

Strategic Theme:

4

A Greener Town Centre

Strategic Priorities aimed at greening the town centre

Initiatives under this Theme include:

- Creating vital biodiversity connections on a regional scale and the implications for the town centre.
- Creating a new inner city small park in Queen Street with the use of existing mature trees.
- Planting more street trees in the town centre to soften the feel and look of the place and provide shelter from the sun and rain.



5.4.1 The need for a greener Town Centre

Regional biodiversity and ecology

The Blenheim Town Centre sits within the valley enclosed by the Tuamarina and Wither Hills. Ecological and biodiversity connections in this wider ecological network could be improved. The town prevents ideal ecological connections between the areas of significant biodiversity value either side of the town from occurring. For a town to have good ecological and biodiversity connections these areas of green space need to be of a reasonable size (about 2ha), be located within 500m of each other and be planted with many types of vegetation. These features will help create quality habitats between which birds and other species can travel.

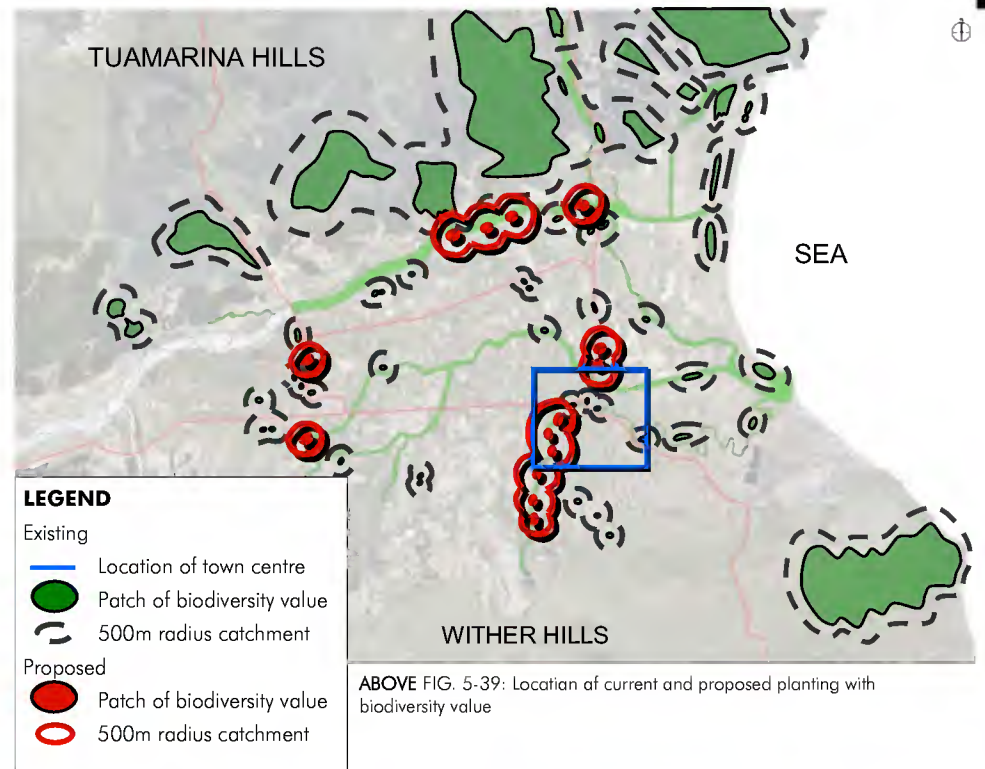
The ambition exists within the Council to create links in order to attract the Tui back to Blenheim (the Tui To Town project). This project can be strengthened and the lack of biodiversity connections can be countered by concentrating planting within school grounds, in parks and reserves, riparian planting along the Taylor River (less than 1km apart), and along transport corridors within and around the town centre.

Local amenity

Within the scope of this project, two types of improvements could be pursued to contribute to increased biodiversity and to give the town centre a greener appearance:

1. Add more public open spaces with a green and soft character as places of amenity in strategic locations.
2. Establish more green connections between existing green public open spaces within the town centre, in combination with additional street trees, including native species.

The scope for improvement specifically around the rivers will be dealt with separately in Strategic Theme 5: Connections to the Rivers.



LEFT FIG. 5-40: Diverse planting in stream corridors and open spaces to help link up the wider ecological environment

Technical background: Blenheim Open Space Distribution

Analysis of the distribution of public or communal open spaces and their catchments shows significant areas of Blenheim where people do not have open space within easy walking distance.

