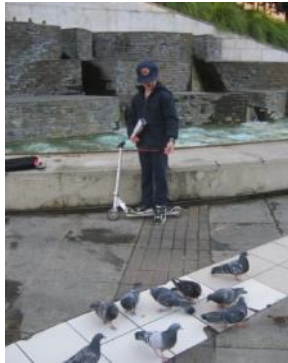


# Freyberg Square and Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall Upgrade

## Children's Consultation



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## Introduction

*‘Children and youth are seldom involved in the construction of their environment. They are considered too inexperienced, too unrealistic, too unqualified. Yet...tapping into young people’s ideas and reflections is essential for improving our cities’* (Pierre Sane, UNESCO, Driskell, 2002).

We were approached by Auckland Council to carry out a ‘child-friendly audit’ of Freyberg Square in Auckland’s CBD – in the first instance, an audit of the current square; and later, of the proposed redevelopment concept plans. Freyberg Square is being redeveloped by Auckland Council as part of the wider redevelopment of the Pioneer Women’s and Ellen Melville Hall.

This report presents findings from a preliminary workshop and on-site consultation conducted with a group of 7-13 year-old children in June 2015; a follow-up photo-voice exercise in July; and further consultation in August, seeking the children’s feedback on the draft concept plans.

The report is structured as follows: firstly, the ‘child-friendly’ consultation is placed within the context of literature on children’s rights/child-friendly built environments, and Auckland Council processes which lead to the consultation are briefly outlined (Background). The Methods section summarises the procedures used to consult with the children. Their feedback is set out in the Findings. It includes recommendations for changes they would like incorporated into the re-development and instances of where these were taken on board by the design team. A brief consideration of ‘where to from here?’ is presented in the Conclusion. Resources for encouraging children and young people’s participation are listed in Appendix 1 and the power-point presentation by Council from the August 2015 consultation appended in Appendix 2.

Heartfelt thanks to the children – Aira, Angeline, David, Dustin, Elizabeth, Fergus, Jaden, Jennifer, Jessica, Julian and Scarlett – for their willingness to take part in this process and share their expertise; and to their parents for their support.

## Background

*‘Children and young people, as members of our community, are users of our local environment with their own particular set of wants and needs. It is important that their input into planning be sought and heard’* ( NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009, p.5).

Cities are largely designed for adults and cars, and urban design and planning has been slow to take into account the specific needs of children in New Zealand as elsewhere (Gleeson and Sipe, 2006). The built form and social dynamics of many cities restrict play and independent mobility opportunities, curbing children’s social interactions, and impacting negatively on their emotional, cognitive and physical development (Spencer and Woolley, 2000).

If children can safely engage with urban environments, their independence, resilience and social competence are enhanced, and the whole community benefits. If, on the other hand, children’s well-being is severely compromised in their urban environments, the sustainability of our cities is in question (Carroll et al., 2015).

In New Zealand a default position in planning practice has largely confined children’s use of the public realm to specific places such as swimming pools, libraries, playgrounds and skate

parks. Their presence is seldom embraced city-wide and they are generally excluded from the planning process itself (Freeman & Tranter 2011).

In 1993, when New Zealand ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it committed itself to acknowledging a raft of children's rights – including the right to play, to move safely through the public realm, and to speak out and be heard on matters which affect them. In 1997 UNICEF launched a framework for the participation of children in urban planning with its Child Friendly Cities initiative. This followed the 1996 UN Conference on Human Settlements, which declared 'the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy habitat, a democratic society, and of good governance' (UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative). *A World Fit for Children*, followed in 2002. Collectively, these UN initiatives have signalled a shift from a view of children as adult 'becomings', with a focus on their need for care and protection, to a broad consideration of children's lived experiences and a view of children as citizens in the here and now, capable of participating in civic decision-making (Freeman & Tranter, 2011).

Auckland Council's stated aim to "put children and young people first and consider their wellbeing in everything that we do" (The Auckland Plan, 2012) indicates a change. In the Auckland City Centre Masterplan (2012) – the blueprint for the development/redevelopment of the city centre – 'inclusiveness and child-friendly' is listed as one of the 10 guiding factors. Furthermore, Waitematā Local Board, which includes Auckland's city centre, is now working towards full accreditation with UNICEF as a 'child friendly city'. (Accreditation is also being sought by Wellington, Christchurch, and Whangarei).

