

Bason Botanical Garden Strategic Plan

Chairperson's Foreword

The Bason Botanic Gardens (BBG) have come of age. They have matured as a garden. They have matured as a place to visit. They have matured as an important strategic asset for Whanganui.

In drafting this document, it has become starkly apparent how significant the gardens are to Whanganui, and what an enormous benefit they are to our community. They are an asset with a huge positive return to the community, the region and the country. With careful strategic management they will grow in these roles.

The challenge is to continue to develop the gardens while preserving the original intention of its creation. The BBG is a unique cool temperate coastal garden. It is a Premier Park, a Botanical Reserve and a significant public garden that attracts people, families and groups to enjoy a peaceful and meaningful connection with nature.

This strategic plan builds upon the 2012 to 2020 plan and brings together the conservation, horticultural and educational goals of the founders, Stanley and Blanche Bason, and the means to project, develop and sustain them into the future. It moves the main emphasis from capital development to development of use and community benefit.

Importantly, the plan provides a basis to make decisions within a strategic framework and sets clear guidance to future decision making in the context of the guardianship goals of preserving rare, unique and interesting plants and their safe enjoyment by all people.

Governance of the BBG is about long-term strategy. Decisions made today will be there for our grandchildren and great grandchildren to witness and it is in this context that we must be good kaitiaki of this special place. It is the duty of the BBG Trust Board to promote the above values and work with the Whanganui District Council (WDC) to maximise the benefit of the Gardens to the city, region and its visitors.

This plan sits well with the WDC's Strategic Plan and to be effective it should be an agreed and continuing partnership with the WDC who resource the maintenance of the Gardens.

Terry Dowdeswell

Chair

Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Board

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Vision, Mission and Values

Our Vision

To provide a sanctuary for people and plants.

Our Core Purpose

To connect people to the environment through plants and spaces.

Our Mission

To ensure Bason Botanic Gardens is:

- A sustainable and influential botanic garden of regional and national significance in perpetuity
- A valuable asset to Whanganui, that will provide the local community and tourism industry the opportunity to experience and enjoy recreational, educational, artistic, and leisure facilities and features of a national standard
- A place Whanganui is proud of

We Value

- The aesthetic beauty of open spaces, flow and great garden design
- The sustainable care of the environment, the preservation of rare, interesting and endangered plants and the education of future generations in these values
- That all people can easily access the gardens and that they are a place where people gather for a special experience or occasion
- The safety and spaciousness of this garden sanctuary
- Educating future generations about our connection with nature

Strategic Objectives of the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust

There are three major strategic objectives for the Bason Botanic Gardens:

1. Make Bason Botanic Gardens a sustainable and influential botanic garden of regional and national significance.
 - Develop and catalogue a GPS database of existing key plant specimens and collections
 - Clearly define the criteria for future collections, garden design and assets
 - Complete and maintain already scheduled capital development and infrastructure plans
 - Plan for future development scenarios consistent with existing design parameters

2. Develop and enhance the Garden's reputation as a core, beneficial, strategic asset of Whanganui.
 - Pursue a communication and marketing strategy to promote the Gardens
 - Engage politically to ensure Council awareness of the Garden's significance to Whanganui
 - Plan for financial sustainability of the Board's plans and operations
 - Maintain strong, strategically focussed governance

3. Connect people to the Gardens and to the environment
 - An online-centric strategy which defines what makes the Garden unique and showcases why they should be visited and explored.
 - Hold events that are special, which people would travel to experience
 - Provide education on plants and the environment
 - Hold collections which are labelled and have botanical and cultural information available on plants
 - Install a Gardener in Residence
 - Define and grow membership (friends of) as means of engagement and financing
 - Be an ambassador for plants and what they mean to society

These Strategic objectives are expanded in Board documents as are the individual policies (Botanical, Communications, Structural, Financial and Governance etc) necessary to achieve these objectives.

Policies and Plans

To achieve strategic objectives the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust will be guided by the following policies and plans:

The Role of the Board of Trustees

Though not specified in the deed of trust our implied role is: "To carry out and facilitate the fulfilment of the purposes of the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust in partnership with the WDC"

The Bason Botanic Gardens are moving from a stage of building and development to one of maximising the Garden's use, utility and its benefits to the region and community at large. It is necessary that the composition of the board of trustees reflects the skills needed to achieve these goals.

Botanical Collections and Plants

The Bason Botanic Gardens will receive, maintain and develop collections that thrive in the various micro-climates the Gardens offer. Collections will:

Provide a sanctuary for plants that should be:

- Suited to the climate and soil
- Rare, endangered or of specific botanic interest
- Or that may be of historic significance to the Whanganui region.

Collections may be confined to one area or dispersed throughout the Gardens as appropriate.

Collections will be catalogued, significant plants labelled and recorded with GPS locations.

Many factors must be considered when determining where and how plants are used to best effect. The Garden's varied topography and many microclimates enables the use of a wide range of plant species, and thus offers opportunities for interesting design and positioning of plant collections. It is our policy to use these features to create changing vistas and atmospheres as visitors progress through the various sections of the gardens.

Communications

The three key messages at the centre of our communications policy:

- What we are, where we are and what we do
- The benefits from contact with plants and nature
- Visit us – make the gardens part of your life

We will regularly engage with our members, other stakeholders and the public in general through a wide variety of technologies and media to communicate these messages.

Current and planned works and events will be detailed on the BBGT Website

Our Communications Plan details how this will be achieved.

Capital Development

Except for the completion of the round the lake walkway, structural development of landscaping and roading can be viewed as virtually complete.

