

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ORIGINS OF THE OUTER GREEN BELT VISION

1.1.1 WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The origins of the Outer Green Belt concept can be traced through Wellington City Council resolutions and other references to 1976, although it is likely that the concept had been germinating for some time before that. Until as late as 1998, the term Outer Town Belt was used, indicating a similarity in purpose to the Wellington (Inner) Town Belt.

The first formal reference and description is contained in *Preserving Wellington's Open Space*, a precursor to *Capital Spaces*, published in 1976². The plan proposed the 'Outer Town Belt' as one of five focus areas providing for the city's open space needs (the others are coastal open space, outstanding features, active recreation spaces and inner city open spaces). The original vision for the Outer Town Belt was presented in this plan as:

Several connector links are required to form a continuous green belt or outer town belt encircling the outer city suburbs from Brooklyn and Karori north to Johnsonville and Churton [Park]. These links will enable the retention of the skyline surrounding the suburbs, the protection of local features such as Makara High, the formation of a walkway system surrounding the city and possibly in later years, a scenic drive, and a segregation between housing and rural land uses. The outer skyline reserves would then effectively repeat in form and intention the Town Belt, preserved in the original city layout.

In 1978 eight objectives were set for the Outer Town Belt including:

- *protect bush-clad hillsides, soils, wildlife and open space*
- *preserve land for public recreation*
- *improve and enhance the rural landscape near urban areas*
- *protect the natural features of the landscape as a scenic and recreation amenity, particularly the skyline ridges.*

In 1983 and 1985 the Council passed resolutions to endorse the acquisition of Outer Town Belt lands with priority given to the lands behind Otari-Wilton's Bush and Ngaio.

In 1987 the Council confirmed the concept of the Outer Town Belt "to provide a continuous open space network on the skyline from Karori to Johnsonville".

In 1992 the aims of the Outer Town Belt were restated as:

- *fulfilling the functions of structuring suburban growth*
- *protecting the significant landscape of the skyline behind the suburbs of Karori, Ngaio, Khandallah and Johnsonville*

Total area of all Wellington City Council properties in the Outer Green Belt: 2,658 hectares.

Total area of Outer Green Belt concept:
Approximately 5,000 hectares.

Total area of Wellington:
29,000 hectares.

² Wellington City Council, 1976

- *providing a buffer between residential and rural land and ultimately the provision of land for informal recreation, mainly as a skyline walkway.*

A number of key properties have been acquired since 1992, including:

- Kilmister Tops
- former Ivanoff land at Makara Peak
- Karori Reservoir (now Karori Sanctuary)
- the Airstrip Block in upper Stebbings Valley
- former Landsdale Developments Limited land at Old Coach Road.

In 1993 and 1994 the Council made further resolutions focusing on the section from Karori to Kaukau. However, in 1996 the Council was beginning to expand the concept to include the ridges north to Tawa, while also taking a more cautious or considered approach to the means of achievement (ie. alternatives to outright purchase). At this time it also flagged the need for a more comprehensive strategy for protecting important open space, landscapes and ecological values across the city.

Subsequent strategies are consistent with the original vision of protecting ridgetop landscapes, protecting and enhancing areas of bush and providing public access.

Our City – Our Future, 1997³

This was the first strategic plan for a New Zealand city and followed an unprecedented level of community participation. It defined a vision supported by specific goals, targets, indicators and initiatives, including the establishment of *linked protected areas on the outer town belt from the South Coast to Porirua.*

Wellington City Council Strategic Plan, 1997 / 98⁴

This plan was developed to implement the goals and initiatives arising from *Our City – Our Future*. The resulting policy framework provided a foundation for development of the, now named, Outer Green Belt and other natural environment outcomes. The following objectives were stated in the *Strategic Plan* and reaffirmed in strategic reviews in 2000 and 2001.

<i>Biodiversity:</i>	<i>The city environment hosts and protects a representative range of indigenous and non-indigenous plants and animals in their natural communities and habitats.</i>
<i>Ecosystems:</i>	<i>The city's varied marine and land-based ecosystems are valued and, where appropriate, protected and restored.</i>
<i>Open space recreation:</i>	<i>Wellington's open spaces, including the coastline, harbour, Town Belt and Outer Green Belt are accessible to all and provide a wide range of recreational opportunities that do not compromise environmental values.</i>
<i>Landscape and natural heritage:</i>	<i>Features of Wellington's landscape and natural environment with special importance are recognised and, where appropriate, protected.</i>

³ Wellington City Council, 1997

⁴ Wellington City Council, 1997 (2)

Capital Spaces, 1998

The need for a comprehensive plan for the city's open space resulted in the publication of *Capital Spaces – Open Space Strategy for Wellington, Te Whanganui-a-Tara*. Before this plan, *Capital Spaces* provided the most detailed description of what the Outer Green Belt vision was about.

