

Research Report

Open Spaces Strategy

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**munday
consulting**

Shireen Munday
P: 021 212 5917
E: shireen@mundayconsulting.net

Public Policy Solutions

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1 Purpose

To describe and discuss the key issues and opportunities to be considered in the development of an Open Space Strategy (OSS).

2 Context and Situation

The opportunity to research and develop an OSS to support Council's goals and objectives has received support from Elected Members and funds to support the project have been allocated in the 2021-2031 Long Term Plan.

Staff have long identified that an OSS would be of benefit to Council, aligning with best practice approaches, which is evident through the many other councils that have adopted this type of strategy. A draft Strategy was developed in 2008, however the project was not completed at that time.

A key first step in developing an OSS is to confirm the scope, approach, and purpose of the proposed Strategy, and to research and analyse how an OSS should or may align with, impact on, or potentially conflict with, other key strategies, plans and policies (SPPs) of Council, both statutory and non-statutory.

3 Objectives

The objectives of this report are to:

- provide an overview of the purpose of an OSS
- outline the potential scope or elements of an OSS, and the associated advantages and disadvantages
- provide an overview of how an OSS can support the four well-beings
- propose which types of open space should be included in an OSS
- outline how an OSS would impact on other SPPs of Council or other entities.

4 Problem and opportunity statement

Open spaces are a highly valued community asset. The need to provide an appropriate range of active and passive recreation and leisure opportunities is also reflected in Council's vision of 'Creating Great Places'.

The development, protection and growth of open spaces, and improvements to the quality of these, is increasingly important. Population growth, changes in community expectations, and economic and tourism opportunities all have implications for open spaces. With residential intensification, including subdivision of large productive land holdings, there are fewer larger sections and vacant land that provide incidental local recreation areas.

Open spaces are key contributors to cultural, ecological, environmental and amenity values. Ensuring these values are appropriately maintained and supported as the District evolves and grows is of great interest to the communities of the Far North District.

In addition to providing recreation opportunities, the secondary functions of open spaces are becoming increasingly significant, as residential areas intensify, and the need to provide connectivity and an active transport network (both pedestrian and shared paths) to support sustainability and address transport concerns becomes more pressing. Trees and other vegetation provide ecological corridors and networks for native plants, birds and animals. They also support drainage functions and ecosystem services, including rain infiltration and water detention for low frequency weather events. These functions provide additional important benefits to communities.

How open spaces are planned for, in terms of how they are used, what range of facilities should be provided, as well as the provision and creation of new open spaces is therefore a key consideration for councils.

The problem is that to date, open space acquisition and development has occurred in a largely ad hoc manner across the District. This can result in a range of issues, such as too much of only one type of recreational opportunities in an area, or very limited recreational and leisure opportunities in another. Likewise, where the District is experiencing growth, the opportunity to create the right type and mix of open spaces to support existing and new communities is often missed.

An OSS, based on best practice approaches and developed within the context of Council's other SPPs, provides the opportunity to establish a longer-term vision for the open spaces of the District, informed through community engagement.

An OSS ensures all elements of the open space network are considered as a whole, but also through an appropriate range of lenses, such as social and biodiversity needs. A particularly important element of an OSS is that it can detail Council's approach for open space provisioning connected to population growth.

5 Background and Analysis

5.1 What are open spaces?

5.1.1 Overview

A range of definitions can be applied to open spaces. The Project Scope and Mandate for this Strategy development have already proposed certain types of open spaces to be excluded from the OSS, with a more detailed analysis contained within this report (section 5.5) to fully inform the scope. This section provides a general overview to support understanding, as well as framing the more detailed analysis.

At a simple level, open space is land that is accessible to the public for movement, recreation, and social activities.

For the most part, this type of land is either owned or under the control of a local authority, or the Department of Conservation (DOC). In the past, school grounds and sports fields, under the control of the Department of Education, often provided accessible open space outside school hours, however this has become more restricted in recent years, with schools having

to control access for insurance purposes or due to vandalism. In some cases, open space is 'other' crown land, usually under the control of Land Information New Zealand (LINZ).

Some types of open spaces are privately owned, for example the Bay of Islands Golf Club. The use of these types of spaces may be limited to only some members of the community or may not be guaranteed into the future.

An element of developing an OSS is to analyse and describe the existing 'open space network' resulting in a database and associated map(s) of the range of recreation and leisure opportunities provided in the District. Generally, this will include all the above open spaces, to inform an understanding of the types and volume of available open spaces. This then also includes identifying potential limitations where open space is not under the control of Council.

The project scope for the OSS has identified that where other agencies or entities who control open spaces in the District wish to collaborate with Council in the development of the OSS, these are included in the scope. Staff are anticipating engagement with DOC on the development of the OSS at a minimum.

As indicated, local authorities have the primary responsibility for the provision of open space. Open space that is either owned or controlled by Council can be generally classified as follows:

- parks and reserves
- off-road walkways and cycleways
- other open spaces
- beaches
- civic spaces (such as town centre squares and pedestrian zones)
- roads and streets which incorporate footpaths, shared paths, and/or cycle lanes.

5.1.2 Parks and Reserves

Generally, when people consider 'open spaces' they think of parks and reserves. There are however key differences in how councils are required to manage, plan for and, if appropriate, dispose of these open spaces.

