



Ngā māra, ngā matatāhuna, me tētehi papa wātea kākāriki nui

Parks, beaches and open space

Background report

March 2026

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Purpose

This background report provides a clear, evidence-based overview of Wellington City Council's Parks, Beaches and Open Spaces activity. It sets out what the Council does, why it does it, how it is funded, how it is performing, and the key issues shaping future choices.

The report is intended to support informed engagement with the Council's role in Parks, Beaches and Open Spaces. It provides advisory groups with shared context on Council responsibilities, settings, constraints, and strategic direction, and supports elected members by bringing together relevant information, performance insights, stakeholder views, and emerging challenges to inform deliberations through the Long-term Plan (LTP) 2027–2037 process.

This is not a strategy or a set of recommendations. Rather, it is a foundation document that identifies current settings, pressures, and opportunities, and surfaces the key trade-offs that will need to be considered as the Council refreshes its strategic direction and investment approach for Parks, Beaches and Open Spaces within a constrained fiscal environment.

Council Activities

A Council 'activity' is a formal Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002) term to refer to Council goods and services. Council activities are grouped for the purposes of the Long-term Plan and budgets – some are relatively stand-alone like transport.

This group of activities includes:

2.1 Parks, beaches and open spaces

- 2.1.1 Parks and Reserves
- 2.1.2 Wellington Gardens
- 2.1.3 Beaches and coast
- 2.1.4 Urban Ecology
- 2.1.5 Trails
- 2.1.6 Wellington Waterfront

2.5 Stormwater

2.6 Conservation organisations

- 2.6.1 Conservation visitor attractions

What we do as a Council

The Parks, Beaches, and Open Spaces activity provides access to a wide range of open spaces across the city, supporting recreation, nature, and heritage.

- **Managing city parks, reserves, beaches, and the waterfront.**
 - Looking after 4,390.7 hectares of parks and reserves, beaches and 391 km of walking and biking tracks. This includes 160 buildings, signage, road reserves, leases, mowing, and vegetation. We also maintain 200,000 m² of horticultural areas, including: Wellington Botanic Garden ki Paekākā, Ōtari Wilton's Bush, Truby King Park, and Bolton Street Cemetery ki Paekākā. The gardens hold diverse plant collections and attract 1.3 million visitors per year.
 - Caring for significant heritage features such as wāhi tapu (sacred sites), archaeological sites, historic gates, heritage cemetery, and heritage trees.
 - Managing 42 coastal structures, including boat ramps, wharves, slipways, and seawalls, to ensure safe and accessible coastal areas.
 - Partnering with mana whenua to co-manage spaces, including the recently agreed Mātai Moana Reserve, Te Wai Ora o Parirua Porirua Harbour Accord, Taputeranga Island and Te Kopahou cultural restoration.
 - Restoring native habitats, managing biosecurity risks, and controlling pest animals and plants. Our work includes growing eco-sourced plants at the Berhampore nursery, trapping and pest control, and managing invasive plant species. The Ōtari Laboratory supports rare indigenous plant conservation and science.
 - Supporting over 120 volunteer environmental groups, schools, universities, and workplaces to contribute and learn through planting, pest control, and trail maintenance. This includes providing eco-sourced indigenous plants, communications, education, and resources.
 - Handling landowner approvals for events, trading, filming, and monitoring compliance across reserve land. We also manage freedom camping and encroachments on reserve and Town Belt land.
 - Providing a 24/7 rostered Park Ranger response service.
 - Contributing to the city's sequestering of carbon emissions through 1,304.8 hectares of indigenous forest and 33 hectares of exotic forest on Council land, all established after 1989 and included in the Emissions Trading Scheme.
- **Partnering, supporting, and funding organisations across Wellington.**
 - Predator Free Wellington, working towards a predator-free capital where native species thrive.
 - Capital Kiwi, restoring wild kiwi populations to Wellington.
 - Funding Conservation Organisations: Te Nukuaō Wellington Zoo and Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne as conservation attractions to promote biodiversity,

conservation, sustainability and excellent animal welfare with high-quality education and visitor experiences.

- **Managing the city's stormwater activity.**

- Governance of Tiaki Wai (formally Metro Water).
- Effectively managing the Stormwater Service Level Agreement between the Council and Tiaki Wai.
- Stormwater service agreements with Tiaki Wai will be established by 1 July, these are expected to clarify roles and responsibilities between the two organisations and within the council.



