

Every Body Active by Design

A guide to creating active urban environments in Aotearoa New Zealand

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

SPORT
NEW ZEALAND
IHI AOTEAROA

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Aerial view of Te Papa Ōtākaro, Avon River Precinct outside Te Pae Convention Centre, Ōtautahi Christchurch.
Acknowledgment: Matapopore
Credit: Sam Pietras

Foreword

The places where we live, learn, work and play have a significant influence on how active we are every day.

Our vision is Every Body Active. We know that supporting people to be active is about more than sport, active recreation and play. It is also about creating environments that support and inspire movement, connection and participation as part of everyday life.

That is the purpose of Every Body Active by Design.

Developed by Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa and Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora and informed by expertise from across Aotearoa, this guide highlights how streets, parks, neighbourhoods, schools and public spaces can support people to walk, wheel, cycle, play and connect more. It shows how good design can deliver broader benefits too, contributing to healthier people, stronger communities, environmental outcomes and a greater sense of local identity.

What stands out in this guide is its focus on practical action. Active design is not always about major infrastructure projects. Often, simple and affordable changes can make a meaningful difference to how people experience and use a place. The examples throughout this guide demonstrate what is possible in communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

This is not about one-off projects. It's about embedding active design into planning and investment decision-making so that movement and connection are considered from the outset. Creating places that are safe, welcoming and accessible helps more people be active in ways that work for them and reinforces the importance of listening to the communities who use these places every day.

This work depends on collaboration. Local government, mana whenua, planners, designers, schools, community organisations and many others all have a role to play. Their knowledge, commitment and partnership are reflected throughout this guide.

Every Body Active by Design highlights what can be achieved when people work together to create environments that support wellbeing and activity. We hope it inspires and supports those shaping the places and spaces of Aotearoa to make active living a critical part of everyday life.

I would like to acknowledge Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, Boffa Miskell and Ngā Aho for their expertise and contribution to the development of this guide.

Raelene Castle ONZM

Group Chief Executive
Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa

Executive summary

Background

Physical activity is a critical contributor to health, wellbeing and quality of life. However, for many New Zealanders opportunities to be active as part of everyday life are becoming increasingly limited. While organised sport and recreation are important, there is growing recognition that regular incidental physical activity is significantly beneficial. This kind of movement is heavily dependent upon the environments in which people live, work, learn and spend time.

The planning, design and management of urban environments play significant roles in shaping opportunities for everyday movement. Streets, parks, public spaces, neighbourhoods and community infrastructure can either facilitate or discourage walking, cycling, play, recreation and social interaction.

Why active design matters

Research from cities globally has shown that the design of urban environments has the potential to contribute substantially to physical activity.



150 minutes

The World Health Organization recommends that adults complete at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week to gain the greatest health benefits.



Up to 89 extra minutes

Adults living in the most activity-friendly neighbourhoods undertake up to 89 more minutes of physical activity each week than those living in the least activity-friendly neighbourhoods.



Up to 59%

This additional activity equates to up to 59% of the recommended weekly amount.

Source: Sallis et al. (2016)



Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington Waterfront. The way places are planned and designed can influence how easily people can move, connect and be active in everyday life.
Credit: AsianDream

Enabling people to be physically active is central to Sport NZ's vision of Every Body Active. Recognising that opportunities for physical activity are shaped by the built environment as well as sport and recreation provision, Sport NZ is championing active design as an important way to help create healthier, more active and connected communities across Aotearoa.

An ageing, growing and increasingly diverse population, changing community needs, housing pressures, increased density and sprawl, ageing infrastructure, climate change and rising rates of obesity and chronic disease are creating complex challenges for the planning and management of towns, cities and communities. Yet these factors are also what make environments that support everyday physical activity increasingly important.

Responding to these challenges means considering how the built environment can support movement as part of daily life. This includes access to desirable destinations, high-quality public spaces, connected networks, opportunities for play, recreation and sport, and environments that are safe, inclusive and welcoming for people of all abilities, ages and genders.

Evidence from Aotearoa and overseas shows that environments which enable and encourage everyday activity can support healthier populations, stronger and more inclusive communities, environmental sustainability, cultural wellbeing and local economic prosperity.

How the guide has been developed

This guide has been developed through a highly collaborative process led by Sport NZ alongside Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora. It has involved workshops with key stakeholders across the country, wānanga with Ngā Aho (a national network of Māori design professionals), and engagement with academics and technical experts. Contributions were sought from a broad range of technical practitioners and organisations, including representatives from local and central government, planning, urban design, landscape architecture, transport, public health, disability, youth, sport and recreation sectors.

The development process combined literature review with professional expertise, mātauranga Māori and lived experience to establish a set of active design principles and guide content relevant to Aotearoa. Local context and knowledge and a whole-of-system view were prioritised.

It also reinforced that active design is most effective when integrated into existing planning and decision-making processes, rather than treated as a separate discipline or additional requirement. The guide builds on established good practice and complements existing urban design, planning, transport and recreation guidance. It recognises that the way urban environments are planned, delivered and managed shapes opportunities for everyday physical activity.

Guide content

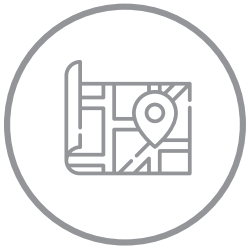
The guide is structured around a set of Active Design Principles that support the creation of urban environments where everyday movement is easy, attractive and accessible for all. Together, the principles describe the qualities of places that enable physical activity, wellbeing and connection as part of everyday life.

The overarching aspiration is to **Enable Everyday Activity for Every Body**. Achieving this requires collaboration across the planning, design, delivery and stewardship of urban environments. It is best realised when built environment practitioners and decision makers work in partnership with mana whenua as Treaty partners and kaitiaki, and with communities and delivery partners. Together, they can shape outcomes that reflect local aspirations and whakapapa (history, genealogy).

Together, these principles are an approach to planning, designing, delivering and managing urban environments that supports healthier, more active and more connected communities across Aotearoa. The guide then demonstrates how the principles can be applied across a range of urban environments, including new residential developments, existing neighbourhoods, city and town centres, business parks and industrial areas, parks and local green spaces, and blue-green corridors. For each setting, a series of active design approaches illustrates practical ways to apply the principles, supported by case studies that showcase examples from Aotearoa.

The final section brings together related resources, guidance and tools to support implementation, helping practitioners integrate active design into projects of different scales and stages, from strategic planning and major developments through to smaller retrofit and renewal initiatives.

The Active Design Principles are:



Movement

Connect people to places



Joy

Promote playfulness and fun



Vitality

Bring spaces and places to life



Nature

Integrate everyday encounters with nature



Identity

Celebrate the essence of people and place



1 Understanding active design

Te Ara Tupua seawall infrastructure providing for new active travel routes and connections to nature, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.

Acknowledgment: Len Hetet and Te Atiawa Taranaki Whānui

Credit: Sam Pietras

Introduction

Purpose of the guide

The purpose of Every Body Active by Design is to help shape urban environments that make everyday physical activity easier, safer, more accessible and more desirable for everyone. It provides a practical approach for considering how decisions about land use, transport, public spaces, neighbourhoods and infrastructure can influence opportunities for physical activity and realise broader societal benefits.

For Sport NZ, enabling people to be physically active is about more than sport and recreation. It is about creating the conditions that help people of all ages, abilities, genders and backgrounds to be active as part of everyday life, regardless of where they live. By supporting Active Design, Sport NZ is helping ensure that more people can enjoy the lifelong benefits of physical activity in urban environments that are inclusive, connected and welcoming for everybody.

The guidance can be applied across a range of scales and settings, from small, affordable improvements by local residents and community groups, schools and businesses, through to neighbourhood renewal, parks, streets and public spaces, major infrastructure upgrades, and strategic spatial planning for new communities and city and town centres. It encourages practitioners to integrate active design into everyday decisions and to leverage planned investment in civil infrastructure, maintenance and renewal programmes to deliver better outcomes for physical activity, health and wellbeing.

The Active Design Principles can be applied throughout the life of a project, from strategic planning and policy development through to design, consenting, delivery, stewardship and ongoing management. While the principles are presented separately, they are most effective when considered together.

This guide is not intended to be used as a checklist or a set of design standards. Rather than introducing a new or separate process, it builds on existing planning and design guidance by providing an approach for asking better questions, identifying opportunities and supporting more informed and collaborative decision-making. The case studies and examples included in the guide demonstrate how the principles can be applied in different contexts and show that there is no single approach to creating successful active environments.

Readers are encouraged to use the guide in ways that best suit their own needs. It may be used to inform policy, strategies, business cases, project briefs, design processes and consent assessments, drive community engagement or investment decisions and help communities articulate what they need.



Connected, people-focused urban environments can help make physical activity a natural part of everyday life, Wynard Quarter, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: David St George

What is active design?

Active design is an approach to shaping urban environments that promote and enable everyday physical activity for every body.

Active design recognises that decisions about urban form – including how our streets connect, where places and destinations are located, how public spaces feel and how environments are cared for – directly influence who can be active, how comfortably and with what level of confidence. It acknowledges the strong relationship between people and place, supporting hauora by creating opportunities for movement, connection with others and connection to whenua.

Active design takes a place-based approach to supporting physical activity. Rather than focusing solely on individual behaviour change, specific modes of transport or provision of facilities for sport and active recreation, it considers how urban planning, policy, investment, design and management decisions can work alongside communities to create environments that support walking, wheeling, cycling, play, active recreation and sport as part of daily life.

Active design uses a range of tools to create active urban environments that make activity and movement more accessible, appealing and safe as part of people's everyday lives. It is not a substitute for other urban design, transport or planning good practice or guidance. Instead, it is about applying a physical activity lens to existing frameworks to strengthen health, wellbeing, social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes for all.



Whānau on the boardwalk at Te Auaunga Oakley Creek, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: Boffa Miskell

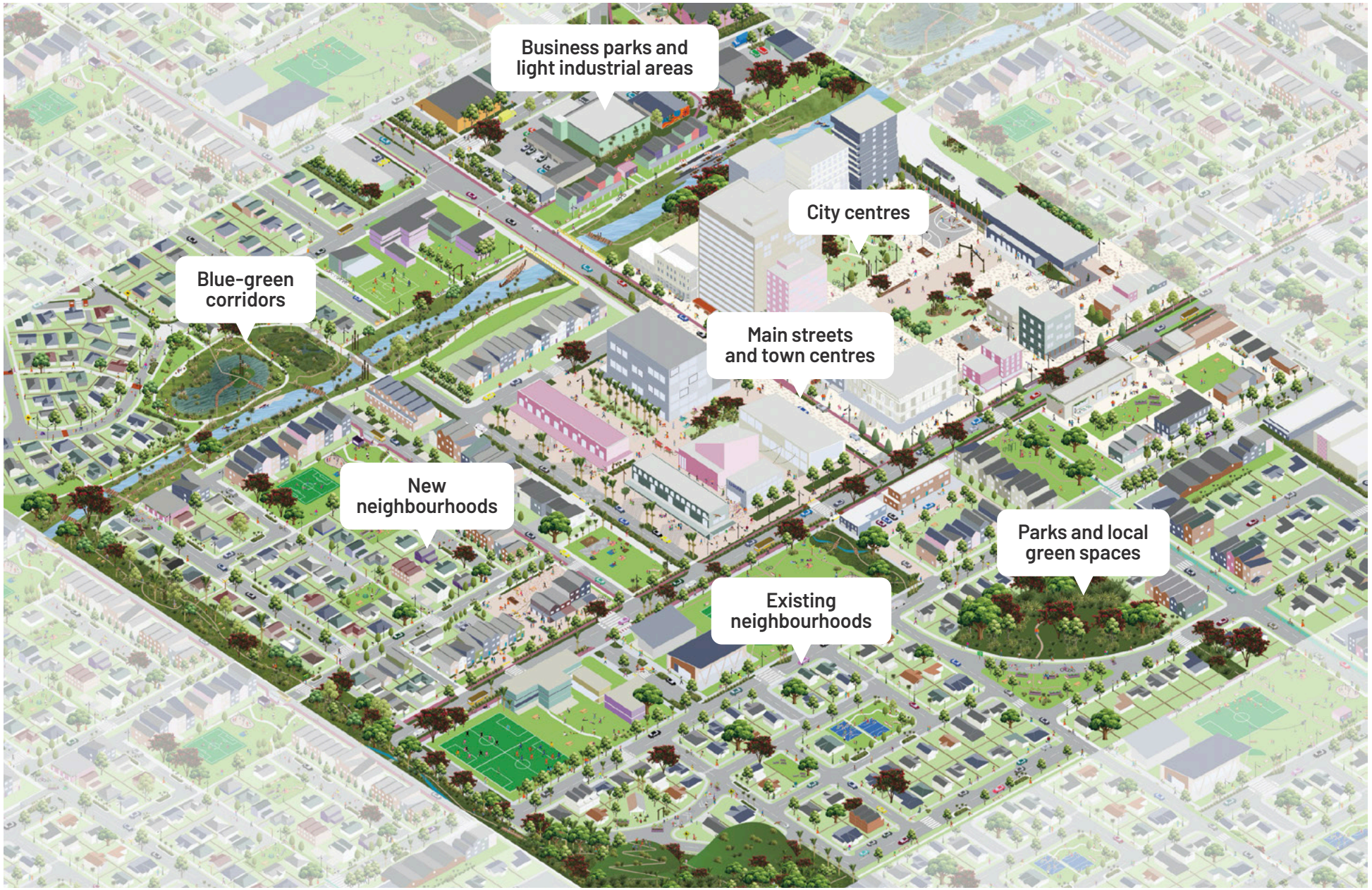


Everyday play in a residential neighbourhood.
Credit: Sam Pietras



Public using Te Ara Tupua looking towards Te Matarae o Wharepouri, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.
Acknowledgment: Len Hetet and Te Atiawa Taranaki Whānui
Credit: NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

Vision of an active urban environment



Why active design matters in Aotearoa

The primary purpose of active design is to make physical activity a natural part of everyday life. It supports planning and design decisions about urban form, transport networks, public spaces and access to everyday places and destinations that shape opportunities for walking, cycling, play, recreation and sport.

Research consistently shows that people living in active urban environments are more physically active than those living in places designed primarily around private vehicle travel. Features such as connected street networks, mixed land use, access to parks and green spaces, public transport and active travel infrastructure, and quality public spaces are all associated with higher levels of physical activity. Longitudinal research tracking more than 2 million people found that those who moved to more walkable cities accumulated approximately 1,100 additional steps per day on average, demonstrating the powerful influence urban environments can have on everyday movement (Althoff et al., 2025).

1,100

extra steps per day

People who moved to more walkable cities accumulated approximately 1,100 additional steps per day on average.

For Aotearoa, this matters because many people are not active enough for good health, and communities are facing growing challenges relating to chronic disease and obesity, climate resilience, social isolation, inequitable access to opportunities to be active and increased car dependence. Active design helps address these challenges by making movement easier, safer and more attractive as part of daily life. Rather than relying solely on organised sport, recreation or individual behaviour change, active design creates environments where physical activity is possible through easy, everyday choices and routines.

Importantly, the benefits of active design extend well beyond physical activity and health. Evidence consistently demonstrates that environments that support everyday movement also contribute to stronger social connections, environmental sustainability, cultural aspirations and economic prosperity.



Wide clear pathways and separated Te Hā Noa cycleway on Victoria Street, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland CBD. Credit: Jay Farnworth

The benefits

Active design delivers more benefits than just physical activity



Physical and mental health



Social



Environmental



Economic



Cultural



Physical and mental health benefits

Active urban environments make it easier for people to be active every day, leading to measurable improvements in physical and mental health.

Strong evidence links activity-supportive environments with higher levels of daily physical activity, improved cardiovascular health, lower rates of chronic disease and better mental wellbeing. Systematic reviews have found that walkable neighbourhoods, access to green space, quality parks and playgrounds, active travel infrastructure and public transport are all associated with increased physical activity levels in both adults and children (Bird et al., 2018; Ige-Elegbede et al., 2022).

The benefits extend beyond physical health. Access to green space and opportunities for everyday movement can also support mental wellbeing, while improving access to parks, and walking and cycling infrastructure in underserved communities may help reduce disparities in physical activity and health outcomes. Research shows the restorative benefits of being physically active in nature can be experienced in as little as 5 minutes, reinforcing the importance of integrating parks, blue-green networks and natural environments into everyday neighbourhoods and movement networks (Barton & Pretty, 2010).

Social benefits

People-focused urban environments help build stronger, safer communities by fostering social interaction and reducing crime.

A number of systematic reviews found a positive link between compact, walkable neighbourhoods – with mixed land use, safe infrastructure and access to community amenities – and favourable social outcomes such as social engagement, connection and cohesion, higher civic engagement, sociable attitudes of children, stronger community networks and reduced feelings of isolation (Mazumdar et al., 2018; Bird et al., 2018; Bonaccorsi et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2024; Ige-Elegbede et al., 2022).

At the same time, active design can improve feelings of safety and contribute to reductions in crime when combined with social and community measures and wider crime prevention strategies. Research on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) indicates that measures such as better street lighting, clear sightlines, CCTV and well-maintained public spaces can reduce fear of crime and improve feelings of safety. Together with broader crime prevention measures, they can also result in small but significant reductions in crime (Cozens & Love, 2015; Bird et al., 2018; Widmark et al., 2026). Research has also found that well-designed, people-centred urban environments can improve road safety outcomes, including fewer crashes (Ding et al., 2024; Raerino et al., 2021).

In addition, evidence shows that accessible and supportive built environments encourage physical activity and healthy ageing, while also enhancing mobility, independence and community participation for disabled people and older adults (Bonaccorsi et al., 2020; Ramírez-Saiz et al., 2025).

These social benefits reinforce each other: as public spaces become safer and more appealing, more people walk, play and meet locally, further strengthening community cohesion and wellbeing (Sallis et al., 2015).



A well-designed public space supports walking, social connection and a sense of community, while reflecting local identity, Amey Daldy Park, Wynyard Quarter, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Credit: Auckland Urban Development Office

Environmental benefits

Active design supports active travel, lowers carbon emissions, improves air quality and enhances climate resilience, creating cleaner, more sustainable environments that promote healthier lifestyles.

A 2024 systematic review reported that nearly all active travel initiatives lead to environmental benefits, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions and lower air pollution (Ding et al., 2024). Such gains occur when people shift from private cars to walking, cycling and public transport. For instance, a New Zealand study of two 'model communities' that invested in cycling and walking infrastructure saw an 8% decrease in transport CO_2 emissions in those cities, alongside increases in local walking and cycling (Chapman et al., 2018).

Additionally, green infrastructure, such as tree-lined streets, native planting and parks, has been found to strengthen these benefits by creating urban environments that are better able to manage weather extremes, stay cooler, filter air pollutants and improve climate resilience, while also supporting everyday movement and population health (de Blasio, 2016; Choi et al., 2021; Lungman et al., 2023).



Seawall infrastructure showing the resilience for different transport systems that Te Ara Tupua creates, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.
Acknowledgement: Len Hetet and Te Atiawa Taranaki Whānui
Credit: NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and Mana Whenua

Taken together, this evidence shows how designing infrastructure to perform multiple functions can support improved environmental outcomes while creating more comfortable and attractive places for people to be active. Examples include shared walking and cycling routes integrated with seawall improvements and flood defences, or sports fields and recreation spaces designed to provide temporary stormwater retention.

Economic benefits

Investing in active design is cost effective and can stimulate local economies by reducing costs and attracting activity.

Across the evidence, active travel and walking and cycling infrastructure consistently show positive economic returns, with benefits driven largely by improved health, reduced healthcare costs, fewer sick days, productivity gains, and reduced congestion and transport-related costs (Ding et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2017; Bland et al., 2024; Chapman et al., 2018). A New Zealand cost–benefit analysis of city-wide walking and cycling improvements found a return of around $11 of benefits for every $1 spent, driven by healthcare savings, reduced transport costs and lower pollution (Chapman et al., 2018).

Evidence also shows that active design can strengthen local economies by making neighbourhoods more attractive, accessible and connected. Walkable and bike-friendly environments can support nearby businesses through increased foot traffic, visitation and customer spending, while also contributing to higher property values, neighbourhood revitalisation and stronger local economic activity (Carmona, 2019; Kornas et al., 2017; Volker & Handy, 2021).

Active design also has the potential to improve the value of public investment by embedding opportunities for everyday movement into transport, public spaces, stormwater and open space projects. This creates multifunctional infrastructure that delivers social, environmental and economic benefits through a single investment.

Together, these benefits show that active design can deliver tangible economic value: reducing costs associated with physical inactivity, supporting more efficient infrastructure investment, and contributing to vibrant, connected and prosperous local communities.

$11 return for every $1 invested



Investment in people-friendly streets can support local businesses, encourage visitation and contribute to vibrant local economies, George Street, Ōtepoti Dunedin.

Credit: Dunedin NZ

Cultural benefits

Urban environments that reflect and celebrate local culture can boost community pride, strengthen cultural connections and encourage people to be more active in shared spaces.

In Aotearoa, active design plays a unique role in supporting cultural wellbeing by working in partnership with Māori to create environments that reflect the identity and stories of place. In te ao Māori, wellbeing is relational – linking people, whānau, whenua and wai – and movement is embedded within everyday life through cultural practices, connection to place and caring for te taiao (nature), rather than being viewed solely as recreation or exercise. Active design can strengthen these relationships by restoring access to whenua and wai, supporting opportunities for kaitiakitanga (guardianship), and embedding local whakapapa, narratives and cultural values into the planning and design of urban environments.

