
REPORT 4
(1215/52/IM)

WATERFRONT FRAMEWORK REVIEW

1. Purpose of Report

This report feeds back to Council the results of a process of discovery highlighting any issues with the current Waterfront Framework in order to guide the extent of any review. After carrying out focus groups with the general public, interviews, workshops and a survey with key stakeholders, officers have found that the values, principles and objectives in the Waterfront Framework are still relevant and fit for purpose. Consequently, officers recommend Council reaffirm the values, principles and objectives in the current framework and consider any implementation issues as part of a Waterfront Development Plan to be developed and considered in the Long-term plan 2012-22.

2. Executive Summary

The Council agreed to consider a review of the Waterfront Framework in response to the following potential issues raised during the review of the implementation company:

- an uncertain planning and regulatory environment¹
- difficulty in meeting the principle that all ground floors of buildings will be predominantly accessible to the public
- connections with the city
- timing of developments and their relationship to the financial viability of the waterfront
- the balance of open space to built form.

In light of the significant resources required to carry out a full-scale review of the current framework, the Council agreed in May this year to complete this review in two stages starting with a process of discovery to highlight any issues with the current framework. The findings from which would inform the need and extent of any review.

¹ Uncertainty is created for developers when they embark on the resource consent process without any certainty that the consent will be approved. All resource consents along the Waterfront currently must be publicly notified. This means that resource consent applications could take a long time to resolve, could end up before the Environment Court, or could be declined altogether. Proposed District Plan Variation 11 is an attempt to create more certainty for developers in the North Kumutoto area. It allows for certain developments to proceed without public notification provided certain thresholds are met. The Variation was publicly notified on 1 February 2009. Three appeals were lodged against the decision. Mediation is underway, but an Environment Court hearing may still be required to settle one or more of the appeals.

The research/discovery process is now complete. It included:

- five focus groups with the general public
- interviews with interest groups (Waterfront Watch, the Architecture Centre, the Community Trust)
- workshop with the Waterfront Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
- survey of waterfront business owners and operators.

The review found that the values and principles in the 2001 Waterfront Framework still reflect the values people attribute to the waterfront. People also agree that the developments that have occurred along the waterfront have been largely successful in representing these values. The review has re-emphasised, however, that the Waterfront is not a uniform entity. The way it performs and connects with the city and its people varies along its length.

This piece of work confirms that development (in line with the framework) on the waterfront is on the right track. The waterfront is thought of in a very positive way – vibrant, diverse, exciting, cutting edge – a stark contrast to reflections on how it was perceived a decade ago.

Issues around the uncertain regulatory environment, difficulty in meeting the ‘ground floor’ principle, connections to the city and the balance of open space to built form largely all relate to challenges in implementing site-specific developments in accordance with the framework. While these elements might be difficult to achieve, they still reflect what is important to Wellingtonians and the overall safeguards and objectives that underpin them need to be retained in the framework.

Overall, this review has found that:

- On the whole, people are supportive of the way the waterfront has been developed to date, although there is recognition that this development is not complete.
- The northern end of the waterfront is seen as a key location for connecting both residents and visitors to the city, and as such, warrants desperate improvements.
- The current balance of built form and open space is seen as key to any future waterfront development, especially at the northern end of the waterfront
- The Waterfront Framework principles provide a robust framework to guide development, but there will still be site-specific responses required.
- The Waterfront Technical Advisory Group (TAG) believes that the current framework is still largely fit for purpose, although there are some concerns around the regulatory environment, particularly in relation to the public notification of resource consents.

3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Agree to reaffirm the values, principles and objectives in the 2001 Waterfront Framework.*
3. *Note that implementation issues of the framework and future Waterfront development priorities will be included in a Waterfront Development Plan. This plan will be considered as part of the Long-term Plan 2012-22.*

4. Background

The discovery process aimed to answer the following questions:

- How do people and businesses value Wellington's waterfront and how has this changed over the past ten years?
- Which spaces along the waterfront work well and which do not, and why?
- Do people compare Wellington's waterfront to other cities? If so, which cities and how do we compare?
- What role and function does the waterfront play in the CBD and Wellington as a whole?
- How do people see the waterfront evolving over the next ten years? What will be important to retain? What needs improving?

To gather this information five focus groups with the general public, and interviews, workshops and a survey with key stakeholders were carried out.

