

Wither Hills Management Plan Background Information

Wither Hills Management Plan – Background Information

June 2024

Published by:

Parks and Open Spaces | Ngā Papa o Wairau
(Property and Community Facilities Department)
Marlborough District Council
Cnr Seymour and High Streets
PO Box 443
Blenheim 7240

This document is published on the Council's website:

<https://www.marlborough.govt.nz/recreation/parks-and-open-spaces/parks-and-open-spaces-plans-and-reports/plans>

Contents

Introduction	4
Overview of the Park	5
Previous management planning	11
Current management	13
Rivers Team (Assets and Services Department)	13
Parks and Open Spaces Team (Property and Community Facilities Department)	13
Other Council management responsibilities	14
Review process	15
Assessment of objectives and policies	16
Input Areas	17
1. Kaitiakitanga / Guardianship	17
2. Te mahi tahi / Working together	18
3. Te mahi hoahoa / Planning.....	19
4. Te reretahi / Coordination.....	20
Outcome Areas	22
5. Te whāomoomo oneone / Soil conservation	22
6. Te whakahaere tūraru ahi / Fire risk management.....	24
7. Ngā āheinga mahi ā-rēhia / Recreation opportunities	27
8. Te tāmi momo rāwaho / Invasive species control.....	43
9. Te whakaora i ngā taiao māori / Restoration of native habitats.....	45
10. Te tiaki horanuku / Landscape protection	48
11. Te tiaki i ngā taonga tuku iho / Cultural heritage protection	49
Other Areas	51
12. Te tūāhanga / Infrastructure	51
13. Ngā rohe tauārai o te pāka /Park boundaries	54
Appendices	57
Appendix 1 – Summary of first round of feedback	58
Appendix 2 – Land ownership background	65
Appendix 3 – Values and constraints maps	68

Introduction

For many people today the Wither Hills Farm Park (Park) is a place to walk, run, mountain bike, experience the feel of being in the 'country' or simply recognise its place as a backdrop to Blenheim. However, its origins stemmed from the need to manage significant soil erosion problems, which were a potential threat to Blenheim.

The need to address soil erosion issues is ongoing. Public access to the farm park is therefore enabled within a soil conservation management framework. Increasing numbers of people are using the Park for recreational pursuits and Blenheim residential activity has pushed up against the Park boundary. Along with issues around managing fire risk, biodiversity restoration, invasive species control and vegetation management the need for integrated management of the Park is key.

The last management plan prepared by the Council for the Park was adopted in 2003 – the 'Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan' (2003 Plan). A review of the 2003 Plan has been undertaken and a new draft plan has now been prepared. The draft Wither Hills Management Plan (Plan) is supported by this background document, which provides information that may assist in providing a greater understanding of the management approaches included in the new Plan.

Information is included on the following:

- Overview of the Wither Hills Farm Park features and activities noting that further discussions and proposed management frameworks are discussed later in the document
- Previous management planning
- Current management
- Review process
- Assessment of objectives and policies including consideration of issues, options, feedback and policy framework to be included in the Plan.

Overview of the Park

This section describes the land parcels that make up the Park and includes information on the soil conservation function of the land, farming, recreation activities, fire risk, the Sutherland Stream QEII covenant, pest management and activities occurring on adjacent land.

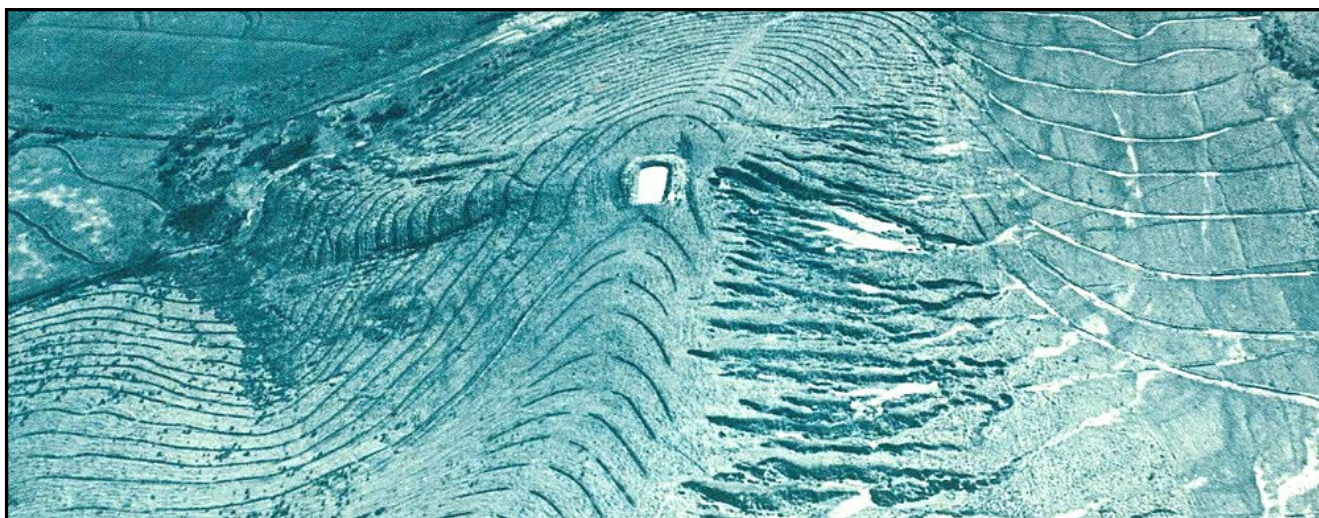
Legal descriptions

There are several parcels of land with different land statuses that apply to the Wither Hills Farm Park (Park). These include the following (noting that a more detailed description can be found in Appendix 2):

Block	Legal description	Status
Block A: Wither Run	Part Sec 2, Sec 8 SO 3776 Blk IV Taylor Pass SD Lot 609, 615 DP 409373 and Lot 630 DP 466163	Council owned
Block B: Soil Conservation Reserve	Section 2 of 8 Blk IV, Taylor Pass Survey District.	Crown owned Control and management vested in Council
Block C: Sutherland Stream	Lot 1 DP 8914 and Lot 1 DP 10763	Council owned
Block D: Crown Rehabilitation Block	Lot 1 DP 2833	Crown owned Control and management vested in Council
Block E: Part Bluegums Landfill Site	Part Lot 2 DP 9569	Council owned
Block F: Part Sutherland Stream Reserve	Part Lot 12 DP 10374 Lot 1 DP 11209	Council owned Local Purpose (Esplanade) Reserve

Soil conservation

The Park covers some 1,100 hectares, and its principal management function has been centred on soil conservation. This was behind the original purchase of 165 hectares of the current Park land back in 1944. The loessal soils of the Wither Hills were particularly vulnerable to tunnel gully erosion and combined with the historical pastoral management a severe erosion problem resulted, which was recognised as a potential threat to the township of Blenheim.