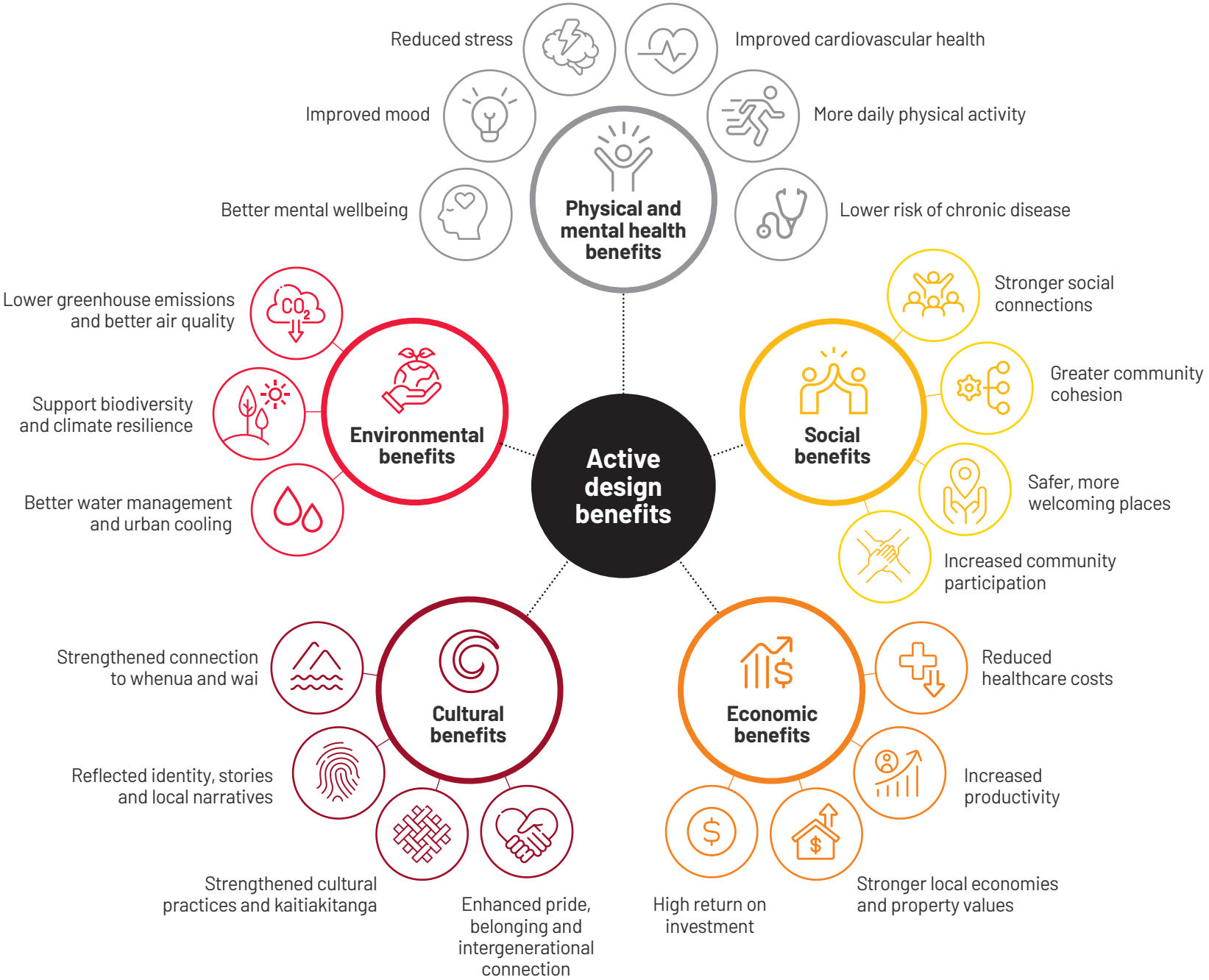
When places reflect local narratives and identity, they are more likely to be meaningful, well used and cared for over time. The Te Ara Mua – Future Streets project in Māngere demonstrates how Māori leadership and partnership in street design has led to safer, greener and more walkable streets, while strengthening local identity and community pride (Raerino et al., 2021). The project incorporated te reo Māori, public art, native planting and cultural narratives throughout the street environment. Similarly, Sport NZ's Social Return on Investment research found that community sport and active recreation strengthen cultural identity, reinforce Māori values and support intergenerational relationships through shared physical activity (Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa, 2022).

These cultural benefits are a distinctive aspect of active design in Aotearoa. By embedding te ao Māori perspectives and working in partnership with mana whenua and Māori communities, active design contributes not only to increased physical activity, but also to the protection, expression and continuation of Māori culture, identity and connection to place.

Active design is a powerful tool for achieving outcomes that matter to many sectors and stakeholders.

What this means for decision makers

These findings provide clear evidence that prioritising active design in urban planning has positive outcomes for physical activity behaviours, and simultaneously yields co-benefits across health, environmental sustainability, social and cultural wellbeing, and local economies. Taken together, this evidence highlights active design as a powerful tool for achieving outcomes that matter to many sectors and stakeholders. It also presents opportunities for more integrated urban planning policies that align health, environmental, social, cultural and economic goals, encouraging consideration of these benefits across sectors when evaluating and investing in active design.


Active design benefits
Physical and mental health benefits
Reduced stress
Improved cardiovascular health
Improved mood
More daily physical activity
Better mental wellbeing
Lower risk of chronic disease
Environmental benefits
Lower greenhouse emissions and better air quality
Support biodiversity and climate resilience
Better water management and urban cooling
Social benefits
Stronger social connections
Greater community cohesion
Safer, more welcoming places
Increased community participation
Cultural benefits
Strengthened connection to whenua and wai
Reflected identity, stories and local narratives
Strengthened cultural practices and kaitiakitanga
Enhanced pride, belonging and intergenerational connection
Economic benefits
Reduced healthcare costs
Increased productivity
High return on investment
Stronger local economies and property values

Active design for Māori outcomes

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides a foundational framework for how active design is approached in Aotearoa, creating expectations for partnership, protection of taonga, and meaningful Māori participation in decisions about places and environments.

Engagement with Ngā Aho has been an important part of developing this guide, recognising that the relationship between people and te taiao, together with partnerships with Māori, enriches our understanding of physical activity, movement and wellbeing.

This guide recognises that wellbeing is multidimensional and consistent with the holistic health model, Te Whare Tapa Whā. It acknowledges that active design can support physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing by strengthening opportunities for everyday movement alongside connections to people and place.

Active design is a practical way to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by promoting equitable and inclusive planning and design processes. This guide reflects Sport NZ's commitment to Te Tiriti through its organisational approach of Partnership, Participation and Protection, encouraging meaningful relationships, shared decision-making, and the integration of Māori knowledge and values into the planning, design, delivery and stewardship of active urban environments. It acknowledges that Treaty obligations are a foundation for achieving Māori aspirations and equity for Māori.

Partnership

Build relationships with Māori and mana whenua from the earliest stages of planning through to delivery and stewardship. Support co-design, shared decision-making and long-term relationships that recognise local knowledge, tikanga (customs, protocols and practices) and kaitiakitanga.

Participation

Enable Māori knowledge, values and priorities to inform planning, design, management and stewardship decisions. Remove barriers to participation, including access, affordability, safety and representation, so Māori can participate in and benefit from everyday physical activity.

Protection

Embed mātauranga Māori and cultural values in planning and design to protect and enhance experiences with whenua, wai and taonga. Safeguard culturally significant places and strengthen opportunities to enhance the mauri of people and place.

This guide does not seek to define universal 'Māori active design principles' for national application. Instead, it focuses on creating the right conditions for good practice, supporting users to engage appropriately with Māori and to value and respond appropriately to the expertise Māori offer to enhance outcomes for Māori and everyone.

Te ao Māori

Te Whare Tapa Whā demonstrates the interconnections between mental, spiritual, physical and collective health, and the relationship with te taiao: when nature is well the people will prosper.

Through this lens, active design:

- recognises that for Māori movement is purposeful, and places should provide for activities such as gathering kai, restoration and Māori arts (such as kapa haka and carving)
- emphasises the relationship between people and place, including recognising, protecting and enhancing sites of significance for Māori
- understands that function and wairua (soul, spirit) are inseparable – places need to work well for everyone while also expressing identity, cultural narratives and care for whenua and wai.

This guide supports established Māori design frameworks and draws upon recognised Māori design principles – including Te Aranga Design Principles and locally developed kaupapa – as essential reference points. It does not seek to replace them. Instead, it demonstrates how active design outcomes can be aligned with and strengthened by these approaches.

Oranga taiao, oranga tangata: When the environment is healthy, so too are the people.



Te Ara Tupua at night, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.
Acknowledgement: Len Hetet and Te Atiawa Taranaki Whānui
Credit: NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and Mana Whenua

Mahi tahi

Collaboration is fundamental to successful active design. Establishing relationships early and maintaining them through planning, design, delivery and stewardship helps create places that reflect local needs, respond to their context and continue to function well over time. It builds shared understanding, supports local ownership and leads to more resilient, enduring outcomes.

In Aotearoa, this commitment is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and recognises mana whenua as partners in shaping the environments that support everyday life. Early and ongoing partnership with mana whenua provides a deeper understanding of place through whakapapa, tikanga, cultural values and local histories. This strengthens planning and design by informing spatial structure, access, and the use and care of te taiao. Partnership extends beyond consultation to shared decision-making and long-term stewardship, creating places that reflect local identity, support the wellbeing of people and te taiao, and are valued and cared for over time.

Working in partnership with communities, local organisations and delivery partners further grounds decisions in lived experience, particularly around safety, accessibility, comfort and inclusion. Successful active environments strengthen relationships, reconnect people with place and te taiao, and create meaningful opportunities for everyday movement.

Active design often involves balancing competing priorities, such as movement and amenity, efficiency and inclusion, or short-term costs and long-term value. A partnership-based approach helps identify opportunities and risks early, supports transparent decision-making and builds shared ownership of outcomes.

Collaboration is fundamental to successful active design.

Meaningful collaboration and engagement also help identify opportunities and challenges that may not be evident through technical analysis alone. Community knowledge and lived experience give practitioners and designers valuable insights, strengthening their understanding of safety, accessibility, comfort and how places function day to day,

In practice, collaboration is strengthened:

- when early engagement helps shape briefs and options
- when tikanga, local protocols and lived experience are respected in both process and outcome
- when stewardship, maintenance and activation are considered alongside design and delivery.

If collaboration is embedded from the outset, active environments are more likely to be well used, well managed and looked after by everybody.



Park deisgn workshop with Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Hoani Waititi Marae.
Credit: Boffa Miskell



Cultural tour of Ōtautahu Christchurch city centre.
Credit: ChristchurchNZ Ltd



Participants involved in freshwater monitoring as part of the Living Waters programme.
Credit: Boffa Miskell



2

The active design framework

Avon River City Promenade shared path, Te Papa Ōtākaro, Ōtautahi Christchurch.
Acknowledgment: Matapopore Charitable Trust
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Enable Everyday Activity for Every Body

Enable everyday movement and activity for all through safe, inclusive, people-centred planning, design and stewardship.

Enable Everyday Activity for Every Body is the overarching vision for this guide. It reflects Sport NZ's vision of Every Body Active and recognises the important role urban environments play in enabling regular physical activity as part of everyday life.

Physical activity extends beyond organised sport and formal recreation. It includes walking, wheeling, cycling, play, casual recreation and sport, as well as gardening, volunteering and socialising. Urban environments that make these activities safe, convenient and enjoyable help make everyday movement the easy choice.

This guide focuses on creating the conditions that enable people to be active as part of daily life. Decisions about urban form, streets, transport, parks, public spaces and neighbourhoods influence whether people can move safely, comfortably and independently to reach the places and services they need. Connected, inclusive and attractive environments make regular physical activity easier for more people, more often.

This vision is grounded in equity. Everyone – including disabled people, older adults, tamariki, women and girls, and those who currently experience the greatest barriers to being active – should have equitable opportunities to be physically active, regardless of where they live or their age, ability, gender or background.

Designing for those who are least well served creates places that work better for everyone.

Achieving this vision requires collaboration across the whole planning, design, delivery and stewardship system. Opportunities to support everyday physical activity exist at every scale – from spatial planning and master planning for urban growth to local developments, neighbourhood renewal, and the design and management of streets, parks and public spaces. Whether shaping a new community or improving an existing one, every decision can help create environments where regular physical activity becomes an easy and enjoyable part of everyday life.



A welcoming public space can encourage people to be active, connect with others and spend time outdoors as part of everyday life, Te Papa Ōtākaro, Avon River Precinct Terraces, Christchurch City Centre, Ōtautahi.

Acknowledgment: Matapopore

Credit: ChristchurchNZ Ltd



A well-connected waterfront environment supports walking, social connection and everyday movement, Viaduct Harbour, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Credit: Truestock



Connected paths and green spaces help make everyday movement an easy and enjoyable choice, Ōtautahi Christchurch.

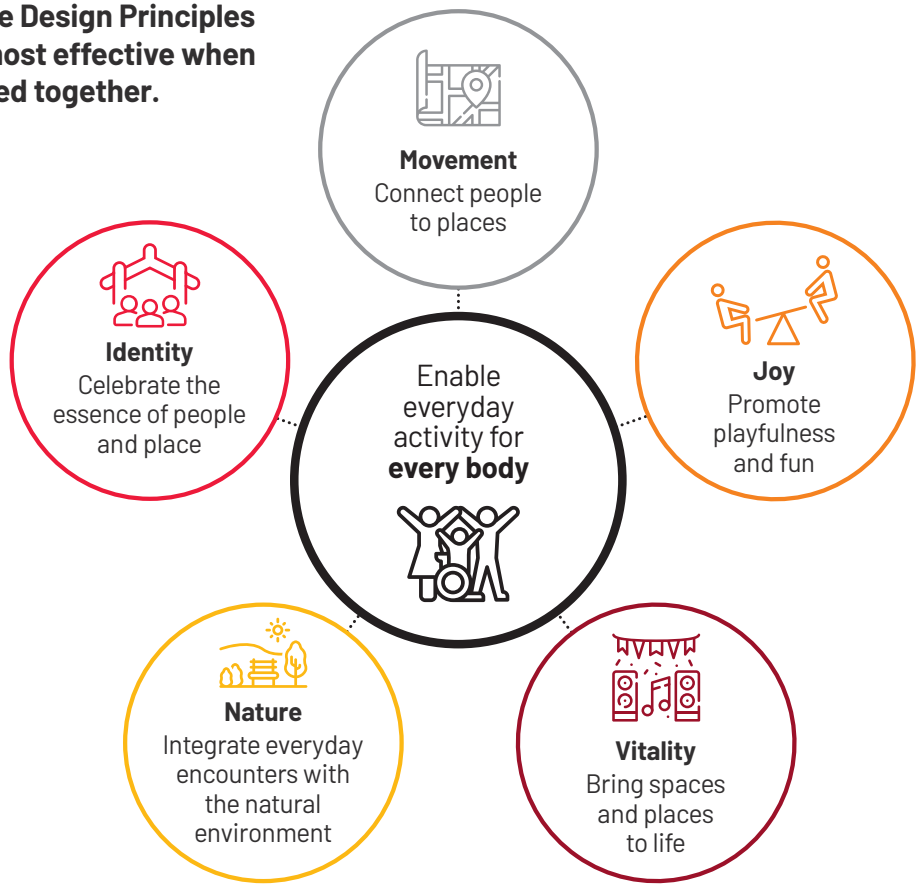
Credit: Sam Pietras

Active Design Principles

The following Active Design Principles provide a practical approach for achieving this vision. Together they guide the planning, design, delivery and stewardship of urban environments that support regular physical activity, respond to local context and identity and improve health, wellbeing and quality of life.

These principles work best when they are used together. While the opportunities and priorities for applying each principle will vary depending on the urban environment, project scale and community aspirations, collectively they create conditions for everyday activity for every body.

Active Design Principles are most effective when applied together.



Movement – Connect people to places

Make it easy, safe and attractive for people to walk, wheel and cycle in their local neighbourhoods, towns and cities, creating easy-to-use routes between homes, parks, schools, shops, public transport and other destinations.

Joy – Promote playfulness and fun

Create places that invite movement through playful, engaging design. Interactive elements, opportunities for exploration and spaces that support social connection help make activity enjoyable and part of everyday life.

Vitality – Bring spaces and places to life

Bring our streets and public spaces to life, with things to do and experience that encourage physical activity. Design multifunctional open space and street networks with features for informal activity, social interaction and year-round comfort to encourage spontaneous use and active neighbourhood life.

Nature – Integrate everyday encounters with the natural environment

Weave green and blue infrastructure into our streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces. Sensory-rich access to trees, parks, waterways, rivers and harbours creates inviting settings for walking and cycling, supporting everyday movement, wellbeing and connection to te taiao.

Identity – Celebrate the essence of people and place

Places that express local identity, mana whenua values and community aspirations help strengthen belonging, connection and care for place. When people feel connected to where they live, work and spend time, they are more likely to be active as part of everyday life.



Movement – Connect people to places

Make it easy, safe and attractive to walk, wheel and cycle between homes, parks, schools, shops, public transport and other everyday destinations.

People are more likely to walk and cycle when the places they visit every day are easy to reach. This principle focuses on creating well-connected neighbourhoods where homes, parks, schools, shops, community facilities, public transport and open spaces are linked by safe, direct and convenient routes.

Evidence shows that nearly 1 in 3 private vehicle trips in Aotearoa are less than 2 kilometres, a distance that can typically be cycled in 6 to 10 minutes or walked in 20 to 25 minutes. Well-connected urban environments make more of these short trips possible without needing a car.

Connectivity is about more than distance. Routes need to be safe, legible and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Connected street networks, a variety of route choices and direct links to everyday destinations help make walking and cycling practical and convenient choices for daily life. Neighbourhoods that bring together housing, employment, shops, schools, community facilities, parks and public transport enable people to meet more of their daily needs close to home. This supports greater independence, reduces reliance on private vehicles and creates more opportunities for everyday physical activity.

Connecting people to places means:

- locating homes, destinations and services close together to support walking and cycling
- creating safe, direct and accessible routes that are easy for everyone to navigate
- connecting streets, paths, walkways, cycleways and open space networks to provide a variety of route choices
- providing the comfort and amenities that make walking and cycling convenient and enjoyable, including seating, shade, shelter, drinking fountains and accessible toilets.

Applying this principle

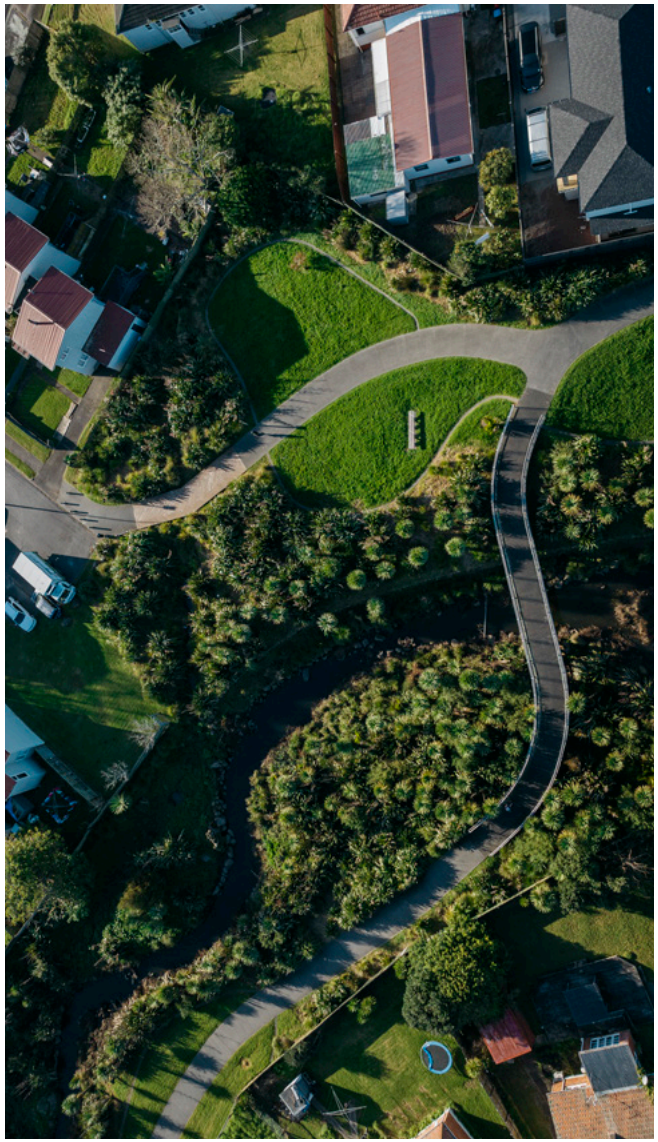
This principle can be applied across the full lifecycle of urban development, from planning new communities to improving existing neighbourhoods and trialling temporary changes before permanent investment.

The greatest opportunities to improve connectivity occur during spatial planning, structure planning, zoning and master planning. Decisions about street networks, block size, land use and access to destinations establish long-term patterns of movement and influence how people travel.

Nearly 1 in 3 private vehicle trips in Aotearoa are less than 2 kilometres.

However, the same principles can be applied in existing neighbourhoods through redevelopment, infrastructure upgrades and neighbourhood renewal projects. Even small improvements can remove barriers and make it easier for people to walk and cycle as part of daily life.

Common challenges arise when destinations are separated by long distances, disconnected street networks, or major barriers such as busy roads, rail corridors or waterways that are difficult or unsafe to cross. Connectivity can also be undermined when walking and cycling infrastructure is delayed until later stages of development or when destinations are difficult to access without a car. These decisions can lock in car dependency and reduce opportunities for everyday physical activity.



Aerial view of Walmsley Park connected pathways, Te Auaunga, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Putting it into practice

- Create connected street networks, with short blocks, frequent intersections and crossing points, to provide direct routes and multiple travel options.
- Locate homes, schools, parks, shops, community facilities and public transport stops close together, so more daily needs can be met within walking and cycling distance.
- Provide safe, accessible and appealing walking and cycling routes through measures such as shared paths, continuous footpaths, separated cycleways, raised crossings and accessible kerb ramps.
- Use parks, blue-green networks and stormwater corridors as movement corridors, providing off-road connections between neighbourhoods, destinations and services.
- Improve access to schools, town centres and public transport through safer crossings, missing link connections and clear wayfinding.
- Support shared community use of schools and public facilities after hours, allowing them to function as local destinations and neighbourhood hubs.
- Test improvements before permanent investment with temporary measures, such as pop-up cycleways, temporary crossings, trial street closures and pilot projects.

