7 Culture and history

Guiding principle

Management of the Wellington Town Belt will acknowledge historical and cultural links to the land.

The Town Belt has a rich and diverse history and the Council recognises that the historical link of mana whenua to the land has not been well acknowledged in the past. The Council intends to take significant historical and cultural values into account when making decisions about the Town Belt.

There are more detailed reports on history in Appendix 3: Town Belt traditional history and Appendix 4: Town Belt historical outline.

7.1 Objectives

7.1.1 Significant historical and cultural features and values of the Town Belt are identified, managed and protected.

7.1.2 Appreciation of the cultural heritage of the Town Belt is enhanced through research and interpretation.
7.2 Policies

Recognition and protection

7.2.1 Explore the listing of the Wellington Town Belt on the New Zealand Historic Places Register to recognise its historical and cultural importance.

7.2.2 Explore options for heritage recognition and protection under the Open Space C zoning during the review of the open space chapters in the District Plan.

7.2.3 Consultation with the New Zealand Historic Places Trust and mana whenua will be an important part of managing historic and traditional sites and wāhi tapu (sacred sites).

7.2.4 Recognised historic sites will be protected and managed in a manner reflecting their value and significance, in consultation with any directly affected groups or individuals.

7.2.5 Where possible, proposed works will avoid recorded archaeological sites. Where avoidance of recorded sites is not possible, authority shall be sought from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust before any work is carried out. In areas of high archaeological potential, when there is reasonable cause to suspect that an archaeological site (recorded or for the discovery of unrecorded sites) may be damaged, modified or destroyed by any activity, an archaeological authority shall be applied for from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust in accordance with the Historic Places Act (1993).

7.2.6 Wherever possible Māori place names will be used on signs and maps.

7.2.7 Any activity occurring on or near the “Sites of Significance to Tangata Whenua or other Maori” listed in the District Plan shall be discussed with mana whenua before the activity starts.

7.2.8 Interpretation of these significant sites will be carried out in partnership with mana whenua.

Research

7.2.9 Record and disseminate Māori and European historical information about Town Belt land. This may include conducting a systematic archaeological study.

Interpretation

7.2.10 Work with mana whenua, community groups and historical societies to identify, assess and interpret important heritage sites.

7.3 Traditional history

The history and traditions related to the places that now make up the Wellington Town Belt go back to the earliest arrival of Māori in Wellington. That time was arguably 850 AD, but perhaps nearer 1200 AD. Two important components of the Town Belt are the key ridgelines in the east and west of central Wellington, known as Te Ranga a Hiwi – or the ridge of Hiwi – and the ridgeline of Ahumairangi. Hiwi was the son of the daughter of Tara, the eponymous ancestor of Ngāi Tara. Ngāi Tara were probably the first Māori to settle the area, constructing pā and developing gardens and using the forests to gather food. Before Ngāi Tara were others, more of the hunter-gatherer groups known by some as the kahui tipua, who moved around taking advantage of the natural resources of the region.

Ngāi Tara built a series of pā, the largest being the Akatarewa Pā on the Town Belt around Wellington College and extending up to the ridgeline. The Basin Reserve was the mahinga kai...
(access to food and resources) called Hauwai, where the eels and other fish from the swamp streams were gathered.

The other great ridgeline to frame Wellington City was known as Ahumairangi and later as Tinakori Hill. Ahumairangi was to feature more in later Māori history as a place where Te Atiawa/Taranaki Whānui were to establish gardens to feed the pā below and keep lookouts to warn of the approach of raiding parties from other tribes. The name Ahumairangi could have derived from a type of whirlwind. That ridgeline was less favoured for building pā and none were known to be located there. By the time of Te Atiawa/Taranaki Whānui there had been the change from fortified pā situated on defendable headlands to pā with minimal fortifications sited around the harbour and close to the foreshore.

Not all the areas included in the Town Belt were occupied by Māori with pā and kainga, but the entire area would have been used for food gathering with birds being snared. This is acknowledged in names such as Paekaka, which probably referred to the tree perch for catching parrots and was the name of a village situated in Thorndon close to the Town Belt.

Sites of significance to Māori are listed below. Those protected as “Sites of Significance to Tangata Whenua or other Māori” in the District Plan are noted.

**Tinakori and Orangikaupapa:** 80 acres of the Town Belt were awarded by McCleverty to Pipitea Māori in 1847. It is known that the Town Belt contained Māori cultivations, although it is not known if they were on these lands awarded to Māori.

