

2. Analysis & Assessment



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Introduction

Waihi Beach lies on the eastern coastline of the lower Coromandel Peninsula and marks the northern end of the Bay of Plenty. The Waihi Beach township is situated on the coastal flats and sand dunes that run roughly north-west from the northern (Katikati) entrance to Tauranga Harbour. The subject site is the main commercial and retail centre of Waihi Beach approximately 300m inland from the coastline (Figure 2.1). The commercial centre is structured around Wilson Road that runs at a 45 degree angle to the coastline and extends inland in a north easterly direction along Two Mile Creek. The length of the retail strip is approximately 200m. As a result of the street pattern the town centre as a whole is relatively disconnected from the coastline and is surrounded by residential areas.

Wilson Road runs parallel to Two Mile Creek. The Creek has a relatively small catchment area of approximately 550 ha, part of which is due to be diverted, and it includes coastal hills, pastoral land, and sand flats. It is the final 500m of its lower reaches that is bounded by retail to the south and residential to the north, that is the subject of this town centre project. Upstream from the town centre Two Mile Creek passes through a relatively large area of undeveloped land owned by the Western Bay of Plenty District Council. This land comprises sections of open pasture and a large freshwater wetland dominated by tree willows. Beach front development includes beach-front baches of varying age and several limited lineal pocket parks. The current residential development at Waihi Beach is of low density and has spread out in a lineal fashion along the coastline and is concentrated at the northern end of the beach near Waihi Stream and further south along Wilson Road. Development on the northern side of Wilson Road is structured around an adjusted grid pattern while south of Wilson Road development tends to adopt a less formal pattern. Dillon Street connects the northern and southern residential development to Wilson Road across Two Mile Creek by the coastal inlet.

Waihi Beach town centre is the main commercial centre serving the beach communities from Bowen Town and Athenree in the south to the northern end of the Bay of Plenty, with Waihi serving as the sub-regional business hub. This is likely to remain the case in the foreseeable future. An increasingly prosperous Waihi Town just 11 km up the road (with the gold mining activities) and a growing resident population in Waihi Beach will ensure that the town centre will become even more vibrant and attractive, if the planning and design forms a good platform to achieve this vision. Together with the "Defining Our Future" these analysis, concept designs and plans are tools to ensure the achievement of this vision.



2.1. Waihi Beach town centre, on the western-most edge of the Bay of Plenty



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Business centre qualities

Observations from a business point of view show a healthy business centre with an exceptionally high degree of diversity for a town of its size, with a neat and tidy look about it. Overall the main street qualities can be summarized as follows:

- The business situation in the town centre is generally healthy with a well-diversified retail offering for the size of the permanent population.
- Out of season the shops generally seem to operate at a low level but with sufficient turnover to cope with the slow months in the lower season.
- Most shops tend to keep a low stock and limited inventory, which needs frequent replenishing during the peak season. This often occurs from trucks parked on the flush median in Wilson Road or in the access lane to the parking area behind the shops (between nrs. 23 and 27).
- The shop front continuity in the main street is moderate to good with a good variety of displays. In addition the compact format of the main street with its near level contour is highly conducive to walking with everything within easy reach.
- A multitude of narrow driveway entrances to backyards cause some discontinuities and disturbance and could become a safety issue with more intensive use.
- The footpaths are busy during the peak season with (too) limited space for the combined activities.
- In contrast to all the positive attributes above, the street lacks both in focus and secluded space to relax, apart from off street space at "The Porch"

Generally the town centre shows signs of being healthy and well used. It also has good long term growth capacity as current shops only occupy a small percentage of their sites with virtually no multi storey buildings.

Connections — physical and visual

Visual and physical connectivity from the Waihi Beach Town Centre to the beachfront and surrounding residential areas is compromised by building orientation and road alignment as well as an urban structure which tends to mask the presence of the beach. As a result the town centre tends to appear inward focused and has limited obvious coastal character, considering its close proximity to the beach.

