

5 RURAL ZONE

5.1 Background

The rural sector is in transition as a diverse range of rural and rural lifestyle activities gradually replace traditional farming activities. A balanced approach is needed to sustainably manage the resources of this part of the City. The rural area contains much of the City's agriculture and primary productive land resources which are an important part of the City's economic and social wellbeing, both now and in the future. It also forms the immediate backdrop to the City in terms of landscape. Areas for rural lifestyle, passive and active recreation and leisure opportunities, and other mixed urban/rural activities also form part of the character of this environment.

5.2 Resource Management Issues

5.2.1 ***The loss of rural character, the destruction of significant areas of indigenous vegetation and areas of significant habitat for fauna, the degradation of amenity values from development and activities and competing expectations of, and demands for, rural resources.***

The rural environment is highly valued for a variety of reasons. It has been highly modified by changes in land use and exhibits a range of characteristics. The valley floors are characterised by a patchwork of fields under pasture with farm and other buildings dotting the landscape. The hillsides are marked by more extensive pastureland, regenerating scrub, exotic forestry plantations and indigenous forest.

While the appearance of the rural environment is subject to considerable change and evolution, some characteristics remain constant. These are the open, expansive nature of the countryside with a relatively low density of buildings and with vegetation being the dominant feature. Open spaces, a key feature of rural character, serve to mitigate adverse effects which may be generated by farming, forestry and other activities commonly located in the rural environment. Loss of this open space through more intensive subdivision and subsequent residential development may create an environment in which the effects of rural activities are no longer acceptable.

The level of amenity in the rural area is important to the quality of life enjoyed by people living and working in the area and by visitors. Amenity values refer to those natural and physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people's appreciation of its pleasantness, aesthetic coherence, and cultural and recreational attributes.

The rural environment is characterised by important ecological values. These include significant areas of indigenous vegetation and areas of significant habitat for indigenous fauna. Such areas can be degraded or partially or totally destroyed by clearance, milling or pest and weed infestation. These issues are considered in greater detail in Chapter 12.

The rural area comprises natural and physical resources which are often the subject of competing demands and uses. For example, areas may have value to some as a residential environment, while to others the value may be as a recreational environment. Others still may value the productive or economic return from a land area, or recognise a particular cultural significance. Competing demands are greatest for flat land, which is suitable for a wide range of activities, from farming and business, to tourist and residential uses. Activities, such as outdoor recreation or rural lifestyle development can become an accepted part of the rural environment if they do not impact on rural amenity and character. A range of opportunities are therefore required to enable the community to make use of the rural land resource.

It is necessary to provide for both rural and non-rural activities while ensuring that rural character and amenity is maintained and enhanced, and natural ecosystems are protected.

5.2.2

The loss of the life supporting capacity of soil through inappropriate development and unsustainable land use practices.

Land and soil are the most important non-renewable resources in the City, and form part of the City's economic and social wellbeing. The productive potential of land relies on the ability of the soil resources to support the production of food, the growth of plantation timber and the sustenance of indigenous vegetation. Soil retention is important in maintaining the life-supporting capacity of land in the City as well as protecting water quality. The productivity of soils is also dependent on soil quality which results from the physical, chemical and organic elements that make up soil.

Unsustainable farming practices can deplete topsoil or break down the soil's fertile structure through inappropriate crops or contamination from agrichemicals. Erosion is less of an issue on the valley floor but could occur on sloping terrain.

Adverse effects from inappropriate land use and land disturbance affect not only the soils but may have implications for downstream areas. These off-site effects include impacts on streams, rivers, water quality, and flooding potential on adjacent land, as well as adverse effects on landscapes.

Subdivision, and subsequent development, can also affect the life supporting capacity of soils. They can be removed, compacted, covered, contaminated or otherwise damaged by development.