In developing capital and Infrastructure goals for future years the focus should be on educational, artistic and cultural aspects. These will be projects that enhance the botanical and environmental values of the gardens, attract and engage the public. Projects could range from the grand (lecture facility/venue?) to the less so (small sculpture).

Capital reserves are held as seed money to enable the BBGT to contribute to capital projects which would be largely funded from outside sources.

In the 6 years to 2019 the BBGT sourced funding and delivered approximately \$2 million worth of capital development.

Finance

The BBGT will continue to seek donations and bequests to fund its activities.

Projects will be fully funded from donations and the capital fund.

The BBGT will endeavour to fund administration costs through memberships and subscriptions.

Events will be budgeted to be economically neutral or raise a small surplus.

Cash reserves will be managed to ensure that plans are implemented in a balanced way, and to safeguard areas that are key to achieving our strategic goals. These are Communications (our interaction with everyone) Botanical (plant related activities and plans) and Structural (capital development). A \$50,000 reserve will also be held for unforeseen expenditure/opportunities.

Operational areas will work within their own budgets which are set and reviewed annually.

Strategic Alliances

It is imperative that the BBGTB continue to develop strategic alliances with other stakeholders such as the WDC, tourism, art, service and garden industries to help best deliver mutual benefits.

10 Year Plan 2020 to 2030

In moving the main emphasis from capital development to development of use and community benefit, the Board will concentrate on the further development of robust policies to guide future decision making and increase public awareness of the enormous importance of botanical diversity, plant protection and benefits to our health and wellbeing.

These are detailed in this document and are in the areas of:

Physical Structures

Botanical development

Communications

Physical Structures

We have completed six important capital development works flagged in the previous 10-year plan. Two that remain are described hereunder and programmed for completion.

Development of track and features to the north of the lake

Action: To install a track which leads through the wooded area from the raised boardwalk by the weir to the Japanese Tea House. This will finally provide safe access right around the lake removing the need for pedestrians to use the road. The track will incorporate at least one restful space with a panoramic view of the lake, Picnic Flat and Millennium Hill. Part of the project would involve the removal or reshaping of large poplar trees on the north side of the Lake.



Figure 1: The track will offer views across the lake.

Survey and other preliminary work has been completed and approaches are being made for suitable finance.

Cost and resources required: \$125,000

Target completion date: May 2021

Expected outcomes:

At present, the walkway beside the weir finishes in a short flight of steps that joins with the ring road. This has disadvantages in that it is not a safe option, doesn't provide a route that is conducive to strolling, and is lacking in aesthetic appeal. A pathway up and across the hill, through the trees to the tea house will provide a more pleasing aspect and permit the

completion of the long-desired loop walk around the Lake. The poplars to be managed are dominating the view beyond the Lake when viewed from the Millennium Hill or Picnic Flat, reducing them in scale would allow a greater variety of trees to be visible, and for vistas from the new path.

Maori feature in the wetland area:

Action: To commission a 5-7 metre sculpture for the *Carex secta* wetland area upstream from the Lake. The sculpture will be centred within the wetland and be about 50 metres from the road. It will be framed by the native revegetation that is a feature of this area. The feature is to be the outcome of creative endeavour by local Iwi, and the result of consultation with them by the Board.

Cost and resources required: \$60,000

Target date: July 2025

Expected outcomes: This project reflects clause 4 (Tangata whenua) of the Bason Botanic Gardens trust deed. This states “In attaining its purposes the Trust shall recognise the views and expectations of tangata whenua.” Furthermore, the WDC Public Art Strategy points out that “public art needs to reflect both the interests and aspirations of this part of the population [Maori] and also to reflect the increasing diversity of the whole population.”

The Board is aware that there is no current feature or facility that reflects the culture of local Iwi, even though Maori represent over 22% of the Wanganui population. This feature aims to redress this imbalance. The position is uniquely suited for this purpose, comprising a wetland composed mainly of native sedges (*Carex secta*) which is bounded by native wetland species, particularly kahikatea (*Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*). The prime viewing point for this area is from the walkway to the Japanese Tea House; consequently, it is envisaged that the feature be large and with simple lines. Because it will be tricky to install a feature within the wetland, it will probably need to be composed of a relatively light material such as wood.



Figure 2: The iconic wetland, planned site for a Maori-themed feature

Botanical Projects

Development of plant database using GPS technology

Action: WDC will complete the development of software that will allow a powerful database to be developed, compatible with that used for other WDC property (such as street trees) and at other local authorities. Using compatible laptops and GPS equipment owned by Board members, botanists and horticulturists will enter plants into the system, starting with key collections such as those on the Millennium Hill, Conservatory Flat and Eucalyptus Hill. WDC will provide secure storage for the database, which will be able to be accessed over the Internet.

Cost and resources required: Costs are already covered through WDC facilities and systems, most of the labour required to input the results would be voluntary expertise organised by the Trust Board.

Target date: Urgent and ongoing

Expected outcomes: At present, the identification of key plant collections is mainly contained in ageing plant lists that gradually lose their relevance over time, or in the memories of local experts and others. The Board and WDC desire an alternative system that is systematic, robust, secure, accurate, flexible, searchable, and accessible. The system that is planned should provide all of these outcomes. In addition, the database will be an essential part in the Garden's journey to becoming viewed as a true botanic garden in the eyes of its peers. The system will also allow the development of the plant collections (the previous goal) to be carried out in a more methodical way. It is envisioned that the viewing of this database be enabled for visitors to the Bason Botanic Gardens website.

