

Public Space Design Policy

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POSITIVELY

ME HEKE KI PŌNEKE
WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

Wellington



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Introduction

Streets, lanes, intersections, parks, promenades and squares are the public spaces of a city. As part of a larger cohesive network of individual spaces, they act as the 'glue' that binds the city together.

Public spaces are where many of the key events of urban living take place, including: movement (by foot, car, bus or bike – moving people, goods and information); gatherings (events, concerts, games, political and civic functions); recreation (eating, coffee drinking, promenading, picnicking, skateboarding, window shopping); and other encounters of an urban nature. Every type of public space has its own specific characteristics and function.

Wellington has some very attractive and well-loved streets, parks, squares and promenades. Over the past 25 years, Wellington City Council has invested heavily in the quality of the most used central area and suburban places, including Civic Square, the waterfront and its promenade, the Golden Mile, and the 'high streets' of most suburban centres. Wellington's public spaces are some of its greatest assets and this policy provides a mechanism to manage these spaces holistically.

The quality of Wellington's public open spaces is critical to the economic, environmental and cultural success of the city. Public open spaces contribute to the core function of a city by enabling a wide range of activities to occur.

Further, public spaces allow people to understand the city's structure and to find their way around, as well as providing a connection between the natural and built environment. They are an important part of what makes Wellington an attractive place to live. Therefore, it is imperative that these spaces feel safe for people to enter, move around in and engage with what the city has to offer.

Work in Wellington's public spaces is instigated in several ways, including the City Council's Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP), responses to political or community requests, initiatives by parties other than the Council, and as a result of unforeseen circumstances.

These diverse triggers produce a wide range of projects including:

- stand-alone design projects, eg Waitangi Park
- city-wide initiatives, eg SaferRoads projects
- resolution of particular issues, eg a new set of traffic lights
- asset repair and renewal
- work by organisations other than the Council, eg post boxes, telecommunication hubs, signal boxes and kerbside cafés.

Purpose of this policy

This Public Space Design Policy gives direction to how Wellington's public spaces are initiated, designed, delivered and managed.

The policy gives direction to the Council for:

- designing, or commissioning the design, of new public spaces
- managing public spaces
- incorporating infrastructure requirements
- incorporating a degree of consistency in hard and soft landscaping, including paving.

The policy directs the design, delivery and management of public spaces. The policy does not address the interface between public spaces and adjacent buildings. Direction of this interface is more appropriately considered in the District Plan. It's important to note that the edges of buildings provide the active edge of the city. Access to and from buildings along these edges via the public spaces is a critical factor in the successful operation of the city.

This policy also provides direction for all other organisations and individuals engaged by the Council in the design or management of Wellington's public spaces, by providing objectives and policies that should be met when operating within public spaces.

It also provides guidance for public spaces throughout Wellington City. While the policy does not include direction for the Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, coastal and other 'wild areas', the Wellington Botanic Garden, or local sportsfields and parks, the edges and links through these green areas need to be carefully considered in terms of how they integrate into the wider city.

Wellington City Council's strategic outcomes

1	More liveable
2	Stronger sense of place
3	More compact
4	More eventful
5	More inclusive
6	More actively engaged
7	Better connected
8	More sustainable
9	Safer
10	Healthier
11	More prosperous
12	More competitive
13	More entrepreneurial and innovative

Sitting under these outcomes, this policy provides eight key objectives for the identification, design, implementation and management of Wellington's public spaces. These objectives are supported by specific policies providing detailed direction for all involved in Wellington's public spaces.



This policy needs to be considered in line with, and draws upon, the following Council policies, plans and frameworks:

- Centres Policy
- Cycling Policy
- District Plan Central Area
- Urban Design Guide
- Footpath Management Policy
- Open Space Policy
- Parking Policy
- Playground Policy
- Public Art Policy
- Road Encroachment and Sale Policy
- South Coast Management Plan
- Town Belt Management Plan
- Town centre plans
- Trading in Public Places Policy
- Walking Policy
- Waterfront Framework

It also draws upon national statutes including:

- Building Act
- New Zealand Standards
- Resource Management Act
- Local Government Act

The Public Space Design Policy is supported by the Council's Public Space Design Manual. The manual guides those responsible for designing and maintaining public spaces by providing detailed direction for the use of street furniture and material pallets. It addresses both Wellington's central city and suburban areas, providing guidance appropriate to both. The manual is a key tool for achieving the objectives of the Public Space Design Policy, and sits alongside future work that will define and set principles based on the topography and built form for a spatial hierarchy of the city including streets, parks and other public spaces.



