

2 Landscape

2.1 Existing conditions

Our managed landscapes are an expression of our relationship with the land, of our identity. The extent to which our development is woven into the natural patterns of the land is an expression of what we value. The way we see and experience our landscapes is a reflection of the choices we make. An awareness of what makes our landscapes and the places where we live attractive, helps us to ensure that ongoing development and change better reflect our needs.

The landscape evolves and changes with our values and aspirations. The landscapes of Wellington city are special and unique, in part because the difficult topography placed limits on what was able to be developed in the past, but also because far sighted people recognised the value of public open space. The Town Belt and the Outer Green Belt are defining features in the lives of people in the central city. Both provide coherent threads of connected open space through the city centre and along the western ridgeline. With people's ever increasing demands for outdoor recreation opportunities, and a desire to enhance the city's indigenous flora and fauna, has come initiatives to extend and to enhance the threads of public open space across the city. The emphasis on ecological as well as recreational linkages has seen a strengthening of the natural patterns in the city's landscapes.

In the area covered by the Northern Reserves Management Plan, development has been less constrained by topography than in the older, southern, parts of the city. Apart from the steep faces along the western side below the Outer Green Belt and the harbour escarpment, most of the area is relatively gentle and has until recently been farmed. Although the landforms are a dominant feature of the landscape the natural patterns of gullies and streams have been largely lost to development. Burning and subsequent grazing has removed most of the woody vegetation and roads have cut across waterways which have vanished into pipes. Almost all of the indigenous vegetation is recent and naturally regenerated. Indigenous vegetation provides a continuous cover along the harbour escarpment and the western faces above Tawa but for the remainder of the northern area it is fragmented and restricted to reserves and steeper areas on private land. Pine plantations, a significant feature in the landscape, tend to give emphasis to culturally imposed patterns. On the western side of State Highway 1 housing development has been softened with planting while on the eastern side where development is more recent (and ongoing) structures and roads dominate.

2.2 Issues and opportunities

The connectedness of the reserve frame work is important in providing a sense of continuity across the landscape and in contributing significantly to natural character and amenity. Patterns of open space that reflect the flow



Landscape features and development, Tawa.
Photo: C. Anstey

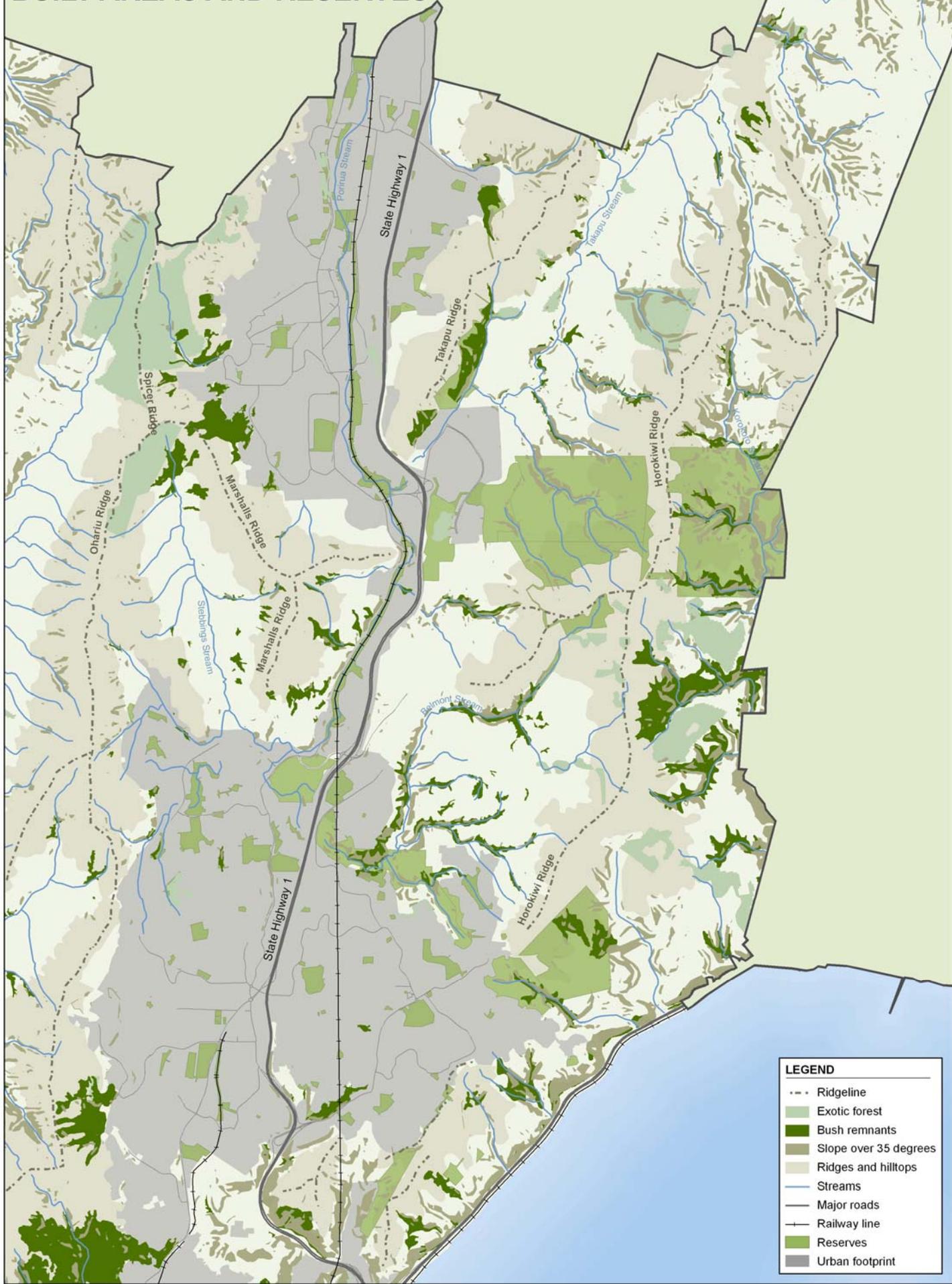
of the land and its contour give emphasis to landform. Well integrated patterns of open space tend to include the areas of ecological significance and simultaneously provide tracks for walkers and cyclists.

