

7. DRAFT PARKS AND WATERWAYS ACCESS POLICY

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Corporate Plan Output: Parks Plans and Policy Statements	

The purpose of this report is to present the Draft Parks and Waterways Access Policy to Community Boards for their comment and to the Parks and Recreation Committee for approval.

BACKGROUND

The Draft Parks and Waterways Access Policy (sent under separate cover to Community Board members) emerges directly from the Council Equity and Access Policy and presents the Parks and Waterways Unit's own strategic policy on how the Unit intends to apply the Council policy.

One out of every five New Zealanders is affected by a disability and it is important to consider their needs when planning and managing our parks and waterways. Disabilities occur at all life stages and may be major or minor. There are a wide range of physical, sensory, psychiatric, and intellectual disabilities that result in differing needs of parks users. The Draft Parks and Waterways Access Policy provides for inclusive use of parks by people with disabilities and also takes account of older people and caregivers with young children all of whom find access hampered by design or distance. Improved access has the potential to increase park use by enhancing comfort and convenience for all users and providing significant safety benefits.

The Draft Parks and Waterways Access Policy was prepared in consultation with the disabilities community and staff. The Parks and Waterways Unit aims to overcome barriers to access to ensure that everyone is able to enjoy Christchurch's parks and open spaces.

It is important to retain character and variety in parks and to cater for different levels of ability with a range of challenges and degrees of difficulty. Therefore, not all Parks and Waterways facilities will be fully accessible, e.g. advanced mountain bike tracks. However, where it is feasible to make a facility accessible it is expected that the policy will apply. The three main reasons why a facility would not be accessible are:

- Existing facilities – Many existing facilities are not accessible and it may not be practical to modify them. However, where possible a design change will be implemented to improve accessibility of existing facilities.
- High cost - The cost of constructing accessible facilities may be prohibitive and outweigh the usefulness of such a facility, e.g. constructing an accessible path on a steep hillside.
- Conservation values - Some reserves have high conservation values that should not be compromised, e.g. wide paths may encroach on an ecologically sensitive area that needs to be conserved.

POLICIES

The six policies included in the Draft Parks and Waterways Access Policy are listed below.

1. All new parks and waterways facilities, and existing facilities when they are upgraded, will be designed, where feasible, to meet the national standard access design criteria (see Appendix 1).
2. An audit will be undertaken of all parks to identify accessible facilities and opportunities for improvement. Questions will be included in current park surveys, which are undertaken every two months by contractors, to monitor the maintenance of continued accessibility in parks.
3. The Parks and Waterways Unit shall ensure that staff members involved with providing park facilities are educated about the requirements of people with disabilities, allowing effective service provision.
4. The Parks and Waterways Unit shall develop and use a standardised classification system for paths and tracks that allows users to readily identify the degree of ability required.
5. The Parks and Waterways Unit shall provide public information about accessible facilities using a variety of media.
6. The Parks and Waterways Access Policy will be reviewed every two years in consultation with the KiwiAble Network, Disabled Persons Assembly, and relevant Council staff.

SPECIFICATIONS

A comprehensive list of specifications is included in the policy document. Facility design is to meet these criteria.

IMPLEMENTATION

A strategy for implementation of this policy will be required and is expected to be produced within four months of the policy being adopted.

As the cost to immediately alter all existing parks and waterways facilities to make them accessible would be exorbitant, the policy will be staged progressively over time. Minor maintenance details can be addressed as soon as they are identified, new facilities will be constructed to meet accessible specifications, and existing facilities will be made accessible when they are upgraded.

Recommendation: That the Draft Parks and Waterways Access Policy be adopted.

Chairperson's Recommendation: That the officer's recommendation be adopted.