

Environmental Strategy

Protecting and enhancing our natural environment

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Context
3. Long-term direction
4. Three-year priorities
5. Strategy tree



Wellington City Council

July 2006

1. Introduction

This Environmental Strategy is about protecting and enhancing our natural environment. It provides a high-level statement of the Council's long-term environmental intentions for Wellington, as well as shorter-term priority areas for action.

Wellington's natural environment is composed of many elements, such as air, climate, water, land, soil and minerals, and plant and animal life. These elements support the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the city by providing visitors, residents and businesses with a range of resources, opportunities and benefits. Wellington also depends on the natural environment of other places in New Zealand and the rest of the world to provide some resources that are not generated locally.

All of these elements of the natural environment are under pressure in one way or another through the effects of human activity. Without careful planning and strategic action, the long-term health of Wellington's natural environment is likely to suffer.

The Council already plays important roles in environmental protection and enhancement, along with other agencies such as Greater Wellington, the Ministry for the Environment, the Department of Conservation, and various non-governmental organisations. It has certain statutory responsibilities and a range of other activities that it performs to achieve its desired outcomes. The Environmental Strategy is designed to clarify and confirm Council's roles regarding the natural environment in the long-term and in the short-term.

The Environmental Strategy is based on the premise of sustainable development—that is, meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This requires a long-term, future-focussed approach and recognition of the linkages between environmental, economic, social and cultural well-being. Council's sustainable development approach is described in its Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted in December 2003.

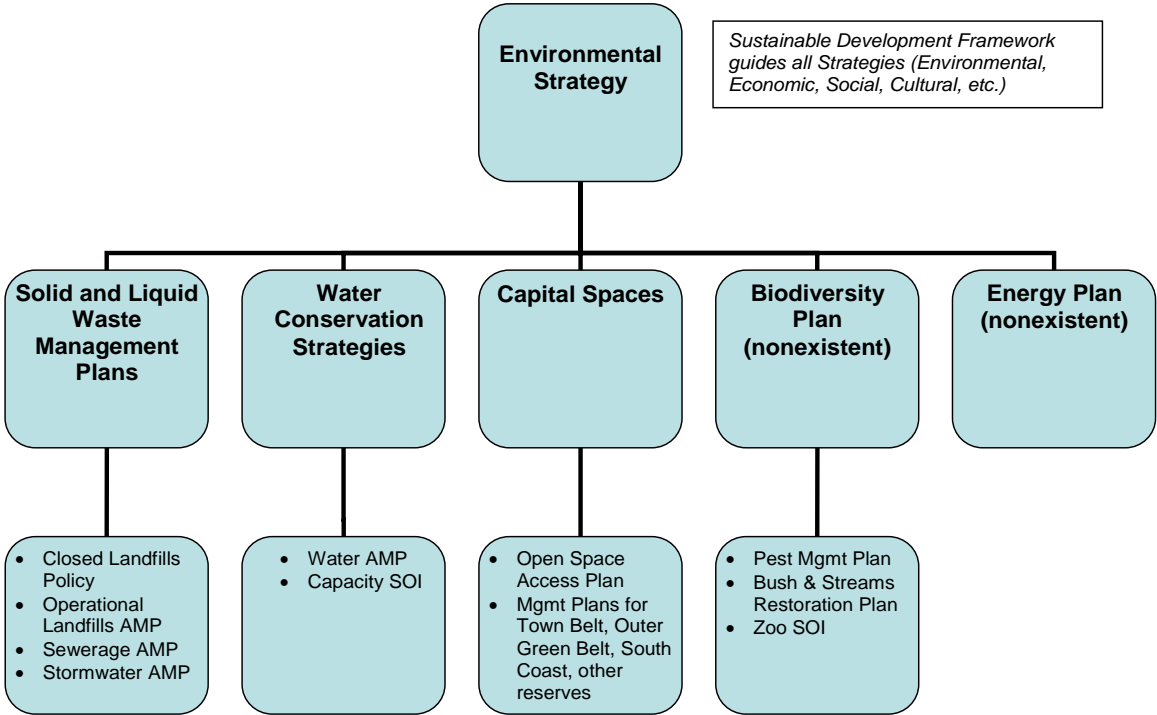
Just as the four well-beings are inter-related, so are the various elements of the natural environment. For example, use of water, energy, soil, land and other inputs affects waste generation, which in turn affects the quality of the receiving water, soil, land or air.

