

12.2 MAJESTIC SQUARE

Majestic Square is considered Whanganui's main town centre public space for members of the community and visitors alike.

12.2.1 The current layout

In the original design for Whanganui the current square was positioned on the intersection between Victoria Avenue and a strong visual and formal alignment between Cooks Gardens and Queens Park. This formal design with strong visual connections helped to connect the main street with the key open spaces beyond. This provided a legibility, which is important especially for visitors.

Majestic Square currently offers seating areas and a stage but the layout, including its planting, grading and retaining walls, results in a physical and visual barrier between the Sarjeant Art Gallery and Cooks Gardens. The current square also currently does not visually and physically connect well with the Whanganui Regional Museum, the War Memorial Hall and its forecourt in between. Both open spaces can be experienced as two different and unrelated public spaces.



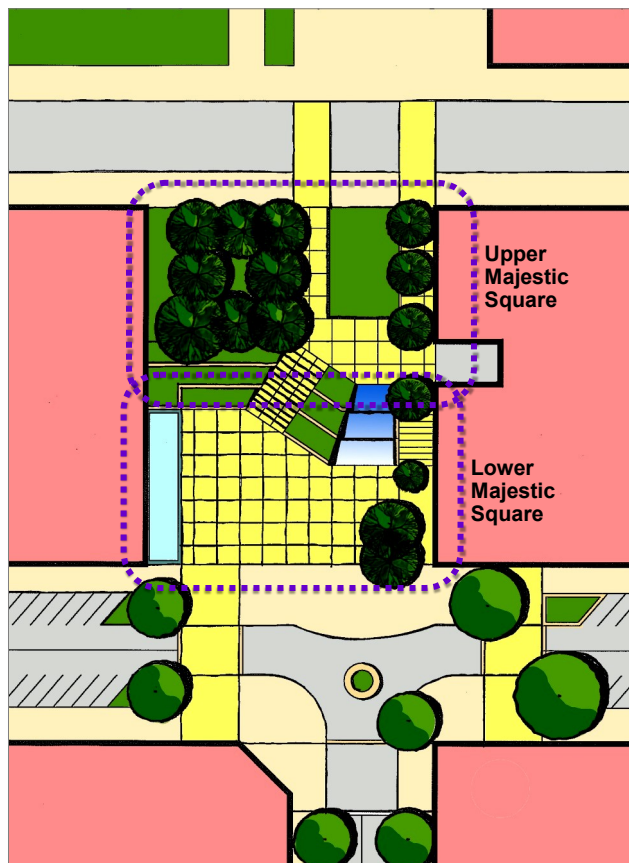
ABOVE FIG. 12-6: Historic photo of Majestic Square with the Sarjeant Art Gallery in the background (image courtesy of John Anderson).

12.2.2 The proposed layout

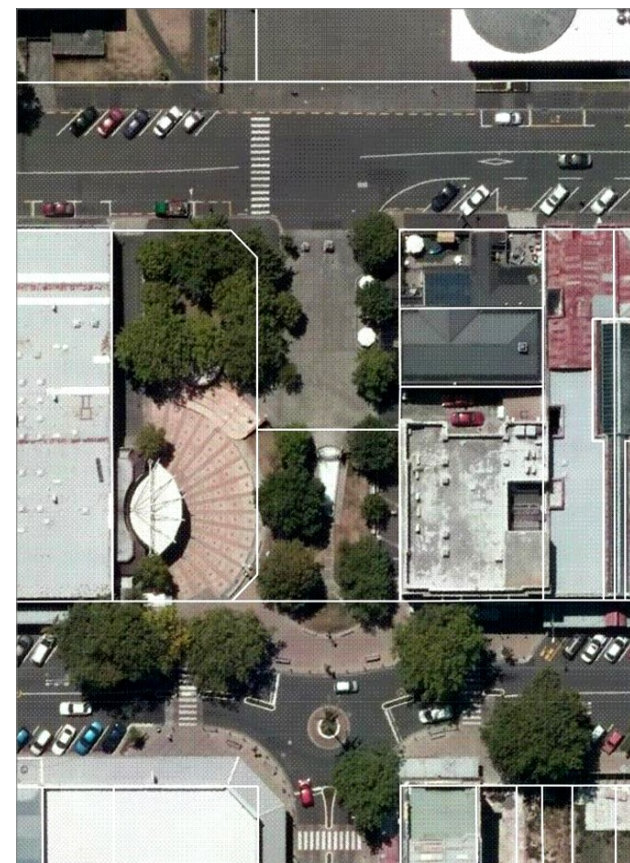
During the town centre strategy process a range of redesign options for Majestic Square were developed. These were based on the following key considerations:

- Opening up the views and connections between Cooks Gardens / St Hill Street, via Victoria Avenue, through to Queens Park / the Sarjeant Art Gallery and vice versa.
- 'Decluttering' the space.
- Working with the current grades and levels in order to avoid radical changes and costly earthworks.
- Preserving trees that are not blocking visual or physical connections, while noting that several of the trees to be removed are small enough to be transplanted for use elsewhere.
- Working with the existing water feature plant room, which is the expensive part of the water feature, while changing the surface design to create a wet play space for children of a wide range of ages.
- Retaining vehicular access to the service area between former ANZ building and Mint Café.
- Either opening up the blank façade on the north-western side of the square with windows and doors (e.g. in the scenario that the library were located into this building), or placing a kiosk against the blank wall to activate the space.

The preferred conceptual option compared with a recent aerial photo is shown in **Figures 12-7 and 12-8**. Please note that this is an early concept. In a future detailed design process critical issues, such as disabled access and a detailed response to the micro-climate should be addressed.



ABOVE FIG. 12-7: Proposed layout for Majestic Square.



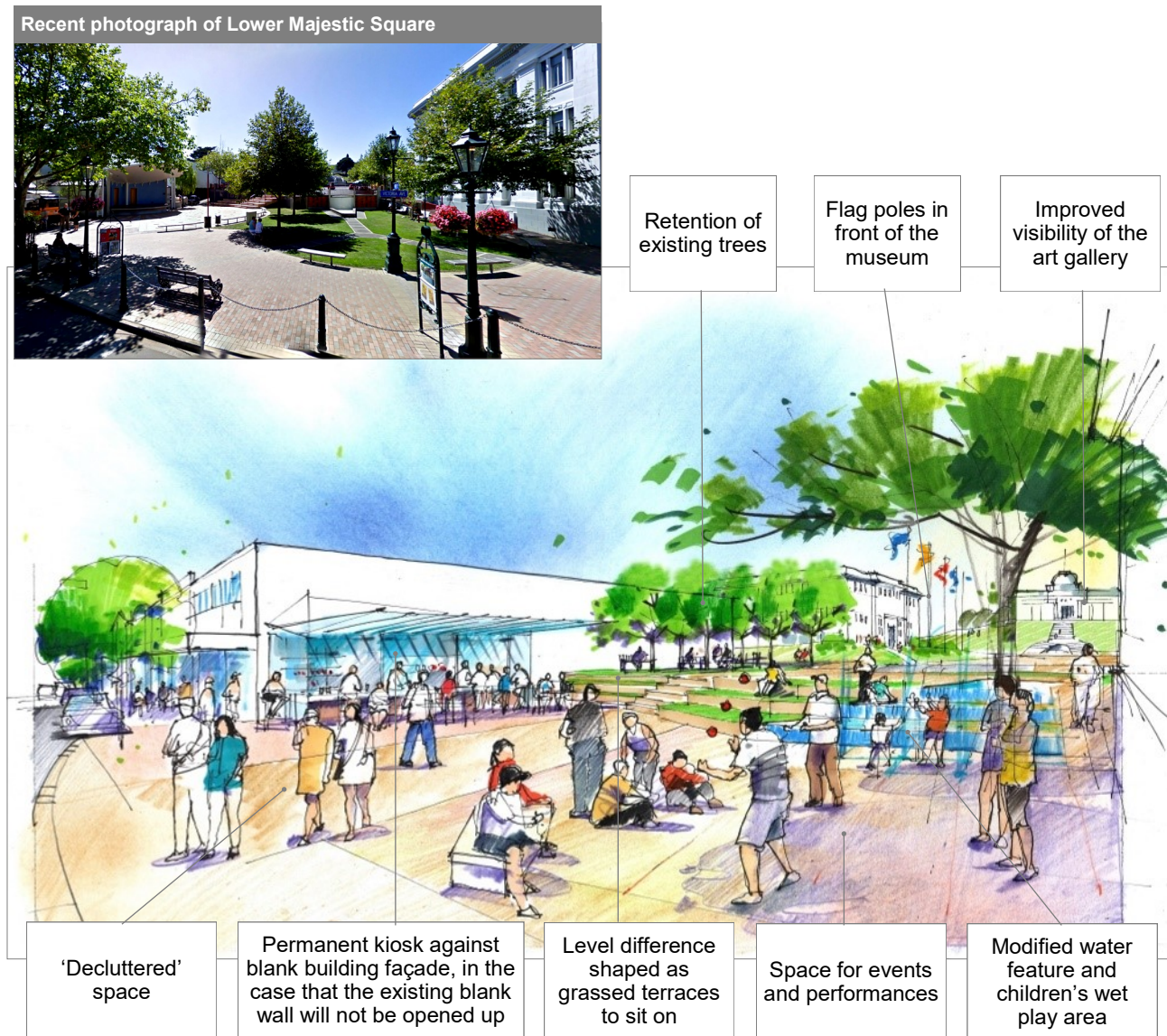
ABOVE FIG. 12-8: Aerial photo showing the current layout of Majestic Square.