Early contour treatment with severe erosion still present

The nature of the highly dispersive soils made farming difficult and costly. Along with these problems, and the need to provide appropriate erosion and flood control on land overlooking the Blenheim residential area, the Council continued to acquire more properties to add to the original 165 hectares purchased in 1944. Numerous trials were undertaken during the early years to minimise erosion by using various tree and grass species, fertiliser application and mechanical treatments of the land. The successful treatments were then used from 1958 to treat over 3,000 hectares of land, including beyond the Park boundaries.

The Wither Hills Catchment Scheme was established in 1959. From this a major part of the northern facing slopes of the hills were purchased by the then Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council and the Crown. This land was placed in public ownership so eroded areas could be rehabilitated and the long term risks from erosion reduced. In 1993, the Council bought the 302 hectare Sutherland Stream block to connect the two existing Council administered properties. This has meant that the management of all areas at risk from erosion on these hills has been combined.

Since the 1940's a huge amount of effort has gone into addressing the significant soil erosion issues. Methods used have usually involved cross-slope bulldozer gully infilling of affected areas, followed by resowing of either grass or exotic trees. This process to re-establish vegetation has been extremely challenging due to the dry climate and low fertility soils. Continued efforts using this approach over many years have been effective in progressively stabilising slopes and reducing the movement of silt. However, soil erosion will always be an issue requiring careful management.



Current day contour treatment

Farming

Farming has been used within the Park to assist in reducing erosion risk through building soil fertility and pasture cover as well as a means of managing grassland and associated fire risk. Currently farming activity is managed through a lease.

Recreation

The Wither Hills have seen a significant increase in community use and enjoyment since the 2003 Plan was approved by the Council. The 2003 Plan identified as a primary objective the provision and promotion of appropriate recreational access and use by the public and user groups, albeit this needed to be consistent with another primary objective, that being soil conservation.

Walking and mountainbiking are significant activities with many tracks and roads offering a variety of experiences. To accommodate both activities and ensure visitor experience and safety are maintained, tracks and farm roads have been identified as bike-only, pedestrian-only, or shared, to reduce the potential for conflict or safety issues.



The highest visitor use of the Park occurs from the Rifle Range and Redwood Street entrances with the Rotary Lookout circuit, Sutherland Stream and Mt Vernon loop tracks being particularly popular.

A dedicated mountainbike park off Taylor Pass Road has also been in place for some time and a pump track has recently been developed in the Rifle Range carpark area.

As recreational use has increased, facilities to support that use have become more formalised. Sealed carparks have been developed at Rifle Range, Quail Stream and Redwood Street entrances to the Park, while a gravelled carpark is located at the Mountainbike Park entrance.



Toilet facilities are currently located at the Rifle Range and Quail Stream carparks and in the upper Quail and mid Sutherland valleys. The Redwood Street carpark currently does not have toilet facilities provided, nor does the Mountain Bike Park carpark.

The Rifle Range carpark is considered the main entry point to the Park and in addition to the carpark and toilets, a small playground, an exercise station and basic tool kit for mountain bikers are provided. The Rifle Range area is also being used as a base for events such as school cross country races and for mountainbiking races. Most recently this area was used during the 2023 Secondary Schools Mountainbiking National Championship.



QE11 covenant

A covenant with the QEII National Trust was signed in September 1994 to protect approximately 42 hectares of land in the Sutherland Stream area. At the time this area contained valuable tracts of kānuka treeland. The covenant was to protect and maintain open space values of the land and to protect flora and fauna.

A subsequent management statement was prepared in August 1997 that set out issues and policies for the future management of the covenant area.

Unfortunately with the Boxing Day fire of 2000, the covenant area was largely destroyed. Since then an active programme of replanting and ongoing pest management has been undertaken. Regular monitoring by the QEII Trust of the extent of regeneration is ongoing. In the last site visit the QEII Trust noted that *“All in all the covenant is looking great and after 23 years of regeneration is almost back to the stage where we can call it a forest again. Once there is an intact canopy there will be the opportunity for more fragile plants and ferns to start to get away which will lead to an increase in bird species settling in”*.



Covenant area 2023

Fire risk

The Wither Hills landscape is highly modified with its original forest cover burnt and recovered to tussock, which in turn was burnt and replaced with exotic grasses. A fire on Boxing Day 2000 destroyed much of the Park's vegetation including the covenant area on the true right side of Sutherland Stream. Subsequently revegetation took place using native species, exotic amenity trees, and harvestable forest species to complement the various land uses.



Boxing Day 2000 fire – burnt across 6100 hectares of public and private land

Fire is considered an ongoing risk to the Park, its users, and facilities as well as neighbouring properties. Over the past 10 years ignitions have occurred both within and outside the Park that either threatened or damaged it. Climate change is also a factor with an increase in the annual average number of low to extreme fire danger days. Over the most recent summer (2023/24), the Park was closed for an extended period (some two weeks) due to the extreme fire risk.

To assist in the review of the 2003 Plan an analysis has been undertaken using modelling to predict fire behaviour. This information was then used to provide an analysis of fire risk for the Wither Hills. The analysis has suggested a range of actions aimed at reducing the chance of fires starting and if a fire starts, reducing its damage potential. Further discussion on fire risk management is included later in this document – see Section 6.

Pest management

Introduced invasive species (weeds and pests) are a significant risk to biodiversity and primary production sectors. For the Wither Hills Farm Park there is an ongoing programme to manage longstanding infestations of nassella tussock in the Regional Pest Management Plan. Additionally, an intensive management programme is also carried out to manage the more recent and significant threat from Chilean needle grass. Other weed issues such as gorse, broom and old man's beard are also subject to weed control effort.

Control of rabbits has historically been undertaken through night shooting, poisoning and the release of biological control agents, however, this is becoming increasingly difficult to undertake safely given the significant recreational use of the area. Possums, mustelids, rats and magpies are also subject to control programmes.

Other uses/activities

In addition to the issues and activities already identified, the Park is used for a number of other activities. These include:

- Water reservoirs and pipelines for Blenheim's town water supply
- Telecommunication and broadcasting facilities (both Council and other providers)
- Weather station
- Floodways connecting the Wither Hills to downstream river control networks.

Council weather station



Adjacent land uses

Over time as Blenheim has expanded, residential activity has advanced towards the boundary of the Park. Today, for much of the Park's northern and western boundaries, residential activity is immediately alongside. There are also rural residential properties located towards the eastern part of the Park's northern boundary.

The Bluegums Landfill is located on the southwestern boundary of the Park extending from Taylor Pass Road. With the Mountainbike Park being located on the same land title there is a need for close liaison to ensure that the landfill can operate safely and efficiently without being impacted by mountainbiking activities.

To the south and east are larger rural properties where the predominant activities are farming and viticulture.

Previous management planning

A range of management plans has prepared for and has guided activities on the Wither Hills and environs over a number of years. This is in addition to the management of soil erosion on the hills since land was first purchased by the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Council in 1944.

Some plans and concepts arose as a consequence of the Council's purchase of the Wither Run in part for the expansion of Blenheim. Landscape concepts were developed for the flat land and toe slopes of the Wither Hills and a feasibility study on afforestation for the Wither Hills was also undertaken. Subsequently a solar subdivision was designed for the flat land and toe slopes and this was incorporated into the then Blenheim Borough District Scheme.

