



**May  
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# Wairau Valley Flood Resilience Project FAQs

## What exactly is a blue-green network?

A blue-green network is a system of waterways (blue) and parks (green) that:

- give stormwater space to flow
- help reduce flooding where people live.

While more or larger pipes may resolve some issues, it's not always possible or cost effective to do so. We need to make more space for water to flow safely through our neighbourhoods without causing risk to people and property.

Creating blue-green networks is one way we can do this. Blue-green networks create open parkland within the floodplain of a stream to better carry rainwater during a storm, diverting it away from neighbouring buildings. During dry weather, the park functions as an ecological corridor providing open space, amenity and connectivity for the community to enjoy.

Blue-green networks are a world-leading, nature-based approach to urban flood management by integrating waterways and green spaces to provide multifunctional areas that absorb, store, and naturally filter stormwater.

Beyond flood mitigation, blue-green networks enhance urban environments by improving water quality through natural filtration, supporting biodiversity, and offering recreational green spaces for communities. Secondary benefits of this work include:

- Enhanced water quality and reduced sedimentation.
- Better and more equitable open space provision and connectivity.
- Economic uplift due to job-creation and greater economic certainty.
- Enhanced biodiversity and habitat.
- Community cohesion and social wellbeing.

## **Why has Wairau Valley been prioritised for a blue-green network?**

The extreme weather events in 2023 affected thousands of people across Tāmaki Makaurau. The suburbs surrounding the Wairau Creek on the North Shore were some of the hardest-hit. Surf lifesaving volunteers rescued 69 people from the area, and more than 250 homes in Milford, the Wairau Valley and surrounding suburbs received red (significant damage) or yellow (moderate damage) placards.

Milford now has the highest number of Category 3 homes (with risk to life that can't be mitigated) of any suburb in Auckland. The current total of 131 Category 3 homes in Milford is nearly double the next highest suburb.

Following this, council developed Making Space for Water, a 10-year flood resilience programme which included blue-green networks co-funded with central government.

We identified 12 focus areas across the Auckland region that could benefit from a blue-green network, one of which is Wairau. Projects are progressing in Māngere, with physical works beginning in April, and concept designs underway in Rānui.

Due to the significant impact the 2023 weather events had in the Wairau Valley area and the ongoing risk to the community, work in this area has been prioritised. However, the large size and complexity of the Wairau Valley catchment means that projects will need to be delivered in stages over the next 10 years and construction is not expected to begin before 2027, allowing ample time for engagement and planning.

## **What are you proposing to do in Wairau Valley?**

As we continue momentum to improve flood resilience in the region, Auckland Council is starting community engagement in the Wairau Valley catchment (including Glenfield, Tōtara Vale, Forrest Hill, Hillcrest, Milford, Sunnynook) to gather feedback on a range of flood resilience projects grouped into the Wairau Valley blue-green network.

Over 100 different interventions have been considered with the goal of delivering maximum flood reduction benefits. On 3 April 2025, the Transport, Resilience and Infrastructure Committee approved the Making Space for Water – Wairau Blue-Green Network Stage 1 and 2 business case for design, consenting and early enabling works.

This is part of a 3-stage long-term holistic approach to reducing flooding risks across Wairau Valley.

This phased approach gives time for the needs of the community to be considered and alignment with their vision for a safer and more resilient Wairau Valley.

## **Stage 1 Initiatives**

The first stage of the Wairau catchment blue-green network focuses on designing and consenting critical flood management infrastructure at AF Thomas Park and reducing blockages in Milford. In this proposal, the AF Thomas Park would be redeveloped into a recreational flood storage wetland, detention basin and overland flow path, forming the cornerstone of the blue-green network similar to [Greenslade Reserve](#) in Northcote to keep water away from homes and businesses downstream. Community would still be able to use the park for recreation for most of the time, incorporating walking and other recreational facilities.

This stage includes developing a recreational flood storage wetland and detention basin.

This will act as a natural sponge to capture and hold excess water during heavy rain events. By slowing the flow of water and releasing it gradually, this reduces pressure on surrounding areas prone to flooding.

## **Stage 2 Initiatives**

Stage 2 of the proposed blue-green network will focus on several key initiatives in Milford and Tōtara Vale using land being acquired as part of the Category 3 buy-out programme.

This will include improving overland flow, stream widening and daylighting to enhance natural flow.

In addition, some minor upgrades will be made to existing detention facilities.

When both stages are complete, 261 dwellings and three large retirement villages will have lower flood risk including 35 properties removed from high flood risk. Additionally, 3,900m<sup>2</sup> of commercial floor area will also see a reduced flood risk.

