

# UNDERSTANDING WELLINGTON CITY'S **DISTRICT PLAN**



**Absolutely**

**POSITIVELY**

ME HEKE KI PŌNEKE  
WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

**Wellington**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. OVERVIEW OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to outline what the District Plan is, why we have one, how it is implemented, and what it tries to achieve for Wellington.

Section 1 introduces the plan and answers these questions, while sections 2 and 3 provide an outline of the plan contents.

For a more detailed understanding of the District Plan's provisions, please consult the plan itself – you can find it at [Wellington.govt.nz](http://Wellington.govt.nz) (search District Plan) – or talk to the Council's District Plan Team.



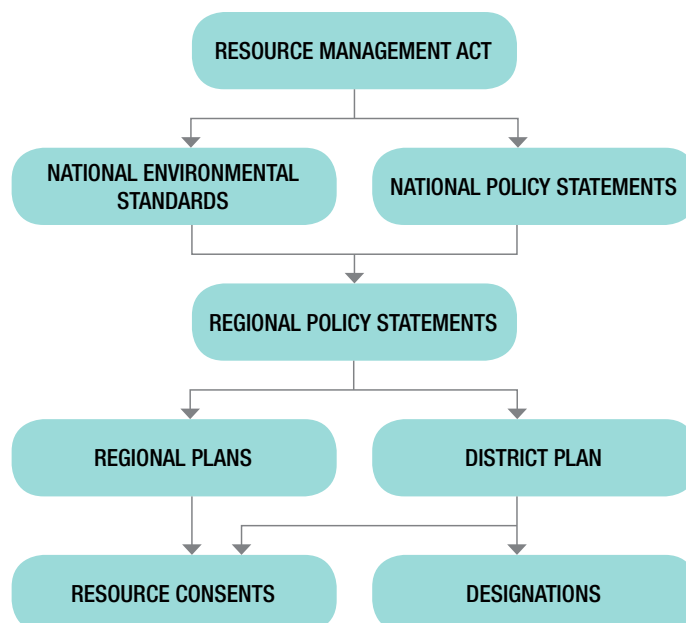
## 1.2. WHAT IS THE DISTRICT PLAN?

The Wellington City District Plan sets out the policies and rules that Wellington City Council uses to manage the city's natural and built environment – sustainably, sensibly and fairly. It is a legal document which Wellington City Council is required to have under the Resource Management Act 1991 (the RMA).

The RMA is New Zealand's main piece of environmental legislation, and provides a framework for managing the effects of activities on the environment. The key aim of both the RMA and the District Plan is sustainable management of natural and physical resources. Sustainable management means balancing current human needs and activities with the need to protect the natural, physical and built environments and the resources they provide.

In addition to outlining the appropriate scope and processes, the RMA also provides a wider regulatory structure that includes the District Plan. This structure is outlined below.

The District Plan is not the only city planning tool used by the Council. The Council's approach to city planning is much broader, drawing not only on the District Plan but also on other strategies and policies covering a wide range of issues (eg transport, urban design, heritage or parks). Some areas also have location-specific documents, such as the Johnsonville Town Centre Plan. These plans, policies and strategies often feed into the District Plan in addition to containing other processes and methods of implementation.





### 1.3. WHAT DOES THE DISTRICT PLAN TRY TO ACHIEVE?

Through the District Plan, the City Council seeks to turn public desires and broad sustainable management principles into a practical set of guides and controls for Wellington City.

While the plan's provisions are specific to particular zones, they can be grouped under five overall goals:

- Protect and enhance the natural or 'green' areas of the city. This includes the Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, rural and open space zones, and conservation sites.
- Encourage more intensive and mixed-use development within the existing urban area to achieve better use of transport, infrastructure and energy – in other words, a compact and more sustainable city.
- Improve the overall quality of the built environment from an urban design perspective.
- Reduce the risks associated with natural and technological hazards.
- Safeguard the natural environment – land, air and water – from pollution and contamination.

