



Hawke's Bay Regional Council

Wairoa Floodway Design Phase




Landscape Scoping Assessment

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REV	DATE	DETAILS
1	30/07/2025	Landscape Scoping Assessment Final
2	8/09/2025	Added impacts on recreation

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1 INTRODUCTION

This scoping assessment is for the purpose of forming part of a resource consent application under an Order in Council (OIC) process. The assessment is an early-stage evaluation of the proposed floodway and stopbank upon the landscape. It describes existing character and views and identifies potential effects.

The general design of the stopbank proposes a height that varies from 0-3 meters in height. Roadways cross or run atop the stopbank in locations on Ruataniwha and Waihirere Roads. The floodway is excavated in locations to a maximum depth of 1.5 meters below ground level.

The Wairoa River is considered an attribute of particular cultural, environmental and recreational significance in the landscape. The analysis assesses the composite landscape, giving particular emphasis to values and effects directly associated with the Wairoa River.

2 EXISTING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The spatial extent of the landscape is the agricultural plains of the Wairoa Valley. Within this wider landscape, this analysis considers two character areas.

1. The flat, agricultural landscape between the wide bend of the river is characterised by wide vistas across the landscape broken up by shelterbelts, fence lines, residences and small farm buildings.
2. The township's edge where land parcelisation becomes smaller, with single-family homes and garden style plantings; recreational park space; a campground; and urban features (such as footpaths, parking areas and fences) marking the transition between town and countryside.

2.1 RUATANIWHA ROAD, WAIHIRERE ROAD AND RAILWAY ROAD

The Wairoa River corridor includes the river, banks, and river reserve. It has a modified appearance and lacks high natural character attributes, generally.

The landscape area spanning Ruataniwha, Waihirere and Railway Roads have a rural, agricultural character.

The river runs adjacent to Ruataniwha Road. The reserve elements include a mix of exotic and native vegetation with numerous trees lining the river. Small pockets of rural residential parcels on the western side of Ruataniwha Road are characterised by lawns, paddocks, agricultural fields and residential houses and sheds. Ecological features contributing to naturalness have been degraded due to the removal of natural habitat for houses, fences, lawns and specimen trees.

The physical character of rural area flanking the three roads is flat, small scale agricultural lands with fences, hedgerows and irrigation channels following the geometry of the fields, roadsides and driveways. Large specimen trees mark driveways and homesteads. Landscape features include large trees (eucalyptus and willows) in mid views, and views of high hills along the northern horizon line.

The river is mostly not viewable from Ruataniwha Road due to the flat nature of the landscape and tall vegetation along the river banks, however it becomes visible at the far western side of Ruatahiwha Road, viewed over lawn from a private residence.

There are no river views from Waihirere or Railway Roads and the connection to the river is imperceptible as the flat topography, specimen trees and hedgerows make it difficult to understand where riparian vegetation or the river sit within the landscape. Low hills sit along the horizon in the background.

2.2 CHURCHILL AVENUE AND MARINE PARADE

Churchill Avenue has distinctly small-town neighbourhood qualities sitting along the urban fringe of the town. Single family homes are more tightly situated on smaller parcels with organized low hedges, lawns and specimen trees surrounding them. A dedicated footpath lines both sides of the roadway. Although the roadway looks directly north towards the river, the flat nature of the landscape creates a short vista in this location and dense vegetation at the river's edge make it difficult to view the river.

As Churchill Avenue turns along the river, the perceptual character transforms to feel more park-like and naturalised. Lawn and evenly spaced specimen trees front the roadway with dense naturalised trees and vegetation in the river reserve.

As the road bends to become Marine Parade the river front changes character once again. In this location it is highly modified and disturbed due to the removal of all native vegetation. Physical characteristics include a flat, uniform ground plane of mowed lawn with evenly dispersed exotic trees providing islands of shade within the park. The character feels distinctly park-like and public. Viewsheds open to the river around the Ski Club. The southside landscape flanking Marine Parade is residential in this location.

The eastern side of Marine Parade is mostly commercial with a mix of park-like and civic features on the north including a community centre and campground. These facilities form a core of activity.

Along the western length of Marine Parade the river is viewable through the open ground plane of the park. Buildings and vegetation in the foreground block views along the central stretch of Marine Parade. Playground features and earth mounds provide filtered views to the river in Wairoa's Destination Playground.

