

Strategic Theme:

5

Stronger Connections with the Rivers



Strategic Priorities aimed at strengthening connections between the town centre and the Taylor and Opawa Rivers

Initiatives under this Theme include:

- Creating a new riverside park at the end of High Street, immediately north of the amphitheatre, as a place to hang out and enjoy Blenheim's riverside setting.
- Creating opportunities to better engage with the river via a new walkway connecting Russell Terrace with the river walkways. Possible options for the Old Clubs site are presented.
- Improving the landscaping around the Taylor River and creating more places to get close to the river.
- Constructing more direct access points to the rivers to improve pedestrian connectivity between the town centre and the river areas.



5.5.1 Blenheim's hidden gems

Blenheim has a rich history as a river port located on the confluence of the Taylor and Opawa Rivers. Some historic buildings connect with this history, such as the Boathouse Theatre, and also the River Queen, a historic paddle boat currently used as a restaurant.

Due to the change in transportation methods, with a greater focus on motorised land transport, Blenheim started to turn its back to the river, like many towns and cities in New Zealand. The need for protection against flooding hazard contributed to this development. More recently, riverfront locations are increasingly desired as high amenity settings for businesses and residential uses.

Blenheim is starting to re-discover the value of its riverfront setting. Recent high quality development near the river, such as the amphitheatre with adjacent boardwalks, but also the new Raupo Café, are examples of this. The river areas are also an attraction for joggers and people with dogs in the mornings and evenings.

This vision seeks to add to and reinforce this move.

- Strengthening existing and adding new direct pedestrian and visual connections will encourage the use of the river areas. Particularly, workers and shoppers in the town centre will be attracted.
- A few high quality public open spaces on the river, such as the amphitheatre will act as local destinations for foot traffic, which will increase commercial potential along those routes.
- Investing in the quality of the experience of the rivers will reinforce the town centre as a destination or starting point for regional bike and walk trails. This will increase Blenheim's tourism potential.
- The river, as a natural element with continuity over a long distance, will offer opportunities for biodiversity connections.



ABOVE FIG. 5-48: Mixed-use development on the northern bank of the Taylor River - Youell House Apartments



ABOVE FIG. 5-49: The Roupo Café by the Taylor River



ABOVE FIG. 5-46: Marlborough's River Queen Restaurant on the Taylor River



ABOVE FIG. 5-47: The amphitheatre on the riverside



ABOVE FIG. 5-50: Aerial photo and close up view of the Taylor River

5.5.2 Amenity of the Taylor river area

The current landscape between the stop banks is dominated by grass. This is partly due to the requirement for access by a digger for purposes of maintenance of the river. This situation should be reviewed to allow for a greater variation in landscaping and more recreational opportunities around the river, including increased public access to it. Figure 5-52 suggests conceptual options for changes to the river cross section.

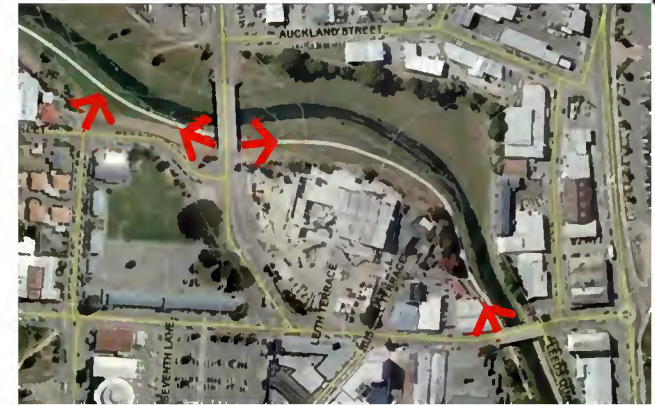
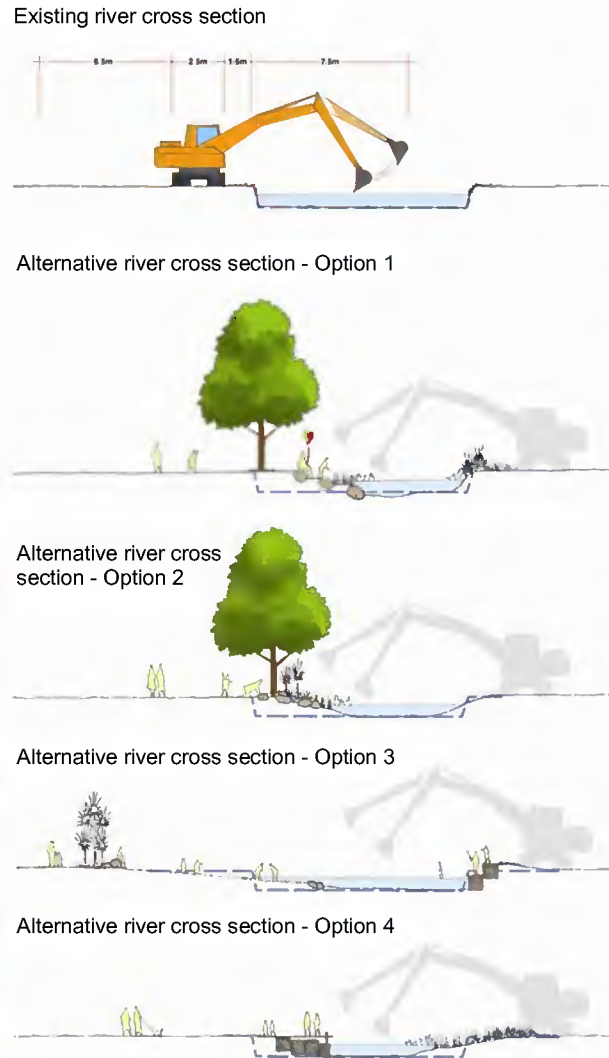
Initiatives:

