

Part 1 – Setting the scene



1. Introduction

Wellington City Council has been working with the community, landowners, businesses, developers, residents and others to explore opportunities to revitalise Kilbirnie town centre.

By developing a town centre revitalisation plan (the plan) we hope to show how the town centre and its surrounds can be improved and enhanced, creating an attractive, vibrant, people-friendly and prosperous part of Wellington City.

The focus of the plan is on revitalisation – closing the gap between what it is now to being a key destination for visitors, shoppers, residents and the wider Wellington community.

The plan has been developed following extensive community consultation and analysis.

2. Why do a town centre revitalisation plan for Kilbirnie?

Town centres are the engine rooms of economic development in cities.

They are the focus for jobs and community activities. We rely heavily on our centres to provide services and facilities, and to provide social meeting places for the community.

Kilbirnie town centre is an important centre in our city. It provides a range of community services and is the location of major regional recreational infrastructure, including the Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre and the soon-to-be completed Indoor Community Sports Centre.

While it has some good anchor commercial uses (supermarkets, post office, banks) the town centre has not delivered on its potential as a sub-regional centre. Economically, it has performed below par over the last decade (which was a period of economic prosperity)¹.

The overall aim is to develop a plan for Kilbirnie that shows how the town centre and its surrounds can be revitalised and enhanced, creating an attractive, vibrant, people-friendly and prosperous part of Wellington City.

There are three key drivers behind the plan:

We are growing and changing

Wellington is a dynamic and growing city. Latest forecasts show by 2031 there will be around 51,000 more people living in Wellington City than in 2006². Kilbirnie town centre and the surrounding residential areas will continue to experience significant residential growth over the next 20 to 30 years³. Additionally, new development is proposed for key sites such as the bus barns, the Indoor Community Sports Centre and the airport. The town centre needs to elevate its role and function from that currently of a convenience centre in decline to a vibrant town centre of regional significance to service this expanded population catchment.

The plan will help ensure that expected growth in employment and residential living in and around the centre will be organised in a way that benefits the entire community. It will also ensure the town centre maintains its role as a key social, community and business hub for the southern and eastern suburbs.

¹ *Kilbirnie Town Centre Market Assessment*, Property Economics, August 2009.

² *Sub-national population projections*, Statistics NZ, February 2010.

³ *Census Area population projections*, Statistics NZ, February 2006.



The centre is not living up to its potential – need to revitalise it

The Kilbirnie area has always been a 'mixed use' community with homes alongside industrial and commercial development. The range of retail is, however, quite limited and largely based on convenience goods. There are also traffic issues, a lack of connectivity between the key activities, and the design quality of the buildings is generally poor. The plan provides an opportunity to address these concerns and revitalise the town centre.