Development of plant and collections policy to guide future collection acquisition and plantings

Target date – Ongoing - policy in draft

Collections and plantings policy to date has been formulated during board discussion, paying attention to the aims of the BBGT and WDC policies for parks and reserves. It is time for this policy to be stated in writing for the guidance and advise of future board members and generations. A plant and collections policy is attached to this document as a reference point for further collections acquisition and development, and to inform future planting decisions.



Figure 3: The succulent garden in the Homestead Garden is maintained by volunteers

Enhancement of existing plant collections

Action: The Board will monitor the existing plant collections and scan the nursery trade and suppliers for promising species that complement them. At the same time, incremental improvements will be made to the cultivation of existing plantings. Planting costs are usually covered by the operational funding of WDC; however in some cases donations for or of plants may be useful supplements. Each autumn WDC officers and Board members with suitable expertise will plan an appropriate planting programme and source desirable plant material.

Cost and resources required: Included in WDC budgets augmented by incidental donations and board acquisitions

Target date: Ongoing

Expected outcomes: Although officially a Botanic Garden, the Bason doesn't include plant collections of national significance. The more notable existing collections held include the genera



Figure 4. Millennium Hill with collections of aloes, echium and agave

Eucalyptus and Aloe and the Palmaceae family, but are not seen as nationally significant. However, the Board and WDC are aware that any overly ambitious additions to the planting

programme may be beyond the capabilities of either body to maintain. Furthermore, many of the prime planting spots are close to saturation, and there is a desire to avoid encroaching on existing open areas, which are valued for amenity and aesthetic reasons. However it is believed that extensions of niche collections can add value to the wider range of botanical collections in Whanganui and New Zealand. Collections policy has always included acknowledgement of the importance of aesthetic as well as botanical value. Since virtually the total maintenance budget comes from WDC rates, value for the ratepayers is understandably seen as key to spending priorities. Future plantings will follow this pattern.

Communication Projects

Communications is an area that has changed rapidly in the last decade and is vital to the continued prosperity of the Gardens. Whereas, since its inception the BBGT has relied upon quarterly posted newsletters and a static web page to advertise and inform, it is no longer practical, efficient or economic to do so. Furthermore, there are now a plethora of information technology services and social media which access a far wider market and perform a function that past methods could not do. It is therefore vital that the BBGT



Figure 5. Shakespeare's "The Tempest" 2018

develop an integrated approach to communications and marketing. Botanic Gardens the world over are facing many challenges; financial; educational; existential. The ones that have developed and embraced a proactive, well integrated communications policy are the ones that are succeeding.

The three key messages we will communicate are:

- What we are, where we are and what we do
- The benefits from contact with plants and nature
- Visit us – make the gardens part of your life

We will do this through:

Publications

- Newsletters
- Newspaper articles
- Email
- Website and social media
- Radio

Events

- Outdoor theatre
- Athletic and recreational
- Educational talks, tours and hosted visits
- Art displays

Signage – static and interactive

- Static signboards
- Interactive electronic media application
- Virtual Guides

Recent events at the gardens included:

Outdoor productions of Shakespeare’s plays, Macbeth and The Tempest

“The Great Bason Fair” A medieval themed fair

Whanganui Harriers Club Annual Championships.

Harriers Regional Championships
(triannual event)

“Bike the Bason” An awesome annual fundraising event created by Trevor Francis and Jason Sturzaker in association with Downers Whanganui.

We will encourage and develop new events in areas of education, sport, culture and art to draw other communities of interest to both the gardens and Whanganui in general.



Figure 6 Whanganui Harrier Club member on Millennium Hill

Costs and resources required – \$10,000 annual budget underwritten by the BBG Trust Board.

- Events and their associated costs are expected to be fiscally neutral over a 3 year period. Previous events have achieved this.
- Outside of events, communications generally will be funded by subscriptions and small donations
- Signage will be funded in partnership with the WDC

Target date: Ongoing

Expected outcomes: Increased local, regional and international visitor numbers to the gardens and Whanganui in general. Increased community awareness and enjoyment of plants and their environment.

Gardener in Residence

Installing a “Gardener in Residence” in the Bason homestead, along the lines of Whanganui’s “Artist in Residence” at Tylee Cottage, is possibly the biggest educational, promotional and economic opportunity of all. This could be a major role encompassing not only botany, conservation, education and the Gardens themselves, but also liaising with Whanganui development agencies and our rural economy with strategies to maximise the economic use of our Class 1 and Class 2 soils. Such soils are identified in the Council’s 2019 Economic Development Strategy as being of key economic significance to the district. This is an opportunity for Whanganui to become a significant horticultural centre of innovation.

This far-reaching concept requires much exploration but is one the board feels would have major beneficial outcomes for the city and district.

Funding sources

As with past projects, the Trust Board envisages multiple forms of funding for the upcoming programme. The main sources will be:

1. **Bequests:** There has been a steady stream of bequests, some of significant size, which have funded past projects. Recent examples include the Homestead Garden Entrance, the sculpture “Villa Rustica” and the new barbecues.
2. **Donations:** These are available from charitable trusts such as the Four Seasons Trust. Funds will be sought for specific projects as their planning matures. It is likely that the projects involving physical features will largely be funded by donations and bequests.
3. **Board reserves:** The Board has a cushion of funds which has been a useful backstop to fill shortfalls for projects, as with the Japanese Tea House and the adjacent walkway. This reduced fund will be used in a prudent and measured way to ensure the balanced development of physical, botanical and communication projects
4. **Whanganui District Council rates:** These are available for general maintenance, and infrastructure developments. Ongoing plantings at the Gardens are covered by rates, supplemented by donations. The development of a plant database using GPS technology will be covered within WDC resources, without additional cost to ratepayers.
5. **Partners:** Where possible and desirable the Board will seek partners such as service clubs and private organisations for participation in, and funding for its projects. This is particularly applicable to events.