'Reserve' is generally used to describe a parcel of land that has been gazetted as a reserve pursuant to the Reserves Act 1977 (the Act). There are seven different classifications of reserves under the Act. Council must meet some general requirements regarding the administration and management of all reserves, as well as specific requirements depending on the type of classification of the reserve. Access and use of the reserve can also be controlled based on the classification, and this further informs the open spaces network and planning matters.

Reserves classified as 'recreation reserves' under the Act provide a fundamental component of public open space, with the purpose of a recreation reserve being:

" providing areas for the recreation and sporting activities and the physical welfare and enjoyment of the public, and for the protection of the natural environment and

beauty of the countryside, with emphasis on the retention of open spaces and on outdoor recreational activities, including recreational tracks in the countryside.”

Council also owns or manages various areas of publicly accessible land that are not gazetted as reserves, but that are owned and managed for a variety of purposes, including recreation, amenity, and preservation. These types of areas are usually called ‘parks’.

‘Sports Parks’ are a specific type of park or reserve, which often incorporate both built structures, such as indoor gymnasiums, as well as associated open spaces, usually configured and used for organised sporting activities like rugby or netball. These open spaces can be complemented by informal recreational facilities (e.g. playgrounds), as well as being available for informal recreational and sporting activities when not being used for organised sports.

Heritage and cultural sites, where under the control of Council, are usually either a distinct park or reserve in their own right, or are a component of a larger park or reserve area. In some cases, heritage and cultural sites are under the control of other organisations (e.g. Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga). In those cases, an OSS would consider these in the same way as any other open space not under the control of Council.

Council controlled parks and reserves can provide opportunities to experience natural areas, but generally the larger areas in the District that provide more immersive nature experiences and the opportunity for tramping and overnight stays are provided by DOC.

Both reserves and parks have a level of legal protection regarding their continuing status.

Changing the classification of a reserve, or disposing of it is subject to a detailed process under the Act, including a formal consultation process.

Similarly, where land owned by a local authority has been used by a community as a park, it cannot be sold or otherwise disposed of without a public consultation process under Section 138 of the Local Government Act 2002.

5.1.3 Off-road walkways and shared paths

These elements are described as ‘off-road’ to ensure they are distinguished from footpaths, shared paths and cycle lanes/ways that may be provided as part of the roading network and which form part of the road. While these can support the wider open space network, they are subject to a range of specific roading related legal requirements that must be met and any planning for these is included in roading specific planning mechanisms.

Off-road walkways and shared paths/tracks (which allow a range of users, usually walkers and cyclists and sometimes horse riders) are often reserves, especially on the coast, where esplanade reserves or strips are commonly used to provide public access, and connect to beaches and other reserves and parks in the coastal environment. Off-road paths and tracks generally offer a higher level of amenity to users as they are separated from the noise and disturbance of motorised vehicles.

Access strips and unformed legal roads are also used for walkways and shared paths. These are often not technically described as ‘parks’ but again can provide linkages between

parks and reserves as well as the roading network, and can also provide independent recreation and leisure opportunities.

As well as providing access links and recreation opportunities, the ability for walkways and cycleways to support ecological corridors is well documented.

Across New Zealand, many walk and cycleways have been created by volunteer groups or trusts, either independently or in collaboration with councils and/or DOC. These can contain any combination of privately owned land, land under the control of council and/or DOC and can include easements or other legal instruments on all or some of the land. A local example of such a collaboration resulting in an open space provision is the Waitangi Mountain Bike Park, which is located on Crown land.

5.1.4 Other open spaces

Council owns or controls land that has a primary function unrelated to recreation or leisure activities, but which can also contribute to the open space network, as a 'secondary recreation function'.

Cemeteries provide a quiet space for passive leisure activities, such as reading and contemplation, as well as allowing for safe walking activities on their pathways. While most cemeteries are Council owned and managed, privately owned cemeteries do exist, and within the context of an OSS these would be considered in the same way other private open space is.

Cemeteries originally had an open space function when there was little space available to most citizens. Urban burial grounds in the 19th century were originally envisaged as public open spaces, and were professionally designed to be attractive places to visit.

As larger areas of land are taken up by cemeteries, and as residential areas extend into areas where cemeteries are located, there is increasing consideration of the use of cemeteries for compatible recreational and environmental functions.

Council also controls or owns land that is held for other purposes, such as drainage or utility reserves. These open spaces can often be made available for public access where this is compatible with other use and can therefore provide additional open space opportunities for communities.

The consideration of both primary and secondary uses of open spaces provides for more efficient outcomes. A drainage reserve would usually provide a poor environment for recreation, however a path within the edge of a drainage reserve may be constructed within the existing land or provided in a narrow additional area, whereas on a separate piece of land a wider width is recommended to provide good CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) outcomes. At the same time, a well-designed path can improve public surveillance of the drainage reserve and reduce vandalism and rubbish tipping. Shared paths and other accessways through the edges of sports parks can reduce vandalism by extending active use of the park.

5.1.5 Beaches, rivers and lakes

Many beaches, rivers and lakes across the District are used by communities and visitors alike for recreation and leisure activities, however these are technically neither parks or reserves.

The jurisdiction of beaches is complicated, with some matters the responsibility of district or city councils, and other matters for which a regional council is responsible. In certain circumstances, such as for a wildlife refuge, DOC may also have certain jurisdictions over a beach. In other cases, areas of a beach can be under private ownership attained through riparian rights.