There is only one location close to the town centre which would provide an opportunity to connect it to the beachfront, physically and visually. This is the parcel of land adjacent to Dillon Street on the corner of Edinburgh Street, by the bridge. This land connects across the stream to the south bank of Two Mile Creek, west of the Dillon Street Bridge, and along the riparian margins of the stream as it passes the rear of the town centre parallel to Wilson Road. (see view towards the town centre in picture 2.5)



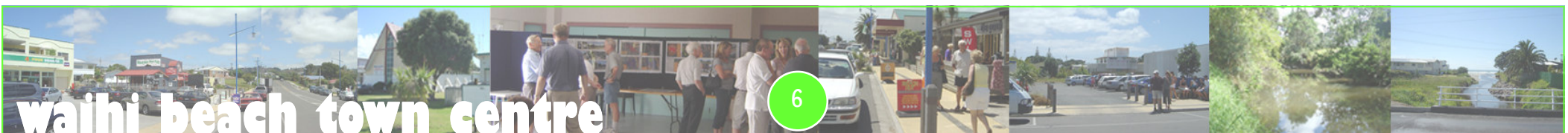
2.2. In the holiday season, loading vehicles have to resort to the alley between nrs. 23 and 27, blocking the entrance to the public car park



2.3. Footpaths turn out to be too narrow for convenient shopping during the busy summer season



2.4. The backdrop to the main street is the surrounding hills (north west), but there are no views to the beach or sea although the views from the Dillon Street bridge (east) is just a stone's throw away



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At the moment the Two Mile Creek is not actually part of the town centre's features as it is tucked away behind buildings, shrub and trees in the backyards. Access too and along the stream corridor does not exist as the town centre properties stretch right to the middle of the stream. It is further obscured at the back of buildings and/or dense vegetation. The northern margin of Two Mile Creek is bounded by a virtually continuous strip of residential land, apart from a parcel of council land east of Dillon Street along the north eastern margin of the stream. This strategically located council land acts as a small flood plain in the form of an 'oxbow' abutting the end of the coastal inlet and rises up to meet Dillon Street by the bridge. Access to the beach can be gained through the reserve via a grass track although it is not marked or emphasised. As there is vacant land on both sides of Two Mile Creek close to the beach it offers the most direct beach access route from the town centre at either Dillon Street or Wilson Road.



2.5. View of Two-mile Creek from the Dillon Street bridge

Stream Character

While Two Mile Creek sits within a natural channel, its margins are highly modified. Fences and hard stand car parking areas have been constructed right up to the margin of the stream channel in some places. Large boulders have recently been dumped and cemented into place along the some sections of the stream bank, presumably to prevent erosion. In these places no natural vegetation is left. Elsewhere the riparian areas comprise a patchy mix of mature trees, mature trees with understorey shrubs below the canopy, semi-permeable and impermeable car parks, tended gardens, rank grassland and waste spaces which have been colonized by weedy shrubs and vines. Some mature trees, e.g., karaka (*Corynocarpus laevigatus*) and willow (*Salix* spp.), provide shade for the stream channel in places, however most of this stream section is unshaded. Dominant adventive species include German ivy, kikuyu, nasturtium, tradescantia, bamboo, lupin, feijoa, tall fescue, Montbretia, hawks-beard, and various garden escapes. There are scattered distributions of several indigenous trees, shrubs and wetland plants; more common species include karaka, karamu (*Coprosma robusta*), pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*), isolepis cernua, Bolboschoenus medianus, giant umbrella sedge (*Cyperus ustulatus*), harakeke (*Phormium tenax*), taupata (*Coprosma repens*), and karo (*Pittosporum crassifolium*). Storm water from many of the adjacent residential properties is piped directly into the stream, which also receives run-off from the car-parking areas. In some cases this run off is piped, while in others it consists of surface flows, which has lead to erosion scouring of sections of the stream banks in some locations. There has been an accumulation of rubbish in the streambed and surrounding banks, which looks unsightly and may be adding to the pollution problems in this water course. The council has erected signs on the approaches to the beach warning people not to bathe in the stream.

Downstream of the Dillon street traffic bridge the tidal banks of Two-mile Creek are more natural, and



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comprise a mixture of adventive and indigenous plants growing on low-lying, hard packed sand. The banks adjacent to Two Mile Creek here are much lower and support a community of tall grasses, reeds and sedges, which overhang the watercourse, and may provide some spawning habitat for fish. Tall fescue, giant umbrella sedge, *bolboschoenus medianus*, *baumea articulata*, *raupo* (*Typha orientalis*) and *oiioi* (*Apodasmia similis*) are all present here. A small 'oxbow' type wetland, dominated by *raupo*, *kikuyu*, and tall fescue has formed in a depression next to the shoreline embankment.

