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Green fingers create award-winning space for Manukau

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When you stop for a moment to watch children at play in the magical wetland playground, it's not hard to imagine the vision behind Barry Curtis Park.

A mingling of vibrant discovery and interaction with nature and culture reflects the diversity of the community and the environment they cherish. Designed and managed since its inception by landscape architects Isthmus Group in partnership with Manukau City Council, Barry Curtis Park is the culmination of a decade of planning, design and construction, with an investment to date of \$17 million.

This will be one of the country's largest urban parks. Nothing of this size and status has been built in New Zealand since Auckland's Domain was established in the 1840s.

With a distinctly New Zealand flavour, the park has been developed around a cohesion of natural and cultural patterns. Landforms are reminiscent of Maori pa sites, tree plantings conjure thoughts of farming days gone by, while ponga logs and recycled stone walls meld seamlessly with the local geology and landscape.

Spanning a monumental 94 hectares, this multi award-winning park was created to form the heart of Flat Bush – a new town in the midst of development, ultimately to become home to more than 40,000 people. Providing for large-scale



civic, festival and sporting events, Barry Curtis Park will also form part of the town's abundance of open space and in total more than 45 kilometres of protected gully and stream areas will form a network of park-like areas, known as Green Fingers.

Eventually, most houses will be no more than a few minutes walk from a green finger.

Rehabilitating the park environment

Like the development of any new park design, sustainability was an important consideration to ensure enduring ecological processes, biodiversity and productivity. Located at the confluence of

a network of streams draining the Flat Bush catchment, Barry Curtis Park is connected to the wider landscape by numerous ecological and recreational green fingers, providing important future links for wildlife between the park and large native bush remnants such as Murphy's Bush, Point View Reserve and Totara Park.

Preserving and improving the ecological areas were a key element of the park's design. Earthworks were carefully considered and designed to give way to the streams while respecting the natural features of the site. Prudent design of bulk earthworks means no material has been trucked off site and any material unsuitable for earthworks >

and riparian corridors via educational trails and human links to the water. A human 'discovery' area has been incorporated and people can access and interact with the wetland edge at many locations throughout the park.

The playground, also, has been designed to encourage discovery and imaginative play based on the wetland theme.

Enduring vision

As the design unfolded from paper to reality, a design-led process ensured objectives were not compromised.

The goal was to create a regionally significant area for large-scale civic, festival and sporting events – integrated with innovative play spaces and stormwater treatment. One of the park's key strengths is the diversity of activity that can be offered at any one time: the festival lawn and other stage areas cater for major events and multiple performances and for more passive recreation, seats, picnic areas and covered facilities are provided. But importantly, the park provides an opportunity for the community to connect with nature.

Promenades allow pedestrians to orientate through the festival and educational spaces, or past a kanuka stand while enjoying the native planted wetlands and stream corridor.

Future plans for the park include a multi-sports complex, premier sports fields and training facilities.

Already the design and development of the park has earned three gold New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects awards, with judges noting the park

"champions the design-led management project: capturing design potential and coordinating creative solutions. It argues for design as the key to achieving quality." Most recently, the entire northern section of the park won the overall Outstanding Park Award at the New Zealand Recreation Association Awards.

The benefit to the Flat Bush and greater Manukau area are undeniable. Native plantings are becoming established and endemic wildlife is quickly increasing.

With the northern section of the park formally opened in April and the playground in operation for three years, the park has successfully hosted an ethnic food and cultural market, a cross-country fun run and a famous Korean music and dance group.

Community organisations and schools are enthusiastic about using the park's facilities as an educational asset – schools have been provided with information outlining how to use the streams within the park as a learning resource.

Former mayor of Manukau City, Sir Barry Curtis, is proud of the park that bears his name.

"We have always seen ourselves as ordinary people trying to achieve extraordinary things on behalf of a rapidly expanding and multi-cultural community." Sir Barry's dream of energising the city with passive and active recreation resources has been achieved and he is enthusiastic about the park's potential.

"May the Manukau sun continue to shine on this idyllic place".