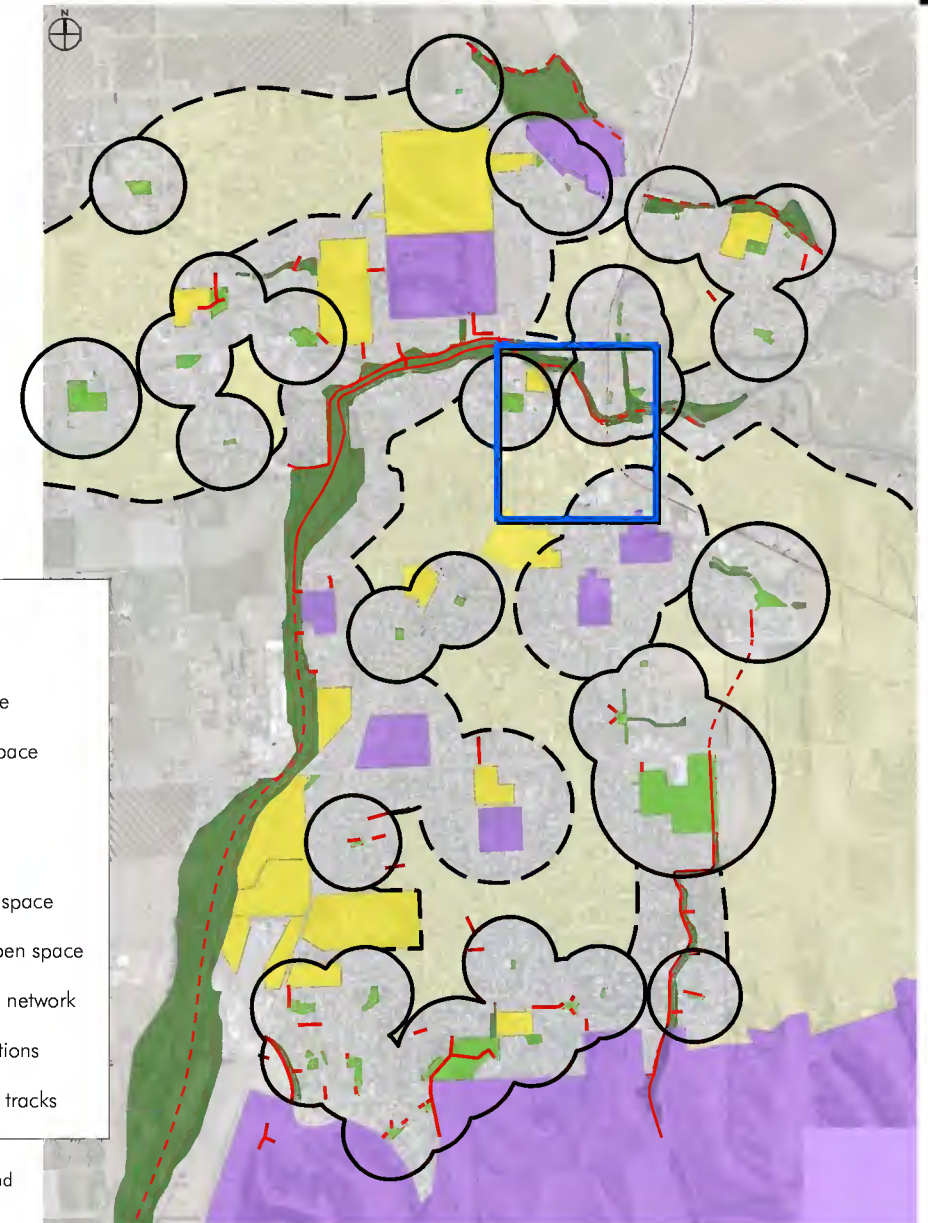
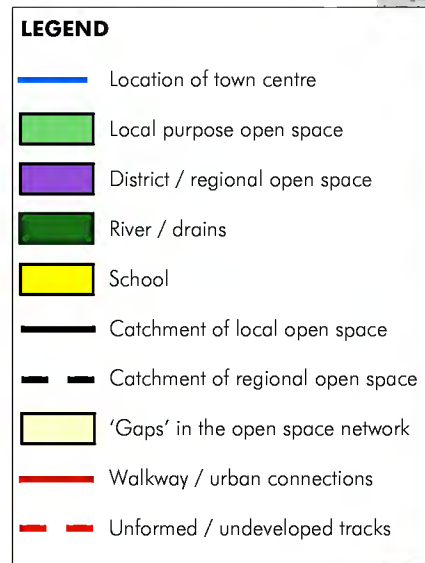
Method:

Refer to figure 5-41. Local purpose and district purpose open spaces have been plotted onto the map of Blenheim as well as the river areas. Schools are included as well, since some schools offer access to their grounds after hours. However this varies from school to school, so school grounds are dismissed as public open space for the purpose of this analysis.

