This outline provides a broad overview of the main events and patterns of change in the story of the Wellington Town Belt. It should be read in conjunction with Appendix 3, which outlines the traditional Māori history of the land that the Town Belt covers, the history of occupation and title to the land from 1839, and the findings of the Waitangi Tribunal.

This outline has been compiled from mainly secondary sources and is by no means a definitive history. For those wishing to find more about the Town Belt’s history, a list of references is included at the end of this outline.

Today’s Town Belt has been shaped by many influences beginning, of course, with the intentions of Wellington’s founders’ and subsequently by such aspects as Wellington’s topography and climate, city growth, changing community needs, changing attitudes and, at times heated, public debate. These influences are reflected in the Wellington Town Belt story, which is told here under the following headings:

1. Origins and governance
2. a public recreation ground
3. a green belt
4. other purposes and pressures on the Town Belt
5. citizen action.

1. Origins and governance: a brief chronology

This section is a brief chronology of the main administrative and statutory events that affected the legal status and governance of the land set aside as Town Belt. (Note: a summary of the main losses and returns of Town Belt land is contained in section 4.)

**Origins of the Town Belt, 1839–1840**

The city of Wellington has its origins in a private colonisation scheme that was run from England by the New Zealand Company. The company envisaged establishing an idealised, class-based society in New Zealand through planned settlements. It would buy land cheaply from the native inhabitants and then resell it to investors at a price sufficient to ensure that a landed elite would be formed, supported by a working class of emigrants who could not yet afford to buy land\(^\text{86}\). Investors in the Wellington settlement were entitled to one town acre and 100 country acres.

In promoting a better life to would-be emigrants, the New Zealand Company described New Zealand as a 'Land of Promise’\(^\text{87}\). In its planned settlements, it made provision for public reserves such as cemeteries and parks, quite possibly influenced by social reformers of the early 19th century who called for green open spaces to counteract the overcrowding and poor living conditions of Britain’s burgeoning industrial cities. So, when the company’s surveyor, Captain William Mein Smith, set sail from England in August 1839, his instructions for laying out a new settlement at Port Nicholson (Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Wellington Harbour) included providing a Town Belt. Company Secretary John Ward wrote:


“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”88.

The objects of the Town Belt, as well as separating the town and country, were, Ward explained in his letter, “... to supply space for recreation and common to the public ...”. He also stated that the company directors “… wish the public convenience to be consulted and the beautiful appearance of the city to be secured ... rather than the immediate profit of the company ...”89.

Following New Zealand Company land purchase negotiations with the Māori of Pito-one and Ngāi-ranga under the Port Nicholson deed of September 1839, the first immigrants arrived in January 1840 and established a settlement called Britannia at Petone, near the mouth of the Hutt River. They soon discovered that the flood-prone site was "quite unfit for a town" so, in March, New Zealand Company representative Colonel Wakefield moved the settlement to the shores of Lambton Harbour, even though the Māori communities of Te Aro, Kumototo and Pipitea, who lived there, had not been party to the earlier land purchases.

Captain Mein Smith finalised the plan for the new settlement of Wellington in August 1840. The extent of the Town Belt was shown and marked as "land around the Town reserved for the enjoyment of the Public and not to be built upon".

**Crown and provincial government, 1841–1873**

In 1841 the Crown assumed ownership of the Town Belt area (approximately 625ha) and proclaimed the land a public reserve. The Waitangi Tribunal later found that the earlier Port Nicholson land purchases had been invalid and the taking of reserves in Wellington prejudicial to Māori (see Appendix 3). Governor Hobson directed that a notice be published in the Government Gazette requiring anyone occupying public or native reserves to vacate those sites, and declaring that "all persons are warned not to clear, fence, cultivate or build in or upon any portion of the belt of reserved land surrounding the town"90.

In 1862, the Town Belt’s management was vested in the newly formed Wellington Town Board91 and an Act92 passed that allowed for carriage roads and footpaths across the Town Belt, the leasing of allotment areas for up to 14 years, and the laying out, planting and enclosure of public areas, including for recreation.

During the period of Crown and provincial government, approximately one-third (193 ha) of the Town Belt area was taken for other purposes including land returned to Māori (see Appendix 3)

**Civic government, 1871–present**

Under the Wellington City Reserves Act 1871, the Superintendent of the Province of Wellington was instructed to convey the Town Belt from the Crown to the City of Wellington (made a borough in 1870). The Act stipulated that one half of revenue derived from the land was to be "devoted to the ornamentation and utilisation of the lands ... and ... the other half ... to the construction and maintenance of roads upon the Town Belt ... connecting the streets of the said city with the country roads". In 1872, before the land was transferred in Trust the Wellington City Reserves Act 1872 authorised the Superintendent to appropriate 21.85 ha (143 acres) of Town Belt in Newtown for education and social welfare purposes (see section four).

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89 Follows
90 New Zealand Government Gazette 1841, P. 80, 16 October 1841. Quoted in Cook, “Background Report 3”.
91 The Board was formed under the Wellington Town Board Act 1862, following the Public Reserves Amendment Act 1862, which enabled the control of public reserves to be transferred or vested to commissioners or other persons, to be held in trust for similar or specified public purposes.
92 Management of City Reserves Act 1862.
Figure 1: Plan of the town of Wellington, Port Nicholson, drawn by Captain William Mein Smith, (Surveyor-General) 1840
(Alexander Turnbull Library, MapColl 832.4799bbl/1840/Acc.316)
What remained of the original Town Belt (approximately 429.5 ha) was transferred to the City of Wellington. The 1873 Deed of conveyance set out the terms upon which the Council, as trustee of the land, was to administer it. In particular, the Council was to hold the land "to be forever hereafter used and appropriated as a public recreation ground for the inhabitants of the City of Wellington ... but without any power ... to alienate or dispose of the same ..." The Deed also allowed Town Belt land to be leased for terms of up to 42 years for "the best and most improved rent ... that may reasonably be had ..." and allowed for all revenue raised from the land to be applied in the same way as that specified in the 1871 Act.

As the city grew, further areas of Town Belt land were taken for roads, education, housing and utility purposes (see section 4). The Town Belt was also gradually developed for recreation and amenity purposes (see sections 2 and 3).

In 1908 the Wellington (City) Town Belt Reserves Act provided the Council with certain statutory powers to lease parts of the Town Belt. These powers were in addition to the Council’s existing powers under the Town Belt Deed. In 1911 the Wellington City Empowering and Amendment Act authorised the Council to charge for admission to sports grounds subject to certain restrictions.