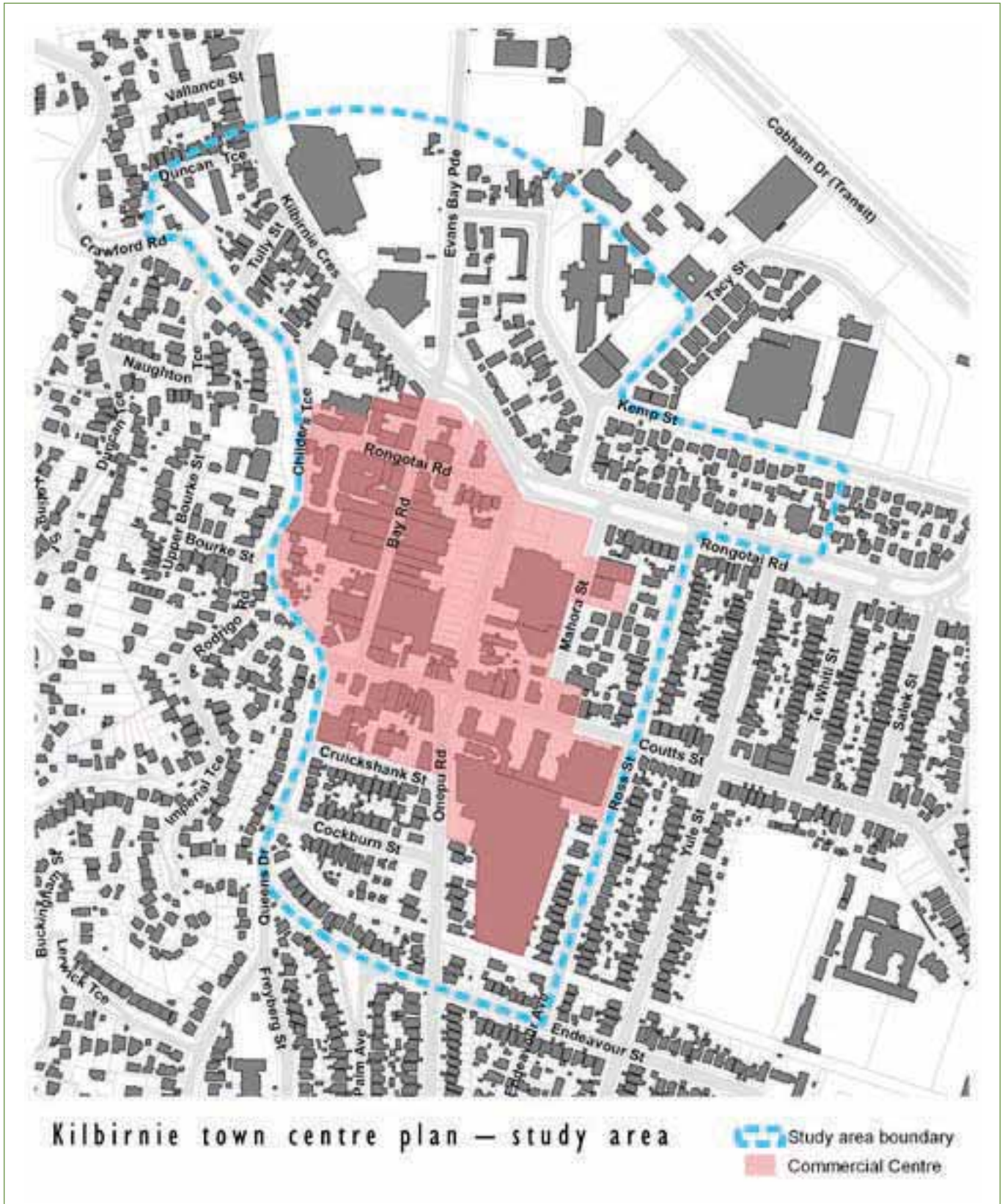
Coordination – improves affordability and leads to more efficient use of resources

It is important, particularly in the current economic climate, to ensure every dollar invested is spent wisely and achieves the greatest benefit. The plan is a useful tool to help coordinate public and private investment to achieve the greatest benefit for the community. From a Council perspective, it will assist in our asset management planning and ensure work on infrastructure and public space is coordinated and carried out in the most efficient manner. The plan will also assist the private sector by identifying opportunities for investment and partnerships that will help revitalise Kilbirnie town centre.

3. Study area

The focus of the plan is primarily on the core town centre. This is shaded in pink on the map below. The study area for the project includes a small area surrounding the centre so that the relationships and impacts of adjacent residential and recreational uses can be considered and form part of the long-term vision for the centre.

The project also considers how the town centre fits in with the wider context for issues such as transport, water-based infrastructure and climate change.



4. What is it today – key facts

History

Previous land reclamations and urban development patterns influence Kilbirnie's current structure. At its inception, the town centre was sited next to the beach at the intersection of Kilbirnie Crescent, Bay Road and Rongotai Road. The edge of the original shoreline is clearly reflected in the street pattern and geometry of Kilbirnie Crescent. The position of Rongotai Road marks the position of the original Evans Bay waterfront.

