

# Public open space acquisition plan

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# 1 Purpose and scope



The public open space acquisition plan is a key open space policy, guided by the long-term council community plan and the open space framework – Our Collective Taonga ‘Places for People, Places for Nature’.

The public open space acquisition plan provides the:

- strategic context of open space acquisition
- priorities for open space acquisitions within a citywide context
- criteria that will be used to evaluate potential sites.

It also includes the framework by which the disposal of open space land will be considered.

The focus of the plan is to acquire land for open space in the widest context. This includes, but is not limited to, parks, squares, plazas, streetscape, riparian and coastal margins, wetlands and other natural features.

Planning of the open space network occurs from a citywide perspective. The measurement of open space provision and the setting of priorities and objectives align with this approach.

This plan relates to the area under the jurisdiction of the isthmus section of the district plan. The Hauraki Gulf islands and central area sections of the district plan are outside the scope of this plan.

## 2 Constraints and challenges



### Auckland city's central location within the Auckland metropolitan region and projected population growth provide the city with a number of constraints and challenges when planning open space.

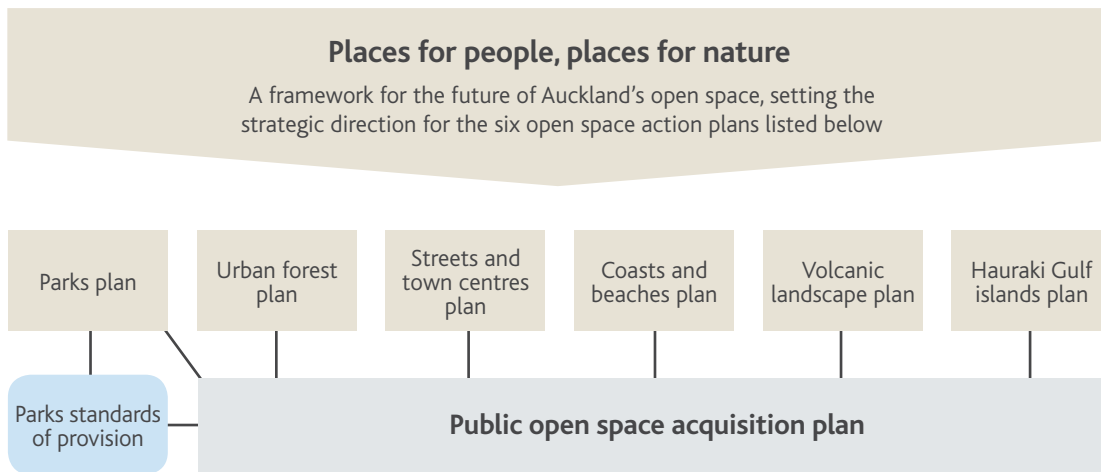
Population growth in Auckland city places stress on infrastructure such as open space. Regional land use planning to accommodate growth principally relies on residential intensification of town centres. Intensification occurs through the development of a more intensive urban form such as apartments, terraced housing and town houses. This approach to accommodate population growth typically decreases the amount of private open space traditionally enjoyed by residents. The increased provision of high quality public open space is important to offset this negative effect of intensification, helping to provide a high quality living environment.

More intensive land use and a reduction of vacant land can result in adverse effects on the natural environment such as the destruction of habitat and increased stormwater run-off. Increasing the provision of open space helps to lessen these adverse effects by protecting ecosystems and biodiversity. Open spaces also provide opportunities for people to learn about, and connect with, the natural environment.

The central location of Auckland city provides an additional constraint when seeking to provide more open space. The isthmus area of Auckland city has no surrounding green-field areas to accommodate expansion of the open space network. This provides challenges for forward planning of open space. Planning is essential to ensure that appropriate sites are secured to meet the present and future needs of the community through the development of a quality open space network.

### 3 Strategic context - the open space framework

Our Collective Taonga 'Places for People, Places for Nature' provides the strategic framework for planning open space. The following diagram shows the relationship between the framework, its component open space action plans and the open space acquisition plan.



The public open space acquisition plan is one of the group of policies and plans that are guided by Places for People, Places for Nature.

Places for People, Places for Nature contains three high-level principles under which a quality open space network will be planned, designed and managed. Open space acquisition can assist with delivery on each of the principles.

- respect our amazing natural landscape
- link people to places
- create and maintain sustainable places

Six action plans sit under Places for People, Places for Nature, providing further direction for the acquisition and divestment of open space:

- parks plan
- urban forest plan
- volcanic landscape plan
- streets and town centres plan
- Hauraki Gulf islands plan<sup>1</sup>
- coast and beaches plan.