Budget

You can find more information in the LTP 2024 Amendment.¹

Percentage of total council spend:

Opex – 12.4%

Capex – 5%

Operating Expenditure

Activity Component Name	Income/ Expense	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
2.1.1 Parks and Reserves	Expense	24,181	24,202	28,435	28,314	30,027	32,093	34,150	36,259	37,962	39,615
	Income	(1,275)	(1,282)	(1,330)	(1,360)	(1,388)	(1,416)	(1,443)	(1,470)	(1,498)	(1,525)
2.1.2 Wellington gardens	Expense	7,690	8,339	8,802	9,002	9,421	9,933	10,336	10,721	11,104	11,794
	Income	(879)	(880)	(816)	(834)	(852)	(869)	(885)	(902)	(919)	(936)
2.1.3 Beaches and coast	Expense	1,800	1,784	2,153	2,180	2,200	2,314	2,450	2,610	2,735	2,800
	Income	(60)	(71)	(63)	(64)	(65)	(67)	(68)	(69)	(71)	(72)
2.1.4 Urban Ecology	Expense	5,137	5,494	5,416	5,539	5,660	5,997	5,945	5,980	6,082	6,219
	Income	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.1.5 Trails	Expense	1,439	1,560	1,637	1,600	1,507	1,746	1,733	1,713	1,698	1,666
	Income	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.1.6 Wellington Waterfront	Expense	17,287	18,320	19,115	18,186	17,520	18,113	18,606	18,798	18,770	18,707
	Income	(502)	(595)	(526)	(537)	(548)	(559)	(570)	(581)	(591)	(602)
Total		54,820	56,871	62,823	62,027	63,481	67,286	70,253	73,058	75,272	77,667

¹ Wellington City Council. (2024). *2024-34 Long-term Plan*.

Capital Expenditure

Activity Component Name	2024/25 Published budget	2024/25 Amendment budget	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
2.1.1 Parks and Reserves	6,973	8,340	9,869	6,167	12,856	4,278	12,180	13,065	23,230	16,529	15,763
2.1.2 Wellington gardens	1,311	804	1,224	6,301	5,520	3,501	2,429	821	2,696	4,350	2,685
2.1.3 Beaches and coast	1,355	1,001	2,232	1,212	510	856	653	827	594	826	840
2.1.4 Urban Ecology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.1.5 Trails	1,343	1,343	1,217	1,934	3,264	2,709	3,129	3,650	1,479	1,680	3,386
2.1.6 Wellington Waterfront	4,985	4,774	17,377	4,544	2,453	8,908	3,089	2,124	1,740	1,763	2,002
Total	15,967	16,261	31,919	20,159	24,603	20,252	21,480	20,486	29,739	25,147	24,676

Higher planned investment in 2031/2 is due to a new budget for land purchases for Inner City Parks. This budget line then drops to around 2.3M the following year and 1.6M the year after that.

Operating Expenditure

Activity Component Name	Income/Expense	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
2.5.1 Stormwater management	Expense	46,095	56,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Income	(1,236)	(487)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		44,859	55,814	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Capital Expenditure

Activity Component Name	2024/25 Published budget	2024/25 Amendment budget	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
2.5.1 Stormwater management	3,721	3,571	5,655	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3,721	3,571	5,655	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Note that overland stormwater responsibilities are currently funded within the relevant activity group. This is likely to remain.

Operating Expenditure

Activity Component Name	Income/Expense	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
2.6.1 Conservation visitor attractions	Expense	9,926	10,026	10,403	10,496	10,929	11,257	11,746	12,518	13,340	13,906
Total		9,926	10,026	10,403	10,496	10,929	11,257	11,746	12,518	13,340	13,906

Capital Expenditure

Activity Component Name	2024/25 Published budget	2024/25 Amendment budget	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
2.6.1 Conservation visitor attractions	1,311	1,311	1,342	1,406	1,823	2,601	3,913	7,457	10,277	2,204	2,251
Total	1,311	1,311	1,342	1,406	1,823	2,601	3,913	7,457	10,277	2,204	2,251

Note that planned investment in years 2030-32 is for the Zoo Masterplan, Zoo Renewal, and Zealandia investment renewals (e.g. renewal of the sanctuary perimeter exclusion fence).

Parks, Beaches & Open Spaces Funding Sources

Parks, Beaches & Open Spaces Subactivity	User Fees	Rates Contribution*	Other Income
Parks and Reserves	0-10%	90-100%	0-10%
Wellington Gardens	10-20%	80-90%	
Beaches and Coast	0%	100%	
Urban Ecology	0%	100%	
Trails	0%	100%	
Wellington Waterfront	0-10%	90-100%	
Stormwater management	0%	100%**	
Conservation Organisations	0%	100%	

*General rates except where specified, ** 77.5% Residential target and 22.5% Commercial. Source: 2024 LTP Volume 2.

Why is this activity important?

Manaaki whenua, manaaki tangata, haere whakamua. This well-known whakataukī, outlined in Te Whai Oranga Pōneke, expresses that if we take care of the earth, if we take care of the people, we will take care of the future.

Open spaces, including parks, beaches, reserves, and conservation organisations are important to Wellingtonians. These areas support native biodiversity and strengthen resilience to extreme weather, while providing valuable spaces for recreation, physical activity, and connecting with nature and one another.

