

Subject: PROPOSED STOPBANK WALKWAY

**To: Chairman and Members
Otorohanga Community Board**

From: Chief Executive

Date: 24 August 2017

Relevant Community Outcomes

- Provide for the unique history and culture of the District
 - Foster an involved and engaged Community
 - Ensure services and facilities meet the needs of the Community
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Executive Summary

The construction of a concrete surfaced walkway along the full length of the flood protection stop banks on the 'town' side of the Waipa River in Otorohanga is proposed.

Staff Recommendation

That consultation is conducted with the community in respect of potential full or partial Council funding of the construction of a fenced concrete surface walkway along the full length of the 'town side' stop banks from Phillips Avenue to Waipa Esplanade.

Background

At a workshop following its meeting of 27 July 2017, and having been supplied with a copy of the last report (September 2014) on this matter that was presented to the previous Community Board, the Board signalled its intent to develop a concrete surfaced track suitable for walking or cycling along the full length of main town-side stop banks in Otorohanga.

The Board also requested that staff make an immediate application to the Waikato River Authority for funding to support such a project, and such an application has now been made.

The potential establishment of a walkway on top of the stop banks has been discussed by Otorohanga Community Boards on a number of occasions over the last 10 or so years, but a firm commitment to such a project has not previously been made.

At the workshop of 27 July and in subsequent discussions the Board has informally indicated that it wishes to establish a 1.8 metre wide concrete surfaced path suitable for walking or cycling that would run on the top of the stop banks from Phillips Avenue to the western end of Waipa Esplanade, with a likely total length of approximately 3.1 km.

The Board has also agreed that the created path should be fenced on both sides to exclude the farm stock that graze the stop banks and adjacent lands.

It is envisaged that a number of short gravelled or unsurfaced accessways would also be created that linked the concrete walkway to sections of riverbank that had good recreational potential, to encourage use of the river itself.

The general layout of the proposed walkway is shown in the plans attached to this report.

A walkway in this form was the most expensive of the options that had been presented to the previous Board in 2014, the estimated GST exclusive costs of which are shown in the following table.

Section	Phillips Ave – SH3	SH3 – Kawhia Road	Kawhia Rd –Waipa Esplanade
Approximate Length	1350m	1150m	600m
1.8m Concrete (fenced)	\$245k	\$209k	\$109k
1.2m concrete (fenced)	\$171k	\$147k	\$76k
1.2m concrete (no fence)	\$139k	\$118k	\$62k
1.2m crusher dust (fenced)	\$95k	\$81k	\$44k
Grass fenced	\$30k	\$26k	\$14k
Grass unfenced	\$4k	\$3k	\$3k

It is stressed that the figures in the table are those that were presented in 2014, unadjusted for inflation, and the intention of presenting them again here is only to very roughly indicate the possible cost relativity of the different options.

It should however also be noted that the costs estimated in 2014 for the concrete options were based directly on the per square metre charge rates that had been tendered for Council's footpath construction contract at that time, and that the rates contained in Council's current contract for similar works are significantly lower.

Furthermore it is believed that the relative simplicity and potential economies of scale associated with constructing all sections of the wider path at one time is likely to further reduce costs, and taking these factors into account it is believed that a somewhat lower total cost of around \$430,000 + GST (just under \$500,000 GST inclusive) may be a realistic estimate for the selected option.

The Board's selection of the most expensive of the options reflected a view of Board members that if a walkway was to be created it should be a comprehensive solution that is suitable for use by the broadest possible range of people, including those with pushchairs and bicycles.

Whilst a crusher dust surface walkway would be significantly cheaper it was felt that such a surface would not be suitable for all users and would also be likely to require much higher levels of maintenance.

Project Benefits

There are considered to be two main aspects of community benefit from the proposed walkway, as follows:

1. Community Connection to the River

In the past the Waipa River almost certainly played a much greater part in local people's lives than it does today. The flood protection works that followed the devastating flood of 1958 saw the river being realigned to a course further away from the town and surrounded by high stop banks that further reduced the visibility and accessibility of the river to residents. The realignment of the river would also have probably resulted in cultural associations with particular locations along the original course of the river being weakened as that channel was filled and a new channel dug elsewhere.