5.2.3 ***Limited development opportunities in the Blue Mountains Area due to infrastructural and environmental constraints.***

Subdivision and development in the Blue Mountains Area is restricted due to constraints associated with land stability, drainage, existing lot sizes and roading and access. There is difficulty with sewage disposal due to poor soakage, as well as limited opportunities to draw groundwater. Blue Mountains Road requires major upgrading to accommodate further development and this may result in significant adverse environmental effects.

The Blue Mountains Area is separately identified in the Plan. Because of its physical constraints, development can only be contemplated where adverse effects can be adequately mitigated. The present capacity of Blue Mountains Road is a limiting factor in considering development proposals in the areas served by it.

5.3 Objectives

5.3.1 ***The maintenance and enhancement of the open spaces, natural features and ecological systems which comprise the rural character and amenity.***

Many natural features and amenity values comprise the rural character. The level of amenity in the rural area is important to the quality of life enjoyed by people living and working in the area or visiting it. In order to protect rural character and amenity, the rural environment is divided into three specific Sub-zones to reflect resource objectives and particular environmental considerations.

The Valley Floor Sub-zone is defined as the area largely used for productive agricultural purposes with a range of land holdings located primarily on the valley floor. It includes the Mangaroa, Whitemans and Kaitoke areas and parts of Akatarawa and Karapoti valleys. The Sub-zone provides for rural-orientated uses appropriate to this particular environment.

The Hill Sub-zone is the largest area within the rural environment. The Sub-zone comprises the hill areas surrounding the valley floor and many open space areas which are largely undeveloped and valued for their recreation, scenic, heritage, habitat, ecological, landscape and scientific values. This includes the Tararua Forest Park, the Wellington Regional Council water catchment areas, plantation forests and the Kaitoke Regional Park. These areas are used for both passive and active recreation. The Sub-zone also includes the Blue Mountains Area, although it has limited development potential.

The Lifestyle Sub-zone provides for low density rural-residential development and includes existing residential areas at Maclaren Street and Maymorn that were established during the construction of the Rimutaka Railway.

5.3.2 *The promotion of an environment within which soil, water and land resources are managed sustainably.*

The Rural Zone covers the non-urban areas of the City, ranging from relatively intensively developed areas through to more extensive land holdings.

The Rural Zone provides opportunities for rural-based activities to occur. The soil and the land base of the area represent a significant resource for the City. It is important that the ability of these resources to support life is not unduly undermined. It is not a sustainable use of the resource to allow the land to be degraded or used in a manner which will significantly limit the choices of future generations.

5.3.3 *To maintain and enhance the amenity values of the rural area.*

The level of amenity values in the rural area is important to people living, working and visiting in the area. The rural environment is however that of a working area, and the level of amenity differs from that which would be found in residentially zoned land.

5.4 Policies
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5.4.1 *To manage the adverse environmental effects arising from the scale, density, number and location of earthworks, new building developments and activities so that they do not significantly compromise rural character and landscape values.*

Buildings, structures and associated earthworks which are not in harmony with the rural landscape have the potential to adversely affect the appearance and rural character of the environment. Council seeks to maintain the natural elements which give the rural area its character. For this reason the District Plan seeks to limit the number of new buildings and structures by controlling the subdivision of rural land, limiting the intensity of residential and other activities, and by placing control on associated earthworks.

5.4.2 *To ensure that subdivision, development and land use within the Valley Floor and Hill Sub-zones minimise adverse effects on rural character, areas of significant indigenous flora or fauna, and amenity values.*

The Valley Floor Sub-zone is characterised by a range of land uses which generally retain the open farmland characteristics. The Valley Floor areas have a low level of building development. While there are some areas in which there are a number of structures, there is generally a high degree of separation between clusters of buildings.

The Hill Sub-zone comprises significant areas of both indigenous and exotic forest which will remain a dynamic environment as varying ages of forest are harvested and planted. It also contains small areas of pastoral farming and areas in various states of reversion to indigenous vegetation.