Potential open space links

Although the visual and physical links between the Waihi Beach Town Centre and the beach are limited, there are potential links and open spaces that will both provide access and provide a coastal character for the town. Two Mile Creek is integral component to linking the town centre with the coastline as it provides a direct physical link to the coastline and potential access along it. At present the land use is "commercial" or "future commercial" and mostly in private ownership to the waters edge. However, there is still the potential to create a corridor along the streams margins which would link the town centre to the coastline and extending pedestrian access further up along the Creek across the council owned land to the Waihi Beach School, Kindergarten, Library, and the Community Hall.

In addition to potentially providing access the route would extend through the large freshwater wetland area, providing opportunities for rehabilitation to improve water quality in Two Mile Creek. Access along Two Mile Creek's margins ideally would include multiple links to adjoining spaces along Wilson Road. These could include links to the surrounding commercial buildings and help to create a unified sense of character between the town centre and the beach, emphasizing its coastal proximity. This can simply be achieved through the similar use of materials and tall trees/plantings that exist within the local coastal environment.

In its present state, Dillon Street is a barrier to accessing the beach. There is a potential to do some surface treatments to prioritise pedestrian movement. The introduction of vertical elements such as avenue plantings would give a greater sense of safety for pedestrians crossing Dillon Street to access the beach.

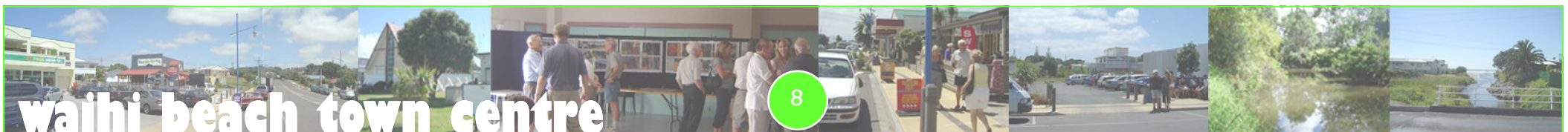
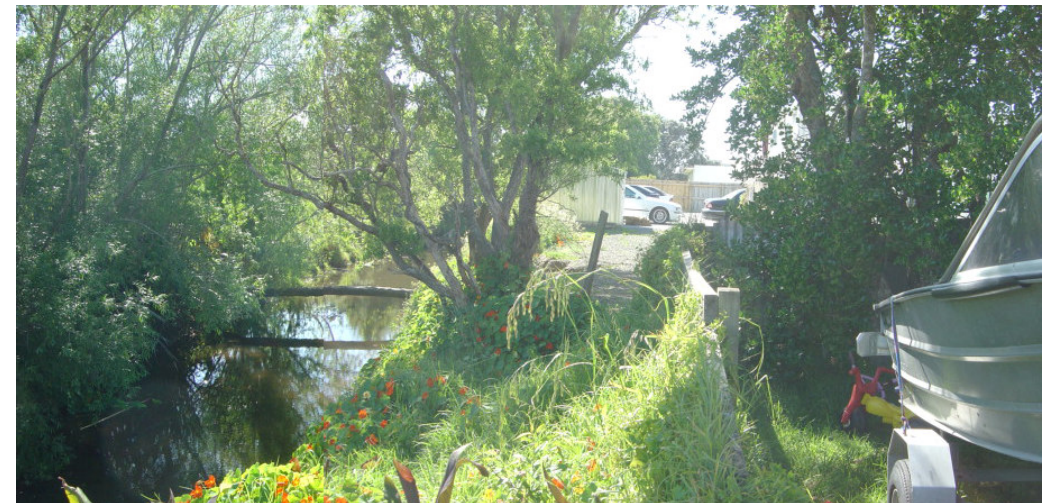
The vacant land to the east of Dillon Street on both sides of Two Mile Creek essentially provides the termination point from the town centre to the coastal area although Dillon Street at present dissects any perceivable connection. However, connecting across Dillon Street to the vacant land owned by the Council could be developed into a passive and recreational space that provides the transition point from the urban environment to the beach area.

Establishing a permanent access way from Dillon Street through this land to the beach would emphasise the connection both physically and visually.

