



NZILA RESENE PRIDE OF PLACE  
LANDSCAPE AWARDS 2019

# URB

Landscape Design:  
URB Urban Spaces  
Whitianga Town Centre Upgrade  
Stage 1: Albert Street

Submitted by  
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# Whitianga Town Centre Upgrade – Stage 1: Albert Street

## Introduction

Whitianga is one of the Coromandel's main tourist hubs, but outside of summer, it's perceived as a sleepy beach town. Founded back in the 1830s, over the last century-and-a-half, Whitianga has experienced ad hoc development, and now a mix of colonial and contemporary buildings existing side-by-side.

Planning and research for a town centre upgrade began back in 2011, with shopper surveys, iwi and community consultation, but put on hold in 2012 as other projects took financial precedence.

In 2015 the project resurrected when below-ground infrastructure needing renewing. Scope and budget was redefined, with \$4.7million set aside to upgrade the main retail street (Albert St), through the main town reserve (Taylor's Mistake) along The Esplanade to Whitianga Wharf. The work was to be done in two stages.

Stage one involved upgrading underground infrastructure (water, wastewater, power lines and provision for UFB) along the main stretch of Albert St. Above ground it was widening footpaths, landscaping and installing a town square and plaza at Taylor's Mistake – all to be completed by December 2018 (ahead of peak summer). Stage two was redeveloping Taylor's Mistake to The Esplanade and along to wharf, along with upgrading the existing children's playground

Iwi engagement and support was paramount. A navigational theme, paying homage to explorers Kupe and Captain James Cook was agreed with local iwi Ngati Hei. Both stages to be completed before the nationwide Tuia commemoration of Captain Cook's arrival in New Zealand in October 2019 - as Mercury Bay (Whitianga) is one of the four main landing sites in the journey - and will receive nationwide attention. <https://mch.govt.nz/tuia250>





The design brief for the main street was “mixed-use,” space allowing for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, as well as accessibility friendly. More al-fresco style dining space be made available to cafés and restaurants, which meant some sections of footpath would be widened from 3-4metres to 10metres, requiring the removal of 59 car parks from the main street. This reconfiguration would require buy-in from, iwi, the local community and businesses, who traditionally parked in the main street for shopping and socialising.

**BOFFA MISKELL WAS SPOT-ON IN THE DELIVERY OF OUR DESIGN BRIEF, WHICH INCLUDED CREATING A MIXED-USE SPACE IN THE TOWN CENTRE TO ENCOURAGE WALKING AND CYCLING INSTEAD OF DRIVING, AND PROMOTE ACTIVE PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING , WHILE TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION ACCESSIBILITY AND MOBILITY NEEDS.**

Mayor Sandra Goudie  
Thames-Coromandel District Council

The upgrade had to be conducted outside peak summer business period, Labour Weekend (October) to Easter (April) as Whitianga’s economy relies heavily on tourism. It was essential there be minimal disruption to businesses – so they could remain open during construction.

Stage one began in April 2018 and was completed within budget, ahead of time in December with an official ribbon cutting and street party. A communications plan setting out regular, relevant updates, and listening to business and resident feedback, having project heroes and supporting businesses, we were able to convert negative perception into positive support. Developing strong relationships with iwi, the public and businesses communities has delivered not only a physical transformation, of the main centre, but a feeling of goodwill and positive ownership by all.

With stage one completed, a bumper summer business season, along with a street art festival in March 2019, which has made the main centre even more vibrant, the town is preparing for stage two using the same contractors (many of them local).





# Essential Criteria

## 1. Clarity

The design brief was to create a mixed use space in the town centre to encourage walking and cycling instead of driving, promote active physical health and well-being with consideration to universal accessibility. We needed to create a safer and more vibrant town centre where people can visit, spend time and enjoy the many activities and opportunities on offer.

This was achieved by designing a main street that had a strong pedestrian focus, which enabled opportunities for alfresco dining, community interaction and events, while still providing for vehicles, but in a safe and appropriate manner. Parking was removed in some areas, whilst formalised in others to ensure no net loss. There was a balance required to ensure that the town centre could cater for the peak summer season, while still being design appropriate for the quieter winter months.





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## 2. Sense of place

The design was to be based around a navigation/nautical theme, as a nod to the regions rich history with Capt. James Cook and the great Polynesian explorer, Kupe.

Design features reflected the nautical theme in a simple and timeless way to ensure the upgrade stays relevant for many years to come. Features such as the street elements and furniture are designed to utilise a simple material selection of corten steel and Tonka hardwood. These are appropriate and commonly used maritime materials. Lighting features and the large shelter were designed to reflect other nautical elements (buoys, ship masts, etc.).

Navigation theme was subtly introduced using long sightlines, changes in angles and materials, placement of features, all enabling the users to take 'bearings' to reach their destinations. These features include the installation of carvings, artwork and pouwhenua (all which are still in the process of being created by local artists).

Due to the regions serene coastal setting, almost all plants selected for the upgrade were native species appropriate to the area and site. This has ensured good survivability to date and helps tie in the surrounding natural character to the site.





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### 3. Performance

One of the key requirements in the brief was for the finished outcome to be 'aspirational and functional'. The design responds to this by efficient and creative use of materials and layout. We maximised the high pedestrian traffic and alfresco dining areas with widened footpaths and concrete pavers, areas where parking was still located, which we surfaced with asphalt and inset paving bands to tie the street together. A late addition to the design was the requirement for an overland flow path in the centre of town. Instead of dipping the paving to allow for this, we decided to celebrate it by constructing a timber boardwalk that spanned the flow path and planted it with appropriate native species. This has become a real feature and focal point for the town and helps to keep the space usable all year round and during peak rain events.

