

The State of our Landscape

The landscape of Waitakere City has certain natural characteristics and features that are unique from anywhere else, including locally found landforms, waterbodies and native vegetation cover. There are also cultural associations with landscape, such as pa sites or historic buildings. The physical processes, which formed the area, are evident in the landforms whilst land cover and settlement patterns are testimony to the nature of past and present activities on the land. Landscape is dynamic and changes as the individual features change.

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This chapter highlights the following key issues:

1. **GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE CITY'S LANDSCAPES AND OUTSTANDING LANDSCAPES**
2. **TANGATA WHENUA'S APPROACH TO LANDSCAPE**
3. **CASE STUDIES OF THREE LANDSCAPE AREAS IN THE CITY**

Information about land use is contained in the chapter "City Form and Design".

Information about vegetation is contained in the chapter "State of our Biodiversity."

KEY INDICATOR

98% of residents believe it is important to have programmes to protect bush and wildlife areas and to take an active interest in the natural world around them.

(From a telephone survey of a sample of residents in May 2000, with a margin of error of +/- 5).

80% said it is very important and 18% said it is reasonably important.

The Waitakere Ranges and the green fingers that stretch to the east coast are an important landscape feature containing bush and wildlife areas. The indicator highlights the value which people place on protecting such areas.

1. Waitakere City's Landscapes

Within Waitakere City there are many and varied features - ranging from the coastal dunes and beach areas, through to the west coast and Manukau Harbour cliffs, the west coast freshwater lakes and lagoons, the dams, the quiet estuaries along the Manukau shoreline and, the magnificent landform and vegetation features of the Waitakere Ranges.

Below the Ranges, the predominant features are the dissected hill country and green rural areas, the pockets of natural vegetation within the rural and urban areas of the City, the orchards, the vineyards, the streams and their margins, the coastal vegetation, urban trees, suburban housing and the prominent landforms within the rolling landscape.

These features can be broken down into seven broad landscape areas:

- The coastal landscape between Bethells/Te Henga and Manukau Heads;
- The coastal and estuarine areas between Whatipu and Green Bay;
- The coastal edge and estuarine areas between the Whau Creek and Brighams Creek;
- The bush landscape including the Waitakere Ranges and the fingers of bush in the upper areas of the eastern foothills catchments;
- The lower eastern foothills with the mixture of pasture and bush;
- The rural pastoral landscape of the northern city and the Redhills/Birdwood area;
- The urban landscape of residential areas, parks, bush remnants, town centres and industrial land.

Of these landscape areas, three have been identified as outstanding. (The areas were identified using a methodology which assessed Waitakere City landscapes relative to other parts of New Zealand, and also took into account the value local residents place on these landscapes).

The three outstanding landscapes are:

- The coastal landscapes between Bethells/Te Henga and Whatipu;
- The coastal estuarine areas within the Manukau Harbour between Whatipu and Green Bay;
- The Waitakere Ranges including the fingers of bush in the upper areas of the foothills catchments.

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Table 1: Outstanding landscape areas, elements and character

Outstanding Landscape Area	Landscape Elements	Landscape Character
West coast- Bethells/Te Henga to Manukau Heads	Dune systems and sandy beaches Freshwater lakes and wetlands Streams/stream catchments Steep coastal ridges Headlands Islands Coastal forest Scarps and cliffs	Dominance of natural over human influences Natural variety and complexity Unhindered natural forces- especially the action of the sea Quiet and with natural sounds – eg of the sea and native birds Sparse population Limited visitor numbers Sense of wilderness
Whatipu to Green Bay coastal landscape	Inward fingers of estuaries Tidal flats and channels Steep to moderately steep coastal cliffs Coastal forest and shrubland Streams/stream catchments Mangroves and salt marshes Headlands	Dominance of natural over human influences Natural variety and complexity Unhindered natural forces- especially the gentle action of the sea Quiet Sense of wilderness Sparse population/some patches of more intensive development to the east
Waitakere Ranges	Prominent ridgelines and, in particular, the Scenic Drive scarp Incised stream catchments and streams Indigenous forest Elevated hills and plateaus Scarps and cliffs Peaks Wetlands	Natural variety and complexity Dominance of natural over built features Quiet Sense of wilderness Sparse population/some patches of more intensive development to the east Limited visitor numbers

2. LANDSCAPE AND TANGATA WHENUA

Maori regard the natural world holistically, and consider themselves to be an integral part of it. The spiritual significance of a particular landform or stream sometimes means that it becomes an essential landscape element often unnoticed unless the viewer understands the history of the area.

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In terms of geographical areas, iwi have indicated that the key landscapes of importance to them are the coastal areas and the Waitakere Ranges – both in terms of natural features, sense of wilderness, bush and streams. The particular sites, for example, burial grounds, places of ritual and battlegrounds, combine to form a web of areas of spiritual significance that are separate from general landscape values (Waitakere City Proposed District Plan – Policy Section 3.6).

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C A S E S T U D I E S

HENDERSON

The landform of the Henderson area is gentle and rolling and its landscape character has changed markedly in the past fifty years as land use patterns have altered. Aerial photographs of Henderson in 1945 and 1999 (that appear in Ted Scott's book "Through the Lens") show former vineyards, orchards and horticultural blocks replaced by commercial, industrial and residential buildings. Landscape values change over time with intensive development.

The area is now densely urban, with development linking Henderson with Te Atatu and Massey West, to form an unbroken urban swathe. The urban area encompasses a range of socio-economic housing types with areas of industrial development, recreational land, and some small remaining pockets of viticulture surrounded by recent subdivision.

The area of development is severed both by the east/west extended fingers of the Swanson, Opanuku and Oratia streams and north by the railway line, Highway 16 and the Whau river estuary.