The previous extensive growth of Crack Willows along the river also reduced visibility and accessibility, and taken together these factors have probably resulted in the river's potential as a recreational and cultural resource not being as fully utilised as it could be.

In recent times things have begun to change, with improved management of the river and some limited efforts to improve access, but despite this it is suspected that for many people in Otorohanga the river, largely hidden behind those high stop banks, barely registers as a feature of the community.

It is believed that the creation of a walkway along the top of the stop banks has the potential to rebuild the connection of the community to the river in a number of ways, both through making it more visible, and improving accessibility to its waters which are suitable for a variety of purposes.

Walking and Cycling Opportunities

Many people in the community walk or cycle for exercise and relaxation and having a well defined track along the full length of the stop banks on the main town side will provide an opportunity for a greater variety of routes for this. Creating this walkway will provide a range of potential circular routes that utilise both a section of the stop bank walkway and lengths of existing footpaths along roads.

Whilst Council does currently permit people to walk along the stop banks, there are a number of factors that deter people from doing so, including the need to walk through long grass (which may often be wet), the presence on farm stock and their droppings and obstructive fences.

Underfoot conditions are also generally unsuitable for bicycles, pushchairs or other light wheeled vehicles and the absence of a well defined path together with a lack of signage and an associated potential fear of trespassing are also likely deterrents for many people.

Having a good path along the stop banks also has the potential to enhance the attractiveness of the town to people considering moving to the community.

Project Cost and Funding

As stated previously an initial estimate of a likely total GST inclusive cost for this project is just under \$500,000, and an application has been made to the Waikato River Authority for just over one third of this (\$178,000).

This application has been accompanied by a letter of support from the Nehenehenui Regional Management Committee which represents local Marae.

It is envisaged that if this application is successful the remainder of the cost would be funded from the monies held in the Board's Special Fund and part of the previously uncommitted proceeds from the sale of the Te Raumauku farm property.

This form of funding would not have any significant direct impact on rates, but will – like almost all expenditure by Council - have some indirect impact on rates in the longer term.

It should be noted that if funding from the Waikato River Authority or some other external agency is not obtained the viability of the proposal would have to be reconsidered as the cost would be likely to exceed those discretionary monies that are currently available to the Board.

Integration with Other Activities

The proposed walkway would be entirely on land that is currently under the control of Council, but liaison with others will however be required to integrate the walkway with the activities of those parties who hold leases of these lands.

Farm stock will need to be able to move between the two sides of the fenced walkway, and hence gated openings will have to be periodically provided to enable this movement to occur.

The riverside accessways, if fenced, would also have potential to interfere with stock movements.

Whilst the existing grazing leases for the stop bank lands all contain provisions to permit public access, there would nevertheless need to be discussion with the existing leaseholders regarding the establishment of such a fenced path.

At the Waipa Esplanade end of the walkway the simplest connection of the walkway to the road would be through a 70 metre long section of land that has been leased to the New Zealand Motor Caravan Association, and it would be hoped that they would be agreeable to this, but if they are not the final section of the path could be along the side of the river, which is outside of the NZMCA lease.

It is always important that any works undertaken on the stop banks do not compromise their primary flood protection function, and this project is unlikely to do so and might even be considered to potentially enhance this function by providing a hard erosion resistant cap on top of them. The only adverse effect in this respect that might need to be managed is potential accelerated erosion due to stock movements through the periodic openings in the fences.

It is envisaged that the fencing alongside the concrete path would be set approximately 0.5 metres from the edges of the path, and that the bottom wire of the fencing would be set relatively high to permit cattle to graze to the edge of the path to avoid the need for vegetation control within this fenced corridor.

It would however not appear to be too difficult or expensive to conduct periodic manual vegetation control inside the fenced corridor if needed.