5. The current framework

The Wellington Waterfront Framework 2001 was prepared after extensive engagement and consultation with the people of Wellington². The framework is intended to provide certainty to the Wellington community, but at the same time allow a level of flexibility for future years. It is not intended to be prescriptive, but to provide a framework of values, principles and objectives within which decisions can be made.

The values highlighted in the framework are:

- expression of heritage and history
- expression of Maori heritage and presence
- sense of place for Wellingtonians

² A Waterfront Leadership Group led the process which consisted of a facilitator, 3 councillors and 7 members of the Wellington community over a nine month period. 23 public meetings were held, 170 submissions were made, 64 presentations were heard and over 32 reports prepared by advisors. The Group also commissioned market research.

- diversity of experience
- sense of collective ownership and involvement
- experience of space and openness
- ease of access for all

Each of these values is supported by a set of principles which guide any decisions made about how the waterfront is developed and managed. The framework also identifies a set of issues that need to be taken into account in the Waterfront Development Plan, a document which sets out the phasing for all the work on the waterfront for the life of the project. It is reviewed annually.

6. Key Findings

Feedback from public focus groups³

All of the focus group participants are overwhelmingly passionate about the waterfront and people on the whole are supportive of the way it has developed and evolved so far, with a few exceptions. All of the values expressed in the 2001 Waterfront Framework are still relevant today, but some more so than others. A sense of place for Wellingtonians is the core value attributed to the waterfront, and the others are key enablers.

In addition to the values expressed in the framework, people are keen that the waterfront is continually evolving and refreshing, but not too quickly so that people don't have the chance to live in it and make it their own. Also, people are keen for the waterfront to represent how innovative, creative and cutting edge Wellingtonians are.

Most participants like the current balance of built form and open space and would like this to continue to the northern part of the waterfront which desperately needs improving as this is a key location for connecting the waterfront better to the city, and the gateway for tourists, both via the train station and the port. People understand that trade-offs need to be made and that built form can create better public spaces. Whatever decisions are made must be taken with extreme caution and very careful consideration as we have got it wrong a few times, for example, Queen's Wharf. But we seem to be learning and have been mostly getting it right since.

While focus group participants felt the values and overall direction of the framework is right, people would like to see some additional facilities such as lower cost food and coffee and better toilets and changing facilities.

Feedback from interest groups

Litmus interviewed representatives from three groups with an interest in the waterfront. The views of these groups largely mirror those of the public focus groups, plus they emphasised the importance of taking it slow and the importance of quality design of buildings and open spaces. These groups would like to see greater information sharing and engagement with the public.

³ A presentation on the focus groups findings will be made at the meeting.

Feedback from the Wellington Waterfront Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

TAG believes the vision, themes, values, principles and objectives in the current framework remain relevant and current, although they recognise that some of the detail is out of date⁴. TAG believes that the framework, along with the governance arrangements for developing and managing the waterfront, has been successful in providing high quality public space and buildings which are very highly rated by the public. If the framework is reviewed, TAG would like to see those aspects of the framework which are out of date corrected.

TAG is strongly in favour of retaining the principle that all ground floors of buildings be predominantly accessible to the public. While this principle may sometimes be difficult to achieve due to the economic reality of running a business on the waterfront, it is fundamentally important for ground floors to look open and interesting to draw pedestrians in. Areas with inaccessible ground floors look barren and discourage other activity around them which adds to the vibrancy of the waterfront. TAG understands that this is what distinguishes Wellington's waterfront for others elsewhere. Other waterfalls elsewhere have struggled with this same issue, many using subsidised rents to attract the activities the public would like to see on ground floors or using income generated from activity above the ground floor to partially fund desirable activities on the ground floor.

TAG notes that since the framework was developed, the city has changed and will continue to change. The international trend is for waterfalls to be better integrated into cities rather than be just destinations for recreation and leisure. TAG recognises the importance of good connections and linkages to make this happen. The current framework provides sufficient guidance to ensure the waterfront keeps developing in the right way.

In summary, TAG believes the waterfront development so far is very successful, but is only half complete. There is room for improvement, but the current framework is still largely fit for purpose and will not impede any of these improvements taking place.

Aside from the content of the framework itself, a key issue for Wellington Waterfront Limited is the uncertain planning and regulatory environment. The TAG note that Auckland's waterfront will progress quickly and be a dramatically improved destination. This is in some part due to the greater certainty developers have in Auckland where resource consents for developments along the waterfront do not need to be publicly notified. Proposed Variation 11 will provide more certainty for the North Kumutoto area, if it is adopted. However under Variation 11, developments in the remainder of the waterfront would continue to be publicly notified.