The Town Belt’s management was generally ad hoc until, in 1975, the Council approved the Management Policy: Wellington Town Belt. This was the first policy aimed at consistent management of the Town Belt as a whole. The six-page document was based upon policies that had been adopted over the years for managing the Town Belt.

A more comprehensive management plan was approved by Council in 1994. The two-volume Wellington Town Belt Management Plan 1995 was prepared over several years, including the publication of eight background reports in 1992 (see references).

In 1998, following on from policy in the management plan, the Council approved the Town Belt Reinstatement Policy, which outlined Council’s approach to the recovery and reinstatement of land that had been part of the original Town Belt. Since then about 26.5 ha of original Town Belt land that had been alienated has been returned to the Council (see section 4).

In 2009, the Port Nicholson Block (Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) Claims Settlement Act 2009 came into force, signed by the Crown and the Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust (representing descendants of tupuna of Te Atiawa, Taranaki, Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāti Tama and holding a kaitiaki role for Ngāti Mutunga). This settlement gave Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust (PNBST) first right of refusal on some of the remaining identified sections of former Town Belt still held by the Crown (see Appendix 3 also).

In August 2010, a Memorandum of Understanding between PNBST and the Council was agreed, in which mana whenua indicated their wish to be more involved in the Town Belt’s future management.

2. Public recreation ground

The idea of setting aside open recreational space for the benefit of all citizens was a new concept in 1840. There was little precedent in Britain, where urban parklands had until then been mainly the private domain of the wealthy. What uses, then, and what kind of public benefit would be appropriate for Wellington’s Town Belt?

To begin with, it appears that many of the settlers saw the Town Belt as little more than a resource for firewood, building timber, quarrying and grazing (see section 4). By the 1870s, however, with Wellington a well-established town of 7000, the townspeople started to think about the leisure and

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93 Under the Town Belt and Basin Reserve Act 1873 (which implemented the 1871 Act).
94 The 26.5ha includes the recent return, in 2012, of a further 4.5 ha of Telecom land.
aesthetic possibilities of the “recreation ground” held on their behalf under the 1873 Town Belt Deed.

**Amenity (public park) areas**

The Botanic Garden, (part of the original Town Belt in 1840) which had been established in 1852 and extended to include former Town Belt land in 1865 was one of the few places popular with Wellingtonians for outings and picnics. The shelter and ornamental plantings there gave hope that even the Town Belt – bare and windswept though it was at the time – might be beautified with suitable planting and parkland development.

So it was that alongside the massive planting schemes and sports ground development that transformed much of the Town Belt over the next century, some parts were also developed simply as pleasant places for the public to enjoy.

Newtown Park is an early example. Sheltered by some of the earliest plantings on the Town Belt, it was used in the 1880s and 1890s for picnics and children’s play equipment as well as sports activities. By 1924, it also boasted a band rotunda and a tea kiosk.

The development of Central Park, partially a former tip site, was spurred by community initiative. The Scenery Preservation Society instigated tree planting in 1907 and, in 1913, the Citizens Easter Carnival Association raised funds that spurred the development, by 1915, of a park that boasted an ornamental lake, a rock garden, a children’s playground and pathways. In later years, donated ornamental gates and a drinking fountain were added, as well as a band rotunda shifted from Oriental Bay.

Other such developments included the Queen’s Park gardens developed in Thorndon to honour Queen Victoria’s jubilee in 1897, the children’s playground at Pirie Street Reserve in the 1920s, the Mt Victoria Centennial Lookout in 1940 (not original Town Belt), the illuminated fountain (ex-Wellington Centennial Exhibition) at Kelburn Park in 1956 and the Byrd Memorial on Mt Victoria/Matairangi in 1962.

In more recent years, the Vice Regal Playground was developed on former Government House land returned in 1980 for inclusion back into the Town Belt. The Mt Victoria Lookout was redeveloped in 2008 to better cater for increasing numbers of summit visitors, Central Park was refurbished in 2009 with a Plimmer Trust grant and the Te Ahumairangi Hill Lookout developed in 2010.

**Sports facilities**

Organised sports began growing in popularity from around the 1870s and with it the demand for suitable venues. Newtown Park was opened in 1881, the first of many Town Belt sports grounds to
be developed over the following century. These developments required significant landscape modification to create the flat land required; hillsides were carved out and gullies filled to create such hard-won platforms as Kelburn and Hataitai parks.

Figure 3: Newtown Park, 1890s. Some of the earliest plantings on the Town Belt were already providing welcome shelter and visual amenity.
(S C Smith Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library F- 152785-1/2)

Figure 4: Hataitai Park under construction in 1932. Relief labour dug out banks and moved spoil in metal bins on rails. Spoil from the Mount Victoria tunnel was also used to form the park.
(Evening Post Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library G- 2478-1/2 -EP)

Demand also developed for specialised sports grounds. In 1915, the Council opened the Municipal Golf Links which, after expansion in 1919, spanned Adelaide Road, adding to the challenges the steep topography already offered to golfers. Lawn tennis, bowls and croquet facilities were more controversial, however, because they involved fencing off areas to protect playing surfaces and were often associated with private clubs.

Community concern about restricting public access on the Town Belt was triggered (see section 5). Amid considerable controversy, an Act \(^{95}\) was nevertheless passed in 1908, which allowed the Council to lease out up to 100 acres of Town Belt to sports clubs. A number of private sports club leases for specialised playing surfaces followed during the 1910s and, subsequently, leases have been taken out for a wide range of uses – some for club rooms associated with outdoor sports activities, others for indoor sports venues such as badminton, small bore shooting, tennis and fencing.

Sports ground development remained a major focus of expenditure on the Town Belt through to the 1970s. After the Second World War, there was a big push to provide sports facilities for returned servicemen and then for their baby boom offspring. At the same time, the demand for

\(^{95}\) Wellington (City) Town Belt Reserves Act 1908
building leases grew, prompting the Council to decide, in 1966, that only buildings connected with active recreation should be allowed. By the 1970s, questions started to be asked about the amount of sports-related development on the Town Belt. The 1975 Town Belt Management Policy referred to the “considerable argument for the retention of the Town Belt solely for passive recreation”. It stated that playing fields and other facilities would still be provided for a range of recreational pursuits, but indicated that they needed to be appropriate to the area and not able to be provided elsewhere. By the early 1990s, when the public was consulted about the balance of active and passive recreation on the Town Belt, the majority view held that enough land had been developed for organised sport.