Objectives and policies

Objective 1 To enhance Wellington's sense of place

Wellington has its own identity.

Rationale

Sense of place is about making Wellington different from other places.

The city gains its individuality, identity and compactness from its characteristics of form; the topography, the landscape, pre-European Māori inhabitation, the street pattern, the open-space network, the buildings and the use of local materials where appropriate. This is further enhanced by acts of reclamation, a mix of building eras and the influence of various planning regimes. The combined nature of these characteristics means that within the city there are wide-ranging differences in spatial character. It results in an informality, a 'picturesqueness' and generosity of public domain, all of which are uniquely 'Wellington'.

The history of Wellingtonians – their origins and pattern of settlement, and the inclusion of traces of this history in the physical form, provides a sense of belonging and continuity with the past and a direction for the future. This makes Wellington different from anywhere else and provides civic pride and a sense of place for residents and visitors.

All the elements – materials, planting, street furniture and lighting – should provide consistency over the city, supporting the identity of Wellington. Individual areas can build on this consistency, and at the same time have their own layers of character. For example, the white fences alongside footpaths and pedestrian access-ways provide a level of consistency through older suburban areas.

If character and sense of place are ignored, there will always be the risk that buildings and spaces will only reflect the latest fashion among design professionals; standard practices to satisfy road safety concerns; standard building-industry products or marketing policies; and corporate identities of developers, investors and users. Such a scenario would give little regard to the unique qualities of Wellington.

Therefore, there is a need to design for a local Wellington distinctiveness. This involves combining an acknowledgement of Wellington's landscape and history, with the creativity of the best local talent and the latest technologies to develop distinctive Wellington solutions.

Where areas do not have a strong sense of place or character, the challenge is to make something that is distinctive – always remembering that a sense of place should not simply replicate the past, but respect the existing character, learn from it and set a direction for the future.

Policies	
1	The principles of sense of place and distinctiveness will be incorporated in the design of public spaces at a range of levels, from citywide through to individual details.
2	All design processes will reinforce and enhance the features that make Wellington distinctive: the topography and its defining elements (the harbour, hills and watercourses); the native vegetation and the history of the city's settlement (by both tangata whenua and other settlers). Such elements will influence the design of public spaces and details within them, often through the use of local materials and visual references, where appropriate.
3	All development and management of public spaces will evaluate whether existing elements of the public space should be retained in order to provide a link to Wellington's past, eg street furniture, such as bus/tram shelters. Elements that are retained will be incorporated appropriately. Their retention and interpretation will tell the stories of the city's past.
4	The ground plane will be designed as a simple backdrop to the activities and character of the city, so as not to dominate.
5	Public art, memorials and monuments will be incorporated, where appropriate, as a means for telling the city's stories.
6	Innovative precedents for a positive sense of place will be created where none exist, to build upon the city's overarching stories.



Objective 2 To make the structure of Wellington better understood as a city

Wellington has a structure which is legible. In this respect, we mean the understanding of a city's shape and form. Ensuring that the city's structure is easily understood helps users to orientate themselves in the city.

Rationale

A city's legibility depends on an acknowledgement of how buildings and spaces fit together and the resulting ability for people to understand their relative location within the structure of the overall city.

Features such as landmarks, connecting streets and distinct localities all help people find their way around the city. Vistas, or what people see in front of them as they walk, create visual links between these elements and places. Visible routes and destinations, and a choice of routes, help people find their way around the city and contribute to making a place feel safe and unthreatening. Public spaces are a key part of this structure, joining together the many other elements that combine to make a city. Two of the key roles of streets are connectivity and legibility. Small street blocks are the key to this, as movement combined with the maximum number of activities, such as cafés and shops, generated from small building frontages at ground level are critical to the success of the city.

The city's legibility is assisted by having standard elements that recur from place to place. This level of consistency reinforces the overall city structure while allowing individual spaces to stand out. There is a need to carefully consider variations to reinforce the city's diversity, which can then be overlaid and provide local character.

New interventions, whether on a large scale, such as new subdivision patterns, or on a more detailed scale, should not weaken the existing structure.