⁴ For instance, Section one needs to be updated to reflect developments since 2011; some of the areas in Section four are superseded by completed works, while new initiatives have also since been adopted; Sections five and six need to be updated to reflect developments in management, work completed, and Council decisions; finally, Appendix one should be either deleted or revised if the Framework is updated.

Feedback from survey of waterfront businesses

Most businesses along the waterfront agree the waterfront plays a critical role in the success of their businesses. In particular, the foot traffic in summer, the beautiful views, convenience to the city, walkability, the unique offer, good atmosphere, attractiveness to potential staff, and prestige are key features the waterfront contributes to the success of businesses. However, some issues exist:

- Lack of protection from adverse weather conditions
- Connections to the city
- Parking and access
- Lack of consistent foot traffic

Key improvements businesses would like to see include more shelter, better facilities, more parking, better connections to the city and to other parts of the waterfront, and activities and features which will attract more pedestrians.

Other recent research on the waterfront

Research carried out last year exploring the values and functions of public spaces in Wellington's CBD found that Wellingtonians are strongly attached to the waterfront and see it as the ultimate multi-purpose recreation and leisure destination⁵. This view is also reflected in a users survey carried out in 2008⁶ which shows very high satisfaction with the waterfront and the recent developments along it.

This confirms the view expressed by many of those who responded to the initial 'Wellington 2040 – the future of our central city' consultation⁷ carried out in December 2009. Half of the respondents indicated that the waterfront was their favourite place in Wellington's central city. It also emerged as the least favourite place a reflection of a number of improvements that respondents thought could be made.

The waterfront is a large area and some sub-areas within it were also nominated as particular favourites (Oriental Parade, Waitangi Park and Frank Kitts Park). The main reasons given for the waterfront as the overall favourite place were its proximity to the CBD and water's edge, and the variety and size of spaces contained within this area of the central city. The waterfront is considered a vibrant place, with areas for a variety of outdoor activities, and well considered and appreciated public art. 'It is so beautiful, a mixture of architecture, art and creatively built structures and the wonderful harbour'.

There were many suggestions for improvements to the waterfront – such as providing more performance space, allowing for more licensed cafes and public entertainment in the evenings. A key concern that was raised centred on the

⁵ 2010, May: Exploring Public Space Values and Functions. Research carried out by Litmus on behalf of Wellington City Council. This research involved focus groups with Wellingtonians to explore public space values and functions within and near the Golden Mile.

⁶ 2008, March: Wellington Waterfront General Users Survey. Research carried out by UMR on behalf of WWL. This research involved a telephone survey with 750 Wellingtonians.

⁷ 2009, December: Wellington 2040, the future of our central city. Risks, opportunities, and priorities facing Wellington's central city. This research invited Wellingtonians to complete a questionnaire and provide feedback.

height of the proposed buildings and also their cumulative effect of privatising the waterfront. With current and proposed development, emphasis upon improving the amount of activity occurring at the street level of a building (often known as ‘active edges’) and maintaining the buildings already on the waterfront was strongly desired.

One improvement repeatedly raised was to prioritise pedestrian access to the waterfront promenade, as at present Aotea, Jervois and Customhouse Quays and Cable Street are seen as barriers. The focus of much of the discontent was with the areas identified above as needing improvement, namely the major arterial routes affecting pedestrian access to the waterfront from the Golden Mile, as well as specific areas of concern such as the port area, Queens Wharf, the Outer T wharf and the Overseas Passenger Terminal.

Improvements proposed for these areas focused upon making pedestrian and cyclist access a priority. Specific suggestions included reducing vehicle traffic on the Quays, and creating tree-lined boulevards with widened footpaths, cycle lanes, active edges, and more shelter for pedestrians.

The findings from all of these pieces of research and consultation indicate that the values Wellingtonians place on the waterfront have not changed significantly since the current framework was put in place.

7. Discussion

For those Wellingtonians that participated in the focus groups, and for most of the key stakeholders interviewed and surveyed, the values, principles and objectives within the current Waterfront Framework are still as relevant today as when they were written ten years ago. The development and management of the waterfront has been very successful in achieving what was set out in the framework. There is still a lot of work to be done, but we are on the right track. While parts of the written material are clearly out of date, as a tool for decision making and directing investment, the framework is still fit for purpose⁸.