This comprehensive network will also protect critical infrastructure such as key roads providing access to North Shore Hospital, power substations, and wastewater systems while providing vibrant recreational areas with walking paths and amenities, similar to Greenslade Reserve.

## **How will this project reduce flooding?**

The Stage 1 wetland and detention basin in AF Thomas Park will act as a natural sponge, capturing and holding excess water during heavy rain events. By slowing the flow of water and releasing it gradually, the wetland reduces the pressure on surrounding areas that are prone to flooding.

By restoring the wetland in this area and reshaping the flow paths to better integrate nature into flood management, the surrounding homes and neighbourhoods will be better protected in future. Combined with the works in other areas like Tōtara Vale and Milford these will act as a blue-green network, making more space for water to flow in the Wairau Valley catchment.

This area will act as the cornerstone of the network with future stages connecting to it to transfer water from further up the catchment down to the wetland, eventually being released into Wairau Creek.

Stage 2 works in Tōtara Vale and Nile Road areas will ensure that flooding and overland flow is managed within newly acquired land and existing park areas and directed away from homes and businesses. Some minor upgrades will also increase detention within existing parks and open spaces through the catchment.

## **Did you consider other options?**

Yes, as part of the feasibility analysis stage of the Wairau Valley project we considered over 100 options to reduce flooding. Several of these have been incorporated into proposed Stage 1 and 2 works, and some are recommended for further exploration in Stage 3. Options explored included redirecting stormwater to Little Shoal Bay, widening Wairau Creek to the east of SH1 and diverting stormwater further up the catchment. However, none of these options were viable due multiple factors including cost, the geology of the land (digging through basalt is extremely difficult and expensive), environmental impacts and the requirement to acquire large amounts of private land.

## **Why is re-developing AF Thomas Park the preferred option for Stage 1 works?**

The area around the Takapuna golf course suffered significant flooding during the severe weather events in early 2023 resulting in extensive flood damage to residential and commercial properties, including the Eventfinda Stadium. The Wairau Creek channel above and below AF Thomas Park could not convey the water flow, putting hundreds of properties at risk.

This area is proposed as the most effective short-term solution to reduce flooding in the Wairau catchment and essential for enabling future flood mitigation in Nile Road and the Wairau Valley commercial area. Without it, later stages of proposed works would not be feasible.

Works in AF Thomas Park have been approved for a Crown funding contribution of 62% of the total project costs, making them a critical first step.

## **What will this mean for current users of AF Thomas Park?**

Council are required to balance the needs of the whole community and provide a solution that will deliver significant flood risk reduction to hundreds of properties while maintaining an important park area to be enjoyed by the community.

Our proposal is to redevelop part of AF Thomas Park to incorporate significantly more stormwater storage (from 60,000 m<sup>3</sup> to 500,000 m<sup>3</sup> **equivalent to 220 Olympic sized swimming pools**). This would reduce the risk of flooding to 261 residential properties as well as road flooding to Nile Road, Waterloo Road and Alma Road in Milford, which are access points for North Shore Hospital and Westlake Boys and Girls schools.

The redeveloped park would remain as a desirable community green area, with newly built walking and cycleways, and other recreation areas which could include golf.

Healthy Waters is working with Community Facilities, Kaipātiki Local Board and local community groups before any construction begins in 2027. There will be opportunity for the community to decide how to develop this space into a vibrant recreation and environmental area for the community to enjoy.

## **Takapuna Golf Club have presented an alternative proposal. Are you considering this?**

At the April Transport, Resilience and Infrastructure committee meeting we agreed to a technical feasibility review of the alternative approach presented by Takapuna Golf Club which proposed a series of smaller dry ponds to create the necessary stormwater storage we have identified while retaining the full 18 holes at the Takapuna Golf Club.

We are currently working through this proposal and in regular contact with the golf club representatives when further information is required. We expect to have the results of this review in mid-June.

Our priority is to provide a cost-effective and feasible solution that quickly delivers real flood risk reduction to the surrounding residential and commercial areas, while maintaining useable green space that can be enjoyed by the whole community.

## **What will the redeveloped wetland look like?**

We don't have the final design yet, as we'll need community engagement to decide on the type and placement of the recreation areas. The proposed wetland areas in the northern section of the park will include planted ponds and native vegetation, increasing the natural ecology of the area and creating a beautiful community asset.

Walkways and cycleways will be included to provide public access to the whole park and sections will be reserved for other recreational activities which will be determined by Kaipātiki Local Board and community engagement.

Design will reflect other blue-green networks built by Auckland Council, including [Te Auaunga](#), [Tiaotea Creek](#) and [Awakeri Wetlands](#).Awakeri Wetlands.