The first management plan however, that was prepared for the entire Wither Hills pulling together all aspects of use and management occurred in 1993.

Management Plan – Wither Hills Property 1993

This management plan was prepared not long after the purchase of what is known as the Sutherland Stream block. The purchase had created the opportunity to combine management of four areas of the Wither Hills in public ownership addressing the integration of production, soil and water conservation and recreation objectives.

There were three objectives identified and in order of priority, these were:

Soil and water conservation	To reduce soil erosion and minimise downstream soil and water hazards from the Wither Hills area.
Recreation	To promote appropriate recreational use by the public, consistent with achieving the soil and water conservation and having regard to the farming objective.
Farming	The establishment of a sustainable farming system that meets the objective of soil and water conservation and recreation.

Policies under each of these objectives were subsequently developed. The management plan also identified that a development plan was to be prepared and was to be read in conjunction with the management plan.

Wither Hills Farm Park Development Plan 1994

The development plan was essentially the same document as the 1993 management plan with a little more detail on how various policies were to be implemented. Additionally, there was a map included within the plan that showed visually the various development proposals.

Sutherland Stream Open Space Covenant (Wither Hills Farm Park) Management Statement 1997

The Sutherland Stream section of the Park contains valuable tracts of kānuka treeland and attractive landscape features typical of the Marlborough region. Approximately 42 hectares of this area has been protected in perpetuity by way of a QEII National Trust open space covenant in 1996.

A management statement was prepared in 1997 for the covenant area and this describes the resources of the land, identifies management issues, and outlines policies agreed between the Council and the National Trust for the area's future management.

The two main objectives for management were to protect and maintain the open space values of the land and to protect indigenous flora and fauna on the land. In addition, the management statement records that it is an objective of the Council to ensure public access remains in perpetuity, except at certain times for management reasons: i.e., extreme fire danger exists, during pest control operations, or similar.

Policies were included on open space values, development and structures, vegetation, weed and pest control, fencing, public access, fire risk and management of adjoining farmland. The management statement has not been reviewed but still provides the framework for managing the area in terms of the original covenant agreement.

Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan 2003

In 2003 a new management plan was prepared after reviewing the 1993 and 1994 planning documents. This included the following:

Land Use Review	Looking at the economic aspects of the Farm Park operations and alternate opportunities for use of the land.
Fire Management Review	Focusing on developing a comprehensive Fire Response Plan following the Boxing Day 2000 fire. Specific attention was paid to provisions for public safety, acknowledgement and mitigation of the proximity of residential housing to the farm boundary, protection of soil conservation values and Council assets in the event of future fires.
Soil Conservation Review	Looking specifically at the condition of the land within the Wither Hills Soil Conservation Area, to identify the appropriate requirements for ongoing soil conservation management of the hill country, and its associated drainage network.

The earlier management plans did not clearly define the boundaries of the perceived or actual areas of public use, and instead encompassed all Council owned or controlled land in the vicinity, regardless of its function and use. The 2003 Plan did define the boundaries of the Farm Park and also identified four specific activity zones that set out a range of permitted, discretionary and prohibited activities as a means to manage land use.

The primary objectives were soil conservation and recreation with soil conservation being the dominant objective. Recreational access and use was to be provided for and promoted so long as it was consistent with achieving soil conservation objectives whilst also having regard to secondary objectives, being:

- Sustainable and economic land use
- Preserve and enhance biodiversity and natural values
- Preserve and enhance aesthetic values
- Enable and promote use and accessibility.

Additionally, the 2003 management plan did not include 'farming' as a management objective as the previous plan had, as it was considered that farming should more appropriately be recognised as a management tool.

Current management

Within Council there are several teams that have varying degrees of management responsibility for the Park. The following provides an overview of the role of each of these teams.

Rivers Team (Assets and Services Department)

The Rivers Team of Council has the responsibility to promote soil conservation, prevent and mitigate soil erosion and prevent damage by floods. This is a statutory responsibility for parts¹ of the Wither Hills Farm Park.

A range of works and activities are employed by the Rivers Team to achieve these objectives including maintaining an appropriate vegetative cover to protect soils and reduce erosion and an effective grazing regime to reduce fire risk. A lease is in place that enables farming activities to help achieve these outcomes. The responsibilities are also aimed at ensuring that little or no sediment is deposited into the watercourses at the base of the Wither Hills, thereby reducing flood capacity in these watercourses. The Rivers Team also has a role in maintaining stormwater assets at the base of the Wither Hills that detain water run-off to delay its concentration downstream and avoid flood accumulation.

The range of works and activities overseen by the Rivers Team includes:

- Soil conservation and earthworks – constructing and repairing sediment control structures, cleaning out of sediment ponds and debris dams, gabion baskets and slash catching structures, earthworks and recontouring of significantly eroding faces and gullies with revegetation as required, mechanical tunnel gully remediation to reduce discharges to water and neighbouring land
- Fire risk management, working with FENZ and the farm manager to control dry matter into the summer, fire dam maintenance, emergency access maintenance and decision-making on when to close the Park to public access
- Repairs and maintenance of farm buildings, infrastructure, and assets, replacing of damaged water tanks, maintenance of farm tracks and water mains
- Tree planting of gullies and retirement of erosion prone areas and maintenance of trees and other plantings including removal of dead trees, pruning etc
- Soil fertility and pasture species management, including soil testing, aerial topdressing, and pasture renewal
- Biosecurity – administration of control programmes for nassella tussock, Chilean needle grass, gorse and broom, and wilding pine within the Park using aerial and ground-based crews
- Pest control of feral cats, possums, rats, rabbits and other pest species
- Education and engagement work, including organising native planting days for volunteers and school groups.

Parks and Open Spaces Team (Property and Community Facilities Department)

The Parks and Open Spaces Team has management responsibility for recreational activity in the Park as follows:

- Provision and maintenance of walking and biking tracks and trails (including the Rifle Range pump track)
- Monitoring numbers of track users
- Directional signage for tracks and trails and informational signs
- Carparks at main entry points

¹ Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act 1941

- Provision and maintenance of public toilets and drinking fountains
- Approving events and organised recreation activities in the Park
- Coordinating Park closures with the Rivers Team and FENZ when fire risk increases.

This Team also manages and maintains the covenant area supported by the QEII National Trust in monitoring of regeneration and enhancement of the area. Plant and animal pest control forms a part of this activity.

Other activities overseen by the Parks and Open Spaces Team include:

- Trees and gardens maintenance within carparks
- Tree maintenance around tracks and trails
- Management of buffer strip between residential properties and the Park
- Maintenance of the event area at Rifle Range and the playground and exercise station
- Maintenance of bridges, stiles and mountainbike raised cattle crossings.