The completion of Rugby League Park in 1979 saw the end of the major new sports grounds. However, rising expectations of sports facility standards, together with increasing use and the desire to host national and international sporting events, saw major upgrades subsequently undertaken in recent decades – at Newtown Park, Rugby League Park and the National Hockey Stadium as well as the recent installation of two artificial sportsfields at Wakefield Park and Te Whaea to provide all-weather playing surfaces.

Competitive sporting activities that have been based on the Town Belt: athletics, badminton, basketball, bowls, croquet, cricket, cycling (velodrome), fencing, football (soccer), golf, harriers, hockey, marching, mountain biking, mountain running, netball, orienteering, rugby, rugby league, smallbore shooting, softball, squash, table tennis, tennis.

Track network
In 1949, the Director of Parks and Reserves recommended that the whole of the Town Belt be “suitably roaded” for fire access and general maintenance. Although he mentioned the added benefit of providing public walking access, it was not until the 1970s that a more deliberate approach to walking tracks was adopted. Walking as a leisure activity was growing in popularity at this time, as reflected in the passing of the New Zealand Walkways Act in 1975.

The Council decided to incorporate walkways within Wellington’s parks and reserves, and set about improving tracks, signs and information. In 1973 the community group, Action for Environment, suggested developing a continuous scenic walking track along the length of the Town Belt, a concept that broadly came to fruition with the development of the Northern Walkway in 1973, the Southern Walkway in 1979, and the City to Sea Walkway in 1998.

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97 WCCF 1905:50/830 Pt 4, Town Belt, (general file, Deed 88), WCA.
98 WCCF 00004:82/5/1 Pt 1, Town Belt, General – 1947-1965, WCA.
99 WCCF 00001:1905:50/830 Pt 3, Town Belt (general file), (Deed 188); 1970-1974, WCA.
100 WCCF 00004:82/5/1 Pt 3, Town Belt, General – 1973-75, WCA.
102 WCCF 2005/21:4/7 Southern Walkway, circa 1986, WCA.
In the 1990s, mountain biking on Town Belt and other reserves became popular. Conflict between bikers and walkers led the Council, after consultation, to designate certain tracks for mountain bike use while keeping others clear for walkers. A new trend in recent years has been the use of the Town Belt’s track network for national and international mountain biking and mountain running championships.

### The Wellington Botanic Garden

The Botanic Garden was established on approximately 12 acres of land along Glenmore Street, reserve for the purpose in 1852. The Garden was further extended with the addition of former Town Belt land that the City had repurchased from the Wesleyan Missions in 1865 and the combined area of approximately 68 acres was formalised as the Botanic Garden of Wellington under the Wellington Botanic Garden Act 1869. The Garden was governed by a board comprising the governors of the New Zealand Institute (later the Royal Society) until the board was dissolved in 1891 and control returned to the Wellington City Corporation³⁰³.

Early experimental planting of introduced species importantly demonstrated which species were suited to local conditions. It was from these plantings that the conifers used to reforest the Town Belt in succeeding decades were sourced.

The Botanic Garden soon became popular with Wellington’s citizens for outings and picnics, providing welcome relief from the bare, exposed township. The garden showed what could be achieved by planting quick-growing species, tough enough to withstand Wellington’s rigorous environment.

From its earliest beginnings, the garden was managed separately for its specialised purpose. Since 2002 it has operated under a management plan for the combined areas of the Botanic Garden, Anderson Park and the Bolton Street Memorial Park.

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³⁰³ Wellington Botanic Garden Vesting Act 1891
The Wellington Zoological Gardens

Wellington’s zoological gardens were New Zealand’s first, established in 1906, on Town Belt land when a lion was gifted to the city. This gift coincided with a residents’ petition to the Council to establish a zoo. An existing reservoir at Newtown Park, together with adjoining land, was fenced off, cages erected and a menagerie at the Botanic Garden shifted to the new site. By 1912, when an entry charge was first introduced, more than 500 animals had been acquired. Interestingly, the zoo’s enclosure and admission charges did not attract the same level of opposition that ignited over leasing Town Belt to sports groups; perhaps because the zoo was perceived as a public facility available to all, even if not free of charge.

The zoo’s development focused, for many years, on providing visitor entertainment such as elephant rides, chimpanzee tea parties and miniature railway rides. Since the mid-1980s, however, the emphasis has changed to animal welfare, species conservation programmes and visitor education.

The Wellington Zoo Trust was formed in 2003 to take over the zoo’s day-to-day management on behalf of the Council.

3. A green belt

Now you see it, now it's gone
When the English settlers arrived in Wellington in 1840, Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill) and the inland parts of Kelburn and the Brooklyn hills were, according to early descriptions and illustrations, covered in verdant podocarp and broadleaf forest. Charles Heaphy recalled seeing “high manuka, some of the trees forty feet high” growing along The Terrace when he visited in
1839, and noted “the rata, with its crimson flowers, being conspicuous” on Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill). Kanuka shrubland and fern covered the Mt Victoria ridge (Te Ranga a Hiwi) and there were clearings used for Māori cultivation (see Appendix 3).

In 1843, Colonel Wakefield, of the New Zealand Company, in a letter protesting against the Borough of Wellington’s intention to lease out Town Belt land, declared the forest to be “one of the greatest ornaments of the Town.”

Despite government prohibitions against bush clearance, however, the Town Belt had by the 1870s been cleared of forest, converted to pasture with large areas leased out for grazing.

The result was a backdrop of bare, windswept hills around a largely treeless settlement. Wellington was, according to the 1897 Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, the “ugliest ... in the colony.”

The first re-greening

By the 1880s, with Wellington well established and now run by a locally based civic government, Wellington’s citizens began to clamour for beautification planting.

Provision had been made in 1871, that when the Town Belt was transferred to the Council, half the revenue derived from the land would be used for its “ornamentation and utilisation”. But no significant planting occurred on the Town Belt until 1880. This may have been partly due to the difficulty of getting trees to grow on Wellington’s exposed hillsides. Fortunately, experimental planting at the Botanic Garden during the 1870s demonstrated the suitability of certain introduced species. The garden donated around 600 surplus conifers to the Wellington Lunatic Asylum in 1872 and to Wellington College in 1873. The resulting plantations, although both on alienated land, were the earliest examples of deliberate tree planting on what was originally Town Belt. They showed what could be done and were distinctive landmarks in the Wellington landscape for decades.

In 1880, the Council undertook the first large scale planting on Town Belt land – at Newtown Park and the Pirie/Ellice streets area on the slopes of Mt Victoria. Planting slowed during the recession of the 1880s and 1890s but, by 1900, further plantations had been established in the Hutchison Road, Queens Park, Victoria Park and Nairn Street Reserve areas.