Maintaining larger lot sizes in the Valley Floor and Hill Sub-zones will generally ensure that the rural character is not compromised by numerous clusters of buildings spread across the landscape. It also provides greater opportunities for significant natural features and areas of indigenous flora and fauna to be retained. Larger lots also assist in avoiding the creation of nuisances resulting from inadequate separation between new dwellings and existing activities. Retaining openness maintains a rural character which distinguishes the areas from the more densely settled urban environment. Further consideration is given to these matters in Chapter 12.

5.4.3 *To provide for rural lifestyle subdivision which maintains the rural character and amenity values and avoids, remedies or mitigates the effects of natural hazards.*

The presence of smaller lots in the Lifestyle Sub-zone provides the opportunity for a variety of residential and rural land uses in areas where change to the rural character may not be so marked. The pattern of development within the areas is much closer than in the other rural areas, with structures occurring at more regular intervals. Use of land in the Sub-zone is more varied.

Proposed allotments within the Lifestyle Sub-zone shall be of a sufficient size to ensure that subsequent development provides for maintenance of rural character and amenities and is visually unobtrusive. The existence of potential natural hazards such as flooding and landslip need to be recognised and taken into account in any development proposals.

5.4.4 *To ensure that subdivision, development and land use within the Rural Hill Sub-zone minimise adverse effects on significant natural, ecological, scenic, visual, landscape, recreational and cultural values.*

The Hill Sub-zone contains some of the most scenic areas in the Wellington Region and provides significant recreational opportunities. The proximity to large urban areas increases the importance of preserving the landscape and natural values for the enjoyment of residents and visitors to these areas. Consequently, there are provisions for landscape and visual amenity in the District Plan. When assessing development proposals, particular regard will be given to avoiding adverse effects on areas with high visual amenity and features with special cultural significance.

It is intended to protect the Blue Mountains Area by restricting further subdivision and development in order to retain its rural character and amenity, and avoid potential environmental impacts. Within this area and nearby settlements, development is restricted due to environmental and infrastructural constraints, as properties are not connected to a common drainage disposal system or water supply. Roading access provides further development constraints. However, development can be contemplated when the effects on the environment and infrastructural resources can be adequately addressed. The specific controls which apply in the Blue Mountains Area are in addition to those applying in the Rural Hill Sub-zone.

5.4.5 *To ensure that activities which alter the contour of the land do not significantly affect rural character and amenity values, particularly where the land is visible from roads and public places.*

The altering of land contours by filling and excavation has the potential to permanently alter the appearance of the landscape. Such effects may not be limited to the areas actually disturbed, but may relate to the integrity of an adjacent or nearby feature. While there may be some circumstances where such effects are unavoidable, for example the construction or upgrading of a State Highway, or are a required aspect of land use and development, they need to be mitigated in areas of high public visibility.

5.4.6 *To ensure that essential services are able to be operated safely and efficiently.*

As their name suggests, essential services underpin human activity. Their ongoing operational and development needs require safeguarding in view of their strategic importance.

5.4.7 *To avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse effects of activities on soil, water, land and other natural resources.*

The soils, water and land of the rural environment are finite in nature. Without them, life could not be supported. Food and fibre products could not be produced and indigenous flora and fauna would not be sustained. Council seeks to ensure that subdivision, development and land use do not significantly impair the life-supporting capacity of the rural environment's natural resources.

5.4.8 *To avoid or mitigate run-off, contamination and erosion of soil from subdivision and land development so as to sustain the life-supporting capacity of the soil.*

It is important to ensure that activities are managed in such a way as to avoid the depletion of resources. Subdivision and land development in areas prone to soil erosion can have an adverse effect on soil retention. The acceleration of erosion in such circumstances depletes the soil resource and can have adverse impacts on water quality and on vegetation in the margins of water bodies. The rural area can be used for a variety of activities as long as the potential effects of erosion and contamination are considered and addressed.