Why this matters

Connected neighbourhoods make walking and cycling a natural part of everyday life. Whether it is walking to school, cycling to the shops, catching public transport, visiting a local park or accessing local services, well-connected streets, paths and open space networks make it easier for people to reach the places they need to go. By providing a choice of safe, direct and easy-to-follow routes, everyday trips become opportunities for physical activity rather than journeys that rely on a car.

Principle in action

Wānaka Schools to Pool Active Travel Route

To make it easier and safer for people to walk and cycle between everyday destinations, Queenstown Lakes District Council developed the Schools to Pool Active Travel Route in Wānaka. The project connects schools, neighbourhoods, parks and recreation facilities through a series of targeted improvements that create a continuous and accessible active travel network.

Rather than relying on a single large piece of infrastructure, the route has been delivered through a series of practical improvements, including shared pathways, signalised crossings, raised safety platforms, pedestrian refuge islands and traffic-calming measures. These interventions fill missing links in the network and make it easier for people to travel between key destinations on foot, by bike or by scooter.

The route links Wānaka Primary School, Mount Aspiring College, Holy Family Catholic School, neighbourhood parks, residential areas and the Wānaka Recreation Centre. By connecting places that people already visit every day, the project supports healthier and more active travel choices while reducing the need for short car trips.

An important feature of the project is the way it uses existing parks and open spaces, including Kelly's Flat Recreation Reserve and Lismore Park, to create off-road connections between destinations. This demonstrates how parks, reserves and open space corridors can function not only as recreation spaces but also as part of a connected movement network.

The project highlights how relatively small and incremental improvements can have a significant impact on connectivity. New pathway links, safer crossings and better connections between existing destinations can remove barriers to walking and cycling, making active travel a practical option for more people.

Key lesson

Improving connectivity does not always require major infrastructure projects. Strategic investments in pathway links, crossings and safer streets can connect people to everyday destinations and make walking and cycling more convenient, attractive and accessible.



Schools to Pool Active Travel Route, Wānaka.
Credit: dchadwick



Joy – Promote playfulness and fun

Create places that invite activity and movement through curiosity, play and fun.

People are more likely to be active when movement is enjoyable. Curiosity, play, discovery and exploration encourage people of all ages to be more active by making movement fun and socially rewarding. Research shows that environments that support play, exploration and engagement can increase physical activity, time spent outdoors and social interaction.

Active design is therefore about more than providing play equipment and dedicated playgrounds. It involves creating places that spark curiosity, invite participation and make physical activity feel natural, rewarding and fun. When environments are interesting, engaging and comfortable, people are more likely to walk, play, explore and spend time outdoors.

Playfulness is not limited to playgrounds or children's spaces. Opportunities for informal recreation, exploration and social interaction can be integrated throughout streets, parks, centres, open spaces and everyday journeys. These opportunities should be accessible and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities, with inclusion considered from the outset.

Promoting playfulness and joy means:

- creating places that are fun and engaging, and that encourage curiosity, exploration and informal recreation
- embedding opportunities for play and enjoyment throughout everyday journeys and destinations, not just in dedicated play spaces
- providing opportunities and permission for spontaneous activity through playful and interactive design
- ensuring opportunities are accessible and inclusive for people of all ages and abilities
- providing spaces that support intergenerational play and activity, enabling families and whānau to play together and participate in ways that suit their interests and abilities.

Applying this principle

This principle can be applied across all urban environments, from new communities and town and city centres to existing neighbourhoods, parks, schools, streets and walkways. It is most effective when opportunities for play and fun are woven into the places people use every day, rather than confined to dedicated recreation spaces.

Playful environments do not always require significant investment or major infrastructure. Small-scale interventions, such as tree swings and stepping stones, can make places more engaging and encourage people to move, explore and interact. The most successful places create opportunities for fun, discovery and activity throughout daily life, regardless of the scale of investment.

Common challenges arise when play opportunities are confined to dedicated recreation spaces or when accessibility, comfort and inclusion are overlooked. This can limit spontaneous movement and social interaction, making physical activity something people need to plan for rather than something that occurs naturally as part of everyday life.

Putting it into practice

- Provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to climb, balance, swing, skate, jump and move in urban environments, including town and city centres, through features such as climbable boulders, skateable edges, low balancing walls and parkour elements.
- Design playful streets and public spaces with play along the way elements such as playable public art, interactive water features and stepping/jumping opportunities that encourage play as part of everyday journeys.
- Use small, affordable interventions such as tree swings, hopscotch markings, outdoor table tennis tables and temporary play installations to encourage spontaneous movement and physical activity.
- Integrate public art, sculptures, lighting and creative installations, such as climbable sculptures, interactive light features, musical play elements and kinetic artworks, that invite participation, curiosity and discovery.
- Incorporate features such as manu platforms, stepping stone crossings, boardwalk loops and paddling areas into waterways, harbours and coastal edges to support recreation and exploration.
- Throughout blue-green networks and walking routes, incorporate public art trails, movement challenges, playful wayfinding elements and resting places that encourage people to pause, engage and continue their journey.



Tamariki in the tree at the Mara Hupara, Underwood Park, Te Auaunga Oakley Creek, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Credit: Boffa Miskell

Why this matters

Active design weaves opportunities for play and enjoyment into everyday journeys and destinations. Whether balancing along a low wall while walking to the shops, stopping to play on an interactive artwork on the way home from school, taking a playful shortcut through a public space, or pausing to swing, climb or explore along the way, everyday moments of fun can encourage people to move more often and spend more time being active.

Principle in action

Invercargill tree swings

To celebrate Play Week 2025, Invercargill City Council installed 20 new tree swings across parks and reserves throughout the city, building on an earlier trial that proved highly popular with the community. The initiative was designed to bring opportunities for play into everyday environments, encouraging people of all ages to be active when walking through parks and neighbourhoods.

Rather than creating new dedicated play spaces, the project used existing trees and simple, affordable materials to introduce playful experiences into places people already visit. Swings were attached to carefully selected tree branches and installed in locations where they could be discovered unexpectedly during everyday journeys. The approach demonstrates how small interventions can transform ordinary environments into places that encourage curiosity, joy and spontaneous movement.

Invercargill City Council's Play Advocate, Dr Damien Puddle, described the swings as a way for people to enjoy 'playful movement' while out and about in natural settings.

The community response was so positive that the initial trial of 6 swings was expanded to a permanent network of 26 swings across the city. Some swings were even created using recycled playground materials, helping keep costs low while extending play opportunities throughout the city.

The project highlights an important active design lesson: opportunities for play do not need to be confined to playgrounds. Simple interventions embedded in parks, streets and public spaces can encourage people to pause, explore, interact and be active as part of everyday life. By combining nature, movement and play, the Invercargill tree swings help create a more playful and physically active city.

Key lesson

Small, low-cost interventions can create moments of surprise and delight that encourage spontaneous play and physical activity in everyday settings.



Tree swings are a simple, affordable intervention that supports playful movement in everyday public spaces, Waihōpai Invercargill.

Credit: Invercargill City Council



Vitality – Bring spaces and places to life

Ensure our urban environments offer a variety of activities, experiences and opportunities to be physically active.

People are more likely to spend time outdoors when there are interesting places to visit and reasons to stay. This principle focuses on creating vibrant urban environments that support everyday activity and community life.

Bringing places and spaces to life is about more than physical design. Activities such as markets, walking groups, community gardening, cultural events and local gatherings can attract people to public spaces and support regular use. Clear information, effective management and well-maintained environments help make participation easy and welcoming.

This principle moves beyond approaches where parks and public spaces are dominated by large areas of flat grass or have single-purpose uses. While sports fields and organised recreation remain important, the most successful places support a variety of activities throughout the day and year, creating opportunities for gathering, relaxation, events and shared experiences.

Partnerships with local businesses, community organisations, mana whenua and event providers can further strengthen activation and encourage people to visit, stay and return.

Bringing places and spaces to life means:

- creating vibrant places that attract people throughout the day and across different seasons
- providing a mix of activities and experiences that encourage people to visit, stay and return
- supporting both everyday use and organised activities through flexible, adaptable spaces
- maintaining clean, safe and well-cared-for environments that encourage regular use
- enabling community groups, mana whenua, businesses and local organisations to activate public spaces through events, services and activities
- using design features or visual cues to invite people to explore, play, connect with others, care for places and take part in regular activities and events.

Applying this principle

This principle can be applied across all urban environments, from town centres and main streets to parks, schools, waterfronts, public open spaces and new neighbourhoods. All these places should provide opportunities for people to participate in activities, gather, rest and spend time outdoors.

Bringing places to life does not always require major investment. Small improvements such as additional seating, shelters, temporary activities, food vendors, community events or better lighting can significantly increase use and encourage people to be more active. Partnerships with local businesses and community organisations can also play an important role in activation. Coffee carts, food vendors, local markets and community events can help create destinations that encourage people to visit and stay longer.

Common challenges arise when public spaces rely on occasional events rather than supporting everyday activity, or when they are designed for a single purpose with limited opportunities for informal use.

Poor maintenance, inadequate amenities, restrictive management approaches or unclear information can discourage activity and limit opportunities for people to use public spaces. Management approaches and rules should support appropriate use and make it easy for people to understand what activities are permitted. Addressing these challenges early can help ensure public spaces remain welcoming, flexible and well used throughout the year.



St Asaph Street basketball half court, part of a temporary youth space in the Christchurch rebuild.
Credit: ChristchurchNZ Ltd

Putting it into practice

- Support regular community activities, such as parkrun, walking groups, outdoor fitness classes, cultural performances and community gardening.
- Design flexible public spaces that can accommodate everyday use, activities and casual sport and recreation, as well as markets, food stalls, performances and community events.
- Small, covered spaces, pavilions and gathering areas can support year-round activities such as Tai Chi, walking groups, meeting points, event hosting and community gatherings.
- Provide clear information about activities and opportunities, including event listings, walking maps, wayfinding, community noticeboards and digital information platforms.
- Create spaces that support people staying longer, with seating, shelter, drinking fountains, toilets, bike parking and other visitor amenities.
- Activate new neighbourhoods early, with temporary events, food vendors, pop-up activities and community programmes before development is fully established.
- Provide spaces that support cultural and community activities, such as gathering spaces, shared kai facilities, community gardens, hāngī pits and flexible areas for cultural events and celebrations.

Why this matters

Active design creates places that people want to visit, stay in and return to. Whether it is grabbing a coffee from a local cart on the way to work, browsing a weekend market, meeting friends at a community event, joining a walking group after work or gathering under a pavilion for a Tai Chi class, vibrant and well-managed public spaces give people reasons to be out and about. When design, programming and stewardship work together, streets, parks and public spaces become valued destinations that support everyday public life.

Principle in action

Whānau Ātea, Te Pane o Mataoho, Te Ara Pueru, Auckland

Whānau Ātea demonstrates how public spaces can be brought to life by creating opportunities for gathering, recreation, cultural activities and everyday community use. Developed by the Tūpuna Maunga Authority in partnership with mana whenua, the space was designed as a destination where people can come together to play, share kai and participate in community life.

The project moves beyond the traditional model of a neighbourhood park dominated by open grass and a small playground. Instead, it brings together a diverse mix of facilities that support activity throughout the day and year, including a māra hūpara (traditional Māori play space), sports courts, a kī-o-rahi field, gathering spaces, walking routes and the first permanent community hāngī pit available for public bookings in Auckland.

A key feature of Whānau Ātea is its focus on participation. The hāngī pit and kai space provide opportunities for whānau, schools, sports clubs, community groups and local organisations to host events, celebrations, fundraisers and shared meals. Together, these facilities create reasons for people to visit, stay and return, helping transform the space from a traditional park into a vibrant community destination.

The project also highlights the importance of programming and stewardship. Rather than relying solely on occasional events, the space was designed to support regular community use. Facilities can be booked for cultural activities, gatherings and celebrations, while the diverse recreation opportunities encourage everyday use by people of all ages. This helps keep the space active throughout the week and across different seasons.

Whānau Ātea demonstrates that vibrant public spaces are created through more than physical design alone. By combining recreation, gathering spaces, cultural facilities and community-led activities, the project supports everyday community life and creates a destination that people want to visit, use and return to.

Key lesson

Vibrant public spaces are created through a combination of design, programming, partnerships and stewardship. Providing spaces for people to gather, share experiences and participate in community life can transform parks and public spaces into destinations that support activity throughout the year.



Hāngi pits and kai space at Whānau Ātea, Māngere Maunga, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Acknowldge: Rewi Spraggon and Tūpuna Maunga Authority
Credit: Boffa Miskell

Nature – Integrate everyday encounters with the natural environment

Provide easy access to nature to encourage people to be active and spend time outdoors.

This principle is about making it easy for people to experience nature as part of everyday life. Evidence shows that regular access to nature supports higher levels of physical activity and improves physical and mental wellbeing. Even short periods in nature can reduce stress, improve mood and encourage people to spend more time outdoors (Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa, Blue and Green Spaces Research).

Active design creates opportunities to experience nature as part of everyday life. Greener, more comfortable streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces encourage walking, cycling, play and outdoor recreation, while also supporting native biodiversity, protecting and restoring te taiao and contributing to more climate-resilient urban environments.

In Aotearoa, green and blue spaces provide opportunities to support biodiversity and kaitiakitanga, enable customary practices such as kai gathering, and strengthen ecological health through native planting that reflects local ecosystems. Healthy rivers, lakes and coastal environments can also support recreation and sport, including swimming, fishing, kayaking, waka ama and rowing.

Integrating everyday encounters with nature means:

- creating greener, cooler and more comfortable neighbourhoods, streets and public spaces that encourage walking, cycling, play and time outdoors
- providing opportunities to experience nature throughout everyday journeys, from native planting and pocket parks to waterways, wetlands and coastal environments
- protecting and restoring te taiao through native planting, biodiversity enhancement, ecological restoration and support for kaitiakitanga
- recognising nature as essential urban infrastructure that supports physical activity, wellbeing, biodiversity and climate resilience.

Just 5 minutes in nature can support wellbeing.

(Based on the Barton & Pretty finding already referenced in this chapter.)

Applying this principle

This principle is relevant across all urban environments and is most effective when nature is woven into the fabric of towns, cities and neighbourhoods rather than treated as a separate ‘destination’. In new communities, green and blue infrastructure should be integrated into neighbourhood structure, creating open space, walking and cycling networks from the outset. In existing neighbourhoods, new community gardens, street trees, native planting programmes and stream restoration, and improved access to waterways and connections to parks and open spaces bring nature closer to everyday life. Temporary and pilot initiatives such as pop-up community gardens, planter boxes and potted trees can be used to test ideas and build support before permanent investment.

Common challenges arise when nature is disconnected from people and neighbourhoods, treated as an amenity add-on, or designed without considering safety and access, ecological health and long-term stewardship. These approaches can reduce opportunities for people to experience nature as part of daily life.



Karanga Plaza Harbour Pool – a free public saltwater swimming pool at the tidal steps in Auckland's Wynyard Quarter, developed through a waterfront restoration project that returned this part of the harbour to community use.

Credit: Auckland Urban Development Office

Putting it into practice

- Create connected greenways, with shared paths linking homes, parks, town centres, schools and other everyday destinations and services.
- Integrate walking, wheeling and cycling routes alongside urban waterways, wetlands, harbours and coastal edges, as part of blue-green networks, stormwater corridors and climate adaptation projects.
- Incorporate street trees, planting, pocket parks, planted courtyards and public spaces into urban neighbourhoods, particularly higher-density areas where access to private green space is limited.
- Integrate nature play elements, such as logs, rocks, water, landforms and planting, into streets, parks, reserves and public spaces.
- Use rain gardens, swales, wetlands and other blue-green infrastructure, such as daylighted streams and constructed wetlands within parks, to create attractive, nature-rich environments that encourage walking, cycling and recreation.
- Restore native habitats and ecological corridors, including riparian planting and urban ngahere (urban forest) to support biodiversity while creating opportunities for recreation, exploration and outdoor learning.
- Provide easy and safe access to a variety of natural environments and native habitats through connected walking and cycling networks, such as shared paths linking neighbourhoods to awa and wetlands, or boardwalks providing access to ecological areas.

Why this matters

By weaving nature into the places people live, work, learn and play, everyday journeys become more attractive, engaging and enjoyable, supporting physical activity and wellbeing. Whether it's walking beneath street trees, spending time in a pocket park or following an urban river walkway or harbour path, when nature is easy to experience and access, people can be more active, native biodiversity and a healthy te taiao are supported, and our communities are more resilient.

Principle in action

Te Ara Awataha Greenway, Northcote, Auckland

The Northcote regeneration project demonstrates how nature can be woven into everyday environments to support physical activity, wellbeing, biodiversity and climate resilience. At the heart of the project is Te Ara Awataha, a 1.5km greenway that connects neighbourhoods, schools, parks, open spaces and the town centre through a network of walking and cycling paths integrated with restored natural systems.

Rather than treating nature as a separate destination, Te Ara Awataha brings nature into everyday journeys. The greenway follows the historic Awataha Stream, which has been daylighted and restored after being buried underground for many years. Native planting, habitat restoration, wetlands and stormwater features are integrated alongside shared paths, creating an attractive and accessible environment that encourages people to walk, cycle, play and spend time outdoors.

The project illustrates how green and blue infrastructure can perform multiple functions. In addition to providing opportunities for recreation and everyday physical activity, the greenway helps manage stormwater, improve water quality, support biodiversity and build resilience to flooding. The restoration of the stream corridor has created habitat for native species, including kōkopu, kōura and tuna (longfin eel), while strengthening the ecological health of the area.

Te Ara Awataha also demonstrates the value of integrating nature early in the planning and design process. The greenway was planned as a central piece of neighbourhood infrastructure, helping to structure new housing, schools, parks and public spaces while improving connections across the wider community.

The project was developed through collaboration between mana whenua, local schools, community groups, Kāinga Ora and Auckland Council, reflecting a shared commitment to restoring the health of te taiao while creating a more active and connected community.



Students from Northcote Intermediate School planting at Te Ara Awataha greenway.
Credit: Auckland Urban Development Office



Identity – Celebrate the essence of people and place

Embed local identity and values in our places and spaces so they foster belonging, connections and everyday use.

Research shows that people who feel connected to a place are more likely to spend time there, return regularly and walk within their neighbourhoods. When local identity, cultural narratives and community values are embedded into places, everyday journeys can feel more purposeful and engaging, supporting physical activity as part of daily life. This principle focuses on creating places that reflect local culture, history, values and community aspirations, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and connection.

In Aotearoa, celebrating the essence of people and place includes working in partnership with mana whenua to understand whakapapa, cultural values, narratives and relationships with te taiao. This means recognising mana whenua as enduring partners whose relationships with place can influence not only cultural expression but also planning priorities, spatial arrangements and stewardship outcomes.

This principle is about more than artwork, planting or naming. Local identity can influence how places are structured, how people move through them, where they gather and how they are cared for over time. A collaborative approach helps create places that reflect both cultural values and lived experience, making them more meaningful, welcoming and well used.

Celebrating the essence of people and place means:

- partnering with mana whenua throughout to understand and reflect local whakapapa, cultural narratives and relationships with te taiao
- embedding local identity, history and community values into the planning, design and management of places
- creating places that are distinctive, meaningful and connected to their local context
- supporting a sense of belonging through designing, planning and managing places that respond to young people, disabled people, women and girls, older people and underserved communities' aspirations and lived experiences.

Applying this principle

This principle can be applied across all urban environments, from new communities and town centres to existing neighbourhoods, parks, streets and public spaces. The greatest opportunities often occur early in the planning and design process, where cultural values, stories and community aspirations can help shape movement networks, public spaces and destinations.

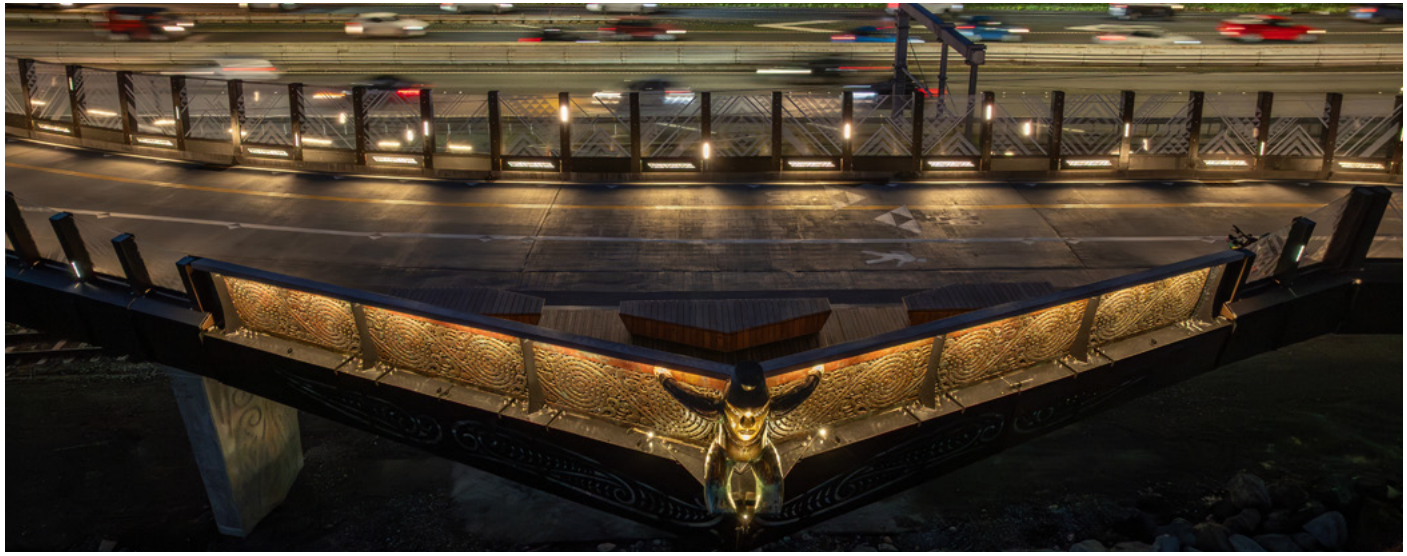
However, celebrating the essence of people and place does not require major investment or large-scale redevelopment. In existing places, local identity can be strengthened through simple interventions such as bilingual signage, storytelling elements, public art, interpretation panels, wayfinding and the restoration of heritage features. Even small changes can help reveal local stories, celebrate cultural values and strengthen connections between people and place.