Figure 9: Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill), with native forest partly cleared, 1863.
(Ferguson Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, PA7-09-02)

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106 The Cyclopedia of New Zealand, (Wellington: Cyclopaedia Co, 1897).
The plantation years
Public agitation for planting continued. The Scenery Preservation Society was formed in the mid-1890s and undertook a number of self-funded reserve planting projects, including Town Belt sites, over the following decade. In 1906, an editorial in the *New Zealand Mail* \(^{107}\) deplored the Council’s expenditure on bedding plants in preference to trees and, in 1910, the *Evening Post* suggested fundraising “to buy some decent covering for the Cinderella of the Town Belt”\(^{108}\).

Mass planting resumed again in the early 1900s and continued into the 1930s. Relief labour employed under central government and Council unemployment relief schemes greatly assisted the completion of the major plantations by 1940.

During this period, Council reorganisation in 1913 saw the setting up of a Forestry Department. It was soon absorbed into the new Parks and Reserves Department, set up in 1918 to, among other things, apply a more comprehensive style of management to the Council’s reserves, with better integration of recreational and scenic objectives.

During the 1920s and 1930s there were calls for the plantations to be methodically planned for potential commercial harvest\(^{110}\). Although the Parks Department did plan planting configurations these were designed to withstand wind and provide shelter for young planting rather than quality timber. In reality, plantings were often haphazard, according to what land became available as grazing leases ended. Little, if any, silvicultural work was carried out.

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\(^{108}\) *Evening Post*, 14 March 1910, 6.


\(^{110}\) Follows, 26.
Figure 11:
Mt Victoria/
Matairangi, early
1990s; eucalyptus
among the darker
conifer plantings are
evidence of the
mixed plantings
started in the early
20th century.
(Neil Price, City
Photographer)

Post-war beautification
During the 1940s and 1950s the success of the mass plantings started to have a public backlash.
People complained about the sombre character of the conifers, the sunless forest environments and
the views impeded by the maturing trees. This was an era of amenity horticulture when seasonal
displays and colourful plantings were popular. The Wellington Beautifying Society, among others,
called for the ‘drab pines’\textsuperscript{111} to be replaced with more ornamental species.

In 1952 the Director of Parks & Reserves, E. Hutt, reported that, “... the policy of planting pines on
the Town Belt has been discontinued. The use of native trees will predominate in the planting
schemes of the future, and with this in view huge quantities of suitable native trees are being raised
in the municipal nurseries. Other trees ... will be planted in fairly large groups and drifts to provide
colour”\textsuperscript{112}.

Under the resulting propagation programme a wide variety of native and exotic species were
produced, including deciduous trees, flowering gums, wattles, pohutukawa and kowhai for their
seasonal displays.

Large numbers of these species were planted on the Town Belt during the 1950s and 1960s – yet
few remain today. Some of the eucalypts and native trees can still be seen behind Macalister Park
and the Wellington Show Buildings, but many plantings disappeared. This can largely be attributed
to inadequate follow-up maintenance which, in part at least, was due to the post-war labour
shortage. It was difficult to find workers, let alone those with the necessary skills. Without
maintenance, the seedlings were often out-competed by the gorse (a rampant legacy of the 19th
century farm hedging) or inadvertently destroyed by gorse cutting gangs\textsuperscript{113} or incinerated in the
gorse-fuelled fires that for many years flared in the summer months.

As fires became less frequent, it was realised that gorse, if left to mature, provided a good nurse
cover for native vegetation to naturally regenerate. Gradually, over a period of 15–20 years, the
ageing gorse would open up, allowing the regenerating native plants to overtop and suppress the
gorse canopy. This process has seen many of Wellington’s once gorse-infested hillsides return to
native vegetation cover.

\textsuperscript{112} WCCF 00001:1905:50/830 Pt 2, Town Belt (general file), (Deed 188), 1935-1970, WCA.
\textsuperscript{113} Cook, “Background Report,” 50.
The new balance – indigenous and exotic
This changing perception of gorse, together with increased community appreciation of native vegetation, matched the emergence in the 1970s of environmentalism and ecological consciousness. Native vegetation was seen increasingly as a fast-disappearing resource and a symbol of New Zealand identity that should be conserved. By the 1980s, citizens were urging the Council not to clear gorse on the Town Belt, while at the same time recommending more native tree planting.

The 1990s and 2000s saw ‘sustainability’ and ‘biodiversity’ become increasingly mainstream vocabulary in both public consciousness and central government/Council policy. In 1989, the Council launched ‘Campaign 2000’, a 10-year campaign towards achieving ‘a sustainable Wellington ecology’ that included plans for a major citywide tree planting programme. In 2000, the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy was released and in 2007 the Council published its Biodiversity Action Plan, in which the restoration of native forest on areas of the Town Belt featured as part of the citywide strategy.

As already mentioned, Parks Directors, McKenzie and Hutt, had advocated planting native species since the 1920s, although implementation had been ad hoc. When the first management policy document specific to the Town Belt was approved in 1975, a similar approach was adopted; to use native species wherever possible while continuing to use exotic species “for practical reasons”.

The 1995 management plan took this a step further, specifying an overall objective of changing the vegetation balance from the existing 20 percent native cover to 60 percent over a 50 to 100-year period. The existing vegetation, including grassland and shrub land, had been surveyed and mapped in detail in the plan’s preparation and maps of the proposed new balance were included in the plan.

Planting solely with native species was not advocated, however. Some replacement conifer planting was recommended for difficult sites or to perpetuate landmark features. The public had generally favoured increasing the proportion of native vegetation but wanted to see areas of mixed plantings and conifers retained for their amenity and heritage value. The Town Belt’s conifers – dark, forbidding and needing topping as some perceived them – were regarded by others as part of Wellington’s character and an important historic link back to the early plantings derived from the Botanic Garden. This latter attitude was reflected in periodic protests when conifers have been removed for safety reasons.

During the 1990s and 2000s, the ageing condition of the conifer plantations became an issue as the risk of tree falls increased. A risk assessment was carried out and a plan adopted to progressively remove the most hazardous trees. Where access was difficult on steep slopes above vulnerable housing, helicopter extraction was the only option, despite the cost, and this attracted much public and media attention. The vulnerable state of the old plantations was graphically illustrated in 2004 when a storm brought down many of the ageing conifers, particularly on Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill).

