

Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan

4th Edition

March 2024



Information

Document Reference

2024 Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan

Contributing Parties

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Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan Advisory Group

Version

4th Edition – 2024 Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan

Date

March 2024

Special Thanks to:

Stakeholders across Local and Regional Authorities, Regional and National Sports Organisations, Recreation and Funding partners and Regional and National Venue Management Organisations who were actively involved in the review of the 2024 Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan.

Sport Waikato, who have led the development of this 2024 plan, and Robyn Cockburn, Lumin, who has provided expert guidance and insight to help facilitate The Plan's development.

Disclaimer:

Information, data and general assumptions used in the compilation of this report have been obtained from sources believed to be reliable.

The contributing parties, led by Sport Waikato, have used this information in good faith and make no warranties or representations, express or implied, concerning the accuracy or completeness of this information. Interested parties should perform their own investigations, analysis and projections on all issues prior to acting in any way on any project.

All proposed facility recommendations made within this document are developed in consultation with the contributing parties. Proposed approaches represent recommendations based on the findings of the report. All final decisions remain the responsibility of the respective property owners and investors.

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1. Executive Summary

The purpose of the 2024 Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan (The Plan) is to provide a high-level strategic framework for play, active recreation and sport facilities and spaces and places planning, development, and optimisation across the region. It provides direction on what should be done and crucially, by inference, what should not be done. The Plan is focused at a network-wide level with emphasis on national, regional, and sub-regional assets, while also considering local level facility information that informs regional themes.

Regionally and nationally there have been changes in our communities, and the most significant of these are:

- **the way we participate in play, active recreation, and sport;**
- **current and future funding (including availability of funding towards infrastructure);**
- **and increased fiscal strain at both individual and sector levels.**

In response to changing participation trends and preferences, The Plan focuses on the regional network of spaces and places where play, active recreation and sport occurs, allowing for a wide lens on infrastructure that supports physical activity outcomes. Aligned with Moving Waikato, this Plan not only focuses on participation trends, and it also explores national and regional challenges such as climate change and sustainability. It assists regional decision making in an aim to enhance the provision of opportunities to play and actively recreate across the Waikato region.

Climate considerations, skyrocketing costs of operating leisure buildings, and lack of associated funding is a 'perfect storm' that is threatening not just existing facilities but community leisure typology itself.

This has led to a focus on retrofit first, build lean, build efficient, build to last, and build for reuse, with an emphasis on:

- **Active Environments** - ability to participate anywhere
- **Adaptable Spaces** - meeting lifelong participation needs and a range of users
- **Social Spaces** - that lead to greater community connection outcomes

- **Sustainable Planning** - asset and infrastructure resilience and meeting environmental goals

While increased investment into existing infrastructure is a core focus of the Plan, across the Waikato region there are **still significant gaps in the provision and quality of play, active recreation, and sport infrastructure to meet the needs of an aging population and a region in growth mode.** This Plan acknowledges these regional challenges and subsequently provides a detailed list of regional infrastructure recommendations to provide a roadmap forward.

The 24 priority facilities and active recreation spaces identified for development require investment of more than \$400 million. The local sport and recreation sector has identified they require investment of an estimated \$110 million to develop and maintain existing infrastructure to overcome participation barriers. These local initiatives are above local authority investment. An increased focus on regional and national collaboration is needed to progress identified priorities. A review of available regional funding sources highlights that there is not sufficient funds to make meaningful change.

The Plan also includes initiatives focused on **Strategic Implementation (13) and Optimisation and Operations (10).** These are highlighted in **Appendix 1** which outlines the regional collaboration required.

The 2024 Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan continues to ensure a greater proportion of active spaces are affordable, efficient, effective and sustainable in delivering more movement opportunities. This Plan outlines priority facility developments and initiatives, which optimise and repurpose the current facilities stock including leveraging the benefits of co-location and shared services. The 4th edition guides good stakeholder decision making and investment and focuses on collaboration, partnerships, and community hubs.

2. Background Information

2.1 Purpose

The Plan is the result of a structured planning process and is supported by a highly-valued regional partner network. It prioritises and guides investment and is designed to increase access to play, active recreation and sport facilities through facility planning, provision and optimisation guidance.

Benefits of The Plan:

- A structured planning and decision-making process
- Advocacy with funders and investors – informs decisions around priority investment areas
- Peer reviewed facility development including concepts, feasibility and business cases
- Knowledge, resource and insights specific to play, active recreation and sport facilities and spaces and places provision
- Regional facility utilisation data that tracks demand and informs decision making
- Support and partnership guidance including advice on development of community hubs
- Facilitation of information sharing and training opportunities

Like all high-level plans, more further considerations are required for specific initiatives. The Plan is not a replacement for this detailed research and analysis.

2.2 Review process

The 2024 Plan development included engaging key stakeholders in a review of the 2021 plan, collaborating to develop and agree on future priorities, initiatives, and recommendations.

Participants included: local authority mayors, chief executives and technical managers; representatives from regional and national sports organisations; funders; recreation providers; regional council; Sport New Zealand; and Sport Waikato.

Robyn Cockburn, an independent consultant with Lumin, worked closely with Sport Waikato to facilitate the review process.

For further information about the process and methodology refer to [Review Process and Methodology Appendix](#)

2.3 Funding and Delivery Partners

The Plan's current funding and delivery partners include:



Additional partners include: Waikato Regional Council; Community Trusts; Walking and Cycling Commission; Department of Conservation; Ministry of Education; Iwi; National and Regional Funders; and National and Regional Sport and Recreation providers. All were engaged in the development of the plan and have key roles in activating the regional priorities and recommendations.

2.4 Implementation

Following endorsement at the Waikato Mayoral Forum in March 2024, The Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan is available via the Sport Waikato website. Funding, delivery and contributing partners will receive the 4th Edition of The Plan, along with any subsequent updates.

The intention of this Plan is for all resources to remain accessible and up to date - Refer to [Using The Plan](#) section. Facilitated by Sport Waikato, stakeholders will have access to the national infrastructure database, and up-to-date insights on the play, active recreation, and sport sector.

The [Strategy Implementation Recommendations section \(Appendix 1\)](#), contains initiatives led by Sport Waikato that will ensure this plan remains relevant to stakeholders and is used to its full potential.

2.5 Sport Waikato and The Plan Advisory Group

Sport Waikato is a Regional Sports Trust whose mandate is to grow the physical activity levels of people and communities in the Waikato region through play, active recreation and sport.



The work of Sport Waikato is guided by *Moving Waikato* – the region’s strategy for physical activity, which has a vision of ‘everyone active’, and a goal of 75% of all Waikato adults and young people active enough to positively impact their wellbeing by 2030.

The Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan aligns with the Regional Leadership pillar of the strategy, by working with regional partners to update and implement a regional spaces and places plan while working in a manner to address regional challenges and deliver on regional recommendations.

The Plan is governed by an Advisory Group of representatives from local authorities, Waikato Regional Council, Trust Waikato, Sport New Zealand and Sport Waikato. The role of the Advisory Group is to:

- **Assist with the development and renewal process** of the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan
- **Guide the prioritisation of the outcomes** of The Plan, including the assessment and prioritisation of regional and higher-level facilities
- **Govern and guide the directions of the outcomes** of The Plan.

Sport Waikato’s role in the development and implementation of the plan is to:

- **Provide technical support** including collection and analysis of data and generation of insights, while ensuring insights remain up to date through partnerships such as ActiveXChange (supply and demand data)
- **Promote the use** of the plan and associated resources
- **Coordinate specialised services** (e.g., consultancy led work) on behalf of partners
- **Coordinate collaboration** between national, regional, and local stakeholders across the play, active recreation and sport sector, including across boundaries

Sport Waikato facilitates collaboration across all stakeholders, implementing initiatives highlighted in the [Regional Recommendations and Priorities Section \(Appendix 1\)](#).

3. Using the Plan

3.1 Features of The Plan

The 2024 Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan has been developed to ensure that information within The Plan remains up-to-date, relevant and informs decision making around investment into the play, active recreation and sport sector.

Stakeholders provided guidance on the trends/themes identified in this Plan throughout the development process it was evident that stakeholders use The Plan in a variety of ways. This section guides stakeholders to the areas of The Plan relevant to their needs.

This edition of The Plan, has four key sections:

Waikato Regional Actives Spaces Plan (this document), with a focus on:

- Regional and national context ([section 4](#))
- Play, active recreation and sport context ([section 5](#))
- Facilities and active spaces guidance ([sections 6-7](#))

Regional Recommendations and Priorities (Appendix 1)

Facilities and Active Spaces (Appendix 2)

- Information on the supply and demand of spaces and places

Resource Hub (Appendix 3):

- Insights, research, and tools (e.g., regional and national case studies, best practice guidelines)

The Resource Hub will remain up-to-date. When changes are made, the documents will be (re) published and shared with regional stakeholders.

Sport Waikato has partnered with ActiveXChange to ensure the availability of a live overlay of infrastructure data, coupled with community profile information and participation statistics.

The Resource Hub will remain up-to-date. When changes are made, the documents will be (re) published and shared with regional stakeholders.



3.2 Relationship between The Plan and Other Key Documents

The following diagram shows the relationship between this plan and other regional and district plans and strategies, which highlights the Plan doesn't occur in isolation.



3.3 Using The Plan

The Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan has been developed for stakeholders to use for: planning; strategy development; facility development; optimisation and management of spaces and places; investment and funding and can be used in the variety of means:

Definitions of Play, Active Recreation and Sport

Definitions of play, active recreation and sport are useful for understanding demand and assisting with planning.

<p>COUNCIL PLANNING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual and long-term • Strategic and internal • Needs and prioritisation • Asset management and acquisition • Assessment of external proposals 	<p>STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational strategies e.g. trails; natural bodies of water • Internal PARS strategies • Regional PARS strategies 	<p>FACILITY LIFECYCLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility conception and development (build and commissioning) • Capital cost considerations i.e. market and comparative values (facility size) • Best practice and resourcing e.g. contractors/consultants
<p>OPTIMISATION AND MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venue management and facility programming • Best practice guidelines for optimisation • Best practice governance structures (e.g. case studies) 	<p>INVESTMENT AND FUNDING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding applications informed by Regional Funding Profile • Funders assessment of proposals based on decision making criteria and development priorities and recommendations • Collaborative, regional approach to funding 	<p>REGIONAL DECISION MAKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform investment priorities based on research and regional/national themes • Highlight opportunities for coordinated approaches to decision making

Note that some facilities and spaces are used for play, active recreation and sport.

District Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plans

PLAY	ACTIVE RECREATION	SPORT
<p>DEFINITION:</p> <p>Intrinsically motivated, freely chosen activities with no predetermined outcome. Play is spontaneous, fun, accessible, challenging, social, repeatable, and occurring anywhere.</p> <p>Play for tamariki is personally directed with limited adult involvement but can also be undertaken together by whaanau.</p> <p>Play spaces and places include playgrounds; skateparks/bowls; natural environments and reserves.</p> <p>Play however, can occur anywhere including across spaces where sport and active recreation takes places (e.g., parks and open spaces for tree climbing or kicking a ball).</p>	<p>DEFINITION:</p> <p>Active Recreation includes activity that requires some level of physical exertion as a core element and can be undertaken individually or in a group setting. It can include exercise, dance or outdoor recreation activities.</p> <p>It can also include activities that cross over into the sport environment but that exist outside of a formalised sport setting (e.g., with rules/conditions of play) – these include activities such as swimming and cycling.</p> <p>Facilities, spaces and places for active recreation include: running/walking, bridle and cycling tracks (including Pump Tracks) and trails; yoga/dance studios; group exercise and weights environments.</p> <p>A number of facilities, spaces and places that are traditionally defined as sport spaces (e.g., indoor and outdoor courts, playing fields, aquatic facilities, BMX tracks) are often used for recreational purposes.</p>	<p>DEFINITION:</p> <p>Sport has institutionalised rules, competition and conditions of play (e.g., time, space/boundaries, equipment). It has a formalised structure and a recognised representative body at a local club, regional, and/or national level.</p> <p>Participation in sport is typically defined by competition between people or teams to determine an outcome/winner.</p> <p>Sports facilities, spaces and places include: indoor courts; aquatic facilities; artificial turf – hockey; outdoor courts; playing fields; athletics tracks; cycling facilities (velodromes and BMX tracks); squash courts; gymnastics facilities; water-based sports facilities; equestrian facilities; club rooms; bowling, croquet and petanque greens; and golf courses.</p>

The Plan should be considered alongside the District Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plans which provide greater local insights. These plans can be found [here](#).