Capital Spaces provides directions for an integrated approach to managing the natural and recreational environment, including recognition of important landscape values.

Guiding principles include:

- enhancing natural succession
- developing better recreational networks and ecological corridors
- protecting threatened species
- reducing fire hazards
- protecting the coast and streams
- the role of open space in managing the city's urban form
- responding to increasing urban density
- taking opportunities for improving the open space network
- promoting outdoor recreation and healthy lifestyles
- balancing recreation and the natural environment.

Capital Spaces also established an open space concept that reflects spatially the different characteristic landscapes of the city - from the harbour to the rural hinterland. This 'spectrum' of proposed open spaces includes the following main categories:

- the city
- the bays
- suburban open spaces
- inner green belts
- Outer Green Belt
- rural hinterland
- wild coast
- harbour and coast.

Capital Spaces describes the Outer Green Belt as:

“A continuous green belt following the ridges west of the city from the South Coast to Colonial Knob, in which indigenous vegetation is restored and an informal recreation network is widely accessible.”

This Plan further explores the issues and opportunities for the Outer Green Belt that are put forward in Section 3.2 of *Capital Spaces*.

Figure 1. Open Space Concept for Wellington



Bush and Streams Restoration Plan, 2001

The Council's *Bush and Streams Restoration Plan* provides more specific directions and actions to achieve better protection and management for bush and streams within the city. Many areas are seeing the regeneration of native bush, but the process is hindered by plant and animal pests and a lack of suitable seed sources. Many streams lack riparian vegetation and are affected by urban stormwater runoff and leachate from former landfills.

The *Bush and Streams Restoration Plan* includes the following specific goals:

- To achieve restoration of native ecosystems as far as possible on the Outer Green Belt.
- This goes beyond the broad objective of restoration of a representative range of ecosystems and habitats to an overall vision of extensive return to past vegetation and habitat across the city.
- Development of a major ecological corridor from the South Coast through to the Tararua Ranges with the city taking an advocacy role in the wider region for this vision.

This is interpreted through the *Outer Green Belt Management Plan* in terms of the real ecological benefits of the Outer Green Belt vision and how this must connect to other ecological linkages - particularly through the Horokiwi area to Belmont Regional Park.

Wellington City District Plan, 2000

This is the Council's principal regulatory document setting out objectives and policies, methods and rules for managing the city environment, land uses and associated activities.

The *Wellington City District Plan (District Plan)* is prepared in accordance with the Resource Management Act 1991 and is based on the principles of sustainability:

<i>Dependency</i>	<i>all life in the natural environment</i>
<i>Irreversibility</i>	<i>some actions can result in permanent loss of species, landforms and heritage</i>
<i>Diversity</i>	<i>is necessary in both natural and urban environments</i>
<i>Efficiency</i>	<i>in the use of renewable and non-renewable resources</i>
<i>Finite resources</i>	<i>recognition that all resources are finite</i>
<i>Equity</i>	<i>in access to and the use of resources</i>
<i>Precautionary approach</i>	<i>should be taken where there is uncertainty and potential for significant harm.⁵</i>

The *District Plan* recognises the Outer Green Belt as an important component in the achievement of a sustainable and attractive city environment. The Plan includes a policy in support of further development of the Outer Green Belt concept, particularly for its role in defining the western edge of the city.

Policy 16.5.1.5: Identify land that contributes towards an Outer Town Belt that will provide an open, undeveloped edge to the city.

Generally the Council has not zoned private land for Open Space or Conservation without the agreement of the landowner (usually this is done where land is agreed to be part of a reserve contribution as part of a residential development). Therefore most private land within the Outer Green Belt concept is zoned Rural. Land use and subdivision consent applications for Rural land in this area are governed by rules for land use and subdivision for this zone type.

Where a change of zoning is sought from Rural to Residential, then the Council has the ability to consider any information or opinions in making its decision. As with all consent decisions, these matters can be appealed to the Environment Court, and some of the existing zones and special conditions applying to them, are the result of Environment Court decisions following an appeal.

This Plan will be further information that the Council, the community and landowners can use in considering *District Plan* changes and new land use proposals.

1.1.2 CONTRIBUTING VISIONS

Tangata whenua aspirations

The recently released Waitangi Tribunal report on the Wellington District states the view of Wellington Maori that, as a result of numerous Treaty breaches, they lost almost all of their land in the district. However the spiritual and cultural link between the tangata whenua and the natural environment, including land, water and air, remains.