Residents value open spaces for enhancing physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing, fostering joy, learning, and active living. They serve as places for community interaction, where people can meet and engage with nature, whānau, friends, and others. Wellington's open-space network, which encompasses the harbour, hills, tracks, the Botanic Garden ki Paekākā, Ōtari-Wilton's Bush, the coast and waterfront, Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne, Te Nukua o Wellington Zoo, and various conservation organisations, contributes significantly to the city's identity, vibrancy, and visitor economy. These priorities are reflected in Te Whai Oranga Pōneke, which recognises open spaces as vital for community wellbeing, environmental health, and economic and tourism opportunities.

Green spaces provide habitats for plants and animals, support soil formation, and absorb rainwater - reducing flood risk and easing pressure on stormwater systems. Trees and vegetation cool urban areas, store carbon, produce oxygen, and filter air pollution. Restoration planting, pest control, and conservation efforts across the city protect native species and ecosystems.

Public feedback on biodiversity and climate-resilience planning also highlights the importance of restoration planting, pest control and ecosystem protection, with many respondents calling for more support for native habitats and nature-based solutions. This feedback directly informed Council's biodiversity and climate actions, which sit alongside the open-space strategy.

Stormwater management plays a critical role in protecting public health and safety by preventing flooding through a network of pipes, culverts, and overland flow paths that manage rainwater runoff from urban surfaces like roads and roofs. How stormwater is managed has a significant impact on the environment, because untreated stormwater carries contaminants, such as heavy metals and bacteria, into streams and harbours, affecting water quality and marine biodiversity. Furthermore, if stormwater is not managed well, it can cause erosion of land and stream banks, as well as damage to public and private property.

Current Direction

Direction from legislation and national regulations

The purpose of local government requires councils to promote social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being (the four well-beings) of communities (Local Government Act 2002 section 10 refers). The Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill proposes to remove the four well-beings from this purpose; however, reserves are explicitly included in the list of core services to be considered in the Council's role (proposed new section 11A of the LGA 2002).

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) governs councils' responsibilities for managing natural and physical resources, including land use, biodiversity, and freshwater. National Policy Statements under the RMA (such as Te Mana o Te Wai (NPS-FM), the National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity, and the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement) guide councils in protecting ecosystems and managing development sustainably. The RMA is proposed to be replaced by the Planning Act and Natural Environment Act, expected to be enacted by mid-2026. The proposed changes will affect the Council's current regulatory functions, and how it works with other councils in the region.

Additional legislation includes the Reserves Act 1977, which provides for the classification, management and protection of public reserves, and the Wellington Town Belt Act 2016, which governs the use and management of the Town Belt. The Wildlife Act 1953 regulates the protection and handling of native species. The Port Nicholson Block Settlement 2009 and Ngāti Toa Settlement 2014 Treaty Settlement Acts formalise relationships between iwi and Wellington City Council, requiring consultation and joint management of significant sites.

The Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025 outlines responsibilities for drinking water, sewerage, and stormwater services. The Council, in response to this Act, agreed to establish a multi-council water organisation, Tiaki Wai, with Upper Hutt City Council, Hutt City Council, Porirua City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC). Together, these legislative frameworks shape how councils manage and protect natural spaces and water infrastructure across Aotearoa.

Regional settings

The Natural Resources Plan (NRP) and Regional Policy Statement (RPS), both developed by GWRC, provide the overarching framework for managing land, water, air, and coastal resources in the Wellington region. The NRP promotes sustainable and integrated management through objectives, policies, and rules addressing the development and

protection of natural resources. The RPS sets binding strategic direction for regional and district plans, guiding decisions on land use, environmental protection, and resource management. There are proposed updates to the RPS in areas including climate adaptation, freshwater management, biodiversity, and urban development. Additionally, the Regional Pest Management Strategy (2019–2039) supports biodiversity and community wellbeing through targeted pest control, classifying species under exclusion, eradication, and containment programmes.

The Metropolitan Wellington Water Services Delivery Plan (WSDP) outlines a collaborative approach by five councils to deliver water, wastewater, and stormwater services, with statutory backing from the Secretary for Local Government. The Whaitua programme, developed by the GWRC captures community aspirations for freshwater ecosystems in Wellington City Council areas.

Together, these strategies reflect a multi-layered approach to environmental management and service delivery across the region.

Wellington City Council settings

Te Whai Oranga Pōneke | Open Space and Recreation Strategy, adopted by council in 2023, sets a 30-year vision for enhancing Wellington’s parks, tracks, and open spaces, grounded in the principle of “pursuit of wellness.” It aims to ensure equitable access to nature by placing every resident within a 5–10-minute walk of a park, increasing greening in underserved areas, and removing barriers to participation. Our Natural Capital – Wellington’s Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2015, focuses on protecting and restoring indigenous biodiversity by fostering community connection and caring for nature. The Green Network Plan 2023 complements these efforts by proposing a continuous network of green spaces in the central city to deliver ecological, social, and public health benefits.

The Wellington Town Belt Management Plan, required under the Wellington Town Belt Act, provides a framework for managing this iconic green space. Reserve Management Plans, such as the recently adopted Tātou ki Uta – Coastal Reserves Management Plan (September 2025), guide the protection, use and enjoyment of Wellington’s coastal reserves, parks, and beaches.