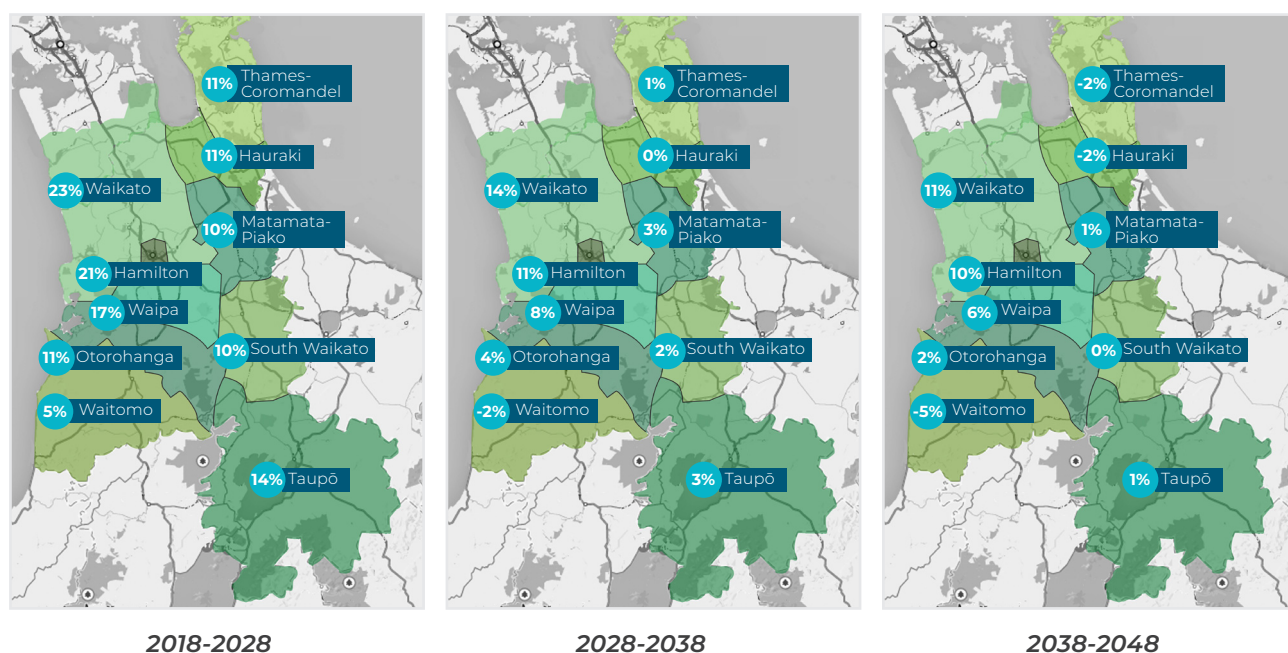
4. Regional Strategic Context

The Waikato region is complex, dynamic, and rich in resources. It is also facing challenges associated with demographic and social change, climate change and economic disparities.

This section provides an overview of:

- Social and demographic features, including changes
- The Waikato region's governance and planning structures
- Regional natural and built assets
- Regional challenges
- Regional strengths and opportunities for the region and its development

4.1 The Waikato Region's Communities



Population changes in district between 2013 to 2018, 2028 and 2038 (Statistics New Zealand)

Demographics

Current State

The Waikato region is comprised of ten districts, all with different community profiles, which are growing or decreasing at various rates. Overall, the [Waikato region is in growth mode](#), and has the fastest-growing population in the country.

A quarter (26%) of the 522,800 population are Maaori, which is the second highest Maaori population in New Zealand (*Statistics NZ*).

Across all Waikato communities, the population is aging with the biggest growth in those aged 65+. Females make up just over half (53%) of the regional population with 25% being under the age of 18, and traditionally, physical activity opportunities, spaces and places do not meet their needs (*Statistics NZ*). Health NZ Data (2021), highlights that only 14% of the region's population rate their health as excellent (which is behind 7 other regions of the country). More than half 53% of adults and 36% of young people in the Waikato identify as having a disability (*Active NZ 2021*).

Future State

The population is going to continue to age, with **24% growth by 2038** and **37% by 2048** of those aged 65+ (*Statistics NZ*).

According to Statistics NZ, projected population growth is expected to occur in Hamilton, Waikato and the Waipa districts, with this sub-regional catchment accounting for over 60% of the region's future population. All other districts are expected to have relatively static populations, with Waitomo projected to decrease, while Otorohanga and South Waikato highlights small growth in young families (0-4 and 18-24 years). However, this is low in comparison to an aging population cohort¹.

Impact on Participation

Changing demographics and population distribution in each district of the Waikato brings with it changing participation preferences.

Recent Active NZ (2021) data shows that sport participation decreases over the lifetime, and people typically choose more active recreation and less formal sport activities. According to Statistics New Zealand (*Census 2018*) data population of those of 'playing age' (5-44 years) is expected to increase by approximately 33,000 by 2048 across the region, although this age group will comprise a lower proportion of the population in 2048 (47% vs 55% in 2018).

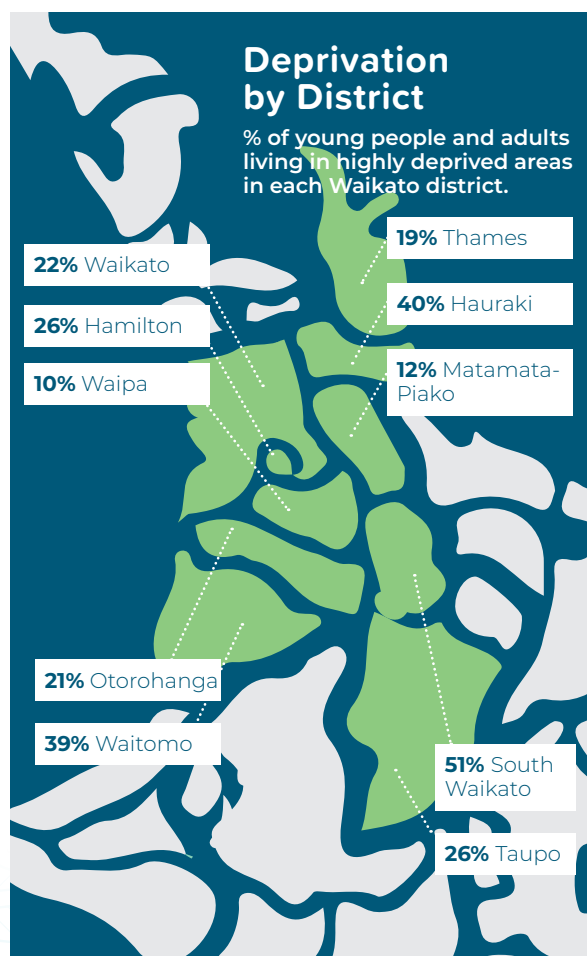
Social (In)equity and Deprivation

The play, active recreation and sport sector needs more inclusive, accessible, and equitable participation and leadership opportunities to address the changing face of New Zealand and address historical underrepresentation of particular groups in the sector.

38% of the Waikato region live in a deprived area, with the South Waikato, Hauraki, Waitomo districts and Hamilton City home to some of the most deprived communities (*Statistics NZ – Census 2018*).

Those in high deprivation communities have lower levels of participation in physical activity with only **55% of adults (18+)** and **53% of young people (5-17)** doing enough physical activity to positively impact their health (*Active NZ 2021*).

Evidence shows that low employment, low levels of education and income results in decreased physical activity. Across deprived communities, there are lower levels of motivation to participate in sport and recreation. (*Spotlight on Deprivation, Sport NZ, 2019*).



Waikato Deprivation Participation Profile

¹ At the time of writing population projections were not available from the 2023 census. This combined with immigration changes due to Covid-19 may mean that population projections will need to be updated as more information becomes available.

Impact on Provision

To keep up with ever changing community profiles and participation preferences, it is critical that facilities are flexible, with the ability to offer a range of play, active recreation, and sporting opportunities.

Facility provision should reflect district demographics and changes. Equitable (vs. equal) provision of services (programming) that support participation in play, active recreation and sport across deprivation levels should be considered. The needs of aging and older populations, including issues of accessibility and types of infrastructure, should be factored into planning.

An increasing population requires strategic long-term planning, collaborative provision with partners such as education, and the capacity to extend and repurpose facilities.

Significant projected growth is evident across Hamilton, Waikato district and the Waipa district sub-region. These 'river districts' are part of the focus on vibrant metropolitan centres, thriving communities and neighbourhoods, with subsequent intensification and micro mobility focus areas to account for growth. Growth areas will require significant capital investment, and these council partners need to continue working together to provide and jointly fund community facilities, where cross-boundary benefits are identified.

Decreasing populations mean that there are fewer people participating in play, active recreation and sport resulting in less funding to maintain current infrastructure. An increase in hubbing or amalgamation initiatives may be required.

These districts need to focus on enhancing wellbeing outcomes within the confined boundaries of their current urban environments.

Councils across the Waikato region have developed spatial and town concept plans to future proof communities.

4.2 Local Government Context

Local Government Planning & Decision Making

Context

Local government has a unique and critical role in the play, active recreation, and sport ecosystem, they provide vital community assets that are part of the fabric of our communities along with grants and opportunities that support local communities to participate in play, active recreation, and sport.

The current Resource Management Act requires all regional councils to produce a Regional Policy Statement and regional and district plans in the Waikato region must give effect to this.

Future for Local Government Review

The independent review of local government report on the Future of Local Government (June 2023), made the following recommendations for play, active recreation and sport:

- **A strengthened local democracy and strategic planning framework** allowing communities to develop local wellbeing priorities and embedding neighbourhood governance
- **Enhancing local wellbeing** with local government as a champion and activator of wellbeing
- **Building equitable, sustainable funding and financing systems**, including Ratepayer Funding Schemes
- **Mechanisms for establishing city or regional deals**
- **Strengthening the relationship between central and local government** with a focus on locally-led, centrally-funded
- **Te Tiriti-based partnerships** between Maaori and local government

Resource Management

Under the Resource Management Act, councils make important decisions about their communities' natural and built environment. From a sport and recreation perspective, the RMA does not currently include consideration of open space provision as it has a focus on the built environment as it refers to housing and property. Parks are not defined as infrastructure and with every space being 'contested' for its use, local government agencies will need to consider the important role green spaces play in advancing wellbeing outcomes to ensure that these spaces are not compromised in the future.

Spatial Planning Act

One of the five interconnected pillars of the Urban Growth Agenda (UGA) is 'spatial planning' – to build a stronger partnership with local government as a means of developing integrated spatial planning. The Waikato has already built a more comprehensive regional approach to planning.

The proposed Spatial Planning Act legislates regional spatial strategies which identify regional growth over the next 30 years and will lead to a more coordinated regional approach, which would align with the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan.

