



ENVIRONMENT: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. Purpose of report

This report outlines the background, context and decisions that the Environment Committee will be asked to consider in the coming months. It is not an exhaustive list and things will be added, removed or changed as the Committee's priorities for the forward programme are developed over the coming months.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Environment Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*

3. Objective

Our over-arching objective is developing Wellington as an eco-city. Wellington plays an environmental leadership role in New Zealand as the capital city. Our environmental priorities reflected in the long term plan include the following:

- maintain the resilience of the city's water infrastructure
- protect and maintain the city's open spaces, ecosystems and biodiversity
- develop the city's open space network in response to future population and cultural needs
- facilitate reductions in waste and resource use within business and communities
- work with partners, particularly other councils, to ensure the efficient and effective management of infrastructure.

Current situation

We are on track to meet our objectives through our programme of priorities and annual activities. The main challenges the city faces are how to:

- increase the resilience of the water, wastewater and stormwater networks, including treatment and storage solutions
- reduce the frequency and severity of overflows from the sewerage system
- accurately assess and adequately fund future maintenance and renewal of our water infrastructure
- manage supply and demand for potable water to accommodate future growth. Future decisions will need to be taken on managing demand for water and the timing of increased water supply
- protect and restore biodiversity across multiple land tenures and boundaries

- understand the implications of, and develop a response to, natural hazards and climate change and its impact on the city's key assets
- influence, and work with communities and businesses so that they become more energy efficient.

4. Decisions coming up for committee

A forward programme is still to be fully developed. Funding decisions relating to the environment, including the implementation of Our Capital Spaces, will be taken through the draft annual plan process. This will be completed by early February 2014. As part of a no surprises approach, officers have identified some issues you will need to consider over the coming months:

Open Space Management and Biodiversity

- consider the recommendations of the Freedom Camping Bylaw
- review the Draft Wellington Town Belt Bill and agree to go out for public consultation
- review and consider the proposed Botanic Gardens of Wellington Management Plan, the proposed Suburban Reserves Management Plan and the Biodiversity Action Plan (2007)
- review the South Coast Management Plan and release a discussion document for public consultation
- consider the draft of the Concessions Policy, which manages private activity on Council-managed outdoor open space
- provide direction on future projects to be funded by the Plimmer Trust as part of the Long Term Plan - (the Plimmer Trust is a funding bequest to be spent on bays, beaches and reserves, including picnic and recreation areas around Wellington - for planting and other beautification).

Climate Change and Energy

- consider and provide direction on the future of the Smart Energy Capital and home energy saver programmes
- review priorities for achieving Wellington's 2020 emissions reduction target, following a public engagement exercise
- note that the Carbon Management Policy to direct revenue from sales of forestry emission units into a Forest Carbon Reserve Fund supporting projects to protect or enhance forest carbon stocks will be considered through the draft annual plan
- review the public engagement plan for sea level rise and for achieving Wellington's 2020 emission reduction target
- consider the scale of Council's ongoing role in the adaptation and sea level rise programme.

Three Waters and Waste

- review the Trade Waste Bylaw that will aim to encourage best practice, combined with ways to reduce operating costs for the sector and business
- review the feedback from consultation on the Water Sensitive Urban Design Guide and agree the final document
- consider committee input into the Asset Management Framework and Asset Overview (this will cover assets in the water supply, storm - water and wastewater, gardens, beaches and green open spaces and waste management)
- review the integrated catchment management plan (ICMP) required under the global storm - water discharge consents. Stage 1- identification and assessment of storm - water issues (due 14 March 2014).

We will be seeking operational decisions on the following issues

- options to complete the Outer Green Belt and Skyline Walkway on private land between Old Coach Road and Spicer Forest
- proposal for an agreement to protect a native forest remnant on private land
- options and feasibility study of alternatives for the Island Bay sea wall.

These are indicative items. The forward programme will be developed in February 2014.

5. Summary messages

Significant strategy and policy work has been completed - now the focus is on implementation

A significant amount of work has been completed to develop the strategies, frameworks and action plans that relate to the environment. The focus is now on implementation.

In 2014/15, we plan to spend around \$134 million in operating expenditure and \$30 million in capital on environmental related activities.