2.6 Views looking up-stream to Dillon Street bridge and the town from the direction of the beach (right)



2.7 And (below) views along the stream behind the businesses showing the undergrowth and current limitations to access



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2.7 Main street connections to the town centre, current (red) and potential future (blue)



2.8 This image highlights the Dillon Street bridge as the crucial street connection linking the town centre to the northern part



Access and circulation

- Wilson Road connects the Waihi Beach town centre with the roundabout that serves as main entrance to the town and indeed the whole beach zone when coming from the north via SH2 and Waihi Beach Road. In the south east Seaforth Road links the town centre to the Athenree area, where another connection with SH2 is located. The structure plan proposes a new road connection, serving as a bypass to the town centre. This road will connect Waihi Beach Road to the town centre via Farm Road with a further connection via The Crescent.
- An assessment of the overall connectivity in the town centre shows a very disconnected situation (figure 2.8). Two Mile Creek divides the town centre into two halves, with the Dillon Street Bridge acting as a crucial link between the two halves. On a higher scale level it means that a large part of the Waihi Beach ward depends on this link for access to the town centre and beyond or is forced to take the longer route via Beach Road, back to the roundabout at the entrance of the town. There are many possible options to improve this poorly connected situation. A second crossing of Two-mile Creek would certainly make the town centre far more accessible for vehicular transport. There is however also the possibility to opt for a new link for pedestrians only. This would encourage foot traffic over car traffic, something that would be very fitting for a place like Waihi Beach with a great deal of tourism related movements through the area. This could eventually be supplemented in the long term by a further street connection across from Scott Street where connections are already in place.
- This leads to an assessment of the accessibility of the town centre and surrounds for pedestrians (and cyclists). This is clearly illustrated by a *pedshed*, a mapping technique that calculates the area (and population or number of properties) within a five minute walk (or 400m) from an activity node. In this instance the point of gravity of the town centre is chosen as point of origin or destination. Figure 2.9 shows the areas in reach by an easy 400m walk. As indicated it is clearly noticeable that the actual catchment falls far short of the theoretical 400 metre circle. Particularly the 'wedge' that is missing in the area in the western end of Edingburgh Street shows the disconnected state of the town centre regarding pedestrian accessibility painfully clearly. However, opening up two strategic connections for pedestrians would improve the situation significantly, as shown in Figure 2.10. Note that these connections are only examples of possibilities and these will be explored further in the sections of this report that deal with design concepts.

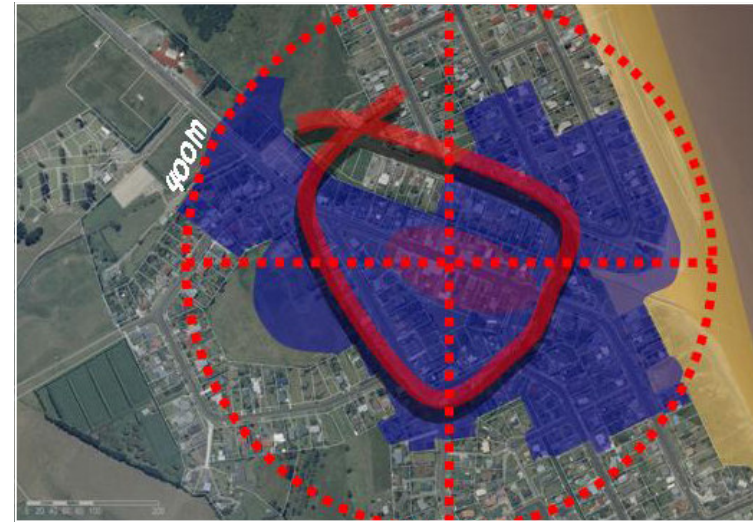


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Main street

In addition to our earlier reflection on the “health” of the retail business on the main street, we have made several further observations over the past 6 months providing a vision on the condition and operation of Wilson Road.