## **How will this wetland and the blue-green network be maintained after it is developed?**

A tailored maintenance plan will be developed once works are complete to ensure the area continues to function effectively as a stormwater management and recreational asset consistent with the ongoing care and management practices applied to other blue-green networks in Auckland such as **Te Auanga, Taniwha Reserve and the Awakeri Wetlands**.

## Will this project affect property values?

Discussions around flood protection and its impact on properties are complex and a challenge being faced by governments worldwide in the wake of an increase in severe weather events.

While our top priority is protecting lives and essential services at the same time the proposed flood resilience work aims to reduce risk to homes and businesses which can help to protect property values and keep insurance costs from rising due to repeated flood damage.

Cities worldwide, are adopting blue-green infrastructure as part of comprehensive flood resilience strategies to create adaptable, scalable, and cost-effective solutions.

While the effects vary depending on location, proximity to blue-green infrastructure and context, research both internationally and within New Zealand consistently shows that properties near well-designed green infrastructure experience [notable increases in value, averaging between 5% and 7% in New Zealand](#)\*.

These studies also highlight that wetlands, especially those integrated into parks with multi-use spaces, are highly valued by buyers for enhancing the character and liveability of neighbourhoods. Waitatarua Reserve and the area surrounding the Awakeri wetland in Auckland are excellent examples of this. Green infrastructure not only boosts property appeal but also strengthens the resilience and sustainability of local economies, in the case of this project by reducing flood risks in adjacent commercial areas.

\* <https://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2022/05/Effect-of-Water-Sensitive-Urban-Design-Solutions-and-Green-Space-on-Property-Values-A-Literature-Review.pdf>

## How is this project funded, and what happens if we don't move this forward?

The Making Space for Water programme offers a unique opportunity to leverage significant government funding (totalling \$1.984 billion in co-funding) to accelerate flood resilience projects across Auckland. This one-off chance allows us to undertake critical works that would otherwise be delayed or unfeasible due to reliance on ratepayer funding alone. It is crucial that we leverage this funding while it is available to build resilient communities that can better withstand extreme weather events.

Funding for the Wairau Blue-Green project is earmarked specifically for flood resilience works. Failure to move this project forward would mean missing out on vital Crown support and potentially slower project delivery, leaving homes, lives and businesses at considerable risk.

Funding for concept design of Stage 2 works has been approved by council. This work will include exploring potential additional funding sources and the development of a detailed business case. Future project funding is subject to Long-term Plan and alternate budget availability.

## Why wasn't Sunnynook or the Wairau commercial area selected as an area for flood mitigation works? These areas were heavily impacted by the 2023 flooding Anniversary Weekend weather event.

**Voluntary Buyout Programme:** Removing houses through this programme reduces the number of properties at risk and creates more space for water to flow during heavy rain, helping to lower flood risks. As of March 2025, there are 8 properties in Sunnynook being purchased through this programme and subsequently removed from flood risk.

**Sunnynook Park Upgrades:** Sunnynook Park has been excavated to increase floodwater storage capacity, reducing flood severity. The project also improved stormwater systems and upgraded sports fields and pathways. Concept designs are being explored to further increase detention capacity at Sunnynook Park.

**Constraints:** Unfortunately, larger projects to increase the rate of water discharge from Sunnynook are unlikely due to concerns about worsening flooding downstream.

**Wairau Commercial Area:** Works in the Wairau commercial area were considered as part of the optioneering however are not included in the Stage 1 and 2 project scope due to the significant costs associated and ineligibility for the Crown funding. These works have been included for further exploration as part of Stage 3.

Healthy Waters are reviewing alternate ways to support the business community in the interim as part of the Wider Making Space for Water Programme.

### **If the 2023 events were a one in 100-year event is there really a need for this scale of flood mitigation?**

A 1 in 100-year rain event, meaning there is a 1% chance a heavy rainfall event will happen in any given year, is likely to become more frequent and intense due to climate change. This means that what is currently considered a 1 in 100-year event might become a 1 in 50-year event or even more frequent. This can be observed in the recent flooding in Easter 2025 where on Saturday morning, a thunderstorm delivered a high volume of water with incredible intensity over a short period of time in Mt Roskill – resulting in 90 millimetres of rain in one hour followed by another 25-30 millimeters later that day within 10-15 minutes. This fell on already saturated soils, further exacerbating surface and catchment flooding, and triggering an ongoing operational response. The proposed work in the Wairau Valley area will mitigate risk during events like these as well as reduce flooding in smaller events.

### **Why is development still occurring in the Wairau Valley area and in areas that have Category 3 properties?**

The [Building Act](#) says that councils must grant building consent if sufficient steps are taken to protect the land or building from a natural hazard. For example, this could mean keeping rooms above flood level.

