
STRATEGY FOR OUR OPEN SPACES

1. Purpose

This paper seeks direction from the Committee on the objectives of a future open spaces strategy. This strategy will guide management of our open spaces, and ensure that we deliver the benefits from open spaces under a tight financial environment.

Our open spaces cover over 4,400 hectares and include the Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, botanic gardens, cemeteries, coastline, 43 sports fields, 250 local and community parks and 330km of tracks.

2. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Strategy and Policy Committee:

1. *Receive the information.*
2. *Agree that officers develop an open spaces strategy to ensure that the Council achieves the benefits provided by open spaces given the tight financial environment.*
3. *Note that an open spaces strategy would enable the community, at reasonable cost, to get greater benefits from our open spaces, including greater health, well-being, biodiversity, sustainability of our environment and cultural heritage, and economic growth.*
4. *Note that an open spaces strategy would set priorities and functions to determine the appropriate levels of service, funding and operations to better meet demand across the open spaces network.*
5. *Agree to the following objectives that officers have developed for an open spaces strategy:*
 - better align activities and investments on open spaces to public demand and best practice (including clarifying the different open space functions)
 - guide how operational management of open spaces links to the very high-level goals of Wellington 2040: Smart Capital
 - encourage more collaboration with other TAs (to improve regional consistency of open space management) and reduce resource duplication

- manage better partnerships with central government, schools, private landowners, iwi and other organisations for managing land on and/or adjacent to open spaces
- provide clearer guidance on managing commercial use and revenue generation
- cover a period of around ten years
- be practical to implement with measurable actions.

6. *Note the following process and timelines for developing the strategy:*

Step	Action	Timing
1	Engagement with stakeholders (including targeted surveys and workshops) on priorities for open spaces	May to end October 2012
2	Report-back and present the draft strategy to the Strategy and Policy Committee (SPC) for feedback	22 November 2012
3	Present final draft strategy to SPC, incorporating feedback from the 22 November SPC meeting	21 February 2013
4	Formal Consultation on draft strategy	March and April 2013
5	SPC and Council approve final strategy	June 2013

3. Executive Summary

There has been considerable change across open spaces since the existing Capital Spaces: Open Spaces Strategy was approved in 1998.

Officers are developing a new strategy to ensure our open spaces better meet the community's needs and deliver values that are important today and for the foreseeable future. This open spaces strategy is crucial under a tight financial environment as it will enable the Council to set priorities across these spaces.

Our analysis (partly shown by the two maps in Appendix 1) shows that use and functions of open spaces vary greatly across the network. People use open spaces for sports, taking kids to playgrounds, cycling and walking. Open spaces also connect people with their cultural heritage, nature and provide pleasant views. Some areas in the outer green belt may not often be used, but they contain important bush remnants, native habitats and grow forests to offset carbon emissions.

The above uses and many more demonstrate the significant ways that open spaces increase our health and well-being, connect people through recreation

and community events, enable healthy ecosystems, biodiversity and environmental sustainability, preserve our historical and cultural heritage, and contribute to Wellington's economic growth. A strategy would enable more of these benefits of open spaces to be realised at reasonable cost.

Currently, area management plans manage activities on different areas of the open spaces. We need to give the public transparent and understandable information about functions and service levels that would better meet customer demand in popular areas of open spaces (shown in map 1). This, however, should not be at the expense of preserving native forest and other important habitats that cut across area management plans (shown in map 2). In this way, the strategy would set priorities across all open spaces and determine the appropriate levels of service, funding and operations. A strategy would drive changes to area management plans and also to policies that cut across different open space areas.

We seek the Committee's direction on the objectives that we have developed for a future open spaces strategy. A successful strategy would:

- increase the ability of open spaces to accommodate climate change, and increased use through population growth and suburban intensification
- adjust service levels to demand for access and / or activities on open spaces
- adequately protect important native habitats and landscapes
- effectively and appropriately manage commercial activities, events and revenue generation.

4. Background

4.1 Importance of open spaces

The Council manages and/or influences more than 4,400 hectares of open spaces, including the Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, botanic gardens, cemeteries, coastline, 43 sports fields, 250 local and community parks and 330 km of tracks. Maps 1 and 2 (Appendix 1) show the large land areas that open spaces cover.

Open spaces are important for our city and define its character. People use open spaces for sports, taking kids to playgrounds, cycling and walking. Open spaces also connect people with their cultural heritage, nature and provide pleasant views. Some areas in the outer green belt may not often be used, but as map 2 shows, they contain important bush remnants, native habitats and grow forests to offset carbon emissions.

Activities on open spaces that generate revenue include events and concerts, tourist attractions (such as the botanic gardens, Zealandia and Wellington Zoo) and associated cafes and shops.

The above uses and many more demonstrate the significant ways that open spaces increase our health and well-being, connect people through recreation and community events, enable healthy ecosystems, biodiversity and environmental sustainability, preserve our historical and cultural heritage, and contribute to Wellington's economic growth. A strategy would enable more of these benefits of open spaces to be realised at reasonable cost.

