

3.4 RECREATION AND ACCESS

3.4.1 EXISTING RECREATION USES

Activities

The Outer Green Belt provides opportunities for outdoor recreation in a variety of natural and semi-natural settings characterised by the dominant landscape elements – ridges and hilltops, forests and streams. At present the extent of these opportunities largely reflects the pattern of landownership. Generally there is little in the way of formal access over private land – although there is the possibility that future access agreements will enhance access.

Recreation involves a combination of places and activities. The Outer Green Belt includes a number of significant places such as Karori Sanctuary and Otari - Wilton's Bush where there is a concentration of natural and historical features with facilities and information to enhance the visitor's experience. The activities at these places are generally passive and often for the enjoyment of the environment, fauna, flora and views (gentle walks, viewing, learning, socialising).

Elsewhere the focus may be more on the activity – walking / tramping, running, mountain biking, where the common element is movement within the natural environment to a desired destination or along a desired route.

The area plans define the main recreation experiences being provided for in each area.

The recreational access network

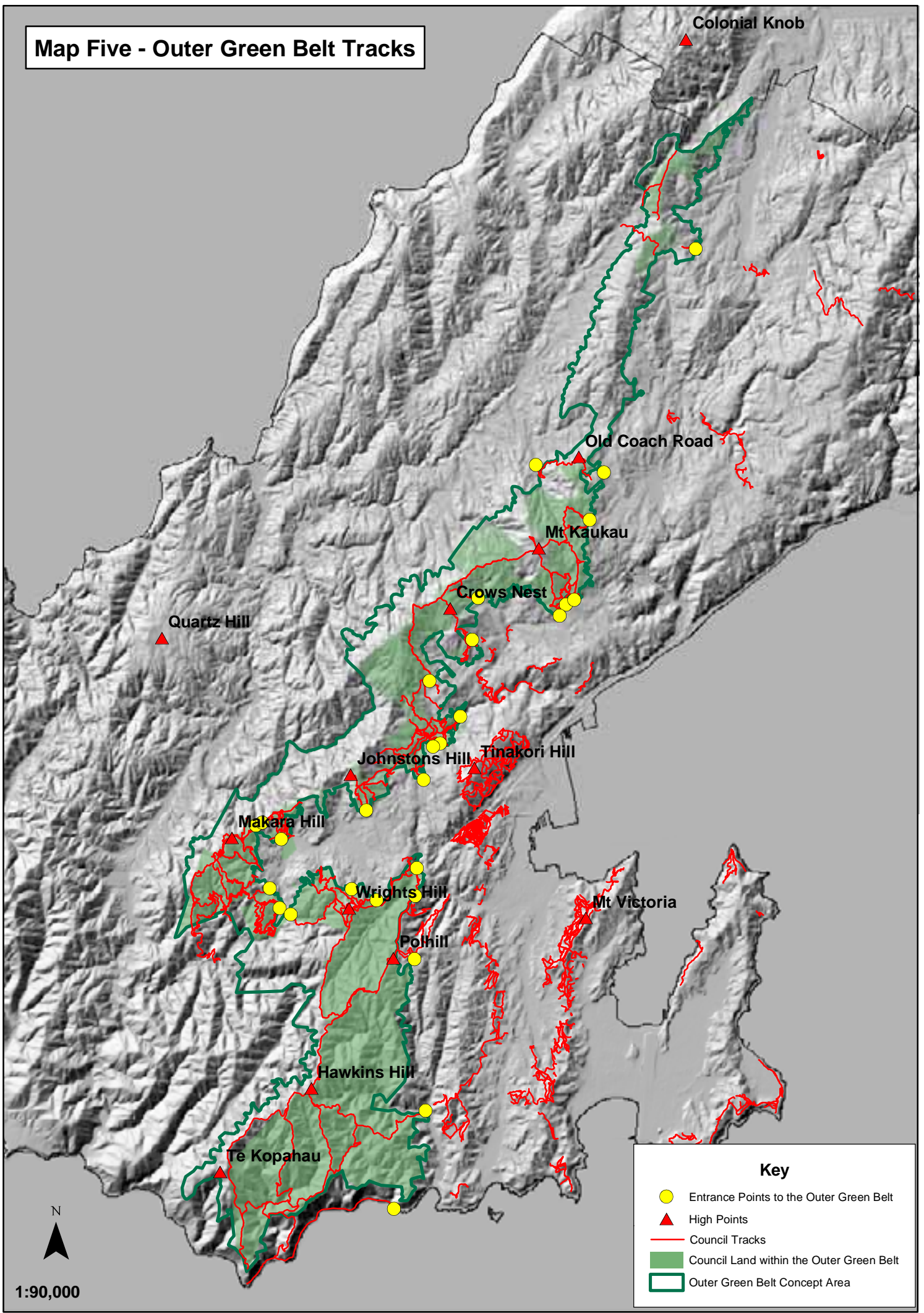
Beyond the main entrances and visitor nodes, the recreation infrastructure is principally the recreational access network (the network of roads and tracks people use to walk and ride in the Outer Green Belt). The planning for this network is a critical part of this Plan, as the value of the Outer Green Belt for recreation depends greatly on the quality and extent of this network. The Council has begun work on a city-wide *Open Space Access Plan* which will address issues of location, usage, design and quality for the entire track network across the city. This will be based on the following basic classification.