To achieve these goals, the District Plan sets out a range of objectives, policies, methods and rules. Their aim is not to restrict development, but to guide and control the effects of development on the environment.

### 1.4. HOW IS THE DISTRICT PLAN IMPLEMENTED?

#### Resource consents

The District Plan allows some developments to take place as of right and without the Council's specific consent (although usually subject to certain standards specified in the plan). Other developments that have the potential to cause environmental impacts are categorised as 'controlled', 'discretionary' or 'non-complying' and may not take place without a resource consent. Further information about these categories is provided in the glossary (page 14).

The resource consent process is the main method of implementing the District Plan. When someone applies for resource consent, the Council assesses developments or activities they are planning against the objectives, policies, and rules of the District Plan and any effects the proposed development may have on the environment.

More detail about resource consents, how to apply for them, and how to make submissions on publicly notified resource consents can be found in the Council's publication, *A Guide to Resource Consents*, available free from the Council's offices and website. For more information, please contact the Council's resource consents staff on 499 4444, or call in to Level 1, Council offices, 101 Wakefield Street.



## Designations

The RMA allows for areas of land to be designated for use as network utilities (such as roads and telecommunications facilities) or large public works (such as schools). These designated areas (or ‘designations’) are identified in District Plan maps.

Land can only be designated for public works or network utilities by ‘requiring authorities’. These can be:

- ministers of the Crown
- local authorities
- approved network utility operators (generally organisations which provide infrastructure).

Once a designation is put in place, the requiring authority may do anything allowed by the designation, and the usual provisions of the District Plan do not apply to the designated area.

A designation also places restrictions on what anyone other than the requiring authority can do on the designated land without first getting the requiring authority’s permission.

## Plan changes

The District Plan is subject to ongoing monitoring and review. Changes to the plan may be initiated by the Council or private persons. Reasons for plan changes include:

- new information or research becoming available
- new legislative requirements from central government or regional council
- changes to public opinion or wider policy
- requests to develop or use land in a manner different from that provided for in the plan.

Proposed plan changes are always publicly notified, and anyone may make a submission on the proposal. This is normally followed by a further submission stage and a public hearing. Once the Council has made its decision, it may be appealed to the Environment Court.

Further information on designations and plan changes can be found on the Ministry for the Environment website ([mfe.govt.nz](http://mfe.govt.nz)).

## 1.5. HOW IS THE DISTRICT PLAN STRUCTURED?

### Volume 1: objectives, policies and rules

The objectives, policies and rules in volume 1 form the key part of the plan. The objectives are the Council's environmental goals and the policies are the ways these will be achieved. The rules provide the means for Council to carry out its functions under the Resource Management Act and to achieve the objectives and policies.

The District Plan also contains non-regulatory methods, where appropriate, such as advocacy, the provision of information, education and incentives. An example is energy efficiency. The key method that the plan identifies for this is advocacy, with the Council recognising its responsibility in acting as a role model and advocate for energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

As required under Section 75 of the Act, each policy is followed by an explanation of the policy, the principal reason for adopting the policy and associated methods, and a description of the environmental results expected from the implementation of the policy and methods. The District Plan rules are also generally followed by explanations to help readers understand and interpret the plan's provisions.

#### Volume 1 chapters consist of:

- **Introductory chapters:** These explain the purpose and context of the District Plan, issues for tangata whenua, and general provisions such as information requirements and definitions.
- **Zone-specific chapters:** These chapters set out the objectives, policies and rules for each zone, ie Residential, Open Space, or Central Area zones. Before listing any objectives and rules,

the plan first describes each area's character and broadly outlines what development is anticipated in that area (refer to pages 8–12 of this guide).

- **Specific issues:** These chapters set out objectives, policies and rules relating to specific environmental issues, such as heritage, earthworks, or contaminated land (refer to pages 13–14 of this guide).