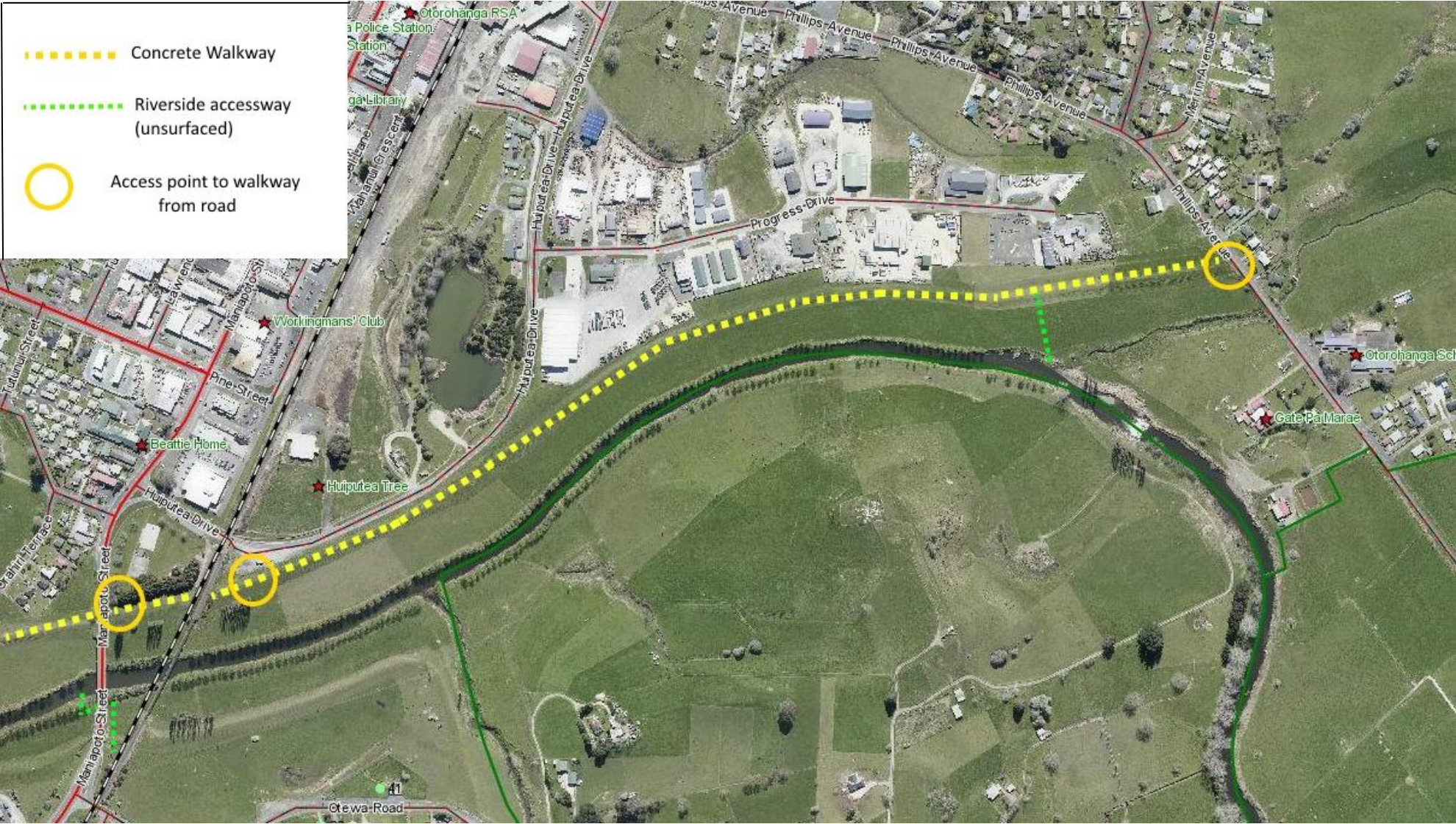
Need For Community Consultation

This project has not been previously reflected in Council planning documents and associated budget estimates, and as such has not been subject to public consultation. Such consultation on this proposal needs to be undertaken before any formal commitment can be made to the project, and it is suggested that this consultation is conducted in accordance with the requirements of Section 82 of the Local Government Act 2002,

