditure (excluding internal interest cost)	\$4.94m
Capital Expenditure	\$3.63m
<b>Total budgeted spend for Parks and Reserves for 2011/2012</b>	<b>\$8.57m</b>
Total Budgeted spend for Council for 2011/2012	\$100.97m
Total percentage of budget spent on Parks and Reserves	8.48%
<b>2009-2019 Ten Year Plan</b>	
Operating Expenditure (excluding internal interest cost)	\$56.83m
Capital Expenditure	\$58.71
<b>Total budgeted spend for Parks and Reserves for 10 years</b>	<b>\$115.54m</b>
Total Budgeted spend for Council for 10 years	\$1,295.64m
Total percentage of budget spent on Parks and Reserves	8.92%

### 12. How this activity is funded, and why?

The Parks and Reserves activity is currently funded as follows:

*Funding rationale summary as outlined in the 2009-2019 Ten Year Plan*

Parks and reserves are available to all residents and visitors alike across the District. While the primary use is for the public domiciled within the area that the reserves are established, anyone from other communities can also access the amenities provided by the activity, as well as tourists from outside the peninsula and from outside New Zealand. In some instances, a facility may be of such a size that it could be seen as a "District asset" and be funded District-wide. The Council expressly sought ratepayer feedback on this matter during the consultation process.

*The funding mechanisms used for operating expenditure are:*

General Rates	UAGC	Targeted Rates	Fees & Charges	Grants & Subsidies
		Land value by Board - 60-79% Fixed charge by Board 20-39%	0-19%	

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*The funding mechanisms used for capital expenditure are:*

Develop. &/or Financial Contribution	Borrowing	Asset Sales	UAGC	Depreciation	General Rates	Targeted Rates	Fees & Charges	Grants & Subsidies	Lump Sum Contribution
✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		

Staff recommend no changes to the current funding policy for the Parks and Reserves activity.

### 13. Staff recommendation

- Staff recommend maintaining existing levels of service for Parks and Reserves.
- In light of the Council's direction to align the annual rates increase to CPI, staff recommend no significant new capital expenditure in this area.
- Property sales being worked through progressively over time.
- The Council be aware of the increased maintenance and depreciation on local rates if leisure facilities are constructed.
- Staff continue to investigate opportunities to strengthen stakeholder relationships and to transition from sole provider to partner/advocate.
- With regards to funding for the Parks and Reserves activity staff recommend no changes to the current funding policy.