### Volume 2: Design guides

These set guidelines for developments of particular types (eg multi-unit housing), or on particular sites (eg within Institutional Precincts, or in defined heritage areas such as Thorndon). New developments which fall into these categories generally require a resource consent. In assessing a resource consent application, the Council will take into account the extent to which the proposal meets the relevant design guide and the relevant area-based policies.

The District Plan also contains design guides for information purposes relating to design against crime and wind.

### Volume 3: Maps

The maps identify various areas or zones within the city where particular policies or rules apply. They are usually the first part of the District Plan consulted by people wishing to undertake developments, or who are affected by proposed developments, and want to understand what provisions will apply to a site. The maps identify which zone the property is in and whether any other provisions apply, eg does the property contain a heritage building? Are there any particular hazards relating to the site?

## 2. ZONES

### 2.1. OVERVIEW OF THIS GUIDE

Wellington is split into various zones, based on historic uses and objectives for what is acceptable in each area. The zones are:

- Residential Areas
- Centres
- Business Areas
- Institutional Precincts
- Airport and Golf Course Recreation Precinct
- Central Area
- Rural Areas
- Open Space Areas and Conservation Sites

This section of the guide introduces each zone and provides a basic outline of how they are managed under the District Plan.

### 2.2. CENTRAL AREA

The Central Area comprises not only the commercial and business heart of Wellington City, but it is also the heart of the wider region. In addition to business activities, the Central Area hosts a wide range of political, recreational, cultural and entertainment activities of national and local significance. The buildings of the Central Area reflect these activities, the presence of a busy port, and the topography of the harbour and hills.

Key goals for the Central Area include protecting the quality of the buildings and the environment, as well as promoting intensified commercial and residential uses. Within the Central Area, the District Plan places minimal direct controls over what land can be used for. Most activities can take place anywhere within the Central Area, provided they meet performance standards that ensure the quality of the city's environment is maintained.

The plan's design guides describe the urban design goals that would enhance the attractiveness of the area and provide

guidance on achieving those goals. In addition, specific rules deal with the siting, design and appearance of new buildings. Other provisions protect important public views, ensure sunlight reaches public spaces, and control excessive wind around buildings.

### 2.3. BUSINESS AREAS

Business Areas, spread throughout the city, provide focal points for business activity outside the Central Area and make a substantial contribution to the City's economy by generating jobs and economic development.

Between 1995 and 2009, there was a trend for residential and retail activities to move into areas previously dominated by commercial and industrial uses. This provided a greater mix in some areas, but a downside has been the increased difficulty for small to medium-sized industrial activities and businesses to find land and premises within the city boundaries.

Consequently, the plan's approach for managing Business Areas is to be enabling and provide flexibility for the appropriate land uses. Two Business Area sub-zones are identified, each with a different focus:

- Business 1 Areas contain a range of uses, including employment activities, light industrial, commercial and business services, recreational, residential and entertainment uses, and local community services. In some cases retail activities are also appropriate.
- Business 2 Areas are based around industrial activities, such as warehousing, manufacturing and commercial services. Because of the industrial nature of the activities in these areas, there is a lower benchmark for appearance and design compared with other areas in the city.





## 2.4. RESIDENTIAL AREAS

The Residential Areas of Wellington are divided into Inner and Outer Residential areas. The Inner Residential Area joins the central city area and is generally contained by the Town Belt. Most dwellings in the area were built around 1900 and development is intensive, with higher population densities than other Residential Areas. Compared with the Outer Residential Area, there are more multiple units – often created by division of existing houses and fewer family households. Many Inner Residential Areas are also protected by pre-1930 demolition controls in order to protect their heritage values.

The Outer Residential Area covers more suburban neighbourhoods further from Wellington's Central Business District.

In the Outer Residential Area, houses are usually located on larger sections and developments are more spacious.