Working alongside mana whenua, communities and local organisations can help identify the stories, values and experiences that make a place unique. Over time, stewardship and care help ensure places remain meaningful, relevant and well used.

Common challenges arise when identity is treated as a design feature added late in the process rather than a principle that shapes planning and design from the outset. Other challenges include generic design responses that could apply anywhere, relying solely on visual motifs, or assuming that celebrating local identity requires significant investment. Places can also feel less authentic when a single narrative is used to represent diverse communities and experiences.

Putting it into practice

- Work with mana whenua to identify local whakapapa, cultural values, narratives and relationships with te taiao that can inform the planning and design of streets, parks and public spaces.
- Reflect local identity through place names, bilingual signage, public art, planting and storytelling elements that help reveal the history, culture and significance of a place.
- Respond to local landscapes and environmental characteristics through planting, materials, artwork and design elements that reflect local whenua, wai and ecological systems.
- Protect and celebrate significant cultural, natural and heritage features, such as wāhi tūpuna (sites of significance to iwi), heritage buildings, mature trees, native plantings, waterways and pathways.
- Celebrate local stories through small-scale interventions, such as interpretation panels, cultural markers, artworks, heritage trails and wayfinding elements.
- Co-design places drawing on cultural knowledge, lived experience and community aspirations to create places that feel authentic, relevant and valued.



Te Matarae o Wharepouri bridge at night, Te Ara Tupa, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.
Acknowledgment: Len Hetet and Te Atiawa Taranaki Whānui
Credit: NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

Key lesson

Places become more meaningful when they reflect the people, stories, values and landscapes that make them unique. Whether following a trail that reveals local stories, stopping to read a cultural marker, gathering in a space shaped by mana whenua narratives or exploring a route that connects with local whenua and wai, places that celebrate local identity can encourage people to engage more actively with their surroundings.



3 Applying active design

Walking along Colombo Street, Ōtautahi Christchurch.
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Applying active design to different urban environments

The Active Design Principles outlined in this guide can be applied across a wide range of urban environments throughout Aotearoa, from new neighbourhoods and major urban development projects through to existing places where smaller, targeted improvements can make everyday activity easier and more enjoyable.

The 12 common approaches used to apply the Active Design Principles in Aotearoa are:

- Connected, accessible movement networks
- People-centred streets and public spaces
- Mixed-use environments
- Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges
- Places to pause, gather and connect
- Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity
- Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments
- Access to the water's edge
- Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place
- Stewardship, learning and community care
- Active travel support and end-of-trip facilities
- Schools as community hubs

The following section explores how these approaches can be applied in different urban environments. Each example demonstrates how active design approaches respond to the unique role and function of that environment, highlighting practical interventions that support everyday activity and movement for a range of users. The examples also identify the types of activity these environments can enable and key considerations for successful planning, design and delivery.

Whether through major development and investment or smaller, incremental improvements, every urban environment presents opportunities to create places that support walking, wheeling, cycling, play, recreation and social connection. Together, these examples demonstrate how urban environments can be planned, designed and managed to enable everyday activity for everyone while responding to the diverse landscapes, communities and aspirations that shape Aotearoa.

Active design approaches

Connected, accessible movement networks

Direct, legible and continuous walking, wheeling and cycling routes that connect homes, workplaces, schools, parks, shops, public transport, blue-green corridors and other everyday destinations to make active travel safe and easy.

Consider:

- allocating sufficient space for movement connections early in structure planning and land-use decisions
- the needs of young people, people with disabilities, women and girls and older adults so they can move around confidently and independently
- the needs of users at different times of day or night and in different seasons
- safe crossings at every intersection
- how stormwater or climate resilience infrastructure might be embedded into the movement network or vice versa
- desire lines, obvious access points and a choice of routes
- lighting and opportunities for passive surveillance
- interesting destinations and points along the journey, such as play opportunities, gathering places or viewing points
- amenities that support comfort, such as seating, public toilets, shade and shelter
- wayfinding and cues that encourage active travel such as step or distance markers.

People-centred streets and public spaces

Prioritise the safety, comfort and confidence of people using streets and public spaces by reducing vehicle speeds, managing conflict, improving crossings and designing for all ages and abilities.

Consider:

- the needs of young people, people with disabilities, women and girls, and older adults so they can move around confidently and independently
- the needs of users at different times of day or night and in different seasons
- safe crossings at every intersection
- desire lines, wide, clear and continuous footpaths, separated cycling routes and slow-speed shared zones
- spaces that are enjoyable and welcoming, and that reflect local identity.

Mixed-use environments

Locate, connect and cluster places that meet daily needs, such as schools, shops, cafés, retirement villages, community facilities, public transport, parks and workplace amenities, within neighbourhoods so active travel becomes part of everyday routines and residents have easy local access to spaces for play, recreation and sport.

Consider:

- using fencing sparingly to support visibility, safety and informal use
- integrating stormwater and climate resilience infrastructure with movement networks where possible
- making land use and site allocation decisions early in the planning process, and delivering key community destinations early in the development programme to help create a sense of community and increase desirability for new residents.

Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Orient buildings, windows and entrances towards streets, parks, corridors and gathering areas to improve visibility, passive surveillance, visual interest and a sense of welcome. This helps create places that feel safer, vibrant and more inviting for passing through, gathering and lingering, supporting active travel, play and recreation.

Consider:

- maintaining clear and accessible movement routes while allowing space for verandas, seating, outdoor dining, markets, events, coffee carts and other street activity
- driveway design that prioritises safe access on to the street across footpaths
- using fencing sparingly and favouring low, permeable fencing where required along street and public space frontages.

Places to pause, gather and connect

Provide comfortable, inclusive and well-located places to rest, meet, wait, linger, socialise, recreate and spend time outdoors. These areas should be supported by amenities such as seating, shade, shelter, toilets, drinking fountains and bike parking.

Consider:

- ensuring these places do not conflict with access needs, particularly for disabled people, parents and caregivers, or older adults
- cues that welcome use and activation
- amenities that can be accessed and used by all, particularly for disabled people, parents and caregivers, and older adults
- that rangatahi want to feel safe without feeling closely observed
- spaces that give rangatahi permission to linger and invite tamariki to climb, balance, explore and play
- spaces that reflect local identity and provide opportunities to learn, participate and contribute.

Flexible spaces for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Design streets, parks, public spaces and open areas to support informal and formal play, recreation, sport, events, community activities and changing needs over time.

Consider:

- how meeting points are communicated and how people are invited to use, activate or interact with the space
- potential conflicts with access needs, particularly for young people, people with disabilities, parents and caregivers, and older adults
- how the space might be used at different times of the day, week and year
- how the space might also be used to manage stormwater or support climate resilience
- spaces that reflect local aspirations, identity and changing community needs over time.

Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Integrate trees, planting, waterways, wetlands, green infrastructure and nature-based stormwater systems to improve comfort, biodiversity, resilience and everyday encounters with nature, creating desirable active travel, play, recreation and sport experiences.

Consider:

- species and design that ensure pathways remain clear and accessible for walking, wheeling and cycling throughout the seasons and over time
- how trees can provide shade, shelter and cooling to make physical activity more comfortable in all weather conditions
- spaces that reflect local identity and provide opportunities to learn about, care for or contribute to the local environment
- opportunities for nature play, rest, exploration and connection with te taiao.

Access to the water's edge

Where relevant, provide safe, inclusive and inviting access to waterways, coastal edges and harbours through boardwalks, terraces, launching areas, crossings, paths and places to observe or interact with wai, enhancing opportunities for recreation, sport and play.

Consider:

- amenities that support activities such as kai gathering, water sports and nature play
- access for people with disabilities, young people, parents and caregivers, and older adults so they can interact with and enjoy the water's edge confidently and independently
- spaces that reflect local identity and provide opportunities to learn about, care for or contribute to the local environment.

Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

Work with communities, including mana whenua, young people and those with lived experiences, to understand the local stories, use patterns, and aspirations, and reflect this back in design, landscape character, public art, naming, materials and planting to create distinctive places that people recognise, value and want to spend time being active in or moving through.

Consider:

- early and ongoing partnership with mana whenua to understand the relationship with te taiao and to help guide planning, design and stewardship approaches
- how local people and those with lived experience currently use the space, how they would like to use it, the barriers they experience, and how they want to be involved in planning, design, delivery and ongoing care
- the impacts of encroachment, unintended barriers and conflicts, such as signage, outdoor dining, street furniture, public art and other elements that can affect access, visibility or use.

Stewardship, learning and community care

Support kaitiakitanga, volunteering, restoration, food growing, citizen science, outdoor learning and community-led care so people can actively participate in looking after places. These types of activities contribute to people's movement, wellbeing and social cohesion.

Consider:

- planning for these outcomes early and building relationships with communities so they can contribute to the planning, design and delivery and ongoing care of places
- partnerships with schools, businesses and community groups.

Active travel support and end-of-trip facilities

Provide the practical infrastructure that makes active travel easier, such as secure bike parking, lockers, toilets, showers, drinking fountains, lighting and clear public transport connections.

Consider:

- wayfinding and clear links to surrounding destinations and public transport
- spaces to meet, wait and gather
- early engagement with public transport providers and businesses
- ongoing cleaning, maintenance and management that contribute to feelings of safety and comfort.

Schools as community hubs

Schools are often centrally located within neighbourhoods. They can provide safe, vibrant and accessible spaces for local play, recreation, sport, connection and events, with the added benefit of fostering positive connections between whānau and school.

Consider:

- new school developments in relation to public open space, community facilities and related infrastructure
- building relationships with schools so they feel supported and confident to provide community access outside school hours
- creating opportunities to address school concerns and improve user safety with lighting, improved visibility, security systems, maintenance and council partnerships.

Blue-green corridors

Designing blue-green networks for movement, connections and climate resilience

Blue-green networks include rivers, streams, wetlands, coastal edges, harbours, green corridors and connected open spaces. In Aotearoa, these routes are increasingly being used to build climate resilience into our towns and cities. In doing so, we gain one of the greatest opportunities to integrate active design into civil infrastructure projects, such as flood protection schemes, seawall enhancement and stormwater management systems. By planning and designing blue-green networks as multifunctional infrastructure, they can support everyday movement while improving water management, strengthening climate resilience and enhancing native biodiversity.

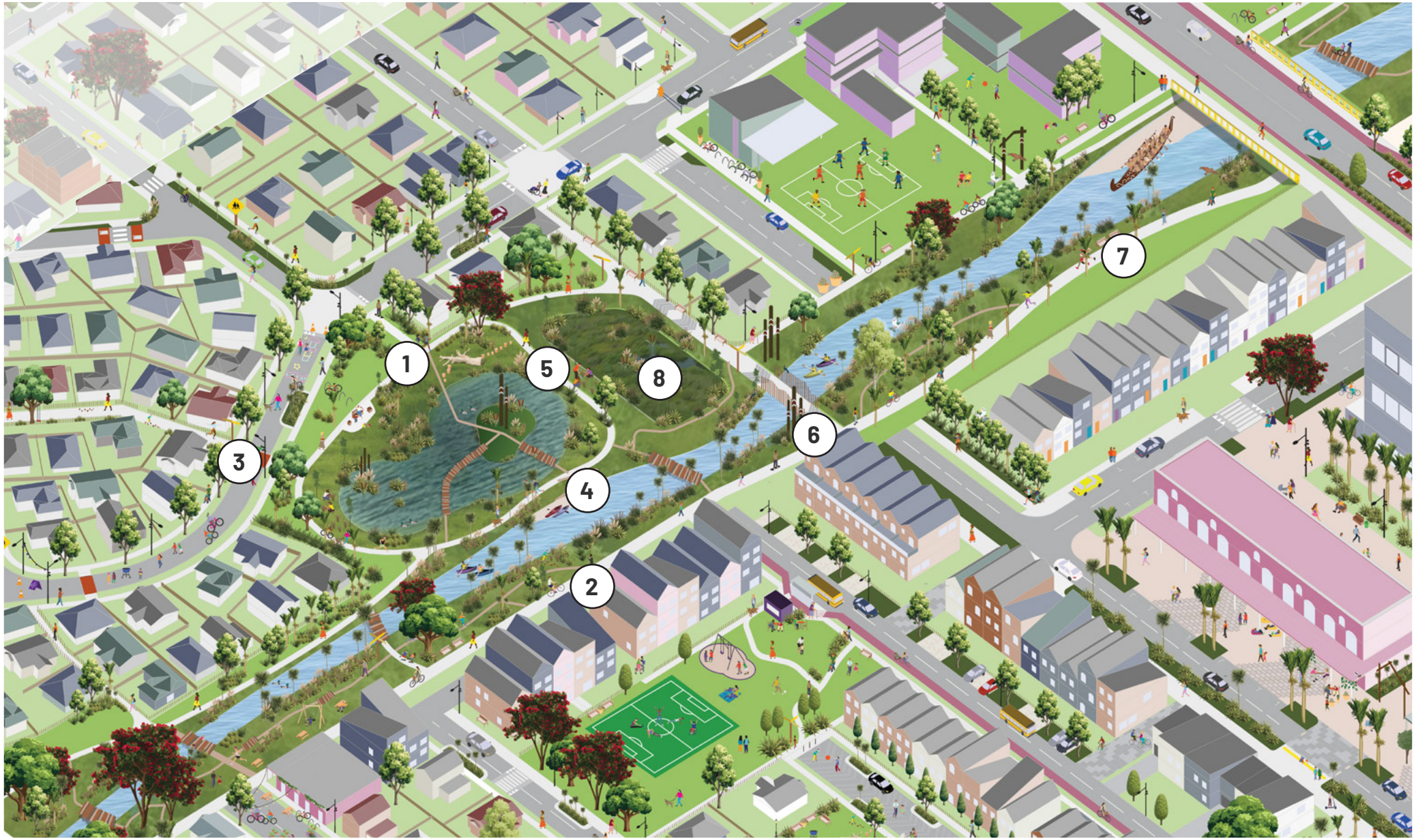
Active design in blue-green networks is expressed through informal access and incidental opportunities to be active, as well as more formal paths, crossings and public spaces that connect people with waterways and the wider landscape. This makes walking, wheeling and cycling practical, attractive and inviting.

Movement is further supported through clear physical and visual access to waterways and harbours, comfortable and legible routes, and well-located places to pause, learn about, care for and enjoy the environment. These spaces support stewardship and volunteering activities – such as planting, restoration and monitoring – strengthening relationships with te taiao while creating meaningful opportunities for people to be physically active.



Wayfinding in Walmsley Park, Te Auaunga Oakley Creek, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Credit: Jay Farnworth

Approaches used and examples of application in blue-green corridors



Approaches used and examples of application in blue-green corridors

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

Connected and continuous shared pathways that run parallel to the wai, linking green spaces, parks and neighbourhoods.

2. Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Building fronts and public spaces face and overlook the corridor, fencing is minimised and, where required, is low and permeable, entry points are frequent, accessible, visible and connected to the surrounding walking and cycling network.

3. Places to pause, gather and connect

Amenities such as seating, shelter, shade, viewing platforms, picnic areas, drinking fountains, toilets, bike parking etc are integrated along or near the routes within the corridor.

4. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Native habitat creation and riparian planting are integrated into the corridor. Routes are designed to work with nature to manage water in flood events, materials are selected to cope with changing water levels, and plant species are considered for their resilience to climate change

5. Access to the water's edge

A range of ways for people of all ages and abilities to access or experience the wai including terraces, ramps, bridges, jetties, boardwalks, launching areas, manu platforms etc.

6. Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

A layered storytelling experience throughout the corridor including opportunities for mahinga kai and expressions of Māori identity through narratives, public art, place naming, recognition of sacred sites and plant selections.

7. Stewardship, learning and community care

Space, opportunities, and cues are provided to educate the public or engage them in restoration activities.

New neighbourhoods

Supporting everyday movement and physical activity close to home

New neighbourhoods play an important role in enabling everyday activity and movement as part of daily life in Aotearoa. They accommodate a wide range of households, ages and abilities and are central to delivering more compact, connected communities. When planned and designed with active design in mind, they support walking, wheeling, play, informal recreation and easy access to public transport as normal parts of everyday routines. This reduces reliance on private vehicles while supporting healthier lifestyles and community wellbeing.

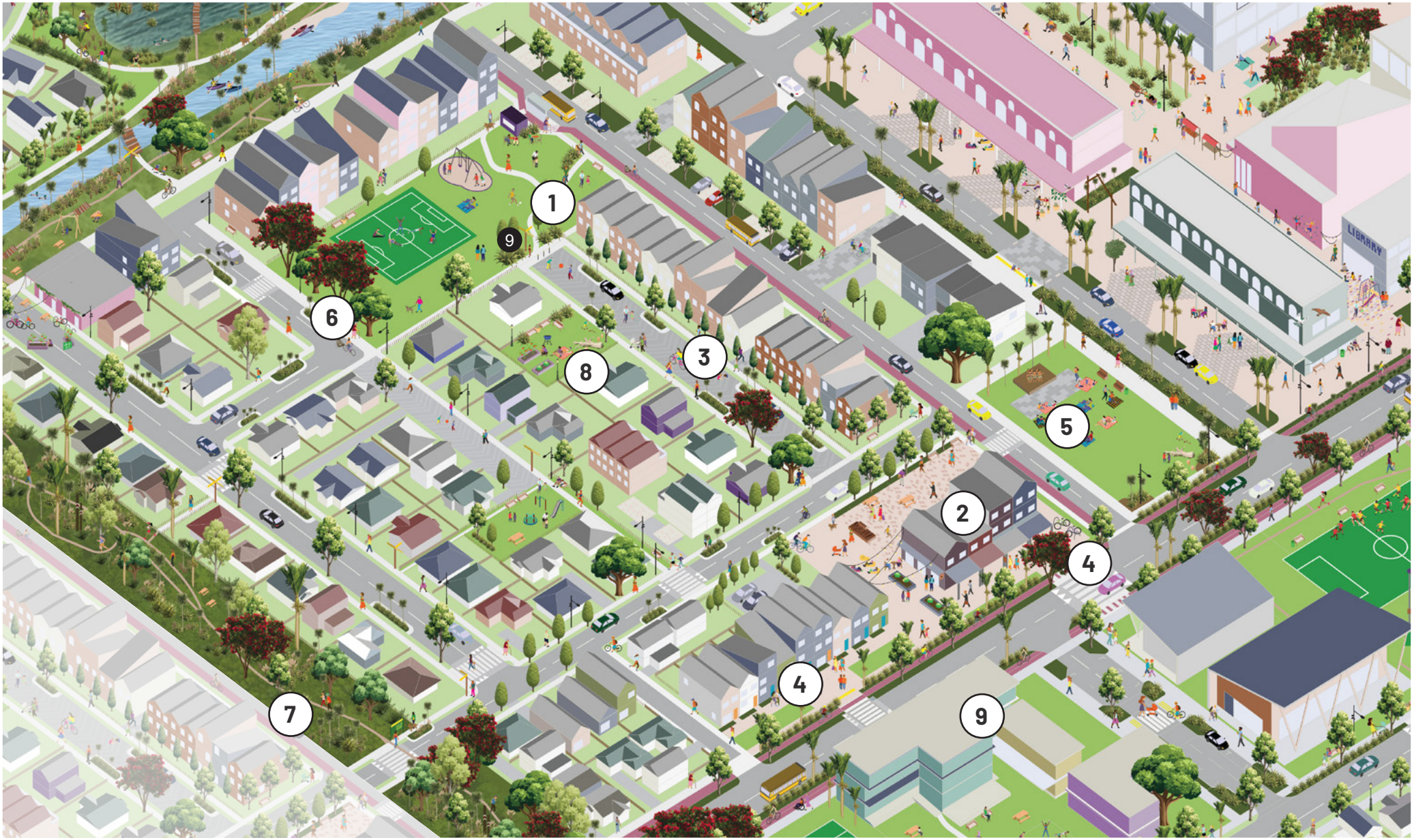
Active design in new neighbourhoods focuses on how streets, paths, parks and shared spaces function as everyday environments, not simply movement corridors. Well-connected street networks, nearby schools, parks, centres and services, and public transport make it easier for people to incorporate physical activity into daily life. These environments can support children's independence, enable people to age in place, and allow disabled people to move through their neighbourhoods with confidence, safety and dignity.

New neighbourhoods are also places of whanaungatanga (relationships, kinship and connection), where relationships are built and maintained through everyday interaction. Successful neighbourhoods are places people enjoy spending time in, not simply living in. Comfortable streets, opportunities to pause and gather, integrated play, visible connections with nature and expressions of local identity all contribute to a stronger sense of belonging. Working with mana whenua, neighbouring communities and future residents can help ensure neighbourhoods reflect local values, histories and aspirations through naming, planting, public art and other design responses that connect people to te taiao. This helps create places that support long-term stewardship, community wellbeing and a strong sense of place.

15-minute neighbourhoods

plan for key daily destinations and services to be within a 15-minute walk of most homes.

Approaches used and examples of application in new neighbourhoods



Approaches used and examples of application in new neighbourhoods

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

Connected, well-lit streets and paths throughout the neighbourhood with short blocks, mid-block connections and variety of safe step-free active travel routes.

2. Mixed-use environments

Plan for key everyday destinations and services to be within a 15-minute walk of most homes.

3. People-centred streets and public spaces

Narrow traffic lanes, raised crossings and intersections, and traffic calming measures are prioritised around schools and parks; frequent crossing points and wayfinding are included.

4. Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Streets, public spaces, blue-green corridors, and parks are well-lit and visible from homes and buildings; community facilities, schools, shops and cafés have active frontages.

5. Places to pause, gather and connect

Amenities such as seating, shelter, shade, drinking fountains, toilets, bike parking etc are regularly and strategically located throughout the neighbourhood.

6. Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Local community facilities, 'play along the way' routes and small public spaces are integrated into neighbourhoods.

7. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Street trees, natural stormwater management solutions, native planting, nature play spaces, wetlands, blue-green corridors, community gardens, parks and local green spaces are integrated throughout the neighbourhood.

8. Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

Planting selections, Māori narratives, public art and public spaces reflect the local environments, aspirations and stories.

9. Schools as community hubs

Schools are connected to the surrounding neighbourhood through safe walking, wheeling and cycling routes; school open spaces have high visibility from the street.

Main streets and town centres

Supporting active, vibrant and connected town centres

Local town centres and main streets are important social, cultural and economic infrastructure. They are places people return to frequently and where everyday experiences shape perceptions of safety, comfort, belonging and local identity. Active design in this setting prioritises people over traffic, turning routine trips into safe, social and enjoyable experiences.

Active design on local main streets focuses on creating streets that support easy and safe movement, stopping and staying, and a mix of uses such as shops, cafés, workplaces, services and community facilities. By prioritising walking, cycling and public transport, main streets support incidental activity such as browsing, waiting, social interaction and everyday encounters with nature, while reinforcing local identity and economic vitality.



George Street, Ōtepoti Dunedin, combines attractive public spaces, lighting, planting and places to stop, helping create an inviting and accessible town centre throughout the day and evening.
Credit: DunedinNZ

Successful town centres are places people enjoy being in, not simply moving through. Comfortable walking environments, opportunities to pause and gather, playful and engaging experiences, active street edges and visible expressions of local culture can encourage people to visit, stay longer and return more often. Well-designed centres support people of different ages and abilities, accommodate a range of activities throughout the day and week, and continue to support servicing, deliveries and access while prioritising people and community life.

Approaches used and examples of application in main streets and town centres



Approaches used and examples of application in main streets and town centres

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

Direct pedestrian movement routes, frequent safe crossings, step-free routes, wide footpaths, and separated cycleways link public transport, retail, hospitality, services, community facilities, public spaces, parks and other key destinations. Navigation is supported by lighting, clear wayfinding, landmarks, consistent pavement treatments and strong sightlines.

2. People-centred streets and public spaces

Traffic calming measures, including narrow lane widths, raised tables, reduced speed limits, and shared spaces prioritise pedestrians. Frequent crossing points, wayfinding and strategically located on-street parking help create a safe and more comfortable environment while supporting local businesses and accessibility.

3. Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Shop fronts, cafés and building entrances are oriented to the street and public spaces with large windows and frequent entrances; lighting, verandas, outdoor dining, spill-out activities and public seating are incorporated throughout.

4. Places to pause, gather and connect

Amenities such as seating, shelter, shade, bike parking etc are regularly and strategically located within the town centre.

5. Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Green spaces, plazas, streets and other public spaces have adaptable layouts for different purposes, seasons, or events; play, recreation and social elements are integrated into spaces.

6. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Street trees, natural stormwater management solutions, native planting and green spaces are integrated into the town centre; physical and visual connections to nearby parks or natural features are evident.

7. Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

The character of the space reflects Māori aspirations, local histories, significant landmarks and the uniqueness of the place through public art, naming, wayfinding, planting, viewshafts, landscape features and materials.

8. Active travel support and end-of-trip facilities

Attractive and welcoming arrival spaces incorporate seating, shelter, shade, bike parking and places to meet and wait as well as clear wayfinding and obvious walking and cycling connections to key destinations.

Parks and local green spaces

Everyday green spaces for physical activity, movement, play and connection with nature and the outdoors

Local urban parks are a fundamental part of everyday life in our towns and cities. They provide some of the most accessible opportunities for physical activity, connection with nature and social interaction close to home. For many people, local parks are their main point of contact with nature and green space. Their value lies not in scale or special facilities, but in proximity, familiarity and regular use by people of all ages and abilities. Active design in local urban parks focuses on how paths, edges, planting and amenities – including sports fields, playgrounds and courts – support everyday movement and wellbeing as part of normal daily routines.

Parks shaped by active design invite walking, wheeling, cycling, play, active recreation, rest and time together without the need for planning, payment or organised activity. They are places people return to often, at different times of day and across life stages. Local parks are communal places where relationships between people and te taiao are expressed through use, stewardship and learning. Active design in local parks supports accessibility, dignity and safety, while also strengthening ecological health and opportunities for kaitiakitanga.



Te Ara Awataha combines play, movement, nature, cultural identity and places to gather along the greenway, Northcote, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Credit: Sam Pietras

Approaches used and examples of application in parks and local green spaces



Approaches used and examples of application in parks and local green spaces

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

Well-lit walking, wheeling and cycling routes for people through parks that also connect parks with surrounding neighbourhoods, schools, and key destinations. Parks have multiple entrances with step-free access, direct crossing points and clear wayfinding and sightlines.

2. Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Parks have welcoming edges with low boundary treatments and good visibility between the park and surrounding streets and neighbouring buildings.

3. Places to pause, gather and connect

Amenities, such as seating, shelter, picnic areas, shade, bike parking, public toilets and drinking fountains, are regularly and strategically located within the town centre. Gathering spaces with good visibility and strong connection to the landscape are located near entrances, play areas, sports facilities and key destinations.

4. Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Open lawns, fields, outdoor courts, play areas, perimeter trails and multi-use spaces can support play, recreation, sport, events, gatherings, and markets; lighting, power, connected pathways, raised viewing areas and covered spaces ensure these spaces are accessible and useable in different seasons and throughout the day.

5. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Diverse planting provides shade, shelter and seasonal interest, and enhances biodiversity; waterways, wetlands, natural stormwater management and walking trails are integrated and encourage observation, education and nature play.

6. Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

The character of the space reflects Māori aspirations, local histories, significant landmarks and the uniqueness of the place through public art, naming, wayfinding, planting, viewshafts, landscape features and materials.

7. Stewardship, learning and community care

Māra kai, space for community restoration activities and information on local ecology are included within the park.

City centres

Creating central city environments that support safe, welcoming and inclusive everyday activity and movement

City centres bring together workplaces, shops, health services, cultural facilities, public transport, parks and public spaces. They are places where many everyday journeys begin, end and connect. Active design helps make these journeys easier, safer and more enjoyable, encouraging people to walk, wheel, cycle and use public transport as part of everyday life.

Active design in city centres focuses on creating connected, accessible and people-focused environments that support movement between destinations while encouraging people to spend time in public spaces. It recognises that physical activity is embedded in everyday experiences such as travelling to work, accessing services, meeting friends, shopping, attending events and spending time in parks and civic spaces. Well-connected destinations, accessible routes and high-quality public spaces help people of all ages and abilities move confidently through the city and participate in urban life.

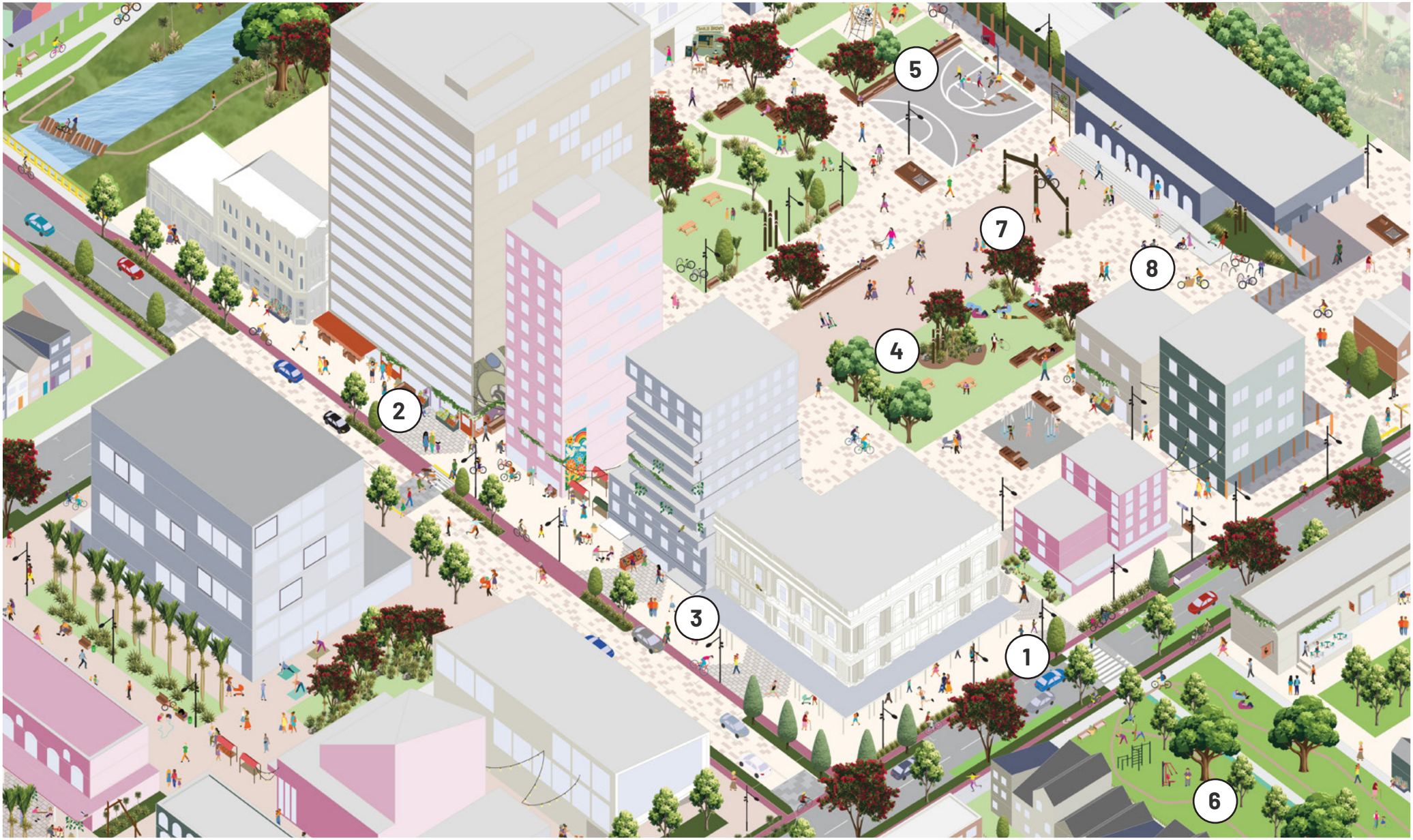


Wide footpaths, seating, planting and active street life help make central city streets welcoming and easy to use, Oxford Terrace, Ōtautahi Christchurch.

Credit: Sam Pietras

Successful city centres are places people enjoy being in, not simply moving through. Comfortable streets, welcoming public spaces, opportunities to pause and gather, everyday encounters with nature and visible expressions of local identity help encourage people to stay longer and return more often. In Aotearoa, working with mana whenua can help embed local stories, cultural narratives and connections to place through streets, parks and public spaces, creating richer and more memorable everyday experiences.

Approaches used and examples of application in city centres



Approaches used and examples of application in city centres

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

Direct pedestrian movement routes, frequent safe crossings, step-free routes, wide footpaths and separated cycleways link public transport, workplaces, inner city housing, retail, hospitality, services, community facilities, public spaces, parks and other key destinations. Navigation is supported by lighting, clear wayfinding, landmarks, consistent pavement treatments and strong sightlines.

2. People-centred streets and public spaces

Traffic calming measures including narrow lane widths, raised tables, reduced speed limits, shared spaces and clearly defined activity zones.

3. Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Shop fronts, cafés and building entrances are oriented to the street and public spaces with large windows and frequent entrances; lighting, verandas, outdoor dining, spill-out activities and public seating are incorporated throughout.

4. Places to pause, gather and connect

Amenities such as seating, shelter, shade, drinking fountains, bike parking etc are regularly and strategically located within the central city.

5. Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Green spaces, plazas and other public spaces have adaptable layouts for different purposes, seasons or events; play, recreation and social elements are integrated into spaces. These spaces are connected by walking and cycling routes to surrounding streets, transport hubs, waterfronts, civic buildings, parks and cultural attractions.

6. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Street trees, natural stormwater management solutions, native planting and green spaces are integrated into the central city; physical and visual connections to nearby parks or natural features are evident.

7. Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

The character of the space reflects Māori aspirations, local histories, significant landmarks and the uniqueness of the place through public art, naming, wayfinding, planting, viewshafts, landscape features and materials.

8. Active travel support and end-of-trip facilities

Attractive and welcoming arrival spaces incorporate seating, shelter, shade, drinking fountains, toilets, storage, bike parking, public art, play elements and places to meet and gather, as well as clear wayfinding and obvious walking and cycling connections to key destinations.

Existing neighbourhoods

Supporting everyday movement and activity in established communities

Existing neighbourhoods are where many people in Aotearoa live, learn, play and connect. They contain many of the places people visit most often, including schools, parks, local shops, community facilities and public transport. When improved, renewed and maintained with active design in mind, they can support walking, wheeling, play, recreation and access to amenities as part of everyday routines. This helps people stay connected, healthy and independent throughout their lives.

Active design in existing neighbourhoods focuses on improving how streets, parks, paths and public spaces function as part of daily life. Unlike new neighbourhoods, opportunities are often realised incrementally through street renewals, park upgrades, maintenance programmes and civil infrastructure projects. Small changes such as safer crossings, wider footpaths, lower traffic speeds, improved lighting and better connections between destinations can make neighbourhoods easier, safer and more enjoyable to move around and spend time in.

Existing neighbourhoods are also places where social connections, local identity and a sense of belonging have developed over time. Active design can help strengthen these qualities by creating more opportunities to walk, play, gather, rest and spend time outdoors close to home. Working with mana whenua and local communities can help ensure improvements respond to local aspirations, histories and relationships with whenua and wai. Over time, a series of small, well-considered improvements can create neighbourhoods that are more active, connected, inclusive and resilient.



Safe cycling routes help connect people to everyday destinations, Te Ara Mua – Future Streets, Māngere, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Credit: Time to Thrive to Stay Alive Charitable Trust and Mangere BikeFIT

Approaches used and examples of application in existing neighbourhoods



Approaches used and examples of application in existing neighbourhoods

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

A connected, well-lit street and path network throughout the neighbourhood gives direct, continuous and step-free pedestrian connections.

2. People-centred streets and public spaces

Narrow traffic lanes, raised crossings, low speed zones and traffic calming measures are prioritised around schools and parks; frequent crossing points and wayfinding are included.

3. Active frontages, visibility and welcoming edges

Streets, public spaces, blue-green corridors and parks are well-lit and visible from homes and buildings; community facilities, schools, shops and cafés have active frontages.

4. Places to pause, gather and connect

Amenities such as seating, shelter, shade, drinking fountains, toilets, bike parking etc are regularly and strategically located throughout the neighbourhood.

5. Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Local community facilities, 'play along the way' routes and small public spaces are integrated into neighbourhoods.

6. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Street trees, natural stormwater management solutions, native planting, nature play spaces, wetlands, blue-green corridors, community gardens, parks and local green spaces are integrated throughout the neighbourhood.

7. Local essence, cultural narratives and sense of place

Planting selections, Māori narratives, public art and public spaces reflect the local environments, aspirations and stories.

8. Schools as community hubs

Schools are connected to the surrounding neighbourhood with safe walking, wheeling and cycling routes; the school open space has high visibility from the street.

Business parks and light industrial areas

Enabling the people who spend long periods of time in these places to enjoy the benefits of movement and te taiao

Business parks and light industrial areas include offices, warehouses, logistics facilities, manufacturing businesses and service yards. In Aotearoa, these environments are often designed around vehicle access, freight movement and operational efficiency. However, they also accommodate large numbers of people who spend many hours there each day, presenting a significant opportunity to use active design to support not only job satisfaction but also everyday movement, wellbeing and social connection.

Active design in business parks focuses on creating employment areas that support safe and efficient operations while enabling people to walk, wheel, cycle and spend time outdoors throughout the day. Well-designed movement networks, comfortable public spaces, access to nature and opportunities for incidental activity can help make physical activity a normal part of the working day. These environments can also support worker wellbeing, satisfaction and productivity by providing attractive, human-scaled places that encourage movement, social interaction and the ability to recharge.

Successful business parks are places people enjoy spending time in, not simply working in. Comfortable routes, tree-lined roads and green spaces, active travel connections and places to gather and be active can encourage people to move between buildings, take active breaks and connect with others throughout the day. Working with mana whenua, businesses, developers and local authorities can help create employment areas that balance operational requirements with worker wellbeing and long-term health outcomes.



Waterloo Business Park entrance render by Boffa Miskell.
Credit: Southpark Corporation

Approaches used and examples of application in business parks and light industrial areas



Approaches used and examples of application in business parks and light industrial areas

1. Connected, accessible movement networks

Connected, well-lit street and path network links the business park with public transport and safe active travel connections to nearby amenities, destinations and neighbourhoods.

2. People-centred streets and public spaces

There are clearly defined pedestrian, cycling and freight movement routes, including frequent crossing points and pedestrian-priority treatments in parking and loading areas.

3. Places to pause, gather and connect

Shared amenities – such as seating, outdoor dining and meeting spaces, shelter, shade, food outlets, drinking fountains, toilets and bike parking – are regularly and strategically located throughout the business park.

4. Flexible places for play, recreation, sport and community activity

Connected walking loops, gathering spaces, outdoor fitness equipment and courts are integrated into the business park along key movement routes for use in break times or for walking meetings.

5. Nature-rich and climate-resilient environments

Street trees, natural stormwater management solutions and native planting are integrated throughout the business park and along movement routes, connecting to recreation and gathering spaces. Views to natural features are protected.

6. Active travel support and end-of-trip facilities

Arrival and waiting spaces incorporate lighting, seating, shelter and shade; drinking fountains, storage, bike parking, showers and change facilities support active travel.



Walking the bridge over the wetlands in Underwood Park, Te Auaunga Oakley Creek, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: Jay Farnworth

4 Case studies

The following case studies demonstrate how active design can be applied in practice across a range of contexts in Aotearoa. They highlight integrated approaches to movement, land use, landscape and public space that support everyday activity, social connection and wellbeing.

Each example provides insights into what has worked, why it works and how the approaches might be applied to similar projects in the future.

City centres



Christchurch Central City

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Downtown Auckland

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New neighbourhoods



Central City, Ōtautahi Christchurch

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Hobsonville Point

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Wigram Skies

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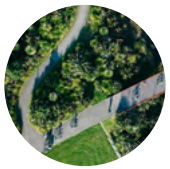
Existing neighbourhoods



Te Ara Mua – Future Streets

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Blue-green corridors



Te Auaunga Oakley Creek restoration

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Te Ara Tupua

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Parks and local green spaces



Flaxmere Park

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Main streets and town centres



George Street upgrade

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Business parks and light industrial areas



Waterloo Business Park

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Christchurch Central City, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Demonstrates how connected destinations, civic spaces and public realm can support walking and everyday movement in a central city environment

Following the Canterbury earthquakes, Christchurch's central city was reimagined as a more people-focused environment, with investment in walkable streets, public spaces, civic destinations and green infrastructure. Cashel Street, Cathedral Square, Tūranga, Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor and nearby parks form part of a connected network of destinations that support everyday movement and activity into and throughout the central city.

Rather than relying on a single park, street or facility, the success of the city centre lies in how these places work together. Pedestrian-priority streets such as City Mall, Cashel Street and improved public transport access, with the new centrally located bus station, high-quality public spaces and short walking distances between destinations, make it easy for people to walk between retail, cultural, civic and recreational destinations as part of everyday journeys. Street trees and planting, seating, active building frontages, lighting and clear sightlines create an environment that is comfortable, legible and inviting throughout the day and evening.



Christchurch Central Recovery Plan Blueprint prepared by Boffa Miskell.
Credit: Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA)

Tūranga provides a particularly strong example of active design in practice. As a major civic destination, the library attracts a diverse range of users and activities, encouraging people to walk through and spend time in the city centre. Its location – within easy walking distance of public transport, Cathedral Square, the retail core and surrounding public spaces – strengthens the overall network and supports movement between destinations. The central city also demonstrates the value of providing both reasons to move and reasons to stay. Walking routes are supported by attractive public spaces, opportunities for social interaction, access to nature, places to sit and rest, and a mix of destinations that encourage people to spend time in the city centre rather than simply pass through it.

City centres **Movement** **Vitality** **Identity**

Why it works

In addition to the design features, Christchurch's success reflects a clear long-term vision for the central city. The Christchurch Central Recovery Plan and Blueprint established an approach that prioritised people, public spaces and civic destinations alongside economic recovery. By coordinating investment in anchor projects such as Tūranga, Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, the Avon Ōtākaro River Corridor and the wider public realm, the city was able to create a network of destinations that reinforce one another and support everyday movement and physical activity. Rather than treating streets, public spaces and buildings as separate projects, the central city was planned as an integrated system. This has helped create a walkable environment where movement between destinations is easy, attractive and supported by a high-quality public realm.



The success of Christchurch's central city comes from how its parks, streets, civic spaces and destinations work together as a connected network. Shown here is Oxford Terrace and part of Te Papa Ōtākaro Avon River Precinct, Ōtautahi Christchurch.