3 VIEWING AUDIENCE AND CONTEXT

There are four key viewing audiences: residential property owners, motorists, recreationalists and commercial establishments. The key resource management issue is that the proposed stopbank will intrude upon views of the river, detracting from its visual amenity, aesthetic values and recreational use. In some locations the view of the stopbank from the road is seen briefly as the road rises over it and descends. Where the stopbank runs alongside the road, it often blends into the horizontal character of the landscape. The recreational connection to the river is weak in most locations, with the exception of the Water Ski Club, Alexandra Park and the Wairoa Playground at the eastern side of Marine Parade. In these locations the river has higher viewing and recreation amenity value.

3.1 OPEN VIEWS

This assessment identifies four viewshafts that have open views of the river. Three of these are along Marine Parade looking northwest; and one is on the western side of Ruataniwha Road, looking northwest.

- 1 View type: Properties along the western side of Marine Parade are separated from the river by a park space. Views over lawn and below tree canopy show the river in the mid-distance. The river provides the parkland with a bucolic feel in the mid-distance. The visual amenity and aesthetic values are moderate-high.
- 2 View type: Public viewers along the eastern side of Marine Parade look over a parking area and a playground to the river. The river can be seen through play equipment, earth mounding and over lawn. As the topography rises along the road to meet the overpass, views of the river become more expansive. The river provides a pleasant backdrop for the park. The visual amenity and aesthetic values are moderate.

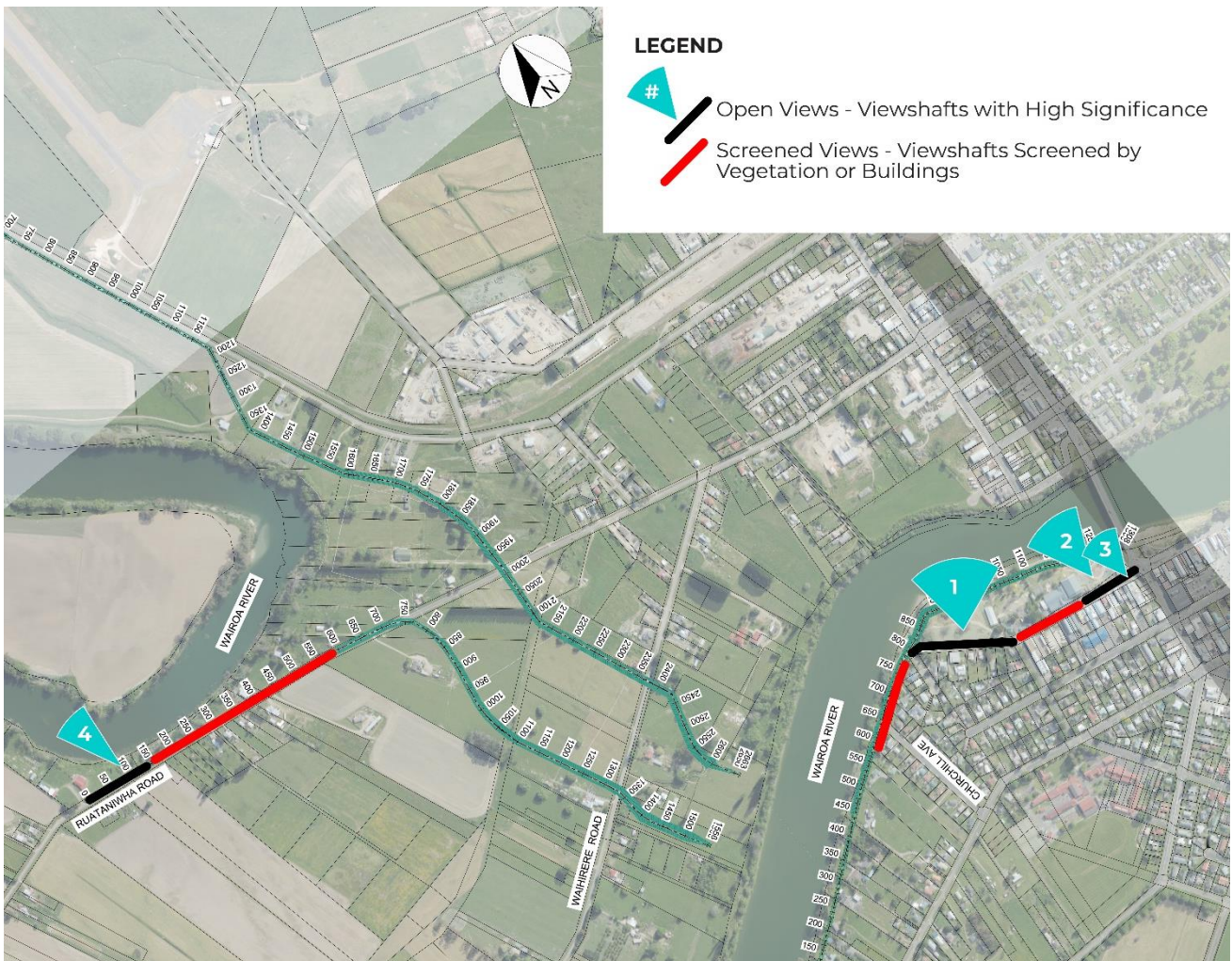
- 3 View type: Commercial viewers along the eastern side of Marine Parade are further set back from the river and their views are screened by intervening vegetation and vehicles on the road and in the parking area. The visual amenity and aesthetic values are low-moderate.
- 4 View type: Properties on the far western side of Ruataniwha Road are separated from the river by lawn. Whereas denser vegetation lines the river just to the east, riverside vegetation in this location is currently low and sparse. However, young plantings along the roadway and river indicate that vegetation will screen these views in the future. The visual amenity and aesthetic values are low-moderate, considering the future vegetation growth that will begin to screen views.