In both inner and outer areas new development must respect existing forms. The Council's approach in Residential Areas is to permit appropriate activities and to assess others on a discretionary basis. This is necessary to protect the character and amenities of Residential Areas. The intention is to make specific development standards as flexible as possible to encourage development opportunities without harming the look and feel of the area.

The Council also encourages mixed-use development and intensification (through medium density housing areas and infill) in some Residential Areas, so long as residential amenities are reasonably protected. Residential Areas provide the place where most people sleep and enjoy their leisure time, and more peaceful, quieter surroundings are expected. However, it is not the Council's intention to 'freeze' all residential neighbourhoods in their current state and for this reason greater diversity of land use is promoted in the District Plan.

## 2.5. CENTRES

Wellington's Centres are the focal points of economic and social life in our communities. They have multiple functions and activities, but their core is providing localised shopping and services that complement the Central Area. Not only do they play a vital role in ensuring suburban communities have convenient services nearby, Centres may also contribute to a community identity and have distinctive characteristics that often determine why people choose to make a certain part of the city their home.

Centres range from large shopping centres to small clusters of shops. To help manage the range of Centres, they have been categorised within a Centres hierarchy (see diagram).

The District Plan encourages the intensification of residential and commercial activities in the Centres to allow for more efficient use of existing infrastructure and resources. It is considered that the majority of new residential and commercial developments in Wellington should take place in either the Central Area or an appropriate Centre.

Key issues managed by the District Plan include:

- promoting quality urban design which contributes to attractive Centres
- ensuring new developments are consistent with the character of Centres
- promoting new developments in appropriate Centres
- ensuring Centres are managed in a manner consistent with the hierarchy
- managing borders with Residential Areas.





## 2.6. INSTITUTIONAL PRECINCTS

Victoria University, Massey University and Wellington Regional Hospital have been identified as Institutional Precincts because of their scale and important role in the city and region. Specific management provisions have been developed for these institutions with rules that allow them to operate without undue restrictions.

Typically, the precincts are characterised by large-scale buildings. Sites are intensely developed, with mixed building forms, including large slab blocks and towers which contrast with nearby housing. Due to the scale and intensity of activities on site, the institutions generate large flows of people and vehicles day and night. The effects of building development and activities in Institutional Precincts impact on surrounding residential neighbourhoods and the District Plan contains provisions to manage this.

Activities and new buildings are subject to performance standards and building design guides to encourage good development and protect the amenity of Residential Areas.

## 2.7. AIRPORT AND GOLF COURSE RECREATION PRECINCT

Wellington Airport is a significant strategic transport hub and plays an important role in providing for the social and economic wellbeing of the city, region and the nation. The District Plan recognises its importance by providing for its continued use and development, as well as related activities.

The plan also contains provisions to manage non-airport activities and developments. This recognises that certain complementary activities can add to the attractiveness and vitality of the airport as a destination and transport hub, as well as providing uses which benefit local communities. However, these activities are carefully managed to safeguard the ongoing operation of the airport, protect the character and amenity of nearby land uses and ensure retail activities do not affect the ongoing vitality and viability of the Kilbirnie and Miramar town centres.

The provisions of the Golf Course Recreation Precinct provide for the continued use of the existing Miramar Golf Course and recreational activities.



## 2.8. RURAL AREA

Wellington's Rural Area extends from the outer boundaries of the city's urban areas to the coast and, in the north, to the boundaries of Hutt City and Porirua City. It represents about 65 percent of the city's total land area, although only a small number of people live here.

The generally rugged landscape comprises steep ridges and deep gullies, and contains many sites of importance to Māori. Most of the land is used for pastoral farming, and settlements are small and scattered.

The District Plan's approach to managing Wellington's rural areas includes:

- maintaining and enhancing natural features (such as important landscapes and ecosystems)
- maintaining and enhancing amenity values and rural character
- managing the adverse effects of new subdivisions and avoiding the unmanaged spread of urban areas
- promoting the efficient use and development of natural and physical resources.

