

Council's open spaces

How much open space does Council have?

The Wellington City Council currently manages approximately 2,800 hectares of land as open space. This includes forest remnants and regenerating bush, coastal areas and formally maintained recreation areas.

This includes:


- 2,500 hectares of bush (native, exotic and mixed);
- 200 hectares of general purpose grass areas;
- 100 hectares of sports turf;
- 98.5 kilometres of maintained tracks;
- 104 children's play areas;
- 3,600 square metres of annual bedding;
- 7 hectares of gardens and shrub areas;
- 4,000 street trees; and
- 2,660 pieces of park furniture.


Council maintains:

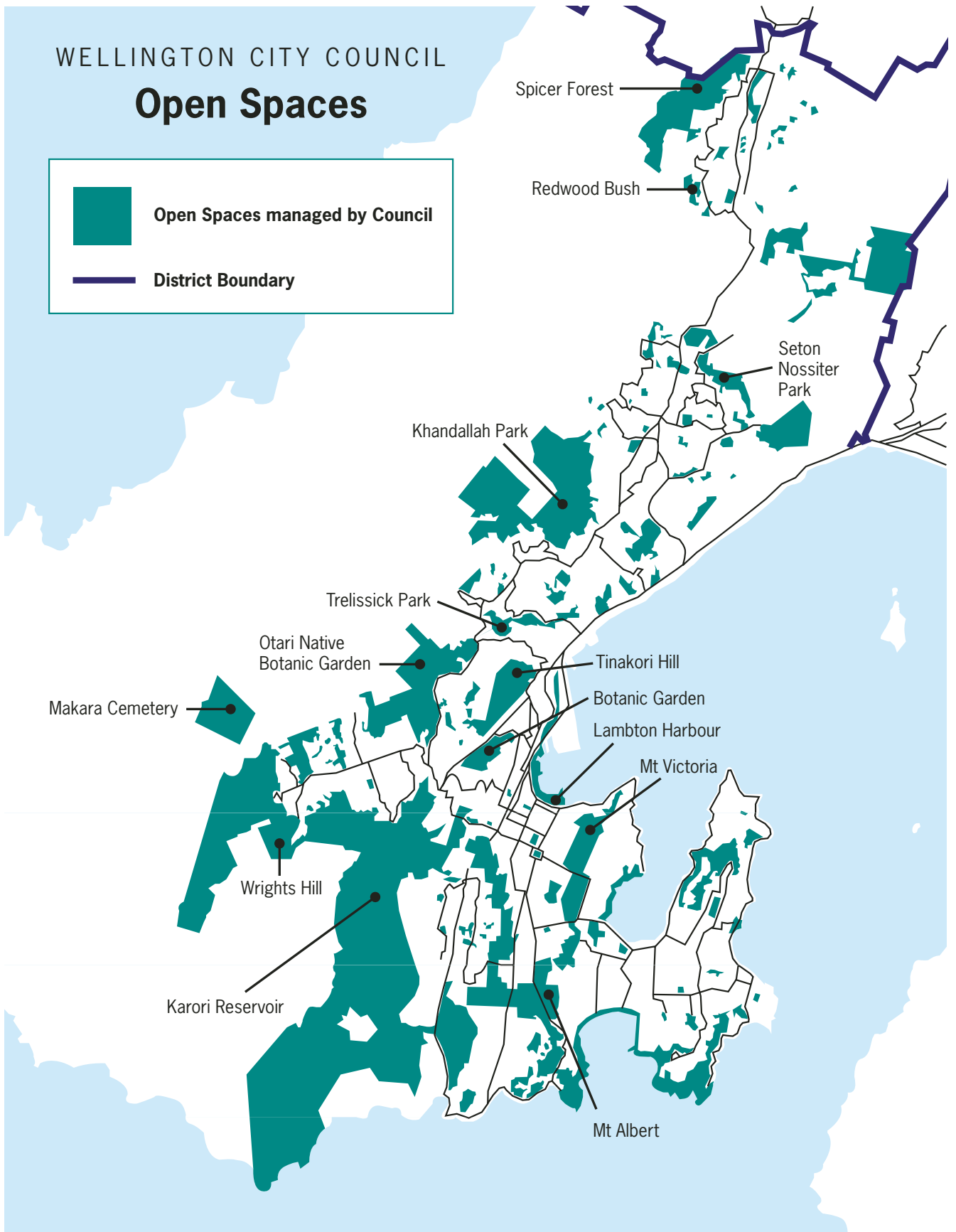
- 50 grass cricket blocks;
- 28 artificial cricket wickets;
- 70 junior wickets;
- 5 limestone softball diamonds;
- 13 grass softball diamonds;
- 4 community softball parks;
- 36 touch rugby fields;
- 2 grass athletic tracks;
- 28 rugby fields;
- 36 soccer fields;
- 18 junior soccer fields;
- 6 summer soccer fields;
- 6 rugby league fields;
- 1 gridiron field;
- 4 grass hockey fields;
- 2 artificial hockey surfaces (sand and wet);
- 14 hard surface netball/tennis courts;
- 1 concrete/wooden cycling velodrome;
- 1 athletic stadium with all weather track;
- 18 hole golf course; and
- 9 croquet lawns (2 clubs).

WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

Open Spaces

 Open Spaces managed by Council

 District Boundary



What do residents think?

Most Wellingtonians use the open spaces currently provided in Wellington and have a high level of satisfaction with them. The following table records the results of a 1997 residents survey⁷. Of the 33 Council services that were surveyed, the highest usage was reported for beaches and the Wellington Botanic Garden.

Activity	% of population using service	% who are satisfied
Beach cleanliness	95	76
Botanic Gardens	94	100
Town Belt	75	97
Other parks, reserves & open spaces	74	96
Children's play areas	48	90
Cemeteries	42	85

In another survey⁸ 87 percent of residents indicated that they felt the overall standard of parks, street trees, flower beds and other green areas in the central city was high.

When asked what they want Wellington to look like in the future⁹:

- 92 percent of residents said there should be continuous *recreational and scenic routes* for walkers, joggers and cyclists from Oriental Bay to Owhiro Bay, and from Karori to Makara and Johnsonville;
- 91 percent of residents said there should be a range of *protected marine areas*, including a marine reserve on the southern coast;
- 82 percent said the city should be surrounded by a *green outer town belt* which stretches from the south coast to Porirua.

While residents are clearly satisfied with the existing open spaces provided in Wellington, they also have a strong vision of how they would like Wellington's open spaces to be extended in the future.

How much is this open space worth?

Wellington City Council owns approximately 2,800 hectares of land as open space. A value for this asset is shown below. However, the figure cannot be taken at face value. One of the considerations taken into account in a valuation is the restrictions on alternative uses of the land. If you cannot use the land for any other purpose it is considered to be less valuable. Most open spaces are protected by the Reserves Act 1977 and/or district plan rules, so it is generally valued at a lower rate which may be as low as 25 percent of the value of similar unencumbered land. In other words the values quoted below are not replacement values.

Approximately 70 percent of the land managed by Council as open space is gazetted under the Reserves Act 1977. This Act provides a high degree of certainty regarding protection and appropriate use of open space and

⁷ Annual Report 1997: Residents Satisfaction Survey, Wellington City Council.

⁸ Interim Strategic Plan Monitoring Report: Residents Survey, Wellington City Council, July 1997.

⁹ Our City ~ Our Future: Resident Survey Results, Wellington City Council, August 1997.



Children playing at the Wahine Memorial, Seatoun

provides for significant community consultation. More than 95 percent of the land managed by Council as open space is zoned Open Space A or B in the *Proposed District Plan*, which restricts the potential land uses.