Other Council management responsibilities

There are several other areas of Council in which advice, regulatory direction or management occurs within or adjacent to the Farm Park. These include as follows:

Biosecurity Team

The Biosecurity Team's role is to both prevent unwanted plants, animals and organisms from establishing in Marlborough where these pose a threat to production values or threaten the environment and to manage some existing pest plants, animals and organisms. This management occurs through the Council's Regional Pest Management Plan where there are rules and obligations placed on occupiers and landowners. This includes a programme to manage Chilean needle grass within the Farm Park.

Land and Water Team

The Council has legislative responsibilities to monitor the condition of the land resource and researches the pressures human activity places on that resource. There are monitoring programmes in place that include soil quality, land use and cover, and land/water quality interactions. This has included consideration of assessment of the soils on the Wither Hills.

Advice on biodiversity matters is also provided by the Land and Water Team.

Review process

Although only a small area of the Wither Hills Farm Park is Reserves Act land – this being a small area along Sutherland Stream – the Council has followed a Reserves Act process in reviewing the 2003 Plan. This process requires two rounds of feedback or submissions: in the first-round persons and organisations are invited to provide written suggestions about the reserve, which are then used to prepare a draft plan for submission; and in the second, a draft plan is notified for public submissions.

Once submissions have closed there will be a public hearing where submitters can present their submissions. Any changes required in response to submissions will then be made to the draft plan before it is adopted by the Council.

During the first community consultation round, a discussion document prepared by the Council set out the key issues for the Park and sought community views on what the future management direction should be. Feedback on the discussions document occurred during April/May 2023 and attracted ninety-two submissions, with many useful suggestions and insights considered as part of the plan development process. A summary of the views expressed can be found in Appendix One.

Three Iwi have participated in the review process (Rangitāne o Wairau, Ngāti Rārua, Ngāti Toa Rangatira). Staff and specialist consultants from several Council departments, the Wither Hills Farm lessee, representatives from the QEII National Trust, Department of Conservation (DOC), Fire and Emergency NZ and Walking Access NZ also provided valuable input.

Other key stakeholder groups directly consulted included Rotary Clubs of Marlborough, Marlborough Mountainbike Club, Marlborough Landscape Group, Marlborough Orienteering Club, and Marlborough Hang Gliding & Paragliding Club.



Why is the Council undertaking this review?

The Wither Hills Farm Park is an iconic and highly valued backdrop to Blenheim and the surrounding lower Wairau Valley.

Since the original purchase of land on the Wither Hills in 1944 to address soil conservation issues, a huge amount of effort over many years by the former Marlborough Catchment Board and Marlborough District Council has gone into stabilising these hills to protect Blenheim. Today the Farm Park's role as a soil and water conservation reserve is as important as ever.

The current management plan produced in 2003 (2003 Plan), has been invaluable in providing the management direction for the last two decades. This 2003 Plan is available for viewing on the Council website. ([Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan 2003](#))

However, much has changed over the 20 years since the 2003 Plan was written and a review of this document is now necessary to consider these changes when determining future management direction for the Farm Park. This will ensure that this important area best meets the needs for residents of Blenheim and the wider Marlborough community into the future.

It will be important that the objective of protecting and further improving the stability and resilience of this area from floods, erosion, drought and fire remains the primary purpose. This is particularly critical given the extreme weather events associated with climate change already being experienced in the district. Further providing for public use and enjoyment of the park and native habitat restoration may also be important priorities for the community.

Assessment of objectives and policies

This section of the background document provides an assessment of issues identified through the review process including from Council staff, Iwi, farm lessee, stakeholders and the general public. What is set out is the following:

- Issues – a description of the issue
- Options – potentially how the issue may be resolved
- Feedback – from Iwi, stakeholders and the general public through the early consultation period
- Discussion – of the issues, options and feedback
- Policies – the management response for dealing with / managing issues.

The analysis undertaken has included consideration of management policies and actions within the following areas:

<p>Input areas</p> <p><i>How do we most effectively manage the Park?</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kaitiakitanga / Guardianship 2. Te mahi tahi / Working together 3. Te mahi hoahoa / Planning 4. Te reretahi / Coordination
<p>Outcome areas</p> <p><i>What outcomes do we want to achieve and how do we get there?</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Te whāomoomo oneone / Soil conservation 6. Te whakahaere tūraru ahi / Fire risk management 7. Ngā āheinga mahi ā-rēhia / Recreation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1 General 7.2 Walking and running 7.3 Biking 7.4 Dog walking 7.5 Motorised vehicles 7.6 Horse riding 7.7 Use of aircraft 7.8 Hunting 8. Te tāmi momo rāwaho / Invasive species control 9. Te whakaora i ngā taiao māori / Restoration of native habitats 10. Te tiaki horanuku / Landscape protection 11. Te tiaki i ngā taonga tuku iho / Cultural heritage protection
<p>Other areas</p> <p><i>What underlying land and assets are necessary and how can we ensure these are in place?</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Te tūāhanga / Infrastructure 13. Ngā rohe tauārai o te pāka / Park boundaries

Input Areas

1. Kaitiakitanga / Guardianship

Objective	1.1 Manawhenua Iwi can exercise kaitiakitanga within their rohe.
Issues	<p>Rangitāne, Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Toa Rangatira have a cultural association with the Wairau River and its wider catchment.</p> <p>The Wither Hills feeds tributaries of the Taylor River, Ōhine-anau-mate canal (Co-op Drain) and Ōpaoa River before entering the Wairau Lagoon. While these waterways are outside of the Park, they are of great historic significance to Iwi as sites for collection of food and other resources. The Ōhine-anau-mate canal is of particular significance, as an example of tūpuna canal building as a means of improving transportation links and to enhance food gathering efficiency.</p> <p>The management of the Park has the potential to adversely impact these downstream areas of significance including from sedimentation through erosion. Within the Park itself, there are also documented archaeological sites that indicate some historic use of these hills.</p> <p>Despite this association, Iwi have had little opportunity to date to participate in decision making that may affect these valued areas.</p>
Options	<p>There are a range of options available to increase the opportunities for manawhenua to exercise kaitiakitanga. These include direct input to management policy development supported by matauranga Māori and participation in reviewing progress towards goals. Wider acknowledgement of the historical association of the area through signage, as well as retaining the right to undertake cultural harvest from within the Park, are also options.</p>
Feedback	<p>Te Taihū taiao staff have confirmed the significance of the Wither Hills and surrounding areas primarily to Rangitāne, Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Toa Rangatira.</p> <p>A strong desire exists to see the mauri of the area returning through further natural area restoration of the valley systems of the Park, which in turn would also contribute towards improving the water quality of the Ōhine-anau-mate canal and Taylor River system.</p>
Discussion	<p>The cultural association with the Wairau River and its wider catchment for Rangitāne, Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Toa Rangatira, is recognised through Statutory Acknowledgements within the Te Taihū Treaty Settlements. While these are focussed on providing for participation on Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) processes, they are a wider acknowledgement by the Crown of the need to provide opportunities for Iwi to exercise kaitiakitanga for environmental management within these areas.</p> <p>All new generation reserve management plans developed by the Council provide policies to provide for kaitiakitanga to be exercised by manawhenua. Efforts should therefore be made to provide a range of opportunities for manawhenua to exercise kaitiakitanga through this Plan.</p>
Policies	<p>1.1.1 Seek to ensure that environmental management policies and management activities enhance the mauri of the Park.</p> <p>1.1.2 Provide opportunities to hui with manawhenua Iwi to regularly consider progress being made towards achieving the objectives, and to provide necessary further management guidance.</p> <p>1.1.3 Ensure that consistent and accurate messaging around the cultural and historical significance of the Park to Rangitāne, Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Toa</p>

- Rangatira is included in information signs and other communication channels.
- 1.1.4 Te Reo Māori to be used in conjunction with English on new signage and mapping.
- 1.1.5 Provide for customary harvest of plant materials in accordance with tikanga subject to:
- (a) The Rivers section of the Council being advised of when and where the cultural harvest will take place to ensure appropriate consideration is given to farming and soil conservation operations
 - (b) Cultural harvest complying with the requirements of the Marlborough Environment Plan.