5.4.9 *To encourage new development of an urban nature to locate within the urban areas of the City.*

The edge of the urban area is defined by the interface with rural areas. Council generally intends to contain new urban development within the existing urban area. Intensive urban development generally has a detrimental impact on the life-supporting capacity of soils, water, land and other natural resources in the rural environment through removal, compaction, coverage and contamination associated with buildings, roads and discharges of waste to land and water. Urban expansion also leads to a radical transformation in the appearance of former rural areas and nullifies any open, vegetation dominated aspects of rural character. New residential development needs to be provided for in a sustainable manner. Accordingly, the Plan provides for new urban development in appropriate locations.

5.4.10 *To provide for limited development within the Blue Mountains Area which takes into account its environmentally sensitive nature.*

Development in the Blue Mountains Area is restricted due to land stability, drainage problems and roading and access difficulties, and the desire to restrict physical expansion in order to preserve the area's natural character and amenity values. There are also difficulties with sewage disposal in this area due to a lack of soakage and existing lot sizes, as well as limited opportunities to draw groundwater.

Blue Mountains Road requires major upgrading to be able to accommodate significant further development and this could result in significant adverse environmental effects.

Subdivision in the Blue Mountains Area is a non-complying activity in order to deal with the infrastructural and servicing constraints, and the desire to maintain the natural character and amenity values. Subdivision proposals will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. While there will be circumstances where such effects are avoidable or readily able to be mitigated, development within the area is not encouraged due to environmental constraints. In addition, an integrated management approach is required with respect to the natural and physical resources within this area.

5.4.11 *To limit the potential adverse effects of rural and non-rural activities on each other and on rural amenity values.*

The rural environment is generally more sensitive to certain environmental effects than the urban parts of the City. The rural area is generally perceived to be a relatively quiet, peaceful environment, although from time to time there are activities taking place such as harvesting and cultivation.

Rural zoned land provides opportunities for people to undertake a range of activities. Activities in and adjacent to the Rural Zone should be able to function without being unreasonably compromised by another activity.

5.4.12 *To encourage building design, location and scale that complements the character of the surrounding area.*

The design and character of buildings within the rural area makes a significant contribution to its amenity. In seeking to maintain and enhance that amenity, it is appropriate to encourage good design.

5.5 Methods

- 5.5.1** District Plan provisions consisting of the following:
- Identification of areas which have different topography, character and amenity values as Sub-zones on the Planning Maps.
 - Rules controlling setbacks, minimum lot size, subdivision and building.
 - Environmental standards to mitigate the potential adverse effects of activities on the rural environment.
 - Financial contributions and conditions of resource consents to achieve amenity values, reserves, landscaping and infrastructural requirements.
- 5.5.2** Code of Practice for Civil Engineering Works.
- 5.5.3** Abatement notices and enforcement orders may be issued where it is necessary to enforce the Plan rules and mitigate any adverse effects.
- 5.5.4** Management Plans prepared under relevant legislation.

5.6 Anticipated environmental results and monitoring

The following results are expected to be achieved by the objectives, policies and methods of this Chapter. The means of monitoring whether this Plan achieves the anticipated environmental results are also set out below.

Anticipated environmental results	Monitoring indicators	Data source
Maintenance of the present levels of diversity and health of soils and ecosystems	Change in land cover and use Numbers of resource consents and types of conditions imposed	Aerial photos Compliance monitoring
New buildings, development and activities which reflect rural character and amenity values	Change in density of subdivision patterns and built form Complaints received about development	Aerial photos Monitoring of building and subdivision consents Complaints register

Anticipated environmental results	Monitoring indicators	Data source
Maintenance of rural amenity values	Changes in ambient noise levels Complaints about adverse environmental effects	Survey Complaints register
Restricted development in areas with environmentally sensitive characteristics and landscape values	Numbers and types of resource consents and conditions imposed Complaints received	Monitoring of consents Compliance monitoring Complaints register
Protection of natural landforms	Change in land cover and use Numbers and types of resource consents and conditions imposed	Aerial photos Compliance monitoring