

Aro Valley Community Centre : Frequently Asked Questions

March 2018

How did the Aro Valley Community Centre Upgrade project come about?

The Aro Valley community has been a strong and effective advocate for the development of its centre as community space, and led the creation of the Aro Valley Community Centre in the 1970s and 80s. The Community Centre was a secondhand school building brought in by the community and WCC in 1977. The Community Centre has been the place where many Aro memories have been made. But the Aro Valley community has always known that the building required an upgrade and has actively planned and advocated for that, including submitting design proposals to WCC in the early 2000s.

WCC has been aware of the issues with the building, and site. From

2008 to 2012 they undertook a review of community facilities throughout Wellington, and developed a Community Facilities Policy to inform the use and development of community facilities. The policy also informs how the Council can support and invest in social well-being through community centres in Wellington. The decision to undertake site development at Aro Valley was informed by demographic and socio-economic information within this review. This led to budget being allocated for a Community Centre Upgrade, within the Long Term Plan.

What is the process for the project and why is it being done this way?

The Aro Valley Community Centre Upgrade is a participatory development

initiative, supported by Wellington City Council (WCC).

WCC wanted to be proactive in their commitment to partnering with communities on the delivery of services that affect them, so they established a partnership with Aro Valley Community Council. Aro Valley Community Council includes residents, workers, property and business owners of Aro Valley, as well as managing the Community Centre

A Steering Group was established to guide the project, which includes members of Aro Valley Community Council and WCC. From its outset the project has been a participatory process where the community has been invited to contribute to the principles that underpin the design, and to provide feedback on the designs. A series of engagement events were organised, to hear from people who use the site. This first phase of activity was to not only inform the site development, but also to build a better understanding of the needs of people in Aro Valley. As a result, alongside the site development, AVCC are establishing new activities in response to that feedback e.g. a meeting to discuss how to support people experiencing homelessness in Aro Valley.

The first phase of Community Centre Upgrade engagement included over 70 interviews, a survey and a series of workshops. This phase concluded with a workshop for site users to prioritize over 300 ideas for Aro Valley. Each event attracted between 35-100 people. They were advertised via posters, newsletters

and mailbox drops. There was also a diversity of different people e.g. users of the hall, residents of Aston Towers, people experiencing homelessness, the preschool staff and parents, children, basketball players, cyclists and our neighbours on Palmer Street.



Images: Prioritising Workshop

The design team then took the community priorities established in workshops, and ran a series of public events. These explored how the community's priorities could be translated into the physical design for Aro Valley Community Centre. The design team used this information, alongside the technical information they were starting to gather, to develop Concept Design options. The next event tested the Concept Designs by undertaking over 60 interviews, where the plans were explained so that users could give informed feedback. A broad range of users was again reached in this way.

The design team then integrated all the feedback, alongside additional information on the physical and financial constraints. The analysis of this information has given a clear steer to the design team. They have now prepared a Preliminary Design. A Landscape Architect has also been appointed, to the design team, to respond the community's aspirations around the landscape adjacent to the Community Centre. They will now work to prepare preliminary designs, alongside the designs for the centre.

More information on the design process and timeline can be found in the document 'Aro Valley Community Centre: Timeline for Upgrade', available in the Aro Valley Site Development section of www.arovalley.org.nz.

How has the location for the Community Centre been selected?

While the Concept Design options explored different locations for the community centre on site, investigations into the costs and site constraints revealed that locating the upgraded community centre in a similar position to the existing centre would have both budgetary and logistical benefits. For example; investigations into moving the hall back towards the north fence revealed an increased fire hazard and associated costs, and there were noise regulations that made building beside Aston Towers unworkable. The alternate location options investigated would also have involved costly infrastructural work to move underground infrastructure (storm drains, water pipes and sewers). This, along with community feedback on the Concept Designs, influenced the decision to locate the proposed Preliminary Design in a similar location to the current centre.

The original site doesn't face the same constraints. It allows the size of the community centre to be expanded without worsening the congestion point or 'pinch-point' between the centre and the pre-school, and money not used to mitigate fire, noise and other factors can be used more constructively in line with the community's needs. The expansion of the community centre, and safety of

site users at the pinch-point were key pieces of information shared by the community.

Can the park be incorporated in the plans?