Child-friendly cities are deemed to be places where children can:

- Influence decisions about their community/city.
- Express their opinions on the community/city they want.
- Participate in family, cultural, community/city and social life.
- Be safe and protected from exploitation, violence and abuse.
- Meet friends and have places and spaces to play and enjoy themselves.
- Have green spaces for plants and animals.
- Live in a clean, unpolluted environment.
- Be an equal citizen, with access to every service regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or ability.

Consulting with children on what they would like included in the redevelopment of Freyberg Square and the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall is in line with both the 'inclusiveness and child-friendly' guiding factor from the City Centre Masterplan and the Waitematā Local Board's commitment to work towards 'child-friendly city' accreditation.

The current children's audit evolved from a combination of Waitematā Local Board commitment to UNICEF accreditation, members of the Council's Community Development team looking for a case study to show the value of child impact assessments, and the Council's City Centre Design and Delivery Manager's suggestion of the Freyberg Square and the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall redevelopment as a possible case study. During subsequent discussions the child impact assessment morphed into a 'child friendly audit' and place-making exercise – a first for Auckland Council.

Project design objectives for Freyberg Square and the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall included the creation of 'a world class place that is a distinctive, safe and popular destination, where locals and visitors choose to frequent and linger'; and a 'high quality, attractive and durable public open space that contributes to a sustainable and maintainable city centre' (Project Design Brief, 2015). There was no mention of incorporating affordances for children and young people in the redevelopment at this early stage.

Our Kids in the City research (Carroll et al, 2015) has highlighted a lack of public outdoor spaces in the inner city for children to safely play and interact. With increasing numbers of families with children living in inner-city apartments, Freyberg Square is a 'vitaly important public open space' not just for city workers and other adults, but for children as well.

## Methods

*'It is essential that the methods used are appropriate to the cultural context and to the children's age and interests'* (Freeman & Tranter, 2011, p 235.)

The consultation was conducted in partnership with Council staff from Community Development and the City Centre Delivery Team. After ethics approval was obtained through Massey University, six children who had previously participated in our Kids in the City research in 2012 and our subsequent Children Researching Children pilot in 2013 were approached to take part in this consultation, along with an additional five younger children. The six girls and five boys ranged in age from 7-13 years. Five were New Zealand-born European and six New Migrant children. All except one – a boy from West Auckland who took part in a 2014 pilot study with disabled children – lived in the inner city or environs.

The preliminary workshop was conducted in Freyberg Square itself and in the adjacent Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall. We were mindful of the need to use age appropriate methods to engage the children in the process and for them to have access to information which would allow them to participate effectively. Beginning the workshop inside, aerial maps of Freyberg Square and surrounding areas were given to the children to orient them to the site. A Council Community Development team member spoke to the children about the proposed upgrade, including what the Council was hoping to achieve, and why and what the design team wanted from an 'audit' of the square. The children were invited to ask questions/make comments at any stage. These activities prepared the children for a general exploration of Freyberg Square, keeping the following questions in mind:

- What do you like and why?
- Where and what would you play?
- What don't you like and why?
- Do you feel safe?

The children took photos as they examined every nook and cranny of the square and bordering areas. Back inside the Pioneer Women's Hall their observations and reflections were elicited during a group discussion. These were recorded. The children then marked on individual aerial maps the places they liked and did not like and wrote down their reasons and comments.

They then returned to the square to further investigate specific features the Project Manager of the Council Delivery Team responsible for the redevelopment of the space asked for feedback on. They were asked to consider what they thought about, and how they might engage with:

- seating
- the tree near the centre of the square
- the water feature
- the Lord Freyberg statue

As before, the children took photos of aspects which interested them.

Back inside the Pioneer Women's Hall their responses were again elicited during a group discussion and further questions were asked:

- What changes would they like to see?
- When might they come to Freyberg Square and who with?
- Would they come for special events?

To complete this audit phase, a follow-up workshop was held with the children at SHORE & Whariki Research Centre in July 2015. During this workshop the children considered the opportunities the redevelopment of Freyberg Square and the adjacent Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall community centre might provide for an increased sense of 'agency', fostering a positive self-image and ensuring a sense of safety.

Maps, a photo-voice exercise with photographs the children took during their on-site investigation of the square (each child chose three photographs and wrote captions for them) and group discussion elicited additional suggestions for activities/features children would like to see in the square and in the community centre. They also considered how the indoor and out-door public spaces could be better integrated.