Urban and spatial planning plays an important role in supporting community opportunities for improving both health and sustainability outcomes with a focus on:

Connectivity

- Street network and design – focus on active environments
- Open spaces with vibrant meeting points
- Density and scale development
- Cycle and walkways, inclusive of all micro mobility defined activities
- Catalyst projects

Implications

- Legislative reform is likely to lead to a more coordinated regional approach to play, active recreation and sport infrastructure outcomes. However, Local Government NZ highlighted that the proposed system changes could create a more complex governance and plan-making process and emphasised that spatial planning without the voice of local communities' voice is at odds with the recommendations of the local government review.

This Plan promotes the value of maintaining a boundaryless approach to infrastructure investment planning while reflecting local participation needs identified in the ***District Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plans***.



4.3 Regional Challenges

Facility and Active Spaces Investment

Community play, active recreation and sport assets are provided by a range of entities, many of which are increasingly challenged with maintaining aging assets, increasing customer service expectations, and ensuring operational sustainability. Coupled with rising infrastructure and operational costs, local government authorities and facilities owners are under increasing financial pressure following the pandemic. **Maintaining investment levels has never been so challenging and a required priority at the same time.**

These challenges are particularly relevant in areas with an aging and/or decreasing population. Duplication and underutilisation of facilities make development, operation, and maintenance unaffordable. Ensuring ongoing facility sustainability where there is insufficient sport and recreation demand creates an opportunity to explore partnerships. Strong facility governance and operating procedures will assist with ongoing and appropriate facility investment, and ensure priorities and recommendations outlined in this plan are actioned.

Refer to the following sections for guidance:

- [Facility and Active Spaces Themes \(optimisation, partnerships, hubbing\)](#)
- [Facility and Active Spaces Development Framework \(supply and demand analysis and network considerations\)](#)
- [Funding Approach](#)

Climate Change

Climate change is having a huge influence on sport and recreation globally and is impacting the Waikato Regional Facilities and Active Spaces network. Rising sea levels, coastal erosion and extreme weather events are key factors in facilities planning, with Thames-Coromandel's facilities and clubs significantly impacted by weather events and flooding, most recently.

Regional planning also highlights that parts of Hauraki and Coromandel will experience more droughts in years to come, while Otorohanga and Waitomo conversely are expected to see increased levels of rainfall (*Ministry for the Environment – Climate Change Projections*).

Some sports may need to adapt formats to adjust to changing weather patterns such as flooding and drought. Spaces that will be particularly affected include hockey water turfs and sport fields (in the case of drought) as they require constant watering and do not align with environmentally sustainable practices such as water conservation.

Social consciousness of the impacts of climate change will reduce the dependence on cars to lower emissions and subsequently impact spaces and places planning. Provision of active transport and shared pathways will complement sustainable facility design, and environmentally sustainable policies and practices.

Play, active recreation and sport has a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership and undertake systematic efforts to promote greater environmental responsibility. The facilities network plays a [vital role](#) in helping communities through natural disaster events (e.g., acting as civil defence sites) therefore, facility adaptability, flexibility and multi-use needs to be considered, while maintaining access for wellbeing purposes as part of social recovery is also essential. **Refer to the [Sustainability](#) section of this plan for more information.**

A recent study into the [value of play, active recreation and sport](#) highlighted the positive role spaces and places can have on environmental wellbeing through regeneration, reduced emissions through active transport and the creation of more environmentally friendly urban environments.

Implications and network considerations

- **Provision:** The impact of climate change on our regional landscape including coastal areas
- **Security of supply:** Impact of weather on our facility network including sport fields flooding and drought
- **Demand:** Increased demand for all-weather facility solutions (including indoor provision)
- **Access:** The balance between sub-regional and local facility provisions with travel typically impacted by weather related events. A balanced network of facilities also playing a key role in climate change mitigation by reducing travel.

4.4 Regional Opportunities

This section (section 4) of The Plan along with The Waikato Plan highlights regional challenges and strengths, creating opportunities that should be considered in spaces and places planning. These are summarised as follows:

REGIONAL CHALLENGES

- Rural population change and impact on infrastructure and affordability
- Aging population and shrinking skill base
- Population growth and impact on infrastructure
- Increasing competition for water allocation and impacts on water quality
- Economic and social inequalities across the region
- Impact of climate change

REGIONAL STRENGTHS

- Significant regional growth corridors - UGA has identified the Hamilton-Auckland (H2A) corridor as a priority area
- National significant transport links – The Waikato Expressway
- High quality amenities and natural capital – including Waikato River, significant coastal areas and lakes

REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Maximising opportunities through aligned regional and sub-regional planning
- Partnering with Iwi/Māori for economic development recognising Māori worldviews and processes
- Capitalising on growth corridor planning across areas of significant natural heritage in partnership with neighbours Auckland
- Exploring opportunities around shared facilities and regional wide investment into sports, recreation, arts, and cultural facilities
- Exploring rural partnership opportunities, especially in disbursed areas impacted by weather events (climate change)
- Exploring new green spaces (parks) and community facilities to support and service growth areas.
- Collaborating on key infrastructure such as nationally significant cycling and walking experiences along with micro mobility initiatives - implement cross regional blue-green open space and recreational networks programme for the corridor that has restorative, protective, cultural and recreational aims

What is evident following Covid-19 is the **importance of localised solutions, affordable access and increased focus on utilisation**. Although localised facilities are becoming increasingly important, the regional challenges and strengths highlighted in this section reconfirm the importance of, and opportunities around, sub-regional/regional spaces and places.

Role of Regional and Sub-Regional Spaces and Places

Sub-Regional facilities have a role in addressing the barriers and needs of multiple communities typically across territorial authority boundaries and are a solution to the opportunities listed above. They cater for local and regional types of participation and are usually formed through a partnership approach to facility planning, which attracts regional and national funding, ensuring sustainability of the asset over the lifecycle. The dispersed nature of the Waikato region and its territorial boundaries, opens up **opportunities for sub-regional 'hubs' where councils' partner on planning and provision**. Regional facilities typically cater for drive time catchments of 90 minutes while sub-regional facilities cater for 30 minutes. This is in contrast to local facilities that capture a 20-minute drive catchment area.

5. Play, Active Recreation and Sport Context

5.1 Participation

Nature of Sport and Participation

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the delivery of sport, changed people's physical activity patterns and types, and increased financial strain on individuals and the sector. Long term challenges of the pandemic include:

- Changing lifestyles and motivations
- Sports competing leading to market saturation
- Greater reliance on accessible spaces and places
- Monocultural and single use design and delivery of facilities and associated programmes and services

- Governance and workforce pressures

Subsequent changes in participation include:

- More independent and self-directed physical activity vs participation in traditional sports
- New and emerging forms of sport being prioritised
- Young people are navigating away from sports participation with rapid decline, typically around the age of 15
- A growing theme around **family centred participation**.

A SPOTLIGHT on physical activity in the Waikato region

As we work towards a healthier and more active region, it's important to understand the current landscape for the people and communities of the Waikato region. Our population have a range of **participation preferences** and **barriers** to being active, and there are some important things we think you should know....

KEY:

Young People (5-17 years)

Rangatahi (12-17 years)

Tamariki (5-11 years)

Adults (18+ years)

The 'State of Play'

58%

Young People

59%

Adults

Do enough physical activity to positively impact their wellbeing

Young women 5-17 years

are currently **more active** than young males

63%

VS

54%

Only

57%

of young people

&

53%

of adults

who are disabled

are active enough to positively impact their wellbeing

But they want to do more! **Adults from HIGH DEPRIVATION COMMUNITIES are less active than adults in low deprivation settings**

64%

Young People

74%

Adults

Want to do more activity

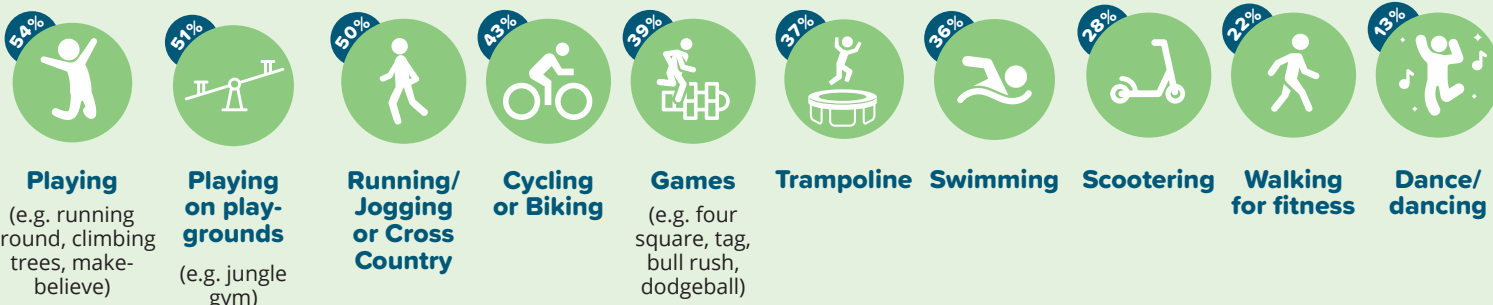
What this means is that we **could have around 70%** of our region's population active enough to positively impact their wellbeing, if we break down some barriers to participation!

There are a number of concerning barriers to participation that require a partnered approach to break down.

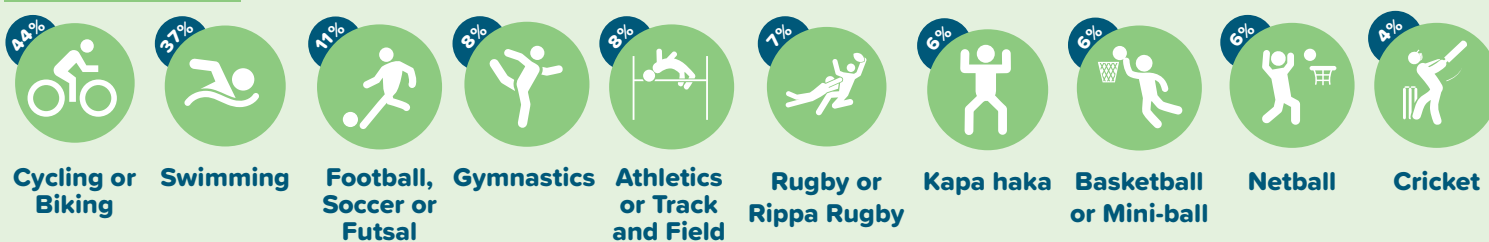
Participation in last 7 days for TAMARIKI (5 – 11 years)¹

Note that swimming and cycling include recreational participation as well as competition through sport.

