

Active edges: New Lynn town centre

Words & Photographs Nick Robinson, landscape architect

An overview of changes to the local urban landscape as New Lynn receives significant upgrades to its public spaces, providing context for upcoming infrastructural development.



brick and ceramics industries and the domestic garden character of the surrounding residential areas.”

The design themes for both sculpture and landscape celebrate three significant elements of New Lynn’s history: the waka portage route across the isthmus from the Manukau Harbour to the Whau River, the brick and ceramics industry that once thrived on the clay deposits so common in the area, and the garden history. Catherine developed a concept design for the larger urban park based on these themes. Further site design and detailing were developed by project landscape architect Nick Robinson, drawing on diverse sources ranging from the forms, colours and textures typical of local ceramic industry to the cosmic patterns that connected time, tide and travel through the watery landscapes of the Auckland isthmus.

Thanks to these inspirations, ‘New Lynn’s New Landscape’ has so far escaped the current formula of grey basalt, grey concrete and stainless steel. Because of the local community’s love of gardens and traditional civic planting, the decision was made to employ warm colours and rich, colourful planting to ensure that the streets and spaces would be good to be in – not just good to look at in photographs. Artist Maui-‘Atalanga ‘Ofamo’oni custom designed a suite of street furniture as an imaginative response to the modernist style associated with the Crown Lynn ceramics industry, in particular the distinctive style of the influential Keith

THE CHARACTER OF WEST Auckland’s town centres is changing rapidly. Once somewhat scruffy, small town centres, set in a wide suburban hinterland they are fast becoming intensive urban nodes with an attractive public realm. The key to this transformation is the increase in population density close to the town centres and the facilities and services that go along with this. Medium rise apartment living and medium density town housing is becoming common in centres like Henderson and New Lynn and brings a more urbane character to the streetscape, thanks to more

sophisticated architecture, better streetscape design and, consequently, more people in the streets. New Lynn is undergoing notable changes due to continuing development of the public realm in the town centre. Two phases of urban landscape improvements have already been implemented. A new community centre and a new library have been completed, and work has begun on the ‘transport oriented development’ of the town centre, which promises a new transport interchange, new roads, cycle routes, and new retail and business development.

Urban landscape recently completed in New Lynn Town Centre includes phase one of the Great North Road streetscape upgrade, two urban parks and street trees, a new market plaza and settings for public sculpture by Warren Viscose and Bill McKay, and a piece yet to be installed by Peter Lange. The streetscape upgrade is informed by the contextual analysis and landscape masterplan completed by Catherine Hamilton and her Studio of Urban Landscape staff. Catherine comments that “We sought to reference New Lynn’s suburban heritage in the design, especially the

Murray and his protégés. He also developed motifs from the riparian vegetation of the Whau River to create unique metal work for the railings and tree surrounds. Maui’s bench seats are popular with the Saturday morning Tai Chi and meditation group that has adopted the new plaza for its activity.

- There are three main streetscape types:
1. **Large public spaces** of Todd Triangle and Memorial Corner. These form major elements in the fabric of the town centre both for pedestrians and, in a visual role, for passing vehicle traffic.
 2. **Small pedestrian spaces** that form nodes and incidents within the footpath along the street

“Once somewhat scruffy, small town centres, set in a wide suburban hinterland ... are fast becoming intensive urban nodes.”

landscape. These include a proposed courtyard between the police station and the proposed new Warden’s Office and the Southern end of Delta Triangle. 3. **The linear streetscape** that links the spaces on both sides of the street and includes occasional sitting places and tree planting. The paving idiom is drawn from the colours and patterns of the ceramics for which New Lynn was known. It consists of simple, well-finished, cream in-situ concrete paving in which the lines of saw cuts mimic the joints of large-scale slab paving. This is

contained by a matrix of dark brown clay paving strips that links with the existing clay paving. The strongly contrasting clay paving identifies the edge of the pedestrian area, where it meets the kerb, vehicle crossings and building frontages. This strip of small unit pavers also helps to accommodate the water meters and other service covers, the variety of signposts and street furniture. Prominent locations such as seating niches are marked with semi-circular hubs and radiating rays of terrazzo or honed concrete paving that echo the art deco sun motif. The radial alignment provides a geometric order that organises the locations and layouts of the spaces and elements

that form the new spatial fabric. Gardens are another part of the town’s heritage and this is reflected in the formal and exotic themes found in the planting. The geometry and symmetry of art deco echoed in the choice of regular and formal planting arrangements such as grids and arcs of fastigate Italian cypress, arcades of sky duster palms and formally clipped cypress hedges. Red roses and showy succulents contrast with these structural planting elements, but a sense of sophistication is maintained by simplicity and restraint in the use of these garden favourites. Ground cover

Opposite: Portage sculpture setting.

Right, below: Street furniture and planting details.





The marketplace, New Lynn.

“Good urban design, especially the creation of active edges rather than inward looking malls, and good architecture are essential if these developments are to enhance the environment of the town centre.”

is provided throughout to try to avoid the ubiquitous woodchip covering of planting beds, and planting is chosen to provide visual consistency during the winter months.

The towering steel sculpture of a waka, borne aloft on leg-like structures, occupies a strategic site fronting both Memorial Drive and Great North Road. It was originally conceived by Warren Viscose and Bill McKay as part of a larger installation that would also have paving, seating, a sundial and water, however only the waka

was installed at that stage. In addition to carrying the waka, themes of time (a sundial) and tides (a water feature) were to have been represented.