Wellington City Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019. Te Atakura – First to Zero, a blueprint to make Wellington City a zero-carbon capital by 2050, was also adopted in 2019.

Indicators and trends

Increasing biodiversity in Wellington

Much of the success in increasing biodiversity has been credited to Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne, creating a predator-free space for birds to thrive, alongside Predator Free Wellington and Capital Kiwi's work across Wellington to remove predators.

Indicators

55%

more native bird encounters since 2011, with species like tūi, kākā, and kererū now common even in suburban gardens and the city centre and as far away as Porirua and the Hutt valley (Bird Monitoring Report 2024)

2m

2 million native plants have been planted over 20 years, creating habitat for native birds, insects and lizards. The programme continues with a new target of 3 million plants (WCC media release, 2021)

75%

of indigenous species in key groups (reptiles, birds, bats, freshwater fish) are threatened or at risk of becoming threatened nationally (Statistics New Zealand, 2023)

14.6%

of NZ habitats have been replaced by urban development, with urban land cover expanding 30,264 hectares between 1996 and 2018, increasing pressure on natural and recreational spaces (Statistics New Zealand, 2023)

High satisfaction with parks, beaches, and open spaces

Wellingtonians generally have a strong positive connection to their city's natural spaces, valuing both their accessibility and the benefits they bring to everyday life.

Public open space land owned or maintained by the Council is increasing. Recent land acquisitions include the Huntleigh Guides Centre (Crofton Downs), an addition to Awarua Recreation Reserve (near Mt Kaukau), and developer reserve contributions in the northern suburbs, including Korimako Play Area (Annual Report, 2025).

Indicators

All statistics are from the Resident's Monitoring Survey 2025 unless otherwise specified.

90%

agree that Wellington's connection to nature improves their quality of life

70-85%

satisfaction with most green spaces including botanic gardens, forested areas, and walkways/trails

83%

are satisfied with the quality and maintenance of botanic gardens including Ōtari-Wilsons Bush, the highest satisfaction of all green spaces

82%

of households are within a 10-minute walk of a neighbourhood park (Te Whai Oranga Pōneke)

75-85%

agree that green and/or open spaces are easy to access – showing a small decline over time. For disabled people*, ease of access is rated 10-20% lower for each space. Respondents with household incomes above 100k were also more likely to say that spaces are easy to access

*Disabled people = people with one or more activity limitation (have a lot of difficulty with, or cannot do activity at all) as per the Washington Group Short Set.

In addition,

- The total amount of open space owned or maintained by Council for 2024/25 is 4390.7 hectares – an increase of 27.7 hectares due to land (Annual Report 2024/25).
- 47% of Council-managed open spaces are covered in trees, contributing to a city-wide 30.6% urban tree canopy cover (University of Canterbury, 2021).

Concern about water quality and climate action

Wellingtonians' concerns about water pollution in streams, rivers, lakes, and the sea have steadily increased over the last 8 years. Most respondents understand local climate impacts, but don't think enough action is being taken.

Indicators

41%

are satisfied with the stormwater system – a slight improvement from 35% in 2024, but does not meet the KPI of 75% satisfaction (Residents Monitoring Survey 2025)

71%

of Wellingtonians said water pollution is a problem in their city, compared with the average of 61% across the other eight cities surveyed (Quality of Life survey 2024)

84%

of Wellington residents said they understood the impacts climate change could have on Wellington "very well" or "fairly well" (Climate Change Survey 2025)

83%

believe that the negative effects of climate change are already being felt in Wellington, but only one in ten felt confident enough action was being taken to prepare Wellington for the effects of climate change (Climate Action Monitor 2025)

88%

agree that Wellington City Council has a responsibility to help residents prepare for climate change impacts (Climate Action Monitor 2025)



Stakeholder views about Parks, Beaches and Open Spaces

Valuing nature and green spaces

Residents overwhelmingly value Wellington's parks, beaches, and natural environments. Many people highlight the abundance of green space and native birds is a defining feature of living in the city. A key theme in recent consultations is the call to "green" the city further, particularly in response to urban intensification, and one of the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly set up to shape the 24/34 LTP, was to increase green spaces.

During engagement on the Spatial Plan, Green Network Plan and Te Whai Oranga Pōneke, there was overwhelming feedback to create new parks and tree-lined areas in the central city and key suburban growth areas. Residents in emerging high-density neighbourhoods are seeking more local parks and green links to ensure everyone is within easy reach of open spaces. The Swan and Garrett Street Park upgrade evaluation found that 89% of those surveyed noticed the 'greening' and 96% were satisfied with the improvements. There is also strong support for community gardens, local food production, and recreational activities in natural settings, as reflected in the 2024-34 LTP Priorities Engagement Report.

Advisory Groups strongly support expanding Wellington's green network, particularly in high-density areas. Recommendations include creating parks and tree-lined streets and ensuring spaces are accessible for disabled people and older residents through safe routes, seating, and clear signage. Youth Council representatives link greening initiatives to mental wellbeing and social connection.