The area of reach of an open space is called its catchment. The assumption is made that smaller local open spaces have a catchment with a 250m radius and more significant open spaces have a catchment with a 500 m radius. The areas outside any one catchment are indicated as gaps in the open space network.

Recommendation:

Undertake a revision of the Open Space Strategy to consider the possibility of delivering recreational open space within easy walking distance of 250 to 500m for 75 to 100% of all Blenheim residents.



LEFT FIG. 5-41: Distribution of public and communal open spaces within Blenheim

5.4.2 New pocket park Queen Street

The town centre is short of planted soft landscapes in an urban setting. Apart from areas around the river, Seymour Square is the only attractive and well maintained public green open space. Town centre workers could spend their lunch breaks in this park or shoppers could go there to take a rest away from the shops or let their children freely run around. With projected growth of higher intensity residential and employment activities in the town centre over time, residents and workers will require additional areas of open space. A good opportunity to create an additional urban pocket park that would usefully contribute to a CBD user's experience in the Queen Street carpark. This space is within close walking distance from Market Place and has mature trees, which could be retained. Open space design should seek to improve employee amenity, enhance business settings as well as facilitate social interaction and a sense of identity.

Initiative:

Create a new inner city small park in Queen Street with the use of existing mature trees. This park could initially just consist of the eastern half of the carpark. It should be extended when additional parking capacity is created through the construction of one of the proposed carparking structures.

Good quality buildings on the edges of this open space are crucial. To the south the proposed new art gallery with its green forecourt (refer to Strategic Theme 1) would form this edge. A building with an active commercial use on the ground floor and turning its back to Thirteenth Lane is



ABOVE FIG. 5-42: Existing situation of the Queen Street carpark - stage 1 with only half of the carpark as pocket park and the new art gallery in place - final stage with full park and new commercial building on the western side

required to the west of this proposed pocket park.

The existing public toilet facility should be removed and new toilets including mothercare facilities etc. should be integrated within the proposed new art gallery, accessible from either Queen or Charles Street.

The existing service building should be relocated as well.



RIGHT FIG. 5-43: Artist's impression of the proposed new art gallery with its green forecourt. The Queen Street pocket park in the foreground

5.4.3 Street trees plan

There are several benefits of having street trees in the town centre:

- Appropriate street trees soften the look and feel of the place; street trees could assist with the legibility in a place, through the establishment of different characters per street; street trees with a canopy provide shelter from the sun and rain; street trees in planters between kerbside parking bays would optically narrow down the street, resulting in traffic calming; street trees provide a barrier for cars to park on the footpath without using bollards; and street trees could help with biodiversity connection for some bird species.

There are however, also challenges with regards to street trees:

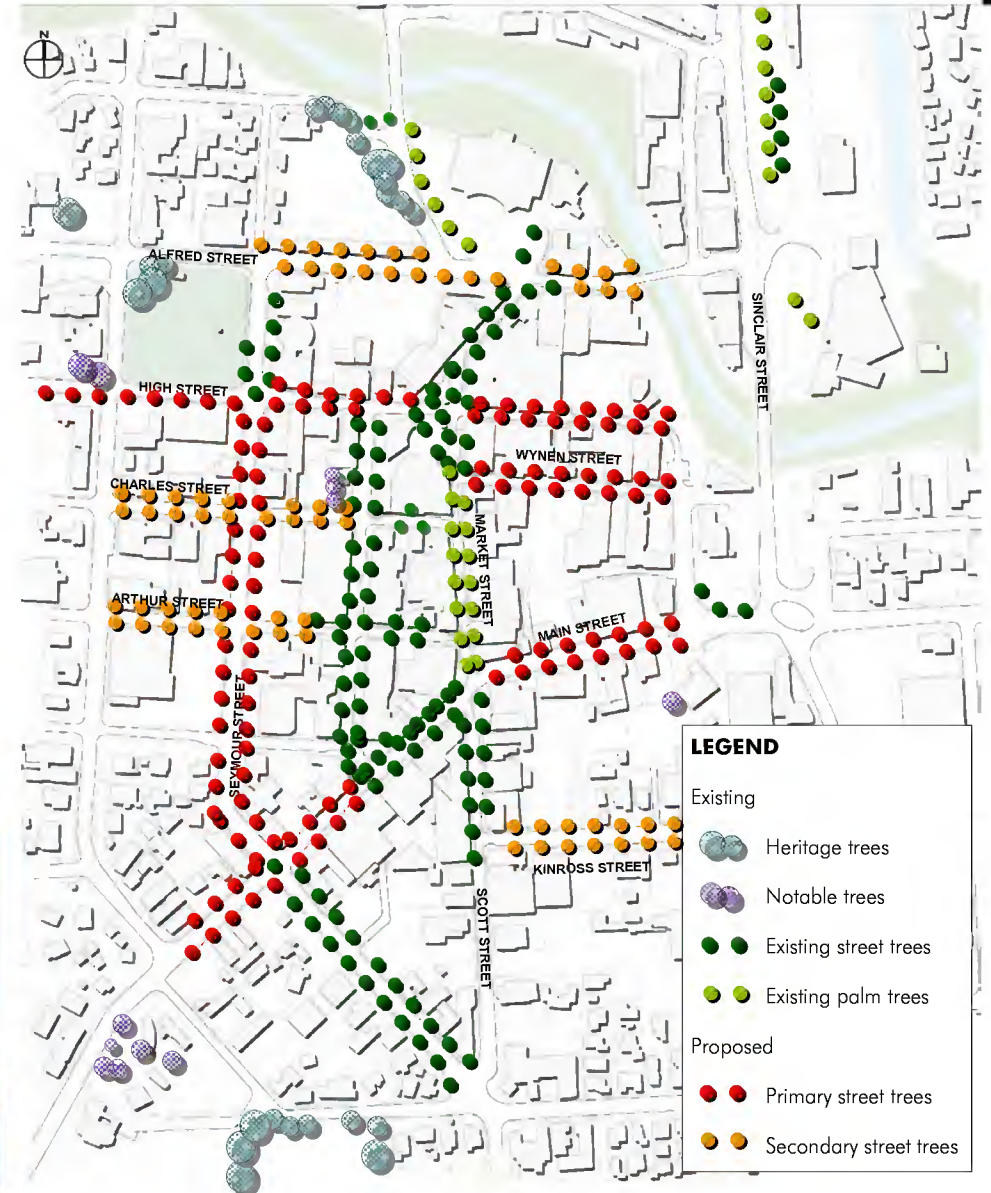
- Street trees could interfere with canopies and footpath spaces; there are infrastructure constraints; tree lifecycle considerations could constrain street upgrade opportunities; and street trees could cause crime issues for pedestrians.