An ideal open space framework incorporates the key landscape attributes of the city; the areas of ecological significance, areas and features of heritage value, and public access ways. The open space framework may include private land (with covenants and easements) as well as public land. The planting undertaken by property owners and their willingness to allow natural regeneration on their properties makes a major contribution to the quality of the environment generally and the visual amenity of their communities in particular. Community members make an increasing contribution to the planting and management of public open space.

The landscape of the northern reserves area can be considered to exist at a series of scales:

At a broad city scale the bold patterns contribute to the essential character and coherence of the wider city and surrounding environment. **At the community scale** the landscape confers identity and provides coherence, contributing to the amenities of the community and providing the setting for day to day experiences, functional as well as recreational. **At a reserve scale** there is a contribution to the open space and amenity values of the local neighbourhood. Most reserves are 'local' and discrete. Larger reserves can be 'local' as well as part of a wider pattern of landscape coherence and connectedness.

MAP 2: NORTH WELLINGTON LANDSCAPE BUILT AREAS AND RESERVES



LEGEND	
---	Ridgeline
Light Green	Exotic forest
Dark Green	Bush remnants
Light Brown	Slope over 35 degrees
Light Green	Ridges and hilltops
Blue	Streams
Grey	Major roads
Black	Railway line
Light Green	Reserves
Dark Grey	Urban footprint

2.2.1 City scale - landscape character and coherence

The city has a distinctive character, defined by the topography and the vegetation cover. The patterns of naturally regenerating native vegetation largely reflect the topographical patterns. Steep slopes and many of the more deeply incised waterways are reverting to their native cover where grazing stock have been removed, pests controlled, and development constrained.

The most significant planning initiatives to capture the attributes of the landscape character include the Ridges and Hilltops Assessment and the OGBMP. Both recognise the importance of Wellington's skyline and its essential contribution to the distinctive character of the city.

The essential attributes of the distinctive wider landscape framework include:

- ridges and hilltops
- coastal edge and escarpments
- steep slopes and waterways
- main roads, state highways and railways
- the pattern and scale of housing developments

2.2.2 The ridges and hilltops

The most significant ridges and hilltops were identified on the basis of their high visibility from many places within the city as whole. All ridges, hilltops, and spurs can be visually dominant and significant however, even if only at a very local scale.