Biodiversity and conservation

There is strong public support for biodiversity initiatives. Across multiple consultations, residents have consistently raised concerns about invasive weeds (like Gorse and Old Man's Beard) and animal pests (rats, stoats, possums), especially in coastal reserves. Wellingtonians strongly support ongoing pest-control and restoration programmes, and they urge continued Council funding and support for these efforts. The Citizens' Assembly also recommended engaging communities in open space management.

Conservation attractions (Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne, Te Nukua o Wellington Zoo) are widely seen as community assets. Locals express pride in Zealandia's success in restoring native bird populations and view it as proof of ambitious conservation work. The Zoo is appreciated for its conservation education and breeding programmes for endangered species, as well as its high welfare standards. Support for continued or increased funding

for both institutions was raised during long-term plan consultations, highlighting their broad appeal across the community.

The community also backs native planting in residential backyards and broader climate adaptation measures, such as flood protection and replacing pine plantations with native vegetation. These priorities are reinforced in the 2024–34 LTP Priorities Engagement Report.

Advisory Groups endorse pest-control and restoration programmes and native planting in public and private spaces.

Waterways and marine environments

Wellingtonians have voiced concerns about environmental threats to waterways and coastal areas. Community feedback indicates ongoing worries about stormwater runoff and harbour water quality, with public surveys showing a steady rise in concern about dirty streams and beaches over the past decade. Community submissions also raised concerns about stormwater, flooding, and water quality, noting that poorly managed stormwater can damage streams, the harbour, and ecological systems. Residents asked for improvements to water infrastructure and for open spaces to play a greater role in absorbing and managing stormwater. These themes are now reflected in Council's resilience and water-management priorities, which recognise the role of natural areas, wetlands and green spaces in reducing flood risk and supporting environmental health. Feedback calls for greater Council investment in cleaning up waterways (e.g. upgrading pipes to prevent sewage overflows) and protecting marine ecosystems. This feedback has been increasing in the wake of the Moa Point wastewater treatment plant failure.

Advisory Groups' feedback highlights concern about stormwater runoff and harbour water quality, urging investment in infrastructure upgrades and nature-based solutions such as wetlands.

Responsible recreation and kaitiakitanga

Parks, beaches, and open spaces are widely recognised as essential for recreation, socialising, and overall community wellbeing, with residents expressing a strong desire for more community-led activities, events, and spaces that foster social connections and civic pride.

While residents love using beaches and outdoor spaces for recreation, they also call for responsible management to protect nature. A prominent concern is uncontrolled dogs in ecological habitats, with incidents of off-leash dogs disturbing wildlife (notably penguin nests on beaches), which the community finds unacceptable. Many submitters have urged stricter enforcement of dog bylaws at sensitive sites or the creation of more fenced dog exercise areas.

Advisory Groups² call for stricter dog bylaw enforcement and fenced exercise areas to protect wildlife, particularly kororā (little blue penguins). Education campaigns promoting kaitiakitanga (guardianship) are recommended to balance recreation with conservation.

Equity and accessibility: The community emphasises that climate and nature solutions must be equitable and inclusive, ensuring they consider the needs of disabled people and vulnerable groups. There are concerns about rising costs and potential negative impacts on low-income residents, with a strong desire for nature-based initiatives to be accessible and beneficial to all.

Advisory Group feedback is that climate and nature initiatives must be affordable and inclusive, ensuring benefits reach disabled people, older adults, and low-income households. Accessible design standards, such as clear signage and mobility-friendly routes, are considered essential.



² Wellington City Council's Advisory Groups provide strategic, identity-informed advice to Councillors and Officers. There is more information about the Advisory Groups in the City Overview Background Report.

Tākai Here partners' perspectives on parks, biodiversity, water, and environmental management

True partnership and co-governance

Tākai Here partners strongly advocate for a genuine partnership in environmental management. They emphasise the importance of early involvement in planning for parks, biodiversity, and open spaces, as seen in their co-design contributions to Tātou ki Uta - Coastal Reserves Management Plan 2025, which reflects Māori cultural and ecological values. Mana whenua wants their knowledge of te taiao (the environment) and kaitiakitanga to guide how natural areas in Te Whanganui-a-Tara are cared for. Tākai Here partners also highlight the need for adequate resourcing to support meaningful engagement, noting limited capacity and the importance of mutual commitment.

Genuine partnership and co-governance of specific open space lands, such as the Wellington Town Belt, Mātai Moana reserve, Oruaiti and Te Kopahou, are important to fulfil Treaty partnership obligations. Tākai Here partners' strategic goal is to move beyond consultation to shared decision-making, enabling Māori to directly exercise kaitiakitanga. This includes investigating land vesting, establishing new reserves on ancestral sites, and securing funding and roles for iwi-led environmental restoration and management.

Mātauranga Māori

Tākai Here partners advocate for authentic integration of mātauranga Māori (traditional knowledge) in the management of parks and reserves, including the need to weave Māori culture and history into Wellington's parks and open spaces. This includes restoring original te reo Māori names, installing signage and art that tell mana whenua stories, and using cultural planting and harvesting practices. Respect for wāhi tapu (sacred sites) and public education about Māori relationships with the land are essential to fostering shared stewardship.