The Gardens

Physical Features

Bason Botanic Gardens is sited in a rural setting, 11 km north-west of Whanganui on Rapanui Road, about 4 km from the coastal village of Mowhanau, which places it on a trail for weekend and holiday traffic. Originally a 25.5 ha dairy farm, it was bequeathed to the Wanganui City Council in 1966 by Mr Stanley Bason.

Topography

The Gardens are part of the Rapanui Terraces, which are comprised of soft marine sedimentary rocks covered by sands and ash from Taranaki. The terraces have been fairly steeply dissected by several streams. The soils are mainly Westmere Silt Loam, which are largely well-drained, although some areas suffer from inadequate drainage. Fertility is high, sustaining robust plant growth. The steeper slopes include patches of exposed sands, and generally have less topsoil. The valley floor suffers in places from excessive water flow from the slopes, and can be very wet in winter.



Figure 7: The valley at Bason Gardens is typical of streams which have eroded the soft soils of the Rapanui Terraces

Climate

The climate is very equable, with few extremes of heat, cold, frosts or storms. Snow is extremely rare. Rainfall is a moderate 900 mm per year, and fairly evenly spread through the year. The wettest periods are in early winter and mid-spring. The rainfall gradually decreases through the summer, the driest month usually being March. However, droughts are infrequent – the rainfall for the driest month (March at 61 mm) is nearly 75% of that of the wettest (June at 85 mm).

Overall, the weather is dominated by migratory anticyclones with their centres to the north of the region, giving dry settled weather with sea breezes. These anticyclones have intervening troughs of low pressure, which bring wetter unsettled weather. Rapanui is a windy place, and late spring has the highest wind-runs, peaking in November. During this period there are frequent strong winds from the west and south-west over the spring-summer period. In winter there are occasional southerly storms. The frequency of winds means that shelter is an important consideration in protecting plantings and public activities.

Proximity to the sea, combined with the coastal winds, means that there is a high level of salt (sodium chloride) deposition. This can burn sensitive foliage. The original Master Plan for the Gardens avoided planting shelter along the boundaries, to maximise the views into the surrounding rural landscape; However, this had to be modified to allow satisfactory plant growth.

The number of light ground frosts in Wanganui average about 10 per year, peaking in July. Sunshine hours average a little over 2000 hours per year, with the sunniest month being January. Relative humidity averages about 75% - typical of the western North Island.

In summary, the Bason provides a good climatic environment which allows good growth of a wide range of plants from temperate and subtropical zones. The limitations of frost and wind can to some extent be overcome by providing suitable microclimates. The fertile soils encourage rapid plant growth and resilient plants, able to cope with occasional climatic adversity.

Original vegetation

The original tree cover of the Rapanui site was typically a mixed podocarp broadleaf association. Remnants of this type of forest can still be found in the Rapanui-Westmere district in gullies. However, during the time of human habitation the vegetation at the Gardens has been totally modified, and had been converted to pasture by the start of the twentieth century. Part of the Gardens at the rear of the property has been planted to resemble the original forest cover, although including native species not found in the Whanganui region.

Early History

Stanley Bason was the adoptive son of John and Mary Bason, who took over the property in 1900, when subdivision of the larger block of land occurred. Stanley began helping on the farm at an early age, and gradually took on a major part of the workload. Mr Bason senior told him that eventually the farm would pass to him. However, when he died in 1934, it was revealed that the property had been willed to his cousins. However, they relinquished their claim when it also became apparent that the farm was insolvent. The farm creditors held a meeting and resolved to sell the property. After much persuasion Stanley succeeded in gaining their permission to try to farm the property out of its debts. Though the terms were harsh and included penalty payments, Stanley and his new wife Blanche committed themselves to making the property their own. They had no cash income, all this going to the creditors. However, they lived off the land. With a good vegetable garden, orchard and plenty of ducks, pheasants and pukeko, and watercress from the creek, they commenced a frugal lifestyle they were never to change. Their sacrifices were rewarded. An era of



Figure 8 A young Stanley Bason

guaranteed prices for milk, followed by the World War 2 period of rising prices, allowed them to repay the debts, settle the mortgage and eventually accumulate substantial savings.

The profitable operation of the farm allowed considerable improvements to be carried out, including a piped water supply and new fencing, and farm buildings were erected. More importantly for Stanley and Blanche, they were able to give fuller expression to their shared interest in the Homestead Garden, and they planted trees that remain today. This garden became their chief recreational activity and over the years they gathered together a collection of beautiful and unusual plants. Regrettably many of these were lost in the years following Stanley's death.

Stanley Bason's philosophy and vision

The following section is an extract from an address given by Trevor Toy to an early meeting of the Friends of Bason Reserve:

Stanley Bason was a man who thought deeply about the future environment of planet earth. Long before it was fashionable, he formed the view that we are all individually responsible. He once wrote "I pledge myself as a human being to assume my share of man's stewardship of our natural resources. I will use my share without greed or waste. I will respect the rights of others. I will support the sound management of the resources we use, the restoration of resources we have despoiled, and the safe-keeping of resources for posterity. I will never forget that life, beauty and progress depend on how wisely man uses these gifts – the soil, the water, the air, the minerals, the plant life and the wild life."

On one occasion he wrote "Through the trouble of this world there still runs a thin stream of serenity for those who seek it. The price of a beautiful sunset is only an hour's sleep... your own store of wilderness needs only the investment of a few minutes' drive from the busy city."