4.2 Why do we need a strategy?

The Capital Spaces: Open Space Strategy was approved by Council in 1998. Urban areas have since grown and Wellington's population has increased. More people are now using open spaces, and the way that people are using open spaces has changed.

Officers are developing a new strategy to ensure our open spaces better meet the community's needs and deliver values that are important today and for the foreseeable future. This strategy is crucial under a tight financial environment as it will enable the Council to set clear priorities across these spaces. The strategy's priorities will determine the functions across various open spaces, and the appropriate levels of service, funding and operations to better meet demand.

Currently, area management plans manage activities on different areas of the open spaces. For example, the South Coast Management Plan, Northern Reserves Management Plan and Town Belt Management Plan. We need to give the public transparent and understandable information about functions and service levels that would better meet customer demand in popular areas of open spaces (shown in map 1). This, however, should not be at the expense of protecting and restoring native forest and other important habitats that cut across area management plans (shown in map 2).

For these reasons, Kapiti Coast, Porirua, and Auckland have recently developed (or are developing) equivalent strategies.

The future management of the Botanic Gardens, Otari-Wilton's Bush, Zealandia, and Wellington Zoo is currently subject to consultation (including whether this land is managed by the Council or a Council Controlled organisation). Officers recommend that whatever the outcome of this consultation, such land areas are covered by the strategy as they will remain as parts of the wider open spaces network.

5. Discussion

5.1 Role of an open spaces strategy

The maps in Appendix 1 show some of the uses and functions of open spaces across the city.

They show that components of the open space network have different functions and values at both the neighbourhood and city wide level, but need to be considered together in a strategy that prioritises future resources and activities across the network.

For instance:

The track network connects open spaces at the city-wide level (for example the City to Sea Walkway). At a local level, the network provides for more localised (and often intensive use), for example on Te Ahumairangi Hill. Map 1 also shows gaps in the provision of tracks, for example near Wellington's northern suburbs where demand for tracks are likely to increase with urban growth.

The Sports field network is managed citywide and location is not as critical. However, many sports fields also function as local neighbourhood parks. The strategy would manage the potential for multiple use and drive resourcing of these spaces, particularly if they are in areas of growth.

Neighbourhood parks and play areas play a local role and need to be assessed at that level, for example the Miramar peninsular area. Map 1 shows that some suburbs appear to have fairly few of these facilities compared to other suburbs. The strategy will ensure consistency of approach and provision that responds to particular neighbourhood needs.

Ecological remnants are also important. Map 2 shows that bush remnants are located mainly located in the west of the City and in less visited areas of the Outer Green Belt. Resourcing is primarily based on environmental values. A strategy would again maximise open space values in areas of multiple use. For example, a park can serve the biodiversity network while also providing for play provision and a track link.

The strategy would set priorities across all functions of open spaces (including those shown in maps 1 and 2) and determine appropriate levels of service, funding and operations to meet these priorities.

5.2 What should be the Objectives of an open spaces strategy?

We seek the Committee's direction on the more detailed objectives, below, that we have developed for a future open spaces strategy:

- better align activities and investments on open spaces to public demand and best practice (including clarifying the different open space functions)
- guide how operational management of open spaces links to the very high-level goals of Wellington 2040: Smart Capital
- encourage more collaboration with other TAs (to improve regional consistency of open space management) and reduce resource duplication

- manage better partnerships with central government, schools, private landowners, iwi and other organisations for managing land on and/or adjacent to open spaces
- provide clearer guidance on managing commercial use and revenue generation
- cover a period of around ten years
- be practical to implement with measurable actions.

5.3 *What would success look like?*

In meeting its objectives, the strategy would:

- increase the ability of open spaces to accommodate climate change, and increased use through population growth and suburban intensification
- adjust service levels to demand for access and / or activities on open spaces
- adequately protect important native habitats and landscapes
- effectively and appropriately manage commercial activities, events and revenue generation.

5.4 *How would the open spaces strategy fit with other Council strategies and initiatives?*

The four goals outlined in Wellington 2040 Strategy: Smart City (People-Centred City, Connected City, Eco-City and Dynamic Central City) usefully inform many areas of the Council's work and are all partly achieved through the open space network.

The open spaces strategy would fit under the Wellington 2040 Strategy and above area management plans. This is because more detail is needed to translate Wellington 2040's very broad goals into how actions and investments are prioritised on the ground.

A large amount of detail for addressing local priorities (for example the South Coast, Northern Reserve and Town Belt) is contained in area management plans. Most of these management plans were, however, developed before the Wellington 2040 Strategy and do not neatly link to all of Wellington 2040's very high-level goals. It is therefore difficult to know whether we are making good decisions across all areas of open spaces and what guides them.

An open spaces strategy would fill this gap, provide guidance on how Wellington 2040 applies to open spaces, and drive the necessary changes to area management plans. The spreadsheet in Appendix 2 provides more details on the other policies that an open spaces strategy might influence.

The open spaces strategy would also take account of the objectives in the recently developed Central City Framework and strengthen the links between green areas inside and outside the Central Business District. The strategy would be set at a high, overarching level of detail, similar to the recent equivalent strategies for Porirua and Auckland.