For political and legal reasons the capital value of this asset is unrealisable. Although the figure is useful to give some idea of the extent of the city's investment, it would not be possible to gain access to this capital for other purposes.

The improvements value refers only to buildings on open spaces. Items such as playground equipment and park furniture are considered to be chattels or *'plant and equipment'* and are not included in the improvements value.

Open Spaces (excluding Lambton Harbour)	1996 Government Valuations (\$000s)
Land	\$134,808
Improvements	\$63,954
Total	\$198,762

How much does it cost to maintain?

The *Contract* cost is the actual cost of delivering the service. Most of these works are competitively tendered and contracted. The second column *Asset Rental* is the rent that Council charges itself for using the facility (this also includes charges for insurance and rates, however these are a small proportion of the cost). In effect the asset rental is not a real cost, but it is a way of accounting for the cost of capital. The *Other Asset Costs* are the costs of managing the asset and include costs such as depreciation, corporate overheads and the preparation of asset management plans.

Outputs	1998-99 Annual Plan (\$000s)		
	Contract	Asset Rental	Other Asset Costs
Beach and Coast	\$115	\$328	\$209
Parks, gardens & open spaces	\$2,440	\$4,657	\$2,688
Botanic Gardens	\$1,363	\$1,140	\$693
Street Gardens	\$547	\$866	\$280
Sportsfields	\$1,134	\$7,145	\$1,106
Pavilions	n/a	\$235	\$76
Public Boat Ramps & Wharves	n/a	\$20	\$95
Cemeteries & Crematoriums	\$623	\$68	\$133
Basin Reserve	\$230	\$479	\$157
Zoo	\$2,092	\$679	\$301
Open Space Policy	\$127	n/a	n/a
Totals	\$8,671	\$15,617	\$5,738

Do we get any income from open space?

Source	1998-99 Budget Revenue (\$000s)
Sportsfields charges (including golf course)	\$350
Botanic Gardens (for events and hire of facilities)	\$70
Zoo charges	\$1,047
Burial and crematorium charges	\$360
Leases to community groups	\$298
Charges for easements, licences and rights of way including utilities (estimated net revenue for 1997)	\$10
Total Revenue	\$2,135



Sound Shell, Wellington Botanic Garden

What are the benefits of open spaces?

There are four broad areas of value which correspond with the four open space outcomes identified in Council's *Strategic Plan*. These are:

- *Ecological values* which include vegetation, wildlife and ecological processes;
- *Recreation values* which include the enjoyment and appreciation of open spaces in active and passive ways;
- *Landscape values* which include patterns of land form and use, visual appreciation and sense of place; and
- *Natural heritage values* which include sites with cultural and historic significance.

The open spaces that we are interested in have generally at least one of these values, and often more than one. In general it is difficult to quantify these values in dollar terms.

There are other environmental benefits which green open spaces have that are not always widely appreciated. These benefits are largely associated with trees which:

- improve air quality by storing carbon. Carbon dioxide is the most abundant of the greenhouse gases;
- improve energy conservation by ameliorating environmental extremes;
- improve water quality in streams and harbour;
- reduce stormwater runoff and flooding; and
- reduce wind (particularly in the City).

It is possible to calculate a dollar value for these benefits, based on the cost of dealing with these environmental problems by other means.

How can Council protect open spaces?

There are five broad roles that Council can adopt in order to achieve its open space objectives. These are described below:

Education

Educating landowners and the public to be aware of and to understand open space values is a fundamental part of a long-term strategy. Once landowners have an understanding of the open space values of their land and how their management can affect these values, they can choose to protect these values voluntarily.

In the long term the open space strategy can only work if the community understands and supports its objectives, and values the resulting open spaces.

Partnerships

Partnerships can be legal agreements which include owning an interest in land, such as public access easements or conservation covenants, or exchanging development rights for the conservation of open space values. Partnerships may also involve offering landowners incentives such as rates relief, or assistance to voluntarily protect an area or manage it in a particular way.