In general terms however, most beaches will generally meet the criteria of an open space, in that they are accessible to the public and can be used for movement, recreation and social activities.

Often beaches are adjacent to an esplanade reserve or other type of council-controlled reserve, park, or walk/cycle way. These elements complement each other, and this is an important component of the open space network.

While the scope of this report includes rivers and lakes as part of this element, it is important to note that rivers and lakes can generally only be accessed and used for recreational purposes where there is an adjacent open space (or a road that is being managed as an open space), unlike beaches where road/pedestrian access only is required to access the beach itself to use for recreational activities. Therefore, rivers and lakes are generally only considered as part of the open space network where such access is provided, noting that future access provisions can be identified as part of the development of an OSS.

5.2 What is an 'Open Space Strategy'?

As indicated, many councils have SPPs for open space. These may use terms such as 'parks and reserves', 'parks and open spaces' or 'open space and facilities' in their titles. The focus of these can vary from a high-level aspirational approach, to a detailed strategic framework supported by an implementation plan, to a lower-level operational policy.

This report will focus on outlining an OSS that provides a detailed strategy with sufficient direction and detail to support the optimal development of the current open space network, as well as planning for additional open space land in the future. It is anticipated that as this project progresses there will be further refinements regarding the approach, scope and content of the final Strategy.

An OSS provides a framework to guide decisions on the provision, development and improvement of open space¹ in the District. For the strategy to reflect community aspirations, it will need to be developed in collaboration with the community.

¹ In the context of this report, the terms 'open space' and 'parks' will be used interchangeably.

An OSS provides transparency for the community and key stakeholders, such as developers, about Council's intended approach for future provision and acquisition of open spaces as well as divestment.

The overview of open spaces described in section 5.1 illustrates the complexity and linkages of the individual elements of an open spaces network. Best practice parks planning aims to achieve a wide range of outcomes for the community, including well-spaced neighbourhood parks, other recreational opportunities such as sports and destination parks and to align these outcomes with existing natural environments and features. A strategic and planned approach for these diverse types of open spaces helps to effectively optimise the desired outcomes, both now and into the future.

The development of an OSS includes the following key research elements and considerations:

- what kind of open spaces do we have
- what recreation opportunities do these provide, how are the open spaces being utilised, and if not, why not
- what secondary functions they do/can provide to meet other objectives, such as active transport or stormwater detention
- how the open spaces form a network within the surrounding geography
- what the appropriate mix, quantity and locations of open spaces are for our communities, both now and into the future
- in relation to the above, whether there are any gaps and how these could or should be provided for.

For most of the above matters, secondary research and existing data can be utilised, however for the more qualitative elements of the research, it may be appropriate to undertake primary research with a range of stakeholders and/or the public.

It is noted that Council does not necessarily have a single source of accurate data regarding existing open spaces in the District and it is likely significant work needs to be undertaken to fill the gaps with information held across the organisation.

To support the analysis and assessment of the above matters, and inform the strategic direction, an OSS often provides a framework hierarchy of parks that provide for different experiences for users. Recreation Aotearoa has developed a 'Parks Category Framework' which is often used to inform such a hierarchy. This includes:

- local or neighbourhood parks within close walking distances to residential areas, with limited facilities
- suburb or community parks with higher levels of development including larger playgrounds
- destination or premier parks with higher levels of development and use, and which are designed to also attract non-local users
- sports parks that provide for sports fields and associated facilities.

This hierarchy focuses on the experiences open space users can have and takes into consideration access issues. Access by different transport modes is a defining characteristic of this type of hierarchy. Local parks are generally provided within easy walking distance of residential areas, whereas community parks, sports parks and destination parks such as Korora Park are distributed at distances that take into account expected travel by car or public transport (if available).

Other types of open space categories include:

- nature parks, providing opportunities for people to experience nature, which can include active adventure activities (these areas are often only accessible by car, and more likely to be provided by DOC)
- recreation and ecological linkages
- cultural heritage parks and areas, including cemeteries
- beautification areas, for example botanic gardens and public gardens with formal display areas.

These elements assist in shaping the foundations of an OSS on which a strategic direction can be built.

OSSs will often include specific goals and objectives that relate to the provision of open spaces. These can be linked to a council's community outcomes and vision as well as the four well-beings as provided in the Local Government Act 2002. Section 5.3 of this report details how the proposed OSS would support the four well-beings.

Based on the initial research and analysis, the subsequent hierarchy and category approach, and informed by any goals and objectives, an OSS will detail its strategic direction elements, including, but not limited to:

- descriptions of the experiences that people can expect in the different types of open spaces provided, for example informal play opportunities, nature experiences or playground facilities, and the associated development requirements for those experiences
- outcomes related to community involvement and expression, including for example community gardens, parks names and sculptures
- how Council will protect natural and cultural heritage
- identifying secondary functions that can be achieved by parks, for example improving tree cover of township areas, or providing detention for low frequency rain events
- guidelines for optimising the open space network, including enhancing connections within the network (active transport routes and ecological corridors)
- a high-level action plan for implementing the strategy (for example, the review of existing SPPs to align with the strategy)
- a provision framework for both the existing and future open space network, which includes:
 - how Council plans to provide an equitable network of parks with varied experiences, for example local or neighbourhood parks within an easy walking distance

- an associated assessment criteria for acquisition and divestment of open space, including factors such as optimal size, contour, and road frontage requirements.

