Kopupaka Reserve is product of a design-led approach drawing together engineering, ecology and cultural values to create a significant new public open space within the rapidly developing area of Westgate in north-western Tāmaki Makaurau.

An integral feature of the Masterplan for the new Westgate Town Centre, Kopupaka Reserve forms part of works implemented to restore the degraded rural Tōtara Creek catchment and to manage stormwater effects of the new development.

Kopupaka Reserve is a new form of hybrid park that challenges expectations around the design and use of streams and wetlands. It illustrates how urban growth can be balanced with ecological restoration, the creation of new public space and development of a strong sense of place informed by Māori cultural values.

Kopupaka Reserve has been recognised nationally and internationally for its success, and sets a new benchmark for Tāmaki Makaurau for placemaking based on environmentally responsive design outcomes.

The name Kopupaka is an ancestral name in this area relating to the meeting point of the Tōtara and Waiteputa Streams, located slightly downstream from Kopupaka Reserve. The name was given by Mana Whenua.

Maori place names in the Whenuapai area (source: Kelly & Surridge 1990)
## KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

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<th>PROJECT TYPE</th>
<th>CLIENT/DEVELOPER</th>
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<td>MANA WHENUA INVOLVED IN PROJECT</td>
<td>NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS – TE KARANGA O TE TUI (MĀORI DESIGN EXCELLENCE) 2017</td>
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<td>22 HECTARES</td>
<td>TE KAWERAU A MAKI</td>
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Westgate Town Centre is one of Auckland Council’s strategic transformational projects that will deliver significant commercial and community infrastructure to meet projected growth within Auckland’s north-west.

Masterplanning of the Town Centre included streets featuring permeable paving, rain-gardens and swales that are integrated within a broader green infrastructure network. Kopupaka Reserve provides the backbone infrastructure for the attenuation and detention of stormwater run-off from the streets and buildings that will be developed for this major new community centre.

The design of the main wetland ponds will include a playground, a botanical weaving garden and a skate park. Cycleways and connections to the residential, town centre and industrial zones were also incorporated into the design planning of the riparian corridors and road networks.

The design of Kopupaka Reserve is based on four major themes: ecology, culture, community and engineering. A collaborative design-led process has ensured that these themes were interwoven into the design, from concept right through to implementation on site.
The Westgate Town Centre masterplan was initially developed in 2010 under the jurisdiction of the Waitakere City Council (WCC), and as such engagement with Mana Whenua was guided by the policies of that organisation. The amalgamation of WCC and other legacy Councils into Auckland Council took place in late 2010. A lack of clarity in that transition process limited regular Mana Whenua involvement in the early design work for the project.

Despite these challenges, the design team has engaged with three Mana Whenua groups on the broader development, including Kopupaka Reserve. These groups are:

- Te Kawerau a Maki
- Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei
- Ngati Whātua Ngā Rima o Kaipara

This engagement highlighted a traditional history of food gathering in this area, including identification of a tuna (eel) gathering site at a historical wetland below the confluence of Tōtara Creek and Sakaria Stream within the site. This Mana Whenua landscape narrative has helped guide the design team’s thinking and is expressed in interpretation signage on site.

Engagement remains ongoing as this area as works continue to develop.
RESTORING MAURI

The surrounding area has a long history of growing market produce, most recently industrial scale strawberry production. Long-term runoff and nutrient overloading from this land use meant the existing water quality and watercourse condition of Totara Creek, Sakaria Stream and their minor tributaries was highly degraded and heavily weed infested.

Whilst the design team possessed an advanced understanding of the importance of Mauri and the cultural values that sit with this core Te Ao Māori concept, this was reinforced by Mana Whenua through engagement. This knowledge encouraged the design team to place restoration of the site’s mauri at the centre of design thinking for Kopupaka Reserve.

The project has completely restored the local stream network, and created a number of stormwater and flood attenuation wetland ponds to filter and manage stormwater run-off and the effects of development.

The creation of large areas of revegetation and riparian planting have restored native species to this area that were absent. This planting will help to manage and naturally improve water quality and significantly improve habitat across the new ecological corridor created.
MAHI TOI CREATIVE FEATURES

Rather than relying upon standalone pieces and integrated design features as ‘decoration’, the form adopted for the major structural features of Kopupaka Reserve is the primary creative and cultural design expression.

In this, the design of Kopupaka Reserve makes a valuable contribution to Māori design in Tāmaki Makaurau by privileging function over form, relying on subtle referencing rather than overt application of a more traditional Māori design vocabulary to express belonging and place.

The overall design speaks simply and subtly to the traditional activities practiced on this site. It pays homage to traditions of rāranga (weaving) and references the architectural form of hinaki (eel-gathering baskets).

The innovative use of the crib-wall system of interlocking timbers is a simple yet sophisticated design response inspired by both of these elements.

Hinaki wahirua – eel basket with two entrances

Interlocking timbers reference rāranga and the form of hinaki
Engagement with Mana Whenua highlighted the need to utilise and restore local native vegetation and ecological habitats that once provided a rich source of māhinga kai (eel fisheries). The design of Kopupaka Reserve features extensive site planting of predominantly native vegetation to contribute to the restoration of the environment. The site also includes garden areas containing a rich variety of traditional Māori weaving plants.

The work done to restore the site’s stream network specifically minimised the risk of erosion to riparian edges. Structures and edge planting have been designed to provide shade for native fish, and pond outlet structures feature fish ladders to encourage ‘natural’ movement to occur and ensure that the ecological vitality of the catchment is maintained.
LESSONS LEARNT

Kopupaka Reserve has been recognised both nationally and internationally for its success and innovation in developing a soft-engineering response to managing the effects of growth in a large-scale greenfield development. Additionally, it has successfully employed a design-led response to restoring a highly degraded environment into one with great ecological value.

Some key lessons learnt on this project included:

**Mana Whenua Engagement**

The design team have noted that a poorly structured engagement programme with Mana Whenua occurred, which has limited the level of engagement. Grant Bailey, lead designer for the Isthmus Group design team notes:

“to effectively utilise Mana Whenua traditions and mātauranga knowledge as inspiration for design, it is essential that design teams are able to engage early in the design process. Early workshop with Mana Whenua representatives and designers establishes an effective collaborative design process. Workshop with Mana Whenua confirms narratives and enables a sense of comfort for the designers, knowing that the creative process is true to cultural values and those narratives are confirmed and supported”

**The value of informed and experienced local designers**

The design team for Kopupaka Reserve contains a number of very senior designers with significant experience within Tāmaki Makaurau. In the absence of a more formalised engagement programme, the design team was able to work with broader Māori environmental values and weave these into the conceptual design for Kopupaka Reserve from the outset.

The design team were able to work with broader Māori environmental values and weave these into the conceptual design for Kopupaka Reserve from the outset, which were strengthened following engagement from Mana Whenua. Incorporating Mana Whenua narratives and history gave the design a richness and sense of place that otherwise may not have been fully developed.
The Auckland Design Manual is a fantastic free resource that’s been created to help you through your design concept and development phase. It’s a practical guide that sits alongside the Unitary Plan. If the Unitary Plan is your rule book, think of the Design Manual as your how to guide - helping you to visualise what you can build in Auckland.

The Design Manual will help you to avoid expensive mistakes by giving you the information you need up front, so that you are well-informed and know how to ask the right questions.

The Design Manual can support you at the following key stages in your development process:

- Inspiration for what you could build on your site
- Understanding the rules
- Writing your brief
- Developing a design
- Hiring your design and build team

Go to aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz to find out more