**Polhill Gully Moe-i-ra:** The area known as Polhill Gully, as established in McCleverty’s Award, comprised 89 acres three roods and five perches. This included 31 town sections, mainly along Aro Street, as well as the Town Belt additions known as blocks XV, XVa and XVb. By 1873, the Te Aro Māori owners were leasing out the three big Town Belt blocks along with most of the town sections to settler farmers.

**Moera (M56 District Plan):** Moe-ra (Moe-i-ra30 or Moe-i-te-ra31) was “a Ngāti Awa kainga, possibly pallisaded”. It was situated where Marama Crescent now is, near the road to Brooklyn and Ohiro.

**Omaroro cultivation area (M74 District Plan):** was located on steeply sloping ground, which was perhaps terraced on a spur of the Turangarere hills at Brooklyn facing north-east within an area now part of the Town Belt. This area became the Vogeltown Block and was awarded to Wi Tako Ngatata of Kumutoto Pā.

**Kumutoto kainga (M66 District Plan):** Cultivations were situated on what is now the Botanic Garden.

**Te Akatarewa Pā (M70 District Plan):** (above the Mt Victoria tunnel) was formerly home of Ngāi Tara.

**Matairangi/Tangi-te-keo – Mt Victoria (M72 District Plan):** Māori tradition has it that Wellington Harbour was occupied by two taniwha, Ngāke and Whataitai. In their time the harbour was a lake blocked from the ocean and Ngāke wanted to escape to the open ocean. He crashed out to form the channel known as Te Au a Tane, the present channel into Wellington harbour. When Whataitai tried to follow suit through the area where Kilbirnie now is, he failed and became stranded and instead the area uplifted leaving Whataitai high and dry. He then transformed into a manuwairua called Te Keo or a spirit bird. Te Keo alighted on the lesser peak next to Matairangi/Mt Victoria. The other peak became known Tangi Te Keo or the cry of Keo.

30 Cited by Neville Gilmore, Historian for Wellington Tenths Trust
31 Adkin, G Leslie: The Great Harbour of Tara 1959, p42
7.4 Historical outline of the development of the Wellington Town Belt

**August 1839:** The New Zealand Company instructed surveyor William Mein Smith to lay out a settlement at Port Nicholson (Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington Harbour), requiring that “the whole of the town inland should be separated by a broad belt of land ... to be public property on condition that no buildings be ever erected on it”.

**1840:** The New Zealand Company settlement was moved, after three months, from its original site near the mouth of the Hutt River to the shores of Lambton Harbour. Captain Mein Smith finalised the plan of Wellington in August 1840. The plan was the first record of the Town Belt, which it denoted as “land ... reserved for the enjoyment of the public and not to be built upon”.

**1841:** Although the Port Nicholson deed of purchase, under which land for Wellington had been obtained from Māori, was invalid, the Crown assumed ownership of the Town Belt area (approximately 625ha) and proclaimed the land a public reserve without compensation.

Governor Hobson directed that a notice be published in the *New Zealand Gazette* requiring anyone occupying public or native reserves to vacate those sites, and declaring that “all persons are warned not to clear, fence, cultivate or build in or upon any portion of the belt of reserved land surrounding the town”.

**1847 to 1873:** Over this period, one-third of the Town Belt was taken variously for native reserves awarded in partial compensation for land taken by the Crown, for social welfare and education purposes and public works. Some of the land was later sold as residential sections or claimed for roads.

**1873:** The remaining Town Belt was transferred from the Crown to the City of Wellington by the Wellington City Reserves Act 1871 and the Town Belt and Basin Reserve Deed 1873. The 1873 Town Belt Deed set out the terms on which the city was to administer the land, as trustee, for the charitable objectives set out in the Deed. In particular, the Town Belt was “to be forever hereafter used and appropriated as a public recreation ground for the inhabitants of the City of Wellington”.

**1873 to 1974:** As the city grew, the Town Belt was increasingly developed and managed for recreation and amenity. Sports ground and park development was a major focus up to the 1970s, followed by the development of walkways and a track network in the late 20th century. Following the almost complete clearance of the Town Belt's native forest cover by the 1870s, large areas were planted in exotic conifers from 1880 to the 1930s. In the latter half of the 20th century a wider range of species were planted, with an increasing emphasis on planting and encouraging the natural regeneration of native species.