The action plans give effect to Places for People, Places for Nature and outline challenges, objectives and actions that will guide the delivery of a quality open space network. The public open space acquisition plan will help to give effect to the action plans' objectives on park provision, use and environmental values.

Determining standards of park provision and service levels are two of the key actions of the parks plan. Standards of provision for parks are derived from socio-demographic data, projected growth and assessment of the supply and demand for parks.

The parks standards of provision set different standards for accessibility, quality and size depending on the catchment (neighbourhood, district, citywide) of the park and whether the park contributes to meeting the open space needs in a growth area.

The provision standards are an important tool used to assess the open space network, identifying gaps in provision. Filling these gaps in provision is a priority of the public open space acquisition plan.

<sup>1</sup> Acquisition of open space in the Hauraki Gulf is outside of the scope of the public open space acquisition plan.

## 4 Acquisition objectives



The public open space acquisition plan will primarily give effect to the objectives of the parks plan.

### **Improving the quality of our parks**

Focuses on addressing issues with the quality of the parks we have, how easy and safe they are to access and use, and the way they are designed, managed and maintained.

### **Strengthening Auckland's park network**

Focuses on protecting our parks, strengthening green corridors and park networks across the city and along the coast, and enhancing their ecological, heritage and biodiversity values.

### **Increasing park use and enjoyment**

Focuses on enhancing the social value of our parks, developing our parks to offer a diverse range of open space experiences that meet community needs and encourage broader participation in park use, design and care.

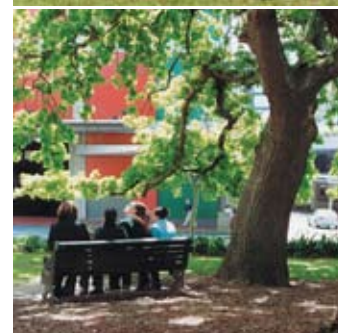
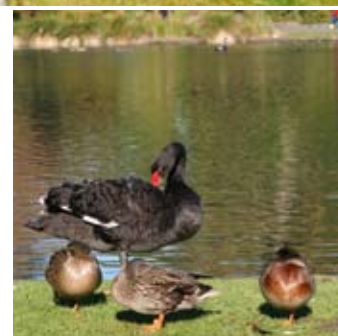
The public open space acquisition plan will also seek to give effect to the objectives of other action plans where they result in the need for land acquisition for open space.

## 5 Acquisition methods



Auckland City Council's preferred method of open space acquisition is to purchase through direct negotiation with the landowner (whether on or off the market). If the council's goals are achievable by the use of other mechanisms then these will also be explored. These include, but are not limited to, easements, leases and entering into "first right of refusal to purchase" agreements.

The council may use its powers under the Resource Management Act 1991 to designate land for open space. Designations have the effect of authorising and securing the use of land for open space. This restricts the activities that can occur on the site without the approval of the requiring authority (the council). Designations can be used to protect important open space sites from being lost to development, and facilitate the compulsory acquisition of land under the Public Works Act 1981. The council will use designations to secure strategically important open space sites, both with or without the agreement of the landowner.



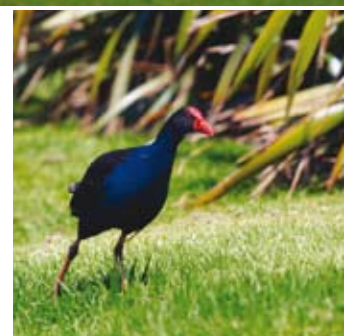
## 6 Post-purchase



After new open space is acquired, Auckland City Council will seek plan changes to rezone the land as open space. The council will also declare the land to be reserve subject to the Reserves Act 1977, where appropriate.

This process ensures appropriate management of the land and gives the community certainty about the future use of new open space acquisitions.