Wellington Maori are developing their vision for the natural environment. This may take some time since the various iwi in Te Whanganui a Tara are still in the early stages of strengthening themselves and moving towards settlement of their Treaty claims with the Crown. At the same time, the tangata whenua are becoming increasingly aware of the opportunity to re-establish, in partnership with local authorities, their kaitiakitanga (guardianship) responsibilities in relation to the natural

⁵ District Plan Objectives Policies and Rules, page 1 / 2

environment. The Outer Green Belt provides an opportunity for the Wellington City Council and tangata whenua to do this in partnership, from the outset of the project.

Contemporary Maori values still broadly encompass their traditional beliefs and values with respect to land. An explanation of Maori beliefs and values toward the natural environment is found in the *District Plan* page 2/3.

The goal of environmental management is the maintenance of mauri (life essence) through the exercise of kaitiakitanga (guardianship). Sustainable management involves sustaining the mauri of natural and physical resources.

The Maori environmental management system was developed by trial and error over at least one thousand years. It is based on the spiritual beliefs of Maori, starting with the understanding of creation. In maintaining the mauri within the domain of atua (supernatural being), a set of cultural practices were developed and became the tikanga (practice of tribal groups). There are some similarities of tikanga across tribes and some significant differences or variations.

Tikanga used the concepts of tapu (sacredness or beyond common usage) and rahui (temporary restraint on use, or timeliness of harvest) which are common to all tribes with variations on the way in which they are used. Tikanga sought to unify the elements of all things in a holistic way so that there were not significant separations of te taha tinana (the physical plane), te taha hinengaro (the intellectual plane), te taha wairua (the spiritual plane) and te whanaunga (the social and cultural plane).

The Maori environmental management system is complex, and tikanga is a developing process able to adapt to modern circumstance.

The growing city

The Council's strategic goals, policies and decisions that support the Outer Green Belt were influenced strongly by a community with a growing interest in the city's environment and increasing demand for access to the city's rural fringes. With respect to the natural environment, several notable developments are apparent.

Wilton's Bush has long been an example of what the original forest cover over much of the city would have been like. The Council and the Otari – Wilton's Bush Trust's stewardship of this area continues to demonstrate the potential of our protected areas, if a long term view is taken. Existing management plans for this and some other parts of the Outer Green Belt already provide clear management goals for those areas that the Council continues to work toward.

In other parts of the Outer Green Belt and the city in general, the natural regeneration of native bush can be seen as a steady and dramatic natural transformation of once gorse-covered hills and gullies, into a series of interconnected bush areas. These areas span both public and private lands.

This natural trend and the potential for both positive and negative influences in its progress was the subject of *Natural Wellington – A Plan to preserve and enhance the Natural Treasures of Wellington City*, prepared by the Wellington branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society in 1991. This plan had two key objectives:

- the preservation and improvement of the natural ecosystems and the native plant and animal species of the Wellington City area
- to bring the native birds back to Wellington.

In 1992 the initial concept for the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary emerged, either directly or indirectly from the ideas contained in *Natural Wellington*. This project is already bringing many rare birds back to this mainland valley and will help to repopulate other parts of the Outer Green Belt and the city.

Also, from 1993/4, Wellington City Council and the Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) began to work more closely on pest control, particularly of possums, and by the end of the decade possum numbers in most key native ecosystems were down to much lower levels. This is almost certainly contributing to the improved viability of these areas as native bird habitats.

In 1993 *Wellington's Living Cloak* was published. This detailed *Guide to the Natural Plant Communities* was commissioned by Wellington Botanical Society and written by Isobel Gabites. It describes the extent of the modifications to the original indigenous ecology of the south-west Wellington region. It puts forward a vision for restoring some of the original ecosystems and provides advice about how natural areas and values can be restored in this area.

The outdoor recreation vision for the Outer Green Belt has grown out of broad community demand and consistent messages that there should be better access to the city's rural fringes. Traditional walking groups have been joined by new walking groups, and by running and mountain biking organisations seeking more than the existing local track network. For the most part, the missing links in the current network are in the Outer Green Belt and there is an expectation that these links will be created without undue delay.

Where there is a perceived need, mountain bikers and runners in particular, have demonstrated a willingness to get out and build tracks. When done in consultation with the Council (according to agreed standards) this is a good way to get things done. Since it was set up in 1998, Makara Peak Mountain Bike Park has grown from the energy of the mountain biking community, with help from the Council, into one of the country's best mountain biking areas.

Many other community groups have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to the city's environment and recreation network. In nearly all cases there is some form of partnership between the community and the Council, with the Council contributing land, money, materials or advice (or a combination of these) and the community contributing energy, time, expertise and sometimes money as well.

For the Outer Green Belt, these partnerships are vital. The Outer Green Belt is very much a work-in-progress and through this Plan the Council will seek to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones with other community interest groups and landowners. To be successful, this vision needs to be practical, yet ambitious. It needs to have broad support within the community, and from affected landowners. It should also be based on a long term view of the city, its shape, ecology and culture.