Further smaller areas of Town Belt land were taken for roads, education, housing and public works, the largest of which was approximately 7.8ha for Victoria College (University) in 1901 and 1949. In 1959, another area of 5.6ha was also taken through the Wellington City Exhibition Grounds Act, which authorised the Council to grant a 21-year lease with perpetual right of renewal to the Wellington Show Association, to use the area as an exhibition site.

Management of the Town Belt was generally ad hoc during this period.

**1975:** The Town Belt Management Policy was approved. This was the first time a set of objectives and policies for the entire Town Belt had been compiled.

**1980:** Former Town Belt land behind Government House was returned to the Council.

**1994:** The Council approved the Town Belt Management Plan, which was published in 1995. The plan provided a policy framework for managing and developing the Town Belt.
1998: The Council approved the Town Belt Reinstatement Policy, which outlined the Council’s approach to recovering and reinstating land that had been in the original Town Belt.

1998 to 2008: During this time some of the original sections of the Town Belt were recovered: Telecom land, Te Ahumairangi Hill (formerly called Tinakori Hill, 18.63ha) and the former Chest Hospital (3.21 ha).

2009: The Port Nicholson Block (Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) Claims Settlement Act 2009 came into force on September 2, signed by the Crown and the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust (representing descendants of tupuna of Te Ātiawa, Taranaki, Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāti Tama and holding a kaitiaki role for Ngāti Mutunga).

The nature and development of the Town Belt since 1842 gives it historic and cultural significance. It is part of the story of Wellington’s development as a city. Its role as a recreation ground means many of its historic features relate to its landscape and open-space character, such as landform modification, historic plantings, track development and garden development. However, the nature of Wellington’s topography and historical development has also seen Town Belt land used for infrastructure and public works purposes, resulting in places of historical significance.

Since its inception, many residents have fought to protect the Town Belt and keep it as a public recreation ground. In the mid-1990s residents successfully prevented the sale of the former Town Belt land at Clifton Terrace by the Crown.

7.5 Sites of interest and historic significance

Wireless Station, Te Ahumairangi Hill: The New Zealand Post Office wireless transmitting station, initially called Etako (Wi Tako), was opened on 14 October 1912 and the first wireless communication between New Zealand and Australia was successfully transmitted. The station, which comprised a 45.75m aerial and a stone building, served as a coast radio station for shipping, aircraft and lighthouses and for New Zealand’s international telegraph and telephone circuits. It was modernised in 1924 into a short-wave radio station and further developed in 1939 for Radio ZLW. It was closed when under Telecom ownership in September 1993.
Grant Road tunnel: The 40m tunnel on the hill above Grant Road was cut by a Mr G Thomas to supply metal, by agreement with the Council in 1906. The tunnel is a point of interest on the Northern Walkway.

Queens Park: This was originally known as the Grant Road Reserve, but renamed Queens Park in 1897 in honour of Queen Victoria’s reign (60 years). It was also later, but temporarily, known as Lady Macalister Park, (after the wife of the former mayor Sir Robert 1950–1956).

The park holds two heritage objects listed in the District Plan. The Grant Road Fountain, circa 1911–1913, provided natural spring water from a nearby spring until 1961 when contamination meant the mains supply had to be used. The Nathan Memorial, built in 1951, was sponsored by estate agent Sydney Nathan to commemorate his 24-year-old son, who died in action in Crete in 1941.

Restoration work was completed on the fountain in 2011, following recommendations in a 2010 conservation plan. A conservation plan for the memorial is being prepared in 2013 and will be followed by recommended restoration work.

Stellin Memorial Park: James Stellin died in France in 1944 as he struggled to avoid crashing his damaged Hawker Typhoon fighter-bomber into the village of Saint-Maclou-la-Brière. The village gave him a hero’s funeral and has honoured his memory ever since. When James’s father, a prominent Wellington businessman and developer died in 1964, he bequeathed funds to build a memorial in Saint-Maclou-la-Brière. He also gifted land upon trust on the eastern side of Tinakori Hill to Wellington City Council to create the James Stellin Memorial Park. The lookout was built in 1977.

