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5.01 Benchmarks

At the outset of the master plan design process, National and international benchmark examples were considered for their relevance to the Botanic Gardens master plan project. Examples were discussed with the Project Design Team to understand, compare and position the unique identity and theme of the Botanic Gardens. The examples were chosen for their distinguishing features, quality and coherence of landscape interventions and structuring devices, and any obvious overall character or flavour.

The examples include:

Bordeaux Jardin Botanique

Dyck field

Montjuic Jardin Botanique

Van Dusen

Pukekura Park

These benchmark examples are not all Botanic Gardens, but have provided some insight during the master plan design process in terms of contemporary themes, organising elements and spatial structuring devices.

Pukekura Park is an example of a park (not a Botanic Garden) within New Zealand that has been successful in drawing national and international recognition for its character and identity as a New Zealand garden. It has a variety of garden settings within a native bush framework, and its maturity has given it an intensity and enclosure focussed around the central lake. Pukekura Park has marketed successfully on its 'festival of lights', attracting visitors from New Zealand and overseas during the summer months.

Auckland Botanic Garden



Hamilton Gardens



5.02 Comparison with Hamilton Gardens

Hamilton Gardens provides a useful comparison for the Auckland Botanic Gardens in terms of spatial analysis. Although the Hamilton Gardens does not fulfill the same function, in that it is not a Botanic Gardens and does not have the same emphasis on the study and identification of plants, it adopts some basic spatial principles in terms of wayfinding, sequencing and enclosure for a 'collection of garden styles'.

The aerial photos on this page are shown at the same scale. The hatched areas show the 'gardens and collections' sitting within a broader park setting. At Hamilton Gardens, this area is consolidated, intensive and enclosed.

Hamilton Gardens uses a system of gateways providing options for visitors to move from one garden to the next. The gardens are contiguous but there is no consistent element linking the gardens together. Instead, the gardens each have their own unique style including the paving and the structuring devices used to enclose each garden so that it can not be viewed from another garden. The amount of enclosure means that the entry and exit point is legible for each garden, but there is no defined route.

An attempt is made to hide service areas down in trenches at Hamilton Gardens, so that they do not disrupt pedestrian movement. Conversely, service paths are integrated at the Auckland Botanic Gardens, and continual activity provides the feeling of an interactive working garden that is a positive point of difference for ABG.

Overall, the Auckland Botanic Gardens has a different character where the gardens are more integrated with the landscape and visible from multiple viewpoints. It would not be possible to invest in the same degree of infrastructure as Hamilton Gardens to completely enclose each space, and would not be entirely appropriate in this context. Aside from courtyard areas closest to the visitors centre, the landscape framework creates the most effective structuring device.

The concept of grouping gardens off 'nodes' can translate to the Auckland Botanic Gardens. An entry and exit from a single gateway provides a logical wayfinding sequence.



5.03 Draft Management Principles

(Regional Parks Management principles adapted for Auckland Botanic Gardens)

Management principles

The master planning of the Auckland Botanic Gardens is guided by the objectives and policies of the operative Auckland Botanic Gardens Management Plan (2001), as well as the following set of management principles largely based on those contained in the Draft Regional Parks Management Plan (2009), but applied to the context of the Gardens:

Principle 1: Protecting the values and worth of regional parks.

Protecting and enhancing the value and role of the Auckland Botanic Gardens in managing plant collections for the purposes of conservation, education, recreation, scientific and horticultural research.

And/or?

Protecting and, where appropriate, enhancing the heritage elements, plant collections and open spaces because of their botanical, landscape, cultural, recreational and educational value and contribution to the quality of visitor experiences at the Gardens.

Principle 2: Protecting the integrity of Auckland's landscapes.

Protecting and enhancing dominant landscape features and viewshafts within the Gardens to assist wayfinding [orientation] and appreciation of the landscape setting and spatial qualities of the Gardens.

Principle 3: Protecting the integrity of the regional parks.

Fostering relationships with public agencies, adjoining communities and landowners to protect the integrity of Gardens from environmental threats and to enhance the landscape setting and recreational, educational and aesthetic experience of the Gardens.

Principle 4: Recognising and providing for the relationship of tangata whenua with ancestral taonga.