Credit: Sam Pietras

Key lessons

- A clear long-term vision matters. The Christchurch Blueprint provided a framework for aligning investment, decision-making and delivery around a shared outcome, including improving accessibility.
- Plan destinations as a network. Individual projects are more successful when they are connected through walkable streets, public spaces and public transport.
- Civic anchors generate everyday activity. Libraries, cultural facilities, public spaces and community destinations can attract diverse users and support activity throughout the day.
- Invest in the spaces between destinations. Streets, laneways and public spaces play a critical role in supporting walking, social interaction and city centre vitality.
- Recovery and renewal can create opportunities for transformation. Christchurch gives us a recent example of how major investment and redevelopment can be used to improve long-term walkability, liveability and resilience, rather than simply replacing existing infrastructure.
- Delivering active environments requires collaboration. The success of the central city rebuild reflects coordinated action across local government, central government, developers, designers and the community over many years.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Christchurch demonstrates the value of a long-term vision, coordinated investment and high-quality public realm. Like all cities, however, its evolution continues. Ongoing opportunities include continuing to increase central city living, strengthening connections between destinations, further activating public spaces and embedding mana whenua narratives throughout the urban environment. These reflections reinforce that active design is not a one-off intervention but an ongoing process of improvement, adaptation and stewardship.

Downtown Auckland, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

Demonstrates how public transport, mixed-use development and high-quality public spaces can work together to support everyday physical activity by making walking the natural and convenient way to access jobs, services, shops and civic destinations

Downtown Auckland is New Zealand's leading example of transport-oriented active design, demonstrating how integrating public transport, mixed-use development and high-quality public spaces can reshape travel behaviour, while supporting healthier, more active urban environments. Rather than treating transport infrastructure as a separate engineering project, the redevelopment has combined investment in rail, ferry, bus and cycling infrastructure with public realm improvements, mixed-use development and destination-focused placemaking to create a city centre where walking becomes the most practical and enjoyable way to move.

The redevelopment centres on Britomart Transport Centre, New Zealand's busiest public transport interchange, and extends across Te Komititanga, Commercial Bay, Lower Queen Street, Quay Street, Lower Customs Street and the surrounding network of streets, laneways and waterfront spaces. Together, these projects create a highly connected city centre where employment, retail, hospitality, civic facilities, tourism and recreation are concentrated within comfortable walking distance of one another.

By integrating transport with land use and public space, Downtown Auckland presents an example of how active design can encourage thousands of people to incorporate walking into their everyday journeys, reducing reliance on private vehicles.

Why it works

Downtown Auckland demonstrates that transport-oriented development is most successful when movement and placemaking are considered together. Public transport provides the foundation for access, while the surrounding urban environment ensures that walking becomes the natural way to complete everyday journeys.

High-quality public spaces – such as Te Komititanga, upgraded waterfront promenades and generous pedestrian streets – provide attractive, accessible and comfortable environments for walking throughout the day. Wide footpaths, frequent crossings, active building frontages, street trees, seating, lighting and high-quality paving create a public realm that encourages people to linger, socialise and move through the city on foot rather than simply passing through.

The concentration of employment, education, retail, hospitality and civic destinations around the transport hub also reinforces active travel. Because destinations are located within a compact urban structure, many daily trips can be completed by walking between public transport, workplaces, shops, restaurants, public spaces and the waterfront. This integration of transport, land use and public realm demonstrates one of the central principles of active design – that physical activity is most likely to occur when movement is embedded within everyday routines rather than requiring dedicated time for exercise.

The project also demonstrates how transport infrastructure can become an important civic place. Rather than functioning solely as a public transport interchange, the Downtown precinct creates spaces where people gather, meet, pause and participate in city life. This contributes not only to increased physical activity but also to economic vitality, social interaction, public safety and a more vibrant city centre.



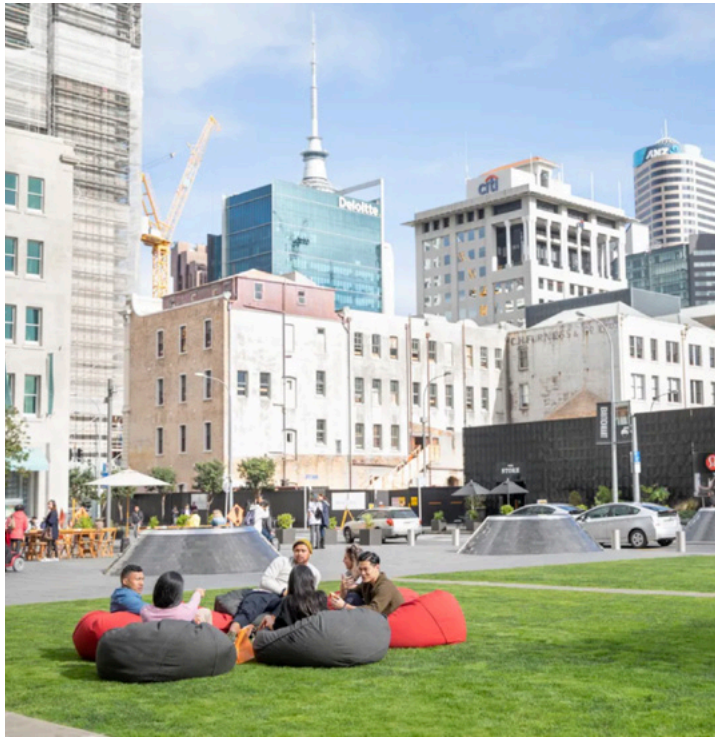
Key lessons

- Transport-oriented development should integrate land use, movement networks and high-quality public spaces to make walking, cycling and public transport the easiest and most attractive choices for everyday journeys.
- Public transport is most effective when supported by walkable streets, active frontages and a compact mix of everyday destinations and surrounding land uses.
- High-quality public realm encourages people to walk further, spend more time outdoors and incorporate physical activity into daily routines.
- City centres should function as places for people as well as transport hubs, supporting movement, social interaction and civic life.
- Coordinated investment across transport, urban design and development can deliver health, environmental, economic and social benefits simultaneously.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Downtown Auckland demonstrates how transport-oriented active design can fundamentally reshape how people move through a city. By combining high-capacity public transport with mixed-use development, pedestrian priority and high-quality public spaces, the project has created an environment where walking becomes the easiest and most attractive choice for many everyday journeys.

The opening of the City Rail Link will further strengthen this role by significantly increasing the number of people arriving in the city centre by public transport. Continued investment in cycling infrastructure, pedestrian connections and surrounding neighbourhood links will help extend the benefits beyond the downtown core. As New Zealand's most comprehensive example of transport-oriented active design, Downtown Auckland provides valuable lessons for other metropolitan and regional centres seeking to reduce car dependence while creating healthier, more connected and more vibrant urban environments.



Te Komititanga, Auckland CBD, provides space for people to meet and enjoy the city centre beyond their everyday journeys, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: New Zealand Story

Central city living, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Shows how medium-density housing close to destinations can support active lifestyles and reduce car dependence

Central city living in Christchurch demonstrates how well-designed higher-density housing can support active and healthy lifestyles. Delivered as part of the city's post-earthquake regeneration, new apartments and townhouses have introduced a growing residential population into the city centre, creating opportunities for more people to live close to jobs, services, public transport and public spaces.

The development provides an example of how medium-density housing can offer an alternative to car-dependent suburban living. Residents have access to a range of housing options within a compact urban environment, allowing many daily needs to be met close to home. This proximity supports walking as part of everyday life and reduces the need for dedicated travel to access services, recreation and social opportunities.

The project demonstrates that medium-density housing can contribute to both housing supply and quality of life when supported by attractive streets, local amenities, public spaces and a mix of nearby destinations.



Rangatahi on scooters, Rauora Park, Christchurch City Centre, Ōtautahi.
Credit: ChristchurchNZ Ltd

Why it works

The success of central Christchurch lies in the combination of housing density and amenity. New homes have been delivered alongside investment in parks, public spaces, community facilities, public transport and local services, creating an environment that supports daily life without requiring residents to travel long distances.

The developments offer a range of housing typologies, helping accommodate different household sizes, ages and lifestyles within a relatively compact area. This diversity supports a more vibrant and active community while making efficient use of existing infrastructure and services.

New neighbourhoods **Movement** **Identity** **Nature**

A key contributor to its success was that the Christchurch Central Recovery Plan and Blueprint, developed following the earthquakes of 2010-2011, recognised the importance of rebuilding a residential population in the city centre. Rather than focusing solely on commercial redevelopment, the plan created opportunities for people to live in the heart of the city, supporting local businesses, public transport, community life and everyday activity.

The project also demonstrates that medium-density living can be attractive and desirable when supported by quality urban design. Access to sunlight, private outdoor space, street trees, public parks and nearby amenities helps create liveable neighbourhoods where people want to spend time both indoors and outdoors.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Medium-density living in central Christchurch highlights the important role housing can play in creating more active, liveable and sustainable communities. The project demonstrates that intensification is most successful when it focuses not only on increasing housing supply, but also on creating places where people can live well, access daily needs locally and incorporate movement into everyday life.

Key lessons

- Housing plays a critical role in supporting active lifestyles. Where people live influences how often they walk and how easily they can access everyday destinations.
- Density works best when paired with amenity. Parks, public spaces, local services and community facilities are essential components of successful medium-density neighbourhoods.
- Provide housing choice. A range of housing types can support diverse households and enable more people to live in walkable urban locations.
- Quality design matters. Well-designed medium-density housing can provide attractive, comfortable and healthy living environments.
- Growing residential populations can support thriving centres. More people living locally can strengthen community life, support local businesses and increase activity throughout the day and evening.



Wide, clear pathways with nature and integrated seating along Oxford Terrace, Avon River Promenade, Ōtautahi Christchurch.
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Hobsonville Point, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

Demonstrates how neighbourhood structure, local destinations and connected streets can embed movement into daily life from the outset

Hobsonville Point demonstrates how active design principles can be embedded within medium-density neighbourhoods to support everyday physical activity.

Developed on a former air force base in northwest Auckland, Hobsonville Point combines apartments, terraced housing and standalone homes within a compact, connected neighbourhood where walking, wheeling and cycling are practical and attractive choices for daily trips. The development was planned around the principle that many daily needs should be accessible close to home. Residents can walk, wheel or cycle to schools, playgrounds, parks, neighbourhood centres, public transport and community facilities through a network of connected streets, paths and open spaces.

Frequent access to green and blue spaces, including the coastal edge and public parks, further supports recreation, play and everyday movement. Rather than relying solely on organised sport or recreation facilities, Hobsonville Point demonstrates how active design can create opportunities for movement throughout the day by connecting people to the places they need and use most often.

The neighbourhood shows how medium-density housing, when integrated with high-quality public spaces and everyday destinations, can help make physical activity a natural part of daily life.

Why it works

The success of Hobsonville Point lies in the way active design principles have been applied across the development. Medium-density housing is integrated with connected streets, parks, schools, public transport and local services, making everyday destinations easy to access without relying on a private vehicle.

The neighbourhood supports many of the conditions known to encourage physical activity, including a compact urban form, connected street networks, access to open space, a mix of destinations and high-quality walking and cycling connections. Together, these features help make movement a normal part of daily routines, whether travelling to school, visiting local shops, accessing parks or connecting with neighbours.

A key contributor to its success was the master-planned approach adopted from the outset. Land use, transport, open space and community infrastructure were planned together to create an environment where active travel and outdoor activity were considered fundamental components of neighbourhood life rather than secondary amenities. The result is a neighbourhood where the built environment actively supports healthier, more active lifestyles.



Connected walking and cycling networks make it easier to reach schools, parks and everyday destinations, Hobsonville Point, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: hobsonvillepoint.co.nz



Key lessons

- Active design starts with neighbourhood structure. The location of homes, destinations, parks, schools and transport connections has a significant influence on how much people move as part of everyday life.
- Locate housing close to everyday destinations. Medium-density neighbourhoods are most successful when residents can easily access schools, shops, parks, public transport and community facilities.
- Integrate housing, transport and open space planning. Walkability is strengthened when streets, paths, parks and destinations are planned as a connected network.
- Design for movement as part of daily life. Everyday physical activity is more likely to occur when walking and cycling are convenient, attractive and practical choices.
- Density and liveability can work together. Well-designed medium-density neighbourhoods can support housing growth while creating healthy, active and attractive places to live.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Hobsonville Point demonstrates how medium-density housing can be a powerful active design tool when supported by connected streets, quality public spaces and access to everyday destinations. Its success highlights the importance of planning for movement, recreation and community life from the outset, rather than treating them as secondary considerations. The development provides a strong example of how housing growth can contribute to neighbourhoods where physical activity becomes a natural part of everyday life, while also supporting community wellbeing, social connection and long-term liveability.



Neighbourhood events and activities help strengthen community connections and create a sense of belonging. Hobsonville Point, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

Credit: hobsonvillepoint.co.nz

Wigram Skies, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Illustrates how embedding cultural identity and local narratives into the planning of new neighbourhoods can strengthen belonging, encourage everyday activity and foster long-term stewardship

Wigram Skies demonstrates how active design can create a community where identity, culture and everyday movement are embedded from the outset. Developed by Ngāi Tahu Property on the former RNZAF Wigram Air Force Base, the master-planned neighbourhood combines a diverse range of housing, schools, neighbourhood parks, public open spaces, walking and cycling connections, stormwater landscapes and a mixed-use town centre within a highly connected urban structure.

Rather than treating movement, open space and community facilities as separate elements, the development was planned to create a connected neighbourhood where many everyday destinations are within comfortable walking and cycling distance. The Landing town centre provides retail, hospitality, health services and community facilities that are easily accessible from surrounding neighbourhoods, reducing reliance on private vehicles while supporting everyday movement.

A defining feature of Wigram Skies is the way cultural identity has been embedded throughout the neighbourhood. Developed by Ngāi Tahu Property, the project reflects both Kāi Tahu values and the site's rich aviation history through landscape design, planting, public spaces, artwork, interpretation, street names and local narratives. This integration of movement, landscape and identity demonstrates how active design can create neighbourhoods that people value, care for and actively use.

Why it works

Wigram Skies highlights that active neighbourhoods are created through more than connected streets. By embedding local identity, cultural values and a mix of everyday destinations into the structure of the community, the development has created places that people identify with, care for and use regularly.

The integration of parks, reserves, walking and cycling paths, schools and neighbourhood destinations encourages residents to incorporate movement into everyday life. Public spaces have been designed to support informal recreation, play, social interaction and community gatherings, while a strong landscape character reinforces a sense of place. Children can walk or cycle to school, residents can access local shops and services on foot, and parks and green spaces provide opportunities for spontaneous physical activity throughout the day.

A defining strength of the development is the integration of Kāi Tahu values, local narratives and the site's aviation heritage into the overall master plan. Rather than treating culture as an overlay, these elements have informed the character of streets, parks and public spaces from the earliest stages of planning. Cultural expression is reflected through landscape design, planting, artwork, interpretation and naming, creating places that feel distinctive, memorable and authentic. This strengthens people's connection to the neighbourhood, encourages community pride and stewardship, and creates public spaces where people want to gather, spend time and be active.



Public spaces for resting, gathering and enjoying nature at Wigram Skies, Ōtautahi Christchurch.
Credit: Ngāi Tahu Property

New neighbourhoods **Movement** **Nature** **Identity**

The project also illustrates the value of long-term master planning. Land use, transport, landscape and community infrastructure have been carefully planned to create a neighbourhood where homes, schools, parks and services work together to support healthy, active and connected lifestyles.

Together, these elements demonstrate that active design is about more than movement infrastructure – it is about creating places where physical activity, identity, landscape and community reinforce one another.



Parks, open spaces and local narratives were integrated throughout the master plan for Wigram Skies, Ōtautahi Christchurch. Credit: Ngāi Tahu Property

Key lessons

- Active design starts with neighbourhood structure. The location of homes, destinations, parks, schools and transport connections has a significant influence on how much people move as part of everyday life.
- Locate housing close to everyday destinations. Medium-density neighbourhoods are most successful when residents can easily access schools, shops, parks, public transport and community facilities.
- Integrate housing, transport and open space planning. Walkability is strengthened when streets, paths, parks and destinations are planned as a connected network.
- Design for movement as part of daily life. Everyday physical activity is more likely to occur when walking and cycling are convenient, attractive and practical choices.
- Density and liveability can work together. Well-designed medium-density neighbourhoods can support housing growth while creating healthy, active and attractive places to live.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Wigram Skies demonstrates how active design principles can be integrated into large-scale residential development from the earliest planning stages. As the community continues to develop, increasing housing diversity, public transport and local employment opportunities will further strengthen opportunities for everyday movement, while reinforcing the neighbourhood's strong sense of identity and belonging.

Te Ara Mua – Future Streets, Māngere, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

Demonstrates how active design can be retrofitted through partnership with mana whenua, communities and agencies

Te Ara Mua – Future Streets is an internationally recognised neighbourhood transformation project that demonstrates how active design can be successfully retrofitted into an existing suburban environment. Located in Māngere, South Auckland, the project was established to understand how changes to streets, public spaces and neighbourhood environments could improve health, safety and everyday physical activity while creating stronger, more connected communities.

The project was delivered through a unique partnership involving Auckland Transport, the University of Auckland, Auckland Council, Counties Manukau Health, local schools, mana whenua and the Māngere community. Rather than focusing solely on transport outcomes, Future Streets adopted an integrated approach that considered health, urban design, community wellbeing, cultural identity and environmental quality together.

A range of interventions were implemented, including safer pedestrian crossings, lower traffic speeds, improved walking and cycling connections, upgraded public spaces, street planting, traffic calming, neighbourhood gathering spaces and opportunities for informal play. Importantly, the project recognised that improving physical activity was not simply about building infrastructure, but about creating neighbourhoods where people felt safe, connected and encouraged to move as part of everyday life.

Why it works

Te Ara Mua demonstrates that active design is most successful when developed in partnership with the people who know and use a place every day. Extensive engagement with residents and mana whenua ensured the project reflected local aspirations, cultural values and lived experience rather than applying a standard engineering solution.

The project also challenged the traditional role of residential streets. Rather than viewing streets solely as movement corridors for vehicles, Future Streets reimagined them as shared public spaces that support walking, cycling, play, social interaction and community life. Safer crossings, slower vehicle speeds and improved public spaces created an environment where everyday movement became easier, more comfortable and more enjoyable for people of all ages and abilities.

Importantly, the project demonstrated that meaningful improvements to physical activity do not always require major redevelopment.

A coordinated series of relatively modest interventions, implemented across an existing neighbourhood, significantly improved opportunities for walking and cycling while strengthening neighbourhood identity, safety and social connection. Evaluation of the project also demonstrated improvements in walking and cycling behaviour and reductions in traffic-related injury risk, providing valuable evidence for the effectiveness of neighbourhood-scale active design interventions.



Tamariki running along Mascot Avenue in the Māngere School Tryathlon.

Credit: Time to Thrive to Stay Alive Charitable Trust and Mangere BikeFIT

Existing neighbourhoods **Movement** **Vitality** **Identity**

Key lessons

- Active design can be successfully retrofitted into existing neighbourhoods and is not limited to new developments.
- Working in genuine partnership with mana whenua and local communities leads to more meaningful, locally responsive and enduring outcomes.
- Streets should function as public places that support movement, play and social interaction, not simply vehicle movement.
- Small, coordinated improvements delivered over time can collectively have a significant impact on physical activity, safety and community wellbeing.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation help build the evidence base for active design and strengthen future investment decisions.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Te Ara Mua – Future Streets provides a valuable model for neighbourhood renewal across Aotearoa. It demonstrates that active design is as much about governance, collaboration and stewardship as it is about physical infrastructure. The project highlights the importance of embedding active design into existing planning, transport and public health programmes rather than treating it as a standalone initiative.

As communities continue to evolve, opportunities remain to build on the project's success through continued investment in walking and cycling networks, public space improvements and community-led activation. The partnership model established through Future Streets provides an important precedent for future projects, demonstrating how long-term collaboration between agencies, mana whenua and local communities can create healthier, safer and more active neighbourhoods, while strengthening social and cultural wellbeing.



New spaces and routes are activated by community organisations – at the opening of the new pump track along the community trail, Māngere, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: Time to Thrive to Stay Alive Charitable Trust and Mangere BikeFIT

Te Auaunga Oakley Creek Restoration, Wesley, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

Demonstrates how restoration projects can incorporate active design principles for both climate and public health gains

Te Auaunga Oakley Creek is one of Auckland's most significant urban stream restoration projects. The project combined flood protection, management, stream daylighting, ecological restoration, public open space improvements and shared walking and cycling connections to create a healthier and more resilient urban environment.

Historically, sections of the stream were highly modified and constrained by surrounding development, limiting ecological function, flood capacity and public access. The restoration project renaturalised sections of the waterway, improved flood resilience for surrounding communities, restored native habitats and created a network of accessible paths, bridges and open spaces that support everyday movement and recreation.

The project demonstrates how blue-green infrastructure can deliver multiple benefits when designed with people as well as ecological outcomes in mind. Walking and cycling connections along the stream corridor provide opportunities for everyday physical activity, while access to nature, restored waterways and improved public spaces create a more attractive and enjoyable environment for residents and visitors. The project also strengthens connections between neighbourhoods, schools, parks and community destinations, supporting both recreation and active travel.