The interface between Aro Park and the Aro Valley Community Centre is important to this project and WCC is open to looking at how those elements work together, however Aro Park is outside the WCC scope of the Aro Valley Community Centre Upgrade. The funding for the community centre upgrade came from the WCC Long Term Plan and is specifically dedicated to community facilities/centre upgrade, not the park, which received an upgrade in 2006 and is not scheduled for further work. The appointment of a Landscape Architect to the design team was in response to community feedback that they would like a review of the external spaces which are within the scope of the project.



Image: Aro Valley Fair – Aro Park 2018

Why is there not an option to build a brand new building?

Once the technical information and community feedback were reviewed a costing exercise was undertaken. All Concept Design options came in over budget, including estimates for new buildings. These concepts were presented to gain feedback of the portfolio of ideas they showed, so the engagement acted as a strong guide to the next stage: the Preliminary Design, of one option. Re-using suitable features, such as the roof from the existing building, not only reduces waste from the build, but leaves more of the budget for features the community has requested.

What's happening with the bunker?

The tennis pavilion or bunker has played a part in the community life of Aro Valley since its construction in 1937, however it is un-occupiable in its current state. The roof and interior space would require large and costly renovations to make it safe and useful to future generations in Aro Valley. For this reason the Preliminary Design proposes its removal. The majority of community participants who voiced opinions on the pavilion were in support of its demolition but we know there are some who wish to retain it, or want its

contribution recognised. We intend to consider how its contribution to Aro Valley can be memorialised, without having to retain it.

Where are the design ideas that I put in?

Collectively, everyone's ideas have helped shape the design. We heard hundreds of ideas through events, interviews, a questionnaire, and workshops. All of the ideas were collated then categorised by the community into themes, and votes of support given to particular ideas. The most widely supported themes and ideas went on to inform the next phase of design.

The top themes that emerged from this process were:

1	Physical Space
2	Activity / Use / Events
3	Sustainability / Environmental
4	Rooms / Spaces
5	Welfare and Homelessness
6	Walkways / Cars
7	Water
8	Community Centre
9	Emergency
10	Environmental Detail

The most supported ideas across all themes were:

1st	Reassess use of space by preschool and community centre - i.e. shift community centre offices to the hall and give current office space to preschool.
2nd =	More meeting spaces - opening community centre to outdoors and sun, big verandah looking onto the park which could be used for stage / performance.
2nd =	More Steve and Kelvin.
3rd =	Learn from marae style event capacity - i.e. indoor/outdoor flow; feeding the hungry, housing the homeless. Aro people are being pushed onto city mission.
3rd =	Emergency response capacity.
4th =	Commercial Kitchen and general kitchen improvements.
4th =	View of the park - hall opening to park with outdoor space - indoor/ outdoor flow.
5th =	Would be cool to have some smaller comfy meeting spaces to be able to have other kinds of gatherings.
5th =	Education area for Waimapihi stream, Te Aro Pa and Aro Valley history available.

One of the top 10 values was homelessness, but nothing in the design addresses this issue, why not?

Homelessness is an issue the Aro Valley community cares deeply about. It's a complex issue and addressing it requires an ongoing and coordinated approach. Our community administrator and developer run soup kitchens and let people use the bathroom facilities, but they do not have the capacity or resources to assist homeless people beyond this.

As this issue is important, but out of this project's scope, the AVCC ran a general meeting to hear from the agencies dealing with homelessness in Wellington. We're establishing a group to discuss what can be done and to work alongside those agencies. The Aro Valley Community Council will set up the group, contact the relevant agencies and facilitate a meeting with anyone interested in helping out.

If this sounds like you, email developer@arovalley.co.nz with homelessness group in the subject line. Include your contact details in the email and we will be in touch.

How can I get involved, is it too late?

Not at all. The Preliminary Designs have been developed, with community input and now we need you to decide if we should move forward with detailing the designs. We ask you consider how these designs will impact on Aro Valley and if you feel that is in the general interest of the people who live, work, learn and play here. Shortly we will announce a General Meeting to discuss the designs, and enable you to be part of the decision whether to move forward with detailing these designs.

View the Preliminary Designs and read about them in the Aro Valley Site Development section of www.arovalley.org.nz.

The date for the meeting will be announced by the Aro Valley Community Council. If you'd like to be kept up to date with the project, sign up for the Aro Valley Community Council monthly e-newsletter at the bottom of the homepage at www.arovalley.org.nz.