

Dixon Street Urban Design upgrade

LEAD BUSINESS UNIT:
URBAN DESIGN AND REGENERATION,
WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

FOCUS AREA:
IMPROVING PUBLIC SPACES



Concept renders of the Dixon St upgrades

Issues around safety and perception of safety identified in Te Aro Park were key drivers for the establishment of the Pōneke Promise and saw urban design upgrades centred around Te Aro Park.

The park has long had a reputation for being dirty, uninviting and a place where anti-social behaviour occurred. This was particularly a problem around the public toilets in the western edge of the park. Through observations and collaboration with key organisations such as NZ Police, the toilet block was identified as a key contributor to the behaviour being observed in the park. The toilet buildings blocked views from Dixon Street and Manners Street and the rest of the park, allowing people to gather around it and feel like they had cover for participating in illegal or antisocial behaviours. Demolishing the toilet block became a key deliverable of the Pōneke Promise project and alongside that was the need to upgrade the space left behind after they were gone.

The other part to the upgrades is related to the significance of the site to mana whenua. Te Aro Park is the last remaining public space within the old Te Aro Pā area and a key opportunity to reflect the historic importance and the connection of mana whenua to the land. The existing landscaped artwork in the park was

designed and built in the 1990s by Shona Rapira Davis, a Māori artist, with support from Te Aro Pā mana whenua. It reflects some of the historic stories of the site. The toilets were always a source of anguish due to their placement on this significant site and proximity to Waimapihi stream which now flows through pipes beneath the park.

Dixon Street was established as the first stage of the urban design project and provided a 'quick win' for urban design upgrades in the area.

The intent was to make immediate safety improvements through transitional changes that would be in place until Let's Get Wellington Moving (a city-wide transport project) undertook permanent upgrades within the next 5 years.

One of the key factors of the deterioration of the park has been its isolation between two busy roads. Manners Street has no parking but is a key bus route. Dixon Street on the other hand is one-way and narrow, making it easy to cross but it has a steady stream of vehicles throughout the day and the parking along both sides blocked the physical and visual connection to the park from the street.

This stage included building out the footpaths with a boardwalk along the north side of Dixon Street to create more space for pedestrians and increase visibility into the park and between pedestrians and vehicles. The build outs were built with a modular wooden composite decking which is easy to install and remove without changing or damaging the existing road or footpath. Sections were also installed on the southern side of the road outside businesses that expressed desire to use the space for outdoor dining, known as a 'parklet'. Planters bordering the decking provided the double benefit of a safety barrier and helping bring more colour and greenery to the street.

Alongside the decking and planters which bordered them, two speed cushions were also installed to slow traffic and secure bike parking was installed.

This stage was completed in September 2022.



Dixon St upgrades have had created spaces for outdoor dining

The second stage aims to restore a sense of pride in the park, to create a more inviting space for people to spend time, and to reflect the historical and future importance of the site to mana whenua.

The site is one of the few public open spaces in the central city and the only public open space within the historic Te Aro Pa site. The demolition of the toilet block was the first step to improving the park and with its removal, there needs to be an upgrade to the space it once occupied.

A co-design process has been undertaken with mana whenua representatives. This has involved a series of workshops to work through values and aspirations for the site and area. The need for a Māori Design lead to assist the landscape architects translate these values and aspirations into physical designs was identified through this process and was then included in the project team.

Inglewood Place is included in Stage 2, as new replacement toilets are being installed in Inglewood Place around the corner from Te Aro Park. These toilets will be designed with safety front of mind using CPTED principles to prevent the same issues from occurring in the new location. The area around the new toilets will also be upgraded according to these principles.

Stage 2 which includes Te Aro Park and Inglewood Place is in concept development.

The feel of Dixon Street and Te Aro Park has changed significantly since the upgrades and toilet demolition.

Having views into the park from Dixon Street enhances the connection between the two and makes the park seem more inviting, larger and better connected to the area. The parklets bring a sense of vibrancy and friendliness to the street. These parklets are a mix of cafés, dining venues and bars, providing a good spread of activity across the day. With people spending time at these parklets, they provide 'eyes on the street' and this casual surveillance can deter anti-social behaviour.

The demolition of the toilet block saw immediate improvements in the area. The adjacent businesses reported an immediate change. Being able to see the rest of the park from their premises instead of the walls of the toilet block improved the feel and vibe. They also noted an immediate reduction in antisocial behaviour.

The biggest challenge with the Dixon Street upgrades was the expectations from local businesses about the access to street parking.

In particular, the access required by many businesses for loading and deliveries. This has been exacerbated by the construction works in Inglewood Place which has blocked all parking and stopping on that street. Remaining parking on Dixon Street were changed from 2 hours to a mix of 30-minute and 15-minute parking to help vehicle turnover.

An unexpected challenge was accommodating fire engine manoeuvring into the laneways. The requirement for their access and the type of access they required came in late in the design process and required a number of design changes which led to other issues.

The method of engagement worked well for the scale and type of project delivered at Dixon St.

It gave directly affected users the ability to voice any concerns or opportunities that were missed while being time and resource effective.

Design resource was tight which resulted in some issues further down the line that could have been prevented had more time been spent on design.

The Poneke Promise group has provided opportunities to connect with and share ideas across other teams in Council. An example of this were the daytime and night-time urban design hīkoi with the Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence, a relationship held by the Sexual Violence Prevention project, to gather data from lived experience of safety in the city. This intel, plus that gathered from accessibility advisors at the same time, help inform the WCC urban design team/design audit and Let's Get Wellington Moving work programme (one during the day, and one at night).