There are many roads and vehicle tracks in the Outer Green Belt which are a vital part of the access network and are maintained for reasons other than, or in addition to, recreation access (for example, access to utilities). There is also a number of paper roads (legally a road but as yet unbuilt) within and beyond the Outer Green Belt which may have some future significance for access.

The existing access network combines existing or former motorised vehicle tracks, purpose built recreation tracks and simple routes across open country. Complex local networks at Otari-Wilton's Bush, Makara Peak and Karori Sanctuary, are relatively self contained and provide for short walks and loops within a definable area. Longer cross-country tracks will gain greater prominence through the Outer Green Belt concept following the achievement of more continuous protection and public accessibility.

One that has existed for some time already is the Northern Walkway which has its northern terminus at Khandallah (via Kaukau). More recently the Skyline Walkway was established from Crofton Downs to Kaukau and will eventually be expanded to run the length of the Outer Green Belt as the main axial track connecting all areas.

Map Five - Outer Green Belt Tracks



Key

- Entrance Points to the Outer Green Belt
- ▲ High Points
- Council Tracks
- Council Land within the Outer Green Belt
- Outer Green Belt Concept Area

Also on the horizon is the vision for Te Araroa (the Long Path) which is a nationally based project to connect both ends of the country with one continuous low-level track. This will enter the Outer Green Belt through Spicer Forest and probably pick up the Northern Walkway route to get into downtown Wellington.

Within the seven sectors, there are various new track connections and track improvements needed to complete a coherent track network. Area plans include ideas for specific track improvements.

The Council has completed an access network (track) strategy for the city, and where appropriate, it uses national or international standards for track classification, design and marking.

In addition to recognising any roads (sealed, unsealed or 4 wheel drive) which form part of this network within open space, the following track classifications are used in the access strategy:

Pedestrian (walking) track classes (based on an adaptation of the current Department of Conservation track standard):

- urban path
- short walk
- walking track
- tramping track
- route.

Cycling or mountain biking track classes (other than cycleway, these classes are an international standard for mountain biking):

- cycleway
- easy ride
- average ride
- difficult ride
- extreme ride.

These standards will be used together wherever dual or multiple track uses are intended.

Makara Peak Mountain Bike Park

The capital's rugged topography and tight challenging roads and tracks are well suited to mountain biking. Like Karori Sanctuary, Makara Peak Mountain Bike Park is a community initiative aided by practical support from the Council in the form of land, funding and advice. When completed, it will have around 25 kilometres of track built by and for mountain bikers. It is already nationally recognised as one of the best areas dedicated to mountain biking and attracts riders from well beyond the city's boundaries.

Walkers and runners are not excluded, but they take second place to the needs of mountain bikers in this unique area.

Entry and exit points

There are at least 30 different points of access into the Outer Green Belt at present. However only a small number of these are, or will be, developed as principal entry

areas with parking and landscaping. Where appropriate, these will be marked and signed according to the Council's standards. Some entrances are through adjoining reserves that are not included within the concept area, but will be identified to the public as places from which the Outer Green Belt can be reached (for example, Karori Park).

Exit points are often different from the entry point as people tend to like to do round-trips or loops, rather than returning by the same path.

Destinations

Planning for a comprehensive and versatile access infrastructure requires knowledge of the important destinations – the places and features that attract visitors and provide an objective around which a particular visit is planned. The most prominent destinations are places like - Otari-Wilton's Bush, Karori Sanctuary and Makara Peak. Other key destinations include sections of the main ridge and high points along it.