Once a draft concept design had been completed, the children met again on site with researchers and two Council staff. In this third workshop, the audit process to date was reviewed, and the Project Manager of the design team presented the draft concept to the children, showing them where and how their ideas/feedback had been incorporated.

Outside in the square the children, armed with 3D images of the concept, were asked to imagine specifics of the draft design within the space and to write their thoughts on plans provided. Back inside the hall the children then wrote post-it notes to answer the following questions about the proposed concept:

- What do you like?
- What else would you like to see here?
- Where would you play?
- What activity would you like to see here?

The children were then shown the draft plans for the refurbished Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall and asked what activities they would like to do there. Their verbal feedback was recorded.

The workshop closed with the children giving feedback on the 'child-friendly' audit process itself.

## Findings

*'It is really important to kids that you show you're totally interested in what they have to say, because what they have to say is utterly relevant'* (Fiona Robbe, in NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009, p36).

This section covers children's feedback from the three workshops, each in turn.

## June 2015 Workshop:

This presents children's responses to the existing facilities in Freyberg Square and suggested changes to make the square more 'child-friendly'. They checked out ground surfaces, seating, the water feature, the tree, and the statue of Lord Freyberg, leaping, jumping and cart-wheeling; climbing the tree, the bank and the stairs and sliding/hiding in the grass on the bank. They balanced on ledges, sat quietly on benches, talking to each other and tried to photograph the pigeons, along with other features of the square. Skateboarding and scootering and wheelchair possibilities were evaluated.



Almost all of the children commented on the drab look of the square. They wanted it to be more 'colourful', more 'vibrant'. A colourful square would be more attractive and feel safer.

*And if it's colourful the weather won't affect the look of it. So [it would be] like light and colourful even like in this weather.*

*I think if it had a bit more colour to it...a lot more people would come and feel safer.*

They felt the current square looked 'dirty', 'dull', and poorly maintained. They commented particularly on the holes and cracks which made the square unsuitable for skateboards, scooters and wheel chairs.

*I would find it quite fun to just get my skateboard and a friend and my friend's skateboard and like just go and skate but I think, like the surfaces, it's not safe.*

*It's easier to ride a scooter on like the road or smooth concrete.*

*I don't like the cracks. If you were playing you would get the [wheelchair] wheels stuck in them.*

They felt the many differently patterned and textured sections looked messy and would prefer a smooth, uniform surface (with possibly a small ramp for skateboards and scooters).

## Seating

Children commented widely on the seating which they used for jumping, running and balancing on, as well as sitting on. As with the ground surfaces, the children generally did not approve of the mixed styles of materials, preferring the seating to match. They wanted some seating face-to-face so that people could talk to each other, and there were suggestions for a picnic table. The 'scratching', dull metal surfaces and backward slope of the long benches around two sides of the square were particularly disliked.

*I think it's yuk...it's just like putting your bottom in a bucket.*



*I don't like the bendy metal seats. Wood is better. And bright colours.*

There was a suggestion that the long metal bench on the Courthouse Lane side of the square could be removed altogether and the wall behind it converted into a climbing wall.

In contrast, most children particularly liked the smooth metal seat surrounding the tree. It provided a launching pad for some children to climb the tree, it was good to run around, and its height and the rounded front made it comfortable for swinging legs underneath when sitting down.

*It just feels good to sit high.*

While some children wanted a long bench in the middle of the square to go because it took up too much of the open space available, another was adamant it should stay.

*I like the bench 'cos I can do gymnastics on it.*

Two suggestions were made for seating above the square, under the large Phoenix palm trees and several children thought that bean bags which you could relax into, read a book in or text a friend, would be a great idea.

*It would be especially nice in summer.*

### **The central tree**

The tree was a popular fixture in the square. Some children wanted it to have more leaves, to look greener and 'less spikey' {difficult in mid-winter!}. Several children climbed into the branches of the tree and commented it would be good to have some support to reach the lowest branches. One child came up with several ideas to make the tree more accessible and 'playable'.