On the 19 August 2007, the 63rd anniversary of James Stellin’s death, a plaque was dedicated at the lookout. French Ambassador HE M. Michel Legras spoke and laid a wreath, as did the Mayor, Kerry Prendergast. The plaque reads:

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In memory of
NZ 421785 Pilot Officer
James Kingston Stellin
Croix de Guerre avec Palme (Fr)
Died 19 August 1944
Aged 22 years
A hero in France and a worthy son of an Anzac
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Kelburn Park: The park is significant as an early example of the Town Belt sports grounds that were created by extensive cut and fill earthworks carried out, at least in part, under relief labour schemes. Work began in 1895 and continued intermittently in tandem with the construction of Victoria College (University), using spoil from the building site to fill a gully in the park. The park was ready for use in the summer of 1906/07. The Kelburn Bowling Club and Kelburn Municipal Croquet Club both began leasing land for playing greens in 1913 and the croquet club still operates from the pavilion that was built in 1924.

The park also features an illuminated fountain, designed by Wellington architectural firm Gray, Young and Morton for the New Zealand Centennial Exhibition in Rongotai in 1940. After the exhibition, it was put in storage until it was relocated to Kelburn Park in November 1956.

Specimen cabbage trees along Kelburn Parade date from 1908 when cabbage trees, popular with the Edwardians, were a “signature tree of the Baths and Reserves Department”32.

32 Walter Cook, “Why major specimen tree types were planted in the Wellington Botanic Garden”. Friends of the Wellington Botanic Garden Newsletter 2010.
Aro Valley War Memorial: The memorial is located on Town Belt land at the top end of Aro Street, bounded by Raroa Road and Holloway Road. The inscription reads: “Erected in memory of the boys of the Mitchelltown School and district who served abroad in the Great War 1914–1919”. The school operated on nearby Town Belt land above Holloway Road from 1894 to 1938.

Brooklyn anti-aircraft battery: The construction of an anti-aircraft battery began in 1942. It supported four 3.7 guns. There was also accommodation for 109 soldiers. The buildings remain but the fittings have been removed.

Ohiro Benevolent Home: Also known as the Ohiro Old People’s Home, the home was built in 1892 on a 2.23ha site, partly Town Belt, above Epuni Street and, from 1904, an access-way across the Town Belt was also leased. It was transferred to the Wellington Hospital Board in 1901 and later renamed the Central Park Hospital. The hospital closed in 1975 and, until its demolition in 1977, was one of the last remaining examples of 19th century large wooden hospitals. Today, remnants of the buildings foundations are visible at Ohiro Park.

Central Park: Tree planting in the area between Brooklyn Road and Ohiro Road, later named Central Park, began in 1907 with encouragement from the Scenery Preservation Society. Park development began in 1913, assisted by money raised by the Citizens Easter Carnival Association. The development plan included a children’s play area, provision for future sports grounds, a small lake and various walks. The fountain and main entrance gates, donated in 1920, still remain as well as exotic trees probably dating back to the early plantings.

Various parts were used intermittently as rubbish dumps between 1904 and 1959, which contributed to the filling of gullies such as that now occupied by the Renouf Tennis Centre. The park was used as a military camp during the Second World War and it underwent various refurbishments during the 1960s, 1990s and, most recently, in 2006.

Newtown Park: The first sportsfield on the Town Belt was opened at Newtown Park in 1881. It included a promenade, band rotunda and formal gardens and originally included a reservoir, which later became part of the Wellington Zoological Gardens. As well as sports and amenity uses, it was used as military camps during the Boer War and both World Wars, and was a site for mass meetings, such as those held during the Tramway Strike of 1912. The park was substantially remodelled between 1969 and 1972 and all that now remains of the original features are the historic conifer plantings on the bank between Newtown Park and Mt Albert Road. The entrance gates are listed as heritage objects in the District Plan.

Mt Albert signal station site: Wellington’s first signal station for shipping was built on Mt Albert in 1844. It operated until 1866, when the signal station at Beacon Hill began operation. The first signalman at Mt Albert was Robert Houghton, a master mariner. Six different-shaped signals were raised on a flagstaff to denote different types of ship approaching and were lowered once the ship was inside the harbour heads. Mt Albert is now the site of two water reservoirs.

Mt Albert military observation point: this was a Second World War installation built near the intersection of Buckley Road and Houghton Valley Road. Only the building foundations remain.