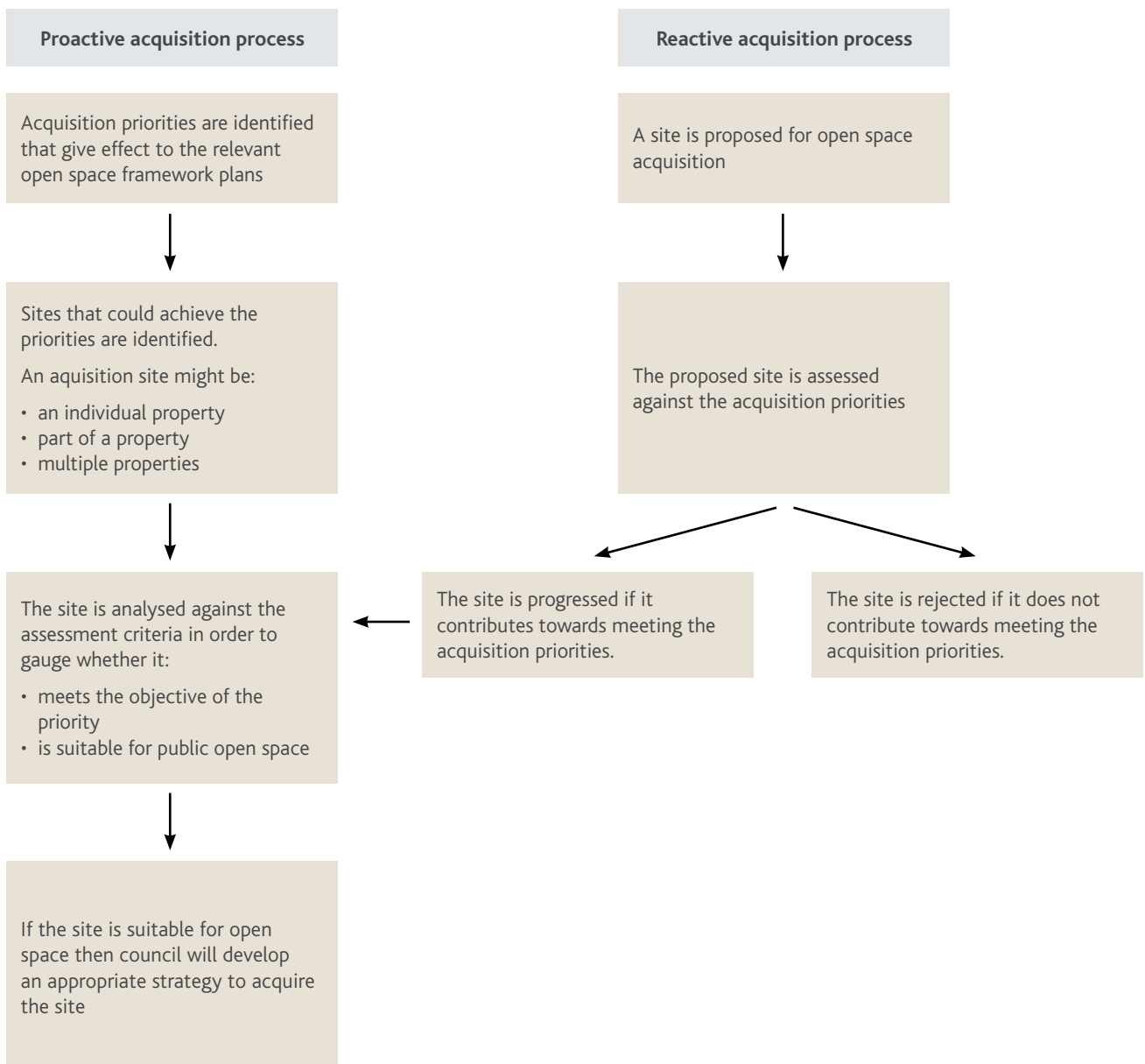
The council takes a long-term approach with land acquisitions and their subsequent development. This is especially the case where more than one property is necessary to achieve the required outcome. Acquisition of new open space land does not signal that council intends to immediately develop the site as public open space.



## 7 Acquisition assessment process

The assessment process has two stages. Firstly, sites must be identified as contributing to the acquisition priorities (section 8). Secondly, the suitability of the site for open space must be considered against assessment criteria (section 9).

The priority and assessment criteria have been developed so that they are applicable to both a strategic (proactive) approach to open space acquisition but also allow for the quick filtering of acquisition proposals as they arise (reactive). The following diagram outlines the acquisition assessment process.



## 8 Acquisition priorities

Acquisition priorities ensure advancement of the acquisition of new open space land in a planned, citywide context and reflect the objectives of the open space framework and council's strategic direction.

Updating of acquisition priorities will occur as the open space framework is reviewed. Sites that are at risk of being developed, making them no longer suitable for open space, will elevate their relative priority.

Note that the order listed below does not imply any hierarchy or weighting between priorities.