The provision framework described above is a key element of an OSS and should include provision metrics which guide or analyse the amount, type and distribution of open space required to provide adequate and equitable open space to communities. This may include walking distances to local playgrounds so that children are able to access them easily, and the population level at which an additional community or destination park is to be provided.

5.3 Open spaces strategies and the four well-beings

Local authorities are required to provide a role in promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of their communities.

The 2014 Design Council UK report: 'The value of public space: how high-quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value' (designcouncil.org.uk) describes how:

- parks can assist in regeneration of areas and may affect property values
- parks have a value in mental health and longevity, and are important for young people
- provide a democratic forum for all citizens and provide a venue for social events
- can help the cultural identity of an area
- can accommodate active transport routes
- provide environmental benefit including improving air quality.

Table 1 below provides a summary overview of the contribution of open spaces to each of the well-beings.

Table 1

Well-being	Open spaces contribution – providing and maintaining spaces for:
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • socialising • participation in leisure and recreation activities • connecting communities • mental and physical wellbeing
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing tourism attractions and activities • supporting liveability and connectivity • placemaking
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protecting cultural and historic heritage • experiencing art and cultural activities
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the protection of natural areas (flora and fauna) • ensuring environmental sustainability through ecological corridors and other mechanisms

Open spaces provide for both informal and formal recreation activities that support social connections and can contribute to community and local identity. Parks can have an emergency response function, for example as a gathering place at times of emergencies, or as an air ambulance landing facility.

The tourism sector in the District is based largely around the natural environment, and the range of open spaces provided are integral to, or support the key suite of tourism attractions and activities available.

Open space can protect ecosystems, natural features and landscapes and provide biodiversity corridors. Esplanade reserves in particular play an important role in climate change resilience and adaptation. Reserves can be important for hazard mitigation including by providing unbuilt areas for rainwater infiltration, and vegetation providing slope stability.

Planted parks provide a visual contrast to the built environment, which has increasing importance with higher residential development and larger buildings.

Vegetated parks may provide opportunities for mahinga kai and kaitiakitanga, and provide exposure to nature, particularly for urban residents. Cultural sites including Wāhi Tūpuna can be protected where the land is preserved as an open space.

An OSS developed through a thorough community engagement process provides an open space network underpinned by a holistic and integrated approach to meeting all four well-beings.

5.4 Advantages and disadvantages of open spaces strategies

5.4.1 Advantages

The main benefit of an OSS is to effectively achieve any recreational and other outcomes identified by Council and the communities it serves into the future.

5% of rates income is spent on recreation facilities, including parks and reserves, with additional funds spent on cemeteries (FNDC AP 2020-21). A co-ordinated and comprehensive planning approach, supported by a strategic direction set by Council and the community, will help to optimise the achievement of the identified goals and objectives, for the provision, development and maintenance of Council owned or controlled open spaces.

The inclusion of provision guidelines in an OSS, including provision metrics, together with associated assessment criteria, can guide Council in acquiring land that best meets the needs of current and future communities, and can identify the need for areas earlier in the development process when land values are lower.

An OSS provides a strategic planning approach that can support, inform, or align with key policies, plans and strategies of Council such as the District Plan and the Climate Change Roadmap, to ensure:

- valuable potential open space land is protected from development or rezoning

- appropriate land-use integration is achieved during developments
- central government funding applications can be supported or achieved
- climate change issues and natural hazard risks can be integrated
- developers will have clear direction on Council's expectations regarding open space provision requirements.
- opportunities are taken when presented where they fulfil an objective of the OSS

Additional benefits of an OSS include:

- provision of parks that reinforce local identity and culture
- parks that protect cultural or landscape features
- a parks network that takes account of biodiversity, green infrastructure, transport and other secondary functions
- a parks network that improves access to natural environments
- equitable parks provision
- parks that support both the local community and visitors
- providing for flexible land use, that supports potential emerging recreational activities
- supporting other non-statutory SPPs, such as an economic development or tourism strategy.

A specific advantage of an OSS relates to Council's current project to review the Development Contributions Policy (DCP).

Where a council chooses to have a DCP that requires development contributions, these are a fee charged by councils for new developments to contribute to the costs of building the infrastructure that supports the development, which can include roads, other infrastructure, and open spaces.

Where an OSS identifies a need for open spaces on either a per capita or area basis, this can be directly related to growth and charged as a development contribution. Where an OSS also identifies open space development requirements, for example expected development of local parks, this can also be charged as a development contribution.

The OSS supports a DCP by providing an approved framework for acquiring and developing new open space land to support developments. In such cases, an OSS can provide information on how much open space, or open space development is needed, and this can be used to guide what type and amount of contribution will be requested. Council can require a contribution from new developments, either in land or in cash, towards improving the open spaces network. This recognises that new developments bring more people to the District and these new residents create increased demand for open spaces.

As proposals are being assessed for these developments, Council can ensure that the proposed land will add value to the open space network. This is also a time to identify opportunities to fill gaps in the network, connecting new reserves to existing open spaces, and to active transport networks.

Projects to support growth generally need to be identified in Council's Long-Term Plan for development contributions to be charged, thereby committing Council to this expenditure, and the DC funds cannot be used for other purposes.

