1 Introduction

Wellington has a very beautiful natural setting by world standards. The inner city faces north and east to the natural sweep of Lambton Harbour, and steep hills enclose it from behind. The inner suburbs cling to these hills of which large areas, including significant ridgetops, are Town Belt.

1.1 The Town Belt concept

Wellington is fortunate to retain a large portion of the space set aside as Town Belt in 1839 under the instruction of the Secretary of the New Zealand Company, John Ward, who stated:

“It is indeed desirable that the whole outside of the Town, inland, should be separated from the country by a broad belt of land which you will declare that the Company intends to be public property on condition that no buildings be ever erected upon it.”

Originally held by Central Government (the Crown) after it was gazetted in 1841, this horseshoe-shaped green space on the hills cradling the central city and inner suburbs has been administered and controlled by Wellington City Council since 1873.

A Town Belt is an area of land set aside during the design of towns and cities to provide a green and open space for the pleasure and health of the citizens. This design approach had been advocated by utopian and radical social reformers in Britain since the early 19th century as a means of providing relief for ordinary citizens from the overcrowding of the cities.

Today it is widely accepted that open space in the city is essential to not only the character and function of the city but the physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing of its people. Cities around the world with environmental and social problems are working to improve the urban environment, and the provision of open space is high on the agenda. Once the built landscape is there, trying to retrofit the cityscape to include open space is incredibly difficult and often impossible. Established open space within the urban landscape, (especially a large, diverse, connected, accessible and visible open-space network like the Town Belt), is extremely valuable to the city and the people who live there.

Contemporary ideas on the value of natural environments fit with the Town Belt concept. The Town Belt in Wellington protects a large, predominantly natural, open-space environment with a
huge range of direct and indirect environmental, social, recreational and economic benefits to the city and its residents.

The concept of a Town Belt has endured through the development of the city. The values associated with the Town Belt have however changed and continue to evolve as the value and potential values of open space in the urban environment is more widely debated and understood.

1.2 What is the Wellington Town Belt? 1

Before the arrival of European colonists, the Town Belt land was under the kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of the resident iwi/hapu. The earliest documented description and pictures of the Town Belt have the land covered in forest with the slopes of Mt Victoria/Tangi te keo covered in kanuka shrubland. The Māori history and traditions related to the places that now make up the Town Belt go back to the earliest arrival of Māori in Wellington. Two important components of the Town Belt are the key ridgelines in the east and west of central Wellington, known as Te Ranga a Hiwi – or the ridge of Hiwi and the ridgeline of Ahumairangi. Hiwi was the son of the daughter of Tara, the eponymous ancestor of Ngāi Tara. Ngāi Tara were probably the first Māori to settle the area, constructing pā and developing gardens and using the forests to gather food. Before Ngāi Tara were others, more of the hunter-gatherer groups known by some as the kahui tipua, who moved around taking advantage of the natural resources of the region.

The term ‘original Town Belt’ refers to all of the land proclaimed as Town Belt in 1841 being 1544 acres (625 ha) that was set aside from land included in the Port Nicholson Deed of Purchase. Despite questions about the legality of purchase in 1841, Governor Hobson proclaimed the Town Belt a Crown reserve, labelled as ‘land ... reserved for the enjoyment of the public and not to be built upon’ (see map on page 5).

The Crown (latterly through the Superintendent of the Province of Wellington) held the land from 1841 to 1871. The Wellington City Reserves Act 1871 instructed the Superintendent to convey the land ‘upon such trusts and for such purposes of public utility to the City of Wellington and its inhabitants’. The Superintendent executed a deed of trust now usually referred to as the Town Belt Deed. See Appendix 1. Other land forming the Basin Reserve was ultimately put into trust under a separate deed. The Canal Reserve, comprising the traffic islands between the Basin Reserve and Courtenay Place was included in (and is still part of) the Town Belt Deed.

A total of 1061 acres (429 hectares) was finally conveyed to the Mayor, Councillors, and citizens of the City of Wellington on 20 March 1873 to be forever used as ‘public recreation ground for the inhabitants of the City of Wellington’. The Town Belt Deed set out how the Council was to manage the land and it remains the most important document for the Town Belt today. The Council holds the land in trust for the citizens of Wellington and is a similar concept to the public commons in England. A public commons means a place that has a public good that is free for people to view and enjoy and owned by everyone who wants to be a part of it.