The recent landscape work offered a chance to create a new setting for the sculpture that responded to the artists' original ideas, and to incorporate them in a comprehensive layout for the urban park. New themes were also developed focusing on the contrast between the linear and cyclical aspects of time and expressed, respectively, in the forward, exploratory purpose of the vessel and

in the cyclical repetitive movements of the tides, the moon and the planets. Elliptical, crescent shapes and vegetated, living landscape elements reflect these cyclical aspects and complement the unadorned, unyielding qualities of the steel sculpture with a more feminine, watery, even mysterious influence. The grove of skyduster palms make a forest of tall, elegant vertical elements that echo the steel 'legs' that carry the waka. This design contrasts with and balances the repetitive rectilinear layout of the adjacent

Memorial Square pergola, but connects the two spaces with its axial alignment and use of some similar materials.

The corner park also includes an extended terrace area for restaurants and cafes on the corner of Lynn Mall. Paving, grass and planting within the space direct people through in a comfortable way, whilst maintaining enough of a distance from the sculpture to appreciate its scale. Seating on curved wall-benches maintains the simplicity of the layout and gives opportunities for individuals and groups to sit with various orientations and permutations. They also help to protect planting from trampling. Like the furniture, paving materials echo those used elsewhere in the town centre, but include distinctive elements such as

the 'water' paving in the shallow basin below the waka and strips of tiles inlaid with paua that follow the sundial lines.

This streetscape and public spaces will soon provide the context for New Lynn's 'transport oriented development', and the 'big dig' that is just beginning in the town centre is a railway trench – up to 8m deep – to take two rail lines through the town centre below ground level. It will also incorporate a new railway station and allow road and footpath connections above the tracks at ground level. This transport work is linked to a number of substantial development sites in the town centre, where intensive retail and service activities will be encouraged.

These development sites, although welcome for the architectural qualities they should bring and the increased shopping and civic facilities, could, if they are not well designed, erode the existing parks and other greenspace. Good urban design, especially the creation of active edges rather than inward looking malls, and good architecture are essential if these developments are to enhance the environment of the town centre. ☞

The author: Nick Robinson is a Landscape Architect in private practice in Waitakere (nick@nickrobinson.co.nz)

New Lynn – Emergence of a major regional centre

NEW LYNN IS SET TO SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND ITS ROLE AS ONE OF WAITAKERE CITY'S MAJOR REGIONAL centres. The development of the amenity of this place has been a key element of Council investment since the mid 1990s.

The City Council, along with the Auckland Regional Council and transport agencies are seeking to focus urban growth into major centres and transport corridors in order to reduce urban sprawl and support investments in public transport. Creating successful higher density growth centres requires investment in the twin arms of access and amenity.

Over \$140 million is being spent on public transport and road investments to secure major access improvements to New Lynn. The largest part of this spend is on rail investment ensuring that New Lynn becomes one of the best connected centres in the region.

Investment in urban amenity is necessary to ensure that centres can intensify and remain attractive places of choice to live and work. This is especially true if a place is to attract skilled workers who have plenty of employment options and choices as to where they live.

While there is still a long way to go, New Lynn is emerging as a case study of public commitment to amenity in the context of urban intensification.

Important amenity building blocks can be classified as natural, historical and modern. New Lynn provides access to the natural amenities of the Waitakere ranges and beaches. It is also interlaced with streams and wetlands although the town generally has its back to these. Recent initiatives to address this include the award winning restoration of the Manawa wetland, and the significant investment in the nearby Olympic Park. Once a fill site, Olympic Park is being redeveloped to highlight its stream access, draw visitors to this asset and enhance its ecological quality. Olympic Park was awarded the premier New Zealand Recreation Association's (NZRA) Outstanding Park Award 2007.

Importantly, the town is rich in historical amenity having been a centre for the brick and ceramics industries. These elements have been built on and referenced in landscape design, seating and public art as part of Council's reserves and streetscape investments.

Emphasis has also been placed on modern amenities such as the public library and award winning community centre. Redevelopment of the bus and rail hub is underway and will further enhance the modern architectural value of the centre. Public art is becoming a feature of New Lynn. A number of works by major

“While there is still a long way to go, New Lynn is emerging as a case study of public commitment to amenity in the context of urban intensification.”

artists have been installed or are planned. The Rewarewa art bridge, designed by Virginia King, on the north-western flank of the town centre was one of the earliest Council investments associated with the intensification programme that began in the mid 1990s. Redevelopment of Olympic Park as a major recreation and arts facility is well underway with many arts and play investments having already been made.

While the focus for critique of urban intensification is often on central Auckland it is also important to observe the way in which this policy is playing out in the suburban centres. New Lynn is at the cusp of a major new chapter in its history. The public transport investments are designed to catalyse investment in office and apartment developments. The way in which Council and the private sector respond to the amenity imperative in New Lynn will be an important indicator of how the region-wide intensification policy is likely to be given expression on the ground. ☞

The author: Catherine Hamilton, Studio of Urban Landscape Ltd (contact@soulenvironments.co.nz)

NEW LYNN STREETScape

STAGE 1

Client: Waitakere City Council Parks and Project Services

Engineers: Neil Prendiville and Colin Bott, Waitakere City Council Project Services

Landscape architects: Studio of Urban Landscape Ltd

Project landscape architects: Catherine Hamilton, Nick Robinson, Bruce Tupp

Furniture design: Maui-'Atalanga 'Ofamo'oni

Sculptors: Bill McKay, Warren Viscose, Peter Lange

Contractor: P & M Paving Ltd