- The town centre part of Wilson Road is well-defined by slight rises on both the western & eastern side of it, with interesting view shafts both when entering as well as leaving the town centre on either end.
- The current environment & ‘feel’ or sense of place sits well with the relaxed beach-side location.
- The footpaths are too narrow in some places, especially where shop wares are spilling over onto the footpath and billboards and/ or advertising takes up public open space.
- A lot of jaywalking takes place. This is not only in the low season when there is limited vehicular traffic, but also in the peak season when the numbers of pedestrians are such that traffic can be brought to a standstill for a short while.
- There are currently no bicycle racks or other bike storage facilities.
- Especially in the busier summer holiday season there is a high parking turnover and demand, but the street seems to be coping quite well. If the public car parking area at the back of the shops (behind nrs. 19-27) on the south side of the street is fully utilised it would easily cope with the peak demand. There is also room for improvement if people would use the car parks more efficiently. It is striking that there is no parking provision towards the eastern end of shopping strip.
- Loading for shops frequently takes place from a trucks parked on the flush median or occasionally, from a vehicle parked in the alley between nrs. 23 and 27. Better provision is needed to make deliveries safe and convenient.
- The atmosphere in the main street could be perceived as hard or even a little harsh with a lack of green leafy elements. For this reason shelter from the sun or the rain is lacking as well as a consistent character or sense of place.
- Generally there is a lack of meeting places of any kind along the street apart from entering the premises of restaurants along the strip.



2.9 Pedestrian catchment of the town centre in the current situation



2.10 Potential pedestrian catchment of the town centre in the event two new pedestrian connections be put in place



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2.11. Collage of the businesses on Wilson Road



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Potential development scenarios

“How will the town centre grow?” one could ask. The following *scenarios*¹ are essentially telling a story of how potential futures could come about. They show that decisions can have surprising and often unwanted outcomes. Decisions need to be taken with great care to avoid unexpected outcomes.

Scenario A. **Consolidation aim**

- The aim is to consolidate the Town Centre
- Due to demand, business flows into the Future Commercial zone
- Parking is in short supply as everybody starts driving to town
- New parking is provided behind the shops and along the streets
- Quality of the main street is diminishing because of increasing traffic with loading in front of the cafes and shops
- Storm water runoff is flowing directly into the stream
- The town centre is becoming really busy and develops its own charm
- With new development becoming really hard, new business eventually jump to “greenfield” locations
- Drawing existing tenants to nice new premises
- It will lead to vacant (older) shops and lower rents, which causes the town centre to lose its vibrancy and sustainability

Overall, this is not the desired outcome.

Scenario B. **Revitalisation aim**

- Another approach of development is to revitalise the Town Centre
- A first step would be to improve street access and traffic circulation
- New streets connect across the stream by the Police Station to Hillview Rd and extending Scott St across the Broadlands Block Reserve
- Improved all round access brings about a tendency for shops to spring up all over the town centre asking for more land
- Leading to a dispersed, car dominated environment with reduced pedestrian amenity & more traffic
- The release of business land leads to the loss of shop front continuity and dispersed parking
- The increasing trading problems require all kinds of remedies like “Band-Aids”
- The net effect is a scattered car dominated town centre, with no continuity of shop fronts and with no appeal

Overall this is not the outcome one would want either.

¹ Scenarios are used to write a story of what could happen if one takes a certain series of actions



2.12 Scenario A—aiming to achieve consolidation



2.13 Scenario B — Aiming to revitalise the town centre



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2.14 Scenario C (above) aim to accommodate expansion whilst Scenario C (right) integrates a range of elements in carefully selected steps



Scenario C. **Expansion aim**

- The following actions allow for expansion, leading to scattered shops, services & apartments rising up over the whole business area and beyond
 - Parking is scattered around on the sites of the new buildings
 - There is a element of oversupply, leading to low rentals, with shops moving to new facilities and current buildings falling prey to “2\$ Shops” or becoming empty
 - Shop front continuity is lost. The town loses its heart and its sense of place and comes out the other end with a scattering of nice new buildings and a set of older poorly kept ones
 - Traffic will be circulating from activity to activity with few pedestrians around
 - The town centre growth outstripped demand as the population did not increase strongly enough
 - Efforts to remedy the situation becomes a “Band-Aid” fixing new problems as they arise, putting in new road connections, providing more footpaths and beautifying the area. However, this will have a limited effect, because it does not address the basic issues of over-supply and dispersed growth
- This is not the outcome one would want either.

