

Wellington City Council
Accessibility Advisory Group

Feedback on:

Zealandia Night Tour

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Zealandia invited the Wellington City Council (WCC) Accessibility Advisory Group (AAG) to participate in their recently created night tour throughout the Karori Wild Life Sanctuary.

The purpose of the AAG's participation was so that we could then provide feedback based on a lived experience perspective to Zealandia that would assist them with making the night tour more suited to a range of access needs, and therefore giving them access to a wider customer base.

Accessibility means,

Environments, information and buildings that are accessible and usable by everyone in the community. This includes: the able bodied, people pushing strollers, the elderly and people with impairments or disabilities.

2.0 DISCLAIMER

The content of this report is provided from a lived experience perspective, and does not constitute a technical review on the provision of access and facilities for persons with disabilities at Zealandia or on the night tour.

3.0 THE ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY GROUP'S BACKGROUND

The Accessibility Advisory Group (AAG) is one of the longest standing Council advisory groups (*previously called the Disability Reference Group*). It was established in 1996 to provide advice on issues that concern people with impairments.

Advisory groups provide advice to the Council on a broad range of issues from the perspective of a particular community. They provide preliminary feedback on Council planning, projects and policy development.

The role of the Accessibility Advisory Group is to raise awareness and understanding of disability and accessibility issues. It also gives the Council information, advice, and feedback on policy development and specific Council projects.

Individuals are not disabled. They have impairments. It's the environment we live in, which creates disability.

4.0 FEEDBACK

The following sections are based on feedback from specific impairment groups, or their representatives who took part in the night tour. The information is formatted to help you better understand the barriers that they encountered, how it affected them, and what could be done to either reduce or eliminate this barrier.

5.0 IMPAIRMENT PERSPECTIVE // BLIND

The following is the feedback from our colleague Julia Mosen who is Blind, typically Julia would use a seeing-eye dog, but as dogs are not allowed in Zealandia during the night tour she used her cane and a person to guide her instead.

5.1 General Feedback

The entire tour was a great experience, and our tour guide did an excellent job at explaining/describing areas and things. This provided a good picture of both my surroundings, and the birds.

5.2 Problems/Issues Encountered

There did not seem to be any slip resistant surfaces on one section of the tour. Also, there was not a rail at the edge of a small bridge. We were told this, but a rail would have been good, especially for people with slight balance issues. Also, there was no Braille signage in areas.

I was ok, as I was pretty confident in my surroundings, but another person might have struggled a bit, especially not being able to hold onto a handrail when going over the bridge. In regards to signage, since there was no Braille, I had to depend on others to provide information, along with the tour guide.

5.3 Possible Solutions

A handrail could be put in on the bridge, and steps. Slip resistant surfaces could be put in where problematic areas are. Braille signs can be implemented, giving equal access to everyone, regardless if they are sighted, blind or have low vision.

6.0 IMPAIRMENT PERSPECTIVE // WHEELCHAIR USER

The following is the feedback from our colleague Kendall Akhurst who is a wheelchair user. Kendall uses a manual chair, but many of his comments would also be applicable to a powered chair user.

6.1 General Feedback

On the whole the standard of wheelchair access for Zealandia is pretty good from my user experience, especially considering its location is on a hill and the natural experience the facility is trying to create.

I don't see any reason why a wheelchair user couldn't get around the whole facility as long as they have someone who can assist on the really steep areas like a friend, family member or your expert staff.

6.2 Problems/Issues Encountered

I encountered a few rugged rocks & uneven pieces of ground after one of the bridges going up the hill to one of the seating areas. In general the surface was great, but there were a few isolated roots and larger rocks which posed a few challenges and caused my wheelchair to come to a complete stop each time I hit them. Someone with less movement could potentially fall out of their chair in this scenario.

No Lighting or rails was present along the wooden mesh bridges. In general the surface of these mesh bridges and the metalled paths between them was nice and compact.

6.3 Possible Solutions

Removing lumps and bumps from the track where possible, possibly painting roots that cannot be removed in white paint so that they stand out more clearly under the low light.

I think the torches on helmets will be much more useful for a wheelchair user than a hand torch.

7.0 IMPAIRMENT PERSPECTIVE // DEAF

The following is the feedback from our colleague Shannon Krogmann who is Deaf. Shannon had two sign language interpreters with her during our night inspection.

7.1 General Feedback

The guide was brilliant! She gave us time to explore the species and the language she used was really easy to understand. The whole atmosphere was exhilarating, being my first experience at Zealandia, it exceeded my expectations and I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

7.2 Problems/Issues Encountered

The videos at the start of the tour could be enhanced and enjoyed by more people if they had subtitles and the interactive displays had more audio description.

My interpreters had trouble lighting their hands while signing, I used Zealandia's red light torches to shine on them which was effective because it was a red tint that was not so harsh to their eyes, but this was still not ideal.

