

## Portfolio report to Albert-Eden Local Board, September 2016 – Helga Arlington

This will be my final report, since I am not standing for re-election. I take the opportunity to make a few comments about my six years as a Board member, as a part of the new Auckland Council structure.

### Libraries

As a librarian myself, I have been proud of my colleagues in Auckland Libraries since the first day of the new council, when fifty-five branches in the new city were announced as now being in one system. I knew from my professional background a little of the huge project that had come to fruition some years earlier that had made that unity (partly) true, as the staffs of the various library systems had sought to collaborate to offer a better service. I have gone on feeling proud, as I understood the quality of all of the Libraries programmes, based as they are on research evidence, and the sheer efficiency of the largest library system in Australasia (I'm guessing that's still true). However, I am disappointed with the way Libraries has interacted with me as a portfolio holder, and with the Board in general.

In the early days, the efficiency of Libraries as a beacon in the whole Council, led to an attitude among everyone that they worked admirably, and that a swift check from time to time was all that was needed. Briefings – which have lately ceased altogether – have all been retrospective, and have focused on performance measures. Other than a single session at the end of the first term, which I think I may have inspired, there have been no efforts made either to educate Board members about the complex systems that underpin the Libraries' operations, Libraries' issues or concerns about which we might advocate, or the new and exciting developments that are always coming up. Perhaps Auckland Libraries is now safe, as a sacred cow beloved of everyone, but to rely on that seems very unwise. More importantly, it deprives Board members the opportunity to experience the culture of lively, continuous innovation that ensures that our city's library services are not, like some of the public libraries in the UK, being shut down as outmoded. My self-initiated learning about the role libraries play in digital citizenship makes their ongoing importance especially clear to me.

### IT

IT was added to my portfolios in the second term, to reflect my interest in this area, and my concerns. In six years, Board members have not had a single briefing about any aspect of IT except (at my request) the fibre installation in our area. In a Council purporting to support the Auckland Plan and its 'agile city' aspirations, I find it extremely disheartening that the Council itself does not seek to empower Board members to improve their own knowledge and skills in the IT area. Council tools have enabled me to learn to have a sensible discussion about, in particular, urban design / placemaking and transport issues, but it is as though IT does not exist. I had expected that my skills in this area would be useful to the Board, but I have been merely an ineffectual campaigner.

Projects that I have advocated for, fruitlessly, have concerned the provision of prototype websites for our villages and town centres, so that each was not left to devise its own at great expense – and a coherent choice of technical system for local oral stories, rather than QR codes in one place and other systems elsewhere.

I have also campaigned for less use of paper, through provision of tablets and an expectation that Board members will read documents on them; for useable electronic versions of documents such as Board agendas and for their storage in a proper text database; for a CRM system for storing information about people rather than individual staff members and Boards making their own 'databases', and rather more successfully for integration of privately-owned phones and other devices with the Council's system.

I was privileged to participate over more than two decades as the legal profession learned to value what enhanced information systems could offer their work. It was a step back in time as I entered the Council world, but I know that Board members too could learn, if good systems made it worth their while to do so.

#### Auckland Council : a learning organisation?

Once again, my expectations were dashed. I have greatly valued the learning opportunities offered by *Auckland Conversations* and the Urban Design Champions Network, and by briefings in the areas of work concerning the Board, but these were not nearly as wide as I had expected. I wish that I'd been encouraged to start learning Te Reo Māori early on, and told how that would enrich my experience on the Board. The two waiata I now know, I taught myself... but nonetheless, the experience with Maori culture has still been enriching. And I am told that more learning opportunities will be offered Board members next term.

#### Sandringham

The role I have had with Sandringham, despite its informal nature, has been one of the most rewarding. Although I cannot at all claim to know the whole community, I have through the various contacts that I have developed been able to advocate in a number of useful ways – for the SBA to have annual festival funding, for Grow Sandringham to start the farmers' market, for a better design for the Reserve, which led to my proposal for the community-led pilot that became SPiCE and its many and varied projects; and less conclusively for repair of the heritage toilet block. Earlier on, I helped to resolve the unhappy situation at the Community Centre, brought together Lisa and Anita when both were thinking about Sandringham food tours, and more recently the various groups which cohered to bid for the Gribblehirst Bowling Club building. Happily I remain a resident and can retain these connections.

#### Public art

I have very much enjoyed this portfolio and the opportunities it has offered to enhance the scanty presence of art in this area, which has been expected in the past to see itself as a subsidiary part of the CBD rather than to experience much in the way of art, locally – although Eden Arts has of course worked valiantly over many years to rectify that at least for Mt Eden. I will continue to enjoy and appreciate the results we have achieved or helped with: temporary art in Dominion Road, the 'eel bridge' on Oakley Creek (Puketāpapa, through AT), the tāniko-patterned Henriata Nicholas work at Mt Albert rail station (also AT), Peter Lange's kumara (privately funded) in Mt Eden village – and his plaque halfway down Dominion Road! Sandringham's Shannon Novak flags may one day soon be flying again, and although it is almost lost, the 'Billy app' still interests those I introduce it to, as does the digital work in Balmoral by Jin Jiangbo, funded regionally. Katy Wallace's design for Sandringham Reserve will soon offer public art to my own immediate community, as does the Carin Wilson work in Point Chevalier. Better still the Board's art brokers are now developing relationships with artists in the community,

offering connections to allow many further, more community-based projects to happen into the future. It's great to leave with this model now established.

#### Heritage

The Board was extremely lucky to have caught the opportunity to start heritage surveys in our area before skilled staff needed to focus on the Unitary Plan, and valuable work was done. The Bungalow Festival, Peter Haynes' inspiration, has been a struggle to get established because of various staff issues, but its second run was a huge development over the first, and I look forward to the next.

#### Community Development / Seniors' Panel

It has been a struggle in this area despite many inspiring staff, but recent developments with the community empowerment model show great promise. The opportunity to work with the Seniors' Panel has also been inspiring: they are a gracious, highly-qualified and stropky group working as hard as they can to overcome the invisibility of older people in our city.

I have of course not covered everything here, but must acknowledge the huge efforts that Auckland Council staff make, and most especially the Local Board Services staff with whom we work most closely, but also others such as our AT liaison officers, public art specialists and project managers, and many others. Greater continuity of Board staffing in recent times has made life much easier. I could never doubt the huge commitment to Auckland amongst many staff, and especially wish to acknowledge the Herculean task of amalgamating nine entities and making it look easy – at least to the public.

I have learned a great deal as a Local Board member and found the role both rewarding and at times frustrating, but am now looking forward to retiring and doing other things, free of the many unpredictable meetings and commitments to which we part-timers are subject, and as an empowered community member!