ACTIVITIES



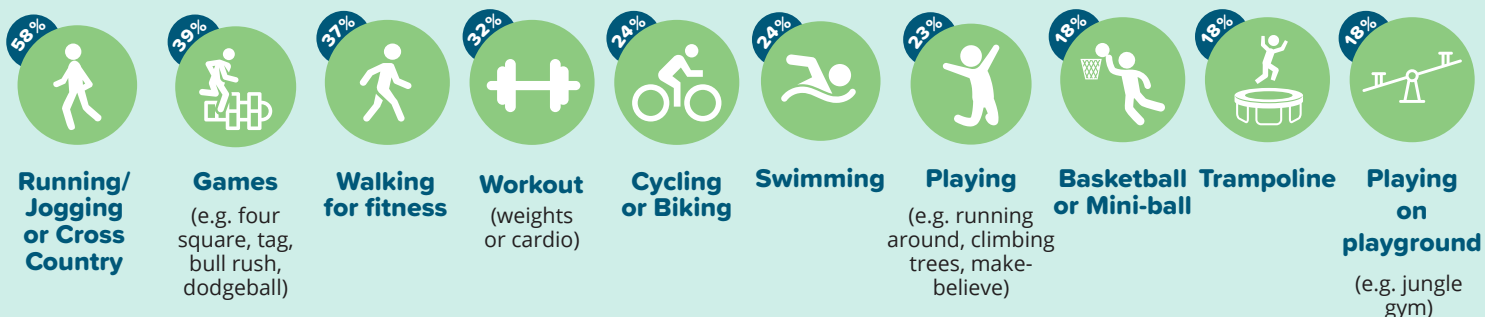
SPORTS



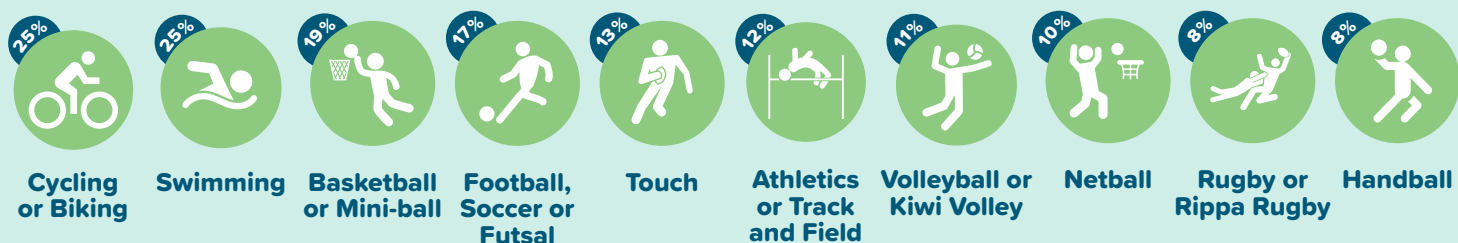
Participation in last 7 days for RANGATAHI (12 – 17 years)²

Note that swimming and cycling include recreational participation as well as competition through sport.

TOP 10 ACTIVITIES



TOP 10 SPORTS



TOP 10 SPORTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS



Participation in last 7 days for **PAKEKE** (adults 18+ years)

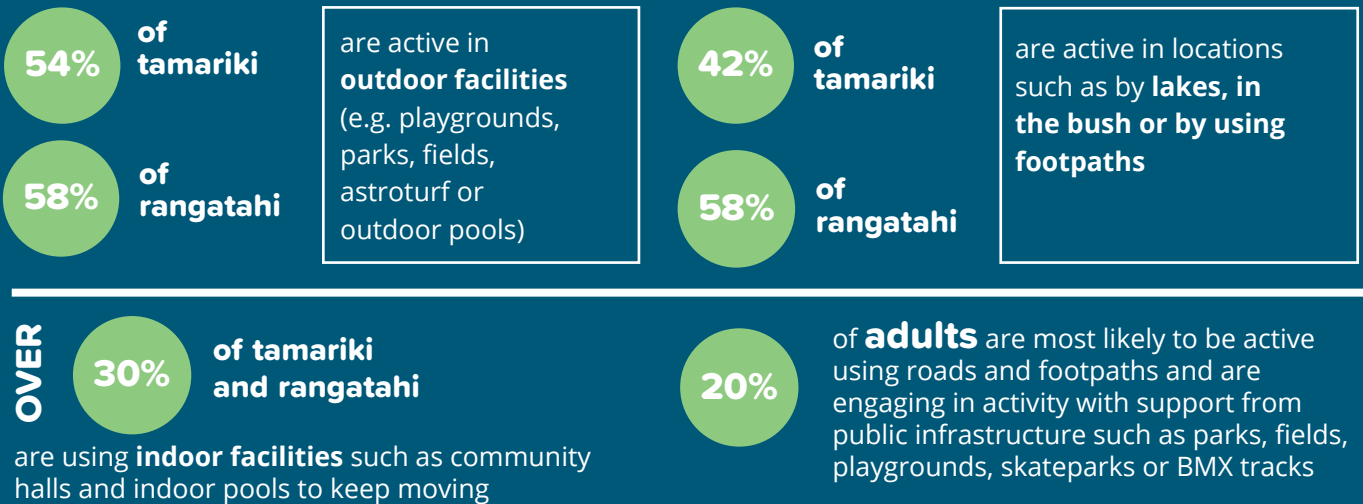
TOP 10 ACTIVITIES



TOP 10 SPORTS

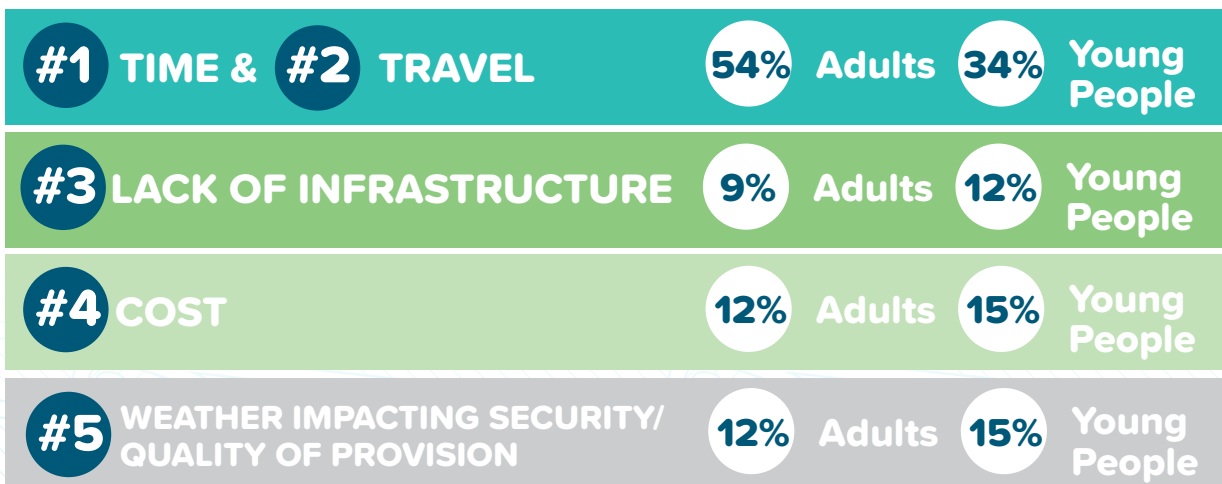


When people and communities of the Waikato get active, they use a range of spaces that Councils provide and maintain:



Participation Barriers

Top barriers identified in the *Regional Community Survey (2022)* completed by Sport Waikato:



Rankings come via *Regional Community Survey (2022)*. Percentages coming from *Active NZ (2021)*.

Emerging sports and continued growth of un-organised activity

The *Regional Sporting Organisations (2022) survey* identified that over the past five years, sports organisations were experiencing three times more growth in their fun/social sport offerings compared with traditional competitive structures.

New sport options and variations are proving popular although there are often no systems in place to allow continued participation locally/outside of school. The Sport for Tamariki Report 2023 highlighted that respondents question the value of 'one off' sports opportunities with a desire to see better systems in place to allow for more opportunities to engage with emerging sports.

Emerging sports have a role to play in venue optimisation, and consideration should be given to opportunities that engage with large portions of the community.

The recent growth of pickleball, which can be played on a range of surfaces (both indoor and outdoor) is placing demands on facilities.

Other sports such as frisbee or football golf have seen a rise in participation, largely because these activities are situated in natural environments

(either reserves or golf courses) with minimal spatial limitations, providing enhanced wellbeing outcomes and cost-effective participation solutions.

Often, new and emerging sports are forced to compete for space and work with facility owners and operators to negotiate scheduling availability, which can lead to un-desirable scheduling.

Some sports are required to offer variants; for example, waterpolo suffers from a lack of deep-water pools, and has seen the rise in Flippa Ball, its sport variation to accommodate a lack of appropriate facilities.

In 2021, High Performance NZ started to invest in growth sports such as Waka Ama, Skateboarding, Climbing/Orienteering and E-Sports, with some of these sports included in future Olympic games, highlighting the appetite for sport variety including those focused on more individual recreational pursuits.

Participation statistics from Active New Zealand (2021) continue to demonstrate the growth and preference in active recreation and play opportunities and reemphasises that participation varies among different demographics. The nature of facility, programme and service provision needs to adapt to changing participation patterns and activity development.

Recommendations

To increase the physical activity levels and wellbeing of people and communities in the Waikato, we need to consider:

Affordability of access and participation

Cost is a significant barrier to many individuals and families to participate in sport and active recreation (and is a significant barrier for Māori and high deprivation communities)

Increasing play opportunities

Play represents an important opportunity for physical activity for both tamariki and rangatahi, it is accessible and free to the participant and informal play (things other than playgrounds) can be relatively low cost to Councils

Pay to play, pop-up opportunities and shortened formats

Demands on people's time is high and the need to commit can be a challenge. Pay-to-play and pop-up opportunities for participants to 'dip in and out', shortened classes and sport formats that lower the time required for participation could also help those struggling to make time to be active

Family-friendly active spaces and programming

Areas and/or programmes where the whole family can be active together can help to support the activity levels of those with competing demands

5.2 Provision and Access

The Waikato region offers plenty of opportunities for children to play in safe playgrounds and young people to access recreation and sports facilities. With over 1,300 key locations identified as part of this Plan that contribute to play, active recreation and sport outcomes we have an opportunity to grow and inspire participation in active recreation. The Waikato region remains home to many high-performance sports (Rowing NZ, Triathlon NZ, Cycling NZ) and facilities (Velodrome, Mighty River Domain).

Nature of provision

The *Regional Community Survey (2022)* highlighted that:

70% of respondents travel outside their districts to be active - 68% for active recreation opportunities, 28% for sport and 4% for play.

The top three spaces where people were active are where active recreation or play takes place – **natural water spaces, walkways/footpaths and reserves.**

This is consistent with the *Active NZ (2021)* survey and *Voice of Rangatahi Survey (2022)* which highlighted these spaces as the top three locations for individual or whaanau-based activity, when excluding home or school.

In response to changes in participation, emerging sports, and the rise in informal play and recreation, towns and cities have had to apply a sustainability lens to their planning. There is more development of urban spaces that encompass natural assets (e.g., Cities with Nature), while early childhood education centres and schools are prioritising natural settings over plastic playgrounds, encouraging more free play rather than prescribed play.

Outdoor activities are a big part of life for many in the Waikato, with the region home to an enviable natural environment to encourage physical activity. New Zealanders' affinity with the outdoors is reflected in the popularity of outdoor recreation (walking, hiking/tramping, cycling, swimming). The *Regional Community Survey (2022)* highlighted the following community **assets promoted physical activity the most:**

- Walking, cycling and mountain bike tracks (35%)
- Beaches (23%)
- Cycling trails (24%)

The continual development of new tracks and trails and sub-regional micro-mobility infrastructure adds to the perception that the Waikato is a great place to live and visit. Significant trail networks include the Hauraki Rail Trail (80km), Waikato River Trails (105km), Timber Trail (85km), Great Lake Trails (71km) and Te Awa Cycleway (70km). Focussing on improving neighbourhood walkability, the quality and quantity of recreational tracks and trails, the [quality of parks](#) and playgrounds, along with providing adequate active transport infrastructure, is likely to generate positive impacts on activity among adults and young people.

The *Regional Community Survey (2022)* highlighted the **highest rate of dissatisfaction** across the region with the following assets:

- Aquatic facilities (29%)
- Playgrounds/obstacle course (28%)

Aquatic facilities ranked low at #7 when considering spaces where people are active, which could be attributed to the inaccessibility of year-round aquatic provision across the Waikato region, the quality of our network provision and barriers getting into the facility (e.g., cost, design, availability, lack of aquatic skills).

Nature of access

Although people are prepared to travel for participation opportunities, the *Regional Sports Organisation Survey (2022)* highlighted two key **barriers for participation and the growth of sport:**

- Lack of facilities limiting growth of their sport – “limited access”
- Travel as a barrier for participants

When coupled with *Active NZ (2021)* Data which highlight 12% of young people outline “no places nearby” as a barrier of participation, local provision is become increasingly important.

