

UPGRADING GLEESON PARK PLAYGROUND: A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC TRANSFORMATION



In early 2023, the Napier City Council embarked on a transformative project to revitalise Gleeson Park Playground, a key recreational space on Faraday Street, Hospital Hill. The initiative aimed to replace the outdated and minimalistic playground equipment with a modern, engaging, and inclusive playspace that blended in with its natural surroundings and served the needs of the community.

The council conducted extensive public consultation in February 2023, which was well-attended and generated valuable input. The community's feedback was influential in guiding the design process, from equipment selection to design themes. Mike Alebardi, Parks Asset Planner at Napier City Council said *"Number one on the community list was an inground trampoline. So, it was important that this was included in any design concepts"*.

The project officially commenced with an initial concept design presented to a panel of suppliers. After evaluating the tenders received back from the suppliers, Park Supplies & Playgrounds was selected for their design concept.

Mike explained *"The designer that they have working there, she really nailed the brief. I remember going through the tenders and her design stood out amongst the other ones. She's very good"*.



The initial design concept proposed by the Park Supplies & Playgrounds team.

Prior to the upgrade, the existing playground featured a basic setup consisting of a single tower with a slide and monkey bars. It was functional but lacked the variety and inclusiveness desired by the community. The design for the playground area was also an important focus for the council, as it would sit on a terraced hill.

“The very top terrace needed to be left untouched, as that’s an area where local kids play cricket or rugby. The second terrace was where we wanted to build the playground, to make the most of the space. We used the third terrace to create more car parking and safe footpath access. There was also a pathway that ran past the playground and up the hillside that kids use as a route to get to the school at the top. We wanted to make sure that there was still space available after the playground, as there’s not a lot of flat space on the hillside. The Park Supplies & Playgrounds design team nailed the brief, especially with the natural vibe that we were going for”.

The design, inspired by the historical and natural context of “Mataruahou” (the original Māori name for Napier Hill, meaning “mirror images of faces in pools”), featured a subtle rock pool and ripple theme. This was reflected through colour schemes in shades of blue and green, natural materials, and planted areas, ensuring that the playground blended with the surrounding green space.

The playground design included several features:

Inground Trampoline: Addressing a top request from the community, this feature allows inclusive play with accessibility for children in wheelchairs.

Sensory Panels: Two accessible Sensory Panels - Bubble and Mirror - offering interactive and visually stimulating experiences for younger and neurodiverse children and are accessible by wheelchair.

Swings and Slides: A two-bay swing set with a Toddler Swing, Belt Swing and Basket Swing. The Basket Swing with its smooth surface is a comfortable transfer option and along with a double slide these items accommodate a range of mobility needs and enhance play diversity.

Balance: Timber Balance Beams and Log Steppers provides additional opportunities for physical activity and exploration.



The Sensory Panels in Bubble and Mirror styles.



The new playground included Timber Balance Beams and log steppers for added physical activity and exploration opportunities.



Two local children enjoying the ‘number one’ request (an In-Ground Trampoline) for the new playground.



A two-bay swing set and double slide were incorporated into the playground design.



Local children got “stuck” into the new playground at the opening. The Orex Spinner was a crowd favourite.

The new playground featured a mix of playground safety surfaces. Wetpour was used for high-traffic and safety-critical areas, while certified wood chip was applied in less critical zones to blend with the natural surroundings and reduce heat. Wet pour provides an accessible surface to the inclusive play pieces within the design.

In terms of the installation process, Mike said “Our Project Manager said the entire process went smoothly. The times I personally needed to reach out to Park Supplies & Playgrounds, the team was always responsive and provided prompt support whenever needed.”

The Gleeson Park playground’s grand opening in April 2024 was a great success. Joined by Napier youth councillor Zahra Jawad Mohamad Abdullah, Napier City Council Ahuriri Ward councillor Hayley Browne officially unveiled the new play space to a delighted crowd. The event drew a diverse mix of families, children,

and community members, creating a vibrant and joyful atmosphere. Overwhelmingly positive feedback from the community and stakeholders underscores the success of the project.

The upgraded playground has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from an outdated facility into a modern, inclusive hub for the community. By seamlessly integrating the play space with its natural environment and rich history, the project has exceeded expectations and aligned with the council and community’s vision for the area. It now stands as a thriving recreational space for local children and a cherished community asset.

Gleeson Park Playground was in desperate need of a revitalisation. With a focus on community input and inclusive design, Park Supplies & Playgrounds transformed the space into a modern, engaging play area.

**Want your next playground opening to be a resounding success?
We’re here to help! **Contact us today!****



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