



# **LANDSCAPE REPORT**

## **55 - 85 CURTIS STREET, KARORI**

September 2012

PREPARED FOR:  
**WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL**

**DRAKEFORD WILLIAMS LTD**  
**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**  
REFERENCE 12008W

The project involves an ecological and landscape study for a piece of land known as 55-85 Curtis Street, Karori, Wellington. This landscape study has been prepared to assist Wellington City Council to make informed decisions about a proposal to change the zoning of the site. It includes a review of the landscape values of the site in order to ascertain whether its landscape values meet the tests for "national importance" set out in s6 of the Resource Management Act.

### **Executive Summary**

The Curtis Street property is unusual in Wellington, a Residential (in the main) zoned site located between two desirable suburbs that is undeveloped, but cannot be used for 'sensitive activities'<sup>1</sup> such as residential buildings, schools and hospitals due to overhead high voltage transmission lines.

The site in itself has relatively low landscape values. It has been highly modified over time with little of the original landform, vegetation or waterways remaining. However viewed in its wider context, the site has strong landscape and visual links to the wider valley landform and the open space network in the Kaiwharawhara catchment.

It is my opinion that neither of the District Plan Business zonings in their current form are a best fit for such a one-off site, and that any proposed development will require site-specific conditions beyond the more general provisions of the Business Areas Design Guide in order to manage landscape and visual effects.

With regard to the Curtis Street site's landscape values within an RMA context, outstanding natural landscapes and features are considered to be exceptional and iconic, and while not necessarily pristine, are landscapes in which the natural components dominate. The Curtis Street site therefore would fail to meet the threshold required for a s6b 'outstanding' natural landscape or feature.

### **Landscape Context**

The site is located in a gully between Karori and Northland or more accurately in a remnant of the Kaiwharawhara valley that runs from the headwaters of the Kaiwharawhara Stream within Zealandia down the Kaiwharawhara corridor and into Trelissick Park in Ngaio Gorge. The site has been modified over time and the stream culverted. Council cleared all buildings, spoil and vegetation in 1996 and vacated the site. The land has been left to manage itself ever since. However the fundamental landscape character of a gully landform is still evident, a narrow sloping floor contained by a steep vegetated escarpment to the west and a steep bank below Curtis Street to the east.

However its landscape attributes derive largely from the wider landscape context. The site lies within the mid-section of Kaiwharawhara catchment from Chaytor Street through to Blackridge Road, in the narrowest section of the valley at a nexus between Te Ahumairangi at the western end of the Town Belt and the lower foothills of the Outer Green Belt. The valley is traversed by Curtis

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<sup>1</sup> National Policy Statement of Electricity Transmission (NPSET) Implementation Guidance for Local Authorities

Street and Wilton Road which follow the contour around the eastern side of the valley and which connect the northern suburbs through to the western suburbs. Development is concentrated on the eastern side of the valley on the less steep lower slopes of Te Ahumairangi. There is only a narrow band of built development to the west due in part to the original steep landform and later, to the landfill between Whitehead Road and Otari-Wilton's Bush that formed the basis for Ian Galloway Park and its sports fields. While many of the buildings are visible, they are partially screened by vegetation or set below the road so that overall the landscape reads as a broad ribbon of open space running the length of the valley, with a mix of dense bush and grassed playing fields. The only commercial scale buildings are sports clubrooms, both of which are set back from the road behind shelter planting. Otari School, though sited close to the road, has a residential in scale terms of its height and building mass.

Due to its location 'between' hillsides, suburbs and roads, the immediate landscape context is clearly defined: a small pocket of land contained between Chaytor Street and Whitehead Road where the road drops down almost onto the valley floor beside the Kaiwharawhara Stream and which signposts the transition from Northland to Karori. The steep hill slopes, particularly the escarpment above Old Karori Road with its dense bush cover, highlight the landform. While indigenous vegetation values within the site may be relatively low, the receiving environment is strongly green. Even though the bulk of this land is zoned Residential, the slopes, the stream and the sun/shade patterns have limited the density of development. While the childcare centre that is currently under construction will increase the visible built development, the building is residential in scale. Given that the vegetated backdrop to the childcare centre is land owned by the City, it is my opinion that the predominance of open space over built form will remain.

### **Landscape and visual values**

While reasonably modified, the site exhibits elements of the original valley. When viewed in conjunction with the neighbouring Curtis Street and Old Karori Road properties, the escarpment with its homogenous bush cover to the west, the hillside to the east with steep embankments above and below Curtis Street and the Kaiwharawhara Stream (which can be heard if not seen from the footpath) all reinforce the landform.