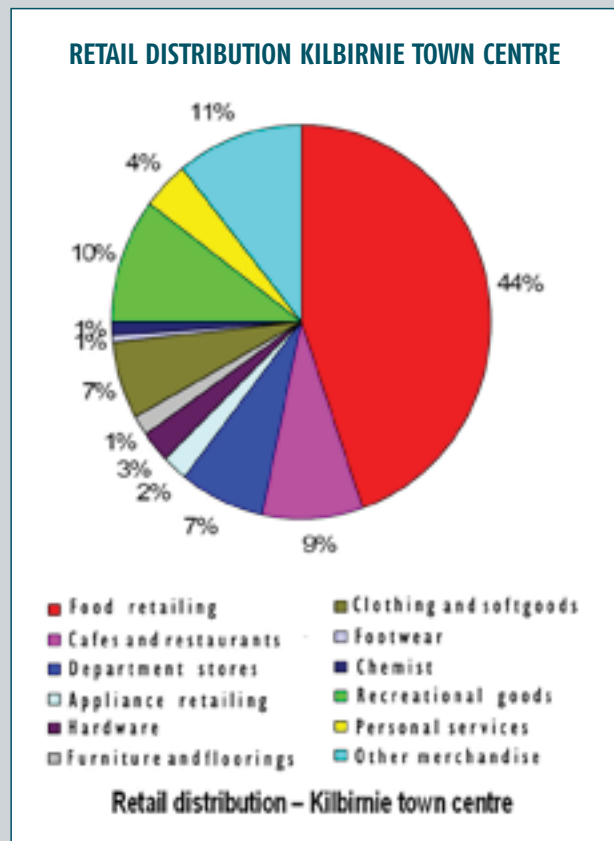
The tramway and depot were important elements and make Kilbirnie an early example of public transport-oriented urban development. The siting of tramlines influenced the local street layout, creating a logical and legible urban form.



Economy

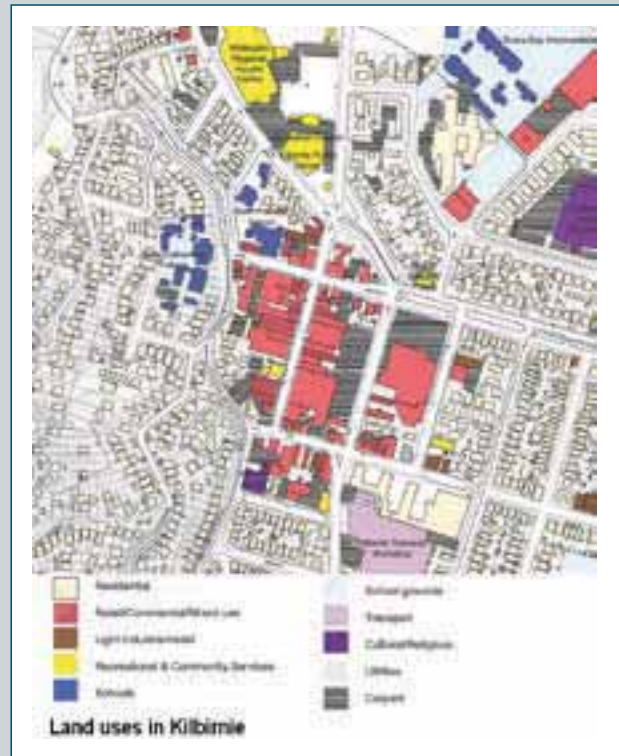
The employment distribution for Kilbirnie shows that retail and industrial employment is dominant. About 40 percent of all retail employees in the catchment area are employed in supermarkets. With approximately 15,000sq m of retail floor space, the existing supply is generally in line with the expected level of demand. However, the range of retail is quite limited.

Future demand for retail space in the catchment area is estimated to be around 25,000–30,000sq m by 2031, an increase of around 500sq m annually – providing an opportunity for the town centre to greatly improve its economic performance and elevate its role and function from a large convenience centre to a sub-regional centre.