3.2 SCREENED VIEWS

Ruataniwha Road and Churchill Ave: In locations where vegetation screens the viewer from the river, specimen trees and high vegetation blocks mid-distance views. In these locations the vegetation can create an enclosed quality and experience. These views are limited to the specimen trees along the roadway, edge plantings and lawn. The visual amenity and aesthetic values are low-moderate.

Marine Parade: In locations where buildings screen the river, views are of the Riverside Motorcamp, parking areas and the Wairoa Community Centre. Vehicles and specimen trees create an urban setting with human activity energising the space. In some places buildings form simply a visual barrier (low value), while in others (namely, the Community Centre) the impacted visual amenity is a positive, activated community scene (low-moderate value). Overall, the visual amenity and aesthetic values are low.

Figure A: Map of proposed stopbank location, open and screened viewshafts of the river.



4 LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

4.1 RUATANIWHA ROAD, WAIHIRERE ROAD AND RAILWAY ROAD

The proposed changes will impact the land use most notably in the area of Ruataniwha and Waihirere Roads where the new stopbank landform will alter how the productive landscapes are used within the floodway. Currently, this land is divided and farmed according to property ownership and parcelization as evidenced by shelterbelts and fences. However, once the fields are amalgamated, the rural land use may be able to be maintained for grazing or agriculture that can withstand inundation.

The proposed stopbank will run alongside (foreground) and behind the fields (mid-distance) adjacent to Railway Road. There are no views to the river from Railway Road due to the flat landscape and intervening vegetation. The horizontal form of the stopbank generally integrates well with the expansive, rural landscape, maintaining the area's cohesive visual character. For motorists traveling alongside or across the stopbank, the experience of the rural setting remains largely uninterrupted, with minimal visual disruption.

In locations where users interact with the stopbank in a more localised manner, the impact of the landform is more acute. On the west side of Ruataniwha Road, the stopbank is proposed to be constructed upon the road; and the new road will be atop the stopbank. This change to the landform will be experienced on a more local scale, but will also preserve the landcover behind the stopbank, continuing to provide a mature tree backdrop to the stopbank. However, the road will elevate and make moving-vehicles more visually prominent. The volume of vehicles will likely be low. Thus, although the stopbank and road will negatively impact the amenity and aesthetic values of the landscape character, it will be localised, and the overall rural character will not change.

The associative value along Ruataniwha Road will be impacted by modifying how people move along the corridor. The public will be able to move along the top of the stopbank, providing a potentially positive, new experience because of potential expanded and elevated views across the rural landscape and to the river.