During his lifetime of 76 years he had seen the average city house section shrink from 1 acre to ¼ acre, and then that ¼ acre settled with perhaps half a dozen housing units. Work methods were rapidly shifting from manual to high pressure intellectual employment with resulting mental stress, and he anticipated that in the future, life could well be so complex and work methods so sophisticated that this trend would accelerate even faster.

His own personal experiences had convinced him that the future would bring an ever growing need for outdoor spaces for recreation and he gradually developed a plan to convert his farm into a botanical reserve. Such a facility was certainly not needed in 1960 ... but as it would take 50 – 100 years to mature, the earlier it could be commenced the sooner it would be available to future generations.

He had an inquiring mind, was constantly observing and studying nature. He could name the birds that visited and imitate their calls exactly. He practiced the art of slowing down to take “one minute vacations”, putting aside for that minute all concerns, in order to focus on the beauty of his surroundings. He urged people to open their minds to sights, sounds and feelings in their quiet moments.

In June 1966 Stanley approached Wanganui Mayor Mr Reg Andrews with a tentative offer of his property. Mr Andrews, together with Superintendent Mr Boothby, inspected the property and were immediately enthusiastic. However, it must be said that a number of Councillors were either vigorously opposed to the Council accepting, or at least doubtful as to the need for such a facility. One councillor suggested that the property should be sold, and the proceeds used for the Sport Stadium under construction ... There was also vociferous opposition from local farming organisations who saw the proposal as a waste of good farming land.



Figure 9: The Homestead Garden, the original garden of Stanley and Blanche Bason

Nevertheless, in July 1966 the Council accepted the gift, subject to Mr Bason’s right to the use of the homestead during his lifetime. Stanley Bason died instantly on the morning of 11 January 1976 as the result of a motor accident. His wife had predeceased him several years earlier.

The Master Plan 1970

A Development Plan was commissioned by Wanganui City Council and drawn up at (then) Lincoln College by A E Jackman and S J Taylor. This was completed and presented in 1970. An underlying principle behind the Plan was Mr Bason’s concern that people should not think of the Gardens as just another park with playground equipment and extensive picnic grounds. He felt that these were well provided for in other city parks, and that by focusing on the collection and conservation of rare plants Bason Botanic Gardens would become a considerable local and national asset in the future.

At the same time the layout planned for the property was to afford maximum access for visitors seeking the passive recreational enjoyments of driving and walking. This last activity was one that Mr Bason encouraged. In an increasingly stressful and complex world the provision for visitors of recreational spaces and opportunities for the peaceful enjoyment of nature represented in the lakes, trees, birds, shrubs and flowers, as well as sheltered picnic areas and maturing trees, are likely to be increasingly valued.

A reflection of Stanley's vision can be felt in the Homestead Garden, which contains the original home of Blanche and Stanley Bason. This Garden includes flowering shrubs and herbaceous plants, as well as a succulent garden, and is a quiet haven from the hubbub of modern civilisation.

1970 – 2000

The initial 1970 design brief, as approved by Council, called for a staged development programme able to be carried out over a period of 12 years. Basic infrastructure was then developed before planting began. A water bore was drilled, water reticulation installed, and underground electrical cables laid. The basic road network was developed as seen today, to a metalled stage. The design called for a complete loop road around the property; However, this has never been completed. A network of paths links with the carparks and each other.

The Lake was formed by excavation and the removal of willows, combined with construction of the dam; a weir was provided for the roadway. Water is provided by two contributory streams. This is the area which is most used for group activities such as barbeques and informal sports. In 1986 the toilet block in the lower level was constructed.

Next the property was surveyed into a grid of 40 blocks, to ensure that each tree would be planted in its designated position. The overall choice of plants was based on the topography of the property, based overall on three land types: terrace flats, hill slopes, and valley floor. Trees were selected based on their surrounding plant community, the site conditions, and the ultimate size of the plant. They were planted inside cages to prevent browsing by stock brought in by farmers who had been leased the grazing rights.

However, during the 1970s there were problems with trees being damaged by sheep and cattle. Also, the mature gum and macrocarpa shelter belt along the western boundary was destroyed by fire. The resultant free flow of salt-laden westerlies proved disastrous for many of the more intolerant trees, especially as no shelter had been provided for in the master plan. Thus, the development of a structure and canopy of trees was very slow for several decades. A review in 1989 recommended further plantings of a specialised nature, and more suited to the evolving character of the Gardens. Later plantings were also suited to the particular micro-environments that were developing as a result of earlier developments.

On the positive side, support from citizens and support groups resulted in the following developments:

- The Rotary Lookout
- Roses for the Homestead Garden, from the Rose Society
- Brick walls to frame the entrance, from the George McKenzie and Olive Scouler estates
- Conservatories as a result of the Stanley Bason estate. The conservatories (including the later Larsen House) display a range of tropical plants and flowers, ferns and orchids.
- The Scouler Room, an interpretative annexe courtesy of the Olive Scouler bequest. It features historic photographs and interpretation, and other displays
- The Jocelyn and Owen Moore Camellia Garden, donated by the Camellia Society. This garden linked to the Daffodil Patch, courtesy of the Daffodil Society
- Open Air Forum, developed by the Horticultural Society
- Succulent Garden, planted and managed by the Friends of Bason Botanical Reserve
- Paving to the conservatories and Homestead Garden, financed by the Larsen Bequest. A pergola was also constructed over the path to the conservatories.
- The Boothby Bush House, financed by the Boothby family, which features native and exotic ferns.
- The gazebo in the Homestead Garden, and the Iris Garden, as a result of an anonymous donation
- The Dovey Memorial Gazebo above the Spring Garden
- The Larsen Orchid House, paid for by interest built up from a significant bequest from Winston and Agnes Larsen.