Land use and activities

The study area accommodates an unusually diverse mix of activities that attract large numbers of people to Kilbirnie. These include regionally significant commercial and recreational attractions and a number of schools. In association with this, small-scale retailing is interspersed around the town centre. The town centre is surrounded by residential areas but has only a small amount of residential living in the core centre. The southern part of the centre is dominated by the Rita Angus retirement village and bus storage activities associated with the bus barns.



Transport

Kilbirnie is dominated by vehicle traffic. It has many traffic generators (such as supermarkets, retail and recreation facilities) and is serviced by three main access points to the CBD, all of which are at or near capacity. There are significant traffic volumes on most of the streets in and around the Kilbirnie town centre.

The town centre is well served by the bus network. Most of the suburb is within a five-minute walk to a bus stop and during weekdays there are up to 400 buses a day on the main routes.

The retail-based nature of the centre means demand for car parks is high and this pressure can be expected to continue in the future. Crash statistics from the past 10 years suggest there are no major safety issues for pedestrians or cyclists in Kilbirnie. However, there are opportunities to improve walking and cycling access.



Spatial structure

The study area is broadly defined by two intersecting street grids. The town centre and blocks immediately south of Rongotai Road are aligned perpendicular to the historic shoreline at Evans Bay, while a second grid south of Endeavour Street is aligned perpendicular to the shoreline at Lyall Bay. The scale of lots and pattern of subdivision contribute to consistent precincts.

Roads to the east provide a curvilinear edge, fitting with a change in landform. The grid pattern shifts on the reclamation, with linear blocks running east-west. In the town centre there is a general lack of mid-block, east-west access routes for pedestrians. A number of laneways offer east-west access between Childers Terrace and Bay Road. Open spaces are concentrated around schools and the community hub in Kilbirnie Crescent.



Ecology

The low-lying dune and wetland environment of the isthmus contrasts with the forested backdrop of the Town Belt and Melrose hills. These two landscape types offer distinct climatic and topographic conditions within a broader region exposed to the salt-laden air and water from Cook Strait. The town centre sits at the transition of these two zones.

The low-lying area has generally sparse vegetation due to urban development, the underlying geology and climatic conditions.





5. Strategic policy context

Regional Policy

The Wellington Regional Strategy (2006) seeks to grow and improve the mix of uses in key centres throughout the region, including Kilbirnie. Action areas include: completing a centre vision for each of the key centres; developing infrastructure investment programmes to support centres; and encouraging residential intensification in and around these centres. The Proposed Regional Policy statement (2009) builds on this by directing councils in the region to improve housing choices, including having more homes close to centres and transport.

Urban Development and Transport Strategies

The 2006 Urban Development and Transport Strategies outline an integrated land use and transport vision for the city. They seek to concentrate additional growth along a 'growth spine' from Johnsonville through the CBD to Kilbirnie town centre and the airport – supported by a high-quality public transport system and improved roads. Improvements in the quality of development and better integration with supporting facilities and services are also key objectives.

Wellington City District Plan

The District Plan sets out the planning provisions that guide development.

Proposed District Plan Changes 72 (Residential Areas) and 73 (Suburban Centres) will introduce new zones and provisions for development in and around Kilbirnie town centre. The new provisions aim to:

- promote a wide range of uses and endorse Kilbirnie's role as a sub-regional centre
- improve the overall quality of urban form, buildings and spaces, particularly for main shopping streets

- better manage issues such as noise, traffic and parking
- promote high-quality medium-density housing in and around the town centre.

Proposed District Plan Changes 72 (Residential Areas) and 73 (Suburban Centres) are in the final phases of review under the Resource Management Act 1991.

Centres Policy

In August 2008, the Council adopted a Centres Policy that seeks to maintain and strengthen centres as primary places for shopping, living, employment growth and services. The policy defines a hierarchy and the function of various centres, provides guidance on how they should be managed and developed, and assists in coordinating Council investment in and around centres. The policy defines a hierarchy of centre types from: the central city, sub-regional centre, town centre, district centre, and neighbourhood centre. Kilbirnie is defined as a sub-regional centre serving the southern and eastern suburbs.

