

# ***Draft* Public Space Design Guide**

18 June 2008

***“ the measure of any great civilisation is in its cities, and a measure of a city’s greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and its squares” – John Ruskin***

The city’s public spaces are its greatest assets and the overarching objective of this policy is to provide a mechanism to holistically manage these spaces.

## **Introduction**

The qualities of Wellington’s public open spaces are critical to the economic, environmental and cultural success of the city.

Public spaces are the ‘glue’ that binds the city together. They are part of a larger cohesive network of individual spaces and include the transport arterials, streets, lanes, street intersections, parks and squares. They all have their own specific characteristics and functions. People should be able to use these spaces to:

- Move through the city as pedestrians, cyclists and passengers on public transport as well as motorists.
- Deliver goods and information.
- Meet formally and casually to interact in an open and free environment
- Carry out civic and political functions
- Engage in leisure activities, including window shopping, outdoor eating, street parties, kicking a ball, or simply places for people to sit
- Engage in recreational activities; for example through the provision of playgrounds, skate board facilities and walking routes

Further, public spaces allow people to understand the city structure and find their way around as well as providing a connection between the natural and built environment. These spaces should feel safe for people to enter, move around and engage generally with what the city has to offer.

## **This design guide**

This design guide gives direction as to how these city spaces are managed and what is located in the city’s spaces, including at the micro level. It gives direction to the Council as to how:

- To manage these spaces
- Infrastructure requirements are incorporated
- Hard and soft landscaping are incorporated, including the ground plane or ‘floodscape’ of the city.

This design guide focuses on the process and delivery of how the Council initiates, designs, delivers and manages the projects in the public environment. This design guide builds on an understanding of the current issues and proposes a set of guidelines for moving forward.

Work in the public spaces is instigated in several ways, including;

- As part of the Council’s LTCCP commitments
- As part of some non-Council initiative
- Political/community requests
- Through unforeseen circumstances

## **APPENDIX 2**

These diverse triggers produce a wide range of projects:

- Stand alone design projects, e.g. Waitangi Park and Aotea Quay tree planting.
- City wide initiatives, e.g. Safer Roads projects
- Resolution of particular issues, e.g. a new set of traffic lights
- Asset repair and renewal
- Work by organisations outside Council, e.g. post boxes, telecommunication hubs, signal boxes and kerbside cafes

This design guide does not include direction for the Town Belt, the Botanical Gardens, Otari – Wilton’s Bush or sportsfields. However the edges and links through these green areas need to be carefully considered in terms of how they integrate into the wider city.

This design guide needs to be considered in line with - and draws on - the following policies, plans and frameworks:

- Open Space Policy
- Playground Policy
- Public Art Policy
- draft Walking Policy
- draft Cycling Policy
- Parking Policy
- Centres Policy
- Town centre plans
- South Coast Management Plan
- Waterfront Framework
- Town Belt Management Plan
- Footpath Management Policy
- Trading in Public Places Policy
- Road Encroachment and Sale Policy
- Central Area Urban Design Guide, District Plan.

Non council statutes include:

- Resource Management Act
- The Building Act
- NZ Standards

## **Objectives:**

The following are the key objectives of this design guide:

**Objective 1: - To enhance Wellington’s sense of place**

**Objective 2: - To make the structure of Wellington better understood as a city**

**Objective 3: - To improve accessibility for all**

**Objective 4: - To improve the diversity of experience for Wellingtonians and visitors**

**Objective 5: - To enhance the night-time environment of the city**

**Objective 6: - To improve the quality of the city’s public spaces through good design and linking to sustainability considerations**

## APPENDIX 2

### Objective 1: - To enhance Wellington's sense of place

*Wellington has its own identity*

#### **Rationale**

*Sense of place is about making Wellington different from other places.*

*The city gains its individuality, identity and compactness from its characteristics of form; the topography, the landscape, pre-European Maori inhabitation, the street pattern, the open space network, the buildings and the use of local materials where appropriate. The combined nature of these characteristics means that within the city there are wide ranging differences in spatial character.*

*The history of Wellingtonians; their origins, the growth of settlement and the on going change through interpretation and/or the inclusion of the traces of that history that are evident in the physical form all provides a sense of belonging and continuity with the past and direction for the future. Combined this makes Wellington different from anywhere else and provides a level of urbanity for the city.*

