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Vision: Wellington's Wild Green Connector

The Outer Green Belt is Wellington's wild green connector - it visibly defines the urban edge, protects and restores nature, and enables people to escape the city and explore.



Wellington city is known for its extensive, wild green, relatively undeveloped open spaces, including its ridges and hills, coast, harbour escarpments and steep gullies. The Outer Green Belt is the central connecting element - an accessible ecological and recreational corridor from the city's northern boundary, where it links up with adjoining hill reserves in Porirua City, to the south coast. It plays a critical role in determining the character, quality and function of the city

environment on a large scale for today's and future generations. It is home to ever-increasing biodiversity. Its open spaces contribute to residents' quality of life and enhance visitors' experiences of Wellington.

The Outer Green Belt contributes to Wellington's unique sense of place. It protects, restores, connects and supports a rich mix of open space values. It will strengthen over time and endure for future generations. It is for all to share and enjoy.

2.1 What is Wellington's Outer Green Belt?

The idea of having an Outer Green Belt dates back to the 1960s and 70s when community groups called for what they labelled an 'Outer Town Belt'. The idea was based on the example of the Wellington Town Belt, an arc of public open space that was preserved on the hills immediately around the original town for public recreation and to separate town from country. With time, the city expanded beyond that inner belt but the line of higher ridges in the centre of the Wellington peninsula remained mainly undeveloped, forming a natural western edge to the urban development. The need to retain and protect the local features and

natural open space character of those ridges became apparent and, over the last four decades, the Council has endorsed the concept of having an Outer Green Belt and endeavoured to protect the continuous belt of open space in a number of ways (see Appendix I, timeline). In 2004, *Wellington's Outer Green Belt Management Plan* was approved, providing the first comprehensive guidance for the area's management.

Today, the reserves and other open space land the Council manages as the Outer Green Belt totals 3,029 hectares, representing 63 percent of the entire city reserve network.

2.2 Why is the Outer Green Belt important?

The hillside landscapes and skylines of the ridges immediately west of Wellington's urban area feature prominently in people's experience of living in and visiting Wellington. The proximity of the Outer Green Belt to the city brings numerous opportunities for people to simply enjoy seeing those open spaces daily as part of the Wellington scene or to get out and experience it directly. The increasing continuity of the reserve land from north to south, and its direct link across the city's northern boundary to Rangituhi/ Colonial Knob Scenic Reserve in Porirua City, gives it a prominent role in the city's open space network. The Outer Green Belt contains, and links up, important areas of biodiversity and provides most of the city's carbon storage forest. It marks the western edge of the city's urban environment.

Open spaces contribute to a diverse city environment with a wide range of inter-related benefits, including amenity value, biodiversity and landscape protection, recreation and social opportunities, ecosystem

services, contribution to the health and wellbeing of residents, and both direct and indirect economic benefits. The Outer Green Belt has multiple open space values. This management plan will be used to ensure consistent protection and management of the key values below, which are described in Part 3.



Nature



Landscape



Culture and heritage



Recreation and access



Community and identity



Resilience and city economy

2.3 Guiding Principles

Certain characteristics represent the essence of the Outer Green Belt. These characteristics have inspired a set of aspirational 'guiding principles' that should endure over time. Large-scale change has already occurred in recent decades. For instance, the Outer Green Belt has become increasingly forested and its track network has become more extensive. In parallel are changing patterns in outdoor recreation, such as growth in mountain biking, and increasing recognition of the way

1

Natural skylines, undeveloped ridges and hills, and healthy native forests and streams are the foundation of the Outer Green Belt

The natural values and relatively natural character of the Outer Green Belt is its essence. The desire to preserve that character and rugged backdrop prompted the Outer Green Belt to be established in the first place. The rugged setting and contact with nature underpin the outdoor recreation and visitor experiences now popular throughout the Outer Green Belt. The first question, when considering change, use or development will be 'how will this affect the natural foundation of the Outer Green Belt?'

> **Example:** A series of permanent 10-metre-high, way-marking sculptures along the Skyline Track is proposed. Even though they are well-designed, are envisaged to also function as information posts for recreational users and be promoted as a tourist attraction, the proposal does not go ahead as it would introduce a visually obtrusive element along the natural skyline contours when viewed from on site and from afar. Temporary way markers of a similar scale for a specific major outdoor event might be allowed, however, provided no permanent environmental damage resulted.

2

Continuity and connectivity is fundamental to the Outer Green Belt concept

The Outer Green Belt's large-scale spatial continuity is key to its natural, landscape and recreational values and its role as the urban edge of the city. Its connectivity with other open spaces helps to knit together Wellington's open space network.

