

Whau River Bridge Gateway Project



the everyday collective laboratory.

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Introduction



Paul Woodruffe
Academic Leader Undergraduate
Unitec Institute of Technology

I have a Masters Degree with distinction in Landscape Architecture, and I am the co-ordinator of the Unitec research group The Everyday Collective Laboratory. I have a background in Graphic Design and Fine Arts as well as Landscape Architecture, the latter involving community engagement and site analysis strategies. I am a specialist in collaborative practices and multi-disciplinary project management as it relates to initiating creative spaces, and re-visioning neglected and marginalized public spaces.

This project was initiated when Douglas Sadler, Senior Planner Auckland Council, commissioned a student design project that researched both a design solution for creating a series of “gateways” for the Whau Local Board area, and a methodology that would ensure that the design would be rooted in the history, environment and narratives of the place. The design also had to be completed within a budget of \$30,000.

To do this, the Unitec research group ‘the everyday collective laboratory’ assembled a multi-disciplinary team of final year students from Landscape Architecture, Contemporary Craft and Product/Furniture Design. This team will be working with Avondale Community Action Trust to engage the

community in the initial process of designing the “Gateway” project. This will be through the use of local knowledge to provide feedback on concept ideas.

Local historian Lisa Truttman has assisted the team by sharing her knowledge of the Whau and its narratives, and this in turn has helped to create a series of design principles that will be used to define the project.

We have booked Avondale Community Action Trust’s Hub Space at 1881 Great North Road to present the concept proposal visuals, which will be designed to engage with local people and interest groups such as Friends of the Whau. This consultation stage will be used to inform the final design.

Design Team



Oraphanh Chanthaphonh
22

Bachelor of Landscape & Architecture

Relatively new to the professional side of practice but have completed studios within the degree dealing with re-designing areas through placemaking. Currently in final year of study.



Rich Coburn
35

Bachelor of Visual Art & Design Contemporary Craft

Prior to studying I gave twelve years service to the RNZAF, seven years as an aircraft technician and five years as an engineering officer. During my service I completed an aircraft mechanics apprenticeship, gained an Engineering Technology (mechanical) degree and received training and experience in leadership, management, and project management. Currently in final year of study.



Zara Jawadi
21

Bachelor of Landscape & Architecture

I have an Iraqi background and am currently in my fourth year in landscape architecture. I am interested in urban design, photography, sustainable practices, and have a passion for retrofitting ecology into contemporary urban developments. Participated in the IFLA student charrette in 2013, and have worked on a few group design projects revolving around the theme of "place making" within the degree of landscape architecture.



Marvin Reber
34

Bachelor of Visual Arts & Design Product & Furniture

In my final year of study as a Product and Furniture design student with interests in construction and user centered design. I have a background in sign fabrication with 14 years experience and have worked with illuminated signage, large scale projects, national re-brands and production managing.



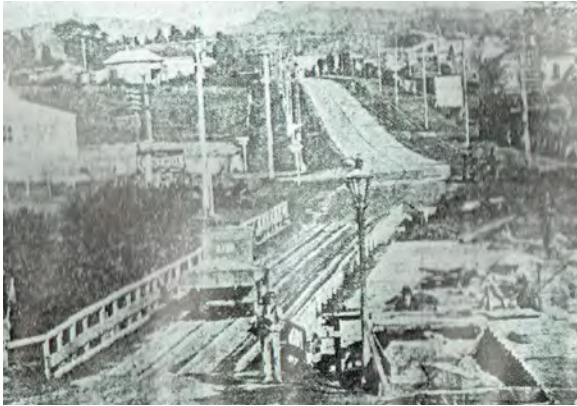
Adam White
48

Bachelor of Visual Art & Design Contemporary Craft

I am in my final year of the design degree. I have worked in the sign industry for ten years and in the steel industry for another ten. I have tried to base my bachelor degree on my blacksmithing skills learnt in England and which is my craft of passion.

Site Analysis

Linkage



1930. A truck crosses the existing wooden with the new ferro-concrete one being constructed to the right.
Image: Peter Buffett, New Lynn (N.Z.). Borough Council.
Publish info: [Auckland, N.Z.] : New Lynn Borough Council, [1989]



Construction of new carpark and Apartment building in New Lynn central. 2013.
Image: <http://transportblog.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/New-Lynn-Apartment-construction-1.jpg>.

Four Bridges.

Before the current concrete bridge, three other wooden bridges were constructed. The first was built some time around 1855 and quickly became rotten. A second was constructed in 1870, this time from best Kauri timber¹, but again, became rotten and structurally unsafe. The third bridge was constructed in 1907 and became increasingly overused by the sheer volume of traffic. 'An engineer, G. A. Jackson, described the bridge as "quite safe for four-ton loads" despite warning signs suggesting otherwise. This meant a carrabanc full of passengers had to stop at the bridge, unload everyone bar the driver, who would then drive across the bridge with the passengers walking behind, then reload everyone to continue the journey.'² Finally, but not before several accidents, Council disagreements and an accusation that a taniwha must be the cause of the continuous bridge failings,³ a new ferro-concrete bridge was constructed in 1931.

