# 10. *Draft Open Spaces Strategy 2026 for public consultation*

| | |
|---|---|
| Authors | *Tayyaba Latif; Policy Advisor* |
| Activity Manager | *Ian Soper, Open Spaces Manager* |
| | *Mark Low; Strategy and Policy Manager* |
| Executive Team Members | *Toni Durham; GM Community and Open Spaces* |

## Summary


- The purpose of this report is to approve the draft Open Spaces Strategy for consultation.
- Council has the following options regarding the policy:
  - Consult on the draft Open Spaces Strategy (no changes), or
  - Make changes to the strategy prior to consultation.


**Recommendation**

1. **That** Council approves the draft Open Spaces Strategy for public consultation from 4 March to 7 April 2026.

## Attachments

**Appendix 1** Draft Open Spaces Strategy 2026
**Appendix 2** Draft Open Spaces Strategy consultation document

## Background

### The current situation

1. Council adopted its existing Open Spaces Strategy in 2016. The strategy will reach the end of its ten- year period in 2026 and is due for a review.

2. The review commenced in September 2025, and officers have prepared a draft strategy.

3. The draft strategy is informed by following:

   a) It builds on the Open Spaces Strategy 2016.

   b) Analysis of previous public consultation on related plans and strategies,

      - Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy 2025
      - Reserve Management Plan 2024 (Love Your Parks)
      - Biodiversity Strategy 2024,
      - Play, Active Recreation and Sport Strategy 2022,
      - Ashburton Domain Development Plan 2020,
      - Walking and Cycling Strategy 2020, and
      - Long Term and Annual Plans since 2016

   c) Analysis of last five years of satisfaction and verbatim responses from the Annual Residents Survey.

   d) On 30 October 2025, during a workshop with Council's Open Spaces Team, feedback was gathered on the issues, challenges, and opportunities across the various open spaces categories.

   e) We did not carry out early community engagement because sufficient information was already considered available from the analysis of the sources mentioned from (a) to (d).

4. The key feedback themes from the community feedback and workshop are as follows:
   - Accessibility and Inclusion,
   - Ecological and Environmental values,
   - Community and Cultural Connection,
   - Connectivity and Linkages,
   - Youth and Play,
   - Safety and Infrastructure,
   - Equity and Investment.

5. On 28 January 2026, Council's direction on draft strategy was sought at a workshop. and further changes were made before finalising the draft strategy for today's meeting. Feedback was sought from Arowhenua via AECL and as a result an additional objective was added (4.5), and acknowledgement was made of AECL/Arowhenua as a partner within the 'who' section of several objectives.

### Proposed Open Spaces Strategy

6. The proposed strategy includes background information on open spaces in the Ashburton District, a vision statement, guiding principles, goals, objectives and an action plan including timeframes to achieve each action.

7. Council owns the Open Spaces Strategy. The Open Spaces Team leads the delivery of the Action Plan, supported by other Council teams. When other organisations or community groups manage open spaces, Council works with them to ensure a consistent, district-wide approach.

### Consultation approach

8. Officers propose to undertake community consultation on the draft strategy, with all supporting information and feedback available on itsourplace.nz and printed copies provided at Te Whare Whakatere for people who want to give feedback.

## Options analysis

### Option one – Approve the draft Open Space Strategy for public consultation (recommended option)

9. Under this option, Council approves the draft strategy for public consultation from 4 March to 7 April 2026.

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Advantages:***<br>• The community's views will be heard and able to be included in the final strategy to refine a shared vision and goals for the district. | ***Disadvantages:***<br>• Current draft may not accurately reflect elected members' position. |
| ***Risks:***<br>No risks identified in consulting on draft strategy with the community | |

### Option two – Approves the draft strategy for public consultation with amendments.

10. Under this option, Council approves the Strategy with amendments, for public consultation. Depending on the nature of the changes the timeline could be affected.

| ***Advantages:*** | ***Disadvantages:*** |
|---|---|
| • The community's views will be heard and able to be included in the final strategy to refine a shared vision and goals for the district.<br>• The document will better reflect Councils position. | • Depending on the complexity and number of amendments, timing for the consultation may be delayed. |
| ***Risks:***<br>No risks identified in consulting with the community | |

## Legal/policy implications

11. There is no legal requirement to have an Open Spaces Strategy. It is good practice to set direction for activities to help guide future levels of service, development and investment.