As when the framework was created in 2001, there are still a minority who would like to see less or no development along the waterfront. There is no evidence that this view is growing or becoming more prevalent amongst Wellington’s public. The public are very keen that the openness and ease of access to the waterfront is retained, but not at the expense of diversity of experience or sense of place.

Discussion of key issues

An uncertain planning and regulatory environment

Uncertainty is created when potential developers embark on a process to develop parts of the waterfront without any assurance that their proposals will be approved. Currently all resource consents for developments along the Waterfront must be publically notified. TAG argue that this detrimentally impacts on the Waterfront as developers are less likely to invest their time and

⁸ Those parts of the framework which are out of date are largely immaterial when decisions are made regarding the waterfront. This information is up dated more regularly in the Waterfront Development Plan as well as the design briefs for each precinct.

money into projects which are not guaranteed to happen or which could take a very long time to approve. This means the Waterfront will less likely benefit from investment which could both improve the sites that are earmarked for development as well as help fund improvements to the rest of the Waterfront. If the Waterfront Framework is to be reviewed and changed to any great extent, this will create more uncertainty for developers in the long term.

Difficulty in meeting the principle that all ground floors of buildings will be predominantly accessible to the public

Most waterfronts around the world aim to be publically accessible, and many experience difficulty meeting this principle. Experts (including TAG) argue, however, that accessible ground floors are essential to retain vibrancy and overall economic vitality, even when this is difficult to achieve.

The viability of these spaces is expected to be enhanced with increased activity on the waterfront. This is anticipated under the plan with improved connections and the activity generated by the sites set aside for development.

Connections with the city

All of the research and engagement carried out as part of this review has highlighted the importance of connections to the city. The current Waterfront Framework has already identified this as a key value for the waterfront. To help achieve this aspiration, the Wellington 2040 Central City Framework highlights the importance of a better connected waterfront in ensuring that large numbers of people both during the week as well as in the weekends use the space. For this to happen, there needs to be easy to find, intuitive and frequent links between the city and the waterfront.

The balance of open space to built form.

Most of the focus group participants felt the current balance of open space to built form is about right. Many noted that past developments were not successful additions such as Queen's Wharf but recent additions (buildings and spaces added since the framework was introduced) are seen as making positive contributions.

All participants acknowledged that some developments created better public spaces and were essential for diverse experiences and vibrancy along the waterfront. They cautioned however that care was required so the spaces that are working well are not ruined by new developments. All felt that the car parks along the Kumutoto area are not good quality nor accessible public spaces at the moment and that improvements are required.

The preference would be to carry the same good quality open space along here as exists on the rest of the waterfront, however, many acknowledged that buildings in the spaces would work if they enhanced the quality of the public space and improved access to the train station. TAG believe that buildings are essential for framing public spaces and making them more inviting and usable. Too much open space can appear barren and isolating.

8. Conclusion

Wellingtonians are passionate about the waterfront. The values, principles and objectives of Wellington's Waterfront Framework 2001 are still relevant and the development of the waterfront has been largely successful and is on the right track.

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Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

The Waterfront contributes to the following Council outcomes:

More Liveable – Wellington will be a great place to be, offering a variety of places to live, work and play within a high quality environment.

Stronger sense of place – Wellington will have a strong local identity that celebrates and protects its sense of place, capital-city status, distinctive landform and landmarks, defining features, history, heritage buildings, places and spaces.

More eventful – Wellington will maximise the economic value from promoting and hosting high-profile events.

More Prosperous – Wellington's urban form, and flexible approach to land use planning in the central city, will contribute to economic growth and prosperity.

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

C378 Wellington Waterfront Project

A312 Wellington Waterfront operations

CX131 Wellington Waterfront development.

The outcome of the review could impact all 3 annual plan projects.

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

Maori have had a long connection with the harbour and waterfront that continues today. There are several sites of significance for iwi around the waterfront including Waitangi Lagoon and Te Aro Pa.

4) Decision-Making

This is not a significant decision. The report deals with a strategic asset, but does not propose any changes to the asset.

5) Consultation

a) General Consultation

Consultation is proposed as part of this assessment. Any feedback will be reported to SPC.

b) Consultation with Maori

Representatives from Council's mana whenua Treaty partners – Wellington Tenth Trust and Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira were involved in the development of the Wellington Waterfront Framework. They will be included in agreement of the Framework.

6) Legal Implications

There are no implications from this report.

7) Consistency with existing policy

This report is consistent with existing WCC policy on the waterfront.