If public spaces are coherent and well integrated, signage should act as a supplementary way-finding device. Signs should never dominate the spaces they serve, and they should never become the primary means by which people navigate their way around a city.

Policies	
1	Design of individual spaces is to be considered in relation to wider patterns. In some cases, larger patterns take precedence over specific design detail.
2	The relative location of spaces within the overall structure of the city will be reinforced. A clear reference to landmarks, character areas and a clear hierarchy of spaces (refer to Public Space Design Manual) will make it easy for people to find their way around.
3	Development of all public spaces will consider having at least two explicit or implicit connections with other adjacent spaces.
4	A clear hierarchy of signs in public spaces should be informed by a citywide design strategy for way-finding signs to make sure they are used sparingly but effectively.



Objective 3 To improve accessibility for all

Wellington is a place for people to easily get to and move around.

Rationale

Access to people, experiences, information, business and social interaction is the whole point of cities. Streets should operate more efficiently than just as traffic channels for vehicles. They should offer a safe and attractive environment for all. The city's public spaces are experienced at their most intense on foot and by cycle, and can be destinations in their own right. Well-designed streets encourage people to use the streets themselves for not only movement and business but also for entertainment and enjoyment, as places to relax, reflect and 'be'. They also make for a safe and pleasant experience.

The progressive impact of the car on the city has been so dramatic over the past 80 years that the management and design of the city environment has often developed primarily to provide for the ease and priority of vehicle-orientated travel and amenity, often at the cost of pedestrians and cyclists.

Ensuring places and spaces are accessible to the widest cross-section of the community is critical. Incorporating universal design principles allows greater accessibility for people with limited mobility, and young and old people, allowing opportunities for participation by all, and contributing to an inclusive society.

The promotion of 'walkability' has wide-ranging advantages:

- it is healthy
- it cuts down on vehicle use (with the additional benefit of minimising environmental effects and fuel demand)
- it allows people to have greater interaction with other people and their surroundings.

We need to integrate the design of public transport systems into the design of public space, as the link between public transport stops and increased walking is critical. An integrated public transport system that builds on the existing infrastructure is important, one which is user-friendly, quick and efficient in distributing people through the balance of the city. For example, in central Wellington large numbers of commuters pass through the Railway Station and then walk into the city.

The central city is surrounded by high-density residential areas, two universities and a number of schools. Because of their proximity, it is imperative that they all have good walking access into the central city.

Despite people being more reliant on public transport and private vehicles for accessibility outside these areas, walking and cycling remain important. The support for, and development of, 'walkability' to public transport, town centres, educational facilities, recreation facilities and major suburban attractions is vital.

Policies

1	Pedestrian amenity will be improved through the design of public spaces, allowing people to move through high-quality interconnected public spaces that have an appropriate scale.
2	The development and management of public spaces will contribute to the creation of a city that is accessible for all age groups and abilities.
3	Traffic efficiency and on-street parking requirements should not dominate, and needs to be considered in the context of pedestrian and cycle use and amenity.
4	Public transport systems, such as bus shelters and signs, will be incorporated into public space design.
5	Design will promote continuity of access between public spaces and the adjacent buildings and private spaces.

Objective 4 To improve the diversity of experience for Wellingtonians and visitors

Wellington has a variety and choice of high-quality spaces to use and experience; spaces that can change and adapt to changing needs.

Rationale

The different areas of the city, while all contributing to Wellington's 'sense of place', have different experiences and uses that add to the individual character of those areas. Both hard and soft landscaping contribute to the visual richness of these different spaces.

Different spaces should be considered in the following order: the overall context of the region and the city; as part of a larger area; and then in its own right. For example, a street intersection is part of two streets, but in its own right forms a centre of activity as people stop and choose their routes.



How people use and treat public space depends on where the spaces are located and how attractive they are. The choice of locations and type of public space, their design and the ongoing arrangements made for management and maintenance of these areas are all critical.

Wellington has large swathes of green open space such as the Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, Botanic Garden and sportsfields, but has limited other parks. With the exception of new 'greenfield' development where reserves can be incorporated into new subdivisional patterns, there are limited opportunities for new parks and squares within the established urban area. Over a vast area of the city, streets are the primary public open spaces. Therefore, the use of streets as open-space amenity is critical. Streets should be considered for a wide range of uses; for the movement of people and goods and also for people-watching, sitting or watching events. Temporary uses, such as temporary art installations, street parties, appropriate street trading, café tables and chairs, festivals and celebrations should be continually expanded on.