Community Facilities Policy

The Community Facilities Policy (2009) provides guidance on the sizing and levels of service for different community activities. The policy identifies a significant shortfall in the capacity of the community centre on Bay Road and, to a lesser extent, the Ruth Gotlieb Library. The policy notes the community centre is one of the better-located community centres in the city. It also suggests an integrated hub approach, where the Council provides multiple services in a single location, is preferable. The policy is supported by an implementation plan which puts forward an investment programme for the Long-term Council Community Plan.

6. Consultation and engagement

Community engagement has been very important in developing the plan. A range of methods has been used including feedback surveys, consultation brochures, key stakeholder interviews, public displays, and a series of community-based planning and design workshops.

The process to date has involved six key phases:

Information gathering and research (from May 2009)

Existing information was reviewed and specific research undertaken on technical areas (eg economy, parking, traffic and transport, urban design, infrastructure capacity, climate change, demographics and community facilities).

Consultation on issues and opportunities (May–June 2009)

Consultation was undertaken with the community through an information brochure and drop-in sessions at the Kilbirnie Community Centre. The consultation provided a good starting point for understanding the issues that need to be addressed in order to revitalise the town centre, including:

- improving the look and feel of the centre
- addressing traffic management and parking issues
- improving the mix of uses and quality of retail offered
- improving the public transport hub.

The consultation also generated feedback on aspects of the town centre that are highly valued, including:

- the village atmosphere of the centre
- proximity to a wide range of community facilities such as the Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre, Ruth Gotlieb Library, recreation centre and the community centre on Bay Road
- high levels of accessibility, including access to public transport
- quality of supermarket shopping.

These considerations have been very useful in informing the development of the draft plan.

Stakeholder interviews (July 2009)

Targeted interviews were held with key groups including Living Streets Aotearoa, the Council's Disability Reference Group and Pacific Advisory Group, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Housing New Zealand, school principals in the Kilbirnie area, churches and cultural groups.

Community-based planning and design workshops (August/September 2009)

A series of community-based planning and design workshops were held at the Kilbirnie Park Bowling Club to develop the key ideas to inform the development of a draft plan.

The workshops were facilitated by a multi-disciplinary consultant team (McIndoeURBAN, Wraight + Associates Ltd, Athfield Architects Ltd) and included a Council-appointed Leadership Group of 12 individuals representing community and local retail and commercial interests. The Leadership Group idea proved to be a successful model for obtaining stakeholder input into the process. Along with Council staff and the consultant team, the Leadership Group played a key role in the development and review of ideas to revitalise Kilbirnie town centre.



Preparation of draft plan (September 2009–April 2010)

A draft town centre revitalisation plan was prepared using the information and analysis from the previous four development phases.

Consultation on draft plan and development of final plan (May–July 2010)

Consultation on the draft revitalisation plan was undertaken over a four-week period from 18 May to 21 June 2010. The draft plan attracted 136 submissions, plus four petitions (one with 443 signatures requesting that the community centre stay in its existing location). A summary of the comments and feedback received during the consultation was prepared and distributed to submitters⁴. The plan was then reviewed and amended, and presented to the Council for adoption.

⁴The consultation summary is available on the Council's website Wellington.govt.nz

7. Issues and challenges

Consultation and technical analysis⁵ has revealed the following key issues and challenges for the revitalisation of Kilbirnie town centre.

Theme 1 – Shopping, employment and mixed use

- While the town centre has some good anchors (supermarkets, banks, post office, community facilities), a wider range of retail and non-retail activities are needed to raise the overall performance of the centre. Activities such as an expanded department store, diversity of shops, and entertainment and family activities would help raise the economic performance of the town centre.
- The quality of the shopping experience is generally poor, in part because the built environment is not attractive. Many of the retail buildings are older single-level buildings, with little emphasis on design quality.
- Retail growth over time is expected to increase as the population base in the southern and eastern suburbs grows – providing an opportunity to significantly improve the performance of Kilbirnie and enable it to fulfil its sub-regional centre role.