Influencing asset management is a priority

The majority of the Council's spending in the environmental area is on the following: water supply, storm-water, wastewater, gardens, beaches and green open spaces and waste reduction and energy conservation.

We have significant potential to achieve environmental aims by prioritising and directing our asset management spend.

Central to achieving environmental aims will be decisions on relevant asset management plans. There will be opportunities to adopt new approaches that meet resilience, resource and environmental objectives.

We are currently reviewing how we manage our assets - so as to apply greater consistency and clearer investment priorities.

Where appropriate, officers will look for opportunities for the committee to consider alternatives to traditional piped infrastructure, including water - sensitive urban design and water conservation measures.

The Council also has important opportunities to lead city action on environmental stewardship through partnerships with community organisations, businesses, and regional and central government.

The most significant challenge for Wellington is how to improve the environment, whilst achieving sustained economic and population growth. We seek to improve water quality in our streams and marine environment, increase biodiversity, manage water demand, reduce emissions (particularly from transport and energy use) and reduce waste to landfill.

Our Living City

The Our Living City programme identifies and implements actions to strengthen the city's urban-nature connections and help realise the vision of Wellington Towards 2040: Smart Capital. Our Living City has three key goals:

- (1) growing and enjoying our natural capital,
- (2) reducing our environmental impact, and
- (3) demonstrating leadership. Projects under the Our Living City programme include the Two Million Trees, Project Halo Framework, Smart Energy Capital, Blue Belt (i.e. reducing pollution into the harbour/South Coast and restoring marine life) and urban resilience programmes.

Wellington ranks well but this must be maintained and enhanced

We rate well internationally in environmental management for a city of our size. We must sustain the gains we have made and focus on our points of difference. For example:

- Zealandia was a world-first urban ecological sanctuary
- Taputeranga Marine Reserve on the South Coast is one of the few examples worldwide of a marine reserve located on the coast of a metropolitan city
- Wellington Zoo has achieved a world-first for a zoo by achieving carbonZero certification
- Wellington's Otari-Wilton Bush holds 40% of New Zealand's threatened plants species. This makes it comparable with the world's best resourced botanic gardens
- Wellington is a partner city in the International Biophilic Cities programme and an internationally recognised leader in the emerging field of biophilic urbanism.

6. Supporting Information

Biodiversity - The city's restoration efforts have seen significant gains in native bird life and native forest regeneration in the last 10 years. Contributions have come from continued Council investment in key programmes (planting and pest control), the valuable work of the city's volunteer groups and the spill-over effects of Zealandia.

Climate change - Wellington City's 2013 Climate Change Action Plan calls for significant action and engagement in two areas. The first is achieving the city's ambitious 2020 emission reduction target (a 30% reduction below levels in 2000/01). A revised greenhouse gas inventory and projections for Wellington City (and the broader Wellington Region) are under development to create a basis for this work.

The second is adapting to long-term sea level rise and other climatic changes, which is complex and difficult. Solutions must involve input from community, business, Government and Council. An engagement plan is being prepared for roll-out in April 2014.

Stormwater - Recent data show stormwater contaminants are above guidelines for aquatic life. Wellington City's stormwater discharges have historically been contaminated with sewage. While significant investment has been made in sewer management, during storms drainage systems are inundated causing flooding and sewage overflows to the harbour. The wet weather overflow from the main trunk sewer to the Davis Street stormwater culvert and the faecal content at the Taranaki and Overseas Passenger Terminal outfalls all remain at levels which are a concern for public health.

Recycling - We continually face challenges with kerbside recycling relating to the commodity markets. The demand for different commodities extracted from recycling continually changes, as do commodity prices. These changes impact on the funding for kerbside recycling. The use of Council recycling bags is in steady decline and Council might need to make decisions about whether we continue to provide this service.

Water storage - Greater Wellington is looking to develop new water storage locations to ensure security of supply during drought years and in emergency events. Greater Wellington has identified two potential water storage options: a dam on the Whakatikei River or new water storage lake/s at Kaitoke. The preferred dam site is on the Whakatikei River and the 2011 estimated cost for a dam and associated infrastructure, including a new water treatment plant, is \$160 million. While the investment is unlikely to start until 2020 or beyond, if the investment is to be deferred, water demand and conservation efforts need to be effectively implemented now.