The city is an ever-changing environment. These changes are not exclusively physical; they include shifts in social patterns or changes in local economies. These changes may be subtle or obvious, small or large, progressive and incremental or instant and all encompassing. Such transformations often take on some form of physical expression.

The different uses of a city all impact on the type of public spaces required. However, uses often change more quickly than the form and contents of public spaces. As a result, spaces need to be robust and flexible enough to cater for unforeseen changes.

Wellington is a capital city and should be a distinctive place that all New Zealanders treasure as part of their national identity. The Capital Centre – the area around Parliament – contains a unique collection of buildings, spaces and activities that exhibit the country's values, institutions and traditions. Wellington's role as capital is essential to the city's identity, and contributes positively to its cosmopolitan character and amenity.

Parts of the city are underused, such as the Pipitea Precinct area to the north and east of the Railway Station, where new public spaces can potentially be created and then integrated into the city's public space network.

Policies

1	Appropriate variations between public spaces provide diversity of experience. This can be achieved both through design and management.
2	The design of individual public spaces, while being part of a larger citywide spatial system, can use elements that reflect particular parts of the city, eg the waterfront.
3	To allow for the city to evolve and change over time, and to accommodate a wide range of uses and activities, public spaces will be flexible and robust, accommodating a broad range of uses, both permanent and temporary.
4	Management of public spaces will be proactive, encouraging a wider variety of uses.
5	Design and management of public spaces will ensure Wellington's national role is celebrated and strengthened through: linkages to key national elements and spaces; public space upgrades that are nationally representative; and the presentation of the nation's stories.



Objective 5 To enhance the city's night-time environment

Wellington's night-time economy is an important constituent of the city.

Rationale

Light in the city is the principle medium by which we perceive the night-time environment and is what triggers our physical and emotional responses to the city and its value to us. To be able to create a city that promotes a perception of pride and wellbeing in its citizens, there is a need to consider light holistically. While this policy addresses the city's development and management at all times of the day and night, night-time use results in additional elements and issues to consider and therefore requires specific attention.

The city changes at night, with lights having the potential to give places a distinct after-dark identity, thereby contributing to a greater diversity of experience in the city.

People's perception of safety can be improved by effective lighting in public spaces: in the central city, suburban centres and residential streets. At present, lighting in public spaces is primarily focused on road safety. While this is an important factor, the lighting of public space needs to acknowledge a wider range of objectives, including the amenity and experience offered to pedestrians.

Lighting affects functional visibility, but it can also draw attention to certain subjects. Different lighting in the same space can generate very

different experiences. Lighting can act as a 'highlighter' of events, stories and architecture. It is capable of arousing interest and curiosity; light can also support a feeling of security and wellbeing.

Lighting operates in two ways: the frequency and locations of lighting can 'mould' spaces and the hardware or poles can both implant a 'style' on the space and divide the space into spatial subsets.

The use of light in our night-time environment brings with it a responsibility to do so sensitively – considering the impact on energy use and the potential for a cumulative effect of 'night pollution' (the dispersion of excess light into the night-time sky), especially in areas on the edge of the city and along the coast.

Policies

- 1 The design, delivery and management of lighting will improve and coordinate the quality and consistency of the night environment.
- 2 Lighting will enhance people's experience of the central city, suburban centres and residential streets after dark, by improving amenity, which in turn supports increased activity.
- 3 Real and perceived personal and public safety levels and sense of security in the central city and suburban centres after dark is improved through the design and maintenance of public spaces, assisted by the incorporation of appropriate lighting.
- 4 The use of lighting enhances the built form, drawing attention to subjects and spaces as appropriate, giving the opportunity to express the elements and activities within the night-time environment.
- 5 Incorporation of lighting will be sensitive to energy use and other factors such as 'light pollution'.

Objective 6 To ensure the design of public spaces incorporates elements of sustainability

Wellington's public spaces contribute to their environment and use high-quality and flexible designs and materials, accommodating lasting lifespans.

Rationale

All design and implementation of public spaces must be sensitive to their environment. This includes the elements of land, air and water, the existence of flora and fauna, and climate change. Therefore, there is a need to work with the environment and to develop ecologically sustainable outcomes.