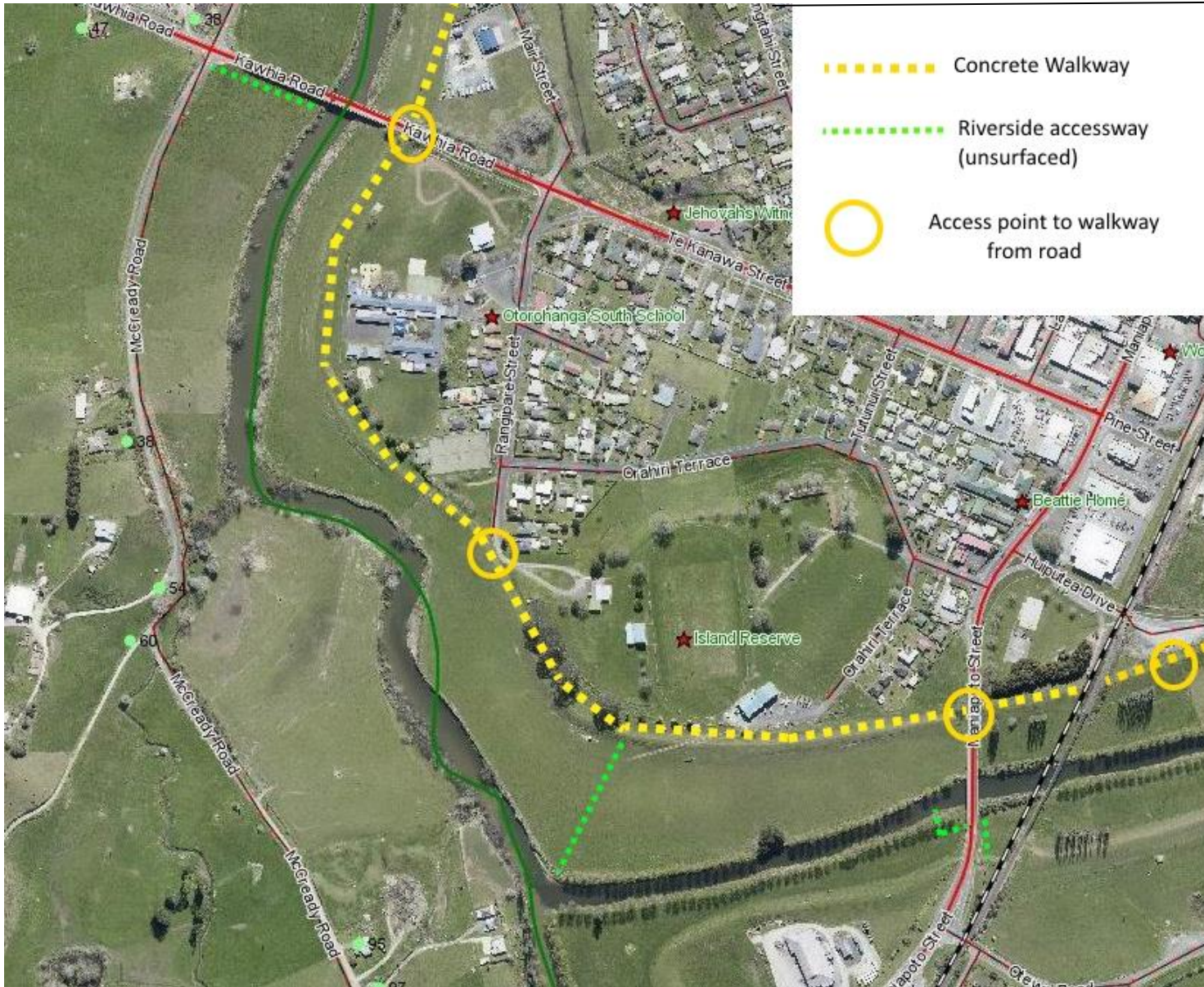
It is therefore suggested that such consultation is commenced immediately, using this report as a statement of proposal and inviting written submissions within a period of 21 days.

Dave Clibbery
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Proposed Otorohanga Stopbank Walkway



Walkway Section 1: Phillips Avenue to State Highway 3 (1350 metres approximately)



Walkway Section 2: State Highway 3 to Kawhia Road (1150 metres approximately)



Walkway Section 3: Kawhia Road to Waipa Esplanade (600 metres approximately)