Since 1841, the growth of Wellington City has meant that over a third of the land originally designated for Town Belt has been taken for community purposes (see map on page 5). Significant portions of the Town Belt were lost for predominantly Crown uses. These included land for Wellington College, the Governor General’s residence, Victoria University, Wellington Hospital, and various roads linking the inner city with the suburbs.

1 The name Wellington Town Belt has not been officially gazetted but is the accepted name for the land held under the Town Belt Deed (1873). In this plan the convention will be to use the full title for major headings but elsewhere it will be shortened to Town Belt.
1.2.1 What makes the Wellington Town Belt distinct?

The Town Belt’s distinguishable features include its:

- perceived continuity and horseshoe shape of open space, comprising the first line of hills and undeveloped skylines encircling the central city
- geographic location and close visual relationship with the central city and inner suburbs
- patchwork and diversity of vegetation cover
- availability to be used for a wide range of sporting and recreation activities
- accessibility and provision of linkages to key community destinations
- rich historical and cultural links with Wellington citizens and mana whenua.

1.2.2 Role in open-space network

The Wellington Town Belt forms an integral part of Wellington’s open-space network comprising 4221 hectares. It is complemented by the Wellington Outer Green Belt established in the 1990s and 2000s and managed under the Outer Green Belt Management Plan (2004). The plan outlines the following vision:

“A continuous belt following the ridges to the 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”.

The map on the next page shows the Outer Green Belt and the Town Belt.

1.3 The Wellington Town Belt Management Plan

The purpose of the Wellington Town Belt Management Plan is to provide Wellington City Council with a clear framework for making decisions and managing the Town Belt for at least the next 10 years.

The plan provides a framework for addressing issues common to the Town Belt and managing them in a comprehensive and consistent way. Objectives and policies give guidance for the development, management, protection, operation and public use of the Town Belt.

Specifically it will:

- ensure the Town Belt is managed and maintained in a consistent manner by providing common objectives and policies
- ensure protection and appropriate management for important natural, recreation, historical and cultural values on the Town Belt
- provide prioritised strategic management initiatives
- build on the policies and initiatives in the 1995 management plan (Appendix 6).

1.3.1 Vision of the plan

“The Wellington Town Belt is a unique and historic horseshoe of open space around the inner city that brings nature into the city and provides current and future residents and visitors with a place to visit, recreate and enjoy.”
1.3.2 Structure of the plan

In 2011 the Council approved a set of guiding principles to guide and support the review of the 1995 management plan.

This management plan identifies:

- the legal framework for the Town Belt
- the guiding principles
- the long-term vision for the Town Belt
- the natural and cultural features of the Town Belt and how these will be protected
- recreational role and activities on the Town Belt
- general management objectives and policies
- actions required to implement this plan.

The guiding principles provide the wider community’s values and aspirations for the Town Belt and provide a framework for decision making. They are fully described in section 2.2.

The objectives and policies in this plan explain the intended methods for the protection, management, development, operation and public use of the Town Belt.

Structure of the plan: In order to provide a framework to achieve connectivity and sustainability on the Town Belt, this plan is principally structured around key themes:

- Chapter 2 – Town Belt legislative and policy framework
- Chapter 3 – Partnership and community participation
- Chapter 4 – Landscape
- Chapter 5 – Ecology
- Chapter 6 – Recreation
- Chapter 7 – Culture and history
- Chapter 8 – Management sectors
- Chapter 9 – Rules for use and development

While the plan is structured around themes, the Town Belt is divided into sectors for the purposes of implementation and ease of understanding for local communities (see Section 8).
Each sector recognises the differences in topography, vegetation, uses and communities of interest inherent in the Town Belt. These sectors are:

1. Te Ahumairangi Hill
2. Kelburn Park
3. Aro Valley/Polhill Gully
4. Brooklyn Hills
5. Macalister Park
6. Golf Course/Mt Albert
7. Newtown/Crawford Road
8. Hataitai Park
9. Mt Victoria/Matairangi

The general policies need to be read alongside the specific policies for each sector.

