

Avon-Otakaro Network Project Proposal in the Residential Red Zone (RRZ)

Project Name:

Natural Playgrounds

Project proposer/group:

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Project outline/description:

This proposal is for creating playgrounds and, in some cases, redeveloping existing playgrounds within the residential red zone. Rather than proposing to create similar parks with commercial playground equipment at different sites along the network, this proposal looks at developing nature-based playgrounds at sites that have particular links to our city's heritage and/or highlights areas of geographic or cultural interest.

Nature-based playgrounds vary from playgrounds seen in many community parks. Although nature-based playgrounds usually have some of the same elements you would expect to see in more traditional playgrounds, there is a focus on the use of natural materials. Swings and slides may be constructed to blend in the environment and natural materials like rocks and logs would be used to encourage balancing, climbing and jumping. Natural playgrounds promote gross motor muscle movement like traditional playgrounds do, but also have elements in their design which can be moved and interacted with to encourage cooperation, creativity, experimentation and a sense of risk. Natural playgrounds use plants to define areas, attract insects for study, create shaded areas for play and introduce children to varieties which are sculptural, scented, useful or make interesting noises in the wind. A natural playground will stimulate all the senses in a child.

Connecting children to the river, the wetland areas and some of the history of the area, will hopefully promote questions about why the river isn't cleaner, why can't we harvest the fish and plants like people used to, why can't we swim and play in the water now. Building an understanding and appreciation of the area will hopefully create a sense of guardianship encouraging future generations to take care of it.

Protecting areas that were people's gardens will not only provide a historical connection to land but will also ensure future generations have access to green spaces. One only has to look at how Wainoni was 100 years ago, with its grand houses and large gardens, to imagine the benefit to the suburb now if the people of the time had had the foresight to preserve some of those green spaces for this generation to play in.

This network would be of enormous benefit to the local and wider community and also the tourist sector. A series of natural playgrounds along the network would serve as destinations and rest stops for families as they explored what the network has to offer. Community events and educational programmes could also be held in these locations. The activities run at the Highline in New York is just one example of how 'reclaimed' spaces have been used to educate and connect people. <http://www.thehighline.org>

Where is the project to be located within the RRZ?

The proposal is for natural playgrounds to be located at several sites along the corridor. The following pages outline these locations.

Walnut Tree park in Avon Loop



A stand of willow trees which could be pruned to create playspaces.



Why this site? What special characteristics of this part of the RRZ make it ideal for the project?

Walnut tree park, in the Avon loop, was a focal point for the Avon Loop community. A playground was first built on a vacant section by families living in the neighbourhood in the 1970s, which later became a council playground. Many of the trees in the park had been in people's gardens and remained as the houses were removed over the past 30-40 years. The park is on the corner of Bangor and Hurley street and is near several historical places of interest including Tautahi/'The Bricks' site and the Bangor street No. 3 pumping house.

Walnut Tree park borders the RRZ. There is an existing playground which could be revamped and updated. There are several large trees which add character and interest to the park and a stand of willow trees which could be pruned to form a playspace. The park is close to the Avon Loop community cottage which is still well-utilised by community. With only red-zoned land between the park and river there is the opportunity to extend the playground to the river's edge, close to the site that the original Christchurch Rowing Club had been built on. The photos and details of people rowing and swimming in the river just over 100 years ago is a good reminder of how clean the river once was and how it could be again.



Some examples of living willow structures

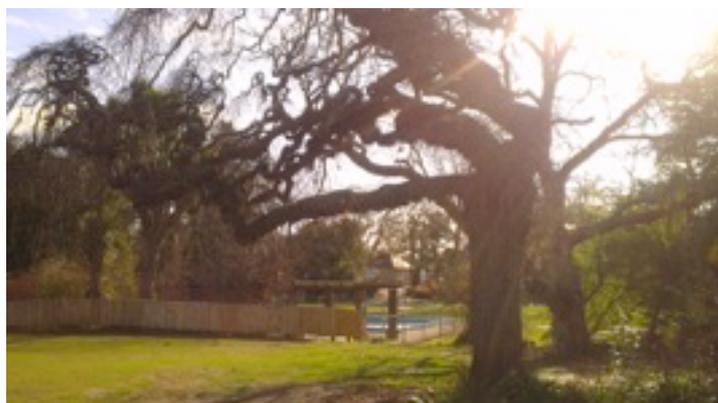
Avebury Park, Richmond



Stone walls and a separate entrance with steps and a pathway



Established plantings border the park, including a shady corner of bamboo.



Trees bordering Avebury park (on RRZ land)

Why this site? What special characteristics of this part of the RRZ make it ideal for the project?

Avebury park was established by the City Council in the early 1950s. The historic house was built in 1885 for James Flesher, Mayor of Christchurch from 1923-25. The house became the Cora Wilding Youth Hostel in 1965 and was used as a hostel until 1997. The house was due to be demolished but restoration started in 2000 and reopened two years later as Avebury House Community Centre.

Avebury park is known for its beautiful, established gardens. The borders of the park are defined by stone walls and a variety of plantings.

Expanding the park into the RRZ would connect it with the river and encompass an open area where a wildflower labyrinth could be developed. Monarch butterflies have been known to overwinter in the area and the park could be developed in a way that enhances the established plantings Avebury is known for by creating new areas that encourages an awareness and appreciation of insects like the Monarch butterfly.

A paddling pool has been a feature of the park since the 1950s and would be retained.



Wildflower labyrinth



Shaded seating or play areas using existing

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The land surrounding 377 River road, the proposed 'hub' along the network, will be a reminder of the working gardens and homes that once occupied the space. The villa at 377 River road will be turned into a kitchen cafe - a place to gather and available for community to use to teach cooking and preserving skills.

The playground will be incorporated into the community gardens and will be a place for children to learn, explore, create and play. It will be reminiscent of a back garden with swings, a slide and sandpit but will also have pockets of quiet areas for exploration. Living huts, fairy garden corners, a mud kitchen, 'secret' pathways and plants designed to be touched, smelled, added to mud pies and nibbled on will encourage an awareness and appreciation of nature.

Information about the area - the history of the homes, the land and the people will be incorporated into the space to tell the story of the people who called this area home. As former resident, Di Madgin, states,

“Scattered along the river, as in many old cities in Europe, information boards could tell the provenance of the place, real memorials to real people and their gardens. I would like to be able to say that although the people had to go, some of their gardens are preserved. Their hearts are intact.”



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The playspaces at Mahinga Kai will enhance the learning areas being established. Together these areas will introduce children to the wetlands - teaching them how the wetlands have been used and changed in the past. Many children in Christchurch have little experience with the river and wetlands and consequently have little understanding of the need to ensure their protection. Otakaro - the place of a game - was named for the children who played on the banks of the river as their parents gathered food. A playspace that allows children to connect with the river, explore the biodiversity and gain a sense of guardianship will ensure future generations have a better understanding and appreciation of the importance this area has.



Potential playground site at Mahinga Kai



Opportunities to play with water is an important component in this playspace. Water channels where children can direct the flow of the water encourages cooperative play, problem solving and provides opportunities for experimenting with how water moves and enters the river. Interpretive signs will encourage thinking about the quality of water currently entering the Avon and what can be done to ensure the storm water isn't contaminated.



Boardwalks offering places to sit and observe - make the wetlands accessible and fosters curiosity.



Play equipment built from natural materials blend into the environment and provides places to balance, climb and take 'risks'.



What is the opportunity? (How would this project be of benefit to Christchurch and the Avon River/Otakaro corridor?)

Project Plan

What steps are needed to develop the project further? Who needs to do what?