![Figure 12: Storm damage among the ageing conifers, Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill), 2005.](Wellington City Council)
Compared to the largely failed plantings of the 1950s and 1960s, the revegetation planting of the last two or three decades has been more successful. Knowledge of revegetation techniques and native forest succession has developed nationally and the need for follow-up maintenance is now routinely recognised in budget planning. Planting has also increasingly focused on the use of eco-sourced native plants that occur naturally in Wellington.

Among the wide range of native species that were previously planted, karo, which is not natural to Wellington has become a pest plant particularly along the city’s coastal escarpments. Much of the Town Belt vegetation management is now focused on weed and pest control, enrichment planting to diversify the range of forest species and planting to attract the now proliferating native bird population.

The value of green space
Among the New Zealand Company’s motivations for creating town belts around its colonial settlements was the idea of creating green open space that would be the ‘lungs of the city’, as promoted by the Garden City Movement of the 19th century. The Town Belt’s 170-year history to date has seen the progressive realisation of that concept, following the initial setback when the land was cleared. The Town Belt plan 1840 along with the 1837 Adelaide plan are recognised as historic examples of the town Belt/green Belt concept in town planning.

Walter Cook commented in his history of the Town Belt, that attempts to take Town Belt land for other purposes have often been based upon a perception of it being a useless and unsightly wasteland. He suggested that counteracting arguments have sought to show that the land is, on the contrary, being well utilised or improved. The early plantation plantings were justified in this way114. Now, in the 21st century, open space advocates point to research which supports the concept that green open space does indeed act as the lungs of a city in terms of environmental servicing, as well as benefiting people’s wellbeing115.

4. Other purposes and pressures on the Town Belt

Over its 170-year history, Town Belt land has been used and developed for purposes other than public recreation and scenic amenity. Some of those uses have been controversial; some have resulted in land being alienated; others are no longer considered suitable.

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**Resource use**

To many of the early settlers, the Town Belt was a source of easily accessible building timber, firewood and grazing land that they needed in order to survive in an environment that was much less hospitable than they had expected. Although cutting timber and firewood on reserves was prohibited as early as 1841, and a number of prosecutions followed, most of the Town Belt had been cleared of native forest and converted to pasture by the early 1860s. The area grazed gradually decreased as reforestation progressed after 1880, but some grazing for the town milk supply persisted into the 1920s and horse grazing into the 1980s.

In the early days, when transporting bulky goods any distance was an arduous task, several quarries on the Town Belt supplied stone until, in 1880, the City Surveyor was instructed to close them\(^{116}\). In 1906 a Mr Thomas gained permission to extract gravel from above Grant Road, where the resulting 40 metre tunnel is still visible today. Clay was also a valuable resource on the Town Belt. Applications to erect brickworks on Town Belt land in the 19th and early 20th centuries were turned down although some clay extraction was permitted. The removal of clay from the Nairn Street Reserve in 1895 and from an area near Lavaud Street in 1919 both contributed to the levelling of land for sports and children’s play use\(^ {117}\).

The Town Belt even briefly hosted a gold mining operation in Polhill Gully during 1869. A small quantity of alluvial gold was found.

**Social welfare, education and housing**

As the settlement grew, so did the need to provide for social welfare and educational needs. By 1873, under provincial and central government, substantial areas of the Town Belt had been granted for hospitals, care of the aged and orphaned, and educational institutions. To the governments of the day, the Town Belt provided cheap land conveniently close to the town for accommodating public services. At the time, there was apparently little protest but community attitudes changed as people started to recognise the Town Belt’s potential for public recreation and amenity.

A home for the aged and destitute proposed on Town Belt land in 1882 was abandoned in the face of community protests (even so, the Home for the Aged and Needy built in 1888 was located on former Town Belt land that had been taken in 1872). Citizens also opposed a plague hospital built on the Town Belt near Liardet Street in 1900. The matter went to the Supreme Court and although the Court found in favour of the hospital it was in the context of an exceptional emergency situation and subject to a three-year lease\(^ {118}\). Further amounts of land were taken well into the 20th century for Victoria College (later University) and for rehousing residents displaced by airport development, despite decreasing community tolerance of such alienations.

In the years following the Second World War, continuing into the 1970s and 80s, the Town Belt came under repeated pressure from private interests as well as government to be used for housing development. Some proposals were for welfare housing such as pensioner flats; others called for the land to be made available for private development. In 1944, the Council itself quashed a motion from two councillors to allow, via legislation, long-term leasing and sale of Town Belt land for housing. A decade later in 1952, however, nearly 4 hectares were taken from the Crawford Road area of the Town Belt to rehouse Rongotai residents displaced by the airport development. The land was exchanged for 4.5 hectares of flat land at Cobham Drive, of which most was later transferred to St Patrick’s College in a deal negotiated over motorway development.

Pre-school care and education was another activity that raised questions about appropriate Town Belt use. In the post-war years, kindergartens and play centres found it difficult to find affordable accommodation and applied on a number occasions to lease land on the Town Belt and other reserves, successfully in some instances. With applications increasing for buildings of all sorts on

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reserves lands, the Council made a policy decision in 1966 that no further land would be made available for pre-school education although play centres were permitted to operate from existing buildings if they did not interfere with sporting activities. Youth activities such as boy scouts and girl guides were deemed acceptable. In 2008, feelings ran high when controversy flared over whether or not a crèche was a suitable activity on the Town Belt. The Council eventually decided against allowing it.

**Public works and utility**

Another purpose for which Town Belt land has been used – and often alienated – has been for the city’s infrastructure both above and below ground. The New Zealand Company’s instructions about the use of the Town Belt were not explicit on this aspect of the planned settlement but by the time the Town Belt was transferred to the Council in 1873, the Town Belt Deed included ‘public utility’ as well as recreation as a stated purpose.

In any event, infrastructure for the growing town was needed.

Roads were needed to connect the town with the country acres and then to enable suburban growth as the city expanded. Construction of such connections was authorised in the Wellington City Reserves Act passed in 1871\(^{119}\), and the major roads were completed between the 1870s and 1930s, aided in some instances by the pick and shovel efforts of relief labour employed in recessionary times. Several tramlines were also developed in the early 1900s across the Town Belt to Wadestown, Kilbirnie, Brooklyn and Island Bay. The public transport network was an important prerequisite to the city’s expansion in the days before car ownership became the norm.

Connections that had less impact on the Town Belt’s open space were the tunnels: the Hataitai/Kilbirnie tram tunnel of 1907 and the Mt Victoria traffic and pedestrian tunnel of 1931. Less well-known are the underground service tunnels, such as the drainage and sewerage tunnel built in the 1890s beneath the Mt Victoria ridge (Te Ranga a Hiwi). A brick ventilation tower beside the Harrier Club building on Alexandra Road still remains today.