Some of the town centre streets, such as Market and Queen Streets are well provided with trees. It is proposed to add to this in a street tree planting strategy (figure 5-45) as follows:

1. First priority street trees (canopy trees) in: Seymour St between High St and Maxwell Rd; in Maxwell Rd between Henry St and Queen St; Main St between Market St and Symons St; High St between Henry St and Symons St; Wynen St as part of a comprehensive streetscape upgrade (refer to page 80).
2. Second priority street trees (canopy trees) in: Alfred St between Seymour St and the bridge; Charles St between Henry St and Queen St; Arthur St between Henry St and Queen St; Kinross St as part of comprehensive streetscape upgrade (page 79-80).
3. The palm trees in Market Street should be replaced with suitable canopy trees to provide shelter. This should be combined with the proposed streetscape review to move some of the physical clutter such as bollards and review potential options for the relocation of removed street furniture to new locations. It is also crucial to first find an appropriate location for the re-use of the palm trees.



ABOVE FIG. 5-44: The importance of street trees. Left: one of Blenheim's streets without trees, right: a tree-lined street



ABOVE FIG. 5-45: Map of existing trees in the town centre and proposed new street trees

5.4.5 Cost estimation, timeline & prioritisation

Ref*.	page	Action	Admin./ Physical	Timeline: short (<2yrs); medium (2-5 yrs); long (>5yrs)	Priority: high/ medium/ low	Comments/ assumptions
A3	64	Revision of the Open Space Strategy to consider the possibility of delivering recreational open space with easy walking distance 200-500m of 75-100% of residents	administrative	Short term	Medium	
B1	66	Street trees in Seymour St between High St and Maxwell Rd	physical	Short term	High	
B2	66	Street trees in Maxwell Rd between Henry St and Queen St	physical	Short term	High	
B3	66	Street trees (canopy trees) in Main St between Market St and Symons St	physical	Short term	High	
B4	66	Street trees (canopy trees) in High St between Henry St and Symons St	physical	Short term	High	
B5	66	Street trees (canopy trees) in Alfred St between Seymour and the bridge	physical	Medium term	Medium	
B6	66	Street trees (canopy trees) in Charles St between Henry St and Queen St	physical	Medium term	Medium	
B7	66	Street trees in Arthur St between Henry St and Queen St	physical	Medium term	Medium	
B8	66	Replace existing palm trees in Market St for suitable canopy trees. First find alternative location for palm trees.	physical	Long term	Low	
G5	65	Encourage development on the Queen Street carpark (across the road from current Noel Leeming and Shoe Warehouse and turning its back to Thirteenth Lane).	administrative	Short term	High	
G6	65	Develop an urban pocket park on the Queen St carpark in front of development as proposed in G5 (see plans)	physical	Short term	High	

*) Refers to Blenheim Town Centre Draft Implementation Strategy