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Together with the reserves and open spaces, these streams were identified within the 'Green Network' draft paper (produced in June 1994) as providing a resource on which to build a network of open spaces and ecological corridors. The Proposed District Plan contains policies and rules on urban development (Living Environment, Working and Community Environment), riparian margins and transport corridors (Transport Environment). The Council has regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to encourage landowners to re-vegetate and maintain riparian margins in the City. This includes rates relief, planting guides and providing trees.

Issues:

- Design, location and scale of development to fit with the existing landscape and neighbourhood character
- Design for well connected and functioning Living Environments
- Sustainable housing patterns – encouraging a compact city
- Management and improvement of coastal/urban interface and water quality through planting and protection of riparian vegetation along streams and watercourses
- Provision of residential and other land use activities in a manner which enhances the urban environment (Waitakere City Council Landscape Assessment by Boffa Miskell and DJ Scott Associates 1994).
- Protection of natural landscape features and landscape character.

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CASE STUDIES

TITIRANGI/LAINGHOLM

Titirangi is located on the urban fringe and is largely comprised of bush lot settlements in Waima, Woodlands Park, Laingholm, Titirangi South, Wood Bay and French Bay. In general these areas have been successfully integrated into the existing native bush. The area is characterised by steep ridge and gully systems (*Waitakere City Council Landscape Assessment by Boffa Miskell and DJ Scott Associates 1994*).

The existing development is located on ridges and easily accessed sloping land generally. There is no doubt that this area is a cultural feature of national significance - Titirangi is famous throughout New Zealand as the residential area where the houses nestle in the bush (*Waitakere City Council Outstanding Landscapes Project, Sept 1997 – LA4*).

Photographs of Titirangi in 1920 and 1999 (that appear in Ted Scott's book "Through the Lens") show a revamped village surrounded by trees that have regrown since being cleared in the earlier photo.

Historically, Titirangi/Laingholm was farmed from the turn of the twentieth century, although from the 1920s onward, many farms in the Ranges moved out of production due to economic conditions and /or land purchase for water supply purposes or reserves.

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Today, the key landscape features of the Titirangi/Laingholm area include the coast and the estuary, streams and their margins, large areas of intact native bush, the Headlands – Tokoroa Point, Laingholm Point and the headland that divides the upper reaches of Little Muddy Creek from Waiohua Creek as well as the ridges defining the visual catchment.

(*Little Muddy Creek Landscape Assessment by Boffa Miskell, November 2000*).

Issues:

- Design , location and scale of development
- Protection and management of the natural landscape character
- Protecting the natural form, character and dominance of the major ("sensitive") ridgelines
- Protection and management of native vegetation and ecosystem health
- Provision of housing opportunities
- Maintaining stability when developing within stability sensitive areas
- Control of noxious animals and exotic plant species

The Proposed District Plan supports appropriate design through rules and policies relating to building location in sensitive ridgelines, parking and access, building height, building coverage, protection of significant views, building height, density, earthworks and vegetation alteration.

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C A S E S T U D I E S

PIHA COASTAL

Piha is the largest area of coastal settlement on the West coast within Waitakere City. The settlement was established on the narrow coastal strip of low sand dunes at the mouth of the Waitakere river. Settlement has historically been in the lower slopes and coastal area, and small in scale, integrating well with the strong natural setting, to create a memorable “Coastal Village” environment.

The surrounding Piha area is characterised by steep incised valleys with dense regenerating native bush cover.

The road leading down to the beach and coastal flats descends from the ridge in a series of wide sweeps providing spectacular views. Open to views from Log Race Road and the settlement of Piha itself, it is a challenge to design structures that integrate with the surroundings. The stunted wind-swept nature of the indigenous cover on exposed slopes offers limited opportunity for the integration of built elements including roads, houses and utilities.

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Photographs of Piha in 1916 and 1999 (that appear in Ted Scott’s book “Through the Lens”) show the change from rugged isolation to built features now part of the landscape in Piha.

Issues:

- Protection of the strong natural character including the natural form of the ridgelines, the cliffs and scarps, the natural vegetation and the wild and scenic qualities of the beaches
- Appropriate management of hazard prone and sensitive areas
- Protection of ecosystems and wildlife habitats
- Provision of recreational opportunities and facilities
- Protection and management of bush vegetation
- Design, location and scale of development
- Protection of water quality
- Control of noxious animals and exotic plant species
- Protection of views identified in the Proposed District Plan
- Maintaining the proportion of built and natural features to provide a wilderness experience

The Council addresses a number of these issues through its Proposed District Plan policies and rules. The Council has been involved in joint projects with community groups such as Karekare Residents & Ratepayers to purchase a visually significant site, which has been added to the Regional Parkland.

WHAT THE COUNCIL IS DOING:

The following are some of the actions the Waitakere City Council is taking:

- District Plan rules and structure plans
- Encouragement of community planning processes such as the West Coast Plan
- Weed control and eco-source planting
- Restrictions on land use in sensitive areas
- Encouraging mixed use and development and better use of urban land to avoid pressures on natural areas, Waitakere Ranges and coastal areas
- Operation Clean Stream Waitakere
- Operation Spring Clean (annual clean of streams and parks, beaches)
- Providing planting guides, green network rates relief, up to 200 free plants
- Dune stabilisation and rehabilitation

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WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Preserve native plants to protect forests, birds, streams
- Join Keep Waitakere Beautiful, Operation Clean Stream, Waicare or other local organisations to restore the natural environment
- Control pests, weeds and animals on your land
- Plant eco-sourced native vegetation
- Facilitate natural regeneration on private land

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