In 1879, the holding reservoir in Polhill Gully, which received water from the Karori Reservoir via a tunnel, was described as the only source of water for the city. The Town Belt, with its high ground above the town was an obvious location for water reservoirs in order to achieve good water pressure.

During the 1880s, some 10 reservoirs, pumping stations or smaller holding tanks were constructed at various locations around the Town Belt. When, in the 1990s and 2000s, new or redeveloped water reservoirs were constructed on Town Belt at Macalister Park, Weld Street and Mt Albert Road, efforts were made to meet community demands to preserve the Town Belt’s open space and visual amenity by installing them as far as possible underground.

The Town Belt’s hill tops were also ideal locations for communications. A signal station operated on Mt Albert from 1844 to 1866 and a repeater station on Mt Victoria from 1866 to 1891.

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\(^{119}\) Wellington City Reserves Act 1871

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**Figure 14: View of Mt Victoria over Oriental Bay, 1965.**

The summit area typifies the pressure of use on the Town Belt’s high points. Pictured are radio masts and the broadcasting station above the new road works cut to construct Lookout Road and complete the ridgetop scenic drive along Alexandra Road. Interestingly, there was little protest at the time about the visual impact of this roading development.

(Whites Aviation Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library WA-65323)
Other communications uses have included a time cannon on the Mt Victoria summit, the broadcasting station (popularly known as ‘the castle’) and radio masts installed on the Mt Victoria summit in 1927 (not original Town Belt), and the New Zealand Post wireless transmitting station that operated on Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill) from 1912 to 1933.

Other infrastructure/public works for which Town Belt land has been taken include the substation opposite Central Park and the fire station in Newtown.

**Military uses**

![Figure 15: US Marine Corps camp entrance at Central Park, ca 1940.](Wellington City Council Archive. Ref:00155:0:121)

Areas of Town Belt land have been used periodically for military or civilian war effort activities.

Newtown Park was used for a military camp for Boer War contingents from 1899–1901, a parade ground during the Second World War and a military camp again during the Second World War. Polhill Gully was used for defence purposes in 1926 and as a rifle range for training territorial regiments during the 1940s.

During the Second World War, the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps had a camp of army huts on Mt Victoria and an artisans’ camp was established at Hataitai Park. Gun emplacements were constructed on Te Ahumairangi Hill and Mt Victoria during the Second World War, which were eventually demolished in 1969 and 1970 respectively. Nairn Street Park was also made available for military purposes and the HQ Battalion, 2nd Marine Division of the United States Marine Corps was accommodated at a camp in Central Park.

In 1943 the Council resolved to make more allotments available on the Town Belt for growing vegetables, in support of the wartime ‘Dig for Victory’ campaign, which aimed to increase vegetable supplies for civilian use. The extra allotments were to supplement the 200 that already existed on the Town Belt and were made available for 2/- per annum.\(^{120}\)

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\(^{120}\) Minutes of Wellington City Council Reserves Public Gardens Baths and Beaches Committee, 22 June 1943, WCA.
Land lost
Although legislation has always been required to take land out of the Town Belt, more than one-third of the original Town Belt had been taken by the time the remaining land was transferred to the Wellington City Council in 1873, as Table 1 shows. A vocal ‘hands off the Town Belt’ community lobby (see section 5) developed in response to the alienations, which continued well into the 20th century, albeit of smaller areas.

Table 1: Area of Wellington Town Belt, 1841–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Governance milestones</th>
<th>Approx Town Belt area</th>
<th>% of original area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Reserved by the Crown[121]</td>
<td>625 ha</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Granted to the Superintendent of Wellington [122]</td>
<td>500 ha</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Conveyed to Wellington City Council [123]</td>
<td>429.5 ha</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Town Belt Management Plan (only 387.5ha legally subject to the 1873 Deed)[124]</td>
<td>424.5 ha</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Managed as Town Belt by Wellington City Council (only 389.68 ha legally subject to the 1873 Deed)</td>
<td>520.0178 ha</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A brief summary of the major areas or representative types of alienation follows, but does not include the roading appropriations as these occurred in a complex succession of proclamations, including various widening and extensions of the original road alignments. Some areas are still being used for the same or similar purposes they were taken for but other areas ended up in different public uses or in private ownership.

‘Native Reserves’, Tinakore (North and South), Moera, Orangikaupapa, Kumutoto and Omaroro, 1847: a number of areas totalling 88.6ha (219 acres) in the Te Ahumairangi Hill, Kelburn, Polhill Gully, Brooklyn and Vogeltown areas of the Town Belt were assigned to Pipitea, Kumutoto and Te Aro Māori in partial compensation for land taken by the Crown (see Appendix 3).

The Wesleyan Reserve, Kelburn, 1852: this area of approximately 45ha (111 acres) was granted to the Wesleyan Mission for ‘education and religious purposes’, including an orphanage and hospital. Part of this land was later repurchased and became part of the Botanic Garden; the rest was eventually sold as residential sections or claimed for roads.

Education and social welfare purposes, Newtown: 1872: this largest single appropriation (57.9ha or 143 acres) was originally taken for a collegiate institution and lunatic asylum and has subsequently accommodated a range of uses including: Wellington College (1874–present); Wellington East Girls’ College (1925–present); the Mount View Mental Asylum (1875–1909); Government House in the converted mental asylum building (1910–present); Wellington Hospital (1882–present); Home for the Aged Needy (1888) which later became the Ewart Hospital and is now used for the Parkview Clinic; the Fever Hospital for infectious diseases (1919), later used as a Chest Hospital for tuberculosis patients (until 1981) and then used by the Wellington Polytechnic School of Music (1988–1995), before the site was returned to the Council in 2002.

Signal station, Mt Victoria, 1872: the signal station operated from 1866 to 1940; the 2ha (5 acre) area was reacquired from the Wellington Harbour Board in 1956 as a pleasure ground[125].

Government Observatory, Kelburn, 1891: this area of 2.4 ha (6 acres) is now the site of the present Meteorological Service office.

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[122] Area of 1,234 acres, 2 roods & 18 perches recorded in Management of City Reserves Act 1862.
[123] Area of 1,061 acres, one rood and two perches as per Town Belt and Basin Reserve Deed, 20 March 1873.
Figure 16: Aerial view taken in 1934 of the large area appropriated in 1872 for educational and hospital purposes. Wellington East Girls College and Wellington College are seen beyond the Basin Reserve (foreground), Government House among plantings (centre right) and Wellington Hospital beyond the plantings. (Evening Post Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, F-122291-1/2 detail)

**Victoria College (University), Kelburn, 1901 & 1949:** 2.4ha (6 acres) were first granted in 1901 and then a further 5.4ha (13.25 acres) in 1949, in exchange for land at Glenside and Miramar. The land received in exchange was used respectively for reserve and housing purposes.