## 2.9. OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION SITES

Wellington's open space consists of private and public land, and many environments – coastal areas, hills, bush areas, playing fields, and more. The Council manages all public open spaces under the Reserves Act 1977 and the District Plan.

As open space is used for a variety of activities, these areas are divided into three groups – Open Space A, Open Space B and Open Space C.

- **Open Space A:** Consists of open-space land used for passive and active recreation. Developed sportsfields and associated buildings are often required and the plan balances the effects of these with their value in providing for public recreation.
- **Open Space B:** This is land which is valued for its natural character and informal open spaces. It involves areas that are used for recreation that does not generally involve buildings or structures. The District Plan seeks to keep such areas in an unbuilt or natural state.
- **Open Space C:** Consists of the Town Belt, which is valued for its historic, social and cultural importance. In addition to the District Plan requirements, the Town Belt is administered under the terms of its own deed and also the Wellington Town Belt Management Plan.

There are many significant areas requiring particular protection because of their ecological significance or other values – for example, native bush remnants and wetlands. These are identified as Conservation Sites.

## 3. SPECIFIC ISSUES

The District Plan also contains chapters relating to specific district-wide issues. These apply to all parts of the plan and need to be considered in conjunction with zone-based rules. The issue-specific chapters cover:

- Heritage
- Earthworks
- Contaminated land
- Utilities and designations
- Renewable energy

This section of the guide introduces each issue and outlines how they are managed under the District Plan.

### 3.1. HERITAGE

This section deals with important aspects of Wellington's natural and cultural environment that have been inherited from the past. This includes Māori sacred and historical sites, buildings and sites dating from European colonial times, and some natural elements including gardens and trees. The Council strongly supports the protection of heritage values in the city, and the District Plan is an important protection mechanism.

The plan lists buildings, areas, objects (eg statues), sites of importance to Māori and notable trees that have heritage value, and seeks to safeguard them. Any proposed development that involves destroying or significantly altering a listed item requires resource consent. The Council also uses other methods to maintain the city's heritage values including financial and non-financial incentives.

### 3.2. EARTHWORKS

Earthworks are necessary for a wide range of developments. However, they also have the potential to modify landscapes, disturb archaeological sites, cause ecological damage, destabilise land, or affect water quality. As a result, objectives, policies and rules have been developed to sustainably manage earthworks. These concentrate on the type of earthworks that are environmentally acceptable and how to avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects. Rules for earthworks vary depending on zoning of land, but are consolidated into a separate section of the plan for easier reading.

### 3.3. CONTAMINATED LAND

Wellington City Council uses Wellington Regional Council's Selected Land Use Register and the Ministry for the Environment's hazardous activities and industries list (HAIL) to identify contaminated land and to gather and record information. HAIL compiles activities and industries that are considered likely to cause land contamination as a result of the use, storage or disposal of hazardous substances and provides a guide for identifying potentially contaminated land.

Contaminated land needs to be managed so that it does not pose an unacceptable risk to current or future owners, occupiers or users. The objectives, policies and rules contained in the contaminated land chapters apply across all zones and cover all applications relating to the remediation, use, development and subdivision of existing and potentially contaminated land.



### 3.4. UTILITIES AND DESIGNATIONS

The city is served by a complex network of utilities, including for communications, energy, water, drainage and waste management. The District Plan enables utility providers to operate efficiently, while managing the potential environmental effects. To achieve this, some of the functions of utility networks are permitted activities (for example, underground pipes or cables), while others require resource consents – especially where structures and activities with a significant impact are proposed. There are conditions relating to the size, scale, location and design of such proposals that must be met for resource consent to be granted.

The plan also allows for designations (see section 1.4), which are listed in the plan along with any conditions which must be complied with.