### Local Government Act 2002

12. Council is, however, legally obligated to take community wellbeing, future generations and sustainable development into account when making decisions (sections 10 and 14, Local Government Act 2002). This can be interpreted as a legal obligation to consider the environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts of climate change on the community. Under section 14(1)(h) in *"taking a sustainable development approach, a local authority should take into account—*

    *(i) the social, economic, and cultural well-being of people and communities; and*
    *(ii) the need to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment; and*
    *(iii) the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations."*

13. For this reason, a large number of Councils throughout the country develop policies, plans and strategies for their open spaces.

### Reserves Act 1977

14. The purposes of the Reserves Act 1977 are:

- providing for the preservation and management of reserves for the benefit and enjoyment of the public;
- ensuring, as far as possible, the survival of all indigenous species of flora and fauna;
- ensuring, as far as possible, the preservation of access for the public;
- providing for the preservation of representative samples of all classes of natural ecosystems and landscape;
- promoting the protection of the natural character of the coastal environment and the margins of lakes and rivers.

### Reserve Management Plan 2024

15. In 2024, Council adopted an omnibus Reserve Management Plan under section 41 of the Reserves Act 1977 to ensure consistent management of all open spaces it owns and administers across the district.

### Long-Term Plan 2024-34

16. The Long-Term Plan 2024-34 notes Council's commitment to provide the district with a network of open green spaces that contribute towards the beauty and enjoyment of the area for residents and visitors alike.

### Climate change

17. Well-managed and fit for future open spaces will contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

| Review of legal / policy implications | |
|---|---|
| Reviewed by In-house Counsel | Jacqui Watson; Senior Legal Counsel |

## Strategic alignment

18. The recommendation relates to all four of Council's community outcomes because long-term planning for our open spaces will have a positive impact on all aspects of the community.

| Wellbeing | | Reasons why the recommended outcome has an effect on this wellbeing |
|---|---|---|
| Economic | ✓ | Open spaces are likely to have an impact on our:<br>• economy through attracting visitors<br>• environment through ensuring positive ecological and environmental outcomes.<br>• Improve cultural outcomes by preserving local heritage, providing places for cultural expression.<br>• social wellbeing by providing inclusive, safe and accessible open spaces. |
| Environmental | ✓ | |
| Cultural | ✓ | |
| Social | ✓ | |

## Financial implications

| Requirement | Explanation |
|---|---|
| What is the cost? | Consultation costs covered by existing budgets. |
| Is there budget available in LTP / AP? | Yes |
| Where is the funding coming from? | Existing budgets – Strategy and Policy and Communications Teams |
| Are there any future budget implications? | Depending on the direction of the strategy and action plan there may be future budget implications. If there are implications these will be assessed as part of the Annual Plan / Long-Term Planning process, when actions are included in our forward planning. |
| Reviewed by Finance | Erin Register; Finance Manager |

## Significance and engagement assessment

| Requirement | Explanation |
|---|---|
| Is the matter considered significant? | No |
| Level of significance | Medium |
| Rationale for selecting level of significance | N/A |
| Level of engagement selected | 3. Consult – formal two-way communication |
| Rationale for selecting level of engagement | The draft strategy development process has been outlined in this report, including community feedback analysis, and Council workshop. This consultation allows the entire community to have their say on the draft strategy and for stakeholders to provide their feedback in a more formal process through submission and hearings. |
| Reviewed by Strategy and Policy | Mark Low; Strategy and Policy Manager |