- Develop a landscape master plan and implementation strategy for changes to Taylor River and associated areas. The scope of this should include landscaping, board walks, jetties, earthworks, parkland and ecological planting, with an educational and interpretation component. Part of this should be ecological plantings 1km apart in the Taylor River corridor to strengthen the Tui To Town project.
- Develop a strategy for the reduction of stream maintenance, mowing and carbon associated cost with the development of 1 ha.



ABOVE FIG. 5-51: Existing riverside predominantly landscaped in grass

BELOW FIG. 5-52: Required access by a digger to both sides of the river for maintenance is the current constraining factor for variations to landscaping in the river area. Four cross sections illustrate different options to increase the use of the riverside for recreational use, whilst retaining accessibility for maintenance.



ABOVE FIG. 5-53: Proposed locations for new pedestrian access points to the river area

5.5.3 Access to the Taylor river area

To maximise the benefits of improved amenity of the river areas for the town centre, it is very important to improve physical and visual links between the town centre and the river areas.

Initiatives:

- Construct more direct access points to the rivers to improve pedestrian connectivity between the town centre and the river areas. Proposed locations for this are shown in figure 5-53: Alfred Street bridge; Hutcheson Street bridge; and John Street (aligning with Seymour Street).
- Install landscape elements and street art to create stronger visual linkages between the Taylor River and Market Place along Market, Seymour and High Streets.
- Market the potential for the many recreational attractions that exist around the Taylor River through information available in the i-Site. This could include opportunities for bike and skate hire, changing rooms, showers and safe luggage storage to create reasons to come and go from the town centre. Connect the opportunities in this town centre part of the river area to existing cycling and hiking trails, such as the Wither Hills Farm Reserve Tracks.

5.5.4 Riverside park on High Street

The site on the riverbank at the end of High Street and immediately north of the amphitheatre has potential to become a place to “hang out” and enjoy Blenheim’s riverside setting.

Initiative:

Create a new public riverside park. The gradient of the slope of the riverbank should be flattened locally and terraces

should be created to allow for easy access and informal seating. Making this a truly public place will be crucial to its success. Development of a building with active uses overlooking this space should be encouraged.

Investigation into the realignment of major underground services is required.



ABOVE FIG. 5-54: Location (left) and concept plan (right) of the proposed riverside park of the end of High Street

LEFT FIG. 5-55: Artist’s impression of the proposed riverside park



ABOVE FIG. 5-56: Example of a park in a similar setting in Queenstown

5.5.5 Riverfront opportunity in Russell Terrace

Another opportunity to increase the interaction with the river exists in the RSA site, where currently the Old Clubs is located. Four options could be identified:

1. Options for adaptive re-use of the **old clubs building**.
The deck on the ground floor of the existing building overlooks the river. This makes the building attractive for a seafood restaurant with al fresco dining, a boutique brewery with a tasting space, or a wine bar. Another option would be visitor accommodation or a boutique office.
2. Long term development site as iconic **hotel** or **office**.
The amenity of its riverside setting makes this site desirable as a location for an iconic hotel or office building. Potential synergies with the Convention Centre could also be attractive.
Any new building should actively relate to the public open space around the river.
3. Long term option for expansion of the **Convention Centre**.
The recently completed Convention Centre could seek to expand to the east in the long term. This would offer the opportunity to develop the extension as a part of the building with ground floor uses that highly relate to the river and makes the most of its riverside setting.
4. Long term development site as public **riverside park**. (overleaf, page 73)

In all options Russell Terrace should be emphasized as a walkway from Alfred Street to this site and through to the Taylor River by means of planting and its materials. An attractive and safe, well-overlooked pedestrian connection between the town centre and the river should be secured.

