

Celebrating green havens: Green Flag Awards®

The most basic freedom afforded by great urban parks is the ability not just to occupy places of beauty and meaning, but to also feel comfortable using them.¹

What makes a great park?

Connections - the community strengthens the park and the park strengthens the community. A good park provides things that the neighbourhood needs and desires for daily life.

Variety - a variety of experiences for many different people across the course of the day and in each season of the year.

Comfort - environmental features such as shade in the summer or rain and wind protection, makes a park more inviting and usable in every season. Similarly, places to sit, restrooms, water fountains, park buildings and food concessions can make parks more appealing.

Materials – choice of materials influence more than how a place looks or feels; they are essential to how a park functions, where “function” can incorporate everything from managing stormwater to engaging the imagination.

Coherence - planting, topography and circulation, all working together are important tools in creating a sense of effortlessness in navigating a big or complex park.²

What is a Green Flag Award®?

The **Green Flag Award®** is an international benchmark of quality for publicly accessible parks and green spaces. Originating in the United Kingdom, in 1997, it was developed in response to ongoing underfunding which saw many previously beautiful historic and local parks become derelict, dangerous, and forgotten. Globally there are 2,000 plus Green Flag Award® parks; in Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, the UAE, UK, Australia and New Zealand.



Image: TECT All Terrain Park, source: <https://www.tectallterrainpark.co.nz/activities>

Why?

The **Green Flag Award®** & Green Flag Community Award aim to:



- Ensure that **everybody has access** to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live.
- Ensure that these **spaces are appropriately managed** and meet the needs of the communities that they serve.
- Establish standards of good management.
- Promote and **share good practice** amongst the green space sector.
- Recognise and **reward the hard work** of managers, staff and volunteers.

Community involvement in parks is key to the success of these Awards.

How are parks assessed?

To receive an Award, parks are assessed against criteria including community involvement in the park's development, environmental impact, biodiversity, landscape and heritage aspects, management, and appearance. When assessing parks, the judges look beyond the park's appearance to how the park connects with its community, and the story it tells.

In the 2018/2019 award season 28 awards were presented to cemeteries, parks and reserves throughout New Zealand. [Click here](#) to review winners.

For more information on judging criteria, click [here](#).

Green Flag Award® winners

Award-winning parks

TECT All Terrain Park in the Western Bay of Plenty is comprised of 1,650 hectares of pine forest and native bush, developed into an adventure playground with tracks for walking, running, beginner motorcycling, mountain biking and horse-riding. This park is utilised by a wide range of users participating in different activities.

Auckland Council's **Waikumete Cemetery** is the largest in New Zealand (108 hectares). Representative of diverse communities of different cultures, faiths, ethnicities and values it provides for a wide range of denominational and cultural groups. A heritage 1886 chapel used mainly for weddings adds to its appeal.

A unique 60.4 hectare park, **Halswell Quarry Park** in Christchurch is an unusual combination of recreational walks, historic sites and botanical collections (including 250,000 new plants) The Quarry also provides opportunities for natural play, mountain biking, dog walking, horse riding or picnics and relaxing.

A gracious old Horowhenua home, set in attractive grounds and dating from the 1920s, **Thompson House Park** is the hub of many community activities – cultural, artistic, educational and social.



Image: Thompson House Park,
<http://www.greenflagaward.org.uk/>

Curator Talk – Arthur Nelson, Property and Parks Manager, Horowhenua District Council

The real power of Green Flag is in bringing communities together with a common purpose regardless of social status, age, or gender. It is about vesting hope, responsibility, and pride in your neighbourhood through its people.

What are the main benefits for your park from becoming involved in the Green Flag Awards?

The award 'gets you on the map' literally and metaphorically, is a charter mark for quality.

Being awarded a Green Flag raises the park's profile and generates interest from the community. Benefits include developing civic pride, benchmarking services, preserving budgets, and developing the 'lifestyle' agenda. The real power of the award lies in bringing communities together with a common purpose.

As one of the most well-used recreational facilities in any community, parks provide environments for many activities, informal and formal recreation, meeting places for family and friends, and serve as areas for rest and quiet contemplation.

Principles into action

Each park has unique elements contributing to its winning formula. *How do you perform?*

Connections – work with local community to create spaces that provide what people need in daily life, including a **welcoming place** that encourages exploration

Variety – offer **opportunities** for play, activity, reflection or peaceful retreat have appeal

Comfort – provide protection from the elements, seating, accessible pathways, good facilities, openness and lighting all contribute to **feelings of safety**

Materials – choose materials that enhance the park's function in design. Minimise **environmental impact** via re-cycling and other methods.

Coherence – design elements to work in harmony. Value **biodiversity, landscape and heritage features** through interpretation and enhanced appearance.

Useful Resources

[Green Flag Guidance Manual](#) for applicants

[Green Flag Award Winners worldwide](#)

Tate, A. & Eaton, M. (2015) *Great City Parks* (2nd edition), Routledge.

Van Walkenburgh, M. (2017) *What makes a great park?* blog.waterfrontoronto.ca

Waikumete Cemetery - See @Friendsofwaikumete facebook page for details of activities

References

¹ Van Walkenburgh, M. (2017) *What makes a great park?* blog.waterfrontoronto.ca

² Ibid.