**Tramways sheds and the Newtown Fire Station, 1912:** the tramway depot closed in 1964. The 1.3 ha site is now used for the fire station and Newtown Park Housing Units, constructed in 1970.

**Wireless transmitting station, Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill) 1912:** 24.3ha (60 acres) of Town Belt, formerly granted as a Māori Reserve (see Appendix 3), was granted to the New Zealand Post Office and later passed to Telecom. The transmitting station closed in 1993 and most of the land returned to the Council in 1998. Additional land was reacquired by the Council in 2012.

**Fire station, Newtown, 1916 & 1929:** approximately 0.25 ha was proclaimed for use as a fire station and transferred to the Wellington Fire Board. The site was later acquired by the Wellington City Mission for the Hadfield House rest home, which was sold in the 1990s. The land is now occupied by the Mt Victoria Lifecare Rest Home.

**Substation, Brooklyn, 1941 & 1962:** 0.28ha beside Nairn Street was appropriated for a New Zealand Electricity Department substation, which became operational in 1945.

**Compensation housing, Newtown, 1952:** approximately 3.6ha (9 acres) near Crawford Road was taken for rehousing residents displaced by the Rongotai Airport development.
Wellington Showgrounds, Mt Cook, 1959: under the Wellington City Exhibition Grounds Act 1959, the Wellington City Corporation was authorised to grant the Wellington Show Association a 21-year lease with perpetual right of renewal over approximately 5.6ha (13 acres) of the Town Belt for use as an exhibition site. The terms of the 1873 vesting Deed were suspended in relation to the site for as long as this Act or a related lease remained in force.

Land regained
Before the 1970s, a few areas of Town Belt land had come back to the Council, being mainly the result of administrative ‘tidy ups’ of land left over from roading and similar work, but also including the addition of about 0.2 ha (½ acre) to Tanera Park in 1943 and 6.4719 ha (15 acres, 2 roods, 24 perches) in 1964, when former Town Belt land on Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill), which had been granted as Māori Reserve and then passed into private hands, was gifted back by the owner, James Stellin in memory of his war hero son James Stellin, who died in France in 1944. The gifted land is now Stellin Memorial Park.

In 1973 Action for Environment wrote to the Council suggesting that a new policy be adopted, under which the Town Belt would be given special status “as more sacrosanct than other reserves” and that former Town Belt land should be returned. These proposals were, in essence, adopted in the Council’s first Town Belt Management Policy in 1975.

The Council acknowledged that the “continued existence of the Town Belt despite increasing demands on the land for other uses from many different agencies is vitally important to Wellington City.” It set out to establish existing boundaries, and to obtain Town Belt land that had been alienated “to gain a Town Belt more resembling the original land area.” The policy also stated that if any Town Belt land were to be taken for other uses, then the Council would seek land of equal value, which would be given the same Town Belt status.

In 1983, when Action for the Environment investigated and found that some of the land taken for the Rongotai housing relocations in 1952 remained undeveloped, the Council of the day decided not to buy it back for reinstatement in the Town Belt. However, in June 1980, an area named the Vice-Regal Play Area, on the upper part of Government House land adjoining the Ewart Hospital, was handed back to the city and planted as part of Arbor Day activities. Return of other land, was slower to occur, complicated by the creation of State-owned enterprises that were reluctant to let inherited – and valuable – former Town Belt land go, even if no longer used for the purposes taken. Furthermore, the status of Town Belt land in relation to the Wellington Treaty Claim was being considered by the Waitangi Tribunal.

While return of legally alienated land was one issue, so too, was the use of Town Belt land by neighbouring property owners. In 1988, the Council set about inspecting the Town Belt boundaries. An up-to-date register of all encroachments was compiled; some formalised under licence, others informal and historic in nature. Collectively, more than 2ha of Town Belt land was found to be in use for private purposes.

The 1995 Management Plan introduced policies to systematically address the encroachments. It also reiterated the 1975 policy to seek the return of alienated former Town Belt land where possible, with the intention of introducing a Bill to Parliament “to regularise the legal status and unite the lands managed as Town Belt.” The Council developed its intentions in more detail in the Town Belt Reinstatement Policy, 1998 and undertook preparatory work on a Bill.

In 2000, 18.63ha of the land held by Telecom on Te Ahumairangi Hill (formerly Tinakori Hill) was returned to the Council; in 2002, the 3.21 ha Chest Hospital site was returned; and, in 2012, a further 4.7 ha of Telecom (now Chorus) land was returned.

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126 WCCF00001: 1147:31/433, Pt 1 Reserve: Stellin Memorial Park, Orangi Kaupapa Road, WCA.
127 WCCF 00001:1905:50/830 Pt 3, Town Belt (general file), (Deed 188), 1970–1974, WCA
129 WCCF. 00001:1905:50.830 Pt 4, Town Belt (general file), (Deed 188), 1974–1983, WCA
5. Citizen action

The Town Belt has attracted ardent citizen involvement over its history. A ‘hands off the Town Belt’ lobby has regularly spoken out against the misuse and shrinking of the Town Belt, positioning itself as the defender of a threatened public good. Many of the same groups and individuals have put their energies into practical ‘hands-on’ beautification projects.

Community advocacy for the Town Belt started as early as 1842 with letters to the editor and developed around the early 1880s, perhaps spurred by the realisation of what had been already lost – the Town Belt was already substantially diminished and denuded when it was transferred to the Council in 1873. Perhaps, too, citizens felt more able to influence Town Belt management once it was in local government hands.

Several groups, in particular, have featured as Town Belt advocates:

In the mid-1890s, the Scenery Preservation Society was formed to beautify the city. It carried out a number of reserve planting projects, including several on the Town Belt, raising money to fund the plant purchases and to employ a gardener to look after the plantings.

There were individuals who also worked to prevent development and loss of the Town Belt. William Tonks, a Wellington businessman (1837-1916), was opposed to any encroachment onto the Town Belt or leasing parts of the Town Belt to private sporting clubs. He opposed moves to charge for admission to the Basin Reserve and enclosing parts of Newtown Park for the Zoo.

The Wellington Beautifying Society was strong during the 1930s to 1960s. It too, was involved with tree planting to enhance the condition of the Town Belt, which it described in 1952 “as a disgrace to citizens”\(^{130}\). It was also vocal in its protests against alienations from the Town Belt, which it described as a “breathing space”\(^{131}\) passed on from Wellington’s forefathers.