Te mana o te wai – water as a sacred taonga

The sacred importance of water is central to mana whenua concerns. Mana whenua across the region have consistently highlighted the health of Wellington's waterways (harbour, streams, wetlands) as a top priority. Their feedback on various plans, including through the Whaitua catchment plans, has urged stronger action to restore streams, prevent pollution, and 'daylight' (uncover) streams that have been buried in pipes. They advocate for the protection of coastal ecosystems, estuaries, reefs, and mahinga kai (traditional food-gathering areas) from degradation. The Council's new plans (like Tātou ki Uta - Coastal Reserves Management Plan) explicitly incorporate Māori environmental values, including improving the mauri (life force) of water and embracing ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea holistic management). Feedback reinforces that water quality and biodiversity go hand-in-hand with cultural wellbeing - when the waters and forests thrive, so do the people.

Support for indigenous biodiversity and climate action

Through the Tākai Here partnership and other forums, our partners have endorsed ambitious environmental targets – for example making Wellington predator-free, restoring native forests, and supporting the city's climate and ecological emergency declaration. Ngāti Toa and Taranaki Whānui both have partnerships with Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne, contributing cultural guidance such as ceremonial blessings for translocations of species, or Māori names for birds released. They have provided guidance to Te Nukua o Wellington Zoo on respecting Māori perspectives on caring for animals, including protocols for handling sacred species remains.



Key issues and opportunities

Maintaining open space network with increasing cost pressures and high community expectations

An ongoing challenge is improving and maintaining our extensive parks and open spaces services and facilities, with increasing external cost pressures and high community expectations. As community expectations increase, we are facing cost pressures to maintain existing services and maintenance budgets for our existing assets. Decisions regarding service levels will become increasingly challenging and complex in the coming years.

In some areas, there is a disconnect between community members and Council regarding the levels of service, the level of enforcement or compliance being undertaken, or the provision of amenities. This can result in working reactively, increased and unbudgeted costs, delays to other projects, and work not being completed in a timely manner.

Wellington's passionate and engaged residents present opportunities to improve our parks, beaches, and open spaces. To harness this potential, the Council could enhance the way we communicate and collaborate with communities. This could include sharing what is being done and why, storytelling around championing community-led projects, successes, and initiatives that encourage residents to take ownership of their local spaces and contribute meaningfully.

Equitable, inclusive and accessible green spaces

Unequal distribution of green space across Wellington

Our open space network, which includes significant assets like the Wellington Town Belt and the Outer Green Belt, means Wellington has a high amount of green space per person, and open space land owned or maintained by the Council is increasing. Despite this, some densely populated neighbourhoods in the central city, particularly in Te Aro, and in some areas of higher deprivation, for example, Kilbirnie and Strathmore, lack trees and nearby parks or reserves. Wellington has less neighbourhood park space per capita than any other city in New Zealand, and although 82% of households are within a 10-minute walk of a neighbourhood park, there are some significant gaps, and some of these are in high-growth areas. Te Whai Oranga Pōneke - The Open Spaces and Recreation Strategy outlines gaps in green space across Pōneke and where the Council may decide to focus investment to meet the Open Space Categories Provision.

An ongoing challenge to improving distribution, access, and maintenance of our parks, beaches, and open spaces, is affordability and increasing economic pressures. Rising costs, and challenges related to rates affordability, are making it increasingly difficult to

manage and maintain existing services and assets. If the Council chooses to progress towards equitable access to green spaces for all Wellington residents, current and future, decisions around agreed service levels will need to be considered.

Parks, beaches, and open spaces are not accessible for all

In a 2022 Wellington City Council survey that informed Te Whai Oranga Pōneke, 14% of respondents outlined the key barrier for using open space was that it is not accessible enough or not designed for easy access. Accessibility information, wayfinding and navigation are not consistent across parks, beaches, trails and open spaces, in particular, maps of trails are not currently accessible. Te Whai Oranga Pōneke's *Outcome 2: Whai Wāhitanga - Inclusive* commits to considering universal design principles in all our projects to make access to parks, beaches and open spaces accessible to as many people as possible. This means considering elements such as the accessibility and availability of toilets; mobility car parking; seats and sheltered spots to rest; use of Braille on signage; tactile guidance, and ground surface treatments. While it will not be possible to make every trail, garden and beach fully accessible due to topographical or ecological constraints, the Council can work with accessibility advocacy groups and disabled people to identify and address access barriers or prioritise locations for investment. Accessibility audits on key trails, beaches, parks, gardens, and reserves would help identify gaps and support finding the most effective tools to help everyone navigate parks, reserves and beaches across the city.

