

3.3 LANDSCAPE AND LANDFORM

3.3.1 LANDSCAPE AND LANDFORM CHARACTER

This summary of landscape and landform values is derived mainly from a recent study commissioned by the Council entitled *Wellington's Ridgetops and Hilltops – The Natural and Amenity Values*¹⁷. Another useful and well known study of Wellington's geology and landforms is *Rugged Landscape, The Geology of Central New Zealand*¹⁸. This should be referred to for a fuller understanding of the geological makeup of Wellington and the Outer Green Belt.

The Outer Green Belt concept is fundamentally based on a major landform and landscape that is typical of the south west Wellington Peninsula. The improvement of the Outer Green Belt as an ecological feature has been discussed in the previous section. Recognition of the significance of the landform and landscape values, and their protection, is of equal importance in the Outer Green Belt vision.

Wellington defined by ridges and hills

Wellington is a hilly city and the built environment, is partly on and partly constrained by the hills that form it. Many of the smaller ridges in the city have been almost completely built over and this is part of Wellington's urban character. Notably some of the most central ridges were protected by the city's founders and are known today as the Inner Town Belt.

To the north and the west of the central city there are four major ridge systems, shown on Map 3:

- Horokiwi Ridge
- The Outer Green Belt system
(comprising from north to south: Spicers Ridge, Best's Ridge, Totara Ridge, Te Wharangi Ridge, Wright Hill and Te Kopahau Ridge)
- Quartz Hill – Outlook Hill Ridge
- Terawhiti Ridge

The Outer Green Belt ridge is not quite a continuous ridge because it is bisected between Wright Hill and Makara Peak by Karori Stream. Nevertheless, it is perceived as a single entity because it defines the entire western edge of the city from Tawa to the South Coast.

While the highest point in Wellington (Outlook Hill: 534m) is not in the Outer Green Belt, many of the city's best known hilltops are, including:

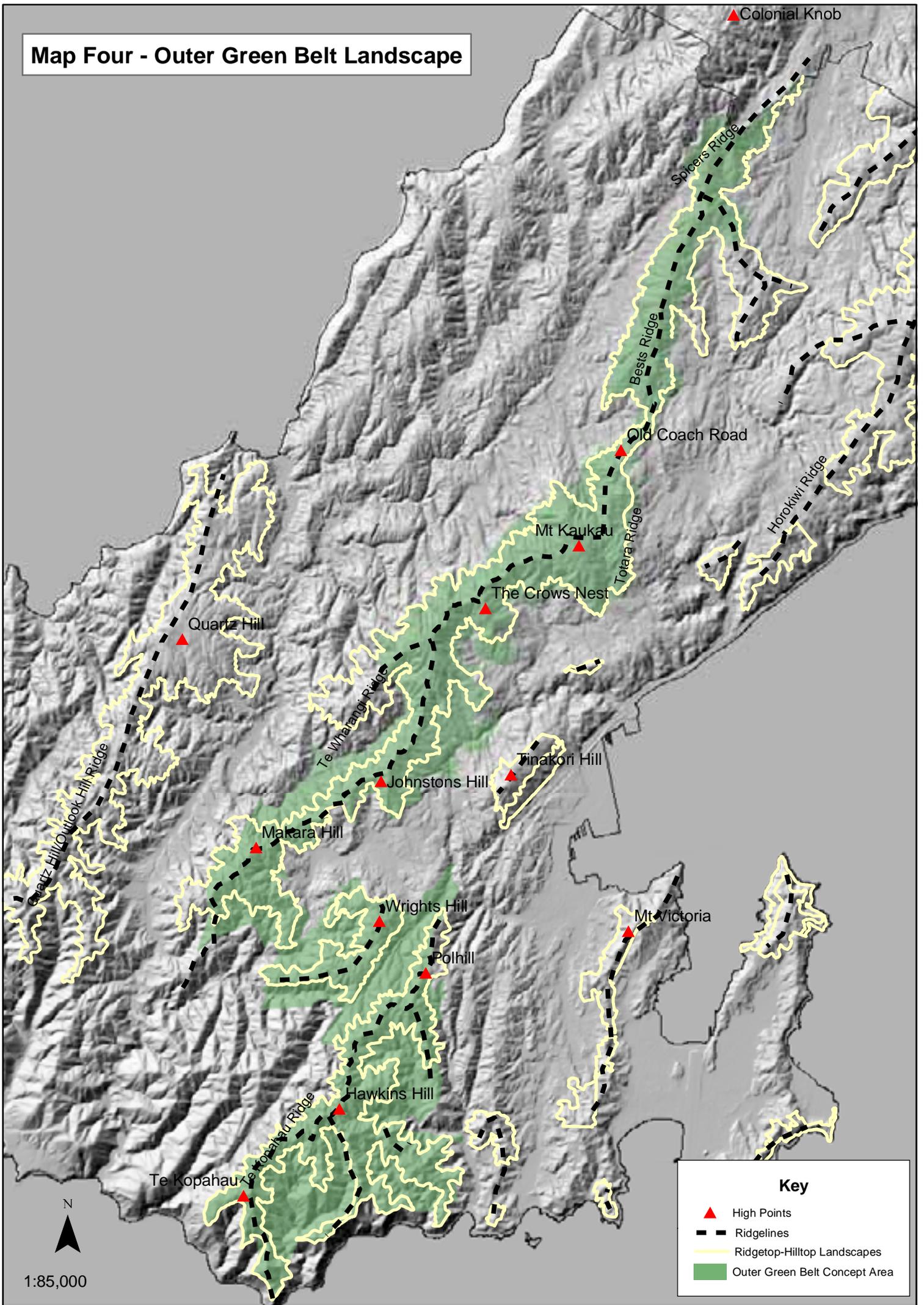
Kaukau:	445m	The Crows Nest:	385m
Makara Hill:	412m	Johnston Hill:	360m
Polhill	299m	Wright Hill:	358m
Te Kopahau:	484m	Hawkins Hill:	495m