In 1997 the name was changed to Bason Botanic Garden to better describe its distinctive nature, and to reinforce Stanley Bason's emphasis on the educational and scientific aspects of the property. It also reflected a new commitment to the development of significant plant communities of botanical and horticultural importance within the Gardens.

2000 – 2012

In 2000, the Trust Board in conjunction with the Wanganui District Council produced a Development Plan, to provide direction for the next decade. The improvements seen in this century reflect this Plan, particularly the dramatic changes to the Millennium Hill.



Figure 10: The pergola leading to the conservatories

Millennium Hill

The hill leading to the lower flat had been maintained as a fenced deer park since the initial development stage. In 1998 the deer fence was removed, and a zigzag grass track excavated, to provide access for machinery and a walking route for visitors. On 28th May, 2000, the Millennium Hill was officially dedicated by Mayor Chas Poynter, with a planting of trees by the Mayor and other dignitaries.

Since the slopes were north-facing, it was decided that a Mediterranean theme was most applicable. The planting design was carried out by the Wanganui District Council in partnership with the Trust Board, in particular internationally recognised plantsman Clive Higgie. Plantings reflecting this theme include palms, Italian cypresses, olive trees, oleanders, lavenders, plus a range of botanically unusual plants which reflect the status as a Botanic Garden. In 2008, a collection of aloes was donated to the Gardens by Heather Giltrap. These were planted on a dry spur, enhancing the Mediterranean flavour and diversity of the Hill.

In 2008, the Hill was enhanced by the installation of a sweeping flight of steps that run the full height of the Hill. This feature was enabled by a bequest from the Gopperth Estate. The Millennium Steps are flanked by brick plinths, on which stand large terracotta Burrelli pots. A large open gazebo was constructed close to the top of the Steps, courtesy of donations from the Eleanor Burgess Trust and William McAlpine Duncan Trust. In 2009, a modern steel sculpture by Rangitikei artist Steuart Welch was installed to complement these features and complete this area.



Figure 11: Children love playing on the Welch sculpture. The Board visualises that future sculptures should provide the same interactive opportunities

Lakeside Development

A devastating storm in February 2004 felled or damaged many of the trees at the Gardens, particularly around the Lake. The clean-up entailed the major removal of willows and other trees around the Lake. This including draining the Lake to remove trees that had fallen into it. The storm However, created opportunities, as the newly opened vistas of the Lake inspired a resurgence in developments around it. It was recognised that the Lake was hard for visitors to access; for most visitors their only connection with it was while they drove over the dam front. In 2005 the Basons Trust Board commissioned Isthmus Group of Wellington to draw up a concept plan for a Lakeside walkway. The overarching concept was to allow the public to appreciate the water from a range of vantage points, and in a range of active and passive forms. Progress was enabled through a generous bequest from two sisters, Christian and Belle Alexander. The project was carried out in 2011, in three stages.

Stage One involved creating a boardwalk over the Lake adjacent to the dam front. This required driving large piles eight metres into the Lake bed. The irregular shape of the boardwalk is designed to encourage strollers to pause and enjoy the vista; seating is also provided for this. At present, the boardwalk stops abruptly at the northern side; it is planned to extend the path up towards a ridge on the northern side, and continue it around to complete the full Lakeside Walk. The Board envisages a sculptural feature above the northern terminus of the boardwalk, as a focal point and to encourage further exploration.

Stages Two and Three involved the major excavation of soil to allow a more graduated and terraced slope down to the Lake. On this slope, concrete and brick retaining walls have been constructed, which will also serve as seating for small or large gatherings. These terraces were built in a broad sweep that echoes the margins of the Lake, and could also serve as an amphitheatre for musical events in the longer term, provided that electricity was reticulated to this area. Sweeping steps lead from the Picnic Flat to the Lakeside Track; as well as being elegant, the steps allow further seating options. A number of trees were removed after the 2004 storm; further trees were removed as part of the Lakeside project to allow the development to occur, and to improve the vistas and access to the Lake.

These two stages also involved linking the new Lakeside developments with the steps and pathways over the Millennium Hill. The main carpark on the lower flat was reformatted, and an attractive lawn area in front of the toilet block was defined by providing a surrounding pathway. The Trust Board plans a major sculptural feature for this lawn in the period of the current plan. A shellrock path then links this area with the main Lakeside development.



Figure 12: The Alexander Steps, a major project in 2011

The completion of the Lakeside Project in late 2011 has created the opportunity for further developments which will be the “icing of the cake” for the process of linking and enhancing the attractions of the different parts of the Gardens. The Isthmus Group, landscape architects for the Lakeside Project, agree that sculpture and other features are consistent with their plan and vision.

Further developments 2000 – 2012

- Curbing and sealing of the road from the entranceway to the top of the hill, combined with improved drainage of the top flat, courtesy of the Powerco Community Trust in 2001
- The planting of a scented Friendship Garden at the top of the Millennium Hill, in conjunction with the Friendship Force

- Recognition of the Gardens as a Garden of Regional Significance by the New Zealand Gardens Trust in 2005.
- The redevelopment of a maintenance yard and modern shed in 2007, replacing the ramshackle earlier structures.
- The refurbishment of various ageing facilities, such as the roof of the Boothby House, the display stagings in the conservatories, the Scoular Room, and seating.

2012 – 2019

The next stage of development was the result of a planning process carried out by the Bason Botanic Gardens Trust Board, in consultation with other interested parties. In particular, the Board liaised with Wanganui District Council officers to align the Plan with WDC’s direction regarding premier parks. Several planning meetings were held, some at the Gardens.

