

Innovating Streets featured project

Drews Ave. Arts Quarter

Whanganui City Council

The project

A semi-permanent 'living street' was installed on Drews Ave, a heritage area with a strong identity as Whanganui's arts quarter, to create attractive spaces for people to gather and meet outside cafes and galleries. Thanks to high quality materials, intriguing place-specific work by local artists, and positive public reception, the refreshed street has become a source of community pride.

In total, 22 car parks were transformed into seating areas for dining, play, and performance, with attractive shelter, lighting and planting. New amenities include bike racks, a bike repair station and a water fountain. A spectacular road mural leads to painted pathways and wayfinding to the riverfront and nearby attractions, while a trail of interactive artworks and musical installations offers historical context and invitations to explore the area.

'Getting creatives involved makes projects come alive - out of the box ideas are possible!'

Project team

Project outcomes:

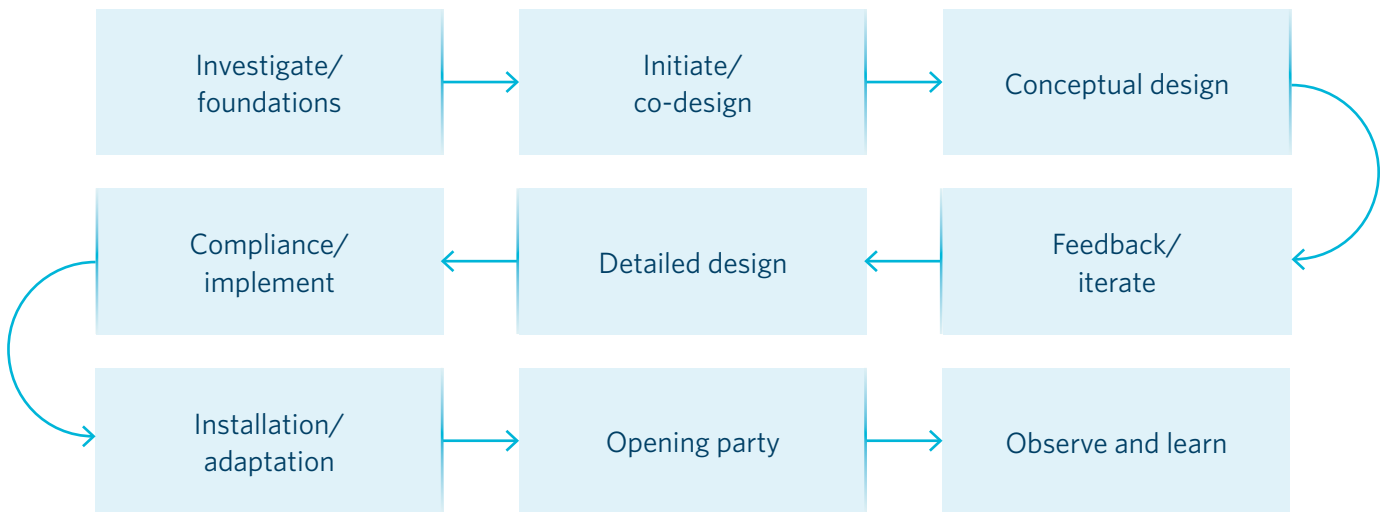
- 19 parking spaces were reclaimed as people-space
- Over a thousand people attended the midwinter Lights on Bikes launch event
- Three businesses on the street report a 30% increase in takings for July 2021 compared to July 2020

Next step

In mid-2022, the installation will be formally evaluated with a view to keeping the project installed for up to five years, while Whanganui District Council investigates turning the block into a shared space. This tactical project is a key pathway towards that transition.



Process



Workshops

A strong foundation for engagement was provided by the town centre regeneration strategy and a deep understanding of the location as a historic arts precinct. Engagement began with community co-design workshops at a café on Drews Ave, and included site walkarounds paying attention to sun, shade and wind. An architect turned the results into design form, and the community group selected a preferred design and provided further suggestions for refinement.



Local Procurement

A large number of local artists and businesses contributed a wide range of services, including: design, artworks, signage, painting, filming, catering, event planning, venues and support for workshops and events, engineering metal structures, sandblasting, removal of existing structures, providing plants and planters, building light boxes, and transportation and traffic management.



Adaptation

Minor tweaks were made during installation, and one section will be installed later in the year once nearby construction is complete. Once the project was in place, street surveys asked people how they were using and enjoying the area, and an online survey invited feedback and suggestions for what else people would like to see in place. There is also a letterbox on the street to collect feedback over the coming year.

Outcomes

Reduction in traffic speeds and volumes

Traffic speeds and volumes are lower, and more people are walking and biking.

Increase in visitors to the area

The project team has observed a significant increase in people spending time in the area, especially on Saturday mornings when the local market is happening nearby. The local café reports its busiest days on record, and three businesses report a 30% increase in sales for July 2021 versus July 2020.

Community satisfaction and support

Co-design participants have seen their feedback and priorities injected into the project giving them a feeling of ownership and community pride in the outcome.

Since the project was officially launched, social media commentary has been overwhelmingly supportive.

High-quality and interactive art installations create intrigue and delight along the street, encouraging people to explore the area. These include:

- A large marble run in the topographic shape of the Whanganui River
- A phone booth telling stories of the local area and the meaning behind the artworks
- A bus stop furnished with musical instruments
- Lightboxes highlight the work of local artists
- Sculpted lanterns made by local glassworks, and light fixtures upcycled from electrical insulators



Tips for practitioners

Focus on one project at a time – Initially the Council started working on two projects and quickly learnt that these types of projects, while they have relatively small budgets, require more time and resources for the communication and engagement aspects. As a result, the project team paused the parallel plan for an adjacent block to allow them to concentrate on delivering Drews Ave to the highest standard.

Time the installation for dry weather – especially if it includes road art – and locate parklets and seating strategically, in sunny spots and outside businesses that are keen to activate the space.

Plan for plenty of early baseline monitoring – including retail data, to ensure strong before and after comparisons.

Plan with your local community in mind – even for a temporary project, high-quality design and semi-permanent materials, plus site-specific artwork, will help create an appealing outcome with a proud local flavour.



Lights on Bikes x Drew's Street Party with group 25 June 2021
<https://fb.me/Hd50U870>