Restored stream corridors can create attractive places for walking, running and connecting with nature close to home, Te Auaunga Oakley Creek Restoration.
Credit: Sam Pietras

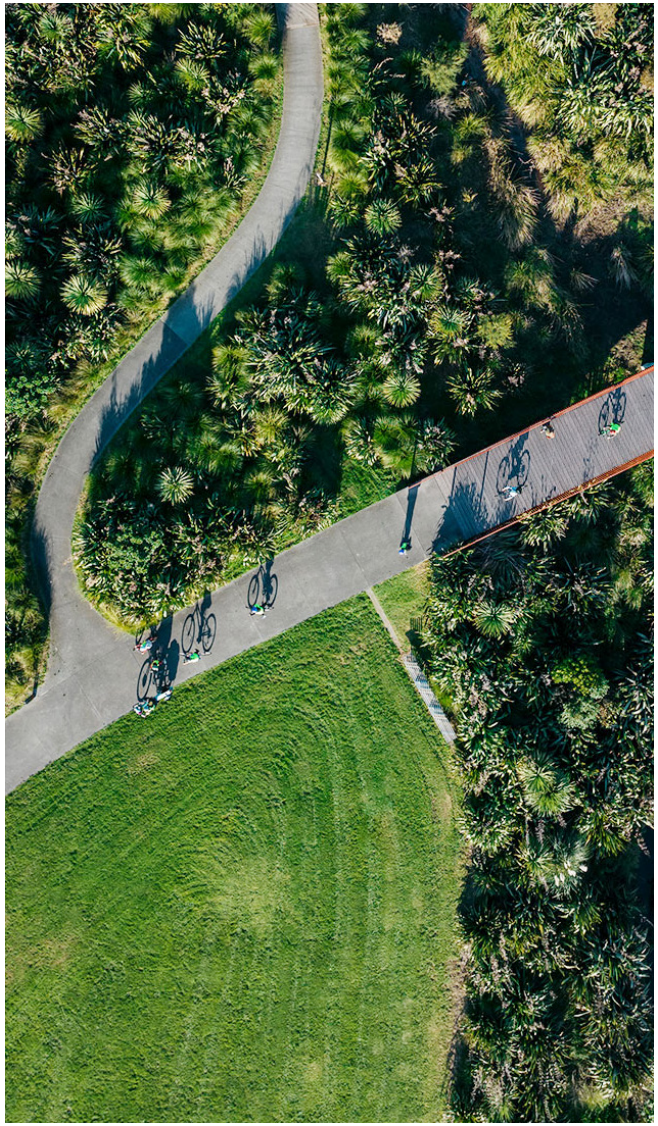
Why it works

The success of Te Auaunga lies in its ability to deliver multiple outcomes through a single integrated project. Rather than treating flood management, ecological restoration and public access as separate objectives, the project combined them into a connected blue-green corridor that supports environmental, social and health outcomes.

The restoration of a visible and accessible waterway creates a destination in its own right while also providing an attractive setting for walking, wheeling and cycling. Native planting, improved biodiversity, accessible paths and connections to surrounding neighbourhoods help encourage regular use and strengthen people's relationship with the local environment.

The project also reflects the value of long-term partnership and stewardship, including collaboration with mana whenua and local communities to restore the health and identity of the awa, while improving outcomes for surrounding neighbourhoods.





Te Auaunga Oakley Creek restoration project, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Key lessons

- Blue-green infrastructure should also be planned and designed as places where people can be active. Stream corridors, waterways and ecological networks can provide connected routes that encourage everyday movement while enhancing environmental quality and increasing climate resilience.
- Integrated planning delivers multiple benefits. Coordinating flood management, ecological restoration, public open space and movement networks enables a single investment to improve health, biodiversity, recreation and community wellbeing.
- Nature encourages people to move. Attractive natural environments make walking, wheeling and cycling more enjoyable and encourage physical activity as part of everyday life.
- Restoring waterways strengthens connections between people and place. Improving access to streams and natural environments supports recreation, learning, cultural connection and long-term stewardship.
- Partnership creates places that reflect local values. Working alongside mana whenua, communities and delivery partners results in projects that are meaningful, better used and more likely to be cared for over time.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Te Auaunga demonstrates the potential for environmental restoration projects to contribute to active design outcomes. Ongoing opportunities include strengthening connections to surrounding neighbourhoods and destinations, expanding access to the wider blue-green network, and continuing ecological restoration and stewardship activities over time. The project highlights that active environments can be created through the restoration of natural systems as much as through traditional transport or public realm projects.

Te Ara Tupua, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington to Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt

Illustrates how active design principles can transform a climate resilience and transport infrastructure project into a place that supports everyday movement and physical activity

Te Ara Tupua is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most significant climate resilience and walking and cycling infrastructure projects, creating a new connection between Wellington and Lower Hutt along the harbour edge. Delivered by NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi in partnership with mana whenua, local authorities and the community, the project addresses a long-standing gap in the region's walking and cycling network while improving the resilience of this nationally important transport corridor to the impacts of climate change.

Rather than functioning solely as a transport infrastructure project, Te Ara Tupua demonstrates how active design principles can be integrated into climate adaptation and resilience projects to create places that also support everyday movement, physical activity and public access. Running alongside the Hutt Valley railway corridor, the project creates a continuous walking and cycling connection between communities, railway stations, employment areas, schools and recreational destinations. It demonstrates how infrastructure investment can deliver transport, health, environmental and social benefits through a single integrated project.



Cyclists experiencing stunning views while using Te Matarae o Wharepouri Bridge, Te Ara Tupua.
Acknowledgment: Len Hetet and Te Atiawa Taranaki Whānui
Credit: Boffa Miskell

The project also reflects the cultural significance of Te Whanganui-a-Tara through close partnership with mana whenua. Cultural narratives, landscape design, artwork and interpretation are woven throughout the route, strengthening connections between people, whenua and moana while creating a distinctive sense of place.

Why it works

Te Ara Tupua demonstrates that transport and climate resilience projects can achieve far more than their primary engineering objectives when active design is embedded from the outset. By integrating a high-quality walking and cycling route into a major infrastructure project, it creates opportunities for everyday movement while improving public access to the harbour and strengthening connections between communities.

Importantly, the route complements the Hutt Valley railway corridor, making it easier for people to combine walking and cycling with public transport as part of everyday journeys. It provides



a safe and attractive alternative to travelling by car, linking residential communities with railway stations, employment areas, schools, local centres and recreational destinations. This integration of walking and cycling, public transport and everyday destinations encourages people to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines.

The project also demonstrates how active design can strengthen cultural identity through genuine partnership with mana whenua. Māori narratives and values have informed the design of structures, landscapes and public spaces, creating a route that reflects the unique history and significance of Te Whanganui-a-Tara. Rather than treating culture as an overlay, it has been embedded throughout the project, enriching the experience of movement while strengthening connections to whenua, moana and local identity.

A defining feature of Te Ara Tupua is the way climate adaptation has been integrated with active design. Rather than delivering coastal protection and transport resilience as standalone engineering solutions, the project combines resilient infrastructure with high-quality public spaces and improved public access to the harbour.

This creates an environment that responds to the impacts of climate change while encouraging everyday physical activity and providing opportunities for recreation, reflection and cultural connection. The result is infrastructure that performs multiple functions while creating a healthier, more resilient and more attractive environment for people.

Key lessons

- Climate resilience and transport infrastructure projects can also create opportunities for everyday movement and physical activity when active design is embedded from the outset.
- Integrating walking, cycling routes and public transport creates connected movement networks that make everyday physical activity a practical part of daily life.
- Walking and cycling corridors should connect people with everyday destinations, including their homes and neighbourhoods, as well as providing recreational opportunities.
- Partnership with mana whenua can enrich infrastructure projects by embedding cultural identity and local narratives throughout the planning and design process, improving people's connection with the place.
- Active design can maximise the long-term value of investment in climate and transport infrastructure by delivering a range of co-benefits including health and social benefits.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Te Ara Tupua demonstrates how major infrastructure investment can deliver far more than transport outcomes when active design principles are integrated from the earliest stages of planning. By combining climate adaptation, transport resilience, walking and cycling infrastructure, high-quality public spaces, and a strong cultural narrative and identity within a single project, it provides a model for how future infrastructure can create healthier, more connected and more resilient communities.

As climate adaptation becomes an increasingly important driver of infrastructure investment across Aotearoa, projects such as Te Ara Tupua demonstrate how resilience initiatives can also improve physical activity, public access and community wellbeing. As connections to surrounding neighbourhoods, railway stations and local centres continue to evolve, the project will further strengthen its role as a regional movement corridor.

It provides a nationally significant example of how active design can help future infrastructure projects deliver multiple long-term benefits for people, communities and the environment.

Flaxmere Park, Heretaunga Hastings

Demonstrates how well-designed, well-managed neighbourhood parks can support everyday physical activity, recreation and community wellbeing while serving as important hubs for community life

Over more than a decade, Flaxmere Park in Hastings has evolved through sustained investment, community involvement and ongoing stewardship, transforming it into one of New Zealand's leading examples of an active community park.



Hastings District Council worked in collaboration with tamariki, rangatahi and mana whenua to design the skate plaza known as Te Pae Whīra.

Acknowledgment: Alex Heperi and Wilray Price - Iwi Toi Kahungunu Artists Collective

Credit: Simon Cartwright Photography 2021



Community events help bring people together, creating opportunities for connection, participation and regular use of local parks, Flaxmere Park, Heretaunga Hastings.

Acknowledgment: Hastings District Council

Credit: Simon Cartwright Photography 2021

Located in the heart of Flaxmere, the park combines sports fields, walking and cycling paths, a playground, skate park, splash pad, outdoor fitness equipment, disc golf, kī-o-rahi facilities, event spaces and informal open space within a connected and accessible setting. Together, these features support a wide range of activities, from organised sport and active recreation to walking, play, social connection and community events.

The park has received national and international recognition, including Recreation Aotearoa's Active Park of the Year Award 2023 and Green Flag Award status. These awards recognise not only the quality and diversity of facilities, but also the park's accessibility, safety, management, maintenance and strong connection to the local community.

Why it works

The success of Flaxmere Park lies in its ability to support many forms of physical activity and community life within a single destination. Rather than focusing on one activity or user group, the park provides opportunities for organised sport, informal recreation, walking, fitness, play and social connection, creating reasons for people of all ages and abilities to visit throughout the day and week. Judges recognised this diversity when naming Flaxmere Park New Zealand's Active Park of the Year in 2023, noting that virtually every part of the park was being actively used.

A key contributor to its success has been a long-term commitment to community-led development. The park has evolved through ongoing engagement with residents, helping ensure facilities reflect local needs, aspirations and culture. Features such as the kī-o-rahi field, parkrun, fitness facilities, play spaces and community event areas support both physical activity and social connection, creating a destination that is active, inclusive and well used.



The park also demonstrates the importance of long-term stewardship. High standards of maintenance, accessibility, safety and environmental management help create a welcoming environment that people value and use regularly. Recognition through the Green Flag Award programme reflects the role of ongoing care and management in sustaining successful public spaces over time.



Aerial image of Flaxmere Park in Heretaunga Hastings.
Acknowledgment: Hastings District Council
Credit: Simon Cartwright Photography 2021

Key lessons

- Design for a variety of activities. Combining walking, play, fitness, informal recreation and organised sport enables participation by a wider range of people.
- Create reasons for people to visit regularly. Facilities, programmes and community events help embed physical activity into everyday life.
- Support both activity and connection. Successful parks encourage movement while also providing opportunities to gather, socialise and participate in community life.
- Community involvement leads to better outcomes. Ongoing engagement helps ensure parks reflect local needs, aspirations and culture.
- Accessibility and maintenance matter. Well-maintained, safe and welcoming spaces are more likely to be used and valued.
- Successful active places evolve over time. A clear vision, sustained investment and long-term stewardship can transform neighbourhood parks into highly valued community destinations.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Flaxmere Park demonstrates that successful active environments are created through more than physical infrastructure alone. Its success reflects a combination of good design, community participation, activation and long-term stewardship. The park highlights how investing in the ongoing management and evolution of existing public spaces can support physical activity, strengthen social connections and deliver lasting benefits for local communities. Flaxmere Park reinforces an important lesson: opportunities for activity and movement are only part of the equation. Long-term success depends on creating places that people value, care for and return to as part of everyday life.

George Street upgrade, Ōtepoti Dunedin

Shows how play, social interaction and moments of delight can be embedded within an existing main street to encourage people to be active, move and linger

The George Street upgrade demonstrates how active design can transform an existing city centre main street into a vibrant, people-focused destination that invites movement, play, social interaction and everyday activity. Completed in 2024 by Dunedin City Council, the redevelopment reimagined one of Dunedin's principal retail streets by prioritising pedestrians, accessibility, public life and placemaking while maintaining access for businesses and vehicles.

The project created a shared space environment by introducing extensive street tree planting, rain gardens, generous seating, improved lighting, public art to create flexible spaces for community events and outdoor dining. A defining feature of the redevelopment is New Zealand's first integrated in-street play space, where opportunities for play are woven directly into the public realm rather than confined to a traditional playground.

The design was developed in close collaboration with Aukaha (a mana whenua-owned consultancy), ensuring Kāi Tahu values, cultural narratives and local identity are embedded throughout the streetscape. Cultural references are expressed through artwork, paving, planting and interpretation, creating a public realm that reflects the history and identity of Ōtepoti while encouraging people to engage with the street in new and meaningful ways.

The George Street upgrade demonstrates that active design is not limited to new developments. Existing main streets can be progressively adapted to support healthier lifestyles while strengthening local identity, improving accessibility and enhancing the economic vitality of city centres.



Giant seesaw in the play space on the main street.
Credit: NumatREC

Why it works

George Street shows us that movement is more likely to occur when streets are enjoyable as well as functional. Rather than simply improving pedestrian infrastructure, the project creates a vibrant public realm that encourages people to walk, pause and interact. Generous planting, comfortable seating, public art, high-quality paving and New Zealand's first integrated in-street play space create opportunities for spontaneous physical activity, social interaction and everyday enjoyment.

Main streets and town centres | **Joy** | **Vitality** | **Identity**



Places to connect, linger and move through create vibrant street life on George Street, Otepoti Dunedin.
Credit: DunedinNZ

A defining strength of the project is the integration of Kāi Tahu values and local identity through collaboration with Aukaha. Cultural narratives, artwork, planting and landscape design are embedded throughout the streetscape, creating a public realm that reflects the history and identity of Ōtepoti while strengthening people's connection to place. Together, these elements demonstrate how active design can support physical activity, cultural identity and town centre revitalisation through a single integrated streetscape project.

Key lessons

- High-quality public spaces encourage people to walk, stay and spend time in town centres. Attractive, comfortable and flexible streets make everyday movement more enjoyable and support community life.
- Street design should balance movement with place. Prioritising people alongside access, servicing and transport creates more vibrant, accessible and resilient town centres.
- Play encourages everyday physical activity. Integrating opportunities for play into streets and public spaces creates moments of delight that encourage people of all ages to move, interact and linger.
- Culture and local identity strengthen a sense of place. Embedding mana whenua values, local narratives and public art creates more meaningful public spaces that people identify with and care for.
- Partnership leads to better long-term outcomes. Collaboration between councils, mana whenua, businesses and communities creates public spaces that are valued, well used and adaptable over time.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

The George Street upgrade demonstrates how active design can revitalise existing town centres by creating high-quality public spaces that encourage movement, play and social interaction while strengthening cultural identity and local character. It provides an important example for councils across Aotearoa, showing how thoughtful streetscape design and meaningful partnership with mana whenua can create vibrant, resilient places where everyday physical activity becomes a natural part of city life.

Waterloo Business Park, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Demonstrates how active design can create healthier, more connected business parks and employment areas by integrating high-quality public spaces and street networks into the planning and design of business parks

Waterloo Business Park is a 114-hectare master-planned employment precinct developed on the former Islington Freezing Works site in western Christchurch. Rather than following a traditional industrial development model focused solely on vehicle access and freight movement, the master plan was designed to create a high-quality employment environment that supports worker wellbeing, provides inviting opportunities for everyday movement and activity and establishes a strong sense of place while maintaining efficient business operations.

The redevelopment celebrates the site's industrial heritage through landscape design, public spaces and streetscape elements inspired by the former freezing works, creating a distinctive identity that sets the business park apart from conventional industrial areas. Tree-lined streets, rain gardens, generous footpaths, shared walking and cycling paths, public open spaces and places to stop and gather are integrated throughout the development, creating an attractive environment for workers, visitors and surrounding communities.



Render of Waterloo Business Park by Boffa Miskell. Credit: Southpark Corporation

The business park also supports a range of transport choices. Walking and cycling routes are integrated throughout the site and connect with surrounding communities and public transport, while the street network has been designed to safely accommodate freight movement alongside everyday movement. This demonstrates how employment areas can support both business productivity and healthier ways of moving.

Why it works

Waterloo Business Park demonstrates that employment areas can support physical activity without compromising operational efficiency.

Rather than treating walking, cycling and public space as secondary considerations, they have been embedded into the master plan from the outset. High-quality streetscapes, landscaped open spaces and connected movement networks encourage workers to move throughout the day, whether travelling to work, walking between buildings or taking breaks outdoors.

Business parks and light industrial areas **Movement** **Nature**

The project also demonstrates the importance of creating places where people want to spend time. Parks, seating, landscaped courtyards and recreational spaces support informal meetings, lunch breaks and social interaction, contributing to worker wellbeing while reinforcing a strong sense of community.

Facilities such as Little Waterloo Park and its half basketball court provide opportunities for both workers and nearby residents to use the space throughout the day, evenings and weekends, helping create an employment area that remains active beyond standard business hours.

A defining feature of the project is its commitment to place identity. Rather than erasing the site's history, the design celebrates the former Islington Freezing Works through materials, colour palettes, public realm design and landscape character. This creates a business park with a distinctive identity that reflects its history while supporting contemporary employment needs.

Key lessons

- Business parks can support everyday movement as well as business productivity. Integrating walking, wheeling and cycling into employment areas encourages physical activity throughout the working day.
- Master planning delivers better long-term outcomes. Coordinating land use, freight movement, landscape, public spaces and movement networks from the outset creates more functional, adaptable and people-focused employment environments.
- Quality public spaces improve workplace wellbeing. Parks, green spaces and places to pause support social interaction, mental wellbeing and opportunities for incidental physical activity.
- A strong sense of place adds value. Celebrating local history and landscape character creates distinctive employment areas that people identify with and enjoy using.
- Employment areas should connect beyond their boundaries. Safe walking, cycling and public transport connections strengthen links with surrounding communities and provide workers with more travel choices.

Reflections and ongoing opportunities

Waterloo Business Park demonstrates how active design can transform traditional industrial development into a healthier, more connected employment environment. By embedding movement networks, landscape, public spaces and local identity into the master plan, the project creates a place that supports business performance while encouraging everyday physical activity and worker wellbeing.

As employment areas continue to evolve across Aotearoa, Waterloo Business Park provides an important example of how business parks can move beyond conventional industrial design to become places that support healthier workplaces, stronger community connections and more sustainable patterns of movement. Its integrated approach demonstrates that active design can add long-term value to employment precincts without compromising their operational function.

5

Implementation and supporting information



Tamariki using the Whānau Ātea papa-tākaro at Māngere Maunga, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Acknowledgment: Tūpuna Maunga Authority
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Who this guide is for

Every Body Active by Design is intended for anyone who has the potential to influence how urban environments look, feel and function. Each user group will engage with it differently, but its value is strongest when it is used as a common language across multiple roles and alongside other technical guidance.

It can help achieve active design outcomes by, for example:

- helping shape project briefs
- testing street layouts
- optimising outcomes from renewal projects
- delivering infrastructure solutions that offer greater value for communities
- inspiring community-led action
- informing enabling policy, rules and processes
- improving public space design.

Together, these uses reinforce a collaborative, inclusive approach to embedding active design into our urban environments. When the guide is shared across roles and regularly referred to and revisited through planning, design, delivery and stewardship stages, it helps keep physical activity, equity and wellbeing central to how our towns, cities and neighbourhoods are shaped and continue to evolve.

Practitioners

Planners, urban designers, landscape architects, engineers and surveyors

Use this guide to:

- strengthen early conversations with clients, asking clearer questions at briefing and concept stages
- inform decisions and provide expert advice on good practice as early as possible in the design process
- embed active design in renewal or maintenance projects, as well as new developments
- align outcomes with existing policy and standards
- support better walking, cycling and public space outcomes through an equity, wellbeing and accessibility lens
- promote more desirable spaces for owners, tenants and communities
- navigate trade-offs between movement, safety, servicing, environmental performance and cultural values while keeping a focus on long-term community benefits.

Ask



Who is not in the conversation? Consider the potential value of including mana whenua, young people and those with lived experience in the planning from the outset; their buy-in and contribution will ensure spaces are safe, comfortable, valued and used into the future.

Enablers

Policy makers and regulators in local and central government

Use this guide to:

- understand how decisions about urban structure, land use, transport networks and public spaces influence long-term physical activity, health, equity and wellbeing outcomes
- inform policy and rule development, district and spatial plans, consenting processes, civil infrastructure projects, procurement, assessment criteria, developer contributions and incentives, investment prioritisation, covenants and standardised design approaches.

Scenario

A developer is planning a new 30-lot medium-density residential subdivision close to but not connected to a major walking and cycling pathway that links schools, parks, workplaces and the village centre.

Council explored potential incentives to support the developer to connect the pathway to the new subdivision. These included using the pathway to assist with stormwater management for the subdivision, allowing it to be delivered in lieu of development contributions, applying a rates holiday until sections were sold, and providing exemptions from related consenting costs.

The extended pathway would not only expand Council's network of safe, connected pathways with limited upfront resource from Council, it would also provide a direct benefit to the new development and the developer. By improving access to key local destinations the subdivision more attractive to current and future residents and therefore more saleable.

Decision makers and investors

Elected members, property developers and private investors

Use this guide to:

- understand how early decisions about neighbourhood structure, street networks, open space provision and connectivity influence long-term health, cultural, environmental, social and economic outcomes
- assess how development proposals can support everyday physical activity and wellbeing, while creating vibrant, liveable communities that deliver long-term value and broader community benefits
- inform master planning and development layouts, investment decisions, covenants, planning rules, road and berm widths, public space design, open space allocation, infrastructure investment, and stormwater and climate resilience solutions.

Ask

Can we get more value from this investment through small design improvements? Consider opportunities to create infrastructure that serves multiple purposes and delivers broader community benefits. For example, stormwater solutions can also provide walking and cycling connections.

Community champions

School boards and principals, health promoters, public health practitioners, disability advocates, residents and community groups

Use this guide to:

- support advocacy, engagement and decision-making for good practice
- assess neighbourhoods and support conversations about how planning, design and investment decisions influence opportunities for everyday physical activity
- ask constructive questions about how projects support everyday movement, inclusion, resilience and long-term community wellbeing
- take individual action to support everyday physical activity
- inform neighbourhood renewal projects, road safety improvements and school travel routes, park upgrades and public space developments.