Within the wider landscape the site defines Wellington's urban form in a minor way through its location at the intersection of two important Wellington landforms, Te Ahumairangi and Te Wharangi Ridge and alongside the band of open space that links the 'Sanctuary to Sea'.

Vegetation on the site today is largely a mix of weed species and adventive self-sown plants with the exception of few medium sized native trees on the road reserves. The ecological values are not strong from a landscape perspective and depend to some degree on the link to the bush cover on the adjoining escarpment. This vegetation also provides strong visual reference both to the Otari-Wilton's Bush and Zealandia, and areas of bush cover along the Kaiwharawhara corridor, such as the vegetation on the corner of Curtis and Chaytor Streets, and surrounding the Karori Cemetery.

The site has minor heritage significance. It is located near the old 'Devil's Footbridge', an important early bridge for people crossing the Kaiwharawhara Stream. More recently it was a Council depot and an entry point to the former Wilton landfill.

### Summary landscape values

The Curtis Street site in itself has relatively low landscape values. It has been highly modified over time with little of the original landform, vegetation or waterways remaining. However viewed in its wider landscape context, the site is:

- a reflection of the original valley landform
- close to the Kaiwharawhara Stream which has district-wide importance
- part of a bush clad escarpment that denotes the edge of Karori hill.
- a connecting element within a wider green network, particularly with respect to the road corridor linking Zealandia to Otari-Wilton's Bush
- located at a transition between the city and the western suburbs

These values are supported in Council reports including the Open Space and Biodiversity Strategies. Landscape values are further underpinned by high-level documentation such as the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol and the Greater Wellington RPS in terms of managing landscape character and distinctive landform while retaining a compact urban form.

### Potential for Development: Landscape Perspective

The land is an 'orphan' site in more ways than one. It is located in a landscape setting where the existing pattern of development is relatively low density residential. Although there is obviously potential for infill or more intense development in the residential areas above Curtis Street, below Chaytor Street or on the properties directly to the south, topography and access limitations will most likely mean that few of the properties will achieve maximum site coverage.

There may be opportunities for recreation on the site but active recreation is more than adequately provided for in close proximity. Similarly while there would be positive benefits from planting the site and enhancing its ecological values, the net benefit to the city is relatively low due to the size of property and its physical disconnection from the stream and the open space to the north. There is potential to exploit the landform and location to create a wetland feature with interpretation for the stream and the wider catchment. However this would be an artificial construct rather than an ecological restoration; it could be argued that resources would be better concentrated on nearby Zealandia, Otari-Wilton's Bush or Trelissick Park.

The Curtis Street site's landscape values lie in its strong landscape and visual links to the wider valley landform and the open space network in the Kaiwharawhara catchment. Along the western side of the valley in particular, from Otari-Wilton's Bush through to Chaytor Street (and even to Zealandia) runs a strong, green band of open space. There is no visible commercial scale development in the form of buildings and car parks. Without the proximity of high voltage transmission lines, the most logical zoning for this site from a landscape perspective would be Residential. This would allow up to 35% site coverage and buildings up to 8m in height. I note that prior to the proposed PC73, consent

was granted for vegetation clearance and earthworks on this site on a non-notified basis under the existing Residential zoning.

With transmission lines, the appropriate zoning for the site is less obvious. National guidelines dictate that the site is unsuited to sensitive activities such as residential development, schools and hospitals, although NPSET allow that a range of land uses can still occur. Transpower remains neutral in principle, although has indicated a preference for built development to avoid a defined *red zone* directly underneath the lines. *Refer Figure 1.*

The site is visually contained by the existing landform, the narrow winding roads restrict more distant views to the site and the landform coupled with vegetation on the boundaries, both within and off the site, filters views through to the floor of the gully. Given its landscape values and the relatively restricted views into the site, the property has the potential to absorb a level of built development without adverse effects on existing residential amenity or the landscape context.

In order to manage landscape and visual effects, the following development limitations would apply:

- Retaining the integrity of the valley form by controlling earthworks, and minimising fill, particularly with regard to raising ground levels. This effectively precludes large, single level building platforms.
- Protection of vegetation on Old Karori Road escarpment, both on and off site. This would limit earthworks on the escarpment and subsequent buildings or retaining walls abutting the western boundary.
- Minimising impacts on Kaiwharawhara Stream by restricting water run-off. This limits paving or roof areas or demands alternative solutions in the form of permeable paving, green roofs and/or swales and storm water detention areas.
- Requiring buildings with residential scale, mass and articulation to fit the landscape context, avoiding large scale, monolithic built development with blank walls visible from outside the site and placing conditions on building colour, reflectivity and lighting.
- Retaining the Kaiwharawhara corridor character by maintaining the coherence of the street edge. This requires retention of vegetation along the Curtis Street road reserve and creating low visual impact built development by keeping building mass below street level, and/or breaking up building elevations and rooflines. It also places limits on the size and form of signage on Curtis Street.
- Adherence to NPSET guidelines would concentrate built development in the *orange zone* away from the floor of the site and onto the western or eastern boundaries. *Refer Figure 1.*