Not all Wellingtonians feel like they belong in our parks, beaches and open spaces

We understand from a 2022 Council Survey that informed Te Whai Oranga Pōneke, that some people feel unsafe, unwelcome, or uncomfortable when using our spaces, places and programmes, or affordability and transport are barriers. Different groups identify different barriers to using our open spaces, with the survey identifying that key barriers, beyond accessibility, for people using parks are: absence of public toilets (34%), hard to travel to (22%), feeling unsafe (18% of general respondents and 30% of young people), and not feeling welcome (for example due to a space feeling dominated by other users, the entrance access not feeling welcoming, or the availability of facilities) (5%).

In Te Whai Oranga Pōneke, the Council committed to applying crime prevention through environmental design principles. This includes; lighting and passive surveillance³, ensuring social and visual representation in open spaces that resonate with people to create a sense of belonging and empowerment (e.g. local art, cultural elements, and historical representation that tell everyone's stories), provide all-gender bathrooms, provide areas for whānau and friends to share food in open spaces, and improve and invest in public toilets. These actions ensure our diverse communities feel welcome in our open spaces. An example of creating more inclusive spaces is Te Nukuaō Wellington Zoo, making a

³ Passive surveillance refers to natural oversight through the presence of people and their normal activities, including clear sightlines, visibility, and lighting to deter inappropriate behaviour.

targeted, visual effort to ensure rainbow communities feel welcome and included at the zoo. This work led to the Zoo receiving a rainbow tick.⁴ Ongoing engagement with Wellington's diverse communities could improve the inclusivity of parks, beaches, open spaces, and conservation organisations.



Adapting parks, beaches, and conservation organisations for climate change

Climate change is bringing more frequent and intense extreme weather events that pose danger, damage and disruptions to Wellington's parks, beaches, open spaces and conservation organisations.⁵ Wellington's ecosystems and open spaces face growing risks from stronger storms, extreme wind, heavier rain causing floods and landslips, droughts, as well as sea-level rise and coastal erosion.⁶ The changing climate impacts the Council and the conservation organisations' ability to manage the quality of services and visitor safety through the increasing extreme weather events. Storms and extreme weather require staff to focus on reactive cleanups and recovery, taking time away from general

⁴ Wellington Zoo. (4 July 2022). *Wellington Zoo becomes the first zoo to get a Rainbow Tick certification.*

⁵ Manatū Mō Te Taiao Ministry for the Environment & Stats NZ. (April 2025). *New Zealand's Environmental Reporting Series: Our environment 2025 | Tō tatou taiao.*

⁶ Beca Limited. (12 February 2024). *Wellington regional climate change impact assessment: Final report.* Prepared for Wellington City Council and Partner Councils.

maintenance and duties (i.e normal levels of service). Furthermore, there are already impacts on the animals at Te Nukuaō Wellington Zoo and Zealandia Te Māra a Tane due to the changing climate and temperatures, and increased animals needing care after and during extreme weather and storm events.

In the future, due to the effects of climate change, the Council will likely need to scale-up its action to plan for and prevent or manage negative impacts on the environment and community, as well as adapting services. A specific challenge for the Council to consider in the future is how ageing waterfront infrastructure, and use, will be managed with sea level rise and increasing extreme weather. Climate adaptation across parks, beaches, open spaces, and conservation organisations will require the Council to consider a mix of adaptation interventions, spanning restoration of indigenous ecosystems, improving stormwater management, increasing buffers to protect coastal infrastructure from storms, and relocation of vulnerable infrastructure and assets from high-risk areas.

To plan for these climate disruptions, the Council has already embedded climate adaptation considerations into key plans, including Te Whai Oranga Pōneke - The Open Spaces and Recreation Strategy, Tātou ki Uta - Coastal Reserves Management Plan and the District Plan. Nature-based approaches are central to the Council's climate adaptation approach, such as revegetation of dunes and steep hills, which increase biodiversity and help mitigate flooding and erosion. The Council is trying new ways to maintain our parks, beaches and open spaces with a nature-based approach, such as low mow sites. Mowing sites just once a year reduces maintenance costs, increases biodiversity and supports rainwater to be absorbed twice as quickly, providing more resilience to heavy rain.

Wellingtonians are already engaged and committed to both reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the impacts.⁷ Many environmental community groups across Wellington are restoring the indigenous environment through planting and pest control, which is also supporting nature-based resilience to the increasing extreme rain and drought events. Continuing to support community-led action is a key opportunity for the Council to work towards climate resilience in Wellington.

Role clarity amid complex nature of environmental management and legislation changes

There are lots of stakeholders involved in caring for the environment. With proposed reform and as cost pressures increase, roles need to be clear around who is responsible for what. Wellington City Council has good alignment and collaboration on environmental projects with mana whenua and regional partners, including Wellington Water and Tiaki Wai, GWRC, Porirua City Council, Department of Conservation, Predator Free, Capital

⁷ Wellington City Council. (October 2024). *Climate change perceptions*.

Kiwi, Forest and Bird, NIWA, Te Nukuaō Wellington Zoo, Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne and others. At times, meeting the expectations and aspirations of our partners, especially within a financially constrained environment, remains a significant and ongoing challenge for the Council.

