

Explanation proposed principles

1. Plant the right tree in the right place

The first principle is to consider the context of the site, in terms of both the growing conditions and the impact these have on the species chosen, as well as the nature and function of the place. Factors that need considerations include for example soil type, drainage, slope, sunlight access, and the presence of pests and weeds. Potential (future) impacts of the proposed species on the nature and function of the place also needs to be considered. Examples of undesirable impacts include interference with functions of road corridors (e.g. blocking line of sight) or other types of infrastructure (e.g. leaves blocking drains, trees growing under power lines), impacts on cultural aspirations (e.g. by planting non-native species where a native species would have achieved similar outcomes), impacts on public users of the area (e.g. trees attracting birds and their droppings), and land owner preferences (e.g. plantings blocking sunlight or views).

These are all considerations for urban planting and should be informed by best practice and urban design guidelines and strategies.

2. A preference for native species

In combination with principle 1, “plant the right tree in the right place” principle acknowledge the aspirations of Māori and others to plant native trees and vegetation unless there are good reasons why natives are not an option.

A preference for indigenous trees and vegetation in open space zones and road zones is in line with Auckland Unitary Plan provisions E 16.3 (3) and E 17.3 (4) encouraging the use of indigenous trees and vegetation for planting within open space zones and within roads, where appropriate, to recognise and reflect cultural, amenity, landscape, natural character and ecological values.

However, in some circumstances non-natives will be appropriate – for example where it is desirable to have increased sunlight in winter, or the growing conditions are better suited to an exotic species.

3. Ensure urban forest diversity

Diversity is important for a variety of reasons. Planting a range of different species increases the resilience to threats of diseases such as kauri dieback and myrtle rust, and potential future challenges caused by climate change. Tree diseases tend to be limited to a certain species or genus, so with a diverse range of species only a portion of the urban ngahere will be affected.

Diversity also relates to a range of tree ages in any area, as a result, there is no large-scale decline as trees simultaneously reach the end of their life.

Using a range of species can also help provide a variety of landscapes, habitats and food sources for birds and other animals.

4. All residents have access to urban forest

The urban ngahere provides a wide range of benefits including community health and well-being, environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits. It is an important aspect of the daily living environment for 90% of all Aucklanders who live in an urban context.

The current uneven distribution of Auckland's urban ngahere across the region means that the related benefits are also unevenly distributed. Tree canopy cover in southern local board areas are generally lower than the northern and western areas and therefore receive fewer related benefits.

This principal is aimed at addressing the unequal distribution taking into account factors such as the need for more urban forest benefits, public demand for a higher canopy cover and physical access to the urban ngahere.

5. Create ecological corridors and connections

The urban ngahere provides habitat to a range of ecological groups such as birds, insects, moths, and butterflies. It brings nature into urban environments, a place where the majority of Aucklanders (90%) live and spend most of their time. It can also provide ecological corridors for species migrating through urban environments, but this requires connectivity between different areas of vegetation that form part of the urban ngahere. This principal seeks to enhance the connectivity of Auckland's urban forest, in particular between remnant natural areas, to create ecological corridors and connections.

6. Protect mature, healthy trees

Even as we look to expand forest, it is critical to look after what we've already got, especially our oldest trees.

The environmental benefits of mature trees are exponentially greater than for younger trees (e.g. carbon storage, habitat diversity), and it is also more cost effective to care for mature trees, because this is cheaper than investing in planting and aftercare for new trees. It takes decades for trees to reach maturity so a mature tree is essentially irreplaceable in the short-term. The only way to replace a 40-year-old tree is to spend 40 years caring for a new tree.

People can have strong emotional connections to landmark, mature trees in their neighbourhoods, and are more likely to mourn the loss of a large tree. Additionally, some native species such as kaka and bats have a preference for taller trees and their presence can significantly improve the biodiversity value of areas.

7. Address urban forest on public and private land

Around 60% of Auckland's urban forest canopy is on privately owned land and 40% on public land. The values associated with trees also cross property boundaries, and often are independent of who owns the land.

Council has options to protect and enhance the urban forest on public land, but the overall prosperity of Auckland's urban ngahere is to a significant degree dependent on the decisions of private land owners. Managing Auckland's urban ngahere will require private land owners' support and cooperation, which is why engagement has been identified as one of the two key delivery mechanisms for the proposed strategic framework.

8. Deploy regulatory and non-regulatory tools

Council has a range of regulatory tools to protect the urban ngahere such as rules related to Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs), the schedule of Notable trees, and rules to limit the extent of vegetation removal in sensitive environments such as streams and at the coast. These regulatory tools apply to trees and vegetation on private properties, but since the removal of general tree and vegetation protection rules from the Resource Management Act in 2015, councils are mainly dependant on non-regulatory tools to control the removal of trees and vegetation on private properties. Examples of non-regulatory tools include landowner advice and assistance with tree care and planting, community education and outreach programmes, raising awareness of the values and benefits of the urban ngahere.

9. Manage the whole life-cycle of urban trees

To achieve the long term vision it is important that we not only plant more trees and vegetation, but that we look after them during their whole life-cycle. Without ongoing aftercare and maintenance, new plantings may not be able to flourish (or even survive) which will reduce the anticipated benefits. This will also help ensure money is well spent, with less wastage and repeated effort.