The DCP review process will expand and further detail how development contributions can or should be applied to open spaces, however an OSS is considered a key tool in supporting and guiding a DCP to achieve appropriately planned and funded contributions to support the expansion of the open space network because of growth.

Should Council not proceed with a DCP, then the acquisition provisions contained within the OSS will guide council planning and budgeting for land acquisition and disposal as part of its Long Term Plan development processes.

An OSS can be used to support discussions with developers through the resource consent application process. An OSS can ensure that any land provided as open space and vested in Council by a developer is suitable, both in the context of the development, but also the wider goals and objectives of the OSS.

Examples of recent open space strategies and plans that include provision guidelines, for either the provision of open spaces (provision guidance for acquisitions and disposals) and/or development guidelines (how various types of open spaces will be developed, e.g. facilities provided etc) are included in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Council	SPP	Provision of open space	Open Space development guidelines
Matamata Piako District	Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2021-51	Provision guidelines given for community, sports & recreation, and recreation & ecological linkage parks	Play provision and development guidelines
Queenstown Lakes District	Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2021	Accessibility (distance) requirements for different types of open spaces	
Queenstown Lakes District	Parks and Reserves Future Provision Plan (draft)	Provision guidelines for local parks and community parks, including references to DC requirements	Indicative amenity guidelines for all open space types
Kapiti Coast District Council	Toitū Kāpiti - Kāpiti Coast Open Space Strategy (Interim) 2022	Benchmark comparisons of existing provision	Development guidelines included as 'potential characteristics'

Council	SPP	Provision of open space	Open Space development guidelines
Thames Coromandel District	Open Space and Community Facilities Strategy 2020	Accessibility distances for neighbourhood parks	Discussion on current condition
Masterton District	Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2021	Assessment of current provision only	Reference to 'typical characteristics'

5.4.2 Disadvantages

As with any document developed by Council, conflict can arise during the development of the document and the associated community engagement process. Open spaces and how they are managed and provided can be an emotive subject for communities, with divergent views on the best option(s). The community may not have a sufficiently cohesive view of how the strategic approach and/or goals and objectives of the strategy should be framed, or may consider the strategy does not go far enough to meet their aspirations.

Should the proposed OSS include any divestment/co-management/alternative uses for specific areas, this may engender considerable public interest and debate, leading to reputational risk.

Another disadvantage of an OSS is the potential to create unfulfilled expectations of the community. An OSS is generally a longer-term strategic document that is implemented over time and in conjunction with budgets set through Long Term and Annual Plan processes (and potentially development contributions). The benefits of the strategy may not be apparent to the community in the shorter term.

The inclusion of parks provision and development intentions in an OSS can open Council's performance in relation to these intentions to public scrutiny and/or questioning, should elements of the strategy not result in perceived or actual 'on the ground' timely outcomes.

As noted above, while development contributions can be seen as beneficial to Council in general, the requirement to identify projects and infrastructure provisions associated with development contributions in a Long Term Plan, commits Council to this expenditure, even when it may not be fully funded by development contributions received. Development contributions cannot be used to improve parks provision in areas where there is no growth. This is however not a disadvantage of an OSS, but has been included in this section for completeness.

Consideration of how provision guidelines are articulated within the Strategy must include whether to identify specific locations for future open spaces, as this may disadvantage Council's purchasing position.

5.5 What open space elements should be considered for an OSS?

Supported by the overview of the various elements provided in section 5.1, Table 3 provides a summary of the advantages and/or disadvantages of incorporating each element in an OSS, to support decisions regarding the final scope and approach of the proposed Strategy.

Table 3

Type of open space	Advantages to include in OSS	Disadvantages to include in OSS
Council controlled parks and reserves (including natural areas)	Parks and reserves are provided specifically for the community for active and passive recreation activities. They form a significant proportion of the open space network and thus are a key component of any OSS.	None identified.
Off-road walkways and shared paths	Provide a specific recreation (and transport) function that is ideally planned as a network including connections to areas of parks. Off road networks generally provide higher amenity and user satisfaction.	Mixed ownership issues for some trails and tracks will require collaboration and agreement with relevant landowners.
Roads and streets	Footpaths, cycle lanes and shared paths in the road reserve can contribute to the overall open space network connectivity. Inclusion in an OSS allows for better connectivity planning.	These elements are subject to specific legal requirements and other detailed planning mechanisms, inclusion in the OSS could create confusion, duplication and misalignment.
Civic areas	Civic areas can contribute considerably to an open space network by providing informal leisure opportunities, especially for socialising and connecting. These are likely to be perceived by the public as useable open space areas.	Civic areas are often small areas of reserve, specifically set aside for this purpose and often do not provide much in the way of informal or other recreation possibilities.