3.4.2 RECREATION - ACCESS ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Educational experiences

Recreation and education naturally go together in parks. There are major educational opportunities that could be developed in the Outer Green Belt in addition to Karori Sanctuary and Otari-Wilton's Bush.

Eco-tourism products

The Outer Green Belt presents opportunities for the city in terms of the further development of eco-tourism products and services (tours, visits, etc) to complement the small number that already exist in Wellington²⁰. Eco-tourism is, by definition, sustainable in terms of its focus on protecting the natural capital on which the tourism experiences are dependant. This Plan will include policy to ensure that any tourism business proposals that would make use of the Outer Green Belt would need to satisfy a set of eco-tourism standards according to industry best practice. Current best practice for eco-tourism includes social and economic, as well as ecological, considerations. Social sustainability must include consideration of the effect of tourism on local recreational patterns. The development of eco-tourism therefore should not negatively affect public recreation in the same areas.

Wellington is not yet perceived as a significant eco-tourism destination and most visitors are attracted for either business purposes or because of Wellington's reputation for the arts and culture – and of course Te Papa. The Outer Green Belt can help change this.

Clear guidelines for commercial operations

Commercial recreation (which is related to tourism and eco-tourism, depending on who is participating, the nature of the activity and whether any money changes hands) can play a useful role if it complements the basic service provided by the Council and is managed professionally and sustainably.

Public / private sector partnerships and cooperation work best where there is a clear understanding of the participants' respective roles (and these roles don't overlap or

Definition of eco-tourism:

Ecotourism encompasses a spectrum of nature-based activities that foster visitor appreciation and understanding of natural and cultural heritage, and are managed to be ecologically, economically and socially sustainable.

compete), and where there are clear guidelines in place. This Plan provides a basic framework for managing commercial recreation activities.

In New Zealand there is an established tradition of public agency protection and management of important natural areas (including the provision of basic recreation infrastructure), while private businesses provide other services such as specialised tours, supplies and accommodation. For the Outer Green Belt, there may be interesting opportunities involving private landowners working with the Council to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities.

Providing a range of recreation opportunities

Getting the right mix of recreation opportunities is important. Submitters to this Plan generally favoured passive and non-motorised activities such as walking, running, mountain biking and horse riding (in some areas). Some people believe there is a place for motorised recreation, but recognise the need for strict controls (see above). Enjoyment of the Outer Green Belt by a cross section of the community is intended, but it must be consistent with the basic purpose of the Outer Green Belt and protection of its natural values.

Appropriate access points, including those where people can drive to high places (as at Wright Hill and Brooklyn), complement other places where access is only by foot and provides a significant physical challenge. This Plan does not include a detailed mapping of the intended recreation settings but it does promote awareness that a wide range of recreation opportunities is derived from a diversity of settings and activities. For example, a visitor may choose to ride a mountain bike a significant distance to a relatively remote area or choose to picnic in a comfortable sheltered environment a short distance from their point of entry.

Health benefits of outdoor recreation

Providing opportunities for recreation in the outdoors has direct benefits on the populations physical and mental health and well-being. This is supported by the *Wellington City Council Recreation Strategy* through Outcomes 4 (Open Space Recreation) and Outcome 5 (Public Health). The strategy advocates the major role sport and recreation can have in helping prevent illnesses sedentary lifestyle can cause: such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and certain cancers.

Improving the track network

Track building is a very significant part of park management, particularly in green belts where walking and mountain biking are the main activities. This plan includes information on the location and design of the track network, new links needed and how it is intended they be built. There is an important role for recreation groups in track building and maintenance, provided everyone is working to the same overall plan.

The Council's existing *Mountain Bike Policy* will apply in the Outer Green Belt. That is, all tracks are open to mountain biking unless specifically declared closed. Makara Peak Mountain Bike Park is a special area containing a track network built by and for mountain bikers with funding from the Council.

Other facilities and services

Over time, additional facilities and services will be developed and provided to support key recreation opportunities and enhance key destinations. This will include further development of the major entry areas (where they are not already sufficiently developed). Adequate parking and information is needed at all major entry areas. Some places may also warrant shelter or toilet facilities, drinking water, seating, grassed areas, fencing, landscaping and so on – reflecting the current use, future potential and significance of the site.

Area plans include a number of specific improvements, but in some areas a detailed development plan will be needed. Across the Outer Green Belt, facility development will be prioritised and funded according to city-wide parks business priorities.