2. Te mahi tahi / Working together

Objective **2.1 The Council, Iwi, and the community work together in the management of the Park.**

Issues Historically, most of the day to day management of the Wither Hills was undertaken by Council largely independent of community involvement.

This has changed with the steady development of recreational opportunities within the Park and increasing community support for environmental restoration. While relationships have emerged with some groups such as the combined Blenheim Rotary Clubs and the Marlborough Mountainbike Club, there is an opportunity to consider increasing and broadening relationships with these and other stakeholder groups, Iwi and the wider community.

Feedback Strong feedback has been received regarding the importance of the Wither Hills area to the community, with strong support for greater participation in the management of the Park. Ideas suggested included more opportunities for planting and restoration activities, partnering with clubs on the development and enhancement of recreational facilities, or opportunities to participate in, and experience, farming activities.

It has also been suggested that the establishment of a 'Friends of Wither Hills' could be a useful community organisation to support the enhancement and development of the Park.

Options There are several ways that greater engagement with Iwi and the community can be built into management practices and the work programme.

Improvements to communication could include online or physical newsletters or media articles as well as community meetings. Where appropriate, these can include the opportunity for input, as well keeping the community up to date on current issues and activities within the Park.

Opportunities for participation include structured volunteer planting, restoration, pest control or recreation facility development activities.

Education activities could include events such as farm management open days or interpretation field days on different aspects of Park values or operations.

Discussion As a highly valued community asset, it is important that Council in managing the Park on behalf of the community, provides suitable opportunities to support and nurture this strong sense of ownership and pride in the Wither Hills.

While school/community planting days and Rotary or Mountainbike Club facility development projects have been the most common activities to date, there is

clearly opportunity to broaden these to better provide for increased community and lwi participation.

Widespread engagement with lwi, stakeholders and the community has been undertaken in the development of this this Plan. As future development proposals arise that may not be consistent with the outcomes sought by the Plan once approved, the Council will seek further input from lwi, stakeholders and the community.

Policies	<p>2.1.1 Provide opportunities and support initiatives for community participation in Park activities where these are feasible, practical, and consistent with the Plan’s objectives, policies, and actions.</p> <p>2.1.2 Engage with lwi and the wider community before making decisions that will affect the values or use and enjoyment of the Park.</p> <p>2.1.3 Encourage and work with lwi, the community and other volunteer groups who wish to work with the Council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Develop and maintain appropriate recreation opportunities(b) Enhance biodiversity health and resilience(c) Improve the mauri of the Park. <p>2.1.4 Review communication channels to ensure efficient and meaningful information flow between Council and the community and that opportunities for feedback are provided.</p>
----------	---

3. Te mahi hoahoa / Planning

Objective	3.1 An effective planning framework with clear management direction that can be practically implemented.
Issues	<p>Given the importance of soil conservation and other activities within the Park, a framework for day to day and future management is critical to achieving objectives.</p> <p>A plan for the Park needs to reflect current circumstances and address current and future issues and provide an important link to the Long Term Plan (LTP).</p> <p>Work programmes focused on delivering identified objectives also need to be in place and be informed by full information and necessary data.</p>
Feedback	<p>Community feedback strongly supported the development of this updated management plan.</p> <p>Some supported the prescriptive approach taken by the 2003 Plan, however others were strongly dissatisfied with the constraint that this placed on progressing potential future development opportunities.</p> <p>Frustration was expressed from the Mountainbike Club with the cost and complexity of processes associated with obtaining Council landowner approval and necessary resource consents for trail development.</p> <p>A submitter also expressed concern that the name ‘Wither Hills Farm Park’ implies that farming is a key outcome rather than a management tool. It was suggested that ‘Wither Hills Park’ would be a better name given the multiple outcomes sought for the Park.</p>
Options	<p>It has been important that different departments of Council were fully involved in Plan development to ensure it adequately incorporates wider policy direction and different work programme objectives. This has been critical to ensure ‘buy in’ and shared ‘ownership’ of the Plan.</p>

Moving into the implementation stage, tools include further detailed work planning to achieve key outcomes/policy objectives, provision within LTP and Annual Plan budgets to implement actions as well as regular staff reporting to Council of Plan implementation progress.

Discussion

It is expected that the updated Plan will provide clear management direction for various departments of Council, while also ensuring sufficient flexibility remains to accommodate changing circumstances into the future.

As a first step to effective Plan implementation, an up to date inventory of Park assets and values is required. Regular monitoring/condition assessment should then be undertaken so that full information is available to build meaningful and effective work programmes.

For applications by partners or other external parties to undertake management activities or development or operate concessions within the Park, a defined process is also required that assesses an application against Plan objectives.

If assessed as furthering the implementation of Plan objectives and actions, a less stringent process could be used, whereas a proposal inconsistent with the Plan would require a higher level of Council scrutiny and assessment. However, it is important to distinguish between permissions that may be required through this Plan and those that might require resource consent under the Marlborough Environment Plan (MEP) provisions.

The establishment of a Council staff group to support the implementation of the Plan, provide strategic assessment on progress and necessary actions would also be of value. Such a group has been formed during 2023 and is already providing important input to planning processes.

Renaming the Park to Wither Hills Park is also considered a reasonable request given its multiple outcome areas and the role of farming as a management tool rather than a key outcome in its own right. This suggested name change will be highlighted through the notification phase of the Plan with specific feedback being sought.

Policies

3.1.1 Develop and maintain a register of assets and values including regular condition and performance assessments to assist in asset management planning and the development of work programmes.

3.1.2 Collect necessary data on all Plan outcome areas to determine the success of actions and to guide future planning decisions.

3.1.3 Ensure that processes to assess future activities and development within the Park against Plan objectives and outcomes are in place.

4. Te reretahi / Coordination

Objective

4.1 Effective operational coordination of the delivery of key actions.

Issues

As described, different departments of Council have different responsibilities within the Park. This has at times affected both efficiencies in delivering work, or the delivery of one work programme adversely affecting another.

Feedback

Several Iwi and stakeholder representatives have expressed dissatisfaction regarding the need to liaise with several departments of Council regarding the Park. This includes the apparent lack of awareness that departments have at times regarding work programme activities of other parts of Council.

