



The History of Carrara Park

This swampy, low-lying tract of land in the south east corner of the Newtown basin was un-built-on open space until the mid 1920s when the Carrara Ceiling Company factories were built here. After the Carrara Ceiling Company moved out the factory buildings were used by a range of small enterprises for some years while discussions went on about the future of this land. Carrara Park, named after the factories it replaced, was eventually created in the early 1990's to host casual outdoor play and recreation for the densely built-up southern suburbs of Newtown, Berhampore and Mount Cook.

Newtown, Berhampore and Mount Cook have lots of green space, but most of it is either sports fields, which are booked for games and practice, or it is sloping, natural and wild Town Belt. City planners had identified the southern suburbs' need for a local park back in the 1960s. However the play park initiative stayed un-realised until the late 1980's when lobbying by the Newtown Residents' Association convinced Wellington City Council to follow through and meet the needs of our community by turning this industrial site into the park we know today.

Carrara Park was originally established with a Town Planning Hearing (held in Newtown), and a subsequent court appeal – the equivalent of a notified resource consent process. The Newtown Residents' Association participated comprehensively in the Town Planning Hearing that established this should be public open space, a recreational commons: flat land devoted to casual play and ball sports with entry gates from neighbouring properties. With close to 80 submitters the effects on the neighbours were thoroughly explored and the locals agreed that they would allow this vibrant play space to be set up “next door”.

Carrara Park was then created, via WCC compulsory land purchase. Although it is a local neighbourhood park Carrara Park was also set up to meet the needs of a much wider area of the city, in response to an inner-southern-suburbs-wide need. The Park was designed by the parents, children and grandparents of Newtown, Berhampore and Mount Cook through a series of public participatory design workshops. Members of our Association were very active in the design process and in these workshops. The decisions made were then implemented by WCC staff.

As a culmination of this collegial creativity WCC officers and key members of our Association Executive together convened the day long performance event in 1995 that was the Carrara Park opening party. That opening party was repeated the next year and went on to inspire the annual Newtown Festival in Riddiford Street. Ever since the opening performance celebration, our Association has continued to run events in Carrara Park, and supported other peoples' events and activities in the Park.

The layout of the park is devised so that all the areas and equipment are non-standard to any sports code configuration so that they will never be allocated to formal competition or practice, future proofing availability long term as a casual recreational play-space (even the basketball hoop is a

plastic basket up a pole....). The wisdom of this is reinforced as we see other open spaces, such as Martin Luckie Park, being increasingly allocated to the exclusive use of sporting codes and unavailable for casual play.

Carrara Park: The Present and the Future

The large expanse of open space on the north side of the Park continues to be a great resource for all manner of casual sports and games, and has also been the venue for many community events over the years. There have been numerous concerts, Christmas carol sing-alongs, BBQs and picnics, and many other community celebrations.

The park also hosts community gardens, which have gone through a number of iterations since being established in 2014. Currently there are three raised beds for growing vegetables, some fruit trees, and some perennial herbs, currant bushes and rhubarb plants in the borders. The people who established the gardens moved on and were replaced by others, but at the time of writing (July 2019) they have also moved on and there is an open invitation for new people to join in.

To the side of the open space there is a popular, well used children's playground in the shade of two big Norfolk pine trees. However these trees have grown since the playground was built, and now the tree roots are damaging the equipment. The playground needs to be moved, and also renewed because the safety standards have changed and the present configuration is no longer compliant. WCC have embarked on a community engagement process, gathering the views of park users about what they would like to see in future. This information is to be gathered by August 5th 2019, and then the WCC designer, members of the Association and others will consult further about the outcome.

WCC are suggesting that a picnic area could be established as well as the new playground, and this sounds an excellent idea if it involves public use BBQs, seats and tables.

We in the Association, and others, are also advocating for public toilets, to increase the utility of the park. The lack of toilets is a real drawback for the playgroups who use the Park and for event organisers and others. This isn't a new issue, and we have made many submissions about it in the past.

We are expecting the WCC designer to work closely with Park users on a plan for the Park as a whole, a process which would mirror the way the Park was originally developed. We also expect the design to incorporate all the major elements without compromising the open playspace, which has always been such an essential aspect of Carrara Park.

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