Sprawling City

As early as 1865, the realisation of urban sprawl manifested itself and opportunities began emerging in the western boundaries of Auckland city. Farmland, such as Glenburn,

was offered up for sale and described as 'a secluded and beautiful vale' that had communication with the city via the Whau River and potentially be a busy mart of trade.⁴ In 1963, Lynmall opened its doors and was the first american-style mall in New Zealand. SH16 ran alongside it which linked the city consumers to this new style of shopping. New Lynn is now linked even closer to the city with the new infrastructure under construction aimed at city lifestyle seekers looking for an alternative to central Auckland.

Harbour Connection and Gateway North.

The Whau river was used by Maori as a portage route between the Waitemata and Manukau harbours because of the short distance between them. In 1850, surveys were done to consider cutting a canal to link the two harbours. However, the vision was never realised as the challenges would be too costly. Before the Harbour bridge and the North Western motorway, the Whau bridge was seen as the main gateway north. In 1890, John Bollard, Chairman of the Avondale Road Board counted over 1000 persons returning across the bridge in vehicles in one afternoon. The bridge was clogged with pleasure seekers, funeral goers and nightsoil carts.⁵

Duality



Whau River Bridge and market gardens, 1940.
Image: Auckland Council.



Group arriving at Burkes Landing on the Whau Creek, Avondale.
Image: Auckland Council.

Maori and European.

The bridge site shares both a Maori and a European history of travel and commerce, the placement of the bridge intersects these two worlds. The east/west Whau River was a major source of Kai Moana as well as for travel for Waka, it also served as a trade route for European settlers. The banks of the river made a convenient site for industry in the early years, and later became a place for water sports, and with this followed contemporary attitudes to conservation and wildlife protection. Now with local Iwi and Local Government working together to provide restoration and guardianship.

Transportation by water, and by road.

The bridge intersects the Whau River that runs underneath it and the roadway to the west, it formed part of a route for Waka between the Waitemata and the Manukau harbours, the roadway was created to connect the Kaipara Harbour at Helensville with Auckland. Both of these routes were vital to trade and social interaction before the introduction of the motorways, and this would have been especially so on race days at the Avondale Racecourse. And this in turn created an urgent need for the original wooden bridge on this site to be upgraded to the current

concrete one in 1932. This caused some financial controversy, as it was in the depths of the Great Depression and spanned two authorities, with Auckland and New Lynn eventually both sharing the costs.

Industry and Gardening.

In the 19th century, local industry such as brickworks and a tannery were established on either side of the Whau, the area becoming known for its ceramic works, with the brickworks surviving into the 20th century. The surrounding area was for many years large market gardens and orchards, this was due to the high quality of the soil for Kumara, Cabbages and Citrus, but these would gradually give way to light industry and residential pressures in the 1950's. The bridge enabled and hastened this change, as it offered a short route for land transport between industrial factories and the markets for their products in Auckland.

Engagement



Looking West towards New Lynn.
Image: Paul Woodruffe.



Ponte Milvio padlock bridge in Paris, France.
Image: <http://www.localnomad.com/en/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Lockers-Pont-des-Arts1.jpg>

A major concern of this project is reconnecting people with site and local history.

Historic use

Great North road was once the primary route between Auckland and the north and west. The significance of the Whau Bridge is not in the delineation of those communities but rather how it connected them. This narrative is mirrored in the Maori use of the Whau River, connecting the Waitemata and Manakau harbours. There are plenty of compelling stories of connection related to this site, such as the importance of the bridge in providing access to the Waikumete Cemetery; A river landing site close to the current location of the bridge for unloading of mail prior to being delivered to the Avondale Post Office, or Samuel Elliot's Roadhouse on the corner of Great North and Portage Roads as a place for travellers to stop on what would have been an arduous journey in early times.

Contemporary connection

A goal of this project is for the community to have a sense of pride and ownership in the gateway design. The Whau community has significantly changed during the life of the bridge: rapid urbanisation and industrial

intensification since the 1950s, and marked changes in ethnic diversity due to immigration particularly during the 1980s and 90s. So it is no surprise that the way the community relates to this site has also changed. The design can only be relevant and respected by this group if it reflects them. It is planned for the design concept to be displayed at Avondale Community Action Trust's hub space to allow the local community to provide feedback and contribute to the development of the design.

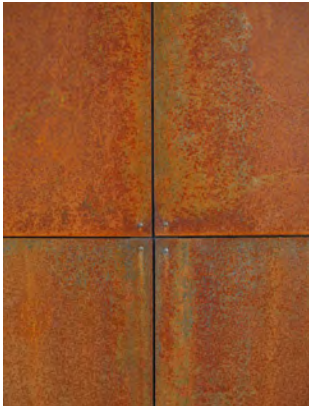
Interactive

We believe that the most powerful way to engage the community is to involve them in some way. There are two main ways we are looking to approach this.