Given these parameters, it is my opinion that neither of the District Plan Business zonings are a best fit for such a one-off site. Business 1 provides for a range of activities and scale of built development that would fit the site and its landscape context, with buildings under 500sqm a Permitted Activity and buildings over 500sqm a Discretionary Activity (Restricted). However from a landscape perspective, the matters over which Council may restrict its discretion (Rule 34.3.5) do not respond to the site values and development limitations that I have identified. Business 2, a more *utilitarian*

zoning, precludes residential activity but allows large scale buildings and industrial activity and lower levels of amenity are tolerated than in the Business 1 zone. In this location, buildings over 4000sqm would be a discretionary activity because the site is adjacent to and abutting a Residential Area. In my opinion the Business 2 zoning is less appropriate for this site because it permits development that could be out of scale with the landscape context and which has the potential to reduce local residential amenity. In conclusion, development on this site will require site-specific conditions beyond the more general provisions of the Business Areas Design Guide in order to manage landscape and visual effects.

### **Potential mitigation or off-sets.**

There are opportunities for site constraints to be used as positive development attributes.

- The site could be developed to showcase best environmental practices including green building techniques and sustainable stormwater treatment solutions.
- While it is my understanding that the Kaiwharawhara Stream cannot be daylighted in this site, there is potential for site development to make reference to the original stream through the formation of drainage swales or riparian planting along the base of the western escarpment.
- Recent promotion of Wellington's distinctive diversity and sense of place through Eco-tourism has focussed on Zealandia and Otari-Wilton's Bush. There are opportunities for a development that retains the existing landscape links (valley landform, vegetated escarpment backdrop and the Sanctuary to Sea Walkway) and strengthens the landscape character of the streetscape through planting on the corner of Old Karori Road and Curtis Street, and Curtis Street and Whitehead Roads. For example, the planting of a grove of the larger native heritage trees as a 'signpost' to Otari-Wilton's Bush.
- Landscape works could extend to weed control and enrichment planting on road reserves, (with community involvement?) and specimen planting on the road reserve that references boundary planting at Otari-Wilton's Bush.

Preliminary discussions with Frances Forsythe indicate her preference from an ecological perspective for buildings, or rather building impacts in the form of earthworks and shading, to be kept away from the western boundary. Maintenance of landscape values plus ecological values plus NPSET guidelines therefore dictates that built development are concentrated towards the eastern boundary, against the road reserve and set down from the road. This also limits views from properties located on the hillside above Curtis Street.

Built development parameters could include requirements such as:

- maintain existing ground levels at approximately RL 102-103 (single building platform) or adjust floor levels to fit so that buildings step up the site from north to south
- locate buildings close to or against Curtis Street boundary

- average building height of 9m, with heights up to 10m allowed, particularly at north end of site
- limit building heights to 8m (or less) at south end of site where there is minimal road reserve to buffer visual effects

Potential activities could include yard based businesses such as a garden centre or landscape materials yard, or business units such as those at the Brookside development alongside the Kaiwharawhara Stream at the bottom of Ngaio Gorge with small business units that do not require large floor areas or large areas of carpark such as furniture upholstery, joinery, animal daycare, boutique food manufacture or food preparation or funeral director premises.

### RMA context

With regard to landscape assessment, the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects has issued a Best Practice Note on this subject.<sup>2</sup> I attach at Appendix 1 an indicative evaluation sheet based on this material and current 'best practice' landscape evaluation methodology listing the evaluation criteria or landscape attributes. These are consistent with the nationally recognised 'Amended Pigeon Bay criteria' and the landscape assessment criteria for identifying outstanding natural landscapes and features and significant amenity landscapes in the proposed GW RPS.

The criteria in the attached evaluation sheet do not constitute an assessment in themselves: they need to be weighted or evaluated, preferably in conjunction with wider landscape assessment to determine whether a landscape meets the s6b 'outstanding' threshold.

In landscape terms 'outstanding' in particular has been considered by the Environment Court<sup>3</sup> to mean "conspicuous, eminent, especially because of excellence" or "remarkable. This has been widely acknowledged by professionals as meaning that an outstanding landscape was an "exceptional" and "remarkable" landscape and needs to have a "wow" factor.