> **Example:** The gradual acquisition of reserves has led to piecemeal land management but once the land is spatially connected, a more integrated approach is possible. The fencing and farm track infrastructure that was inherited with each separate land block is reviewed at the larger landscape scale and rationalised, e.g. to consistently manage open tops, define the main connector route along an entire ridgeline, and to connect species habitat.

3

The Outer Green Belt's diversity of landscape character and outdoor experience is a strength to be reinforced

Continuity does not mean the Outer Green Belt is, or should be, the same throughout. In fact, it encompasses a great variety of different places, values and activities. Feedback reveals that people visiting the Outer Green Belt enjoy it in many different ways - appreciating peace and quiet or seeking adventure and challenge, exploring sheltered forest or taking in wide views. That diversity is one of its great attributes. The idea of providing all things to all people across the whole of the Outer Green Belt has potential to degrade that diversity of values and experiences. Instead, a more optimal approach is to think about the character of the different parts and the opportunities to have focus areas for certain activities.

> **Example:** Horse riding is not compatible with other recreational uses everywhere but has prominence in Spicer Forest, where the wide forestry roads through the pine plantation and accessibility for the rural Ohariu Valley community make it a suitable environment.

> **Example:** Elsewhere, where narrow tracks through mature remnant forest cannot be widened or created without damaging the forest, mountain biking is restricted.

If all the activities happened everywhere in the Outer Green Belt it would not offer the diverse recreational experiences that Wellingtonians enjoy.

contact with nature and access to open spaces benefit people's lives. Change will continue and it is likely that as-yet unforeseen trends and events will be influential. The guiding principles highlight what is special about the Outer Green Belt and will be used to help strengthen it, manage change, weigh up decisions and prioritise the Plan's implementation.

4

People's enjoyment of the Outer Green Belt is grounded in being able to escape to wild places with a strong 'Wellington' sense of place

The Outer Green Belt contributes importantly to Wellington's reputation as a city people visit for its invigorating outdoor recreation within easy reach. People of varied age and physical ability describe vivid experiences of spaciousness and natural elements when they visit the Outer Green Belt. Ensuring activities are accessible to a wide range of people while also being appropriate to the 'wild' sense of place is important.

> **Example:** The Brooklyn wind turbine and Wrights Hill are places where paved roadways provide drive-on access to the ridgetop environment and the immediate topography on the ridgetop itself is not unduly steep. To enable people with disabilities to experience the spectacular views and the 'wild' ridgetop, facilities and some tracks in the immediate vicinity are designed for wheelchair access and the opportunities are well publicised. For people seeking more challenging recreational experiences, the track network extends out into the more rugged surrounding terrain.

5

Community participation in managing the Outer Green Belt is enabled and supported

The work of individuals and community groups in helping to protect, enhance and use the Outer Green Belt is enormously valuable. The Council is committed to supporting and encouraging community participation, which underpins long-term sustainability.

> **Example:** A group of neighbours offers to clear and plant a weedy gully on the edge of the Outer Green Belt. The Council offers advice and materials to support their voluntary work. Others in the neighbourhood see the visible improvements and join in, strengthening the sense of community as well as enhancing the Outer Green Belt's natural values.

6

The Outer Green Belt supports the city's resilience

The Outer Green Belt reserves provide space to help manage response and preparedness to climate change and natural disasters. Communities get to know each other by participating in recreation and environmental enhancement activities (e.g. pest trapping or planting) and individuals benefit from contact with nature and physical activity.

The Outer Green Belt provides ecosystem services that help keep the city's environment healthy. It helps the city to respond to climate change by helping to keep the city compact, storing carbon in its forests and enabling native species to adapt to changing conditions by providing linked habitat. It provides a source of fresh water in emergencies and the vegetation helps to stabilise hillsides and slow storm water in heavy rain events. It provides places of refuge for people in disasters.

The Outer Green Belt is important to the function of the city and the health and wellbeing of the people who live here.

2.3.1 How will the Vision and Principles be applied?

When deciding what to try to deliver across the Outer Green Belt, the primary question is ‘what makes the Outer Green Belt special or different or unique? What things will make the most difference to that, either comprehensively through the whole area, or in particular places?’

As the diagram under leaf shows, the vision and principles will be used as the over-arching elements in the Plan. They will influence decision-making at both the overall scale of the Outer Green Belt and at the scale of the management sectors. The context of the whole Outer Green Belt will be taken into account, weighing up the most suitable combination of environments and activities throughout.

> **Example:** A major objective is the restoration of a broad band of indigenous vegetation as an ecological corridor along the Outer Green Belt. So, too, is the use of the Outer Green Belt for a range of outdoor recreation. Ecological restoration is mainly confined to the flanks and valleys and the open character of most parts of the ridgetops maintained for its suitability as a recreational environment. In this way, a balance is struck between the different elements of Principle 1 and aligned with the other principles too.

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What makes the
Outer Green Belt
*special or different
or unique?*