In the early period of development of the Gardens, the focus was on creating the basic infrastructure, plant structure, and also some features for public utility. The visionary Master Plan created a canvas for later development. The first decade of this century saw development of the Millennium Hill, and the Lakeside area. The second decade aimed at better integration between the now existing feature areas, by providing visual features which serve as links and dramatic enhancements.

Sculpture park

For many years there had been a vision of establishing a sculpture park at the Gardens. The first proponent of this was John Scott, the founder of Wanganui Regional Community College (now Whanganui UCOL). However, at that time it was judged more important to develop the basic infrastructure of the Gardens first. This was now to be addressed. The first such feature was the Steuart Welch sculpture close to the Millennium Hill Lookout.

The Board’s focus is closely aligned with that of the District Council, which states in its Parks and Open Spaces Strategy that “culture, art, sculpture and local history will be incorporated into Wanganui’s parkscapes in creative ways.”¹ Furthermore, the Wanganui District Public Art Strategy states that “Wanganui’s vision is to celebrate the distinctiveness of Wanganui’s environment, history and cultural identity, and enhance our experience of the built and natural environment through a diversity of quality public artworks.”²

As a basic guideline, sculpture at the Gardens should meet these criteria:

- Enhance the natural flow of physical and eye movement through the Gardens
- Provide a naturalistic feel which reflects the Garden essence overall
- Be sympathetic to the spaces they fill
- Be of a durable and low-maintenance nature

¹ <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/Publications/policies/Parks&OpenSpacesStrategy.pdf>

² <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/publications/policies/PublicArtStrategy.pdf>

- Reflect the input of local or developing sculptors where possible

In 2010, members of the Board and a Wanganui artist met with Neil Plimmer, the chairman of the successful Wellington Sculpture Trust. The aim was to develop a process for the development and commissioning of sculptures in public areas. The Board subsequently agreed to adopt the model used by the Sculpture Trust, which included a process of consultation with artists regarding the selection of sculptors and sculptural works. The overall aim being to develop sculpture that is challenging but still comprehensible to the general public, rather than “high art”. All art installed must be subject to individual consent by the Wanganui District Council. This is seen as critical since the WDC is responsible for the overall long-term care of the art works.

2015 was a busy year for construction.

Homestead Garden Entrance – Functional Sculpture

Artwork by Isthmus Group

Completed April 2015

April saw the redevelopment of the Homestead Garden Entrance with the installation of a major sculptured gateway in Corten steel which provided a focal point and drawcard for people walking on the approach path from the conservatories. The redeveloped entrance is a bold feature designed to draw visitors from the road and conservatories into the Homestead Garden, and features a quote from Stanley Bason “*Through the trouble of this world there still runs a thin stream of serenity for those who seek it*”.



Figure 13: Homestead Garden Entrance – Functional Sculpture

It provides an additional setting for photographs for the weddings that are held in the Garden. The redesigned gardens behind the entrance allow a better flow through this magical place into the rest of the Homestead Garden.

“Villa Rustica” – Sculpture

Artwork by “Artventure”
produced by Paul
Johnson (local
raised) and Gail
Mason

Completed Sept 2015

A large, modernistic abstract sculpture which commands the pentagonal lawn at the base of the Millennium Steps. Constructed of

Aluminium to be tolerant of the extreme salt conditions of the Whanganui coast, this sculpture depicts the Whanganui River, Parapara hills and associated native flora and river eels. It has proved to be a feature that garners much interest and comment as well as attracting children to physically interact with it, as they do also with the existing Steuart Welch sculpture by the Millennium Hill Lookout. – just what was envisaged when commissioned.



Figure 14: “Villa Rustica”

Delphinium – Sculpture

Artwork by Fraser Hubert Moreton. 10th
August 1950 – 20th January 2008

Donated 2016

Contract Price N/A

This artwork was designed as a mobile structure, turning in the wind by means of an old vehicle gear box, which may be envisioned as the roots of the delphinium.

It was constructed in exchange for a website, build by Janice Dowdeswell, for a company called “Purfex” which produces a vast array of mannequins

It was commissioned in 2003 by Dowdeswell's Delphiniums Ltd, Brunswick Road and was donated to the Bason Botanic Gardens in 2016



Figure 15: This work depicts a stylised hybrid New Millennium Delphinium

Covered Barbecues – Functional Sculpture

Artwork by Isthmus Group

Completed June 2015

These two, connected barbecues add to the five existing ones throughout the gardens, provide partial shelter from wind, rain and sun and are situated to the right of the driveway at the base of Millennium Hill. Like the Homestead Gardens entrance, they are also a functional sculpture designed by Isthmus Group of Wellington. Viewed when descending to Picnic Flat they draw the visitor's eye, pique their curiosity and lead them further into the gardens. to investigate. They can be imagined as giant kiwis, poking at the ground, or whatever takes the viewers fancy. The barbecues have become very popular drawing large gatherings for family fun. Some even bring their own water slide for use on the adjacent hill.



Figure 16: A Barbecue for Kiwis

Other Construction

Japanese Tea House

On Tuesday 21st April, 2016, mayor Hideo Endo of our sister city Nagaizumi cho, was guest of honour at a ceremony to celebrate the siting of the Japanese tea house, moved from Whanganui East to its oh so beautiful home, by the lake, at the Bason Botanic Gardens.

When our late chairman of the board, Ian Hamilton, learned of the need to move the tea house, he knew exactly where it must go. On a promontory by the lake, opposite the wetland area. Ian had a close relationship with the Japanese community with whom he consulted and championed the relocation of this beautiful structure. Once sited the surrounding gardens were designed in consultation with Nagaizumi and the project completed over the next two years.