*A system of elements; materials, planting, street furniture, lighting should give a consistency over the city supporting the identity of Wellington. Individual areas can build on this consistency, and at the same time have their own layers of character. For example, the white fences alongside footpaths and pedestrian access ways provide a level of consistency through the older suburban areas.*

*There is a need to design for local Wellington distinctiveness. This involves the acknowledgement of the Wellington landscape, the history, combined with the creativity of the best local talent and the latest technologies to develop distinctive Wellington solutions.*

*Where areas do not have a sense of place or character, the challenge is to make something that is distinctive. A sense of place should not replicate the past, but set a direction for the future.*

*The risk is that if this ignored, buildings and spaces would reflect the latest fashion among design professionals, standard practices that are implemented to satisfy vehicular traffic safety concerns, standard products of the building industry, or the reflection of marketing policies and corporate identities of developers, investors and users. There would be little regard for the unique qualities of Wellington.*

<b>Guidelines:</b>	
1.1	Reinforce and enhance the features that make Wellington distinctive. All design processes to understand the Wellington stories; the topography and its defining elements – the harbour, hills and watercourses; the indigenous vegetation and the history of the city.
1.2	Evaluate whether existing elements should be retained to link to Wellington's past and incorporate where appropriate. Look to retain street furniture and other elements, eg bus/tram shelters. Their retention and interpretation will tell the stories of the city's past.
1.3	Incorporate the notion of sense of place at a range of levels from city-wide through to the detail level by the use of local materials and visual references where appropriate
1.4	Incorporate public art/memorials/monuments where appropriate as a means for telling the city's stories.
1.5	Create innovative precedents for a positive sense of place where none already exists that builds on the city's bigger stories.

## APPENDIX 2

### **Objective 2: - To make the structure of Wellington better understood as a city**

*Wellington is legible, has a clear image, users can orientate themselves in the city by ensuring that the city's structure is easily understood*

#### **Rationale:**

*The legibility of the city is dependent on an acknowledgement of how buildings and spaces fit together and how people understand their relative location within the structure of the overall city.*

*Features such as landmarks, edges, paths, nodes and districts all help people find their way around the city. Vistas create visual links between these elements and places. Visible routes and destinations, and a choice of routes will help people find their way around the city and contribute to making a place feel safe and unthreatening.*

*The legibility of the city is dependent on having elements that are standard and recur from place to place. This level of consistency reinforces the overall city structure. There is a need to carefully consider variations to reinforce the city's diversity which can then be overlaid and provide local character.*

*If public spaces are coherent and well integrated, signage should act as a supplementary wayfinding device. Signs should never dominate the spaces they server, and they should never become the primary means by which people navigate their way around the city.*

<b>Guidelines:</b>	
2.1	Reinforce the relative location of spaces within the overall structure of the city. Make it easy for people to find their way around by clear reference to landmarks, character areas and clear hierarchy of spaces.
2.2	Consider options for each public space being able to have at least two explicit or implicit connections with other adjacent spaces.
2.3	Create a clear hierarchy of signage in public spaces as part of a city-wide design strategy for wayfinding signs.

## APPENDIX 2

### Objective 3: - To improve accessibility for all

*Wellington is a place for people to easily get to and move around*

#### **Rationale:**

*Access to people, experiences, information, business and social interaction is the whole point of cities. Streets should operate more efficiently than just as traffic channels for vehicles. They should offer a safe and attractive environment for all. The city's public spaces are experienced at their most intense on foot and or by cycle, and can be destinations in their own right. Well-designed streets encourage people to use them for pleasure as well as purposeful activity. They also make for a safe and pleasant experience.*

*The progressive impact of the car on the city has been so dramatic over the last eighty years, that the management and design of the city environment has often developed to provide for the ease and priority of vehicle orientated travel and amenity.*

*Accessibility to places and spaces to the widest cross section of the community is critical. Universal design principles will allow greater accessibility for people with disabilities, young and old people and allow for opportunities of participation and an inclusive society.*

*The promotion of walkability has wide ranging advantages; it is healthy; it cuts down on vehicle use; it allows people to have greater interaction with their surroundings; and it allows for more casual interaction between people.*