Recognising and providing for the relationship of tangata whenua with ancestral taonga, including providing opportunities to involve tangata whenua in the planning for and interpretation of traditional plant collections, relevant infrastructure development and habitat restoration and enhancement programmes.

Principle 5: Promoting and facilitating wise stewardship of the parks.

Promoting and facilitating wise stewardship of the Gardens through public education programmes and implementing relevant bylaws and regulations.

Protecting and enhancing native biodiversity and ecosystems within the Gardens, including the conservation of the native forest area and waterways as habitat for a range of indigenous flora and fauna.

Principle 7: Protecting the park heritage features and telling the region's stories.

Promoting public awareness and understanding of the Gardens' role and increasing visitor appreciation of plants and the environment through education and interpretation opportunities.

Principle 8: Minimising the impacts of development.

Providing the limited development of infrastructure, buildings and facilities for operational, recreational, and educational purposes that are appropriate to the garden setting and do not compromise the quality of the visitor experience at the Gardens.

Principle 9: Providing a range of compatible quality outdoor visitor experiences.

Providing a range of visitor experiences and opportunities which are compatible and consistent with the garden setting and protection of the unique plant collections and native biodiversity of the Gardens.

Principle 10: Managing the regional parks network as a whole and as part of a network of regional open spaces.

Managing Auckland Botanic Gardens as the region's premier botanic gardens [major destination for the enjoyment and study of plants] and an integral part of the regional parks and regional open space network.

Principle 11: Guaranteeing freedom of access to a spectrum of core activities.

Guaranteeing access to the range of activities and facilities provided at the Auckland Botanic Gardens free of charge where they are covered by the regional rate, except where additional services are required or where there is exclusive use of the Gardens resources.

Principle 12: Limit discretionary activities.

Managing the Gardens to ensure that discretionary activities do not conflict with its core values and visitor enjoyment.

Principle 13: Facilitating public knowledge and safe enjoyment of the parks.

Promoting the Gardens and improving visitor safety and security through information and visitor services.

Principle 14: Providing a ranger service.

Providing and maintaining visitor services to facilitate visitor enjoyment, awareness and understanding of the Gardens and to support communication of its vision and key goals.

Principle 15: Applying adaptive and responsive management

Ensuring that the plant collections and range of activities and facilities provided at the Gardens remain relevant to the needs of the regional community through consultation, monitoring and research programmes.

Principle 16: Facilitating community participation.

Encouraging and facilitating community involvement in the planning for and management of Auckland Botanic Gardens through formal partnerships, such as the Friends of the Auckland Botanic Gardens, liaison with public agencies and specialist organisations, and through volunteer partnership programmes.

Principle 17: Being a good neighbour.

Fostering relationships with adjoining communities and landowners on matters of mutual interest, including public access, pest animal and plant control, habitat restoration and enhancement, and the maintenance and enhancement of amenity and landscape values.

Additional principles:

Transport/Connectivity:

Facilitating and supporting improved connectivity for all transport modes to the Gardens, including public transport services, walking and cycling.

Engaging/Working in partnership with the community and relevant public agencies to influence travel choices by implementing a travel plan for the Gardens and improving information on travel options.

Sustainability

Minimising environmental impacts through sustainable horticulture practise; displaying and promoting plant species suitable for the Auckland region; contributing to increased native biodiversity; and promoting sustainable travel options to the Gardens.

Design principles

In addition to these management principles, the master plan will be developed using the following key design principles:

1. Create a legible framework for the Botanic Gardens to organise plant collections and optimise visitor enjoyment.
2. Create an interesting and unique visitor experience by developing a South Pacific theme expressed in the overall landscape framework.

3. Showcase plant collections from New Zealand and around the world selected for their relevance to Auckland, within the broader landscape structure of the Gardens and the unique setting of native trees, bush and waterways.
4. Showcase sustainable solutions, and enhance environmental protection throughout the Gardens by applying low impact design principles and identifying education and interpretation opportunities.

5.04 Visitor Profile (Event research summary 2008)

This is an interpretation of market research entitled 'Event Research 2008' conducted by Captivate in March & April 2008.

The objective of the research was to understand what events or attractions would increase visitation to the Botanic Gardens. It is important that attractions contribute towards achievement of the Botanic Gardens vision.

The current objectives are outlined below.