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37 Wellington City Archives, Photographic negative Series, Ref. No. 00158:3:7.
39 Wellington City Archives, Graphic positive Series, Ref. No. 00158:3:7.
41 “Signal Station, Mt Albert”. New Zealand Spectator and Cook’s Strait Guardian, Volume I, Issue 21, 1 March 1845, 4.
42 Archaeological recorded site R27/185 (NZAA)
Hataitai Park: The 4.05ha area was created for sports use between 1929 and 1936, partly through excavation works carried out by relief labour and partly by using spoil from the Mt Victoria traffic tunnel, which opened in 1931. The body of 17-year-old Phyllis Symons was discovered buried in fill on the site in 1931 and a site labourer, George Coats, was convicted and hanged for the ‘Town Belt murder’.

Sewer Ventilation Tower: This brick structure, located close to the present-day Wellington Harrier Athletic Club building on Alexandra Road, was constructed to ventilate the drainage and sewerage tunnel built beneath the ridge during the 1890s.

Former Chest Hospital: Originally built as a fever hospital, 1918–1920, the building was later used for the Chest Hospital (1969–1981) and then the Wellington Polytechnic Conservatorium of Music (1987–1998). The site, on Alexandra Road, was alienated from the Town Belt as part of a much larger alienation in 1872, and was returned to the Council in 2002. It includes the hospital wing and adjacent nurses’ hostel. The Chest Hospital building is listed as a Category II heritage building in the New Zealand Historic Places Trust register.

Pirie Street Conifer plantations: These conifers, together with the conifers at Newtown Park, were planted in 1880. They are significant as the oldest of the conifer plantations on the Town Belt and, therefore, representative of the early strains of conifers that were propagated at Wellington Botanic Garden and used throughout New Zealand as well as on the Town Belt. Evidence of an early quarry site, closed around 1880, can also be seen in the Ellice Street area.

The Byrd Memorial: The New Zealand National Memorial to Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, south of the Matairangi (Mt Victoria peak) lookout, was unveiled on 11 March 1962. Admiral Byrd, an aviator and explorer, was the first to fly over the South Pole and commanded American expeditions to Antarctica between 1828 and 1957. He developed close ties with New Zealand, which he used as a base for his expeditions, including Wellington. The concrete memorial, which was designed to evoke the shape of a polar tent, incorporates stones from Antarctica, a bronze bust of Admiral Byrd and commemoration of Paul Siple who accompanied Byrd on his expeditions. When the memorial was restored in the early 1990s, it was reclad with ceramic tiles depicting auroras, designed by artist Doreen Blumhardt.

Time signal cannon: The bronze cannon, now sited on the slope below the Matairangi lookout, was hauled to the ridgetop in 1877. It was used as a time gun, firing daily at noon, until 1900.

Former 2YA Transmitter Building: Also known as ‘the Castle’ because of its distinctive battlement design, the building and radio station 2YA was opened in 1927 by then Prime Minister Coates and new twin transmitter towers were commissioned at the same time. The building, in Alexandra Road, Hataitai, has played an important part in the history of broadcasting in New Zealand, having housed a number of radio stations (private and state-run) as well as early television broadcasting in the early 1960s. It is still used for radio broadcasting. Note this building is not on the Town Belt.

Mt Victoria Signal Station site: The signal station was built on Mt Victoria in 1866 as a repeater station – it repeated the signals from the Beacon Hill Signal Station, so they could be seen from Wellington. The area was also used as a quarantine area for scabby sheep. A signalman’s cottage was built in 1891. The station closed in 1940 and the cottage was destroyed in 1957. In 1964 a paved courtyard was built on the site as part of the summit redevelopment.

Mt Victoria anti-aircraft battery ⁴³ ⁴⁴: When the Second World War started, a base was established on Mt Victoria. The construction of a more permanent anti-aircraft battery began in 1942. It supported four 3.7” guns and there was also accommodation for 176 soldiers. A memorial

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⁴⁴ Archaeological recorded site R27/260 and R27/265 (NZAA)
plaque dedicated to these servicemen is located in Alexandra Road. The gun emplacements were demolished in 1970.

Wellington Centennial Memorial Lookout: The lookout was constructed at the north end of the Mt Victoria (Te Ranga a Hiwi) ridge in 1939 and opened officially in 1940. Granite that had been part of the Waterloo Bridge, demolished in 1938, was gifted for its construction by the London County Council. The covered lookout contains a direction indicator, as well as bronze busts of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (director of the New Zealand Company) and the Duke of Wellington.

Any specific policies on individual sites are included in sector plans.