*You could have a ladder so kids can easily get up...and you could have a platform with a railing a bit higher up with a little tyre swing coming down, or a fireman's pole...*

### **Water feature**

All of the children liked having a water feature in the square – and especially one they could climb all over. The water feature drew the children like a magnet and they spent a lot of time scrambling up the different levels, stepping over the 'water-falls' and standing on the ledge above looking down into the water. Apart from our young consultants, we observed other children as young as four years old (who were visiting the square with their parents) also clambering up and down the stepped fountain. For some, the climbing was more important than the water; for others the water was paramount.

*I like the water, how it comes down, the noise it makes.*

However most children were critical of the yellowy colour of the water and it reminded some of urine.

*It looks contaminated or something.*

*...it smells kind of like not nice. And the glass underneath the water, in some places it's like yellow and looks really gross.*

The children spent more time on and around the water feature than in any other part of the square.

### ***Lord Freyberg statue***

Children felt the statue was hidden away, and not easy to reach. There were even suggestions it should be in the middle of the Square, if the statue was the focus of the park. The children wanted easier access to the statue and an explanation about who Lord Freyberg was and why the square was named after him.

*There's just this little dirt pathway.*

*The statue is nice to touch because it is smooth.*

There were also suggestions for a more interactive relationship with the statue, and even the possibility of 'scavenger hunts' associated with the planted area behind the statue.

*A group of school kids could have like a scavenger hunt around the statue and it would be like an adventure.*

### ***Other 'child-friendly' responses***

Children wanted to see:

- on-site information about Lord Freyberg and the history of the square
- a no-smoking sign
- a drinking fountain
- a playground for 'little kids', with a small jungle gym
- a slide coming down the hillside
- a climbing wall
- some art work – murals on walls and art on the ground
- chalk boards children could draw on
- Wifi

Children were asked if they would use Freyberg Square as a place to play. Yes, they said, they would, especially on warm sunny days.

*I'd come on a warm day with one of my friends, scooter around, go up into the tree, play on a playground – and I'd probably feed the birds.*

And would they come with their families and/or friends to special council-organised events? Again, the answer was yes, but with some provisos.

*If the Council put on events we would come – so long as there is parking nearby [for people in wheelchairs].*

Parking was highlighted as a concern by several children who also felt the 'creepy alleyways' and 'narrow streets' surrounding the existing square would be scary at night.

*If it's in the daylight it would be fine, but if it would be night that would be the scariest time.*

The idea of small-scale 'random events' was suggested.

*I think it should be like random events 'cos there's already a lot of people walking around...you could just go in and sit down...it doesn't have to be like this massive event.*

## **July 2015 workshop**

As a follow-up to their on-site audit of Freyberg Square (Sunday, June 21), the young consultants met with the researchers and the Community Development team member involved to complete the 'child-friendly' audit process and provide additional feedback for Council.

Specific suggestions children made for facilities/activities in a revitalised Freyberg Square and community centre (Ellen Melville and Pioneer Women's Hall) included:

### ***Indoors:***

- A café where parents can sit and talk to their friends and watch their children while they are playing
- Access to toilets
- A fish-tank next to the lift
- An activity area for children to play indoors with lego, bean bags and books, especially books about New Zealand wild life
- Table tennis
- Possible uses of the room with the stage included school productions, talent quests, dance demonstrations, drama classes

### ***Outdoors:***

- A welcome to the square sign which welcomed all ages, including babies
- Smoother surface
- A soft mat for babies to play , perhaps combined with a little baby-appropriate playground (with a gate)
- An outdoor playground for young children
- A basketball /netball hoop
- Handball and hopscotch
- Giant snakes and ladders painted on the ground
- A brightly coloured mural – suggestions for the content ranged from 'abstract' to 'New Zealand birds'
- Street performances
- They also thought it would be great to be able to buy ice-creams and hot chips from a food cart
- The children suggested the community centre/square would be a good place to run holiday programmes, cooking classes, events such as an Easter egg hunt, Christmas lights, chalk drawings in the square, discos and other music. The idea of a place to store play equipment which could be given out to children was also raised.
- Suggestions for integrating the square with a redeveloped community centre included opening up the whole front of the downstairs (where Pumpkin Patch is at

present) so it feels like it is connected to the Square; giant footsteps painted on the ground connecting the two spaces; using the same colours to obtain a flow.

## Photovoice Exercise (based on the existing Square)



A montage of the children's photo voice feedback was presented by the children to the Waitemata Local Board at their meeting on October 13, 2015. Below are the captions children wrote to accompany the three photographs of significance they each choose from those taken during the June workshop.