Priority	Explanation
Achieving provision standards	Land that will help to fulfil council's park provision standards. This may be the acquisition of land to create an entire new park, or to improve the access and configuration of existing parks.  The primary emphasis will be to establish a network of high quality neighbourhood parks across the city.
Growth related	Land in areas that are facing current or projected pressure on the open space network due to population growth.
Sports fields	Land which is suitable for development as sports fields, especially: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• large, multi-field, sites which provide for economies of scale in provision and maintenance</li> <li>• be of a size and configuration to allow flexibility in use by a range of sporting codes.</li> </ul>
Significant natural, cultural or heritage features	Land with significant, unique, representative or rare features in relation to landscapes, volcanic features, heritage, culture or biodiversity.
Ecological	Land that significantly contributes to ecosystem health or links ecologically significant native habitats and associated indigenous biodiversity.
Coastal and riparian	Land that would enhance conservation and public access to, and use of, the coastline and stream margins. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• land that contributes to the connectivity of open space along coastal and stream margins</li> </ul>
Improving safety	Land that improves park safety. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• land that widens a narrow entrance to a park</li> <li>• land that allows visibility of a park from a public area.</li> </ul>

## 9 Acquisition assessment criteria

This section outlines the criteria used to assess the suitability of sites for open space acquisition.

It is important to note that the objective of any given open space acquisition varies, and the criteria used to analyse a proposal will reflect this on a case-by-case basis. For example, the criteria to assess an acquisition to protect an ecological feature will be quite different from an acquisition for a new neighbourhood park.

The term "site" refers to either a single parcel of land or a combination of parcels that create a new open space or contribute to an existing open space. The criteria can inform the consideration of the four "well beings" as required by the Local Government Act 2002. Note that the criteria are not necessarily exhaustive of all matters that may be relevant in any particular case and the order of criteria does not imply a hierarchy or priority setting between criteria.

### Environmental criteria

Environmental criteria assess the physical suitability of a site and if an acquisition would help to achieve ecological or conservation objectives.

Criteria	Explanation
Topography	The topography of the site is suitable for its intended use.
Size	The size of the site is suitable for its intended use.
Configuration	The configuration of the site is suitable for its intended use.
Land-use compatibility	The site is compatible with the surrounding land uses and/or any adverse effects can be adequately addressed.  Factors that will be considered include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• zoning</li> <li>• noise</li> <li>• shading</li> <li>• amenity.</li> </ul>
Environmental safety	Potential hazards to public safety do not exist on the site, or it is possible to remedy or mitigate any hazard to an acceptable level. Potential hazards to public safety include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• site contamination</li> <li>• site stability.</li> </ul>
Significant natural features	The site protects, provides public access, or provides opportunities to appreciate a significant natural feature or biodiversity.  Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rare or unique examples of flora, fauna, ecosystems or geological features (eg volcanic features)</li> <li>• representative examples of flora, fauna, ecosystems or geological features where there are few examples in public ownership</li> <li>• significant natural landscapes</li> <li>• endangered or particularly diverse native ecosystems.</li> </ul> These are identified by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an expert in the relevant field</li> <li>• being referred to in a regional policy statement, regional plan or district plan</li> <li>• relevant national priorities and guidelines.</li> </ul>
Ecosystem health	The site helps to protect significant local ecosystems or contributes to establishing a network of core native ecosystems.  Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• riparian areas that buffer streams or the coast</li> <li>• terrestrial habitat that buffers ecologically significant sites</li> <li>• sites that link habitats of native flora and fauna, allowing movement of species between open spaces.</li> </ul>

## Social criteria

Open space acquisition helps to improve the quality of the urban environment and provide increased recreational and lifestyle opportunities. New acquisitions can improve access and safety in parks. Open space can also be used to link places that people need to go, encouraging sustainable transport options such as walking and cycling.