Rural vs Urban

The changing face of our communities across our region, including the nature of participation, unwillingness to travel, and competing pressure on participant's time will have an impact on demand and the sustainability of our spaces and places provision. Intensification and urbanisation in metropolitan areas and static or declining growth in our rural communities has given rise to localism and the need for more opportunities locally.

The *Sport for Tamariki Report (2023)* highlighted that in rural settings tamariki do not have sport opportunities outside of school. To attend a club sport, they would have to drive between two to five hours. The report also outlined that:

- Those that do participate in sport opportunities outside of school **usually take part in 'traditional offerings'** (e.g.,rugby, football, netball)
- Rural schools often cannot get enough numbers to make a team to send to local school tournaments or regular competitions
- Rural sport facilities are not up to the same standard as urban facilities

Equitable Access

Equitable access can be considered on a variety of levels. The *Voice of the Waahine (2022)* survey highlighted the environment played a key role for females when accessing facilities. Key themes were the need to focus on:

- Welcoming and inclusive spaces (51%)
- Safety (28%)
- Physical environment (21%) – fit for purpose, clean, easily accessible

With a number of aging assets across the region the quality of our spaces and places can be a major obstacle to participation. When considering the re-purposing or development of assets, we should consider opportunities to make our spaces and places more accessible and inclusive.

Barriers and opportunities

Councils, the Department of Conservation, Trusts and private organisations continue to plan for a range of facilities and resources that add value to the cultural landscape of the Waikato, with a focus on “destination places”. Insights gathered for the development of this Plan identify the following barriers and opportunities:

Provision Barriers

- Quality of facilities
- Provision of amenities
- Lack of facilities - in particular, indoor courts and indoor aquatics (Hamilton, Thames and Matamata)
- Access to opportunities and equipment close to where people live, work and learn

Opportunities

- Quality improvements (sport fields)
- Inclusive facilities including amenities enhancements (eg bathrooms)
- Affordable and localised access (indoor courts and aquatics)
- Family-friendly active and play spaces
- Enhance walking and cycle trail network
- Collaborations and partnerships (schools, codes, councils)



5.3 Value of play, active recreation and sport

Personal and community wellbeing

The top reason for participation in recreation and sport is to have fun and engage in social connections (*Voice of the Participant 2021*). Sport and recreation, unlike any other sector, can improve cohesion and social inclusion, with community infrastructure central to positive community wellbeing outcomes.

There is a growing expectation for recreation and sport to improve both social bonding (connections within groups) and social bridging (connections between groups) effectively reducing negative social issues.

It is well documented that sport and physical activity can reduce rates of many physical health related disorders and improve health outcomes as a result. Recreation makes a significant contribution to Maaori wellbeing through strengthening intergenerational relationships and reinforcing cultural values, beliefs, social norms and knowledge, while evidence indicates a positive association between participation and academic achievement.

The *Value of Sport (Sport NZ 2018)* highlights the benefits of participation for improved social capital, feelings of social cohesion and community identity. According to the survey data:

92%

of people believe being active keeps them physically fit and healthy and relieves stress

88%

of people believe that sport and other physical activities provide them with opportunities to achieve and help build confidence

84%

of people believe sport brings people together and creates a sense of belonging

74%

of people say sport help builds vibrant and stimulating communities.

Understanding participation trends, preferences and barriers is essential to enabling communities to participate in sport and active recreation. Knowing these trends and the impact on social wellbeing value allows councils, for example, to [plan differently around spaces and places](#).

Economic value

With rising inflationary pressures, local government, now more than ever, needs to be able to demonstrate the return that is delivered from its investments. A [Social Return on Investment \(SROI\) Report of Recreational Physical Activity in Aotearoa New Zealand](#) highlighted the SROI of \$16.8B to the New Zealand community.

For every \$1 spent on sport and physical activity in Aotearoa New Zealand, \$2.12 worth of social impacts are generated through healthier and more cohesive communities and economic generation.

Other regional, national and international studies highlight the important role spaces and places play in economic generation:

- [Timber Trail](#) - \$225 per rider per day and \$7million per annum to local communities
- [Bike Taupo](#) – off-road biking direct contribution amounts to \$20million
- [Fifa Women's World Cup 2023](#) – \$18M benefit for Waikato region
- [Victorian Aquatic Study](#) – Users value their visit to a public aquatic centre at almost \$48 per visit, the centres provide an average \$38 million of benefits, and \$7.60 of value for every dollar of expenditure
- [Australian Aquatic Study](#) - Social return on investment of \$4.87 for every dollar spent operating an aquatic facility in a capital city or \$2.18 in regional Australia

5.4 Drivers that impact participation

The [Sport New Zealand Futures Project](#) outlined several important trends and drivers of change which will have societal implications on our spaces and places planning. These drivers are reflective of the trends highlighted in the Waikato [Regional Context](#) and [Facility and Active Spaces Themes](#) section of this plan.

Drivers

- **Societal Change** - including, increasing populations in urban areas, ethnic diversity, bi-culturalism, aging populations, socio-economic inequalities, changes in work, declining rural communities, prioritisation of equity and inclusion
- **Technological** – rise in digital products, data-driven processes, advances in health devices, influence of innovation on participation.
- **Economic** – changes in the nature of work (working from home), economic strength of iwi, business values/models, financial environment
- **Environmental** – climate change, Maaori worldview, health trends, environment protection
- **Political** – addressing inequalities, financial environment, evolution of Treaty partnership, changes in geopolitical power, focus on wellbeing/social return on investment

	Social change including changing population distribution and demographics
	Maintaining assets, facility sustainability and service levels
	Changing participation preferences
	Improving collaborative approaches
	Environment drivers including climate change
	Aging infrastructure
	Undersupply of infrastructure that meet the needs of our future communities

5.5 Implications for planning

The regional context, regional participation profile, provision and access, and participation drivers outlined in [sections 4](#) and [5](#) need to be considered in future planning for spaces and places. The following should therefore be reflected on:

Key planning considerations

- How do we overcome inequalities?
- How do we adapt to changing societal norms?
- How do we cater for a range of personal and cultural identities?
- How do we cater for community expectations for quality and accessible spaces and places?
- What will sustainable, easy and safe access to the spaces and places for play, active recreation and sport look like?

Subsequent Considerations for spaces and places planning

- Evidence-based decision making over politically based decisions
- Utilise participant voice (particularly marginalised groups) in design and planning
- Locally led initiatives by empowered communities centred by partnerships
- Review relationship with the environment and use of unstructured spaces
- Future proof adaptable spaces and places that are sustainable and response to climate change initiatives
- Spaces and places that are accessible and inclusive with a focus on equality (universally designed)
- Spaces and places that meet the needs of our changing demographics and societal changes
- More choice/self-determination – venue offering and multi-purpose and innovative solutions
- Societal wellbeing is central to decision making

6. Facilities, Spaces and Places

6.1 Themes and Core Principles

Waikato communities and their participation preferences are changing rapidly, adding complexity to the provision of the facility and spaces and places network. Information about these changes is highlighted in [sections 4](#) and [5](#) of The Plan. Planners and providers of physical activity spaces and places need to focus on the following core principles:

- Rationalisation and/or asset adaption where cost exceeds utilisation
- Collaborative and partnership approaches
- Optimisation initiatives – adaptable and innovative spaces with multi-purpose outcomes
- Future proofing – sustainable, accessible and inclusive spaces with a focus on wellbeing
- Well managed and governed operations

These principles are outlined further in this section of The Plan along with [section 7 \(Facility and Active Spaces Development\)](#).

6.2 Facility Adaptation

Aging Assets – Reinvest or Rationalise

People want facilities improved.

According to respondents in the *Voice of the Participant Survey (2021)*, regional data highlighted a high priority was **improvement to club rooms, changerooms, toilets** #2 for participants and #1 for rangatahi (*Voice of Rangatahi 2022*), while **improved quality of playing provision – courts, fields** – was #3.

In many communities, facilities are aging and maintenance costs to keep these facilities functioning can become increasingly high and burdensome. The ongoing sustainability of some facility and service provision is likely to become increasingly difficult in some locations, especially those where populations are decreasing or aging.

The *Regional Sports Organisation (2022)* survey highlighted that:

- 53%** of facilities accessed or managed have quality issues
- 17%** of organisation cannot financially maintain their facility
- 68%** of facilities meet current needs, this drops to 41% when thinking about future needs.
- 8%** perceived poor-quality facilities as a top barrier to participation

One third (36%) of organisations were planning capital investment projects, primarily upgrading facilities vs building new. Two thirds (65%) of developments related to upgrades of existing infrastructure.

Any investment into spaces and places should consider the Facilities and Active Spaces Development guidelines. However, the following core principles apply to aging facilities:

- Reinvestment into existing assets where demand is warranted – The most sustainable facility is the facility that has already been built
- If capacity allows, explore co-locating codes and/or utilise a multisport/hub model which includes non-recreational users
- Consider rationalisation where cost exceeds utilisation, areas with several facilities for the same sport, and locations where populations are decreasing or aging

A proactive approach should be taken to asset management across the region, which includes asset management plans, depreciation, and contractor advice around facility investment opportunities. This will minimise the impact of the asset's age on its performance and ensure spaces remain relevant to local communities.

6.3 Community Collaboration and Partnerships

Partnerships

Collaborative relationships between organisations for mutual benefit often to ensure long-term viability and sustainability; increasing the likelihood that facilities will be used to their full potential, maximising the return on investment and utilisation.

The best outcomes are achieved when sport and recreational partnerships are developed with education, health, iwi, and/or the private sector. *This Plan promotes a greater focus on collaboration between groups ahead of any consideration of new facilities.* Moreover, there is regional appetite for partnership:

45%

of local sport and recreational organisations are willing to collaborate and share facilities (*Regional Club Survey 2022*)

47%

of schools are interested in allowing or increasing public access (*Regional School Facilities Survey 2022*)

Schools form a significant part of, and are a sustainable solution, to the region's play, active recreation and sporting infrastructure network. A Ministry of Education resource developed in 2022 called [Designing Schools in Aotearoa New Zealand](#) highlighted the role schools play in local community outcomes, outlining that:

“Schools are important to their local communities. They can be sites of cultural significance to local iwi and hapu, community facilities and social meeting places, and they are often a source of community pride.”

A collaborative and partnership approach can lead to:

- Increased pools of resources
- Greater access opportunities – refer to [share our space programme](#)
- Venue/facility utilisation and optimisation
- Reduction in operational expense
- Increased funding avenues

Hubbing and Locally Led Planning

In New Zealand, we commonly refer to the collection of places and spaces such as buildings, fields, courts etc as a ‘hub’. A hub can also be the coming together of expertise in governance and management structures, and of clubs or other organisations working in partnership, either virtually or within physical infrastructure.

The [Sport NZ Hubbing Guide](#) highlights that New Zealand has more than 15,000 grassroots sports clubs, which are the backbone of our sport delivery system. However, things are changing. The club network's reliance on volunteers has become challenging with lower levels of engagement and reduced retention of members and volunteers.

Localised hubbing allows for a partnership between like-minded organisations who strategically collaborate, share expertise, programmes, facilities and/or services, to provide sustainable, quality sport and recreation experiences. These hubs often result in improved financial sustainability through a clear funding strategy, and improved capacity to meet community play, active recreation and sporting demands. Population growth and aging facilities continue to place demands on capital funding budgets, increasing the importance for stakeholders to work collaboratively to improve provision and enhance the sustainability of play, active recreation and sports facilities.