1.3.3 Coverage of the plan

Objectives and policies in the plan will cover:

- 389.68 hectares held in trust under the Town Belt Deed, and
- 130.3378 hectares of reserve land managed as Town Belt.

See map on page 5, and Appendix 2. Policies are not included for the Wellington Botanic Garden, the Wellington Zoo, the Canal Reserve or Wellington showgrounds (except the artificial turf behind Te Whaea).

**Wellington Botanic Garden:** In 1844 land for a botanic garden (12 acres, 1 rood and 9 perches) was appropriated from the land set aside for Public Reserves (part of the Town Belt reserve vested in the Crown).

In 1869 the Botanic Garden Act was passed and management of the garden was entrusted to a board under the auspices of the New Zealand Institute, the forerunner of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

In 1891 the Wellington Botanic Garden Vesting Act dissolved the Botanic Garden Board and vested control in Wellington City Council. Wellington Botanic Garden is not covered by the provisions of the Town Belt Deed.

The Botanic Garden is classified as Local Purpose Reserve (Botanic Garden) under the Reserves Act 1977 and managed under the Combined Management Plan (Wellington Botanic Garden, Anderson Park, Bolton Street Memorial Park (2002).

**Wellington Zoo:** The Zoological Garden, established in 1906, sits on land managed in trust by the Council under the Town Belt Deed. It is an accepted historic use within the Town Belt. The zoo operation is now managed under the Wellington Zoo Trust Deed (2003).

**Canal Reserve:** The Canal Reserve is still part of the Town Belt Deed but is not covered by this plan. Its future role is outlined in the Central City Framework developed as part of Wellington 2040 which outlines the development of a new linear park utilising this area and linking the Basin Reserve and Waitangi Park.

**Wellington showgrounds:** In 1959 5.223 ha of land in Hutchinson Road was suspended from the Town Belt Deed by the Wellington City Exhibition Act. If this Act is repealed or the lease terminates, the showground land will automatically return to Town Belt management.

*It is proposed that this land will be added to the Town Belt as part of legislative change. See policy 2.6.6*
Since 2010, the Council-managed area known as Te Whaea artificial sportsfield has been removed from the Premises Management Lease for the showgrounds. This area will be managed as part of the Town Belt.

**Road reserve** that adjoins Town Belt land managed under this management plan will be managed in a consistent manner with the objectives and policies of this plan.

**Chest Hospital:** The former Chest Hospital land (Chest Hospital) and buildings were transferred at no cost to the Council in December 2002 by the Capital & Coast District Health Board. The acquisition was consistent with the Town Belt Reinstatement Policy 1998.

### 1.4 Key guiding policies and plans

Council plans that give guidance in managing the Town Belt and/or in developing the policies in this plan are listed below. The chart below shows where this management plan fits with other Council plans and policies.

**Wellington City District Plan**

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 is prepared in accordance with the Resource Management Act 1991.

The Wellington Town Belt is identified as a separate open space area ‘Open Space C’ (called Inner Town Belt) in the Wellington District Plan. The Inner Town Belt is valued for its historical, social and cultural importance. The District Plan’s policies, objectives and rules will relate to the management plan. In particular the District Plan proposes to:

16.5.1.2 **Recognise the special status of the Inner Town Belt as public recreation land held in trust by the Council under the Town Belt Deed 1873 and identify that land on the District Plan maps.**

16.5.1.3 **Manage the impacts of activities in the Inner Town Belt in order to protect and preserve its special qualities for the benefit of future generations.**

In addition to policy guidance the District Plan has rules for Town Belt land. The rules allow the Council to exercise control on the type of building and activity that occurs, and this control is exercised by way of the resource consent process. The rules reflect the status of the Town Belt, but have not been reviewed since the District Plan became operative in 2000. A review of all Open Space rules (including the Town Belt/Open Space C rules) is currently programmed as a high priority review in the District Plan work programme. This will provide an opportunity to amend the policies and rules if it is determined they are no longer considered fit for purpose.
The Wellington Town Belt Management Plan will be reviewed at the time of enactment of the Town Belt bill and at least every 15 years after that. Minor reviews may also be required at the time of any Council policy by law review. Note that if there are any inconsistencies between the Management Plan and other Council policies the Management Plan will prevail unless specifically noted otherwise.