The [Resource Management Act](#) sets out different natural hazard risk levels, and how they should be managed and mitigated. The Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP), which is directed by the Resource Management Act and sets the framework to consider resource consent applications, replaced the district plans from the former councils in the Auckland region and came largely into effect in 2016. The AUP has rules and standards that manage subdivision, use and development in areas subject to flood hazards.

Resource consent will likely be granted if risks are mitigated appropriately. A hazard risk assessment is required to support any resource consent application to aid assessment and decision making. The AUP also has other rules and standards for example setting maximum impervious areas to manage stormwater runoff.

In terms of the future, to better manage the effects of natural hazards and in response to the weather events of 2023, Auckland Council is preparing amendments to the AUP to strengthen its ability to manage natural hazard risk and improve resilience. These amendments look to improve the identification of when natural hazard risk assessments are required as well as to provide greater policy direction and more nuanced rules on how and when risk should be assessed and managed. These rules may apply when undertaking any further works on buildings or redeveloping sites in flood plains in the future.

### **What are you going to do with the recently acquired Category 3 land, and do you need more land to make this work?**

Our first priority is safety, and as such we are assessing what parts of this land are required for the proposed blue green network flood mitigation works. This may also include some additional areas of land required to enable stream widening, and overland flow paths.

Properties that have been classified as Category 3 as part of the voluntary buy-out programme are being held by the council as ‘non-service’ land in a dedicated asset class until decisions can be made about their future. We want to ensure Auckland’s land is used effectively to provide homes and maintain strong communities, while managing risk and reducing the financial impact to ratepayers. The [Storm Affected Land Use policy](#) sets principles for how decisions are made about using this land.

If we keep the land, options for use could include:

- flood resilience and stream management (as part of this Blue Green Network programme)
- adding it to neighbouring parkland or bush
- managing it as high-hazard land.

If we don't keep the land, options could include:

- sale for safe redevelopment
- sale with conditions to manage the risk (such as converting ground floor units to storage)
- sale to neighbours for extra backyard space.

### **Maintenance/security of Category 3 properties**

After settlement of a property, Auckland Council provides a basic level of maintenance. The focus is on maintaining areas visible from roads and footpaths i.e. berms and front yards on properties that have road frontages. Regular security patrols will also monitor the properties.

If you have an issue with a Category 3 home that has been purchased by the council, please email [recoveryoffice@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:recoveryoffice@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) or if you see any suspicious behaviour please report it to the police.

Note that until council takes ownership of a property, we are unable to do any work on it.

### **Removal of high-risk homes (as at March 2025)**

- Number of Category 3 homes in Milford purchased by Auckland Council: 33
- Number of homes removed in Milford: 7
- Number of homes removed in Tōtara Vale: 6

Around 1200 homes across Auckland will be assessed as Category 3 (intolerable risk to life) and will be bought out by Auckland Council and removed. More than 10% of homes in Milford West will be removed.

Relocation of the homes is the preferred option to reduce waste to landfill. Over 30% of the homes have been relocated so far, providing homes for families across the upper North Island.

Deconstruction and reuse is the second preference if relocation isn't possible, with most of the materials going to community recycling centres to be reused by local residents.

Across Auckland around 350-400 dwellings are expected to be removed each year, with completion scheduled for November 2027. The timeline for the completion of house removals in Milford will only be known once all houses have been purchased, which is forecast to occur at the start of 2026.

We will be removing these homes in clusters to reduce disruption for neighbours. This means waiting until a good number of homes in a neighbourhood have finalised their buy-outs with us.

We will let people in the neighbourhood know when we are ready to start removing homes in their area, and there will be a dedicated local liaison for any questions or concerns.

## How can I have my say on the flood resilience (blue-green) project? What other opportunities will there be to give feedback?

We will need to work collaboratively with a variety of funders and members of the community, taking a catchment-wide approach to ensure the right outcomes are achieved. A community advisory group comprised of representatives from across the wider community has been established to provide input on the design approach, proposals, and wider engagement plan.

It's really important that we get the balance right and we can only do that by working with the Wairau community.

The changes to land use in the AF Thomas Park will also be done with community input to ensure all recreation needs are considered and inform how this land may be developed into a vibrant recreation area for the community to enjoy.

To stay informed email [bluegreen@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:bluegreen@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) and ask to be added to the Wairau Valley contact list.

### About the Making Space for Water programme

- The [Making Space for Water programme](#) includes a range of initiatives to reduce flood risk to Aucklanders. Part of this is the construction of blue-green network projects which involve enhancing stormwater assets and green spaces to deliver increased flood management.
- Auckland Council is sharing the cost of flood resilience projects with central government, subject to business case approvals. These projects must demonstrate a flood risk reduction for the wider community, not just individual properties.

#### More Information



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