



Birkenhead's Kae Condon (centre) with Laura Hulbert (Onehunga) and Murray Hill (Milford)

## Bittersweet year for 'sugar town'

It was a bittersweet year for the 'sugar town' challenged by landslides, roadworks and a bus crash – but [Birkenhead Village](#) is still attracting the events, the punters and even the PM.

The Te Raki Pae Whenua (North Shore) shopping precinct has literally had its ups and downs, with parking access an ongoing saga.

Town Centre Manager Kae Condon says it's been an exhausting but ultimately rewarding year.

"We have had the Rawene Road car park slip down the gully, four major development projects happening and the major upgrade of our main street, Birkenhead Ave, to contend with.

"Amid the disruption, we have carried on and continue to run successful events such as *The Butcher*, *The Baker* and *The Candlestick Maker* during Auckland's recent Heritage Festival," says Kae, who even found time during May to escort the visiting Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern around Highbury Mall while diplomatically wearing a red coat, *see right*.

There is much to admire about the resilience of the BID-operating town centre which has sustained strong relationships with the Kaipātiki Local Board and ATEED.

"We've worked with Jonathan Sudworth (ATEED Local Economic Development Advisor) and look forward to being part of Auckland's inaugural Winter Festival which we heard about at the (October BID networking) meeting.

"The Kaipātiki Local Board has been really supportive of our events and the economic benefit they deliver. We've gone 50-50 on the cost of running some of our smaller scale events," Kae said.

The Birkenhead BID ran almost half of all the North Shore-based Heritage Festival events, including the popular cavalcade of vintage cars.



IMAGE SOURCE: Stuff

"The "Village with a View" is at the highest point on the Waitematā (364ft above sea level) atop a ridge flanked by unique tourist destinations... In one gully we have Le Roys Bush, a scenic reserve full of abundant birdlife, and *Auckland City's only inner-city rainforest* and, in the other gully, we have Chelsea Heritage Park - NZ's only sugar factory which gave birth to our unique heritage in the village as *NZ's only Sugar Town*."

KAE CONDON

In her manager's report to members at Birkenhead's recent (2017-18) AGM, Kae highlighted the year's challenges and opportunities.

"The impact from the slip and main street upgrade has stunted growth, as forecast. Thanks go to the Kaipātiki Local Board for its generous grant to help us with local promotions.

"The Tourism Growth Strategy is making inroads with an increase in spend and has helped to offset losses from the slip and roadworks," Kae said.

"Birkenhead's unique half-day tourist attraction as *Auckland's only inner-city rainforest* has developed good cut through.

"The addition of the Big Hoot Owl has been a great success for the village as well, with combined community support coming together to purchase it. The Owl (*for image, see previous page*) tells a story of Māori myth and legend which is also relevant to the Birkenhead rainforest," she said.

Slip, sliding away, the landslide cost Birkenhead car parks, customers and revenue.



Chelsea Bay, an exciting new visitor experience centre at NZ Sugar in Birkenhead, opened in November 2018. The new facility includes a café, factory tours, baking school and an interactive education zone.

Kae says that, after years of sweet-talking, the Chelsea Sugar Refinery saw the big opportunity to redevelop and re-open the sugar factory to tours.

"This is an exciting development for the area. These [tours](#) provide a unique visitor experience and will help bring new customers to Birkenhead Village," says Kae.



During the October school holidays, the circus came to Birkenhead town.

While there wasn't a tent to pitch, the Highbury Mall provided the venue and daily performances proved popular with children of all ages.

As Kae pointed out, the covered mall came in particularly handy providing shelter from the chilly spring southerly.