Wellington Town Belt Policy Framework

Wellington Town Belt Management Plan

Town Belt Deed 1873

Governance Framework

Reserves Act and other legislation

Regulatory Framework

District Plan - Open Space C, heritage listings etc

Asset Renewal and Upgrade

Asset Management Plans

Wellington 2040

Our Living City programme 2013

Strategic Direction - priorities

Wellington Town Belt Management Plan

Policy Direction and Process

Plans and Policies

Leases policy for community groups 2012 - sets policy and process for granting leases - subject to what is allowed on Town Belt

Public Spaces by law - regulates activities including maintaining public health and safety and protecting the public from nuisance.

Open Space Access Plan 2008 - outlines policy around dual use tracks, which tracks are open and track standards.

Dog Policy 2009 - outlines the rules around dogs on or off leash, areas prohibited for dogs (zoo) and location of dog exercise areas.

Other policies including the Pest Management Plan 2004, Commemorative Policy 2006, Community Garden guidelines, and reserve management plans.
Wellington towards 2040: Smart Capital (2011)
Wellington City Council’s vision for Wellington is focused on the future development of the city over the next 30 years. It builds on Wellington’s current strengths, acknowledges the challenges the city faces now and over the medium to long term, understands the changing role of cities, and is informed by Wellington’s communities. The vision is supported by four community outcomes based on the city’s competitive advantage. These are: eco-city; connected city; people-centred city and dynamic central city. These goals are central to the Council’s Long Term Plan 2012–2022.

Central City Framework (2011)
This is a spatial structure plan that provides overall context, direction for future planning, coordination, prioritisation and assessment of key city projects. The resulting central city open space strategy has 10 key elements, and there are two that specifically relate to the Town Belt:

• **Big space links**: There are large open areas that can play an improved role in the provision of open space in the city. Primarily these are the Town Belt and waterfront. Improving the links to these from the city area – and providing additional amenities within these large open areas – will enable increased use.

• **Cross-valley links**: The greening of city streets with ‘urban forest’ across the valley will enhance urban ecology and reduce the hardness of the city-scape. This will also provide corridors across the valley to join the town belts and enhance accessibility.

Our Capital Spaces – Open Space and Recreation Framework 2013 (in draft)
Our Capital Spaces is a plan for managing and protecting our parks, reserves, sport and recreation activities over the next 10 years. This plan replaces and updates both the Wellington City Council’s Capital Spaces Strategy (1998) and Recreation Strategy (2003).

There will be a range of initiatives that fall under the following outcomes:

• Getting everyone active and healthy
• Protecting our birds, nature, streams and landscapes
• Contributing to Wellington’s outstanding quality of life
• Doing it together.

Biodiversity Action Plan (2007)
The Biodiversity Action Plan coordinates the Council’s biodiversity activities and identifies local priorities and actions for biodiversity. Biodiversity activities include pest control, revegetation planting, and partnerships with other organisations and groups.

The outcomes of the plan include:

• identifying the current state of Wellington’s biodiversity and the areas/species that require the most protection
• protecting Wellington’s indigenous biodiversity on public and private land
• motivating the community to become more involved in biodiversity conservation
• working closely with other organisations to ensure the conservation of Wellington’s biodiversity
• restoring our indigenous biodiversity where possible and ensuring it is easily accessible for all Wellingtonians
• generating quality information through monitoring and research to enable us to conserve and manage our biodiversity into the future.
Open Space Access Plan (2008)
This plan sets out the Council’s strategic vision for tracks in the city’s parks, reserves and open spaces. The plan’s vision is to strengthen and improve the open-space access network by:

- providing outstanding opportunities for recreation and tourism within the open spaces of Wellington
- ensuring tracks provide for a range of user interests, skills, abilities and fitness levels within each area
- achieving a quality primary network accessing major destination points in Wellington and adjoining districts, and linking with an equitable distribution of secondary and local track networks and recreational facilities.