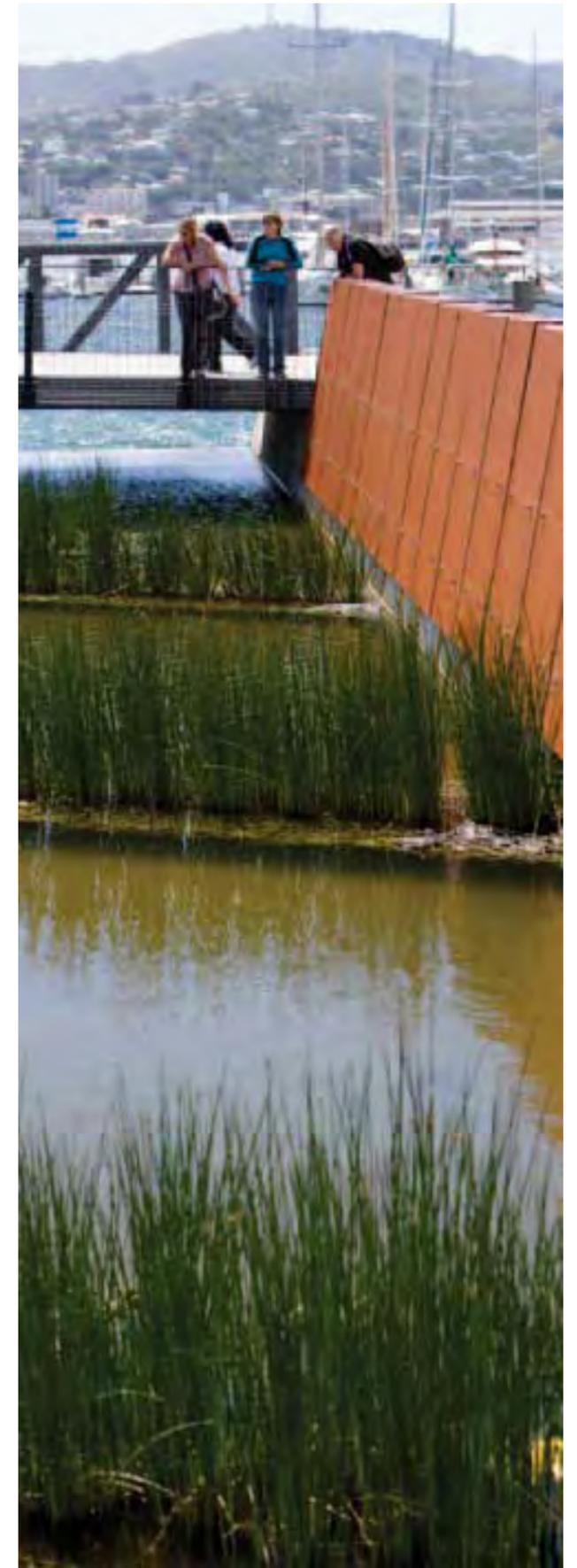
Public spaces should consider microclimate, by protecting users from the elements – be it sun, wind or rain – while also providing the opportunity to enjoy being outside in a variety of spaces within the city. Public spaces are a critical part of the cultural landscape, yet they can also make a contribution to the city's biodiversity, reducing CO2 emissions and stormwater runoff.

Street tree planting should be considered where appropriate. The use of both native plants and exotic plants should be encouraged as both have their place in the city's built environment.

Public spaces must last over time and therefore be designed in a sustainable manner that will accommodate a multitude of uses and changes in fashion. Materials must be of high quality to both illustrate the significance of the space and to ensure longevity. Materials must also be relevant to place, not only to contribute to a sense of place, but also to be efficient in procurement and source. Maintenance programmes must enhance the lifetime of such spaces.

Policies

- 1 All design considerations promote environmentally friendly and sustainable outcomes, contributing to the city's wider environmental and ecological systems.
- 2 Design of public spaces will provide a diversity of experience regarding weather – sunshine, shade, shelter.
- 3 Innovative planting projects and 'water-sensitive urban design' practices will be incorporated in public spaces, contributing to an ecological sustainable city.
- 4 Design of street furniture will be flexible in order to accommodate change of function or purpose, and materials and details will be of high quality to ensure lasting lifespan.
- 5 Where possible, local materials that are simply detailed and easily managed will be used.
- 6 Natural elements will be incorporated within public spaces to provide amenity and character and contribute to the improvement of the city's microclimate.