### Aira

The water feature was the first thing I saw and the first thing I went to. It was an interactive feature – it wasn't just taking up a chunk of space. It was fun climbing to the top.	The statue is important because it shows there is a meaning behind the park. It was a bold feature that I was drawn to after the water fountain.	The tree in the middle of the square was fun and easy to climb on. The seating was a good use of space but uncomfortable.
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### Angeline

I liked the bench around the tree and how you could climb the tree. The bench around the tree was different from the other ones and you could walk around.	I liked the shape of the fountain and the area at the top was good because you could climb. Having different levels was creative and I liked how you could jump around the fountain.	I liked the grassy area right at the top because it was high and going up the side by the stairs. I liked being up high.
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### David

I dislike the bench. I feel it doesn't need to be there because it is lost.	I dislike the tiles in the space. There are many cracks and there is moss growing inside them.	I dislike the look and the feel of the benches because of the rough edges and the rust. I feel they could be replaced by smoother benches.
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### Dustin

You can jump across [the water]and it's quite fun even though they're quite close together.	It's good to have some history in the square so you can know quite a bit about it.	You can jump across the benches and you can climb the tree. It's fun to do that.
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### Elizabeth

There should be a climbing wall. Also you should remove the rusty bench.	The platform underneath the water should be coloured and there could be a giant slide and a mini staircase (just in case you're stuck). The water could be cleaned, the blocks moved much more closer and it shouldn't be slippery material.	The ground is rough and it should be a smooth material because you can't scooter around.
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### Fergus

I dislike the seats at the square because they look disgusting and uninviting due to the rust.	I like how it looks abstract and looks different to other squares but I would like for it to be looked after because the glass panes look grotty.	I dislike this [paving] feature of the square because of all the [different] surfaces on the ground and there are too many cracks.
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### Jaden

I don't like the colour of the water.	The cracks are dangerous – it makes it uneven. It is not a good place for me to go at the moment.	If someone in a wheelchair wants to touch the water they have to lean over. The should replace the concrete so it's nicer.
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### Jennifer

The fountains splash out water which causes a safety hazard to kids. You would have to watch your step and have to be careful.	The park doesn't look fun and exciting at this time of year. It would be good if the park looked good and friendly at any time. In the summer the trees will be green.	Because the statue is a very important in the square it should be a main part of the square and the information should be placed more effectively. The information isn't placed effectively and it is quite hard to look at.
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## Jessica

The statue of Lord Freyberg is good to be built here since this place was made in honour of him. It would be better if it could be moved somewhere else, not in the middle of a lot of plants where no-one can read what it says on the statue.	It is really good how there is a sign for the name of the place but the sign was really small so no-one could actually see it/ notice it. They should change it so there could be a bigger sign of 'Freyberg Place' [Square].	I really liked the circular seat with a tree in the middle. It was good to sit on and the design was good to. The seat was high so it felt good without my feet touching the ground.
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## Julian

I enjoyed seeing there was plenty of space for people to scooter around and do as they please.	I think this big hill of grass can be turned into something like a slide for people to go down. I think they should have the slide go round the foot of the statue. It would make a nice effect, having him look at you as you go down the slide.	It is nice having a water feature right next to the hill. I think they should patch up the wobbly bits so it is safer for people to climb across. It is a cool feature to climb over. They could have it deeper in one place, like a wishing pond.
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## Scarlett

I like that gymnasts can do lots of things in the square.	Gross graffiti - I don't think graffiti looks good anywhere and it makes people feel unsafe.	This water looks and smells like urine. It's just gross. It should be the colour of a summery ocean and smell as good as cup-cakes.
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Children were also asked to consider their sense of agency, safety and security and a positive sense of self vis-à-vis Freyberg Square and the audit process. A child-friendly environment contributes to children's experience of agency by facilitating their active engagement in the local community and providing access to a range of age-appropriate activities and facilities; to their sense of safety and security by ensuring public spaces are safe for children; and to their positive self-image by creating public spaces that make children feel welcome and offer opportunities for them to have fun. (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009)

## Agency

The children were clear that young people had a right to be consulted about public spaces in the city.

*"Children need a say."*

They felt that children and adults had different views, different needs and different desires – and that young people's input could make public spaces more attractive to a range of people.