The Outer Green Belt Management Plan ensures the protection of a coherent and essentially natural western ridgeline, and provides for public recreation. The long-term strategy is to provide public access from the south coast to Porirua City and Colonial Knob, and eventually north on the national Te Araroa Walkway. It has the following principles:

- Landscape and landform: To recognise and protect natural landscape and landform characteristics of the ridge system on the western side of the city.
- Indigenous ecosystems and important ecological features: To recognise and protect indigenous ecosystems and important ecological features, and in particular the streams and significant areas of indigenous vegetation from which a more continuous band of vegetation will grow.
- Recreational places and linkages: To identify and protect important existing or potential recreational sites and linkages (entrance points, tracks, routes and destinations).
- Cultural and historic places: To recognise and protect important cultural and historic places and features identified within the Outer Green Belt.
- Urban environment edge: To provide a western edge to the urban environment and a buffer of mainly open lands between the city’s urban areas and the rural areas of Makara and Ohariu valleys.
- Continuity and integrity: To achieve continuity and integrity in the definition and management of the Outer Green Belt.

Leases Policy for Community and Recreation Groups (2012)
The Council provides leases of land and/or buildings at a subsidised rental to a wide range of community and recreation groups (groups). As Council-owned land and buildings are a limited resource, the Council needs to allocate this resource in a way that maximises the use of its assets and responds to changing demands.

The Leases Policy for Community and Recreation Groups (policy) sets out the Council’s role in leasing land and/or buildings to groups and provides guidance on:

- granting leases of land and/or buildings to community and recreation groups
- managing leases relating to the groups
- the standard to which land and/or buildings will be maintained to ensure appropriate asset management.

The objectives of the policy are to:

- ensure maximum community benefit is derived from Council-owned land and buildings
- strengthen participation and engagement in community and recreational activities
• ensure leases are managed fairly, processes are transparent and Council staff have the flexibility to respond to community needs.

The policy notes that the Wellington Town Belt Management Plan will be used by staff to ascertain what activity or structure can be permitted on Town Belt land. In the Council’s capacity as administrator and trustee of Town Belt, it has the responsibility to ensure the land is managed in accordance with the Town Belt Deed and the Reserves Act 1977.

The policy applies to all community and recreation groups that lease Council-owned land and/or buildings.

**Playground Policy (2002)**
This policy defines how the Council will provide playgrounds to the community in an equitable manner, recognising the needs of communities and suburbs and taking into account constraints of topography and funding. The objective of the Playgrounds Policy is therefore:

*The provision of a range of safe, enjoyable and stimulating playgrounds across the city in a way that best meets the needs of children, care-givers, communities and the city for access, safety, amenity and maintenance.*

Working towards this objective will establish an adequate provision of playgrounds in Wellington, as well as ensuring that excessive provision does not occur.

**Climate Change Action Plan (2010)**
This plan identifies cost-effective initiatives for Council operations and the community that will help the Council achieve its carbon neutral vision, and promote sustainable behaviour. The plan is divided into seven action areas: Actions of relevance to the Town Belt:

**Adaptation**
- A1  A vulnerability assessment for the city to the impacts of climate change ($130k OPEX over two years).
- A2  Improve preparation for more frequent extreme weather events.
- A3  Enhance guidance for asset management on climate-change risks.
- A7  Investigate opportunities to ‘green’ the roofs of Council and city facilities and promote tree planting.

**Forestry**
- F2  Investigate the impact of an enhanced pest-management programme in Council forests to increase carbon sequestration.
- F3  Investigate opportunities to develop forest sinks with other councils to meet respective ETS obligations.

**Council operations**
- C4  Develop a policy to manage carbon credits and obligations.
- C5  Investigate development tools that encourage energy efficiency, quality urban design and built environment.

Many of the actions within the 2010 plan have being completed, or are continuing to be actioned. The plan is being reviewed during 2013 to reflect some of the changes to the ETS and government policy, and decisions taken within the Council, such as the Smart Energy Capital initiative. In addition the Council will be developing improved greenhouse gas inventories and projections to track our emissions over time and to ensure that we consider appropriate measures toward achieving our citywide and Council reduction targets.