By comparison, the highest part of the Wellington Town Belt, Tinakori Hill, is 303m. The highest dwelling in Wellington is probably around 400m near (Hawkins Hill), but the highest residential settlement is Broadmeadows which reaches a height of 320m.

¹⁷ Boffa Miskell Ltd, 2001

¹⁸ Stevens, G. R., 1974

Map Four - Outer Green Belt Landscape



The relationship between the height of the main ridge and the height of the nearest residential development is important as some parts of the ridge are relatively low and the existence of the Outer Green Belt depends on the nearest residential development being significantly lower still. In some places, such as Montgomery Avenue in Karori (300m) this has not been achieved. The recent purchase of land at Old Coach Road (summit at 240m) helped avoid a similar situation where residential development would have gone all the way to the main ridge.

Ohariu Valley Road summit (180m) has already experienced a degree of development not seen elsewhere along this section of ridge. Makara Hill is the only other public road which traverses the main ridge (220m) and remains largely open and undeveloped.

The lowest point is South Karori Road at around 100m above sea level.

Ridgetop and hilltop values

The four main ridges of Wellington, with their characteristic undulating summits above steep flanks, are remnants of an ancient peneplain¹⁹.

Vegetated or not, these ridges form a natural backdrop to the city and a continuous skyline visually linking all the notable high points. Apart from the historic changes to the vegetation, the main modifications are in the form of roads and utilities. The most prominent utilities are the communications tower on Kaukau and electricity supply cables and pylons traversing the ridge at several places.

There are very few buildings along the main ridgeline. Generally the Council wants to prevent or reduce the level of development on or in close proximity to major ridgelines and nowhere is this more important than in the Outer Green Belt.

The broad visual character is a combination of the underlying topography and past and present land use. Southern and eastern areas are mostly clothed in dense vegetation, while the northern and western areas are still mostly farmed and largely devoid of tall vegetation.

Wellington's Ridgetops and Hilltops provides an analysis of the different communities of interest in terms of the perception and appreciation of ridgetop and hilltop values. The perspective of the Outer Green Belt from the rural area is quite different to the perspective from the city side, and these differences will be reflected in the area plans.

The Outer Green Belt ridge system effectively separates the predominantly urban eastern sector of the city from the rural western sector, and consequently defines the western edge of the built environment. The extent to which this edge is formalised and protected is a key issue in establishing the integrity of the Outer Green Belt and achieving the Outer Green Belt vision.