Scenario D. **Integrated aim**

Considering the previous scenarios, there is a need for carefully considered steps, working towards an holistic approach

- First focus attention on Wilson Road,
 - provide a pedestrian friendly street environment
 - with refuges at strategic points
 - slow down the traffic by changing the pavement finish, to the extent where cars are tolerated, rather than dominating.
 - restrict street loading to smaller trucks. At designated loading zones. Keep large ones away from pedestrian areas
- Make it a safe people orientated place
 - Shops will spill over onto the footpaths with their wares and cafes and restaurants will be inviting
 - Connections to all directions will improve pedestrian access, especially to the beach
- Retail growth initially still moderate
 - Few complete site redevelopments
 - ensure aesthetically pleasing extensions
 - New developments combine with pedestrian access on selected routes.
- Incentives to consolidate rear parking with fewer entrance lanes



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- Devise measures to utilise the stream to link activities together and making the town centre more accessible
 - Ensure pedestrian densities where it matters – by the shop fronts
- These actions will lead to a contained, vibrant, sustainable and attractive town centre with a strong local character and room to grow over time.

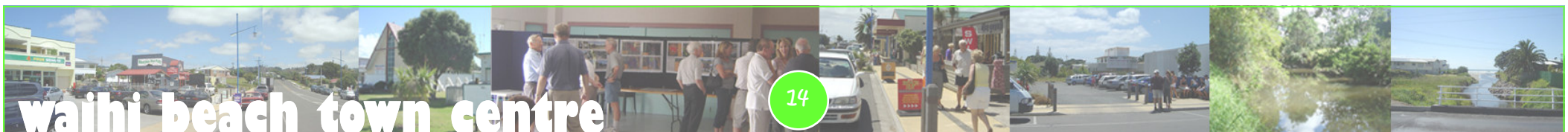
Recommendations and aims from a retail perspective

Having analysed the current business situation in the town centre and having considered the possible consequences of measures in the town centre, some aims from a retail perspective could be formulated.

- Maintain Wilson Road as the key focus for retail, dispersal at this stage can be detrimental as is deduced from the theoretical scenario exercise above.
- In order to strengthen the retail situation of the town centre, Waihi Beach needs to have clear points of difference, special features to remember it by. The town centre needs key focal points to allow for functional, but attractive off-street gathering and meeting places, which could be any of the following:
 - A plaza with activities
 - A square with more formal spaces
 - An alfresco hub of restaurants
 - Important view points or view shafts
 - Some building or structure with height emphasising a key location
- Street crossing points should coincide with and support the key focal point(s)
- The town centre needs intensity, which would emphasise and strengthen its great walkability
- Town centres are competing with malls, therefore:
 - Shop frontages need to be continuous and attractive
 - Signage needs to convey a common theme
 - Amenity has to be inviting and attractive
- In order to define the core, there should be green elements and spaces on/around Wilson Road
- Two Mile Creek can be a key element tying the town centre together
- Establishing a resident population in and around the town centre, e.g. motels and apartments, town houses etc, to smooth the seasonal ebb and flow of the population, whilst providing natural security
- Provide improved amenities: welcoming cyclists and the disabled as well as car users and pedestrians, young and old.



2.15 Retail — making shopping an adventure and enjoyable experience



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2.16 Carefully negotiate ways to connect the town centre to the beach.

It would be important to make use of the stream-edge environment, tying it together with an attractive footpaths network and landscaped relaxing open spaces without disturbing the well-integrated shop-front qualities of the main street

Recommendations concerning Two-mile Creek

The following recommendations focus on broader issues and opportunities to reinforce the coastal character of the Waihi Beach town centre, creating visual and physical links to the beach, rehabilitating Two-mile Creek and celebrating its presence within the township.

- The easiest short term town centre / beach connection is to reinforce the pedestrian link along Wilson Road. Linking the retail centre to the stream banks will enhance the sense of place, urban character, as well as environmental benefit. This option will need to be protected in the short term.
- Any development of the connection between the beach and the town centre, which makes use of the natural corridor along Two Mile Creek, should include some aspects of stream rehabilitation. Weed control and the use of appropriate indigenous plantings to increase the density of streamside vegetation and restore a more natural riparian community are the most appropriate approaches. Rubbish, currently deposited in the streambed, should be removed.
- As identified in the analysis, the un-developed land owned by the Western Bay of Plenty District Council within and surrounding the Waihi Beach town centre provides excellent opportunities to address a number of long-term goals, such as rehabilitation of water quality in Two Mile Creek, improving accessibility and restoring the naturalness of the remaining areas of undeveloped land.