*"Kids ideas of how they like things to be are different to how adults think. Kids usually have more creative ideas, interacting with things and not just sitting and texting on their phone..."*

They also felt that Freyberg Square should be a place for people of all ages and that it should provide interactive features which children would enjoy.

*"It should be an area for all ages, even babies."*

*"There should be tons of fun things so it starts out on the map as a fun activity place, not a place to be bored."*

### **'Safety'**

In terms of whether they felt safe or not in the square, most said they felt safe

*"It feels safe because it is close to a building, and with shops around."*

*"It's safe when it is out in the open, not hidden away."*

However, one or two children said they would feel unsafe if there were 'bullies' or 'creeps' around.

*"It's not exactly unsafe, but creeps could scare kids."*

*"There shouldn't be any bullies there, or rubbish thrown around."*

The presence of rubbish and/or graffiti was highlighted as making the square seem unsafe.

*"I don't think graffiti looks good anywhere and it makes people feel unsafe."*

Most children disliked the cracks on the ground and felt these made the square potentially unsafe for playing in. There was the potential to trip over, and the uneven surface was not suitable for skateboarding, scooting or negotiating the square in a wheelchair.

*"The ground is a safety hazard, all the cracks on the ground."*

They approved of the plan to close off access to cars and turn the current roadway into pedestrian space.

*"No cars should be able to drive in."*

### **'Self image'**

While there were some aspects of the current square children considered provided opportunities to 'have fun', they felt these could be improved upon and that overall, the square did not have a welcoming feel – it looked drab, run down and uncared for.

*"The square at the moment is not very welcoming."*

*"There needs to be more colour and more things to interact with."*

Children also felt that rubbish left lying in the square made it unwelcoming.

*"It looks uninviting due to the rubbish. I think there should be a maintenance guy looking after the square."*

Children's general ideas for making the square more welcoming included more colour and a 'welcome to the square' sign.

*"The park doesn't look fun and exciting at this time of year. It would be good if the park looked good and friendly at any time."*

*"It is really good how there is a sign for the name of the place but it is really small... they should change it so there could be a bigger sign of 'Freyberg Square'."*

### **August 2015 workshop**

The children's feedback and suggestions greatly helped designers shape the draft concept, according to the Council Project Manager, Lisa Spasic. Many of the children's suggestions were included in the evolving design, either specifically, or informing the design – putting their ideas into the functional elements of the space in a way that worked for children and adults alike.

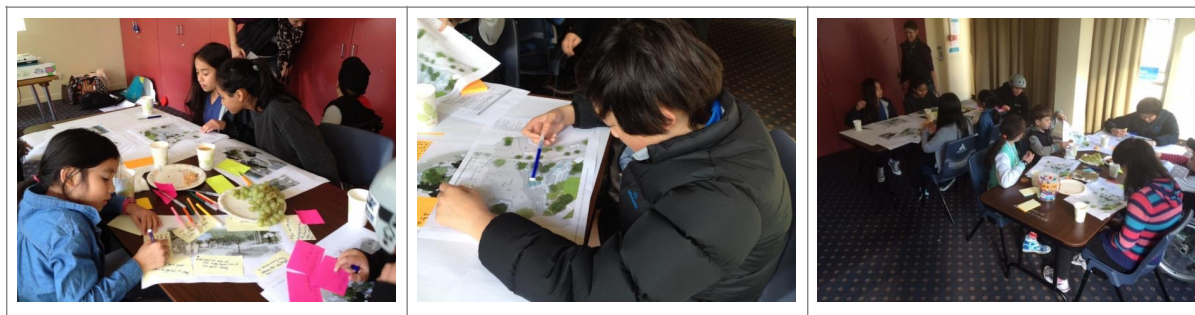
"A lot of the things they came up with were reinforcing the ideas that we had, so it made us feel like we were heading in the right direction."

