

Entry for IFLA ASIA-PAC LA Awards 2023:  
1.1 C) Parks and Open space Category (Built)

# LAKE WĀNAKA LAKEFRONT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Stages 1-3

*Aerial of Roys Bay showing all stages of the Wānaka Lakefront Development*



# PROJECT STATEMENT

This project celebrates the reclaiming through design of a key landscape for the Wānaka community, to engage with and enhance the environment.

The lakefront is a stunning setting for the Wānaka township, framed by the mountain backdrop of the Southern Alps at the head of the glacially formed lake. Though in recent decades cars have been allowed to drive onto the 1.7km long lakefront reserve, dominating the interface, and compromising its potential.

Eight years ago the Wānaka Lakefront Development Plan outlined an integrated vision of creating a true park based on optimising recreational use, cultural significance and natural ecology.

Working with limited funds across a series of small stages, the lakefront reserve has been gradually implemented and pieced together. Cars have been setback and a wide shared path sweeps along the bay providing continuous access for walkers and cyclist, runoff is filtered before entering the lake, cultural artworks feature along with interpretive signage and indigenous planting stabilise embankments.

This is a story of perseverance, of sticking with the vision and getting the big things right. The restoration of this unique lakefront has created a well-used asset and source of community pride helping to further extend the project.



Shared Path - Stage 2



# PROJECT SITE PLAN





# DESIGN CONTEXT

Lake Wānaka lies in Central Otago in Alpine range called the Southern Alps in New Zealand's South Island and was formed by an ancient glacier.

Pre European Māori had seasonal camps here to gather food and precious stones. The eastern most bay was called Roys Bay by early settlers and this is where a small township began in the late 19th century at the end of the gold rush times, servicing a local farming region and with hotels accommodating early visitors drawn by the paintings of the lakes picturesque beauty.

By the late 20th century Wānaka had been established as a centre for outdoor sports and the visitor and resident population had grown hugely as had the demand on the towns open spaces.

The lakefront had been reserved by early surveyors with a 40 to 60m wide strip running the full 1.7km length of the bay.

The reserve though was largely unformed apart from a row of exotic willow trees, a narrow path and access for widespread car parking. Weeds cloaked the embankments, the lake water was polluted by runoff from the roads and there were few facilities. Public access was marginal at best and the town centre was cut off from the lakefront by car parking.

In the last 20 years there had been schemes proposed to remove sections of cars from the lakeside however none succeeded until a comprehensive approach was taken by a landscape architect led team working with the local Community Board produced the Wānaka Lakefront Development Plan (WLDP) in 2016 .

Key to its successful adoption by Council was the consultation with the community and interest groups and the way the masterplan created an integrated vision for entire lakefront based on a series of design principles and indicated a series of achievable stages for implementation.

The vision for the WLDP was made concise to be memorable "Creating a park environment around the central lakefront."

The aspiration statement was: To provide continuous pedestrian access, making strong connections with the town centre, reducing vehicle use in the town centre, hosting a range of activities & enhancing the ecology throughout.



Cheif Huruwhiri's Memory Map, drawn in 1842, etched into concrete paving on the lakefront.



# DESIGN STRATEGY

The WLDP strategy was based on **FOUR BIG MOVES**:

1. Restore & develop **ECOLOGY**
2. Provide continuous **ACCESS**
3. Enhance **LANDUSE**
4. increase **PUBLIC FACILITIES**

Working strategically to build community confidence in the scheme the first small stage involved relocation of car parking to the southern end of lakefront to a defined area edged by a shared path, surface runoff is filtered through a natural drainage system and the stop over is equipped with a public toilet.

The second stage extended the 4m wide shared path (walking and cycling) along 500m in a large sweep to echo the form of the bay and gently enclose a great lawn area. Car parking was setback to the road edge with runoff collected and filtered in a low impact in line drainage system. A series of inscribed tiles celebrating the areas heritage (both Māori and European) edged the promenade/shared path culminating in the centre with a large map enshrining early Māori place names.

The third stage revegetated a long embankment with indigenous plants and in parallel provided a 300m long boardwalk that gives the public access to the lake edge and to observe the endangered Southern Crested Grebe (native bird) restoration project which has been successfully started by community members. The shared path continues on top of the embankment and connects to the town centre.

There are further stages planned to further extend the lakefront when budgets will allow and this will be a priority with public support growing with increasing usage.



Entry to boardwalk in Stage 3, viewing section in the distance.



# ENVIRONMENTAL SENSITIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The key to the WLDP has been the restoration and enhancement of not only the lakefront but also the wider lake. Treating the stormwater and road runoff into the Lake in all stages of the project contributes to enhancement of water quality and all health of users of the lake. Native revegetation planting along edge of the lakefront and along the main stream (Bullock Creek) not only stabilises the edge but provides greater biodiversity and habitat.

Fish & bird habitat creation along lake edge has been the focus of stage 3 works between the Marina & the Bullock Creek delta. The endangered Grebe restoration program was started by a retired ornithologist Dr John Darby, the original 4 breeding pairs have expanded to 18 and the program is now assisted by the local primary school. The planting of the adjacent area has helped provide shelter and food for the Grebes.

The shared path has been given the Māori Te Reo name of Te Ara Wānaka. The project has included a cultural statement report by Aukaha the consultancy arm of the local mana whenua (indigenous Māori of the area) backgrounding their history, associations and indicating cultural features that will be commissioned as integral parts of the lakefront development. A series of interpretive signs have also been introduced to provide environmental and cultural information for visitors.

Recognising the sensitivity of the environment, local plants have been eco sourced true to the local biota from a local plant nursery that is run by a charitable Trust. The design process has continued through implementation. Understanding that the soils are very thin on top of the gravel base and precious, all topsoil was collected, sieved and sorted and then spread to form the base for the grassed areas. Locally sourced gravels were used as the base and in the aggregate for the concrete shared path.

Large glacial rocks have been placed along the lakefront to serve as seats but also to reinforce users of the sense of place formed by large earth shaping events. The cultural artworks including the heritage tiles form a timeline that celebrates the long occupation by the indigenous Māori people and the local pioneers.



Viewing sections of the boardwalk give users the opportunity to view the endangered Grebe nesting stations.



Informational signage along the boardwalk to educate users on the ecosystems of the lake.



# DESIGN VALUE

The Wānaka community has grown quickly in recent years from a drive to destination, to one that has high levels of expectation from its open spaces. The lakefront has become a new forum for the evolving community, a continuous linear space that directly connects people with each other, to the township and to taking real ownership and responsibility for the lake environment.

The project has taken a multi-disciplinary team to deliver, with ongoing collaboration. Landscape architects have exemplified the significance of thorough planning for open spaces and the essential collaborative and integrative approach required to bring people together with the environment.



*Glacier rounded rocks placed along informal path on lakefront provide a natural sculptural element and seating*





Before and after of the shared pathway in Stage 2, this shows the dramatic difference when vehicles are removed from the lakefront