Botanic Gardens vision & objectives

The Botanic Gardens vision is to become:

"A spectacular South Pacific Botanic Garden that is widely recognised for its outstanding plant collections, Auckland regional identity and the interest inspired in the community".

The Botanic Gardens 'Marketing Plan 2004' included a re-evaluation of the role of the Gardens and contains the following objectives:

- Maximizing social and health benefits derived from the practice and enjoyment of gardening;
- Providing opportunities for public involvement, eg. Volunteerism, workshops and other events;
- Enhancing public perceptions of the significance and importance of plants and their cultivation through interpretation and community education programmes and events;
- In collaboration with partners, promoting greater awareness of the value of plants;
- Supporting programmes that effectively promote and conserve plants and natural ecosystems.

What makes the Gardens a unique destination in Auckland is the wide diversity of labeled plants in beautiful gardens, and the ability to provide relevant ideas and expert advice on plants and gardening! The underlying objective is to inspire and educate people about plants, best gardening practice and the environment

Rating of attractions

In summary respondents feel that regional parks are fine just as they are, but more events would get people to parks more frequently.

Overall having one-off events at parks in the city of residence of respondents was considered more appealing compared to permanent attractions.

However if the attraction was at the Botanic Gardens then the more permanent attractions are ranked higher than events.

Appeal of attractions if held at the Regional Botanic Gardens

Floral gardens rated highest of ABG attractions – the perception is that there is nowhere else in Auckland to see these.

Other high rating attractions in order:

- Covered Garden
- Light lighting
- Edible garden
- Botanical discovery centre
- Sculpture in the Garden
- Flower and Garden show

A traditional Maori garden rated relatively low – the appeal of such could be increased by adding additional attractions to the garden such as music. The Maori Garden messages could be conveyed through events that for example could focus on traditional edible uses. Medicinal uses etc and possibly through music that also attracts people.

The overall result for Botanic Gardens was that gardens rated above events, almost the opposite result of that for parks.

There is a marker difference in what attracts people to Bg compared to parks – therefore BG should stick to its core business e.g. floral displays etc.

Top four attractions

Respondents were asked to rank their top four attractions without considering where the attraction was located.

Those that rated an attraction in their top four were asked how many times per annum they thought they would visit it.

Frequency of visiting attractions if held at the Botanic Gardens

The most frequently visited events at Botanic Gardens would be:

- Kids events

- Covered gardens
- Flower & garden show
- Gardeners market
- Edible garden

The value of events can be diluted if they are held too often as uniqueness disappears.

Holding Stoneleigh Sculpture in the Gardens every second year is probably the right frequency.

Attractions that will increase visitor numbers

To calculate: event attendance multiplied by intended visit frequency.

The attractions that will most increase visitation are in order:

- Kids events
- Music
- Film nights
- Gardeners market
- Night lighting

Kids events appear to be the most effective in attracting large numbers of people. They also create long term visitation compared to older visitors. (note: family visitation is dropping across parks)

Sculpture in the Gardens (SSitG) rated 11th – as this event was considered very successful the ten that rated higher could have wide appeal. (note: SSitG combined other attractions such as music).

Based on this research it appears a Flower & Garden Show holds little appeal – just 10% of the population rated it as 1 of the top 4 attractions. It is also noted that a flower show provides little interaction of visitors with the Botanic Gardens.

Best results could be achieved by combining different attractions.

The next question is how to get the message out to the most people possible e.g. there is more 'noise' in the film market so therefore it is more challenging that say the sculpture event.

As Botanic Gardens are a regional facility it is important to attract visitors from distant places such as North Shore. Interestingly SSitG is the 2nd most popular attraction for North Shore people.

Auckland City people find the following most appealing:

- Kids events
- Film nights
- Music events

It appears difficult to attract people from Waitakere City.

Manukau City people have a strong demand for kids events. The Covered Garden holds some appeal for locals – a high number (25%) said they would visit such a facility but the frequency was low. It would be necessary to hold events to increase numbers.

It is noted that Auckland lacks free events in a covered environment – it can be argued that such a facility is needed to serve the needs of Aucklanders. A covered facility could focus on events outside the summer months.

A covered garden holds more appeal than SSitG, and this appeal would increase further if coupled with other events such as music.

Retaining control

It is necessary to return always to the fundamental values of the Botanic Gardens when determining which events to hold i.e. those that will best deliver the conservation and educational objectives. For example visitors should learn about conservation whether they realize it or not.