5.5 Context of possible local government amalgamation

There is some uncertainty around possible amalgamation of territorial authorities. Wellington City particularly needs an open spaces strategy under this environment. As previously discussed, other TAs within the Wellington Region, notably Porirua and Kapiti Coast have (or are developing) equivalents to an open spaces strategy. Wellington City's Strategy will, where possible, be consistent with strategies in our neighbouring TAs. Officers from Wellington City will also work with other TAs in the region to develop the strategy.

5.6 Engaging with stakeholders to inform objectives and actions

Our customers are important. We want to understand their priorities, where they think we need greater levels of service and where different levels of services, funding or maintenance may be appropriate. Therefore, on-going stakeholder involvement in developing the strategy and informing its content will be crucial.

Stakeholder engagement and targeted research will take a mixed approach of drawing on existing evidence, facilitating workshops and developing questionnaires. These activities will help identify current and emerging priorities and expectations of the functions that open spaces should provide.

5.7 Timelines for developing the strategy

The timeline below is driven by the need to meaningfully engage with stakeholders and ensure that the strategy adequately reflects current and emerging priorities.

Table 1: Proposed Timelines and Key Dates

Step	Action	Timing
1	Engagement with stakeholders (including targeted surveys and workshops) on priorities for open spaces	May to end October 2012
2	Report-back and present the draft strategy to SPC for feedback	22 November 2012
3	Present final draft strategy to SPC, incorporating feedback from the 22 November SPC meeting	21 February 2013
4	Formal Consultation on draft strategy	March and April 2013
5	SPC and Council approve final strategy	June 2013

Note that the above timelines are indicative and depend on external factors.

5.8 Financial Implications

Developing a strategy will incur financial costs in staff hours. It is difficult at this stage to quantify the amount of staff time involved. Between now and May 2013, this work may require up to 0.4 FTE¹ from Parks and Gardens team resources, 0.25 FTE from Policy and Planning and 0.1 FTE from Strategy and Engagement Services respectively. This work would also involve some input from Strategic Communications, Treaty Relations and Publication and Design. Other resources (e.g. a budget for an external consultant) may also be needed. Developing a strategy will also necessitate future work to align area management plans and other relevant policies to Wellington 2040.

5.9 Risks

The risks associated with this project include:

- Uncertainties about the outcomes of wider local government reform. This risk will be mitigated, where possible, by ensuring consistency of our open spaces strategy with equivalent strategies in Porirua and Kapiti Coast
- Lack of buy-in and engagement from stakeholders. It will be important to demonstrate how a strategy will affect actions and priorities across open spaces
- Raising public expectations when finances are constrained. A strategy should be realistic about what is achievable given the tight fiscal environment.

5.10 Climate Change Impacts and Considerations

This paper raises no direct climate change impacts or considerations, although an open spaces strategy may influence activities for offsetting carbon emissions.

5.11 Long-Term Council Community Plan Considerations

The strategy would inform the priorities that relate to open spaces in the long-term plan.

6. Conclusion

Officers are developing a strategy to ensure our open spaces meet the community's needs and deliver values that are important today and for the foreseeable future. This open spaces strategy is crucial under a tight financial environment as it will enable the Council to set clear priorities across these spaces.

¹ Full Time (Staff) Equivalent.

Currently, area management plans manage activities on different areas of the open spaces. The strategy will provide a coherent direction for increasing the benefits from our spending and activities across the whole open spaces network. The strategy would drive changes to area management plans and other policies that impact on open spaces.

There would be full stakeholder engagement in developing the strategy to ensure it incorporates the needs of our customers.

Contact Officers: *Mark Jones, Senior Policy Advisor, Policy and Planning;*
Mike Oates, Manager Open Space and Recreation Planning

Supporting Information

1) Strategic fit / Strategic outcome

As previously discussed, the proposed strategy would support all four main goals of Wellington 2040: Smart Capital Strategy by bridging the large gap between Wellington 2040's very high-level objectives and how investments and activities are prioritised across diverse open spaces. In this way, the strategy would reinforce Wellington 2040 at the operational level.

2) Long-Term Plan / Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

Operational expenditure will be required to cover the development of a strategy, including stakeholder engagement.

A strategy would seek to better prioritise financial resources across all open spaces in this financially constrained environment. Therefore a strategy would achieve greater social, economic and cultural values from existing spending on open spaces over the long-term.

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

It is difficult at this stage to identify any Treaty of Waitangi implications. Officers will closely consult with mana whenua to ensure that any Treaty of Waitangi implications that arise from the strategy are adequately addressed.

4) Decision-making

Given that the strategy is currently at a scoping stage, this is not a significant decision.

5) Consultation

a) General consultation

Officers intend to fully engage with all interested stakeholders throughout the development of the strategy. This will include formal public consultation from March 2013.

b) Consultation with Maori

Mana whenua have deep spiritual and cultural ties to many of our open spaces. Officers will therefore specifically ensure that they are fully involved with developing the strategy.

6) Legal implications

This report raises no legal issues at this stage.

7) Consistency with existing policy

The strategy will need to be consistent with and, where appropriate, drive changes to other relevant existing policies. This paper raises no significant issues of inconsistency.