Some examples of children's ideas (included in the draft concept design which went out for public consultation) are listed below:

- *Access to the statue of Lord Freyberg:* "some kids said that they wanted to touch him and it would be fun to play around him, so we made sure that we took him out of the bushes, so to speak, and provided access up to and around the statue."
- *Being able to play amongst the plants on the bank and access areas above the square:* "they talked about how they would really love to do a treasure hunt or to play in the plants and access some of the out of bound areas, and so we then went and had a discussion with Metropolis residents, who are the landowners of that area. We worked in a discovery trail...[which] provided a secondary pedestrian access up the Metropolis bank area. It also provided this great little path that kids can play in and be amongst the planting, and it's something that's really made just for them."
- *Climbing and being up high:* "They loved the idea of being up high. That was quite an easy one to work into the design. What we did was make sure we provided many different places of stairs and terraces so that children felt like they could be up high at many different points within the space."
- *The water feature:* "They wanted to be able to touch it, play in it, you know, really interact with the water feature. And so what we did was shape our water feature so they could. It's much more organic now in form than it was in the previous design. You can walk over it, you can be in it, you can step through it on little stepping stones..."
- *Climbing trees:* "They loved being able to climb the trees. That helped solidify the fact that we thought Pohutukawa would be a good species."

Other suggestions designers took on board included signage explaining the significance of Lord Freyberg; drinking fountains (including positioning one where wheelchair bound users could reach it), an artwork on the side of the Ellen Melville Hall; and bean bags, balls and other play equipment which could be stored inside the hall and used out in the square.

## Freyberg Square – feedback on draft concept plan



Children's feedback on the draft plan was very positive:

- *I really like the fountain sound. Also the fountain is a really good idea.*
- *I really like the fountain especially, if the bricks could be changed and the water should be changed.*
- *If you lived in the giant building [Metropolis], if you're bored this would be a perfect place to go.*
- *I would also play on the stepping stones where the water fountain will be.*
- *I would mainly play scavenger hunts [in the discovery trail].*
- *Lighting/glowing water is an awesome idea.*
- *Extra detail on one of the trees there should be mini steps.*
- *A good idea is maybe beanbags to read books.*
- *I like the idea of events this would be a good place to go with pets.*
- *There should be free Wi-Fi so teenagers could go on electronics.*
- *Pets, Wi-Fi, steps.*
- *I would play around the fountain.*
- *I like the steps.*
- *They could add some more colourful plants.*
- *I like it because it has a lot of space. I would stay on the steps and just read on them. I like that the water feature is spread and it's interactive and the lighting in the water. I really like the steps. There's nothing missing. It is modern and natural.*
- *I definitely like the idea of the lights in the water.*
- *I like the waterfall and I quite like how it's going to be designed soon. I would play around the waterfall/fountain. I don't really like the trees because of their dark colour.*
- *I would jump around the steps, the water feature and I would go through the [discovery trail] pathway.*
- *LEDs in the water so it lights up.*
- *I like the water feature and the steps.*
- *I like the little pathway leading to the hotel [Metropolis].*
- *That the water is still included and is placed much more effectively.*
- *The square will look good and natural in all seasons/all year round.*
- *I would like to play in the bushes and explore the statue.*
- *There's nothing missing, it looks good.*
- *I would play on the steps and the flat place.*
- *How it looks cool and modern.*
- *There's a lot of un-used space.*
- *I like the fountain design and the different levels.*
- *I would like to hang around the fountain or near the top of the site.*
- *I like the amount of trees.*
- *Make sure there are ramps all the way through.*
- *Should put a sign of 'Freyberg Place' somewhere.*
- *There could be colourful lights shining onto the waterfall.*
- *I like the new plants and how it's going to be evergreen.*
- *Water feature "much cooler" – won't smell like urine anymore which is great!*
- *There is a lot of space – seeing it now, it's very freeing.*

- *Really modern and simple and you didn't overdo it.*
- *Much safer without the road [through the square].*

Outside in the square the children, armed with 3D images of the draft concept plan, were asked to imagine specifics of the draft design within the space and wrote their thoughts on plans provided.



Back inside the Pioneer Women's Hall, the children wrote post-it notes to answer the following questions:

- What do you like?
- What else would you like to see here?
- Where would you play?
- What activity would you like to see here?