We are interested in engaging schools and other community groups to participate in the design on an ongoing basis; this could be in revolving elements that are contributed by the community or it could be something that builds up over time.

A second way we are investigating community participation is to look beyond the confines of the bridge itself and how the adjacent green spaces can be developed in a way that makes them more inviting to use or explore.

Materials



Corten Steel
Image: google images



Brick/ceramic
Image: google images



Reclaimed wood
Image: google images



Mangrove vegetation
Image: google images

Materials are the metaphorical glue that realises physical and conceptual forms.

Fit for purpose

It is important to use materials that are suitable. Given that the 'Gateway' will exist outdoors in the public arena - and built with public money - it is essential that any structure is safe; will withstand the elements; have reasonable durability; and ideally require as minimal maintenance as possible. We plan to engage specialist-engineering advice to ensure that our design is fit for purpose on all these points. We are also cognisant of instances of theft and graffiti in the area and believe that we can mitigate these activities with appropriate use of material.

Relationship to place

Clay, stoneware and ceramic industries are synonymous with the region's industrial history, but while it is important to reference the past, perhaps this is something many of the current community do not remember or relate to. By referencing as opposed to specifically incorporating these materials into the design allows us to pay homage in a contemporary rather than nostalgic way. That is not to say that material can't directly reference the past, an example is wood, which

could symbolise the wooden bridge structures that existed before the current bridge; or plants that directly restore the pre-urbanised natural environment.

Materiality

Materiality can be thought of as the language of materials. All materials have latent attributes; these are the not so obvious properties that are often overlooked in importance. What is important is not just how we see materials but how we relate to them as well. Colours, textures, hardness and reflection are all ways that material can connect with us; invoking memories, emotions, and thoughts. They can invite or repel, promote touch and play or discourage it. When combined with form, materiality can enhance a message, increasing engagement and appreciation. We plan on exploiting not just the physical properties of the materials we choose but also the metaphorical ones.

Environment



People gathering and swimming in the Whau River(1800's).
Image: http://muddyurbanismlab.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/slide_print_photos-1.jpg



Photo showing bridge access clearways and council green pocket spaces.
Image: Auckland Council, 2014.

The Whau River Water Environment:

The environment of The Whau River can easily be described as a sanctuary in the past and a polluted dump at present. Before the 1800's, fishing and eeling was a daily routine and same goes for the gathering of watercress along the banks of the Whau River. It was a peaceful area where people could swim, kayak and was even a well-known area for picnics. Friends of The Whau Inc. were formed in 1999 to restore the ecology of The Whau through vegetation and reduction of pollution.⁶

The Vision of a Healthy Environment:

With the spread of housing in Avondale, this area has become less representative of commercial vegetable growing land. What use to be there is now just remnants of the past. In The Whau Local board plan, they state that “the vision for our area and Auckland as a whole is to be an eco-city, where people and economies can flourish in a healthy environment.”⁷ The Whau River is currently in a sticky situation where mangroves are encroaching and the stream itself is polluted from water runoff. Contribution from Friends of the Whau Inc and local people help the regeneration of the river but more is needed to be done.

Reclaiming the past:

Through a site analysis on and around the Whau Bridge, we have identified green pocket areas on both ends of the bridge that played a significant role in the history of the Whau Bridge. On the northern side of the bridge there is potential for the current Arawhata Reserve to become a usable pocket park as well as showcase the historic activities that were once booming but have now disappeared, also a decision to reclaim the land that is currently an entry way into the existing business back into an area that will allow a more visual and physical access to the river. The opposite side of the bridge on either ends have the opportunity to be beautified to initiate the use that it once had.

Design Statement

Using five site analysis principles, produce a gateway design that re-connects the upper Whau bridge and its environment to the community by acknowledging historical and contemporary narratives through the use of form and materials.

Schedule

Meeting - Douglas Sadler	31 March 2014
<i>Unitec Institute of Technology</i>	
Public Engagement.....	18 April - 2 May 2014
<i>Avondale Action Trust hub space</i>	<i>1881 Great North Road, Avondale</i>
Completion Date.....	30 June 2014

References

^{^123} Timespanner: The Inherrently Rotten Bridges (1855 - 1930), acc 12/03/2014.

⁴ New Zealand Herald. Important Land Sale, Volume II, issue 369, 18/01/1865.

⁵ Auckland Star. Whau Bridge Maintenance, Volume XXI, issue 124, 27/05/1890.

⁶ Mackay, J.(2001). The Whau: our streams, our river, our backyard. Waitakere City Council.

⁷ Whau Local Board Plan. (2011). Your voice for your community. Auckland Council.