Figure 17: Japanese Tea House in its new home on the promontory by the lake

Sadly, Ian did not live to see the fulfilment of his dream, but five totara trees were planted in his honour and will grow to overlook the tea house that he so cherished.

Tea House Walkway

Completed 2017

The installation of the Japanese Tea House, which had no pedestrian access, created incentive to progress the round the lake walkway prefaced in the 2012 – 2020 plan by installing a path between Picnic Flat and the tea house. It was designed to reflect both the previous work on the Alexander Terraces and the Japanese Tea House itself. Completed in September 2017 the walkway provides a pleasant walk with excellent platform views of the lake and the tea house.



Figure 18: The Walkway leading to the Japanese Tea House

Electricity reticulation to the Picnic Flat

Completed March 2019

Lack of reticulated electricity, particularly to Picnic Flat had always made full use of this area difficult. The highly successful production of Shakespeare’s Macbeth, in the natural amphitheatre that contains the frisbee area, and the “Great Bason Fair” on Picnic Flat, both in 2016, highlighted this deficiency. Electrification would also enable outdoor concerts to be held on, or near the lake, utilising the new Alexander Terraces. For these, and other events to be produced efficiently, underground electrical services needed to be installed.



Figure 19: Power outlet at roadside

After determining that reticulation from the road was unlikely, due to expense, the board decided to install a hub among the trees across the road and towards the weir from the

toilet block at the foot of Millennium Hill. This was reticulated underground to three points around Picnic Flat and one near the frisbee amphitheatre, ending in stainless steel boxed take-off points with three phase and domestic power outlets. Power may now be provided by a generator, in the trees and at a distance away from powered events, thus limiting noise pollution. Sufficient capacity was installed to enable the production of large events.

Reticulation to this area is consistent with WDC's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, which seeks that "events, entertainment and attractions will be staged at premier parks as appropriate."³

Sealing of internal roadways

Tar sealing of the areas in the rear of the Gardens, including kerbing and channelling and the roadway from the weir around and back past the wetland towards the toilet block, plus the unsealed portion of road adjacent to the Boothby fern house was completed in 2018. The road servicing the homestead and looping through the top arboretum is now the only one remaining unsealed. At this stage there are no plans to do so.



Figure 20: Kerbing and sealing of the top flat was organised by Bason Gardens Trust Board with the assistance of a grant from the Four Seasons Community Trust

This work was flagged and largely funded by the Whanganui District Council from their 10-year plan⁴ although a substantial contribution was received from Four Seasons Community Trust to assist with this.

³ <http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/Publications/policies/Parks&OpenSpacesStrategy.pdf>

⁴ http://www.wanganui.govt.nz/publications/plans/Draft10-YearPlan2012-2022_Volume1.pdf

Living Document

This is a living document to be reviewed and adjusted from time to time, while retaining its core values.



Figure 22: Blood Lilies (Scadoxus multiflorus) a favourite of Stanley and Blanche planted in the homestead garden and recently propagated for sale

Appendix

Extracts from WDC District Plans

From Council website – Parks and Reserves 2018

Whanganui has a number of premier parks that are maintained to high standards and provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities, which may include playgrounds, for residents and visitors to enjoy. **They are significant to Whanganui's cultural heritage.** Examples include

Kowhai Park

Basin Botanic Gardens

Queens Park.

Whanganui has several parks and reserves that are ideal locations for events like weddings and children's birthday parties, e.g.

Kowhai Park

Virginia Lake Reserve

Basin Botanic Gardens.

In 2004 the garden was recognised as a "Garden of Regional Significance" by the New Zealand Gardens Trust. In 2008 this category was renamed "Garden of Significance".

District Plan

8. RULES – RESERVES AND OPEN SPACE ZONE

in 8.4.1 b as temporary commercial activities are not currently permitted. But a permit can be obtained.

From the 2018 – 2028 10 year plan – Groups and Activities

Parks and recreation

This group of activities includes services and facilities that underpin the maintenance of a district that works for everyone. It ranges from the provision of parks, open spaces, reserves and sportsgrounds, which contribute to the health and social fabric of the community, to swimming pools which, although not essential services, **are important facilities for social connectivity and wellbeing of our district. The activities included in the group are:**

- **Parks and reserves**
- Swimming pools

- Cooks Gardens

Parks and reserves

Parks have been classified into the following categories that reflect their varying functions, purposes and levels of service.

Premier parks:

- Virginia Lake Reserve and Winter Gardens
- **Bason Botanic Gardens**
- Queens Park
- Kowhai Park
- Castlecliff Domain
- Majestic Square

These parks are well established and **fill a significant and high-profile role within the community**, for example, Kowhai Park. They are iconic, tourist focused and of economic benefit

Reserve space..... supports the needs and interests of the community and, subsequently, the aims of the Local Government Act 2002 They are areas for the whole community to use. Recreational spaces **contribute to the community's social, cultural, environmental and (in some cases) economic interests** and help to promote family values by providing opportunities for family togetherness. **The delivery of this activity aligns with our overarching vision, mission and strategy to position our district as Leading Edge.**

Principal Objective:

To provide and environment within parks and recreation facilities that contribute to Whanganui's reputation as a great place to live and visit.

Economic development

This group of activities aims to **promote the district as a tourism destination and facilitate the growth and development of the district's economy**. These functions are provided by the council-controlled organisation Whanganui & Partners, with support provided by the Council. The activities included in the group are:

- Whanganui & Partners – Economic development
- I-site