#### ***'Post it' ideas for the Square***

- *Maybe there could be a half pipe.*
- *Maybe there could be a hopscotch or handball square.*
- *Maybe on the roof there could be a BBQ or party place.*
- *A climbing wall.*
- *Chalk, Wi-Fi, beanbags and furniture outside, food.*
- *I imagine me running around with my sister trying to get a hug.*
- *I imagine coming here with my friends and playing soccer.*

#### **Children's ideas for the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall proposed concept plan:**

- *I hope that we can rent a room out without having an adult doing it because I always have trouble renting rooms out because I wasn't trusted enough or because of my age.*
- *I would like to have magic shows here which could be very interesting. There should be art on the ground to show people to walk into the building.*
- *A balcony on this building with shelter so parents can sit there, drinking coffee and watching the children.*
- *I would like to see a movie projected on the building.*
- *Classes to have: yoga meditation, gymnastics, dance, acting, cooking, parenting, singing, photography, art.*
- *Holiday programmes.*
- *Music lessons, light shows, ball storage.*
- *Walking inside to the café area, light shows, activity, watch movie, eat café food, modern, take lessons, colourful, chairs and tables, band.*
- *Music lessons: concerts, to relax, to stop after walking around in the city, sports equipment.*

- *Art classes, music, computer rooms, dance classes, Karate/Tae kwondo, movie, concert/music/band, cooking classes, handball, lessons, BBQ, learn new languages and instruments, tutor classes, ball storage, food, easily opened doors, Zumba classes, market, exercise classes, café.*
- *I would like to relax, listen to music and eat food inside the building.*
- *I imagine me doing a cooking lesson right here or down there.*
- *I imagine me relaxing on a neon green beanbag with my siblings.*

## Conclusions

*‘One of the best ways to make built environments child-friendly is to involve children and young people in creating them’ (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009).*

Children like to play and explore – and spaces to do so safely are scarce in the city centre. It is clear from the children’s comments and our own observations that Freyberg Square, while only a small public open space surrounded by city buildings, offers a variety of opportunities for children to play, explore and have adventures. A unique characteristic of this space is the different levels from the square to the Metropolis terrace above which enable activities such as jumping, climbing, sliding and scrambling. From the children’s perspective, the plantings on the bank above the water feature also offer an enticing ‘wild place’. The designers have taken the children’s feedback on board and incorporated elements which encourage exploration and play into the draft concept plan.

Including children in a meaningful way in urban planning and design processes is time consuming and resource intensive. In this instance, having prior established research relationships with the children and parents involved has allowed preliminary feedback from the children on existing facilities in Freyberg Square within a very short time-frame. ‘Child-friendly indicator questions’ (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2009) explored children’s sense of agency, safety and security and positive sense of self. Interaction with Freyberg Square and the consultation process has enhanced these. There is now widespread support for the inclusion of children in city planning and development internationally and nationally. Freeman et al, (2004) list the following reasons:

- They have the right to be included
- They are valuable members of the community, now and in the future
- There is a legal and moral imperative to aid their participation
- The local environment can help or hinder their development
- Young people should be partners in community development
- Everybody learns through their participation
- They provide new perspectives and ideas
- Environments that are better for children and young people are better for everyone
- They have different needs and perspectives than those of adults.

Major benefits of involving children in developing/redeveloping the built environment identified by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2009) include:

- Grounding adult understanding and decision-making in the reality of children's and young people's experience
- Removing the need for assumptions by adults about what children and young people need and what they want
- Recognising children's right to participate in community development processes as citizens of their community
- Recognising the value of children and young people's contribution to community development
- Recognising that children and young people's knowledge and experience of their environments differs from adults' experience

Auckland Council is 'walking the talk' of the Auckland Plan in instigating this 'child-friendly audit' of Freyberg Square and the Pioneer Women's and Ellen Melville Hall. The children welcomed the opportunity to contribute their ideas and the design team found them extremely useful. To quote the Project Manager of the design team, Lisa Spasic:

"It's actually been extremely useful. The whole concept is stronger because it's had input from the children around what they would like in the space, how they'd use it, what could be improved.

"I would definitely be an advocate for following this process again on another project".



The audit team (above).



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## Appendix 1: Resources

Two key New Zealand government documents setting an agenda for the inclusion of children in decision-making were released in 2002: New Zealand's Agenda for *Children: Making Life Better for Children* (Ministry for Social Development) and *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (Ministry of Youth Affairs). These were followed up with guidelines for participation in 2003 and 2004: *"Keeping it Real". A Resource for Involving Young People*; *Youth Development Participation Guide* (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2003); *Involving Children: A Guide to Engaging Children in Decisionmaking* (Ministry for Social Development, 2003); and *Toolkit for child and youth participation in local government decisionmaking processes* (Ministry for Social Development, 2004). International guides on how to work with children, (usually with case studies), include manuals produced by Driskell/UNESCO (2002), the NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005 & 2009) and UNICEF (2010).