Proposals for 'Lower' and 'Upper' Majestic Square are presented in more detail on the following pages, while proposals for the Memorial Hall Forecourt are presented in **Section 6**.

12.2.3 Lower Majestic Square

The proposal for Lower Majestic Square is depicted in **Figure 12-9**. The following aspects are worth noting:

- The trees in the centre of the space would be removed in order to open up views from Victoria Avenue to Queens Park and the Sarjeant Art Gallery. This would assist with the legibility of the town centre and may draw visitors from Victoria Avenue to the Queens Park and its civic and cultural facilities.
- The proposed grassed terraces would not only allow pedestrian access between both levels, but would also act as informal seating.
- Majestic Square could still be used for events by occasionally putting up a stage when required with the proposed steps providing seating for spectators.
- The existing water feature would be modified and integrated into the steps. A children's wet play area would be installed at the bottom of this water feature.
- The former Farmers building along the north-western edge of the space has the potential to be opened up towards the space with a café facing the square (especially in the scenario that the library moved into this building), thereby decluttering the space around the current stage.
- Alternatively, a kiosk could be placed against the blank wall, which would activate the public space independent from the use of the former Farmers building.
- Apart from opening up the views from Majestic Square towards the Museum and the Sarjeant Art Gallery, it is worth considering integrating some vertical art features, carvings, banners or similar to strengthen the visual connections between the two spaces. Also refer to **Section 6.4** for a proposal to install flag poles in front of the museum.



ABOVE FIG. 12-9: Artist impression for Majestic Square with the Lower square in the foreground.

12.2.4 Upper Majestic Square

The proposal for Upper Majestic Square is depicted in **Figure 12-10**. The following aspects are worth noting:

- The proposed raised planter would provide a grassed area that could be used for children's play or sitting or lying on. The edge of this planter would provide informal seating areas, flexible to accommodate both large and small amounts of people with distances between people decreasing as the space is busier (different to conventional benches, which would usually only provide seating for one person).
- Trees that are not blocking the viewshaft between Cooks Gardens and the Sarjeant Art Gallery could be retained, while the reasonably young trees in Upper Majestic Square should be removed and preferably transplanted to another location within the town.
- The space in the foreground could be used for outdoor seating associated with Mint Café.
- A route (behind the planter in **Figure 12-10**) should be kept unobstructed for vehicles accessing the service area between the former ANZ building and Mint Café. A width of approximately 3 metres would be sufficient.
- Pedestrian routes on either side of the raised planter would connect between Lower Majestic Square and the Memorial Hall Forecourt. Consideration should be given to continuing both the level and the type of paving across Watt Street and into the forecourt.
- The space with benches under the mature trees (in the background to the right in **Figure 12-10**) could be left unchanged in the short to medium term.



ABOVE FIG. 12-10: Artist impression for Upper Majestic Square.