Options	To date there has not been any centralised coordination of management activities within the Park. An obvious option is to form a staff group to ensure coordination of activities across the range of Plan outcome and action areas.
Discussion	<p>A working group of staff and key other parties (such as FENZ and the farm manager) has been recently developed, which appears to be working well. This group's composition and frequency of meetings etc may require further refinement as Plan implementation needs become clearer.</p> <p>There may also be value in assigning a 'relationship manager' for each key Iwi and community stakeholders with an interest in the Wither Hills Park to make Council engagement easier.</p>
Policies	<p>4.1.1 Formalise a Council staff group to coordinate necessary actions to implement the Plan.</p> <p>4.1.2 Consider assigning a staff member for each important Wither Hills stakeholder relationship.</p> <p>4.1.3 Ensure that the farm lease, operational contracts, or management agreements adequately reflect assigned responsibilities as well as health and safety, biosecurity and other statutory obligations.</p>

Outcome Areas

5. Te whāomomo oneone / Soil conservation

Objectives	<p>5.1 Minimise soil erosion from hill slopes and along waterways by actively restoring and maintaining vegetative cover and controlling water flow.</p> <p>5.2 Manage activities such as soil disturbance, earthworks and vegetation clearance.</p>
Issues	<p>While significant progress towards controlling erosion and protecting soils has been made over many years, some problem areas remain, which will require ongoing active management. New areas of instability can also arise particularly following storms, fires, earthquakes and other events.</p> <p>In addition, the whole area remains sensitive to activities undertaken on the land. Those that have the potential to adversely affect progress towards meeting soil conservation objectives will need to be managed to ensure that this does not occur.</p>
Options	<p>The MEP currently provides some controls through the designation of the Park as a 'Soil Conservation Area', which enables Council as 'requiring authority', to ensure only activities consistent with this purpose occur.²</p> <p>Within the Open Space 3 Zone other controls exist, including limits on excavation as a permitted activity to only those locations not identified as 'soil sensitive' containing loess soils.³</p> <p>As Council directly controls and manages the Park, further policy direction on soil conservation issues can be provided within the Plan. This direction needs to focus on ensuring that the objectives for soil conservation, as a priority outcome area, can be met.</p> <p>Previous research and management experience notes the challenges associated with soil conservation within the difficult soil environment, complex topography, and deep eroded gullies of the Wither Hills.</p> <p>Historically cross-slope bulldozer gully infilling of affected areas followed by resowing of either grass or exotic trees has been successful for larger areas of slope and gully failure. However, for most remaining problem areas, physical treatment of erosion is likely to be impractical with planting using appropriate vegetation species, likely to be the best remedial action possible.</p> <p>The use of dams and other structures also remain useful tools to slow and control water flow. It has been recommended that future sediment retention dams where possible, should be constructed on top of the existing accumulated sediments to further flatten valley floor profiles and potential erosion from within the catchments.⁴</p> <p>In terms of controlling activities within the Park, policy options range from the Plan being prescriptive in defining permitted activities within different areas of the Park (such as the zoning approach used in the existing 2003 Plan) or using an outcomes based approach. An outcomes approach focusses on potential effects on soil conservation and other target outcomes, and uses processes, such as assessment criteria, to carefully consider any development proposal.</p>

² MEP, Appendix 14

³ MEP, Section 19.3.5.5 Open Space 3 Zone

⁴ Marlborough District Council 2011 – Soil Survey of Part of the Wither Hills – Redwood Hills Area, Marlborough (MDC Technical Report No: 11-004)

Feedback	<p>Feedback through consultation undertaken has reinforced the importance of soil conservation as the primary management objective. In addition there was strong support expressed that the Council and farm lessee need to model best practice farming and land management.</p> <p>A combination of appropriate tree planting in the valleys with grassland remaining the predominant activity over most of the Park was considered the best mix to achieve soil conservation and other objectives. Most considered farming an important management tool to control grass, as well as to provide a farm experience for urban visitors.</p> <p>The community use and enjoyment of the Park was highly valued by all, with most respondents accepting that limits on some activities are necessary, given the sensitive nature of the soil and land environment.</p> <p>Some feedback also expressed concern to ensure that water courses and stormwater intakes were actively cleared and maintained to actively manage stormwater risks to the urban area.</p>
Discussion	<p>There are a range of options and priorities to progress the soil conservation objectives for the Park. To effectively guide this work, there is a need for further detailed work programme development to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify sites where further soil conservation work is required and the actions necessary at these locations over the next few years • An ongoing schedule for soil conservation activities required across the Park such as cross slope bulldozing, other earthworks, installation of debris and sediment control structures, enhancement of water controls and flow paths, soil testing, fertiliser, and organic matter enhancement and any necessary resowing/oversowing of grassland areas. <p>This work programme should provide a firm schedule of work to be undertaken over a three year forward period, with projections over 10 years and to align this with Council LTP processes. For much of this work, experience from previous management actions has helped inform upcoming actions, hence the programme should be updated/reviewed regularly as a core part of the Working Group's role.</p> <p>Planting and vegetation management priorities to manage soil conservation, needs to be integrated with other vegetation management to ensure all outcome areas within the Park such as managing fire risk, can be met. This could be through development of a long-term planting plan.</p> <p>The controls outlined in the Plan for activities that may have adverse effects on soil conservation objectives, are considered best addressed through an outcomes-based approach. This approach is preferred over the current prescriptive method, which can be inherently challenging to ensure comprehensive coverage of all potential future activities and appropriate controls. The use of standardised assessment criteria would provide the framework for this process.</p>
Policies	<p>Soil conservation management</p> <p>5.1.1 Develop and maintain a 10 year 'Soil and Water Management' work programme incorporating dryland management best practice, to be updated not less than three yearly and contain the following elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Identification of sites where further soil conservation work is required and the actions necessary at these locations (b) A description of ongoing Park wide soil conservation activities required including actions such as soil testing, fertiliser and organic matter enhancement, pest and weed control necessary to maintain pasture, and any necessary programmed resowing/oversowing

- (c) Current flood projections and any necessary channel water control maintenance /enhancement actions
- (d) Ensuring particular regard is had to waterways that flow into Ōhine-anau-mate canal and the Wairau Lagoon.

5.1.2 In conjunction with the with the farm lessee, develop a Farm Plan, incorporating the following requirements:

- (a) The management direction provided for within this Plan and any subsequent work programmes particularly those relating to soil conservation and fire risk management
- (b) The need for the Council and lessee to demonstrate dryland farming best practice.
- (c) Any elements required under the Resource Management (Freshwater Farm Plans) Regulations 2020 or similar legislation that supersedes it
- (d) Necessary record keeping required to measure performance.

This Farm Plan should be reviewed annually to ensure that farming activities best contribute towards soil conservation and fire risk management. It should also be linked to an updated grazing lease.

5.1.3 Identify any specific tree planting requirements necessary for soil conservation over this period and incorporate these into the Planting and Vegetation Management Plan to be developed.