Specific measures to reach these goals should include:

- Weed control and restoration of indigenous plants in the large wetland, and altering the flow of Two Mile Creek to pass through this wetland before it passes the town centre and enters the sea. This would help to remove agricultural runoff from the upper stream catchments. In the long-term, best-practice stream management with regards to riparian fencing and plantings should be encouraged.
- Creating direct pedestrian and cycle access across council owned land between the Waihi Beach School, Kindergarten, Library and Community Hall, which are currently accessed off Beach Road or Queen Street, and the town centre.
- Investigating the use of non-wetland areas for land-swaps to allow the Council to purchase strategic private properties along Edinburgh Street / Dillon Street that improve physical and visual connection between the town centre and the beach.
- Creating direct pedestrian and cycle access along Two-mile Creek that connects at multiple points to open spaces within the town centre.
- Developing the area below the Dillon Street bridge to create a passive recreational space that provides the transition point from the urban environment to the beach area and a permanent access way to the beach.
- Restoration of non-wetland pasture dominated areas, including the corridor which surrounds the pedestrian/ cycle access way, with indigenous trees and shrubs appropriate to this coastal setting.



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Overall key objectives

Building on this foundation of the analysis and subsequent conclusions, a set of key objectives is formulated.

- It should be made possible to be able to both live and work in Waihi Beach, particularly in the town centre. To this end, more practical objectives would be:
 - Enable mixed-use development in the commercial area
 - Make the most of business opportunities without compromising the character of the town
 - Prevent dispersal of business and retail and create the best possible synergies for the town centre to thrive.
- Waihi Beach is competing in a regional and national tourism market. The following actions are aimed at encouraging and supporting tourism
 - Investigate the possibility of a local craft market
 - Investigate linking the town centre with the beach
 - Investigate the possibility of beach facilities to support this link
 - Make it easy, convenient and interesting for pedestrians to get around
- As argued above, the accessibility by any means of transport is fairly poor. The following actions are aimed to improve accessibility and circulation.
 - Design for the ebb and flow of the seasons so that the town centre will be able to operate well at all times
 - Ensure good access in and through the town centre for traffic, public transport, pedestrians and cyclists from all directions and to diverse destinations
 - Allow for adequate parking that would not dominate the image of the town, e.g. through over-flow parking in season
- Establish and / or develop a local design theme
 - Isolate selected key elements to develop a significant and recognisable point of difference
 - Initiate actions to create interesting activity nodes
 - Develop visual connections with the surrounding hills as well as the beach
- Respect, protect and develop the natural environment in a sustainable way
 - Enable activities and access which will enhance the local stream as well as improve the aquatic environment

2.17 Images reflecting on the key objectives

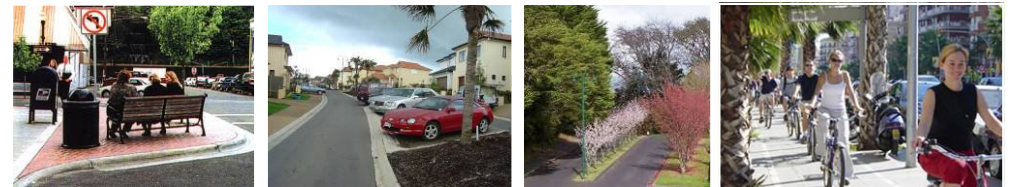
Accommodation and street scenes with a range of activities and uses



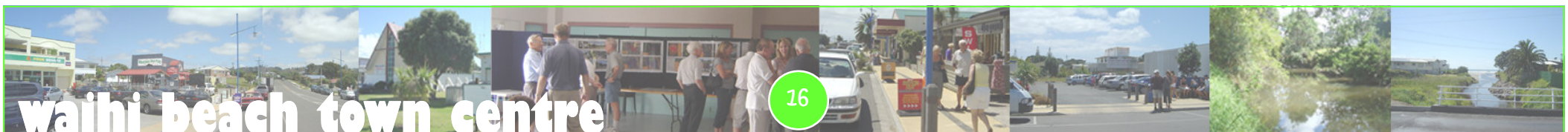
Attractive environment for locals and visitors alike



Street design to offer safe environments for pedestrians, cyclists and cars with parking



Building up the village character with compatible contemporary design and amenity



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2.18 *Protect and enhance the stream by improving water quality before it reaches the stream and build in attractive amenities for everybody to enjoy*



- Ensure that stormwater flows from streets and parking areas are suitable for release into the drainage system
- Put actions and measures in place to prevent flooding