Entering into partnerships allows Council to meet open space outcomes and to involve landowners in the provision of open space in 'win-win' situations.

Statutory Planning

The *District Plan* is prepared under the Resource Management Act 1991 and is concerned with managing the overall natural and physical resources in a sustainable way. The *District Plan* specifies Open Space Areas for recreational uses (Open Space A) and for protecting natural and amenity values (Open Space B). Significant areas of conservation value are identified as Conservation Sites. The *District Plan* also lists buildings, areas, trees and sites of significant heritage value.

The associated policies and rules set out what activities are appropriate in these areas or sites, what criteria Council will use to assess applications for resource consents and what conditions may be imposed on activities. The *District Plan* also contains design guides which seek to encourage better use of the land and resources through good design which responds both to the environment and to the needs of people who live in it.

Funding


Council can fund other agencies / organisations to achieve open space objectives. For example the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust protects privately owned land with open space covenants. This can be helpful by bringing a third party into difficult situations, and in giving this party ongoing responsibility for management and monitoring.

Purchase & Provision of Open Space Land

Council owns and manages significant areas of open space land to achieve strategy outcomes and to meet community needs.

What is the best mechanism?

A more detailed explanation of various mechanisms is given in Appendix 1. There is no single 'best' mechanism, making the right choice depends on the situation. It is useful to see the mechanisms as part of a continuum. At one end Council reserves offer the highest level of protection and control for significant open spaces, at the other end education and incentives offer much less certainty but allow landowners to make their own decisions. In general more protection and control equates to a higher cost.

mechanisms	level of cost & protection	
Designations & heritage orders	 High	
Council reserves		
Council freehold open space		
Conservation & open space covenants		
Easements & rights of way		
District plan policies and rules		
Incentives		
Voluntary management agreements		
Education & advocacy		Low

Council will ask a number of questions when choosing the right mechanism for a particular situation (typically identified through the implementation plan), including:

- what is the most cost-effective mechanism for achieving Council's objectives in this situation;
- what is the significance of this open space, in general the higher the open space values the stronger the level of protection required;
- if other landowners are involved, what are their desires and aspirations;
- what is the level of threat to the open space values, in general the higher the level of threat the higher the level of protection required;

- does Council intend to undertake any improvements in the area, in general it is more practical to undertake improvements on Council-owned land where the permission of other landowners is not required and the question of ownership of the improvements is not an issue; and
- what expectations do the public have.

What about the Reserves Act 1977?

The main emphasis of the Reserves Act 1977 is the protection of reserve land and its availability for public use and enjoyment. The Act requires that land be classified in one of seven categories according to the primary values to be protected: nature, scientific, scenic, historic, recreation, government purpose or local purpose. Each category has principles and broad management requirements which reflect the specific protected values. Most of Council's reserves are held for recreation or scenic purposes.

The Act provides procedures for preparing management plans, revoking reserve status, exchanging reserve land for other land and dealing with applications for easements, leases, licences and concessions. It sets out Council's obligations as an administering body, and the right of the public to be consulted and to have their comments heard.

The Reserves Act 1977 provides a high level of statutory protection for open space land. The benefits of the Act are:

- a recognised protective status which formalises Council's intentions;
- strong democratic processes which provide for community input;
- offences provisions which allow Council to enforce protection if required; and
- a legal status that runs with the land title giving a high degree of certainty.

The disadvantages are:

- additional cost (although minor in relation to the cost of the land);
- less flexibility if Council changes its intentions for the land; and
- additional time required for management decisions.

Council will use the Reserves Act 1977 where it has a clear, long term intention to protect the land for open space purposes. In these cases the Act provides statutory protection for the land and sets in place strong democratic processes whereby the community can be involved in making decisions about the future of the open space.

Where Council is unsure about its long-term intentions, or wishes to retain the flexibility to respond to a situation in a different way, the Reserves Act 1977 may not be the most appropriate mechanism to use.



Wind turbine on Polhill