Scenario

A parent wants to support children in their neighbourhood to be more active in a safe environment. To help make this happen, they:

- worked with the local primary school principal to open the school fields, outdoor courts and playgrounds for community use outside school hours, securing grant funding for a security system to help address the school's concerns
- obtained Council permission to paint hopscotch and other play markings on the footpath between home and school, and install a swing from a street tree outside their house
- organised regular street cricket games in their cul-de-sac on Sunday afternoons
- lowered their front fences to improve visibility and create a stronger connection with the street.

Māori and mana whenua

Iwi, hapū, marae, papakāinga trusts, post-settlement entities and development organisations

Use this guide to:

- contribute to decision-making about how planning, design and investment in urban environments can support community wellbeing
- provide leadership and local knowledge to create healthier, more culturally responsive places that support everyday physical activity
- inform planning and design for residential and papakāinga developments, public space projects, transport and climate resilience infrastructure and urban regeneration projects.

Ask

How can urban development projects contribute to Māori health outcomes and aspirations? Consider how Māori-led development projects can embed active design outcomes that support individual, whānau and cultural wellbeing. This could include providing walking and cycling connections to key destinations, integrating cultural narratives and te reo Māori, protecting and enhancing sites of cultural significance and the natural environment, and creating opportunities to participate in traditional games and activities.

How to use this guide

Every Body Active by Design supports better planning, design and decision making to optimise opportunities in urban environments that promote and enable physical activity. Whether you're a parent wanting to positively influence your local neighbourhood, a health promoter seeking to influence elected member decisions, a designer shaping new neighbourhoods, a council officer planning a transport project or a public servant developing new policy, the guide can help identify opportunities to make everyday physical activity easier, safer and more enjoyable for all.

1.

Start with the vision

The guide is grounded in a simple goal: Enable Everyday Activity for Every Body. Use this vision to guide conversations, decisions and outcomes.

2.

Explore the Active Design Principles

The 5 Active Design Principles provide a framework for creating environments that support movement, wellbeing and connection. The principles are intended to be applied together and adapted to local context.

3.

Find your project type

Turn to the section that best matches your project, place or area of interest. The guide shows how active design can be applied in different urban environments, from neighbourhoods and town centres to parks, business parks and blue-green corridors. Active design elements can be undertaken at a variety of scales. They can be retrofitted into existing neighbourhoods through renewal projects or community-led initiatives or embedded into master plans for significant development projects.

4.

Apply the ideas

Use the active design approaches, examples and considerations to identify opportunities relevant to your project, community and local environment. The guide is not a checklist or design standard, but a tool to support better questions, conversations and decisions.

5.

Learn from real-world examples

Explore the case studies to see how Active Design Principles have been applied across Aotearoa and what lessons can be adapted to your own work.

How it relates to other guidance

This guide complements and builds on existing planning, urban design, transport, parks and wellbeing guidance. It is intended to strengthen and support existing processes, rather than replace them.

Every Body Active by Design can help practitioners and decision makers understand how everyday environments can influence wellbeing by adding an active design lens that can be applied alongside established frameworks, including:

New Zealand urban design guidance

Active design builds on the principles of the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol and related urban design guidance, such as the National Medium Density Design Guide and the Auckland Design Manual, by strengthening consideration of everyday physical activity, health and wellbeing in the planning and design of places and residential developments.

Māori design principles and frameworks

Active design aligns closely with Te Aranga Design Principles and other iwi, hapū and Māori design frameworks that recognise the relationship between people, place and wellbeing. This guide complements these approaches by supporting environments that encourage purposeful movement, strengthen connections to whenua and reflect cultural identity.

Transport, street and healthy design guidance

Active design complements transport, street and healthy design guidance at national, regional and local levels. It supports movement hierarchy, safety and a shift away from private vehicles by focusing on comfort, confidence and choice for walking, wheeling and cycling, along with safe and convenient connections to public transport.

Crime Prevention and Injury Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED and IPTED)

Active design complements CPTED and IPTED by encouraging safe, welcoming and well-used environments where people feel confident to walk, wheel, play and spend time outdoors as part of everyday life.

Inclusive, universal, and age-friendly design

Active design builds on these concepts by helping create environments where people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can move safely, confidently and independently.

Open space, parks and blue-green network planning

Active design complements open space planning by strengthening the role of parks and green spaces in enabling everyday physical activity, while recognising them as essential social, environmental and health infrastructure.

Together, these frameworks and approaches provide a strong foundation for creating healthy, inclusive and resilient urban environments. Every Body Active by Design strengthens this by ensuring everyday physical activity is an integral outcome of planning and design decisions.

Alignment with New Zealand urban planning frameworks

Well-functioning urban environments

As the planning system evolves, there is increasing emphasis on enabling well-functioning urban environments – places that support how people live, move and connect every day. Every Body Active by Design supports this direction by providing a practical approach that can inform strategic and statutory planning, whether through current district plans and regional policy statements or future regional spatial plans, land use plans and other planning instruments.

Rather than introducing additional requirements, the guide strengthens the intent of existing planning frameworks by providing a practical lens to test whether policies, plans and development proposals genuinely enable people to be more physically active. It encourages practitioners to consider whether urban environments are connected, inclusive, comfortable and easy to move through, for better health, wellbeing, resilience and liveability.

Regional spatial planning

Regional spatial planning has the greatest influence on shaping well-functioning urban environments. Early decisions about centres, density, street networks, open space and infrastructure investment establish the long-term conditions for everyday physical activity, access to daily needs and community wellbeing.

This guide supports these early conversations by helping practitioners test growth options against active design outcomes. It encourages consideration of how people will move through and experience places over time, who different spatial patterns work for, and how planning and infrastructure investment can deliver multiple long-term benefits.

As a place-led, non-statutory guide, Every Body Active by Design will remain applicable as planning legislation and statutory processes evolve.

Regional spatial planning has the greatest influence on shaping well-functioning urban environments.



Te Auaunga Oakley Creek restoration, Avondale, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.
Credit: Sam Pietras

Every Body Active by Design works alongside existing guidance



Urban design guidance

Builds on the NZ urban design protocol and related urban design guidance by strengthening consideration of everyday physical activity, health and wellbeing in the planning and design of places and developments.



Māori design principles and frameworks

Aligns with Te Aranga and other iwi, hapū and Māori frameworks, supporting connections to whenua, cultural identity and everyday purposeful movement.



Transport, street and healthy design guidance

Supports movement hierarchy, safety and mode shift by focusing on comfort, confidence and choice for walking, cycling and other active modes.



CPTED and IPTED

Supports safe, welcoming and well-used places where people feel confident to walk, wheel, play and spend time outdoors.



Inclusive, universal and age-friendly design

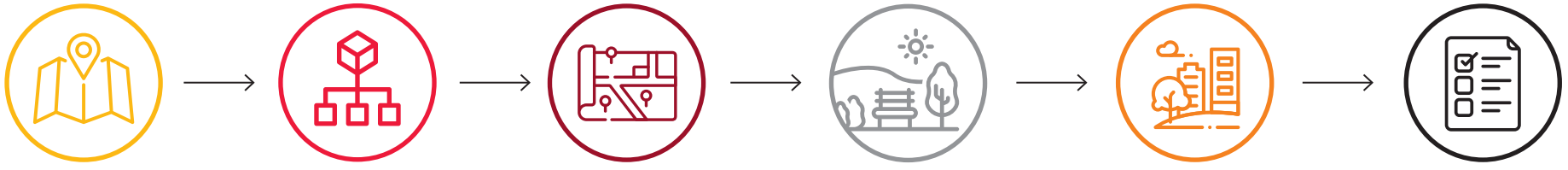
Helps create environments where people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds can move safely, confidently and independently every day.



Open space, parks and blue-green network planning

Strengthens the role of parks and green spaces in enabling everyday physical activity and recognises them as essential social, environmental and health infrastructure.

Applied through planning and design processes



Regional spatial planning

Sets long-term direction for well-functioning places

Structure plans and growth strategies

Shapes connected communities and movement networks

Master planning and urban development

Designs places that enable everyday activity

Infrastructure and investment planning

Prioritises investment that delivers multiple long-term benefits

Urban renewal and place-based planning

Improves existing places so more people can be active

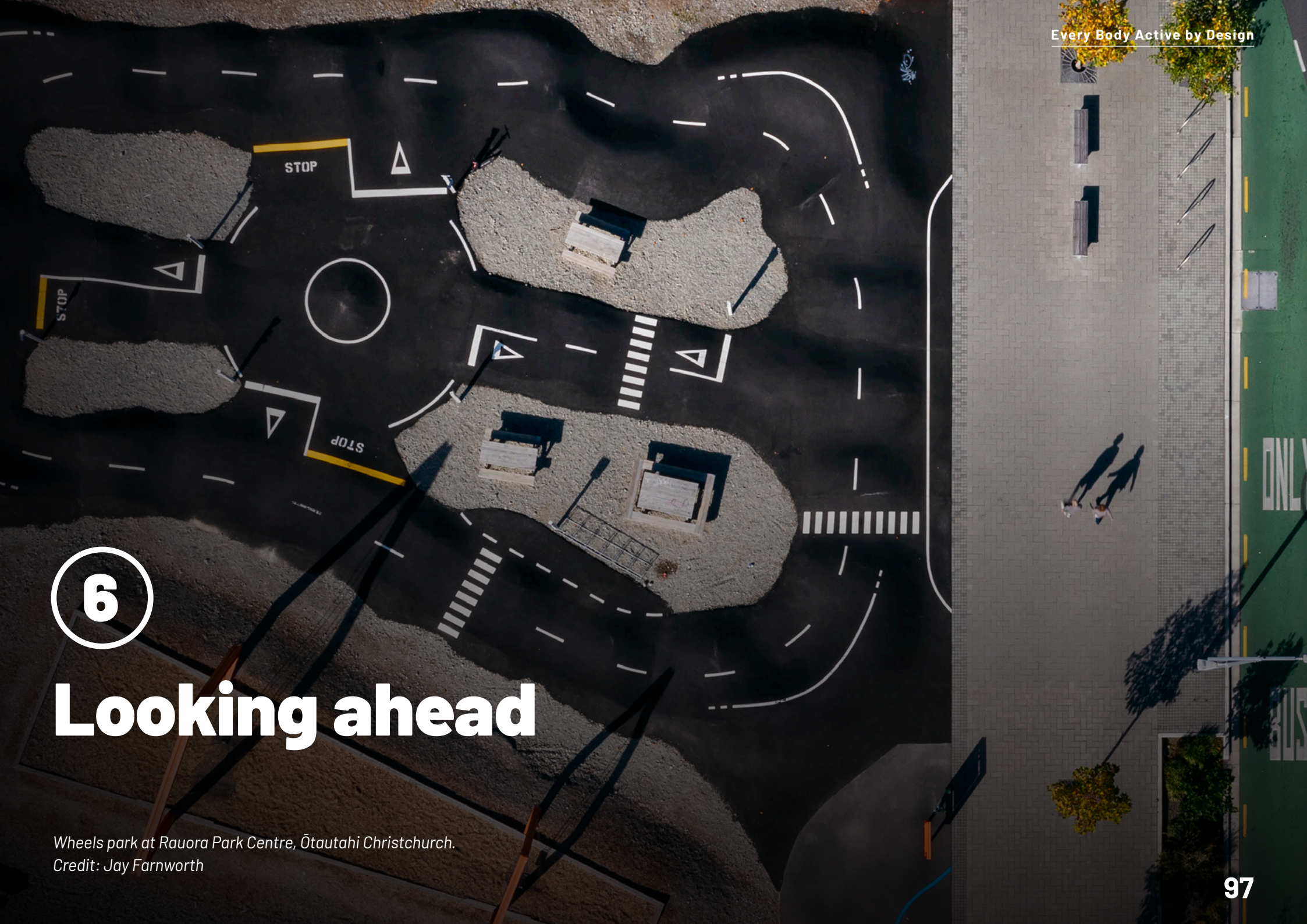
Development and delivery

Ensures projects deliver active, inclusive and liveable outcomes



Together, these frameworks and approaches provide a strong foundation for creating healthy, inclusive and resilient urban environments.

Every Body Active by Design strengthens this by ensuring everyday physical activity is an integral outcome of planning and design decisions.



6 Looking ahead

Wheels park at Rauora Park Centre, Ōtautahi Christchurch.
Credit: Jay Farnworth

Looking ahead

As the first national active design guide developed specifically for Aotearoa, Every Body Active by Design is intended to provide a foundation for ongoing learning, collaboration and action.

It establishes a shared approach for understanding how the built environment influences physical activity and provides practical principles, approaches and examples that can be applied across a wide range and scale of places and projects.

In the short- to medium-term, Sport NZ is committed to working with stakeholders and their communities to raise awareness and knowledge, support and connect active design champions, test, refine and strengthen this guidance over time, explore opportunities to test the theory, and advocate for and leverage active design outcomes.

The guide is intended to support better decision making and help create healthier, more active, inclusive and resilient communities throughout Aotearoa.



Happy users of Te Ara I Whiti - The Lightpath, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. Credit: Jay Farnworth

Further reading and resources

This guide is informed by a range of national and international policies, frameworks and design guidance that recognise the important role of the built environment in supporting health, wellbeing and everyday physical activity. This guide aligns with and builds on these resources, with a specific focus on enabling every body to be active every day.

The resources listed below are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather a selection of key references that have informed the development of this guide. They provide additional context, evidence and practical guidance for those wishing to further explore the principles, research and best practice that support the creation of healthier, more active and inclusive communities.

Urban design guidance

Auckland Design Manual	Auckland Council	Provides Auckland-specific guidance on designing buildings, neighbourhoods, streets and public spaces that support everyday physical activity. Complements this guide by demonstrating how active design principles can be applied to create healthy, connected and people-focused environments. https://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/en.html
New South Wales Government – Design Guidelines	NSW Government, Australia	Comprehensive urban design guidance covering neighbourhoods, centres, density and people-centred public space. https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/government-architect-nsw/design-guidance
New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (2005)	Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport	Promotes people centred, connected and high quality urban environments. This guide strengthens the protocol by applying an everyday activity and movement lens. https://environment.govt.nz/publications/new-zealand-urban-design-protocol/

Māori design principles and frameworks

Te Aranga Māori Design Principles	Ngā Aho	A kaupapa Māori design framework grounded in te ao Māori. Supports partnership with mana whenua and the embedding of identity, movement, care and stewardship into everyday environments. https://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/en/places-and-spaces/maori-design/te-aranga-principles.html

New Zealand | International

Transport, street and healthy design guidance

Active Design: Shaping the Sidewalk Experience	New York City Department of City Planning	Guidance on creating footpaths and street environments that are safe, comfortable and attractive for walking. Supports walkability, accessibility and active travel as part of everyday life. Active Design Shaping the Sidewalk Experience - Department of City Planning - DCP
Aotearoa Urban Street Planning and Design Guide (ASDG)	Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency	National guidance for planning and designing streets as places for people as well as movement. Supports walkability, wheeling, cycling, low speed environments and street comfort. https://www.nzta.govt.nz/partners/maintenance-and-operations/highways-information-portal/technical-disciplines/urban-design-and-landscape/aotearoa-urban-street-guide
Auckland Transport Code of Practice (ATCOP)	Auckland Transport	Detailed technical standards for street and transport infrastructure in Auckland. Complements this guide by providing delivery-level direction while this guide explains why outcomes matter for everyday activity and wellbeing. https://at.govt.nz/about-us/auckland-transport-code-of-practice/
Cycling by Design (2006)	Transport Scotland	National guidance for designing safe, inclusive and connected cycling and walking networks integrated with public space. https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/cycling-by-design-2026/
Cycling Network Guidance and Pedestrian Network Guidance	Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency	Technical guidance for designing connected, safe and legible walking and cycling networks, supporting active travel as part of everyday journeys. https://nzta.govt.nz/partners/design-guidance/cycling-standards-and-guidance https://nzta.govt.nz/partners/design-guidance/pedestrian-network-guidance
Designing and Modifying Residential Streets: Manual for Streets	UK Department for Transport	Influential guidance reframing streets as places for people first, with emphasis on safety, walkability, speed management and place quality. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/manual-for-streets
Designing for Safe Speeds	Global Designing Cities Initiative (GDCI)	Detailed technical standards for street and transport infrastructure in Auckland. Complements this guide by providing delivery-level direction while this guide explains why outcomes matter for everyday activity and wellbeing. Designing for Safe Speeds - Global Designing Cities Initiative
Designing Streets for Kids	Global Designing Cities Initiative (GDCI)	Practical guidance for designing streets that support children's safety, mobility, independence and play. Demonstrates how street design can create healthier and more inclusive communities. Designing Streets for Kids Guide - Global Designing Cities Initiative

New Zealand | International

Global Street Design Guide (and supporting documents)	Global Designing Cities Initiative / National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)	International best practice for inclusive, safe and people-focused street design across a wide range of urban contexts. Including guidance on designing streets for kids and for safe speeds. https://globaldesigningcities.org/publication/global-street-design-guide/ https://globaldesigningcities.org/guides-publications/
Healthier Cities and Communities Through Public Spaces	UN-Habitat	Highlights the role of public spaces in creating healthier, more active and connected communities, and offers practical recommendations for planners and local governments. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2025/01/final_public_space_and_urban_health.pdf
Healthy Streets Approach	Transport for London	A people-centred framework linking street design, comfort, safety and social interaction with public health outcomes. https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/how-we-work/planning-for-the-future/healthy-streets
How to Engage Kids in Street Design	Global Designing Cities Initiative (GDCI)	Practical approaches for involving children and young people in street and public space projects. Supports community participation and child-centred design. How to Engage Kids in Street Design - Global Designing Cities Initiative
How to Implement Street Transformations	Global Designing Cities Initiative (GDCI)	Step-by-step guidance and lessons learned from delivering street improvement projects, helping practitioners move from planning to implementation. How to Implement Street Transformations - Global Designing Cities Initiative
Integrated Planning Guide: For a healthy, sustainable and resilient future	Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora	A practical tool for applying a wellbeing lens to plans, projects and policies by integrating health, equity, sustainability and resilience considerations into decision-making. https://static.info.content.health.nz/docs/publications/IntegratedPlanningGuide.pdf
Principles for Healthy Urban Development	Ministry of Health (NZ)	Guidance on how urban environments can support physical, mental, social and environmental health outcomes through integrated planning and design. https://www.health.govt.nz/publications/principles-for-healthy-urban-development
Promoting Healthy Active Mobility	World Health Organization	Global evidence linking walkable environments, active travel and access to public space with improved physical and mental health. https://www.who.int/europe/activities/promoting-healthy-active-mobility
Walkable Neighbourhoods	Living Streets United Kingdom	Practitioner-focused guidance promoting walkable, inclusive neighbourhoods and access to everyday destinations close to home. Walkable neighbourhoods

New Zealand | International

CPTED and IPTED

National Guidelines for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design in New Zealand	Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions & Transport	Provides guidance on designing safer public spaces through natural surveillance, access management, activity, maintenance and place stewardship. Supports this guide by promoting environments that feel safe, welcoming and accessible, helping to encourage walking, wheeling, cycling, play and community participation. https://environment.govt.nz/publications/national-guidelines-for-crime-prevention-through-environmental-design-in-new-zealand/

Inclusive, universal and age-friendly design

Child Friendly Cities Initiative	UNICEF	Framework promoting safe, accessible and inclusive environments that support children's independent movement and play. https://www.childfriendlycities.org/
Creating Age-Friendly Urban Places	Office for Seniors	Aligns strongly with this guide's focus on walkability, accessibility, public space quality and enabling people of all ages and abilities to be active in everyday life. https://www.officeforseniors.govt.nz/our-work/age-friendly-communities/age-friendly
Make Space for Girls – Councils	Make Space for Girls (UK)	Guidance and case studies to help councils and designers create parks and public spaces that are more inclusive of teenage girls and other under-represented groups. Supports equitable access, social connection and participation in public space. Councils
Outdoors Accessibility Design Guidelines	Recreation Aotearoa Te Whai Oranga	Detailed, practical advice for improving accessibility in outdoor recreation spaces such as beaches, lakes, and green open spaces, with a strong focus on trails. Outdoors Accessibility Design Guidelines | Recreation Aotearoa

Open space, parks and blue-green network planning

The Value of Blue and Green Spaces	Sport NZ	Evidence on the contribution of parks, waterways and natural environments to physical, mental, social and cultural wellbeing. https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/the-value-of-blue-and-green-spaces/

New Zealand | International

Physical Activity

Active Design	Sport England (UK)	National guidance on embedding physical activity into planning, development and urban design across streets, neighbourhoods, schools and public spaces. https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design
Active Design Guidelines 2.0: Designing for Health and Equity	Center for Active Design (CfAD) (New York City)	Provides evidence-based guidance for creating healthy, equitable and resilient communities through the design of buildings, streets and public spaces. Expands the active design approach beyond physical activity to include mental health, social wellbeing, safety, climate resilience and community participation. https://www.centerforactivedesign.org/publications/active-design-guidelines-2
Every Body Active, Strategic Direction 2020-2032	Sport NZ	Sets the national direction for enabling physical activity as part of everyday life. Provides the strategic foundation that Every Body Active by Design builds on, with a strong focus on equity, inclusion and wellbeing. https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/every-body-active-strategic-direction-2020-2032/
Healthy Active by Design	Heart Foundation (Australia)	Evidence-based guidance linking urban form, streets, parks and public spaces with everyday physical activity and health outcomes. https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/
Physical Activity in Relation to Urban Environments in 14 Cities Worldwide	International Physical Activity and Environment Network (IPEN); The Lancet	International research examining the relationship between urban environments and physical activity. Found that adults living in the most activity-friendly neighbourhoods undertake up to 89 more minutes of physical activity each week than those living in the least activity-friendly neighbourhoods, demonstrating the influence urban design can have on everyday movement. View study
Play Sufficiency Assessments	Play Scotland	Guidance supporting everyday, informal and intergenerational play integrated into streets, parks and neighbourhoods. https://www.playscotland.org/playful-communities/play-sufficiency-assessments/
The International Physical Activity and Environment Network (IPEN)	International research network	Research examining how urban form, land use and transport influence physical activity across populations and contexts. https://ipenproject.org/

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