The ridges and hilltops along the western side of the NRMP area are for the most part in grazed open pasture but there are pine plantations, for example, Spicer Forest, at the northern end above Tawa.

On the eastern side of the NRMP area ridges are less clearly defined. Newlands, upper Horokiwi and Belmont Regional Park occupy broad open tops and housing development is encroaching onto the skyline. Steep spurs and gullies drop down to the harbours edge to the east, and on the western side long spurs and easier slopes run down to Tawa and the Porirua Basin.

2.2.3 Coastal edges and escarpments

The harbour's edge follows Wellington's main fault, a very distinctive geological feature given emphasis by the steep escarpment rising up to the skyline. This 'hard edge' is a defining feature of the harbour and city. These fault-scarp and coastal cliffs are important components of the city's landscape.

There are remnants of Wellington's original vegetation in the damper, sheltered gorges and gullies. Naturally regenerated indigenous plants have colonised burnt faces to soften the escarpment and stabilise steep and shaky ground.



Steep slopes and waterways of the western slopes of Marshalls Ridge, Stebbings Valley

2.2.4 Steep slopes and waterways

The development of Wellington has always been constrained by steep topography and deeply incised streams. Threads of vegetation weave their way across the city defining an ecological and cultural connectedness. Housing enclaves are sheltered and contained by this vegetation which defines their character and identity. In the NRMP area the Porirua Stream is a defining feature.

2.2.5 Main roads, the State Highway, and railways

In the NRMP area road and rail reserves cut broad swathes across the landscape, not always in sympathetic ways. State Highway 1 is a central feature in the landscape, dividing the eastern from the western side, and cutting across the streams draining down from the eastern slopes into the basin below. Vegetation associated with the road reserve has a very significant influence on the experience for users of the motorway. Similarly, for those with views of the motorway corridor from their houses, the vegetation is critical in softening the visual impacts of the motorway and the constant movement of vehicles. The motorway corridor can be seen as a valuable swathe of vegetation that breaks up an otherwise monotonous line of houses.

The railway corridor provides an open space corridor similar to roads. The railway corridor can make a significant contribution to the character of the landscape and the amenity values of more immediate neighbourhoods. Porirua Stream moves down through Glenside in a deep gully, the railway

line on its eastern side and Middleton Road to the west. Steeper slopes above the road to the west and above the railway line to the east are clothed in woody vegetation, native and exotic. Taken together these elements combine to provide a very substantial area of open space, adding diversity and interest for the passer-by in a car or on the train. The corridor contributes significantly to the character and visual amenity of Glenside and Tawa.

2.2.6 The pattern and scale of housing development

The patterns of development and its density are defined by, and therefore reflect, the land form. In older suburbs, developed when engineering was more constrained and perhaps a greater modesty prevailed, houses are less dominating and the 'space left over' has been colonised by native vegetation. There is a sense of integration; development that accommodates rather than dominates nature. More recent development has been less generous and accommodating in this regard. Road development cuts deep scars across the faces of steeper hills, and structures dominate. Expansive areas of hard surfacing often leave little space for people to plant trees and shrubs or for nature to simply re-invade.

2.2.7 Community scale

Wellington's older suburbs are well integrated into woody vegetation (indigenous and exotic), have views onto bush covered hills, often have views out onto the harbour, and have reasonable walking or cycling access to larger areas of public open space, either the Town Belt or the Outer Green Belt. In the newer suburbs of the NRMP area, this is not generally the case at present.

On the western edge of Tawa, the Outer Green Belt comprises the pine plantation of Spicer Forest and 944 Ohariu Valley Road. The steep faces below are clothed with a substantial cover of native forest. Extensive fingers of mixed vegetation weave their way into the suburbs along road reserves and across steeper south-facing slopes. The vegetation through built areas is however fragmented and public access is limited. Access to the Outer Green Belt from the developed areas of Johnsonville, Churton Park and Tawa is often ill-defined, or non-existent. Reserves along the lower western slopes serve a valuable scenic and amenity function but exist as separate entities with little connection to the wider open space network, providing little in the way of recreation. Although a relatively recent suburb of Wellington, Tawa has evolved a distinctive landscape character with high amenity values.