The intention of the Environmental Strategy is to recognise these inter-relationships and provide a holistic approach to the management of Wellington's natural environment. This means using the financial and human resources generated by growth to promote the environmental wellbeing that underpins that growth, and tending to all phases of the resource cycle from creation and extraction to use and disposal.

With this long-term, sustainable approach and key priority actions, the Council can help protect and enhance the natural environment so that it will endure and provide benefits for current residents and future generations

2. Context

Existing framework



- Other supporting documents:
- District Plan
 - Bylaws
 - Code of Practice for Land Development

The context

In managing the city the Council must take account of issues affecting several dimensions of our natural systems and environment, including:

- biodiversity and ecosystems
- open space
- landscape
- water supply
- solid and liquid waste management
- energy and climate

Specific current and potentially long-term threats and challenges to the city's natural systems and environments include:

- Climate change
- Energy shortages
- Invasive animal and plant pests

- Disturbance of ecosystems
- Poor water quality in streams
- Potentially harmful trade wastes
- Persistent waste generation and decreasing landfill lifespan
- Potential regional water shortages
- Negative effects of development on significant landscapes

The Council currently has a range of environment plans and policies that attempt to address these threats, including an open space plan (Capital Spaces), solid and liquid waste management plans, and water conservation strategies. However, the Council lacks an overarching environmental strategy that could explain how the various elements of the natural environment and Council's activities inter-relate, and what the priorities are. In particular, the Council has policy gaps in the areas of biodiversity and energy management.

The challenge

In order to actively mitigate current and potential global, national, regional and local environmental threats and challenges, the Council has to move one step further towards integrated environmental decision-making and management.

The solution

An environmental strategy that protects and enhances the natural environment to provide residents, businesses and visitors with a range of resources, opportunities and benefits

In recognition of the fact that sustainable growth depends on the wellbeing of the natural environment, Wellington should use the financial and human resources generated by growth to promote environmental wellbeing.

This means tending to all phases of the resource cycle:

- protecting sensitive natural areas and resources from disturbance
- reducing our resource use and relying more on renewable energy sources
- minimising the impact of our resource use, including development, on landscapes and ecosystems
- disposing of waste products in a way that protects the natural environment that provided the initial resources
- providing quality, accessible open spaces to protect and engage with the natural environment.

The pre-conditions

The successful realisation of this strategy will require:

- increased partnership within the city and the region, to share information and collaborative solutions
- data collection and monitoring to improve understanding of the health of our natural environment
- a meaningful shift in judging progress as sustainable development (measured by the Genuine Progress Indicator--GPI) rather than only economic expansion (Gross Domestic Product--GDP)

3. Long-term direction for the environment

Environmental Strategy 2006-16



Our long-term outcomes

Our overall goal is to protect and enhance the city's natural environment. This means ensuring that natural resources — air, water, land, and plant and animal life — are managed sustainably, in ways that don't compromise the well-being of current residents or future generations. And it means nurturing the natural environment so it can continue to attract people to the city and provide opportunities for recreation and enjoyment.

Over the next 10 years, we aspire to the following outcomes:

4.1 More liveable: *Wellington's natural environment will be accessible to all, for a wide range of social and recreational opportunities that do not compromise environmental values.*

Much of Wellington's natural environment allows public access for a variety of uses. As owner and/or manager of many open spaces, the Council must balance competing demands for their use so that human activities are allowed without compromising their environmental values. Protecting the natural environment, while making it accessible, will mean:

- providing opportunities for active and passive recreation
- actively managing open space ecosystems and public amenities
- balancing various uses of public open spaces.

4.2 Stronger sense of place: *Wellington will recognise and protect significant features of its coastal and terrestrial landscape and natural heritage.*

Wellington is known for its impressive sense of place that features the harbour and hills prominently in a dramatic coastal setting. The vegetation of Wellington, including street trees and private gardens, is an important element as well. Recognising and protecting landscape and natural heritage will mean:

- identifying those elements of the landscape that most favourably contribute to natural functions and Wellington's sense of place
- using the Council's influence as a land owner and its powers as a land use regulator to protect significant features of the landscape and natural heritage.