Bush and stream landscapes

The well developed forests in the south and east of the Outer Green Belt, particularly adjoining Karori, Ngaio and Wadestown, are an important landscape element that gives character to these areas. They also provide an example of the vision that this Plan promotes for the entire Outer Green Belt – which is a combination of densely forested slopes and gullies with areas of open ridges and hilltops above.

¹⁹ Boffa Miskell, 2001

3.3.2 LANDSCAPE AND LANDFORM ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Defining the edge of the built (urban) environment

Cities evolve through an on-going and complex growth process which usually sees new 'green field' areas developed at their edges. In Wellington, the majority of future 'green field' growth will be in the northern suburbs – for example Stebbings Valley in Churton Park.

The *District Plan* does not define an ultimate urban boundary – a line up to which the Council will allow urban development, (although such a line may well be included in future plans). The eastern edge of the Outer Green Belt is potentially the same line, and it exists in parts where the city has fully evolved to its natural limit, give or take a few hectares where land has potential for development and also has value as open space - and final decisions about best use are yet to be made. In the northern suburbs, the logical edge to the built environment is the subject of current discussions mainly through the *Northern Growth Management Plan*. This Plan draws from that analysis and delineates the future built environment and the Outer Green Belt in this area.

West of this line, within the Outer Green Belt, will be areas with important ridgetop and hilltop values, all bush remnants and all areas already protected or zoned for Open Space or Conservation, or essential for public access. This does not indicate that all lands east of this line have no value, but they are not part of the Outer Green Belt concept.

Private land to the west of this line that is included within the Outer Green Belt will not be directly affected by this Plan. However it will show the Council's intent to seek protection of the values contained in these areas and prevention of any land uses or developments that would unduly erode these values.

Ultimately, through negotiations, advocacy, planning consent processes, and possibly further regulation, these values will be more formally protected giving a final definitive western edge to the city and an eastern edge to the Outer Green Belt. This may take some years to achieve.

Protecting ridgetop and hilltop areas

Even with a clear edge to the built environment that is below the main ridgetops, the values of these areas are still potentially threatened. The main threats are:

- placement of utilities and building utility access roads
- unsympathetic land use – such as the planting of pine blocks or wind breaks in prominent ridgetop areas
- development of lifestyle properties along the main ridge and the placement of residential dwellings in prominent ridgetop areas.

The Council accepts the need for some utilities to be placed on ridgetops and hilltops, but will discourage these in places of particular landscape importance or currently undeveloped areas. The Council has a draft policy for assessing applications for new utilities on its land, and additional policies included in this Plan ensure Outer Green Belt values are given due regard.

The Council does not accept the need for lifestyle developments or residential dwellings in the sensitive ridgetop and hilltop environments of the Outer Green Belt. Existing and future *District Plan* rules will continue to restrict this sort of land use.

The Council is considering how best to use the information in the *Ridgetop and Hilltop Study* to give greater protection to these, and similar areas, in other parts of the city.

Current provisions in the *District Plan* are based on a somewhat simplistic '50 metres' rule (developments within 50 metres height of a ridgetop are subject to special scrutiny). Mapping of the important areas will provide greater clarity for landowners as in many places these are significantly more than 50 meters in height from the ridgeline.

However, getting the line in the right place is a significant challenge. One of the difficulties is that the line will not be tied to cadastral boundaries which makes it more difficult to locate the lines on the ground.

The Outer Green Belt concept area is based partly on the footprint of the initial mapping according to the following guidelines:

- the identified values of the particular ridgetop / hilltop
- the importance of adjoining ridgetop / hilltop areas in providing landscape context to the actual ridgetop / hilltop
- the area excludes existing dense residential housing areas.

The resultant footprint is much wider than that covered by the 50 metre rule, but is based on actual values and attributes that can be described. As can be seen from the concept map, the area of ridgetop and hilltop value has considerable width in some areas and less in others.

Defining areas to be kept open and clear

This Plan identifies areas to be kept open and clear for their landscape values and to aid public access and recreation (refer Section 5). These areas are some of the existing ridge and hilltops that are already in an open and clear condition. There is no intention to remove any existing ridgetop or hilltop vegetation unless it is mainly comprised of alien species.

These areas, once defined, must be actively grazed and kept clear of pest plants. The Council will put in place grazing agreements with adjoining farmers in preference to other possible partners, unless this is impractical.