Type of open space	Advantages to include in OSS	Disadvantages to include in OSS
Built sports and recreation facilities	Often provided in association with, and complimentary to, open spaces adjacent to the facility.	<p>A built facility is not generally considered an 'open space'. Usually, such facilities are considered as part of a wider regional strategy and inclusion in the OSS could create duplication and misalignment.</p> <p>Open spaces in the vicinity of built facilities are intended to be included in the OSS.</p>
Cemeteries	Cemeteries provided by Council can have important secondary recreation functions. Recreational use can improve surveillance and support reducing vandalism. They can provide specific types of recreation opportunities that complement the open space network.	Potential for perceived conflict with the primary function of the open space by the community, however this can be mitigated through appropriate planning and alignment.
Beaches, rivers and lakes (including harbours)	<p>Beaches and open space adjoining a beach provide a high-quality recreational experience. This can be reinforced by additional land purchase and development to provide for higher levels of use. Beaches in the Far North District are an integral part of the recreation experience and need to be considered as such within the wider network.</p> <p>Identifying appropriate future access provisions to rivers and lakes is a key advantage in including rivers and lakes in an OSS.</p> <p>Beaches, harbours and their facilities can provide access to the</p>	<p>The jurisdiction on beaches, rivers and lakes can be complicated and includes usage issues such as dogs and vehicles. An OSS should ensure appropriate consideration of any additional policies or bylaws (including regional council bylaws) that may apply to individual beach environments.</p> <p>Northland Regional Council (NRC) has jurisdiction for harbours and marine reserves, and it is expected that appropriate collaboration and alignment will occur in the development of the OSS.</p>

Type of open space	Advantages to include in OSS	Disadvantages to include in OSS
	water to experience marine recreation opportunities.	
DOC reserves (predominantly natural areas)	DOC reserves often can provide a different recreation experience for users than can be provided by reserves under the control of Council due to their often more remote locations, the exposure to nature and the opportunity for tramping and other activities. These reserves are therefore an important consideration in terms of providing an appropriate range of recreation experiences and consideration of biodiversity outcomes.	Council cannot control the types of use and access on reserves under the control of DOC, however the provision of such areas has a high level of long term assurance. It is considered appropriate agreement and collaboration with Department staff will support the inclusion of DOC reserves in the OSS.
Other Crown land (LINZ)	In some districts, land under the control of LINZ can add to an open space network. The detailed research to be undertaken for the development of the OSS will highlight whether there is sufficient and appropriate Crown land that should be considered for inclusion in the OSS.	See comments above regarding DOC reserves. Inclusion of this type of land in an OSS is subject to the agency's agreement to collaborate.
Other Council controlled land	Use of drainage and utility reserves can provide additional land links for access and ecological outcomes and can be particularly important in providing ecological or access networks.	Potential conflict with the primary function of the open space, however this can be mitigated through appropriate planning and alignment.
Other public spaces used for recreation	These are predominantly school grounds, including sports fields. These can contribute significantly to neighbourhood recreational use and tree cover and other outcomes and therefore can be	Can be considered but should not be relied on as a permanent part of open space due to changes in the ways many schools are managing access to their grounds after hours.

Type of open space	Advantages to include in OSS	Disadvantages to include in OSS
	considered as elements of the wider network.	Potential legal implications for joint arrangements with other entities.
Privately owned open spaces	Golf courses and similar types of open spaces contribute to the range of recreational opportunities in the District and should be considered as part of the open space network.	Areas such as private golf courses may not be open to the public, and can be sold. These should inform an OSS, but should not be relied on as a permanent part of open space provision.
Heritage and cultural areas under the control of Council	Cultural areas and heritage sites under the control of Council can add to the richness of a park experience and are important components of the open space network.	Can have limited development and/or other restrictions.

For open spaces under Council's control, the above analysis indicates that most open spaces should be included in a comprehensive OSS. Two elements that should be considered for exclusion from the OSS are roads and streets, due to their detailed legal framework and existing planning mechanisms; and built sport and recreation facilities as they are not technically 'open spaces' and are also generally subject to other regionwide strategy and policy processes.

For open spaces under the control of agencies who also manage open spaces and facilities on behalf of, and for community use and access, such as DOC and NRC, it is anticipated that collaboration on the development of the OSS will occur, and the final Strategy will include an integrated planning approach.

For other open spaces, such as privately owned golf courses, walking tracks managed by community trusts, and school grounds; these may be taken into consideration and noted as part of the OSS, but will unlikely be elements that are actively planned for and managed as part of the Strategy, unless otherwise indicated by the landowner.

Alternatively, such land could be included in an OSS, but only where tenure is assured. Examples of assured tenure include access easements over private land and covenanted land adjoining parks which adds to the recreational and aesthetic experience.

Further potential refinement of this scope is anticipated as the project progresses and the finer details of the open space network and its elements are better understood.

5.6 The OSS and existing strategies, plans or policies of Council

Local authorities are rarely able to develop SPPs based on a 'clean sheet' approach. The range of statutorily required documents and their associated differing review cycles,

together with any additional non-statutory SPPs, can sometimes create challenges in developing a new SPP.

For example, while a new SPP may include a new best practice approach, this might be inconsistent with an existing bylaw that has only recently been reviewed. While it may be better to achieve Council's desired outcomes through the new approach, consideration of the implications on the existing SPP are also important.

As with most proposed SPPs therefore, a review of other council SPPs is a key element of the development process. It is important to determine what, if any SPPs address some or all the specific issues that have been identified through the problem and opportunity stage of the project, followed by a detailed stocktake of existing (and planned/in train/draft) documents to assess for potential alignment, duplication, or inconsistencies with the proposed new SPP.

Generally, such an analysis will have one of the following outcomes:

- The proposed SPP should be informed by and/or align with an existing SPP without reducing or changing the value of both the existing and proposed SPP
- The proposed SPP can/should support or add value to an existing SPP
- The proposed SPP duplicates matters addressed in an existing SPP
- The proposed SPP is inconsistent with an existing SPP, but it is considered appropriate to amend the existing SPP accordingly
- There are gaps in the existing suite of SPPs that would support or complement the proposed SPP.