### RMA context with respect to s6 'Matters of National Importance' and s7 'Other Matters'

RMA	Factor	Description
s6a	Natural character:	Applicable only within the coastal environment, wetlands, and lakes and rivers and their margins
s6b	Natural character:	Under s6b, the natural character of an area must be <b>Very High</b> to be considered an Outstanding Natural Feature or Landscape (ONFL).
s7c	Amenity values	A landscape may have significant amenity values if it has high natural character (but not outstanding) and/or very high shared and recognised values.

**s6a:** The site is not coastal, wetland or on a river or its margin, and is therefore not subject to s6a.

<sup>2</sup> NZILA Best Practice Note: Landscape Assessment and Sustainable Management. 10.1. Dated 02-11-10

<sup>3</sup> WESI v QLDC 2000

**s6b:** The NZILA definition of an Outstanding Natural Landscape is ‘a natural landscape that is particularly notable at a local, district, regional or national scale.’ The site is not natural in terms of its biophysical elements, patterns and processes. While the landform does show some of the formative processes that led to its character, the sensory attributes derive more from the landscape context than from the site itself. Based on the landscape attributes contained in the attached sheet, I would evaluate its **natural** character as being relatively low. Outstanding natural landscapes and features are considered to be exceptional and iconic and, while not necessarily pristine, are landscapes in which the natural components dominate. The Curtis Street site therefore would fail to meet the threshold required for a s6b ‘outstanding’ natural landscape or feature.

The site is not big enough to be considered a landscape in terms of a cohesive and distinctive character area, and is not in itself a landscape feature. Rather it is a small part of a much larger valley landform and landscape catchment. It is my opinion that even if the site were less modified, or the sensory and associative attributes were evaluated as ‘very high’, it would not be considered an outstanding natural landscape or feature.

**s7c:** Amenity landscapes may be valued for their natural attributes or for values that are recognised by the community including a shared sense of place, tangata whenua values or historical associations. Given the highly modified character of the site, its low recreational and heritage values and limited visibility, the shared and recognised values would have to be very high for this site to have significant amenity values.

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**APPENDIX 1: BASE EVALUATION SHEET**

This evaluation sheet is based on the NZILA Best Practice Note: Landscape Assessment and Sustainable Management.

<b>Attributes</b>	
<b>Biophysical elements, patterns and processes</b>	<b>Geological, ecological, topographical and natural process components of the landscape.</b>
Representativeness	The combination of natural components that form the feature or landscape strongly typifies the character of an area.
Research and education	All or parts of the feature or landscape are important for natural science research and education.
Rarity	The feature or landscape is unique or rare within the district or region, and few comparable examples exist.
Ecosystem functioning	The presence of healthy ecosystems is clearly evident in the feature or landscape.
<b>Sensory qualities</b>	<b><i>Perceptual or experiential components of the landscape.</i></b>
Coherence	The patterns of land cover and land use are in harmony with the underlying natural pattern of landform and there are no significant discordant elements of land cover or land use.
Vividness	The feature or landscape is visually striking and is widely recognised within the local and wider community for its memorable and sometimes iconic qualities.
Naturalness	The feature or landscape appears largely unmodified by human activity and the patterns of landform and land cover appear to be largely the result of intact and healthy natural systems.
Expressiveness	The feature or landscape clearly shows the formative processes that led to its existing character.
Transient values:	The consistent and noticeable occurrence of transient natural events, such as seasonal change in vegetation or in wildlife movement, contributes to the character of the feature or landscape.
<b>Shared and recognized values and relationships</b>	<b>Spiritual, cultural and social associations, including both activities and meanings</b>
Recognized values	Natural, visual, heritage and recreational values that give the landscape identity
Tangata whenua values:	Maori values inherent in the feature or landscape add to the feature or landscape being recognised as a special place.
Historical associations:	Knowledge of historic events that occurred in and around the feature or landscape is widely held and substantially influences and adds to the value the community attaches to the natural feature or landscape.

A landscape assessment would evaluate these attributes on a 5 point scale in terms of their significance:

Very High - **VH**; High - **H**; Moderate - **M**; Low - **L**; Very low - **VL**



SITE BOUNDARY

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**ORANGE ZONE:**  
CONSIDERED RESPONSE TO PROPOSED  
NEW DEVELOPMENTS ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS

**RED ZONE:**  
PROTECTED FROM SENSITIVE ACTIVITIES

**FIGURE 1**  
**TRANSMISSION LINE CORRIDOR**  
**55-58 CURTIS STREET**  
**KARORI**

**DRAKEFORD WILLIAMS**  
**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

REFERENCE 12008W/001