

3. VALUES, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

3.1 COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

3.1.1 SOURCES OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION

The Local Government Act 2002 emphasises the importance of communities having involvement in planning for their own future. A number of recent or current planning projects provide community-based input into the formation of policy for the Outer Green Belt:

- Ridgetop and Hilltop Study
- Northern Growth Management Plan
- Rural Community Plans
- Community based pilots for 2002/03 Strategic Review.

This information is supplemented by the consultation process specific to this Plan (refer page seven).

Geographical communities – urban and rural

The Ridgetop and Hilltop Study defined a number of geographical communities of interest as the basis for assessment of ridgetop and hilltop values. The rationale is that different ridgetops and hilltops are valued differently according to a community's location and character. Communities can have strong feelings about particular features in their area, that may not be shared to the same degree by communities further away. These community views need to be given due recognition in city-wide plans.

Perceptions of a place vary according to which side or angle it is viewed from. An interesting and important aspect of the Outer Green Belt is the very different perceptions of the particular sections from eastern and western perspectives. Most Wellingtonians will view the Outer Green Belt from the eastern side. However this plan must ensure that the perceptions of the Makara and Ohariu Valley communities are well understood and reflected appropriately in management decisions. For example, extensive revegetation of farmland on the western side would not be seen as a reflection of rural values as it would result in the loss of hundreds of hectares of productive farm land and valued rural landscapes.

Community organisations

Community organisations tend to make good use of the normal consultation processes undertaken for management plans. The majority of organisations making submissions are highly supportive of the Outer Green Belt vision and some are already involved in making it a reality. Many of these groups made initial submissions on this Plan and their views have been useful in its preparation. A list of submitters and other community organisations and interest groups is provided in Appendix 1.

Landowners

Rural landowners within the Outer Green Belt have some common interests and this Plan has sought to incorporate their views about the Outer Green Belt concept and their potential role in making it a reality. Rural landowners will have a voice through the Makara-Ohariu Rural Community Board and the consultation behind the rural community plans.

Owners of land zoned Rural on the eastern side, possibly have different interests or views to other rural landowners, as some view their land as having potential for residential development.

Any development of rural land for residential purposes requires a resource consent following the process prescribed in the *District Plan*, or a change to the zoning following the process prescribed in the Resource Management Act 1991.

Outer Green Belt users

This encompasses many groups with related but distinct interests, including walkers, runners, mountain bikers and so on. These groups do not have any formal collective representation in Wellington, but are represented to some degree by Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, Inc. and public access advocacy groups.

Utility companies and other business operators

Utilities exist on both public and private land in the Outer Green Belt and include structures for water and electricity reticulation, communication facilities and roads. To the extent that the owners of these utilities (including the Council) have common needs in the Outer Green Belt, they represent a community of interest.

3.1.2 COMMUNITY RELATED ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges: One concept – many communities

There is a risk that the concept of a continuous and integrated Outer Green Belt might not fully materialise and other competing or conflicting influences become dominant in the same area. A challenge for this planning project is the formation and promulgation of a viable concept for the Outer Green Belt that is consistently understood and supported by all stakeholder communities, and consistent with other Wellington City Council strategies.

Large areas of the Outer Green Belt are in private ownership and there is a chance these owners will see the Outer Green Belt as a threat to their existing rights and land values. A careful reading of this plan should dispel any unrealistic notions in this regard. Much of the private land on the western side is included in the plan on account of its landscape values, and it is not the intent of this Plan that all this land be publicly accessible or retired from farming.

Many community groups now have an involvement in different parts of the Outer Green Belt. Alongside the Council, in its environmental planning and management roles, these groups have a range of core motivations and long-term aspirations. These are mostly mutually compatible, but the Council faces the challenge of their various inputs toward one common vision.

Competing recreational and non-recreational uses on public land within the Outer Green Belt will have parallels in many other similar areas around the city and the country. A common issue is the perceived conflict between public and private interests. Traditionally, private businesses, whether they are utility companies or recreation service providers, have been variously reviled, tolerated or ignored on protected public lands. In reality, private organisations can have a significant and positive contribution to make to the achievement of an Outer Green Belt vision.

Many of the roads and tracks currently used for recreation were built and/or are maintained by utility companies. A significant part of the money needed for the establishment of Karori Sanctuary came from the private sector (the rest came from financial assistance from Wellington City Council, the Lotteries Grants Board, individual donations and memberships) and private landowners have a key role to play in farming some of the large open areas owned by the Council.

Increasingly there is recognition of the role of the private sector in adding variety and depth in the range of outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands. Internationally, these providers are recognising and responding to the need for their activities to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

Special advisory and administrative arrangements

Some of the issues discussed above raise questions of governance and administration such as whether a new Outer Green Belt advisory body is needed to foster cohesion and communication. This plan takes a wait-and-see approach where full use is made of existing governance and administrative arrangements for the wider parks network.

The Environment Reference Group (set up to advise the Council on environmental policy issues) has been particularly helpful in this current planning phase for the Outer Green Belt, and it remains to be seen what sort of input it would have once the Plan is finished. This group was not set up to represent particular groups and therefore under the current terms of reference, it cannot be a forum for the organisations and interest groups involved directly in the Outer Green Belt.

Special administrative arrangements already exist for Karori Sanctuary and Otari-Wilton's Bush, and less formal or complex, or short term arrangements exist for Makara Peak, Wright Hill and some other areas. Special arrangements may be needed for other areas or other groups in the future.

Opportunities: Local and city wide benefits

Taking a long term view, the Outer Green Belt can be seen as a unifying influence, linking communities north to south and east to west. The Outer Green Belt provides views of Wellington City showing its proximity to other cities and the South Island.

The process of establishing the Outer Green Belt will provide many opportunities for people and communities to participate in achieving the vision. An important function of this Plan is to identify the key projects in each area, and through this, communities will see opportunities for their local involvement, whether it be planting, track – building, fundraising, or some other useful activity.