*There is need for integration of public transport systems into the public space design with the link between public transport stops and walking critical. An integrated public transport system that builds on the existing infrastructure is important, which is user friendly, quick and efficient in distributing people through the balance of the city. In the central city, large numbers of commuters pass through the Railway Station, and walk into the city.*

*The central city is surrounded by high density residential areas, the two universities and a number of schools which all need to have good walking access into the central city.*

*However outside these areas people are more reliant on public transport and cars for accessibility. The support and development of walkability to public transport, centres and major suburban attractions is an important concept.*

<b>Guidelines:</b>	
3.1	Create a city that is accessible for all age groups and abilities
3.2	Improve the pedestrian amenity allowing people to move through high quality interconnected public spaces while considering traffic efficiency and on street parking requirements
3.3	Integrate public transport systems, such as bus shelters and signage, into public space design.
3.4	Promote continuity of access between public spaces and the adjacent buildings and spaces that are part of the private environment.
3.5	Consider how best to provide for accessibility and usability for all people, including young and old and those with disabilities in the design of all new works.

## APPENDIX 2

### Objective 4: - To improve the diversity of experience for Wellingtonians and visitors

*Wellington has variety and choice of spaces to use and experience, spaces that can change and adapt due to changing needs*

#### **Rationale**

*The different areas of the city do have different experiences and uses, which add to the individual character of an area. Both hard and soft landscaping contribute to this visual richness.*

*Different spaces should be considered in the following order: the overall context of the city; as part of a larger space and then in its own right. For example a street intersection is part of two streets, but in its own right forms a centre of activity as people stop and decide their routes.*

*How people use and treat the public spaces depends on where these spaces are located and the attractiveness of these spaces. The choice of locations and types of public space and their design and on-going arrangements made for management and maintenance of these areas is critical.*

*Wellington has large swathes of green open space, such as the Town Belt, Botanical Gardens and sports fields but limited other parks. With the exception of new Greenfield development where reserves can be incorporated into new sub divisional patterns, there are limited opportunities for new parks and squares. Over a vast area of the city, streets are the primary open spaces of the city. The use of streets as open space amenity is critical. Streets should be considered for a wide range of uses; for the movement of people and goods and also allow for people watching, sitting or event watching. Temporary uses such as temporary art installations, street parties, appropriate street trading, café tables and chairs, festivals and celebrations should be continually expanded on.*

*The city is an ever changing environment. These changes are not exclusively physical, they include shifts in social patterns or changes in the city's local economy. These changes may be subtle or obvious, small or large, progressive and incremental or instant and all encompassing. Such transformations often take on some form of physical expression.*

*These different uses all impact on the type of public spaces required. However uses often change more quickly than the form and contents of public spaces. As a result spaces need to be robust and flexible enough to cater for unforeseen changes.*

*Wellington is the capital city and should be a distinctive place that all New Zealanders treasure as part of their national identity. The Capital Centre, the area around Parliament contains a unique collection of buildings, spaces and activities that exhibit the values, institutions and traditions of the country. Wellington's capital role is essential to the city's identity, and contributes positively to its cosmopolitan character and amenity.*

*There are parts of the city that are under utilised such as the Pipitea Precinct area to the north and east of the Railway Station where new public spaces can potentially be integrated into the public space network on the city.*

<b>Guidelines:</b>	
4.1	Allow for appropriate variations to different spaces to provide diversity of experience
4.2	Allow for the city to evolve and change over time and accommodate a wide range of uses and activities. Create flexible, robust public spaces which can accommodate a broad range of uses both permanent and temporary.
4.3	Provide for proactive management of public spaces to encourage a wider variety of uses
4.4	Celebrate and strengthen the national capital role of Wellington through linkages to key national elements, public space upgrades that are nationally representative and telling of the nation's stories.

## APPENDIX 2

### Objective 5: - To enhance the night-time environment of the city

*Wellington's night-time economy is an important constituent of the city*

#### **Rationale:**

*Light in the city is the medium by which we perceive the nighttime environment and triggers our physical and emotional responses to the city and its value to us. To be able to create a city that promotes a perception of pride and well being in its citizens, there is a need to consider light holistically.*

*The city changes at night, with night illumination having the potential to give places a distinct after-dark identity thereby contributing to a greater diversity of experience in the city.*

*People's perception of safety can be improved by effective lighting in public spaces; in the central city, suburban centres and residential streets. At present, the design of lighting in public spaces is primarily road safety focused. While these factors are important, the illumination of public space needs to acknowledge a wider range of objectives including the amenity and experience offered to pedestrians.*