In most cases, the review will indicate that the proposed SPP should be informed by/aligned with one or more existing SPPs as part of its development and implementation, or the SPP can be used to support and enhance an existing SPP.

Table 4 provides an overview of key SPPs of Council and indicates the outcome of the review of each.

Table 4

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
Far North 2100	<p>A non-statutory aspirational 'District Strategy', which envisages how the Far North might look in 80 years' time, based on the vision He Whenua Rangatira – a district of sustainable prosperity and wellbeing, including principles of environmental, social and cultural prosperity.</p> <p>Connections for open spaces are through at least two of the five 'drivers of change' outlined in the Strategy ('putting the wellbeing of communities</p>	Development to be informed by, and align with, principles and drivers of change.

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
	<p>and people first', and 'protect the natural environment for future generations').</p> <p>No specific open spaces content.</p>	
Spatial Plan	<p>Council is in the process of developing the Kerikeri / Waipapa Spatial Plan.</p> <p>A spatial plan is a key tool in capturing the aspirations of the communities it applies to and showing how or what of these aspirations can be achieved. A spatial plan is a future thinking document that includes growth projections in general as well as where that growth should occur and how and can include specific open space elements.</p>	To be developed in conjunction with the Spatial Plan, will align with and give effect to specific elements of the Spatial Plan as a result.
District Plan (DP)	The District Plan currently being reviewed and revised under the National Planning Standards includes chapters and associated objectives, policies, and rules on open spaces in the District as well as providing for public access issues, particularly regarding esplanade reserves and esplanade strips.	Can provide guidance to and support the DP. Can possibly (due to timing) inform the current DP review process in terms of zoning to ensure that the plan adequately protects open spaces, and provides, maintains, and enhances public access to and along the coastal marine area, lakes, and rivers.
Long Term Plan (LTP) 2021-2031 /Community Outcomes	<p>The LTP includes budgets and plans for open spaces for the ten-year period of the Plan, which will be supported through the Infrastructure Strategy, the Financial Strategy and any relevant asset management plans.</p> <p>This can include parks acquisition and development activities where these have been quantified through an OSS or other process. Maintenance and improvements and possibly land acquisition goals for open spaces may</p>	<p>Development to be informed by and align with Strategic Priorities and Community Outcomes.</p> <p>An analysis of the specific details of the relevant supporting documents to determine specific linkages to the OSS will be required for alignment but also to inform the development of the next LTP.</p>

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
	<p>have been provided in the supporting documents for the LTP.</p> <p>The LTP strategic priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable sustainable economic development • Deepen our sense of place and connection • Better asset management <p>The LTP includes the following Community Outcomes that are relevant for open spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities that are healthy, safe, connected, and sustainable • Proud, vibrant communities • Prosperous communities supported by a sustainable economy • A wisely managed and treasured environment that recognises the special role of tāngata whenua as kaitiaki. • We embrace and celebrate our unique culture and heritage and value it as a source of enduring pride 	
Infrastructure Strategy	<p>This document references a 'Living Asset Management Plan' to cover district facilities including open spaces.</p> <p>The limited reference to open space does not take account of secondary functions of open spaces including drainage retention and protection of other council assets including roads.</p>	<p>The OSS is likely better informed by and aligned with the Asset Management Plan referenced in the Strategy, rather than the Strategy itself.</p> <p>However, future reviews of the Asset Management Plan and Strategy may be informed by the OSS.</p>
FNDC Climate Change Roadmap	<p>This is a high-level document that details Council's broad approach to climate change, including key objectives and four key focus areas.</p>	<p>Development should be informed by the Roadmap and any subsequent climate change related SSPs of Council.</p>

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
(This is also informed by the Te Tai Tokerau Climate Adaptation Strategy for Northland)	<p>'Vulnerable parks and reserves' is listed as one of eight significant risks for Council in this document.</p> <p>Functions of an esplanade reserves and strips under Section 229 of the RMA include mitigating natural hazards, and it is expected that esplanade reserves and esplanade strips will have an increasing importance in coastal defences and at the same time are generally reduced in area by sea level rises.</p>	<p>Esplanade reserves are an important component of both an open space network and climate change adaptation.</p> <p>The OSS could provide direction on a range of matters that can support and enhance the achievement of the roadmap objectives and focus areas.</p>
Transport Strategy	<p>Includes a strategy and an integrated transport plan and recognises open space in investment objectives. Strategic responses include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to enhance and promote sustainable transport choices both 'within' and 'between' communities greater provision for shared active modes including making them more attractive. <p>While reference to parks and open spaces is not direct, provision of off-road facilities in parks is a commonly used solution to make active transport routes more attractive.</p>	<p>Development to be informed by, and align with the relevant aspects of the Transport Strategy.</p> <p>Future reviews of the Transport Strategy may benefit from alignment with and reference to the OSS.</p>
Reserves Policy 2017/ Draft Parks and Reserves Policy	Both the existing and draft Policies are entirely focused on open spaces and have considerable content that will likely be superseded by the approach and content of the OSS.	The OSS development should be undertaken in conjunction with a review of the Policy to ensure duplications are removed and the final policy is primarily operationally focused. An option may be to incorporate the Parks and Reserves Policy into the OSS.
Northland Walking and	This document is at a strategic level, and it is unclear if proposed 'enhancement' sections of trails will be located in public or private land,	Development should be informed by the Strategy, likely requiring a level of collaboration