7.3 Possible Solutions

Subtitles for the video at the start of the tour

It would have been good to have a headlight for the interpreters to wear, with a light facing down towards their hands for clear visibility.

Install lighting in areas to assist with reading the displays and signs.

8.0 IMPAIRMENT PERSPECTIVE // ELDERLY

The following is the feedback from our colleagues Allan Royal and Rosemary Cole who represent the elderly's perspective on the AAG.

8.1 General Feedback

The guiding and commentary were excellent she spoke clearly and enunciated her words well. This made it easy for me to hear her and what she said was very interesting and informative. They also had a good empathy with impaired visitors.

The route was easy to negotiate with an easy gradient, and while the surface often varied from smooth to rough it felt comfortable under foot. The length of the walk was ideal for the circumstances with signage being clear and easy to read.

8.2 Problems/Issues Encountered

It just would have been good to sit down occasionally and rest while waiting or listening to the Guide talk.

The edges of the path were difficult to identify at times, particularly on the lake track, stairs, and the bridge by the eels.

The night torch didn't give me enough light to avoid bumpy ground, tree roots and uneven camber, later in the night the signage was quite difficult to read even with the red light torch.

8.3 Possible Solutions

Provision of seating in common stopping areas

I would have felt more comfortable on the lake track, when we went to see the eels, if the edges were visible, especially on the bridges and stairs (a fluorescent edging could have been sufficient. Tree roots were a slight problem but were clearly pointed out as they were reached.

Maybe solar lights or catseye type lighting along the edges of the walkways could have improved one's comfort to those aged or, with physical impairments.

Provide low luminance lighting in areas to assist with reading the displays and signs.

9.0 GENERAL AAG FEEDBACK

The following is the feedback from our colleagues Angela Vanderpoel and Jason Strawbridge who have experience and a good understanding around the needs of a wide range of impairment groups.

9.1 General Feedback

Very friendly, welcoming and inclusive

Clear verbal commentary (*didn't speak too quickly and not too technical, but at the same time didn't dumb it down*) Good amount of information - didn't go on too long

Good responses to questions asked Suitable walking pace generally paths were well graded and mostly safe given we were in an outside "wild" environment.

Good preparatory information about what was coming next (*"now we will be heading towards...where you may see...."*.)

Great that they supplied warm clothes for those who needed them I liked the way they had samples of a couple of things e.g. possum fence for blind person to feel

Provision of three hybrid unisex accessible toilet cubicles in the sanctuary is way above the minimum required and is commended.

9.2 Problems/Issues Encountered

No subtitles on the 'God Zone' video at the start of the tour to assist deaf persons with following the commentary.

When escorting a blind person there were times when I wanted to explain something but couldn't as we needed to be quiet e.g. when we came across the kiwi and I wanted to describe what the kiwi was doing.

Bridge felt a little unsafe when 2 abreast due to not having guardrails.

I noted that for a deaf person it was difficult to walk and talk/signage at the same time (as they need to be able to see their interpreter and in the dark they couldn't see where they were going plus look at interpreter alongside them). This didn't happen very often

Torches were a bit difficult to work out how to use, and provided very low levels of light which did not give me much confidence walking around some of the darker areas such as the bridge.

9.3 Possible Solutions

Having a subtitles overlay on the 'God Zone' video, or alternately having a small video in one corner of someone doing NZ Sign Language (NZSL).

Installing a barrier on both sides of the eel bridge, and providing some low luminance lighting each side. This could possibly be a glass barrier to maintain vision of the water, but would need contrasting strips or a top rail to clearly identify it as such.

Make guides aware that they need to stop whenever communicating to the group if a deaf person is present. This is so the deaf person can see the interpreter and hear what they are communicating without being left behind the group.

10.0 FINAL NOTES

Overall the provisions for accessibility seemed to be good on the Zealandia night tour, however there were several key things which could be improved on to give a greater experience to those with access needs these are summarised below;

- Providing an angle adjustable head mounted light option for people, this would be particularly useful to wheelchair users and sign language interpreters.
- Removing lumps and bumps from the track where possible, possibly painting roots that cannot be removed in white paint so that they stand out more clearly under the low light.
- Installing a barrier on both sides of the eel bridge, and providing some low luminance lighting each side. This could possibly be a glass barrier to maintain vision of the water, but would need contrasting strips or a top rail to clearly identify it as such.
- Inclusion of subtitles or NZSL to “God Zone” video.
- Inclusion of Braille on signage/displays.

The AAG would like to thank you again for this opportunity to experience the night tour, and we hope that our feedback will contribute to improvements in its accessibility. By making Zealandia slightly more accessible and proactively marketing its accessible features to both Wellingtonians and tourists alike there is a real opportunity to significantly increase the number of visitors to Zealandia.