*Lighting affects functional visibility, but it can also draw attention to certain subjects. Different lighting in the same space can generate very different experiences. Lighting can act as a "highlighter" of events, stories and architecture. It is capable of arousing interest and curiosity; light can support a feeling of security and well being.*

*Lighting operates at two levels: the frequency and locations of lighting can 'mould' spaces; the hardware or poles can implant a 'style' on the space.*

<b>Guidelines:</b>	
5.1	Improve and co-ordinate the quality and consistency of the night environment through lighting and how it is delivered and managed.
5.2	Develop better lighting to generally enhance people's experience of the central city, suburban centres and residential streets after dark by improving amenity which in turn supports increased activity.
5.3	Improve both real and perceived personal and public safety levels and sense of security in the central city and suburban centres after dark.

## APPENDIX 2

### **Objective 6: - To improve the quality of the city's public spaces through good design and linking it to sustainability considerations**

*Wellington has successful public spaces that have a high quality of urban design innovation which provide attractive and safe environments.*

#### **Rationale**

*Clutter of elements is an inherent issue in public spaces. New elements are introduced often to resolve a single issue rather than any consideration to overall effects on the public space.*

*Good design improves the quality of the urban environment and enhances people's lives in countless ways. Favourable outcomes are more likely when designers consider how people experience public space, taking into account all the human senses: sight, touch, smell, hearing and motion. The design of public spaces should also take into account micro-climate by providing opportunities to shelter from rain, wind and sun.*

*The designs should be kept simple and robust, as the day to day activity and what happens along the built edge provide for the richness of the city environment. Good outcomes are seldom be achieved by regulation or prescription.*

*The inner city waterfront through The Waterfront Framework has developed a strong precedent for high quality design that should set the direction for other public space design in the city.*

*At the same time, design should take account of life-cycle benefits and costs. In particular, sensible maintenance expenses, durable materials, readily available materials and components and environmentally responsive services all feature in well designed public environments.*

*Some locations are inherently more important than others. Design solutions need to reflect the relative status of each area. Places which are highly visible or heavily used deserve to have more intense input. Places which require a catalyst for new redevelopment also merit special attention. The distinct character of individual areas is important but, equally, every design must consider how a given location contributes to city-wide patterns.*

*Designs need to be inclusive and consider requirements from a wide range of stakeholders. These requirements can be conflicting and a balanced outcome needs to be worked through a robust design process.*

*There is a need to work with the environment and develop ecologically sustainable outcomes which will both raise the issue of climate change in people's minds as well as provide for practical solutions on the ground and integrate with objectives to deal with climate change issues.*

*Street tree planting should be considered where appropriate. The use of both indigenous plants and exotic plants should be encouraged as both have their place in the more built environment of the central city.*

## APPENDIX 2

<b>Guidelines:</b>	
6.1	Start any design by keeping concepts simple and robust while reviewing opportunities to reduce clutter, minimise the number of elements where possible and look to integrate functions into a single unit or set of units.
6.2	Consider holistically the shape of spaces, scale, environmental factors and all physical elements.
6.3	Consider all public furniture containing advertising needs careful consideration to whether it provides sufficient public amenity and the location avoids 'getting in the way'.
6.4	Consider in spaces that are more heavily used and in more highly visible locations that higher maintenance regimes are more appropriate
6.5	Promote environmentally friendly and sustainable outcomes in all design considerations.
6.6	Introduce an ecologically sustainable city through innovative planting projects and 'water sensitive urban design' practices.
6.7	Assess projects not only on a single issue but in terms of the contributions to the overall character and effectiveness of public space.
6.8	Integrate works of art, street furniture and elements so as to reduce clutter and create and delineate spaces while not impeding pedestrians, vehicles, desire lines or view lines.
6.9	Promote high quality design that can be recognise locally and internationally through the use, where appropriate, of a range of innovative designers, design competitions, workshops, collaboration with artists and through community charettes that all can support up-skilled Council resource.
6.10	Set up a process of 'enquiry by design' for major public space projects that is to involve community engagement. This includes rigorous testing and exploration to assess and understand particular issues while unlocking unforeseen opportunities to deliver cost effective, functional and aesthetically pleasing results.