### 3.5. RENEWABLE ENERGY

The District Plan contains specific chapters for renewable energy activities. The objective is to encourage efficiency in energy use, and the development and use of energy from renewable sources. This goal is influenced by international and national obligations relating to climate change and renewable energy. However, the plan also ensures that the potential for adverse effects arising from renewable energy proposals are also given consideration.

## 4. GLOSSARY

<b>Amenity</b>	This refers to those natural or physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes.
<b>Character areas</b>	The character of an area is derived from the qualities that distinguish it from its wider surroundings. These may include the presence of old buildings, distinctive streetscapes, significant natural features, important public views, a diversity of uses, and more. The Council has identified a range of character areas and prepared design guides for each.
<b>Controlled activity</b>	In the District Plan, some activities in some areas are 'controlled' if they relate to specific issues of concern to the Council. The Council must grant consent for such activities, but consent may be subject to conditions – such as complying with design guides when building in character areas.
<b>Design guides</b>	These offer general guidance to people wishing to undertake developments/activities of specific kinds (eg multi-unit developments) or in particular locations where the Council has decided such control is warranted. The design guides contain standards or criteria against which the controlled elements of proposed developments are assessed for resource consent. They do not prescribe specific design solutions. Design guides are found in volume 2 of the District Plan.
<b>Designations</b>	These are provisions made in the District Plan and under the Resource Management Act, allowing land to be secured for public works or other projects providing essential services in the city. A designation may be sought by a local authority, a network utility operator (eg telecommunications provider) or a central government ministry.
<b>Discretionary activity (restricted/ unrestricted)</b>	<p>In the District Plan 'discretionary' activities require a resource consent, which may or may not be granted. Activities defined as discretionary (restricted) can only be assessed in relation to specified issues. If consent is granted, conditions may only be imposed in relation to those issues.</p> <p>Discretionary activities (unrestricted) allow the Council to consider any relevant issue. If consent is granted, the Council may impose conditions that help control any potential adverse effects.</p>
<b>Mixed use</b>	This refers to the presence of a wide range of activities: residential, retail, recreational, commercial, educational, institutional etc.
<b>Multi-unit development</b>	These are residential developments containing three (in some cases, two) or more household units on a site. The Council encourages such development as a way to achieve a more compact city.
<b>Non-complying activity</b>	This is activity that is beyond the scope of permitted, controlled or discretionary activities. Resource consent may be granted, with conditions, if the Council is satisfied that consent would be consistent with the objectives and policies of the District Plan or has environmental effects that are no more than minor.
<b>Permitted activity</b>	This is activity that can be undertaken as of right, providing it meets any conditions specified in the District Plan. Resource consent is not required for permitted activities.
<b>Resource consent</b>	Resource consent is permission granted by the Council to an applicant wishing to undertake an activity or development that is not 'permitted' under the District Plan. In granting resource consent, the Council will consider what effects a proposed development will have on the environment and whether it is consistent with the objectives of the District Plan. Resource consents may be granted with conditions, eg the Council may require noise levels to be monitored while a construction project is under way.
<b>RMA</b>	The Resource Management Act 1991. The Act's purpose is to promote the sustainable management of New Zealand's natural and physical and resources. Under the Act, all cities and districts are required to have district plans that give effect to the sustainable management principles laid down in the Act.
<b>Sustainable management</b>	<p>As defined in the RMA, this means: managing the use, development, and protection of natural and physical resources in a way, or at a rate, which enables people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural wellbeing and for their health and safety while —</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) sustaining the potential of natural and physical resources (excluding minerals) to meet the reasonably foreseeable needs of future generations; and</li> <li>(b) safeguarding the life-supporting capacity of air, water, soil, and ecosystems; and</li> <li>(c) avoiding, remedying, or mitigating any adverse effects of activities on the environment.</li> </ul>
<b>Utilities</b>	These are essential systems and networks that provide the city with services such as water, energy, communications, or sewerage.