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### 4. Value

The biggest risk to the community was the loss of income due to the road closures during construction. This was mitigated by not starting works until after the busy summer tourist/holiday season to enable the retailers as much time as possible to maximise sales opportunities. Works then had a strict timetable to be completed by early December, to ensure retailers were able to be open and accessed for the Christmas shopping season.

Another opportunity that arose from the construction works was the extensive use of local labour to implement the project. The contractor hired many skilled local contractors, ranging from traffic management, haulage, machine operators, paving installers, etc. This created an economic injection into the community in what otherwise would have been the quiet winter months. The local workforce was upskilled in many aspects, with the added benefit of getting strong buy-in from the community due to them being so heavily involved in the outcome. In addition to this, local suppliers were used wherever possible, further adding to the local economy.

Council also enabled this with a strong communications and media plan. As an example, every week a retailer / commercial business affected by the upgrade, was showcased by council online and on print media. They were interviewed and asked about their thoughts on the project as well as highlight what they have to offer as a business. This was used as a weekly lead into the general project works update to the wider community.





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## 5. Innovation

The decision was made early on to future proof the works as much as possible. This included the complete replacement of the 'three waters' underground infrastructure and provisions laid for future installation of fibre. This ensured that the street won't need digging up any time soon. We also chose to use segmental concrete pavers, this allows them to be lifted for maintenance works, then re-laid to tie back in without leaving permanent cut marks or different finishes like concrete or other poured finishes would require. We also selected a quality concrete paver from a major national supplier on the pretence that Council will be able to easily source additional replacement stock in the future if needed.

Furniture and other street elements were all deliberately sourced and manufactured in NZ. This enables additional stock to be ordered without long delays and ensures consistency with supply moving into the future.



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## 6. Execution

The design responds very well to the brief and the setting it sits within. It has also been constructed to a very high level by the contractors. The project was completed early and within budget, which is a further testament to the practical design solutions and quality contract management by all involved. Pragmatic solutions were sought out at every opportunity to maximise the upgrades outcome against the budget. This required close working relationships with council, us the designers and the contractors throughout the project duration.





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## 7. Plantsmanship

The planting design and selection utilises almost exclusively native species. These species are proven to handle the often-times harsh coastal environment that the site is located in. Summers are often hot and dry where winters can be very wet with a few sub-tropical storms thrown in the mix. This required careful selection of species which in turn had to be balanced against the need to provide amenity to an urban environment, where foot traffic, vandalism and other conflicts can often occur.

The use of natives also aligns with the community's aspirations to be sustainable and use New Zealand products as much as possible.

Irrigation was installed to ensure that the plants have the best possible opportunity to grow and flourish, especially in the first two years when they are establishing and are at their most vulnerable.

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## 8. Environmental stewardship

As with any urban street upgrade, there is always a balance of providing enough space for activities and human interaction to occur, with the requirements of intertwining green space and natural elements. The design also encourages people to walk or cycle into and throughout town, where previously cars had priority.

In keeping with our goal to be as sustainable as possible, the existing palm trees from the main street were relocated to the adjoining reserve at Taylors Mistake instead of being destroyed. These have provided instant height and scale to the space at minimal additional cost. We also tried hard to work around other existing natural features, such as the large Phoenix palm in the centre of town and the Totara tree at the southern end. Retaining these required some effort with design solutions, but have helped retain some of the natural character of the site.

Carina Creek, and intertidal stream which runs from the centre of town out to the harbour, is being extensively planted along its banks. This protects the fragile slopes from future erosion and creates additional habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species to colonise.

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## 9. Significance and influence

The project is a great example of delivering a high quality outcome with a limited budget. This was achieved through smart use of materials, design solutions, detailing and by working closely with delivery partners and council. This methodology could be utilised to deliver similar outcomes in other regional towns.









## Project Information

Client: Thames-Coromandel District Council  
 Allan Tiplady – TCDC District Manager  
 Andrew Scobie – TCDC Project Manager (Main client contact)  
 Andrew Boden – TCDC Project Delivery Manager (In charge of build)

Boffa Miskell Team: Morné Hugo  
 Bryan Sanson

Project Partners: WSP Opus – Civil engineering support  
 Dempsey Wood – Kusay Bearakat – Area Manager  
 Dempsey Wood – Gerald Carty – Project Delivery Engineer / Manager  
 Streetscape NZ Ltd – Manufacturer & supplier of all custom furniture and feature shelter  
 CGC Landscapes Ltd – Planting Contractor  
 Garth's Gardens and Landscaping – Paving Contractor  
 Firth Industries Ltd – Paving product supplier  
 Metal Art Ltd – Lighting sphere/bollard supplier

Project Date: 2015 - 2018

Photographer: Name from Bryan

**“A TRAFFIC MOVEMENT ENVIRONMENT WAS DEVISED WHERE CAR PARKING WAS MAINTAINED AT THE EXISTING LEVEL, MORE OUTDOOR DINING SPACE WAS MADE AVAILABLE FOR CAFÉS AND RESTAURANTS AND A TOWN SQUARE AND PLAZA, SHADE CANOPY, SEATING AND LANDSCAPING WAS CREATED WHICH DRAWS PEOPLE IN TO SIT AND SOCIALISE.**

**THE WHITIANGA TOWN CENTRE IS NOW A VIBRANT PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT FOR EVENTS AND FOR RETAIL AND SERVICES TO OPERATE AND TO BRING LOCALS AND VISITORS TOGETHER.**

**FEEDBACK INDICATES THAT PEOPLE BELIEVE THE TOWN NOW LOOKS BETTER, PROVIDES MORE WALKING AND CYCLING OPTIONS AND BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER.”**

Mayor Sandra Goudie, Thames-Coromandel District Council