RIGHT FIG. 5-59: Artist's impression of adaptive re-use of the Old Clubs building as a boutique brewery/ wine bar (option 1). The Convention Centre is shown on the right hand side of the drawing



LEFT FIG. 5-57: Location of the site



RIGHT FIG. 5-58: Proposed public access way to the river



Riverfront opportunity in Russell Terrace -continued

4. Long term development site as public riverside park.

The site could be developed into a public park, which draws pedestrians from the shopping precinct to the river. To that end, Russell Terrace should be extended to connect directly to the riverside walkways. It is crucial to attract development of uses with an active ground floor to overlook this space (refer to figure 5-62). The current side elevation of the convention Centre and the current layout of the area south of this site are not suited to form the edges of a possible park. This park is a potential destination to relocate the palm trees from Market Street, due to the historic connection between the RSA and the introduction of palm trees to Blenheim.

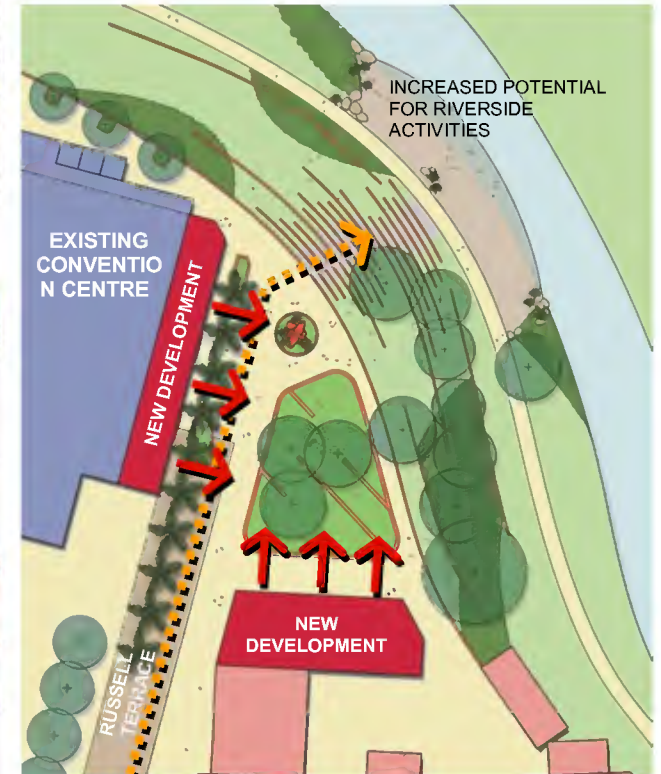
Russell Terrace should be emphasized as a walkway from Alfred Street to this site and through to the Taylor River by means of planting and its materials. An attractive and safe, well-overlooked pedestrian connection between the town centre and the river should be secured.



ABOVE FIG. 5-60: Location of the site



ABOVE FIG. 5-61: Artist's impression of the riverside park as in option 4



ABOVE FIG. 5-62: Conceptual plan for the riverside park option. The required new buildings with strong overlooking capacities located on the edges of the open space are indicated in bright red.

5.5.6 Cost estimation, timeline & prioritisation

Ref#.	page	Action	Admin./ Physical	Timeline: short (<2yrs); medium (2-5 yrs); long (>5yrs)	Priority: high/ medium/ low	Comments/ assumptions
C1	71	Develop small riverside park in location of service station north of amphitheatre: change gradient of riverbank locally to flatter angles; investigate whether realignment of major underground services is required.	physical	Short term	High	
C3	72	All options for Old Clubs site: extend Russell Terrace as walkway from Alfred Street to River	physical	Long term	Low	
C4	72	Option 1 for Old Clubs: Refit existing building into a seafood restaurant, boutique brewery or wine bar	physical	Long term	Low	
C5	73	Option 4 for Old Clubs: develop small riverside park	physical	Long term	Low	
C6	73	Option 4 for Old Clubs site: Attract development sleeving Convention Centre with active use fronting on to proposed riverside park as in C5	administrative	Long term	Low	
C7		Develop a riverside walkway between Sinclair St (northern bank Taylor River) and Dillons Point Rd (western bank Opawa River). Coordinate with possible SH realignment.	physical	Long term	Low	
C8	70	Develop a landscape master plan and implementation strategy for changes to Taylor River and associated areas.	administrative	Short term	High	
C9	70	Implement landscape masterplan item C8: landscaping, board walk, jetty, earthworks, parkland and ecological planting, educational and interperation component, active recreational and art component linking back to the town centre	physical	Medium term	High	
C10	70	Develop a strategy for reduction of stream maintenance, mowing and carbon associated costs with the development of 1 ha. Ecological plantings 1km apart on the Taylor River to strenghten the Tui To Town project	administrative	Short term	High	
O8	70	Installation of landscaping and street art to create stronger visual links between the Taylor River and Market Place along Market St, Seymour St and High St	physical	Medium term	Low	

*) Refers to Blenheim Town Centre Draft Implementation Strategy