The interconnected nature of the environment, our freshwater catchments, parks and beaches, supports taking a regional approach to caring for the environment. Wellington City Council's responsibilities for the environment intersect closely with the responsibilities of the GWRC. How we work together across the region will need careful consideration as the Simplifying Local Government programme, RMA reform, and amalgamation conversations progress.

Consistency of engagement in our partnership with mana whenua

Wellington City Council is committed, through the Tākai Here partnership and commitment in the 2024/34 LTP, to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and partnering with mana whenua to progress the waypoint in Tūpiki Ora Strategy, Tiakina Te Taiao (caring for the environment). Tiakina Te Taiao is a priority for Tākai Here partners. Wellington City Council has many recent successful examples of partnering with mana whenua, such as the recently agreed Mātai Moana Reserve, Te Wai Ora o Parirua Porirua Harbour Accord, Taputeranga Island, Te Kopahou cultural restoration, and Tātou ki Uta. How these agreements and plans are implemented is a significant opportunity to strengthen our Tākai Here partnership and to progress shared goals for nature. The ownership arrangements for Tiaki Wai include Taranaki Whānui and Ngāti Toa, which means they will be at the governing table for future decisions about three waters.

While these are examples of good partnership, there are still many areas for improvement, and consistency of engagement and partnership. As the relationships grow, there may be opportunities to move into more co-governance of parks, beaches, and open spaces. Tākai Here partners have outlined priorities within current programmes and places, with the following examples of where there could be more aligned collaboration:

- A series of projects to heal water quality, as outlined in the Whaitua plans led by the GWRC.
- Initiate and develop a mana whenua ranger programme in direct collaboration with mana whenua, as outlined in Tātou ki Uta.
- To improve engagement and communication with Tākai Here partners around land disposal and acquisition.

Defining the Council's role in stormwater in relation to Tiaki Wai

The three waters activity will be transferring ownership and full delivery accountability to Tiaki Wai (formally Metro Water) on 1 July 2026, but even with the transition to Tiaki Wai, Wellington City Council will continue to have roles and responsibilities relating to stormwater, and how activities on land impact the health of streams, rivers, and the ocean. This includes:

- Managing stormwater within the roading corridor.
- Regulating land infrastructure and development through the District Plan.
- Supporting the work of Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne with mana whenua to improve the water quality of the Kaiwharawhara Stream and dam and restore the Kaiwharawhara estuary.
- Managing water run-off, including through parks and reserves, to prevent flooding and minimise environmental impacts.
- Working collaboratively with Tiaki Wai across all facets of stormwater services.

The stormwater activity that the Council is currently resourced for crosses multiple teams, including parks, transport, and waste. Following the transfer of assets and responsibilities to Tiaki Wai, the Council could improve its approach to stormwater across several activity areas, and together with Tiaki Wai, address overland stormwater management and take a collaborative approach to improve water quality in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. Stormwater service agreements with Tiaki Wai will be established by 1 July, these are expected to clarify roles and responsibilities between the two organisations and within council.

Getting the balance right between different users and uses of open spaces

Getting the balance right between different and sometimes conflicting users and uses of our parks, beaches, and open spaces presents challenges.

Pets and wildlife: Dog walking is a popular activity in Wellington's parks and on beaches. However, uncontrolled dogs remain the main threat to wildlife such as kororā (little blue penguins) and kiwi, causing injury or death, and disturbing dune restoration efforts or trampling vulnerable vegetation. Domestic cats also pose challenges for achieving Wellington's predator-free goals. Progress has been made by bringing Animal Services in-house and appointing an additional Animal Control Officer (ACO), enabling more targeted patrols. Alongside enforcement of the Animal Bylaw, which requires microchipping and desexing of cats (unless registered as breeders), the Council could continue to improve signage, provide support for pet owners, and focus efforts where they will best protect the natural environment.

Different users of trails and ecological impacts: Trail development within the open space network enables increased recreation and public access and supports our ability to manage pest animal trapping efforts. However, it could require the removal of native vegetation, which allows pest plants to establish, increases soil erosion, and can disrupt and threaten our native wildlife. Increasing the trail network also increases ongoing maintenance costs for the Council. As the number of trails increases, there are more instances where different user groups, such as walkers, people in wheelchairs, and mountain bikers, use the same spaces. Ongoing engagement with the public may help to balance the various uses of trails, considering user priorities and safety, environmental impacts, and ongoing maintenance costs.

Encroachments into reserves and the Town Belt: Reserve encroachments are where residents or past property owners have developed their land into the adjoining public reserve or the Wellington Town Belt (WTB). Encroachments onto land owned and managed by the Council as public open space are prohibited. There have been 665 encroachments identified, covering 9.6 hectares of Wellington reserve and WTB land. The cumulative effect of encroachments substantially compromises ecological values, reduces public open space use and enjoyment, and the values of the WTB and reserves. The city's reserve and WTB land are important community assets, particularly as the city grows and intensifies. To protect these assets for public use, the Council may choose to take a more active approach to managing new and existing encroachments.