The overall impact is assessed as low since the effects are localised to a small area on the west side of Ruataniwha Road, and the rural character of the wider landscape remains intact.

4.2 CHURCHILL AVE AND MARINE PARADE

The proposed stopbank will require the removal of vegetation and trees in the reserve along Churchill Ave. The associative value to recreation along Churchill is low as river access does not currently exist.

The river has cultural and recreational importance along Marine Parade where the WaterSki Club, rowing groups and public users of Alexandra Park regularly access the river. The associative value of the stopbank is high in this location because of the connection to the awa, and the public's ability to interact with and recreate in it. The proposed stopbank will impact the permeability between the town and neighbourhood with the park and campground. River access will also be obstructed and require mitigation.

The overall impact is assessed as low for the area along Churchill Ave; and high for the areas along Marine Parade.

5 VISUAL EFFECTS (OPEN VIEWS)

Due to the natural character, amenity, and aesthetic values of the Wairoa River, a higher sensitivity (significance) rating is applied to viewpoints with clear, unobstructed views of the river. See Figure A.

The assessment identifies four viewshafts where residents will have open views of the river and background features. However, the sensitivity between these views will differ based on distance and visibility of the feature.

The sensitivity (significance) of these views is rated in the table below:

View	Sensitivity Rating (Significance of View)	Explanation
1	Moderate-high	The Wairoa River is an important focus of the view through the public parkland from Marine Parade. The river is an integral part of the natural scenery, and enjoyed by a diversity of people using the park and campground. Views from residences along the south side of Marine Parade are oriented towards the river and will be impacted by the stopbank which will rise to a max height of 1.5m.
2	Moderate	Views of the river are an integral part of the ambiance of the park. The views begin to elevate towards the overpass and become more expansive. Although the river's edge is modified, the river itself still exhibits natural qualities. The Wairoa River is an important backdrop of this view.
3	Low-moderate	The river is viewable across a roadway and through intervening vegetation. The viewshafts to the river will be minimally impacted.
4	Low	The view of the river is relatively small, over private land that is newly planted and will likely have screened views in the future. Views from the top of the stopbank may prove to have improved significance, while views from behind the stopbank (south side), although shortened, may not change significantly towards the river.

View 1

The natural quality of the river at this location is degraded, however the significance of this view focuses primarily on the fact that the river is a backdrop to a public space, giving visual access (and recreational amenity) to the Wairoa River to the general public. Due to its moderate-high sensitivity rating, the loss of this view (magnitude of change) will likely result in a moderate to high impact on the visual amenity and aesthetic values of View 1. It will be difficult to mitigate this impact on the viewshed.

View 2

Similar to View 1, the natural quality of the river is highly modified, due to its use as a recreational asset to the public park. In this location is an important part the visual amenity of this location, forming an aesthetic backdrop. However, playground features and earth mounding created glimpsed views as they occasionally block wider views of the river. As the topography rises to meet the elevation of the overpass, views become more expansive over the wider landscape.

Due to the filtered views through the playground and earth mounding (making the river appear lower), the sensitivity rating is slightly lower than in View 1. The loss of this view (magnitude of change) will likely result in a moderate impact on the visual amenity and aesthetic values of View 2.

View 3

The view of the river from View 3 is further filtered and blocked by activity on the roadway and further distance to the river. For this reason, it is assessed as having a low-moderate sensitivity rating, and the loss of this view (magnitude of change) will likely result in a low to moderate impact on the visual amenity and aesthetic values.

View 4

The perceptual amenity of this view extends over privately owned land that has recently been planted. As the vegetation matures, it is likely to create a visual screen for nearby residential properties. For these properties, views from behind the stopbank will be adversely affected, as the current, limited view of the river will be lost. However, the impact may be low, given that future views are expected to be naturally screened by the new planting. Public views for people walking or driving along the top of the stopbank may improve when visual access from the top is gained. Due to its low sensitivity (significance), this loss (magnitude of change) will result in a low visual effect on the visual amenity and aesthetic values of View 4.

6 VISUAL EFFECTS (SCREENED VIEWS)

Ruataniwha Road and Churchill Ave: Due to the screening of the vegetation, a low amenity and aesthetic value will result in a low visual effect. The loss of vegetation and trees will change the nature of the feeling of enclosure that was created by the vegetation; however, a similar sense of enclosure may be created by the stopbank.