4.3 More actively engaged: *Wellington will pursue a collaborative, participatory approach towards environmental kaitiakitanga (guardianship), by sharing information within the community and establishing partnerships to achieve environmental goals.*

Wellington's natural environment can benefit from the combined strength of community groups, iwi, businesses, households, academic/research institutions, and local and central government agencies. While the roles of some organisations are defined by statute, there is still great potential for collaborative leadership in environmental matters. Promoting a more actively engaged city will mean:

- information sharing among agencies and across the community
- the Council leading by example through development and management of publicly-owned land, buildings and infrastructure
- collaborative decision-making
- community participation in decision-making and achievement of goals.

4.4 Better connected: *Wellington will have a network of green spaces and corridors linking the coastline, Town Belt and Outer Green Belt.*

The green open space network is important for ecological, social and non-motorised transportation connections through the city. The Council owns and/or manages much of the publicly accessible open space in the city and therefore has great influence over this valuable network. Providing a green open space network will mean:

- owning and managing local parks, including small urban parks, as well as larger open spaces like those in the Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, Botanic Gardens, and coastal areas
- facilitating and managing public access to privately owned open spaces throughout the city
- developing and maintaining walkways and trails
- monitoring and enhancing the ecological function of the green open space network.

4.5 More sustainable: *Wellington will reduce its environmental impact by making efficient use of energy, water, land and other resources; shifting towards renewable energy resources; conserving resources; and minimising waste.*

Without efficient use of scarce resources and/or increased use of renewable resources, Wellington faces several risks, including: running out of these inputs to its economy; creating more harmful emissions leading to poor local air quality and to climate change; and generating more solid waste which requires costly landfill expansion. Reduction, re-use, recovery, and recycling can help mitigate these risks and create economic opportunities based on waste reduction instead of waste generation. Sustainable resource use will mean:

- monitoring and managing Council's own resource use
- promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy development through the Council's role as facilitator and as land use regulator
- using the Council's control of the water supply system to promote water conservation through appropriate technology such as water meters and rainwater tanks
- promoting greywater re-use, water-saving toilets and rainwater re-use
- gathering more extensive data on waste sources, destinations and composition
- continuing kerbside recycling and encouraging greater re-use, recycling and recovery in the wider community, including businesses
- continuing to implement 'polluter-pays' charges to provide incentives for waste reduction and to fund mitigation efforts
- greater regional collaboration on appropriate matters such as pricing and data collection.

4.6 Safer: *Wellington will have access to safe and reliable energy and water supplies, clean air, and waste disposal systems that protect public health and ecosystems.*

Safe and reliable supplies of energy, water and air are the foundations of a healthy and prosperous city. Wellington needs to provide or facilitate these key inputs, including mitigating the negative effects of waste generation on these resources, the public and ecosystems. Reliable supply and safer disposal will mean:

- continued access to quality water supply
- sustainable stormwater management practices to prevent flooding
- greater protection of receiving waters from polluted stormwater
- high-quality treatment of sewage and innovative use of biosolids to protect the marine and terrestrial environment

- continued management of solid waste collections and landfills to protect public health and ecosystems.

4.7 Healthier: *Wellington will protect and restore its land- and water-based ecosystems to sustain their natural processes, and to provide habitats for a range of indigenous and non-indigenous plants and animals.*

Biodiversity is important because it represents the complex interplay of biological and physical elements that supports a thriving environment – one that produces the natural resources we use and the natural amenities we experience, view and value. Biodiversity is also a potentially valuable source of genetic material for future medical and technological advances. Beyond its material use to humans, biodiversity and ecosystems have intrinsic value. Protecting ecosystems and biodiversity will mean:

- providing natural habitat for a range of species
- controlling animal pests and invasive pest plants
- planting appropriate species and proactively managing the transition of some areas from exotic to indigenous vegetation

4.8 More competitive: *Wellington's high-quality natural environment will attract visitors, residents and businesses.*

Wellington has a competitive advantage in the quality of the natural environment that it offers tourists, potential residents, and potential businesses. This advantage is based not on resource extraction, but on the ample opportunities for appreciating and engaging with the natural environment while preserving it for future generations.

High-profile, public facilities that support the eco-tourism industry are particularly important in attracting short-term visitors. Additionally, many other Council activities such as parks and gardens, walkways, and sewage treatment contribute to Wellington's quality natural environment. These basic environmental services, as well as valued amenities like the open space network, are particularly important in attracting and retaining residents and businesses.