Objective 7 To ensure that public spaces incorporate high-quality design

Wellington has successful public spaces that incorporate high-quality urban design innovation.

Rationale

Good design improves the quality of the urban environment, which as a result enhances people's experiences. Favourable outcomes are more likely when designers consider how people experience public space, taking into account all the human senses: sight, touch, smell, hearing and motion.

Design of public spaces should be kept simple, lasting, flexible and robust, as the day-to-day activity – including what happens along the built edge – contributes to the richness of the city environment. Good outcomes are seldom achieved by regulation or prescription. Through Wellington's Waterfront Framework, the inner-city waterfront has become a strong precedent for high-quality design and sets the direction for other public space design in the city.

Some locations are inherently more important than others. Design solutions need to reflect the relative status of each area. Places which are highly visible or heavily used deserve to have more intense input. Places that require a catalyst for new redevelopment also merit special attention. The distinct character of individual areas is important. But, equally, every design must consider how a given location contributes to citywide patterns.

Clutter of elements (such as signs, street furniture, traffic signs and utility structures) is an issue in public spaces. New elements are introduced often to resolve a single issue and give no consideration to overall effects on the public space. Therefore, it is imperative that the type, design and location of elements are integrated into the overall design concept of the space.

The design of each public space needs to consider its particular role in the city and the requirements of a wide range of users. For example, where large numbers of people gather, spaces need to be open and uncluttered. Design of public spaces must consider the relationships between the space and its surrounding buildings and activities – incorporating principles of passive surveillance and active edges to enhance safety.

Policies	
1	Design of public space will consider the shape, form, scale and environmental factors of all the physical elements related to the space. The integration will also need to consider the context of all other public spaces throughout the city.
2	Designing public space will start by keeping concepts simple and robust, minimising the number of physical elements that may result in 'clutter' where possible, especially by looking to integrate functions into a single unit or set of units. Life-cycle costs need to be considered.
3	Public space projects will be assessed in terms of their contribution to the overall character and effectiveness of public space rather than on a single issue.
4	Works of art, street furniture and other elements will be integrated into public space design.
5	Public furniture containing advertising will be considered carefully in order to ensure it provides sufficient public amenity and to avoid it becoming 'clutter'. The decision as to whether advertising can be incorporated should be weighed against the overall design of the space, its location in the city and any applicable strategic frameworks.
6	Selection of materials, street furniture and detail used within public spaces will be guided by the Council's Public Space Design Manual.
7	The range of colours of materials used within public spaces will be limited to enable colour and variety to come from street furniture, vegetation, public art and the activities of daily life.
8	High-quality design that can be recognised locally and internationally through the use, where appropriate, of a range of innovative designers, design competitions, workshops, collaboration with artists and community planning sessions, is promoted.
9	Major public-space projects will incorporate community engagement processes. These are to include rigorous testing and exploration to assess and understand particular issues, while unlocking unforeseen opportunities to deliver cost-effective, functional and aesthetically pleasing results.
10	Public space design will incorporate 'Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design' principles and methods to improve safety.
11	Public space design will ensure the range of users (eg vehicles and pedestrians) can jointly use the space safely and efficiently, supported by elements appropriate for all users, eg lighting.



Objective 8 To manage and maintain public spaces effectively

Wellington's public spaces are managed and maintained in a manner that retains their high quality over time.

Rationale

The size and scale of public spaces can vary significantly. However, to ensure all remain of high quality, an appropriate management and maintenance regime is required. This can be enhanced as early as the design stage, which should take account of life-cycle costs and benefits, asset management and sensible maintenance expenses, durable and readily available materials and components, and environmentally responsive services. Such an approach will ensure affordability over time.

The design of public spaces and their management and maintenance programmes should also adapt as a result of incorporating feedback from its users and those responsible for supervision.

Policies	
1	To use high-quality, durable materials that reflect the volume of use and relative importance of the place, and that are easily maintained and replaced.
2	Maintenance regimes will be appropriate to the use and visibility of individual public spaces.
3	Public spaces and their elements will be maintained to a high level and supported by budgets enabling this to occur.
4	Feedback from users of a particular public space, and from those responsible for their maintenance and management, will result in improvements to their design, the elements contained within them, and their use.

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