Design and delivery of services will depend on local community involvement and needs to reflect the lived experiences and aspirations of the identities, cultures and ethnicities in those communities. Partnerships speak for a larger proportion of the local community than a single club, so adds weight to the impact of overall community benefit.

Key Hubbing Principles

Determine your vision

Understand your local network of spaces and places including local school provision

Form a sustainable governance structure with a balance of member and community representation.

Consider optimisation and programming initiatives relevant to local community

Explore social enterprise opportunities as a way of generating revenue

6.4 Optimisation of Spaces

Matching Participation Trends

39%

of regional sport and recreational organisations highlighted that their facilities were not being used to their full potential (*Regional Club Survey 2022*)

Facility optimisation is a key sustainability initiative and should be considered as part of any spaces and places planning. The *Regional Sport Organisation Survey (2022)* highlighted 'spaces that do not cater for community needs' as one of the key challenges. As outlined in the [Community Collaboration and Partnerships section](#) of this plan, the best outcomes are achieved by sharing space to increase optimisation.

With a change in participation preferences along with the pressure of play, active recreation and sport infrastructure to become and remain financially and environmentally sustainable, facilities need to be adaptable, flexible, and focussed on inclusiveness to ensure optimisation targets are realised.

Changes to the work/life balance and growth of a 'work from home' culture among our adult populations has implications on participation trends and should be considered when exploring peak and off-peak facility offerings and programming. Venue owners and operators should consider the following key principles to improve optimisation, especially where supply exceeds demand:

Key optimisation principles

- Know your community – understand your community demographics
- Focus on community venues – migration away from pure sport and recreation venues
- Know the latest play, active recreation, and sport participation trends
- Review your venue booking systems and prioritisation procedures – are these up to date and do they reflect trends?
- Accessible and inclusive customer journey considerations
- Explore creative use of existing facilities that depart from traditional viewpoints – e.g., don't consider courts as 'courts', changerooms as changerooms, carparks as carparks. These are space that can be utilised.
- Explore cost effective capital investment opportunities to increase hours of use – e.g., shade (including court covers), amenities, lighting, technology/gaming systems

Integrated Spaces – Multiuse/Flexible/Adaptable

Change is inevitable, so spaces and places should be designed to accommodate changing circumstances community profiles, participation trends and activity innovations. Well-designed sport and recreational facilities can contribute to greater community outcomes.

Facilities offering sport and recreational opportunities provide key social spaces in people's lives, aside from home and work/schools so these spaces should have a community first focus, and [Third Place Thinking](#) ideology can assist when future proofing these spaces. Sports centres now being called community and recreational hubs or wellness hubs with a greater focus on lifelong participation needs, especially with traditional sports now being delivered in non-traditional ways. However, it is critical to note that 'facilities don't just plug into communities' and need to be well planned to maximise social value outcomes.

Facilities need to stay relevant, and managers and owners should always explore opportunities around connecting with the community through venue optimisation initiatives and with a focus on transforming existing before developing. Multi use/adaptable spaces and opportunities should be considered against the following principles:

Role of the facility in the community – network view of community spaces

Spaces that lead to repeat visitation – spaces that attract new users, inspire users to return

Focus on Informal/Playable Spaces

Plural Functionality: user groups/sport organisations that work well together within a space and core user groups (similar specifications around floor surfaces, peak times that do not compete with each other etc).

The downside with multi use can be a 'focus on all' which leads to facilities that are 'fit for none'. Sometimes it is best to 'cater well' vs 'cater to all'

Technology & Gamification

[Digital technology supports engagement and participation](#). Technologies (digital, physical, and biological) will, and in some cases already do, have a variety of roles (both legally and illegally) in enhancing performance and engagement, as well as being competitors for people's leisure time. Changing participation preferences and increasing demands on people's time have amplified the need for increased use of technology to enable pay to play and casual facility use.

A positive and innovative impact of COVID-19 has been that the pandemic has connected and organised people in different ways through digital technologies — online fitness sessions, social platforms, virtual cycling tours on stationary bikes, social media skill sessions with elite athletes and networked communities creating informal sport-care-support economies. Increased appetite for this type of provision will undoubtedly influence facility demand while infrastructure using technology will enhance the programming and subsequent optimisation of venues.

6.5 Future Focus

Sustainable Spaces and Places

Acknowledging the contribution of facilities to carbon emissions, along with natural or green spaces where sport and recreation occurs, and the impact of these places on [climate change](#), we must plan our play, active recreation and sport infrastructure for the future. A commitment to longer term sustainability requires a shared vision, collaborative planning and effective design to better align to climate change response targets.

In [future proofing our places of play](#), there are two key areas of opportunity to influence the role of our spaces in protecting our clean future: built environment. To address the built environment the following Environmentally Sustainable Design (ESD) measures should be considered:

- **Understand national standards for 'green' infrastructure**
- **Work with local and central government** to ensure planning is in line with legislative policy and targets
- **Focus on biodiversity and conservation of natural environment**

- **Conservation of historical buildings and cultural heritage**
- **Focus on water retention**
- **Minimise energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.**
- **Use of long-lasting environmentally and socially responsible materials**
- **Focus on universal design**
- **Internal environments** that foster health and wellbeing
- **Consider the role supplementary assets play in sustainability** (e.g., installing water fountains to reduce use of plastic bottles; building in connected bike and walking paths to encourage no emissions in active transport)

In New Zealand, we are fortunate to have [renewable energy sources](#) providing most of our electricity (around 82%) and around 40% of our total primary energy providing a good platform to consider ESD measures in part of our facility planning with a focus on Climate Positive being optimal.

Although there are assumptions around increased capital outlay, green buildings do not always increase the design and construction costs and if they do, costs are typically recovered within the first seven years, with ESD measures reducing operational costs by 20% if facilities are well optimised ([Future Proofing Community Sport & Recreation Facilities, Sports Environment Alliance](#)). There are significant risks involved with not building for environmental sustainability into the future, such as regulatory changes banning inefficient buildings, increased insurance, and reduced demand for unsustainable products.

One third of the total emissions of a facility come from the build and construction phase while two thirds is embodied carbon via operational means. This will reverse if we can focus on:

- a) Optimising Operational Efficiencies
- b) Repurposing Facilities
- c) Building more Sustainable Assets.

Consideration should be given to the [repurposing of facilities](#) and whole of lifecycle costs. Facilities that are already established as community assets can be upgraded to extend their life to provide a cost-effective solution to solving supply constraints.

Sport, although not a big emitter of emissions, typically has a wide following and audience and therefore, can lead sustainability outcomes through advocacy.

Sport and recreational organisations should consider:

The current environment - to what extent is your organisation dependent on the natural environment and the role this environment plays in meeting climate change outcomes

Impacts of organisation or events on nature and what adaptation plans can be considered

Types of products/material used in the facilitation of your sport e.g., Artificial Turf

Examples of Sport and Recreational Sustainable Planning

- [World Rowing](#) - strategic alliance with WWF International raising awareness around water cleanliness and opportunities to regenerate ecosystems.
- [Golf NZ](#), commitment to make sustainability a central pillar for the sports future development
- [The European Synthetic Turf Council](#) guidance on the Circular Economy for turf

Key sustainability principles

The Waikato region's sport and recreational partners will need to collaborate when planning future provision. Key principles for the region include:

Develop an intergenerational vision – focus on sustainable risk management

Consider a network approach (boundary-less) and transport/travel to and from spaces and places when planning

Prioritise decisions that provide long-term value over short-term thinking

Consider a circular economy and asset lifecycle approach to planning

Clearly define the role the surrounding natural environment plays

Consider adaptation strategies (including retrofitting facilities with energy efficient systems)

Accessible/Inclusive Spaces and Places

[Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa's Strategic Plan \(2020-2024\)](#) states that “every New Zealander has the right to participate in play, active recreation and sport within an inclusive environment, and to be treated with respect, empathy and positive regard”.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion form a key component of both Sport New Zealand and Sport Waikato's strategic directions, with the aim to embed principles of inclusion across the play, active recreation and sport sector, and the spaces and places landscape.

Over the last 20 years, the application of Universal Design to enable access to and inclusion in spaces and places has increased internationally to ensure that products, services and environments meet the needs of people regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability, age and stage, without the need for adaptation, and that continue to be usable by everyone over time.

Accessibility presents as both a barrier and opportunity to facility and spaces and places planning and (re)development, with 25% of New Zealanders - 53% of adults and 36% of young people in the Waikato - identifying as having a disability (*Statistics NZ - Census 2018*).

Creating inclusive environments through a 'customer journey' enhances individuals' ability to engage in physical activity authentically and meaningfully in quality locations. In an access report completed by [Be.Lab](#) in 2020, 52% of access citizens in Aotearoa New Zealand reported that they are unable to participate in all the activities and events of public life they'd like to due to inaccessibility.

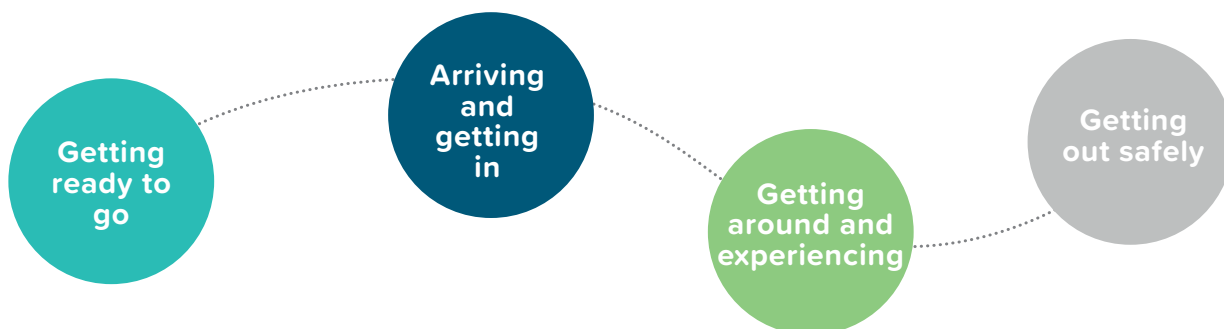
Accessibility isn't just about the physical environment. The research identified that the key enablers for the access community to participate are welcoming helpful customer service and accessible online information.

Overall, ensuring that equity and inclusion principles (such as Universal Design) are central to sector planning guarantees a play, active recreation and sport system that is equitable and accessible for everyone.

Be.Lab have developed four phases along the customer journey that are critical to look at when creating an accessible experience:

Active Spaces Customer Journey

1. **Getting ready to go** – planning, registering, online information, maps, contact details.
2. **Arriving and getting in** – car parking, drop off zones, wayfinding, accessible route to the space from all transport options including bus stops.
3. **Getting around and experiencing** – accessible route, seating, viewing, participating in the activity, wayfinding signage, lighting and sensory aspects, customer service, documentation, food & beverage areas, toilets and changing rooms, parent facilities.
4. **Getting out safely** – emergency information and egress plans for access citizens.



Connection to Wellbeing

Along with the **social and physical wellbeing value** highlighted earlier in the plan ([section 5.3 Value of play, active recreation and sport](#)), spaces and places that provide opportunities for play, active recreation and sport can enhance mental wellbeing outcomes, particularly across open spaces. Two thirds (76%) of the Waikato region's adults believe that being physically active in the great outdoors is an important part of New Zealanders' lives (*Active NZ, 2021*).

Physical activity in natural settings has been linked in some studies to having more of a positive influence on mental health and wellbeing compared with physical activity in an indoor setting. Communities feel meaningfully connected to nature through elements such as water, lakes, grass/pasture, views, trees/forests/bush and birdsong, with 13% outlining that enjoying the natural environment is why they utilise local reserves, while 12% indicated protecting the natural environment was important and 9% wanted to understand more about opportunities to access heritage information about parks across their districts or the region (*Regional Community Survey 2022*).