5.1.4 Identify any erosion control or stock management infrastructure necessary for soil conservation over this period and incorporate these into the Infrastructure Plan to be developed.

Activity management

5.2.1 Incorporate any necessary soil conservation practices within work programmes for all existing activities undertaken within the Park that are provided for within this Plan.

5.2.2 Assess soil conservation impacts for all new planned or proposed activities or development within the Park. As part of this assessment, consider the degree of risk that the activity presents and any mitigation actions available. If high risk, seek geotechnical advice.

Note: Key Assessment Criteria are provided in Appendix 4

6. Te whakahaere tūraru ahi / Fire risk management

Objective

6.1 Actively manage fire risk by:

- (a) Reducing likelihood of fire ignition
- (b) Reducing the consequence of fire through early detection, fast and effective response, reduced rate of spread and fire intensity
- (c) Minimising injury and asset damage, potential financial impacts and environmental damage.

Issues

The Wither Hills are particularly susceptible to fire. This is due to its location in an eastern dryland hill country pasture environment subject to windy conditions over the summer months, and potential ignition sources in the form of Park users, surrounding properties and arsonists.

Over the past 10 years several fire ignitions have occurred both within and outside the Park that have threatened public safety and damaged assets.

Over time, climate change will also increase the number of High and Extreme fire danger days for the Park, further raising this risk.

Options

While some of these underlying conditions cannot be changed, there are several areas where Council as owner and manager of this Park can actively manage this risk.

A Wildfire Risk Management Analysis report commissioned by the Council in 2023, identified reducing the likelihood of ignitions as a priority, followed by reducing the consequence should one start.⁵

In this report the following range of actions within each of these target areas has been recommended:

Reducing the likelihood of ignition

- *“Requires increasing the awareness of fire risk with users and neighbours and the application of activity controls for spark hazardous operations including access controls. For properties that boundary the Park a fire prevention (reduction) awareness program is needed, and this would be done in conjunction with FENZ.”*

Reducing the consequence from a fire

- *“Looking at the safety of people, protection of assets, reduction in a fire’s damage potential through early detection, fast response, and reduced rate of spread and fire intensity. This aims to minimise injury and asset damage, reduce potential financial impacts and environmental damage, and maintain organisational reputation.”*

Feedback

Most feedback received through consultation supported taking a range of actions to reduce fire risk. This included actions such as increasing public awareness, limiting activities during periods of high fire risk, progressive removal or lifting of lower branches of higher risk exotic plantings and progressively replacing these with less fire susceptible broadleaf native species.

Management of long grass was seen by some as a bigger issue than the management of isolated areas of other vegetation.

Specific feedback on the farming operation reinforced the importance of getting the soil conditions right so that different species of grass can be used – potentially reducing the amount of fire susceptible ‘tag’.⁶ To achieve this, it was suggested a focus on use of lime and sulphur rather than superphosphate.

There were also mixed views on:

- The necessity of removing gorse, kānuka and eucalyptus (given the nursery crop and bird food source role they respectively play)
- The effectiveness of widening farm tracks to control fire spread, given the soil conservation risks that these earthworks would create.

Given the value of the Park to the community for use and enjoyment, it was hoped by many, that the active management of fire risks would allow for the Park to remain open for access for longer over dry summer months.

Discussion

The 2023 Wildfire Risk Management Analysis report provides a comprehensive assessment and an extensive detailed list of recommended actions and their relative priority.

⁵ Wither Hills Farm Park – Wildfire Risk Management Analysis, Tony Teeling, Integrated Consultancy Limited 2023.

⁶ Tag: Long grass seed heads.

This list should form the basis of the work programme arising to manage fire risk within the Park. In a few areas it will be important that FENZ also review the analysis and actions recommended and that these are modified/adjusted as necessary.

Similarly, where a recommended action to manage fire risk has a potential adverse impact on another outcome area for the Park, then a process will be required to weigh up the relative overall benefit/cost of the action before it is confirmed. In some cases, an alternative action could be selected that more appropriately achieves several objectives. This particularly applies to the management of vegetation and infrastructure, both of which serve a wider function.

The specific actions necessary to manage wildfire risk – such as further detailed planning, response, access restrictions, and systems for early detection etc. should be incorporated into a Fire Plan for the Park.

It is also important the Council has a consistent process in place for making decisions about closing the Park to the public and other users during times of very high fire risk. Decisions to prohibit access will be guided by the advice of FENZ.

Other fire risk management actions, which affect several outcome areas such as the management of vegetation (removal, planting, mowing, grazing etc) and infrastructure (roads/tracks and water supplies etc.), should be incorporated into a Planting and Vegetation Management Plan and Infrastructure Plan respectively.

Policies

Planning

6.1.1 Develop and maintain a Fire Plan (to be updated annually) to incorporate elements of fire risk management including, but not limited to:

- (a) Risk monitoring, review, and reporting
- (b) Response to wildfire
- (c) Activity and access restriction levels
- (d) Communications and signage to ensure awareness of current risks and restrictions and to encourage 'Fire Smart'⁷ actions by adjoining landowners
- (e) Security and surveillance/early detection systems
- (f) Fire Weather System and CIMS⁸ training needs
- (g) First responders site plan (access, water supplies etc)
- (h) Evacuation plan.

Management

6.1.2 Identify vegetation management necessary across the Park to manage fire risk and incorporate this into the Planting and Vegetation Management Plan to be developed. Elements may include:

- (a) Tree removal and/or pruning
- (b) Tree planting
- (c) Use of summer greens⁹ to replace pasture grass on Park margins
- (d) Areas to be irrigated, grazed or mown.

⁷ Fire Smart: Campaign to encourage actions by landowners on the rural/urban interface to manage fire risks.

⁸ Coordinated Incident Management System.

⁹ May include species such as lucerne, chicory, plantain, ryegrass and clovers.

- 6.1.3 Identify Park assets requiring maintenance or development to manage fire risks and incorporate these into the Infrastructure Plan to be developed. Elements may include:
- (a) Management tracks and roads, culverts, bridges
 - (b) Water supply tanks, reticulation, ponds
 - (c) Helicopter landing sites
 - (d) Powerlines, yards, buildings
 - (e) Signs.
- 6.1.4 Identify recreation assets requiring maintenance or development to manage fire risks and incorporate these into the Parks and Open Spaces asset management system and maintenance contract specification.
- 6.1.5 Maintain a process to enable a rapid, ready response to the closure of the Park when fire risk increases.