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
Cycling Strategy	<p>however council controlled open spaces can provide an opportunity for off-road cycle trails that can assist in activating parks.</p> <p>Half of the Far North Cycle Trail is located on Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē / Ninety Mile Beach, and large sections of the Twin Coast Cycle Trail are located on parks including esplanade reserves, whereas the Kauri Coast Cycle Trail is an on-road trail.</p>	<p>with private landowners and other entities.</p> <p>The final OSS may support future reviews of this Strategy.</p>
Kōkiri ai te Waka Hourua/ Far North Spaces and Places (Facilities) Plan	<p>The Far North Spaces & Places Plan is a facility-focussed plan developed in conjunction with the regional strategy for play, active recreation, and sport – Kōkiri ai te Waka Hourua.</p> <p>The regional strategy provides the high-level strategic framework to guide future decision making, with the district level plan providing more detailed guidance for the Far North part of the region.</p> <p>The Plan mentions open spaces, however the content largely relates to facilities to support active sport and recreation activities.</p>	<p>While built recreation facilities are to be excluded from the OSS, the wider approach of the Strategy and Plan should inform the development of the OSS.</p>
Dog Management Policy	<p>This statutory policy provides, among other things, where dogs can be allowed off-leash or on-leash as well as providing areas prohibited for dogs, or areas where dogs are the priority users (dog parks).</p>	<p>Development to be informed by this Policy, noting this may still result in recommended approaches that are inconsistent with the current Policy.</p> <p>Any consultation on the OSS may provide a baseline for future amendments to the Policy to align with the OSS.</p>

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
Stormwater Strategy (draft)	<p>The draft document includes the following focus areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stormwater flooding does not create a hazard to our community or cause damage to properties • Urban streams, aquatic habitats and coastal marine environment are healthy and accessible. <p>Stormwater flooding is already linked to the climate change issues as already provided and has implications for parks and reserves. The focus on the health of natural waterways has direct linkages to the management of open spaces.</p>	<p>Development to be informed by and aligned with the Strategy. Depending on timeframes, an ideal approach would be to develop the OSS and this Strategy in conjunction with each other.</p> <p>The OSS could provide direction on a range of matters that can support and enhance the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy.</p>
Development Contributions Policy (DCP)	<p>The overall purpose of a DCP has been outlined in section 5.4.1 of this report. Council's current approach is to not collect development contributions.</p> <p>Should a review of the Policy determine that development contributions should be collected, this has clear linkages and implications for open spaces.</p>	<p>An OSS is a key tool in providing a framework to base development contributions on and would inform and support such a Policy.</p>
Structure Plans, Township Plans, Concept Plans, Community Development Plans	<p>Council has a range of these types of plans. These have not been analysed in depth and the status of these in terms of being 'active' documents of Council is unclear.</p> <p>However, in general terms, these plans are all developed in conjunction with the relevant communities and provide an expression of each communities' aspirations. It is highly likely that the final plans include elements of leisure and recreation goals and objectives and therefore have links to open spaces.</p>	<p>Development to be informed by plans as required.</p>

SPP	Linkage to open spaces	Outcome for OSS development
Engineering Standards	<p>This document provides guidance to design and construction of reserves by reference to NZS:4404.</p> <p>This document is at an operational level and is not relevant to the OSS development.</p>	N/A
<p>Other non-statutory policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cemeteries ▪ Art and Memorials in Public Places ▪ Camping in Public Places ▪ Community Gardens ▪ Equity and Access for People with Disabilities ▪ Footpaths ▪ Public Toilets 	<p>These policies all have content and approaches that are linked to open spaces, either specifically, such as the Cemeteries Policy, or generally such as the Equity and Access for People with Disabilities Policy.</p> <p>Therefore, all will have implications for the development of the proposed OSS.</p>	<p>The OSS development will need to address any potential inconsistencies and duplications across these policies.</p> <p>In some cases, alignment between the OSS and a policy is appropriate, in other cases it may mean a recommendation to review and update the existing policy or even revoke it. The OSS may also support and enhance existing policy provisions.</p>

6 Conclusion

At present, the lack of an OSS means decisions regarding open spaces in the Far North District are made in an ad hoc manner that is resulting in an open spaces network that is not planned for in a holistic and integrated fashion, and may not have optimal outcomes. An important consideration is that currently the open space network in the District is not adequately future-proofed and Council risks losing opportunities for valuable potential open space land.

This research report has outlined and described what an open space strategy is, how it is developed and what key matters a best practice OSS should address. The range of individual open space elements that could be included within the proposed Strategy have

been described, together with an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages for their inclusion.

The analysis of the linkages of an OSS to other existing SPPs of Council and other agencies indicates how much of an important element open space is to a wide variety of outcomes, goals and objectives of Council. A single strategy document for open spaces is likely not only to be beneficial for the delivery of fit for purpose open spaces, but will also contribute to, support and enhance other SPPs of Council.

Should the project to develop the OSS proceed, the detailed research and analysis required, as outlined in this document, will be reported back to Council to inform future decisions on the final approach, scope and content of the OSS.