Around 85% of New Zealand's population live in urban centres, with this expected to grow with urbanisation (*Statistics NZ*). Therefore, it is vital that our communities have access to [natural neighbourhoods](#), in particular for children from lower income families.

Consideration should be given to ways to ensure safe access to natural spaces and places for physical activity (e.g., rivers, bush, footpaths) to support residents' desire to be active in nature/the outdoors.

The 2023 Local Government Review highlighted that future government agencies, whether this be local, regional or national will need to centre decision making around wellbeing outcomes.

Spatial Planning

Spatial planning addresses active recreation outcomes, play opportunities and connectivity using urban planning and environmental design. Good environmental design includes the following principles:

- Adaptable spaces that invite opportunities for informal play
- Give 'permission to play' via implicit and/or explicit design choices
- Connection and interconnectedness between playable spaces and parks/reserves
- Seamless integration between a variety of settings (indoor and outdoor)
- Accessible and inclusive design, including sensory disabilities, as well as designing play areas that reflect and celebrate cultural heritage

6.6 Management and Governance

Facility Management

Facility managers are responsible for successfully managing facility operations. Depending on the organisational structure, they may also be assisted by a board, whose responsibility it is for organisational governance by measuring outcomes or results against facility policy and priorities, with the facility's purpose as the ultimate yardstick for effectiveness.

There are several models for facility ownership, governance and management, and decisions are typically made at a local level based on several factors. Consideration should be given to the network of spaces and places when considering the preferred model. To ensure ideal facility outcomes, venue owners/managers should explore the following core principles:

- Focus on active management (not passive) when considering [management and programming arrangements](#)
- Ensure facilities are maintained through appropriate [facility auditing systems](#)
- Continue to benchmark your facility or space and place against industry benchmarks – e.g., [Yardstick](#), [Parkscore](#), [Playscore](#)
- Mitigate risk factors through detailed planning – e.g., vandalism through the sharing of [CPTED considerations](#).

Recreation Aotearoa, with support from Sport New Zealand, have developed the [Facility Management Manual](#) to provide information and industry guidance.

Explore optimisation initiatives – [Refer to Optimisation of Spaces section \(section 6.4\)](#)



7. Facility and Active Spaces Development

Aligned with the *National Spaces and Places Framework (2024)*. This section covers the following principles, processes and criteria that form the foundation for all facilities and spaces and places decision making across the region.

7.1 Key Principles of Spaces and Places Planning and Provision

This Plan consolidates the key principles that underpin facility and active spaces planning and provision.



Meets Needs

Facilities should meet an identified need and be fit-for-purpose, taking into consideration changing demographics and societal changes. The best outcomes are achieved when all the potential facility users are identified, and a deep understanding is gained of their range of needs. This is typically achieved through a [co-design approach](#) to ensure design elements meet the needs of users for the type of activities

Sustainable – Environmental and Financial

The best outcomes are achieved when the 'whole of life' costs of the facility are considered at the outset as well as how it is intended that these costs will be funded.

Future proof spaces and places that are sustainable and meet challenges of extreme weather events, climate change and resource scarcity and response to climate change initiatives. A focus on facility features which enable greater energy efficiency that deliver dividends over time.

Collaborative and Partnership

Historically play, active recreation and sport spaces have tended to be planned and built in isolation.

The best outcomes are achieved when partnerships are developed with education, health, iwi, and/or the private sector. This increases the likelihood that facilities will be used to their full potential, maximising the return on investment and optimising utilisation.

Integrated and Connected

Creating multi-use facilities or hubs, or co-locating with other sport and recreation, community, education, or transport facilities and infrastructure is an effective approach. The best outcomes are achieved by sharing, multi-use and integrating facilities as part of other infrastructure with a focus on and linkages to existing provision.

Flexible/Adaptable – Future Proof

The future is unpredictable, and things will change. The best, long-term, outcomes are achieved by designing facilities in ways that enable them to be adapted, developed and extended in response to changing community profiles and associated trends and needs over time. Technology and changes in communities will create new activities and modes.

Functionality: it is important to ensure design principles promote safe and optimal functionality to accommodate formal, competitive, social and recreational activities as well as flexible use by a range of users capable of sharing facilities and usage times.

Inclusive/Accessible – Future Proof

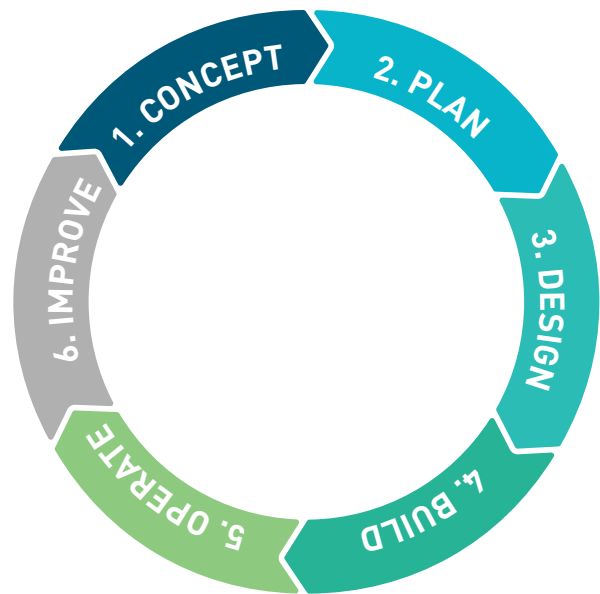
Societal wellbeing is central to decision making. Therefore, spaces and places should be accessible and inclusive with a focus on equitable access (universally designed), ensuring design elements accommodate users of all ages, gender, ability and cultural backgrounds. This principle requires us to consider the needs of a wide range of our community when making decisions to best achieve through a Co-Design approach.

7.2 Planning Process and Development Lifecycle

The 2024 Plan adopts the National Spaces and Places Framework seven stage development life cycle (*Sport New Zealand, 2024*).

Those exploring developments should review the project at each stage of the planning process, and its alignment with the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan principles and decision-making criteria.

For more detail about the Development Lifecycle, refer to the [Sport NZ detailed development guide](#).



CONCEPT	1. Challenge Identification	Work with stakeholders to clearly identify the challenge or opportunity. Explore all initial options , including options to modify delivery and optimise the existing network . Identify potential partners or collaborators including mana whenua relationships & involvement.	5% OF PROJECT COSTS	
	2. Proof of Need Gateway to progress to detailed planning	Identify the need and develop the strategic case for doing so, including assessing the specific need in the wider context of the desired facility network and model of provision. Desktop analysis should be relative to project scale and could include taking a Pestle Analysis or Porters Framework approach and should refer to key facility development principles when assessing opportunities/risk.		
PLAN	3. Proof of Viability Gateway to progress to design	Critically analyse feasibility of the concept/options (e.g., facility mix and draft functional brief) and whole of life costs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Confirm location – including site assessment/resource consent considerations b. Establish sustainability ambitions c. Feasibility Plan - assess market dynamics, including demographics and changing sport and participant needs d. Business Case - critique and review key thinking. Include detailed assessment of capital and operational budget and associated funding plan, ownership and subsequent governance model, and SROI indicators. <p>It is at this stage that local authorities should assess entering an MoU</p>		10-15% OF PROJECT COSTS
	4. Design Gateway to progress to build	Develop the detailed functional and spatial requirements (function brief) allowing for play, environmental sustainability, and technology solutions through innovative mindset. Details are confirmed, typically through peer review/steering group process and estimates finalised. Review security of funding for capital and operational investment and expenditure. <i>Consider prelim and detailed design elements in line with facility build approach – traditional, design-build, early contractor involvement while ensuring this is true to the original concept (the need)</i>		
BUILD	5. Build	Construct the facility or active space considering best procurement methodology and commissioning approach. Don't build to the lowest specification with a focus on future proofing.		80-85% OF PROJECT COSTS
OPERATE	6. Operate	Manage and maintain the facility to ensure it delivers a quality experience. Develop the most effective and efficient operating model and the programming of the facility ensuring a focus on accessibility awareness and cultural training.		
IMPROVE	7. Improve	Evaluate the success of the facility or active space, how it has delivered on the identified outcomes and objectives (user feedback). Measure performance against environmental sustainability goals and SROI indicators. Identify improvements that can be made (adapt) and any experience or learnings that can be shared.		

Sport Waikato, as lead agency of the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan can provide guidance on contractor engagement and a list of national consultants.

Roles and responsibilities in Planning Process

Each facility or active space planning process requires stakeholders to clearly identify roles and responsibilities, including who plays both facilitation and support roles.

Depending on the project, specialised support could be required and could include the following:

Identify the right expertise throughout the planning process such as disabled people with lived experience, technical expertise, operators and/or specialist designers as this will save time and costs.

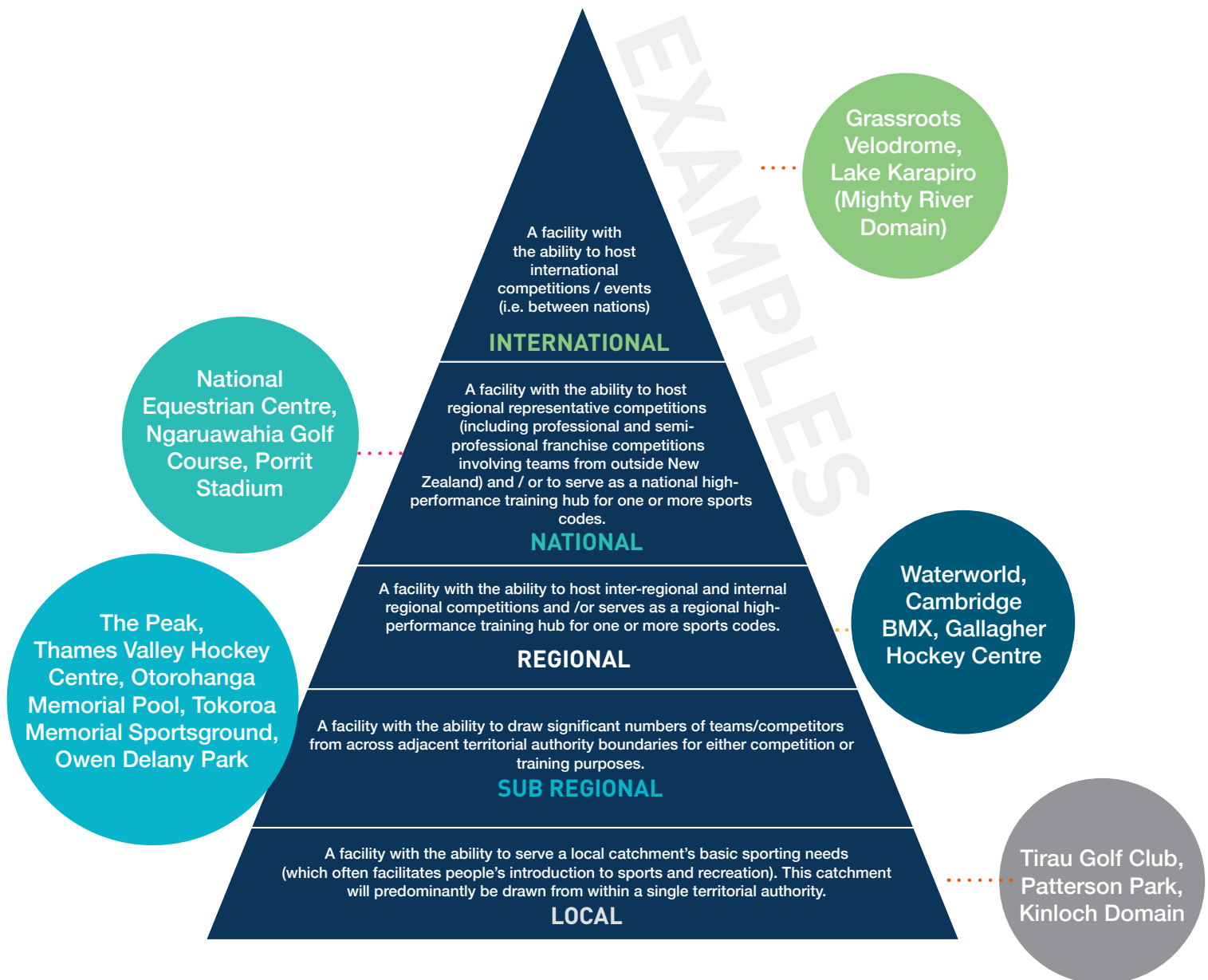
Consultant Specialty	Stage to Engage	Guidance and Notes
Needs Consultant	CONCEPT	Assess the network to determine the need and sustainable options to meet challenges identified.
Feasibility Consultant	CONCEPT>PLAN	Engage to provide guidance and assessment of the practicality/viability of your project including risk identification. Can recommend and engage additional consultants such as architects, planners, quantity surveyors and project managers on your behalf. This will assist you with developing a Business Case for your project while advancing the project to the next stage.
Architect	PLAN>DESIGN	Produces initial design drawings to identify design features. Concept drawings can then be modified closer to project time once project specification has been determined.
Quantity Surveyor	PLAN>BUILD	Engage to provide early project cost estimates. This will help you to budget for your project. Capital Goods Price Index (CGPI) Construction Cost Calculator
Project Manager (PM)	DESIGN>BUILD	Engage as early as possible, ideally prior to the main contractor procurement and contracting as this will assist with the technical delivery and construction phase of the project. They play a significant role in risk mitigation
Planner	DESIGN>BUILD	Investigation to identify environmental, traffic, resource management and spatial parameters.