Action for Environment became active in the 1970s. It not only undertook planting projects aimed at restoring native forest on the Town Belt but was also proactive in its advocacy, writing regularly to the Council asking for information about Town Belt management and suggesting policies for better protection and enhancement. It was active in promoting the establishment of the Open Space C zoning in the District Plan. Forty years on, it is still active, most recently having appealed an Environment Court decision to allow an extension of the Wellington Badminton Association’s hall on Town Belt land.

The Friends of the Wellington Town Belt group was established in 1995 (in accordance with the Town Belt Management plan 1995) “to safeguard the Town Belt as a place of visual beauty and public recreation, and to assist in its management”\(^{132}\). It has made regular submissions on Town Belt issues, disseminated information about the Town Belt and assisted with funding Town Belt projects, including the preparation of the Te Ahumairangi Hill Landscape Plan.

Other groups that have been involved with Town Belt issues or projects at various times over the decades have included progressive associations, residents associations, historic societies, sports and other user groups, environmental groups, rotary and lions clubs and gardening groups.

Hands off the Town Belt
‘Hands off the Town Belt’ became the rallying call among those who lobbied to protect the Town Belt. For them, the Town Belt was a sacrosanct open space that was held in trust for all and provided a valuable public good. Other interests perceived it as an under-used wasteland that would be better put to other use. Controversy and public debate between the opposing viewpoints has flared at intervals.

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\(^{131}\) Ibid

As early as 1882, a Council proposal to build an old men’s home on five acres of Town Belt met with opposition and was abandoned. The *New Zealand Times* entered into the debate, declaring that, “... as plunder always will be deemed a holy thing by some, from Governors down to city councillors, so almost as soon as granted, the Town Belt has been mutilated”\(^{133}\).

In 1900 nearly 150 residents and landowners opposed the building of a plague hospital on the Town Belt at Berhampore. One citizen, James Wilson, took the matter to the Supreme Court, on the grounds that such a use was in breach of the trust under which the Town Belt was held as a public recreation ground. Although the Court decided against him, the urgent necessity of the bubonic plague scare at the time was a likely factor\(^ {134}\). Certainly, the case illustrated the strength of citizen feeling about protecting the Town Belt.

Controversy over Town Belt housing proposals featured regularly in the media from the 1950s through to the early 1980s. The alienation of Bayview Terrace across the Town Belt to the then French Embassy in 1970, also caused a furore, prompting an editorial in *The Dominion* entitled ‘Another Chunk’\(^ {135}\) which highlighted the history of Town Belt alienations.

As mentioned above, Action for the Environment was proactive in the 1970s in urging the Council to develop policy that recognised the Town Belt’s special legal and heritage status, and sought the return of former Town Belt land.

**Free access for all**

Another issue that sparked controversy had to do with the widely held view that the Town Belt, being a public recreation ground, should be freely accessible to all.

From this viewpoint, sportsfields were acceptable, being open for anyone to use and to walk across. However, leasing land to private sports groups was another matter. This issue came to a head around 1908, when an Act was passed allowing up to 100 acres of Town Belt to be leased to sports clubs\(^ {136}\). Those who opposed the Bill envisaged wealthy interest groups taking over parts of the Town Belt for exclusive use and, potentially charging members of the public for access on land that was held in trust for everyone’s benefit\(^ {137}\).

The anti-leasing lobby lost that particular battle but the question of exclusive rights has from time to time resurfaced since. One example is the concept of community gardens. Productive gardens on the Town Belt were readily accepted during the Depression and Second World War when there was a clear public benefit, but subsequent garden allotments and the shared community garden that has existed at Ohiro Park for many years, led to concerns about whether the general public was being excluded for the benefit of a few. The issue arose again in recent years with applications for inner city residents without their own garden space to be able to use Town Belt land. Eventually a licence was granted to Innermost Gardens group to develop a community garden at a site on Town Belt in Mt Victoria.

Similarly, those in defence of the Town Belt’s public sanctity have opposed occasional applications by private interests for long-term commercial enterprises on Town Belt land. Applicants of such proposals as a driving range at the Municipal Golf Links (1988) or a gondola and summit restaurant on Mt Victoria (1987) have argued that such uses would add to the recreational and visitor opportunities on the Town Belt but the ‘hands off the Town Belt’ lobby has generally been adamant in its opposition.

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\(^ {134}\) Quinn, “The Origin and Development,” 59–62


\(^ {136}\) Wellington (City) Town Belt Reserves Act 1908

\(^ {137}\) Cook, “Background Report,” 12
**Buildings**

The question of building on the Town Belt has also been debated, given the New Zealand Company’s instruction in 1839 that the Town Belt was not to be built on.

Pragmatism appears to have driven some of the permitted building – utilitarian buildings such as cow bales and barns were permitted under the grazing licenses of the 19th century, and buildings that facilitated the Town Belt’s recreation purpose, such as public toilets, changing rooms, band rotundas, maintenance depots and lookouts appear to have been generally accepted.

Dwellings were another matter, however. Those that sprang up during the 19th century were ordered to be cleared yet, in 1903, the Reserves Committee proposed raising revenue by leasing sections on the Town Belt for housing and in 1908 worker housing was proposed on the Town Belt. Both proposals were abandoned in the face of stiff public opposition.\(^{138}\)

By the 1970s and 1980s, the proliferation of buildings on the Town Belt including club rooms, halls, curator houses and larger indoor venues like the Renouf Centre, resulted in public concerns about their impact on public access and scenic quality.

**Hands on the Town Belt**

As mentioned earlier, citizen groups have also participated on the ground with planting and development projects, aimed at enhancing the Town Belt as public parkland. Planting, in particular, has been a consistent ‘hands-on’ activity, including the first efforts of the Scenery Preservation Society in the late 19th century, the Wellington Beautifying Society plantings in the 1950s and regular Wellington Rotary Club planting days in the 1980s. In recent years, forest restoration groups have sprung into action at Te Ahumairangi Hill (Tinakori Hill), Kelburn Park, Central Park, Brooklyn Hills, Prince of Wales Park, Mt Albert, Clifton Terrace and Mt Victoria, supported by the Council with advice and annual allocations of native plants propagated at the Berhampore Nursery.

### 6. References


Boffa Miskell, Green and Promised Land: Wellington’s Town Belt. Wellington: Museum of City & Sea, c2001


\(^{138}\) Cook, “Background Report,” 11.