On the eastern side of the area, new housing development has moved onto formerly grazed land where woody vegetation is restricted to scattered gully remnants. The more open and easier topography means that development tends to be sprawling and dispersed rather than contained. Although there are significant areas where the difficult topography and aspect preclude development for houses, these areas are not always coherent and connected. Vegetation cover is in the early stages of succession with a preponderance of gorse, broom, and other scrub weeds. The longer-term value of such areas is not always recognised by developers, or by the pioneering pursuits of new residents.

The challenge at the community scale is to recognise the future value of containing and connecting open space. Ideally, open space should shape and define community identity and be accessible. Local open space should be linked into the wider networks so that access to wider recreational opportunities, on foot or on bikes, is possible. Containment can be provided by planting and by encouraging natural regeneration on public as well as private land, and generous road corridors can accommodate substantial ribbons of woody vegetation and attractive cycling and walking tracks.

2.2.8 Reserves scale

Reserves vary in size as well as in their purpose. Some are an integral part of a wider network and have ecological values that contribute to the resilience and quality of this. Others are local purpose and stand alone. Local purpose reserves may contribute to the wider amenity values of the area or they may simply be playgrounds where safety and visibility requirements mean that vegetation is minimal (or at least low in stature). Reserves can be classified into the following categories (2.2.8.1 – 2.2.8.4)

2.2.8.1 Large scale reserves

Large scale reserves affording ecological and recreational connections. Examples include Caribbean Drive and Seton Nossiter Park.

2.2.8.2 Medium scale reserves

These are not part of a wider connectedness but are never the less attached to waterways and areas of ecological significance. Examples include Willowbank Park, and Wilf Mexted Scenic Reserve.

2.2.8.3 Small scale local purpose reserves

These have ecological and amenity values but are isolated from wider networks and accessible only from the road. Examples include Wingfield Place and Pinkerton Park, Newlands.

2.2.8.4 Local playgrounds

These often have low ecological and landscape values and are essentially functional in character.

Table 1. Critical reserves contributing to landscape coherence and amenity

	Large	Medium	Small
Western Tawa	Spicer Forest		Main Road West
	Marshalls ridge (A)	Woodman Drive Lyndhurst Park	Victory Crescent Porirua Stream Esplanade
		Grasslees Reserve	
		Willowbank Reserve	Rowells Road Reserve
Takapu Valley, eastern Tawa, Grenada North	Takapu Ridge (A)	Wilf Mexted Reserve	Raroa Park
	Grenada North	Woodburn Reserve	Woodman Drive Lookout Pikitanga Recreation Reserve
Churton Park/ Stebbings Valley/ Glenside		Lakewood Reserve	Wingfield Place
	Glenside Reserve	Edward Wilson Reserve	Amesbury Drive
	Rowells Road Reserve	Churton Park	
	Marshalls Ridge (A)		
	Stebbing Valley(A)		
Lincolnshire Farm, Grenada Village, Paparangi Newlands		Woodridge	Pinkerton Park
	Hillcroft Road	Henly Estate	
	Seton Nossiter	Kentwood Drive	
	Caribbean Drive		
	Lincolnshire Farm (A)		
	Belmont Reserve		
Harbour escarpment	Waihinahina Park - in memory of Dennis Duggan	Gilberds Bush	Brandon's Rock (landscape feature)

(A) Areas of change and development where advocacy will be important to ensure that critical ridges and spurs are protected from excessive structural dominance and where waterways and steeper slopes provide vital linkages and coherence across the landscape.

2.3 Objectives

- Protect the natural character of reserve areas to maintain the unique landscape of the northern areas.
- Protect and enhance corridors of revegetation to provide coherence and unifying themes across the landscape.

2.4 Policies

- The Council will seek to protect outstanding landscapes and features.
- The Council will (so far as possible) protect the existing character of the ridges and hilltops using all appropriate means, including Reserve Contributions, additional land acquisitions, Reserves Act classification and covenanting.
- Retain ridgetop and hilltop landscapes on the eastern side as a blend of open and forested areas.
- The Council will seek to protect visually significant vegetation on steep slopes on Council reserves and through advocacy and other mechanisms such as covenants.
- The Council will work with developers to establish reserves that recognise significant landscape and amenity values and contribute to a wider landscape connectedness and coherence.
- The Council will engage with landowners and communities in the protection and enhancement of landscape and amenity values of reserve areas and private land to encourage appropriate land management and community action.