

Introduction

Wellington has a very beautiful natural setting by world standards. The inner city faces north and east to the natural sweep of Lambton Harbour, and steep hills enclose it from behind.

The inner suburbs cling to these hills of which large areas, including significant ridgetops, are Town Belt.

Wellington is fortunate to still retain a large portion of the space set aside as Town Belt under the instruction of the Secretary of the New Zealand Company, John Ward, in 1839.

Originally held by Central Government after gazettal in 1841, this crescent of green space on the hills cradling the central city and inner suburbs has been administered and controlled by Wellington City Council since 1873.

A Town Belt, by various names, is an area of land set aside during the design of towns and cities to provide a green and open space for the pleasure and health of the citizens. This design approach had been advocated by utopian and radical social reformers in Britain since the early nineteenth century as a means of providing relief for ordinary citizens (not just the aristocracy) from the overcrowding of the cities. However, they were not part of British cities in 1840. The town belts established around the settlements planned on the Wakefield model in Australia and New Zealand were unique for their time anywhere in the world. Thus, to the British colonists in the new town of Wellington the Town Belt was a novelty, with no traditional identity or legal framework. Therefore, the purpose of the Town Belt may have been misunderstood by some. Then, as now, the Town Belt was sometimes seen as "waste land" waiting to be exploited.

Visually dominant in the Wellington City scene, the Town Belt is very important to the physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing of the citizens of Wellington, and an essential component of their feelings about "their" City.

As the city has grown the pressures on the Town Belt land for development have become extreme. Last century land was lost to other, mainly Crown, uses; Wellington College, the Governor General's Residence (originally a lunatic asylum), Victoria University, a signal station, Wellington Hospital, the Meteorological Office, and roads to link the city with the, then,

country across the Town Belt. Lesser reductions occurred earlier this century. All together, over a third of the original Town Belt land is now in other uses and perhaps lost forever, despite the strength and clarity of the founding legislation (see figure 1). It is only through the continued vigilance of Wellington's community and of Wellington City Council as Trustee, that the Town Belt will be managed to protect its many, often unique, qualities for the benefit of future generations.

Since the 1960s the Wellington City Council has made progress in developing an "Outer" Town Belt to complement the original Town Belt. This area of land has the same principal aim as the first Town Belt, in that it is designed to separate the city from the country with a set of "green lungs" for the benefit of the citizens. Only part of the land intended to form the Outer Town Belt is currently in Council ownership, but additional land will be acquired or protected as it becomes available. This land is administered as Recreation Reserve and does not yet have a management plan encompassing the whole area.