Theme 2 – Sense of place

- Kilbirnie's sense of place needs improving. Many of the buildings are low-rise and in need of improvements. The spaces between buildings and public spaces are poorly designed and there is significant space dedicated to car parking – resulting in a town centre that is not a compelling place to visit. There is scope to enhance the streetscape, working with key retailers to provide solutions that are commercially viable and improve the public spaces and streetscapes.
- Street-edge conditions decline towards the southern end of Bay Road, with edges dominated by large blank walls or open service areas and car parking.
- The overall grid street pattern provides a good foundation to build on – the challenge is to enhance east-west linkages and improve connections to key destinations in the town centre.
- The busier streets and intersections are vehicle-dominated, making them unattractive and difficult for pedestrians and cyclists to use.
- The town centre is a generally safe and low-crime area but would benefit from safety enhancements. While good design can reduce opportunities for crime and perceptions of unsafe surroundings (by removing dark alleys and the like), there is more immediate scope for using lighting to improve safety and security.

Theme 3 – Movement networks

- The town centre is generally dominated by vehicle traffic, with significant traffic volumes on most of its streets. The majority of traffic issues arise around the intersections at the northern end of the town centre.

- Transport network modelling shows the northern part of Kilbirnie is sensitive to the impact of new development. Given the complexity of the traffic network, even minor street changes will require careful assessment.
- The town centre is well-served by public transport, but the look and ease of use of bus stops needs to be improved.
- Access to, and overall availability of, parking is important for town centre users and retailers alike. The existing provision of parking within the town centre compares well to other centres. The challenge is to ensure that sufficient parking is incorporated into new development.
- There is a unique mix of uses and destinations in the town centre and its surrounds, creating demand in terms of vehicles and active modes of transport (walking and cycling). A key challenge will be to improve pedestrian connections while providing continued access for vehicle traffic.

Theme 4 – Housing

- At present there is a limited choice of housing available in the area, particularly in terms of apartments and medium-density terrace and town houses. The challenge is to ensure that new types of residential living are successfully integrated into the existing urban environment and that the buildings are arranged and designed to enhance (not detract from) Kilbirnie's sense of place.

Theme 5 – Community infrastructure

- While the community centre's central location is advantageous, the buildings are a poor fit for the scope of activities that occur. The buildings were originally intended as a temporary/stop-gap measure. As a result they are too small to accommodate medium-size gatherings (such as public meetings) and have a lack of storage space. The frontage on Bay Road is unattractive and poorly lit.
- The existing community hub area on Kilbirnie Crescent accommodates a wide range of community and recreation uses. The location's popularity means there is ongoing demand for new or expanded activities. However, the buildings are arranged in an ad hoc manner and many are facing capacity issues. The challenge for this area is to get maximum use out of community facilities while being ready to meet future needs and demands.

Theme 6 – Resilience and climate change

- Kilbirnie is a low-lying area and some areas to the north of the town centre are already prone to flooding in heavy rain. Climate change impacts (including sea-level rise) are expected to exacerbate these issues. The challenge for this area is to be resilient, ensuring these impacts are taken into account in our asset management planning.

⁵ Kilbirnie Town Centre [KTC] Market Assessment, Property Economics, August 2009. Summary of Consultation and Feedback, Wellington City Council [WCC], June 2009. KTC Summary of Transport Issues, WCC, July 2009 and December 2010. Assessing the Implications of Sea Level Rise, KTC, WCC, September 2009. KTC Working Paper (November 2009), KTC Urban Design Analysis (July 2009), McIndoe Urban, Athfield Architects Ltd, Wraight & Associates Ltd. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Assessment, Stoks Ltd, August 2009.