Criteria	Explanation
Physical access	<p>The community can access the site safely.</p> <p>Features which encourage safe access include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wide entrances to the open space</li> <li>• suitable topography for the purpose of the park</li> <li>• alternative routes through the open space</li> <li>• multiple entrance and exit points to the open space</li> <li>• a clear and legible layout, where appropriate.</li> </ul>
Visual access and sightlines	<p>The site is visible from surrounding public areas and there are clear sightlines within the open space.</p> <p>Visual access helps to improve public knowledge of the existence of a park and allows for passive surveillance from the public, helping to improve safety. Clear sightlines within a park help users to travel safely through the open space.</p> <p>Acquisition sites could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide visibility along movement routes such as entrances, footpaths and cycleways</li> <li>• remove features that inhibit sightlines, such as blind corners</li> <li>• provide for surveillance and visual access from surrounding areas such as footpaths, streets and buildings with active frontages.</li> </ul>
Linkages and networks	<p>The site links to surrounding streets, walkways, cycleways or connects areas of existing open space.</p> <p>Creating green networks provides both ecological and recreational benefits. Open space linkages encourage sustainable transport choices such as cycling and walking.</p> <p>Acquisition sites could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create an open space connection to activity nodes (eg town centres, schools, community facilities, transport hubs)</li> <li>• connect existing open spaces, creating larger parks or allow for continuous journeys through open space</li> <li>• provide routes and circuits for recreational use.</li> </ul>

## Cultural criteria

Open space acquisitions can protect culturally significant features. The objective of protecting a feature needs consideration alongside the benefit the site provides as open space. Open space acquisition can provide new recreation opportunities for residents.

Criteria	Explanation
Cultural or heritage value	<p>The site protects, provides public access, or enhances the open space of a site containing cultural or heritage value.</p> <p>Acquisition sites could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contain cultural, historical, archaeological, scientific, technological, heritage or landscape qualities that help to contribute to an understanding of New Zealand's history and cultures.</li> </ul> <p>Significant sites could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be identified as being culturally significant by Maori</li> <li>• contain features identified by expert historians or archaeologists</li> <li>• be referred to in a regional policy statement, regional plan or district plan</li> <li>• be identified in the register of places of historical and cultural heritage by the NZ Historic Places Board or the Maori Heritage Council</li> <li>• be identified in the site recording scheme of the NZ Archaeological Association.</li> </ul>
Recreation	<p>The site is suitable for meeting an identified recreational need.</p>

## Economic criteria

The cost of an acquisition will need to be weighed against the level of open space benefit a site provides to ensure that acquisition budgets are spent equitably and efficiently.

Criteria	Explanation
Cost of the site	<p>The cost of acquisition is within agreed professional valuation parameters.</p> <p>The value of unnecessary development (eg buildings that would need to be removed) on the site compared to the value of the land for open space purposes.</p>
Cost of the acquisition process	<p>The cost involved in negotiating with landowners is not unreasonable given the open space value of the site.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• purchase of a single site may be preferable to multiple sites that achieve the same open space outcome</li><li>• purchase of land on the open market from a willing seller rather than using statutory powers under the Public Works Act 1981.</li></ul>
Maintenance costs	<p>Future maintenance costs are not unreasonable for the proposed purpose of the open space.</p>



## 10 Disposal

Disposal of open space land should be undertaken cautiously. Before any disposals proceed, Auckland City Council needs to consider the proposal from a very long-term perspective. Disposal of an underutilised or “undesirable” park may be regretted in the future due to unforeseen changes in growth pressures, environmental changes or increased demand on the open space network.

The key driver to any disposal of open space owned or managed by the council is to improve open space, rather than to dispose of low quality open space. Opportunities sometimes arise to reconfigure parks and reserves within neighbourhoods to achieve this goal (eg where Housing New Zealand is reconfiguring their housing stock adjacent to parks and reserves). In these situations, land swaps often are the most appropriate method of achieving improved outcomes.

The disposal of open space can be a lengthy process and escalation of property prices can erode the benefit of selling land if a replacement is not secured prior to the disposal process being completed. It is therefore important that open space purchased to replace that disposed occurs before or simultaneously with disposal.

Before any properties are considered appropriate for disposal, the following factors will be considered, including:

- how the land contributes to meeting the objectives of the open space framework and its supporting plans
- analysis of the land being considered for disposal against the acquisition assessment criteria and priorities (to be a candidate for disposal, land should not meet the plan’s priorities or criteria)
- the immediate acquisition opportunities in the surrounding neighbourhood
- the relative net benefit of pursuing the disposal, including the expense involved and the benefits to the open space network of conducting the disposal
- the value the community places on the open space
- whether the land can be used for another public purpose.

Disposal of land should not be triggered because council receives an offer from the public wanting to purchase an area of public open space. Any proposal to sell open space must be considered on its merits, as outlined above.

The disposal of open space land must be undertaken in accordance with relevant statutory requirements (Reserves Act 1977, Local Government Act 2002 and Public Works Act 1981). Public notification and consultation regarding any proposed disposal is likely to be a statutory requirement.