Sport Waikato, as led agency of the Waikato Regional Active Spaces Plan can provide guidance on contractor engagement and a list of national consultants.

7.3 Facility and Active Spaces Hierarchy

When considering the network of facilities across the region, as part of the planning process, it is important to consider the role each facility plays and the hierarchy of the associated asset.

Facility hierarchy can often be defined by facility type and subsequent user profile due the components of the space and place. A facility at a higher hierarchy level may also meet needs at all levels, including locally.



7.4 Decision Making Criteria – Assessing Opportunity

The 2024 Plan uses the following criteria to ensure a robust, transparent, and fair process assisting with:

- Determining facility/active space investment requirements – asset planning
- Assessing developments/proposals and consistency across the region
- Evaluating priority of proposals against other regional priorities

These criteria work in conjunction with the facility and active spaces planning process (principles and facility lifecycle) and should be considered at all levels of planning.

Decision Criteria.

Level One Criteria (Planning Stages - CONCEPT)

<p>Strategic alignment</p> <p>(50%)</p>	<p>The degree of alignment a facility or proposed facility has with national, regional and local facility strategies and wider strategic documents and plans. Including those concerned with urban planning, infrastructure development, tourism, economic development, and transport networks</p> <p>The extent to which the project aligns with the users' needs and is inter-dependent with other projects</p>
<p>Projected users and needs</p> <p>(50%)</p>	<p>The degree to which any existing or proposed facility matches the projected needs of the community within its core catchment area with a focus on equitable community access. In the case of facilities with wide utilisation (such as aquatics facilities) this involves consideration of all potential and existing users from general recreational users through to members of formal sports codes, ethnic, financial and ability barriers including but not limited to age and disability.</p>

Level Two Criteria (Planning Stages - CONCEPT > PLAN)

<p>Stakeholder partnerships</p> <p>(20%)</p>	<p>The potential for, and level of, operational and/or capital partnerships between multiple stakeholders including other contributing local authorities.</p> <p>The extent to which the project provider demonstrates the capacity and capability to undertake the project – achievability</p> <p>The potential for wider partnerships (beyond operational and capital) between multiple stakeholders to allow inclusion of a wide range of user groups.</p>
<p>Network consideration</p> <p>(35%)</p>	<p>The degree to which a facility or proposed facility complements rather than duplicates the existing network, contributes to network optimisation, and builds on the Waikato region's strengths.</p> <p>Network considerations around accessibility (linkages to infrastructure services, transport, biking, and walking routes)</p>
<p>Demand</p> <p>(10%)</p>	<p>The degree to which current and forecast demand exceeds potential supply (once all existing facilities are being run at an optimal operational level) and the facility or proposed facility can meet the identified gap and future community growth projections.</p>
<p>Operational sustainability</p> <p>(20%)</p>	<p>The degree to which the existing or proposed facility is operationally sustainable. Assessment uses a whole of lifecycle approach including operational and maintenance costs throughout the facility's life and long-term affordability.</p> <p>Consideration of the capability of governance and operating groups.</p>
<p>Return on investment</p> <p>(15%)</p>	<p>The return on investment (both capital and operational) that the facility/proposed facility can generate. This includes social, economic, environmental, and cultural impacts.</p> <p>Consideration given to the level of risk and consequence of not funding the project, along with affordability considerations.</p>

Level Three Criteria (Planning Stages – PLAN > DESIGN)

<p>Best practice (50%)</p>	<p>The ability of the facility or proposed facility to reflect international and national best practice in its location, design (appropriate scale) and subsequent operation</p> <p>Consideration against <i>Facility and Active Spaces Development Principles</i>, such as sustainability, inclusiveness, facility adaptability and future proof.</p>
<p>Progress play, active recreation and sport objectives (50%)</p>	<p>The ability of the facility or proposed facility to progress the play, active recreation and sport objectives and outcomes of the Waikato region and wider New Zealand society</p>

Making Decisions

Although the criteria are considered at all levels of planning, the criteria should also be used to inform decision making in a timely manner, and to rule projects in or out. This can occur via two approaches, a gateway approach or via a weighted evaluation approach.

Gateway Approach

A gateway approach allows for a project to be reviewed early in the planning process before advancing to detailed business case.

- Level One Criteria - Initial evaluation stage.
- Level Two and Three - Applied should a proposal progress (past level one criteria assessment)

Weighting Evaluation Approach

While the weighted evaluation approach assists with evaluating various proposals against each other to assess priority along with project viability/alignment with regional best practice to provide project guidance.

- Level One: 50%
- Level Two: 30%
- Level Three: 20%

Sub weightings are recommended under each criteria level as per the table above and projects





Sport Waikato can provide stakeholders with formulated assessment sheets with associated weighted criteria for stakeholders to make project assessments or regional stakeholders (including funders) assess priorities

Regional Priorities and The Plan Advisory Group

All proposed *facility and active spaces development priorities* identified in the Plan (Appendix 1) will need further testing, including analysis of verified facts and evidence-based decision making against the criteria.

The Waikato Regional Advisory Group has a role in advancing the proposed regional development priorities through the development lifecycle along with assessment of any new sub-regional and regional concepts against the criteria. The Advisory Group also plays a crucial role for regional funders in assessing the priority of regional projects via the above evaluation and decision-making criteria approach.

7.5 Funding

Funding Associated with Facility and Active Spaces Hierarchy

The following funding approach outlines the hierarchy of facilities and potential funders aligned with each. Some funders, such as the Ministry of Education, are more active at the regional, sub regional and local facility category levels through facility partnerships on education land. Central government is focused on international and national facilities. The Ministry of Education, School Boards, charitable and other funders also allocate funding across all facility levels. Other remaining funders have the potential to contribute across the facility hierarchy.

Potential Funders	Facility Category			
Ministry of Education		Regional Facilities	Sub Regional Facilities	Local Facilities
Local Government	International Facilities	National Facilities		
Charitable Funders				
Other Funders e.g. DOC, NZTA, Lotteries				
Central Government				

Funding Approach.

Regional Funding Approach

A regional funding approach enables cross boundary facility partnerships between local authorities, regional funders, and other partners, which could involve the transfer or amalgamation of both capital and operational funding to enhance play, active recreation, and sport outcomes. The mechanism for a regional approach to funding requires coordination, while at a project specific level this may require negotiation in the early stages of the concept and planning stages. The right investor needs to be matched with the right project for the right purpose at the right time and asked by the right person/s while positive relationships built on trust and confidence are essential.

It is important that every investment is evaluated carefully, optimising the impact of the investment on the facility network to meet the changing local and regional community needs.

A 2023 review of national grant and philanthropic funding (Philanthropy NZ Survey Report, 2023) highlighted:

- Over 80% of funders are expecting to maintain the levels of their funding distributions or increase them in their current financial year, with 19% of funders are expecting their funding to decrease.
- Non-investment income sources and higher community need are key drivers of increased funding levels
- Funder partnerships and collaboration are seen as a significant opportunity, alongside increased collaboration with grantees
- Standout challenges are funders' ability to respond to the increasing demand for funding and the financial environment within which they are operating
- Some funders highlighted less transactional funding and moving to multi-year transformational or strategic grantmaking

A review of key regional funders highlighted that annually the Waikato region has \$30 million of Trust Funding and \$24 million of Gaming Trust Funding available for community outcomes

Funding partnerships and collaboration offers a significant opportunity, therefore there needs to be consideration around advancing a collaborative regional funding approach which could include:

- Regional Fund Via Target Rates/Levy
- Regional Funding Forums
- Regional Funders inclusion in the Plan Advisory Group
- Consideration of alternative funding sources on greenfield sites – i.e Development Contributions
- Alignment of the **Decision Making Criteria (section 7.4)** with Regional Funders Decision Making

Useful Links for Groups Assessing Funding Opportunities

- Funding Distributed <https://granted.govt.nz/>
- <https://www.waikatocommunityfunders.org.nz/>
- [NZ Fundraising Capability Building and Support Platform - Funding HQ \(funding-hq.com\)](#)
- [Sport Waikato - Funding](#)
- [Philanthropy New Zealand – 2023 Status Report](#)

Recommended Approach

- Continue to progress partnership funding towards regional priorities
- Further exploration around regional private and public joint ventures
- Establish an MoU and work closer with regional funding agencies and charitable trusts - in line with endorsed Regional Facilities Funding Framework and Agreement
- Work with all local authorities and the Waikato Regional Council advocating the need for a Regional Rate

8. Appendices

8.1 Links to Sub-Sections of the Plan

Appendix 1 - Regional Recommendations and Priorities

Appendix 2 - Facilities and Active Spaces

Appendix 3 - Resource Hub

- Resources and References
- Facility and Active Spaces Themes
- Case Studies

Appendix 4 - Review Process

8.2 Key Documents

Other National and Regional Plans and Strategies

A number of plans and strategies inform and interact with the 2024 Plan requiring the alignment of local, regional and/or national plans. These can all be found either via:

- a) The Resource Hub – Documents are located under the applicable Plan section
- b) Facilities – Spaces and Places

The regional hub includes links to relevant regional strategies including local Iwi Plans such as Waikato Tainui's Te Ara Whakatupuranga 2050.

Local Authority Long Term Plans (LTP)

In 2023-24 Councils are undertaking their long term planning process (LTP), effective 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2034. These plans outline all services and major projects the Council is planning for the next ten-year period, an indication of cost, and how they will be funded including the proposed impact on rates. Long term plans are reviewed every three years. Copies of all LTP outcomes can be found on each council's website.

Local Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plans

Sport Waikato has developed Local Play, Active Recreation and Sport Plans in partnership with local authorities, and engaging with communities, local sport and recreation organisations/clubs.

The local Plans;

- provide local level guidance for facility, place and space infrastructure investment
- outline priorities for the delivery of opportunities and services to grow participation in play, active recreation and sport
- identify opportunities for partner organisations who provide local community services to contribute to outcomes



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