Marine Parade: Due to the stopbank construction, the urban nature of the buildings and facilities will be degraded and the low-moderate visual amenity and aesthetic value will result in a low-moderate visual effect. Although this will not impact views to the river, as they are screened currently, the public environment created by these places will suffer from the stopbank. Mitigation in access and activation of these public spaces should be considered.

7 IMPACT ON RECREATION

Alexandra Park can be divided into three parts. The eastern part includes the skate park, destination playground and flying fox. There is no formal access point to the river at this end of the park due to the steep riverbank and the high currents often experienced in this location. The middle part includes the rear of the Wairoa Community Centre and Riverside Motor Camp. The western part consists of an informal recreation space occupied by Adventure Wairoa and the Ski Club. Adventure Wairoa have a long rectangular building housing waka and various other row boats. The Club utilise an informal boat launch ramp directly in front of the building. Locals have historically used this ramp location for swimming due to the shallow depth and low current. The Ski Club have elevated club rooms at the far western end of the park and a concrete ramp down to the river. In between these buildings is a large green space that is occasionally used for informal community events.

There is no formal access to the river from Churchill Avenue due to the presence of dense riparian vegetation along the riverbank. Access will remain hindered by the construction of the proposed stopbank along Churchill Avenue.

The stopbank will result in the loss of the skate park and existing flying fox. It is understood that Wairoa District Council will look for an alternative location for the skate park and may consider the incorporation of the flying fox into the stopbank (separate projects).

The stopbank will require the relocation of the Ski Club and will impact the use of the informal grassed area at the western end of the park. Access to the river from the relocated Ski Club and Adventure Wairoa will be impacted as boats will need to be transported over the stopbank to get to the river. A suitably graded ramp will be constructed to enable towed boats and hand carried waka and row boats to cross the stopbank. The final location for the Ski Club and future boat ramps will be determined at a later date, once park master planning has taken place.

It is envisaged that space will be left available on the river side of the stopbank for boat parking and the temporary storage of waka and boats during event days. Public pedestrian access to the river will be retained.

Whilst the stopbank will impact the current recreational use of the park, public access will be maintained and the opportunities for the future master planning of this recreational asset should not be hindered.

8 CONCLUSION

The Wairoa River and its surrounding rural, working lands form a layered and culturally significant landscape that supports both livelihoods and recreation. The proposed stopbank introduces a new, utilitarian feature that will influence land use, landform, vegetation cover, and viewsheds.

This assessment evaluates the landscape and visual effects of the stopbank, focusing on four primary user groups: residential property owners, recreational users, motorists and commercial stakeholders. Of these, recreational users—particularly the rowing and Ski Clubs—are expected to experience the most significant impact, both culturally and recreationally. These groups have expressed a strong desire to retain access to the river for their activities.

Landscape effects: Land use within the floodway of the stopbank is likely to change, potentially altering farming and grazing practices. Mitigation strategies should consider the preservation of the functionality of this land for rural livelihoods, allowing it to continue serving as both a productive landscape and a floodway. In areas where the stopbank does not impact land use and where the landform blends with the wide, horizontality of the agricultural plains, the landscape effect is less impactful. The landscape effects along Marine Parade are considered high because of the impact to the cultural and recreational connection to the river.

Visual effects: The stopbank will modify the landform and views primarily at a local scale, with the most noticeable changes for viewers in close proximity to the stopbank. Overall, the horizontal form of the proposed stopbank integrates relatively well with the broad, open character of the rural landscape. Visual impacts range from low—where residential views may be partially obstructed—to moderate to high, particularly in areas where the river holds cultural and recreational importance.

9 LIMITATIONS

This report ('Report') has been prepared by WSP exclusively for Hawke's Bay Regional Council ('Client') in relation to the Wairoa Flood Mitigation Design project ('Purpose') and in accordance with the Proposal letter dated 9 July 2025 and accepted on 18 July 2025. The findings in this Report are based on and are subject to the assumptions specified in the Report and the Proposal. WSP accepts no liability whatsoever for any reliance on or use of this Report, in whole or in part, for any use or purpose other than the Purpose or any use or reliance on the Report by any third party.