Operational issues

Children's Garden – \$750k Plimmer Bequest funding has been allocated to assist the development of a children's garden at the Wellington Botanic Garden. We are actively fund-raising to secure the rest of the funding. The children's garden will be a living, outdoor classroom where children can explore, discover and connect with the natural world.

Open space land acquisition – There are opportunities to acquire and protect strategic open space including the Outer Green Belt between Old Coach Road and Tawa, and facilitating the return of former Town Belt land held by the Crown. In addition the Council will receive reserves land in lieu of development contributions as greenfield subdivisions are developed.

7. External factors

Freshwater Policy Statement - The Government is proposing wide-ranging, staged and long-term changes to how fresh water is managed in New Zealand. We need to understand the implications for Wellington.

Resource Management Act (RMA) reforms - A Bill is likely within the next few months. Councils will need to specifically identify outstanding landscapes and natural features in District Plans if they are to be protected. Economic, infrastructure, and built environment matters will be equally weighed against ecological/landscape matters.

Environmental reporting - An Environmental Reporting Bill is likely to be introduced within the next few months. The Bill will require a standardised approach to monitoring and reporting by councils that will inform policy decisions and the development of national policy statements and national environmental standards. The Council already monitors and reports on resource consents, plan changes, noise and other environmental issues.

Better Local Government - The proposals in the Better Local Government Bill would focus local government asset management on five “core infrastructure” categories (water supplies, sewage treatment and disposal, storm-water drainage, flood protection works, and roads and footpaths). The bulk of local government assets are in those five categories.

Climate change - The Government has declined a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol. Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, it has taken a non-binding, unconditional emission reduction target of a five percent reduction below 1990 levels by 2020.

Revised delegation of powers under the Reserves Act 1977 - The Government has approved delegations to local authorities, under the Reserves Act 1977. These delegations extend the scope of existing powers and include some additional delegations. It is envisaged they will better enable local authorities to make decisions affecting reserves. It should be noted that the power to revoke a reservation has not been delegated and will stay with the Minister.

8. Supporting Documents

Our Living City work programme (2012) - Our Living City programme identifies and implements actions to strengthen the City’s urban-nature connections and help realise the vision of Wellington Towards 2040: Smart Capital.

Our Capital Spaces (2013) - focuses on outdoor areas of land or water with recreational, ecological, landscape, cultural and/or historic value.

Regional Waste Management and Minimisation Plan (2011) - the councils of the Wellington Region jointly prepared and adopted a WMMP, which set objectives, policies and activities to achieve shared goals.

Climate Change Action Plan (2013) - defines Wellington City’s approach to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and managing the City’s long-term response to sea level rise and other climate change impacts.

The Biodiversity Action Plan (2007) - sets the Council’s priority actions and investment relating to biodiversity. This plan is due for review.

Water Conservation and Efficiency Plan (2011) - identifies seven priority actions to implement from 2011 through to 2013/14. The focus is primarily on education, informing the community and ensuring provisions are in place to advance conservation and efficiency while addressing wastage.

Water Sensitive Urban Design Guide (2013) - aims to reducing infrastructure overload and flood hazard, reducing demand on potable water supply and reducing pollution in the urban environment.

Our Volunteer Capital (2013) - identifies Council priorities for volunteering in Wellington, which involves our 70+ restoration groups.

Central City Framework (2011) - outlines a framework and priority areas for improving public and private spaces in the city.

District Plan – sets out the regulatory framework to manage the City’s built environment and manage the environmental effects.

Asset management plans (Service delivery plans) - outline the cost phasing, type and rationale for infrastructure investment in the City.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1) Strategic fit / Strategic outcome

Delivers on the Councils Wellington 2040: smart capital objectives and contributes to the attractiveness of Wellington as a place to live and work

2) LTP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

There are no decisions in this report and any financial impact of projects will be considered separately

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

Any considerations will be considered in individual projects

4) Decision-making

Any projects will be considered separately by the Committee

5) Consultation

a) General consultation

NA

b) Consultation with Maori

NA

6) Legal implications

NA

7) Consistency with existing policy

Yes