To this end it is best to retain control of events so that outcomes are achieved – therefore growing visitation and engagement with our messages. This does not necessarily mean running them ourselves but could be contracted whilst retaining control.

Botanical events related to these objectives could include: 'The Symphony of Flowers' – themed gardens & music event.

Retail space

The current use of the retail space is just meeting existing visitor needs. Opportunities for alternative uses should be investigated to attract new visitors to BG.

Using the space as an event centre contributes more appeal to visitor experience than using it for retail.

People want covered events! If the space is used as a flexible space enabling a range of attractions linked to Botanic Garden outcomes it should attract additional visitation as well as increasing visitor engagement with Botanic Gardens messages. Interactive activities in particular are in demand.

Exhibitions such as the current art displays could be integrated into the programme of events for the centre provided they are aligned with the gardens objectives. Criteria would need to be established to determine those events that are appropriately aligned with our objectives.

An example of a suitable event could be 'Storytelling' (currently run at Aotea centre) linked to plant or conservation stories.

Conclusion

The number one issue on our parks is awareness. Without specific marketing funding an increase awareness needs to be events led!

For Botanic Gardens the objective is to get more people through the gates so that they form long term relationships with plants and the environment.

5.05 Marketing objectives (ABG Marketing Plan Summary 2008)

1.0 Role of the Botanic Gardens

Traditionally the role of botanic gardens has been to provide for the study and identification of plants. Today however, increasing pressure is being placed on Botanic Gardens around the world to provide a destination whose product and services are relevant to today's needs, expectations and lifestyle trends. Not responding to customer needs will potentially result in a decline in visitor numbers and potential benefits not being realized by those that do visit.

Research of Botanic Gardens visitors indicates that most visit for recreational purposes. To grow visitation it remains important to continue enhancing the quality of visitor experience through improved services and product. Events remain a key element of this strategy. Recent research indicates that there is considerable demand for events pitched at children and families.

A re-evaluation of the role and function of the Gardens has recently been undertaken which recognises the worldwide priorities of today's botanic gardens, including objectives such as:

- Maximizing social and health benefits derived from the practice and enjoyment of gardening;
- Providing opportunities for public involvement, eg. Volunteerism, workshops and other events;
- Enhancing public perceptions of the significance and importance of plants and their cultivation through interpretation and community education programmes and events;
- In collaboration with partners, promoting greater awareness of the value of plants;
- Supporting programmes that effectively promote and conserve plants and natural ecosystems;

2.0 Garden's Brand

The core characteristics that will define the Gardens Brand are:

- Innovator of contemporary plant and gardening ideas;
- Supportive, friendly expert – offers the "I can do it" about gardening and plants;
- Is natural – but man made / structured i.e. the best possible;
- Health, wellbeing, rejuvenating;
- Vibrant and dynamic;
- Quality, integrity, authentic, best possible.

Product, services and communications to be consistent with the Gardens brand. This includes products and services of license holders.

**What makes the Gardens unique as compared to other destinations in Auckland and for that matter NZ, is the ability to provide relevant plant and gardening ideas for the homeowner, together with expert advice. While the expert advice is already available and will be enhanced in delivery of workshops, there is still some work to be done in order to provide garden and plant ideas that people can apply to their own lifestyle situations. Underlying the Garden's positioning is the objective to*

inspire and educate people in best gardening practise (growing the right plants in the right way).

3.0 Positioning Statement

The brand positioning is the "market space" a brand is perceived to occupy in people's minds; the part of the brand identity that is to be actively communicated in a way that meaningfully sets it apart from the competition.

The positioning will focus mainly on the Gardens being a place of garden and plant ideas and support. The Gardens' positioning statement (byline) is "**Where Ideas Grow**".

4.0 Marketing Goal

The Botanic Gardens vision is to become:

"A spectacular South Pacific Botanic Garden that is widely recognised for its outstanding plant collections, Auckland regional identity and the interest inspired in the community".