Fostering the competitive advantage offered by Wellington's superior and accessible natural environment will mean:

- showcasing biodiversity at public facilities
- marketing Wellington's natural environment to tourists, potential residents, and potential businesses
- continuing to provide an accessible open space network
- continuing to provide the other environmental services that make Wellington's natural environment special.

How we will measure our progress towards these outcomes

To assess whether Wellington is becoming **more liveable**, we'll measure the number of hectares of open space land we own or maintain per capita. We'll also monitor resident usage of the city's open spaces (including parks, Town Belt, reserves etc).

To assess whether Wellington is developing a **stronger sense of place**, we'll survey residents to find out what percentage think the city's natural environment is appropriately managed and protected.

To assess whether the city's residents and communities are becoming **more actively engaged** in guardianship of the environment, we'll survey residents to find out what action they're taking to reduce waste from their homes (eg by recycling or composting), and what steps they're taking to reduce pollution of the stormwater network. We'll also measure the number of hours worked by recognised environmental volunteer groups.

To assess whether the city's green spaces are becoming **better connected**, we'll keep a record of the number of kilometres of tracks we maintain throughout the city.

To judge whether the city is becoming **more sustainable**, we'll monitor trends in the total amount of waste going to the city's landfill per capita, total water use per capita, total energy use per capita, and total recyclable material Council staff divert from the landfill per capita. We'll also measure the city's ecological footprint.

To judge whether the city is providing a **safer** environment for residents, we'll monitor trends in air quality (measured in particulate matter), and number of energy supply interruptions.

To judge whether the city's environment is getting **healthier**, we'll monitor trends in: the number of macroinvertebrates in city streams; water quality; native bird populations; and native vegetation in reserve areas.

To judge whether the city's natural environment is making it **more competitive** by attracting visitors, residents and businesses, we'll monitor trends in the number of visitors to key environmental attractions (including Wellington Zoo, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, Wellington Botanic Garden and Otari Wilton's Bush).

4. Our three-year priorities

For the period 2006-09, we've identified the following four priorities for our contribution to the city's environmental well-being. These priorities are important stepping stones towards our long-term goals.

- We will increase our promotion of water and energy efficiency and conservation, energy security, and the use of renewable energy sources, and we will take a more active leadership role in these areas.
- We will increase our efforts to improve the protection of streams.
- We will develop a coherent plan to address biodiversity issues, including removing and replacing hazardous trees.
- We will strengthen our partnerships with stakeholders to increase environmental awareness, community participation, and the achievement of environmental goals.

How we plan to achieve these priorities

We already play a major role in protecting the environment from the negative effects of human activity, by looking after the city's sewage and stormwater networks, and rubbish and recycling operations, as well as encouraging waste minimisation. These tasks, along with water supply, keep the city liveable. They are among our biggest areas of operation.

We also look after the city's open space areas — beaches and coastline, Town Belt, Outer Green Belt, and parks and reserves. And we work with a wide range of organisations, from volunteer groups to major nature-based attractions, to enhance the city's natural environment and ensure the city offers a wide range of nature-based attractions.

Over the next three years, we're planning several new initiatives to protect and enhance Wellington's environment. We'll be taking steps to encourage water conservation and to promote energy efficiency, both within our own operations and throughout the city. This will include development of sustainable building guidelines aimed at encouraging greater energy efficiency and other sustainable features in building projects.

From 2006/07, we're increasing the amount of funding available in our environment grants pool to support community groups and volunteers who do work that benefits the city's environment, and we'll be increasing our support for community planting initiatives. We're also supporting the EnviroSchools programme to raise Wellington school students' awareness of and involvement in environmental issues.

We'll be working with others to protect and enhance the city's streams, by completing our restoration of the Kaiwharawhara Stream and starting restoration of the Porirua and Owhiro streams, as well as reviewing the use of regulatory tools.

And we'll be developing a Biodiversity Action Plan to ensure that we're protecting the city's biodiversity as effectively and strategically as we can. The plan will consider current biodiversity work (such as stream protection, weed/pest control, and management of reserves), what the priorities are, and whether there are any gaps that need to be addressed. A draft will be completed in 2006/07 with implementation to begin the following year.

5. Strategy Tree – Environment

STRATEGY TREE – ENVIRONMENT