5.0 Objectives

- Increase awareness and improve perceptions of the Gardens regionally, nationally and internationally and position uniquely as a destination of great gardening ideas (and quality recreational time?);
- Define the Gardens' key customer segments;
- Increase visitor numbers of target customer groups and quality / benefit of visit;
- Increase capacity through volunteer hours;
- Increase revenue for the Gardens through various means including leveraging from events, relationships and utilisation of Huakawaka and the Gardens as a venue / location for 'events', sale of merchandise and art etc;
- Increase support for, and from, the Friends of the Botanic Gardens (how?);
- Planned development of the Gardens which is consistent with the brand and is customer focussed;
- Recognition as leading plant and gardening trends in Auckland, influencing 'best gardening practice' – growing the right plants in the right way.

5.0 Target Markets

- Locals (especially those living in the Manukau area)
- Garden Dabblers (amateur / 'new' gardeners)
- Family groups (not a homogeneous group – could be included under all identified customer segment groups)
- Tourists, domestic and international but focus on the Interactive Traveller;
- Asian (and other major ethnic groups)
- Landscape design students and new graduates
- Parents of students whose children visit Gardens for educational programs
- Garden enthusiasts (active – especially potential Friends volunteers)

SWOT:

7.0 Marketing Challenges

- Weather (bad weather = decline in visitor numbers)
- Competition from other destinations and leisure activities
- Lack of awareness vs lack of marketing budget to promote
- Wrong / poor perception, including perceived difficulty in terms of distance
- Considered 'infinitely delayable' (with exception during events)
- Lack of convenient public transport
- Motorway access for people travelling north
- Funding – ability to achieve expectations with limited funds (expected to achieve sponsorship in a recessive market)
- Quality vs quantity? - Increased visitor numbers? Vs quality of visitor experience vs who would benefit most from visiting and how does that benefit the Gardens? Council? Auckland region?

8.0 Marketing Opportunities

Opportunities for the Gardens are numerous and need to be prioritised based on the Gardens goal and objectives vs internal capability. Opportunities include: revisiting the gardening workshops to meet common gardening problems or trends, and development of lifestyle courtyards to provide ideas and inspiration; growing the role of Huakaiwaka and the Gardens to increase revenue; increase promotional activity esp. targeted to appeal to key audience(s); other opportunities for increased revenue through branded merchandise etc; increase the Gardens share of overseas tourists through a closer relationship with the tourism sector and online links with sites such as Tourism NZ etc.

9.0 Marketing Strategies for 2008 -

These are in brief:

- Master Plan developed in conjunction with key stakeholders (development of the Gardens product)
- Research – customer segmentation;
- Develop a marketing mix aimed at increasing awareness aligned with branding / desired positioning among customer segments and general;
- Develop and implement an events strategy.....;
- Networking opportunities to increase support for the Gardens.....;
- Develop and promote a corporate 'conference' / 'events' package/s with view to increasing revenue.... (other opportunities for revenue increase)...
- Increase the Gardens volunteer contribution....
- Improve interpretation including development of a network of self-guided interpreted walks, aimed at moving people off the ring-road and meeting needs in terms of botanical / gardening interest and time

11.0 Evaluation (Success Indicators) –

To measure the successful implementation of the Marketing Plan, the following performance indicators will be used:

- Auckland Botanic Gardens recalled in the top 10 destinations in the Auckland region (AC Neilson)

- Support given in the budget process for marketing activity and including capital work expenditure
- Actual development of the gardens and services (eg. workshops, events etc) align with brand and wants / needs of targeted customer groups;
- An increase in visitor numbers (as per objectives) and an increase in 'new' people visiting the Gardens and attending workshops and events;
- People actively seeking out information about the Gardens, which may be seen through increased visits to the BG website, calls for information or brochures etc.
- An increase in tourist numbers and especially that of the Interactive Traveler
- People other than the enthusiasts will seek out advice from Gardens' staff
- More people seen in the currently under-utilised areas of the Gardens (outer zones)
- Increased licensee turnover
- Mutually beneficial partnerships developed with onsite concessionaires (retail and café), EFS organisers, Tourism industry representatives including Enterprising Manukau, and at least two sponsors
- Sponsorship base and contributions made by partners increase that add to the financial resources available to the Gardens
- Increased positive media coverage about the Gardens and what is on offer
- People's perceptions of the Gardens (visitors & non-visitors) will be positive and in keeping with our desired positioning
- Low staff turnover and high calibre, relevantly trained or experienced people, actively seek work at the Gardens.
- Increased number of visitors on wet days
- Workshops held are well attended by the target audience