7. Ngā āheinga mahi ā-rēhia / Recreation opportunities

General

- Objective **7.1 Provide for a range of recreational activities that can be accommodated without negatively impacting on other outcome targets or other users.**

- Issues
- The Park is hugely valued by the community and visitors as a location for a range of recreational activities. These opportunities contribute to the quality of life for residents of Blenheim and the wider Marlborough district.
- The primary challenge is to ensure ease of access to the Park for visitors, and a high quality experience while providing for a range of different types of recreational activities and capabilities to meet visitor needs.
- While the recreational facilities currently provided are broadly appropriate and have been functioning adequately to date, there are several issues that need to be addressed within this Plan. These will become more important as the use of the Park continues to increase. These include:
- The need to ensure that the Park is accessible to people with a range of abilities
 - Providing the right mix of facilities for users through a higher level of facility provision close to Park entrances and a more remote experience further into the Park
 - Ensuring different uses in the same location, such as mountainbiking and walking, do not create experience and safety issues
 - Managing visitor access and facility development to ensure necessary farming operations are not affected
 - Difficulties achieving other Park objectives – such as soil disturbance from track construction and increased fire safety risk resulting from public access
 - Increasing community demand to provide for other activities
 - New and emerging activities such as e-bikes, drones etc

- Inconsistent wayfinding and information signage as well as gaps in the provision of other supporting facilities (such as the lack of a toilet at the Redwood Street carpark)
- The need for current and future recreational use and associated facilities to not adversely affect the environment in other ways – such as through waste, physical damage or by visually detracting from the amenity values of the Park
- Ensuring that safety risks are managed and easy access is available for emergency services and to identified AEDs¹⁰
- The presence of the public within the Park also exacerbates fire risk both through potential ignition sources (arson and carelessness with cigarettes etc.) and the safety consequences of people potentially being in the path of a wildfire.

Options

Most of the current and potential issues can be managed by providing clear policy direction regarding the management of different recreational activities within the Park. Historically, a transition from high level and quality facilities close to Park entry points to a more remote experience towards the southern Park boundary, has effectively provided for a range of visitor needs and experiences.

Identifying standards and priorities for the capital and renewals programme to support the policy approach taken, can be included within the Parks and Open Spaces asset management planning process and future budgets. In some cases, redefining maintenance and operations levels of service for inclusion in maintenance contracts may also be needed.

A process to consider future proposed activities/development under the Plan framework could also be useful.

Feedback

As described above, overall feedback regarding the current recreational opportunities available within the Wither Hills has been resoundingly positive.

However, as a valued asset for the community, there have also been many suggestions for further improvements including:

- Widespread support for improving or increasing existing opportunities for walking and biking
- Requests for inclusion of other activities not currently provided for such as horse riding or dog walking
- Improving access for people less able or of limited mobility
- Providing shade in the playground area and over seats
- Provision of wayfinding signage from surrounding suburbs to direct visitors to Park entrances
- Improving event management through better traffic management and overflow parking
- Provision of better signage including additional education panels or QR code markers that provide interesting information regarding the history of the Park
- Support for the improvement of maintenance and development standards for tracks
- A suggestion that further advocacy actions are necessary to ensure the 'pack in it pack it out' rubbish policy works more effectively
- Change the management approach of formally discouraging nighttime access of the Park.

¹⁰ AED: Automated External Defibrillator

- A desire by some for a more explicit 'right to roam' through the Park.

Discussion

Given the importance of the Wither Hills to be as accessible and available to visitors as possible, simple actions to support finding and accessing the Park are worthwhile.

Continuing the management approach to provide for an increasingly rural/remote experience that the Park provides in the upper valleys and southern ridgelines, is worthwhile given this is a key attribute that appeals to the predominantly urban community nearby. Visitors to these areas are expected to be, and in most cases are, more self-sufficient in terms of equipment, shelter and food and drink. The level of facility provision should correspondingly be less in these locations. Other visitors that have lower levels of capability or self-sufficiency, more often remain closer to entrance points, and require a higher level of facility provision. This is a key factor to take into account when considering future facility development proposals.

Guidance regarding standards and future development of a range of walking and biking opportunities, (including avoiding negative impacts between these and other activities), is also important and will be considered separately. Similarly, suggestions for other possible recreational activities need to be considered and have also been assessed separately.

Improving the existing sign hierarchy and reconfirming that the existing 'pack it in pack it out' policy for rubbish is working adequately is needed.

While a few areas of the Park contain trees of an adequate size to provide shade, there are several intensively used areas such as the Rifle Range playground and the Pump Track spectator area that would benefit from shade structures. This is particularly important given the high sun environment and the prevalence of skin cancer in New Zealand.

Drinking fountains are currently unexpectedly well distributed through the Park including in the upper Mountainbike Park, various locations along the Taylor View and Mt Vernon tracks and the upper Quail and Sutherland Stream valleys. While these are appreciated by some visitors, there is an increasing cost to maintain these facilities and to ensure higher potable water standards are met. It is suggested that these 'backcountry' drinking fountains are not cost effective or necessary, and that these be phased out. Messaging should instead be provided on signboards reinforcing the importance of carrying water in these locations, particularly over summer months.

While not a common issue, retaining the existing 2003 Plan policy prohibiting use of motorised equipment such as chainsaws, generators etc., which could cause disruption, disturbance and create safety issues, should be retained.

In recent years, the night use of parks and reserves, particularly for walking, running, orienteering, and biking has become more common. It is therefore appropriate to review the 2003 Plan approach of discouraging use outside of 1 hour before sunrise to 1 hour after sunset. As there have been few documented safety or operational issues arising from this trend, not restricting hours of use for the Park is considered reasonable. This revised policy could be reviewed if problems arise in the future.

Antisocial use at car parks at night is considered a separate issue and can be addressed separately if required in the future.

Similarly, the desire for the 'right to roam' can remain a broad principle, however the Council and farm manager need to retain the ability to control access when and where necessary for management reasons and to ensure public safety. Locations most suitable for public use can be encouraged by appropriate signage and facilities.

For any organised event or organised activity within the Park the Council's park booking system must be used. This will ensure users can have appropriate access to designated locations. Information on organised events and activities is also important from a farm operation, management and health and safety perspective.

Given the importance of managing fire risk in this area, increasing the Smokefree status of the Park, to a full prohibition is considered necessary. (Elsewhere in the parks and reserves network an advocacy approach is taken for Smokefree designated areas).

Policies	Access and availability
	7.1.1 Ensure Park entrances are easy to find, use and meet the needs of a range of visitors. ¹¹
	7.1.2 Where practical, ensure that visitor facilities are available in suitable locations to people of limited mobility ¹² .
	7.1.3 Hours of public use of the Park shall not be restricted unless required for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) soil conservation, farming, or other management activities (b) public safety (c) security of park assets (d) management of special events.
	7.1.4 All areas of the Park shall as much as possible remain available for public use and enjoyment unless restrictions are required for safety to prevent adverse effects or to enable activities associated with farming operations or other management activities.
	7.1.5 Designated areas within the Park shall be made available for organised recreational events or activities through the park bookings system.
	Safety and health
	7.1.6 Safety risks for visitors shall be managed and all facilities meet relevant statutory standards and where possible other 'best practice' standards ¹³ .
	7.1.7 Provide/upgrade the network of emergency contact location bollards and access for emergency services.
	7.1.8 Provide input to a Farm Plan to be developed, to ensure public safety risk and disturbance to the farming operation is minimised.
	7.1.9 Retain the Smokefree status of the Park, with a prohibition on smoking and vaping discouraged to be implemented through appropriate signage.
	7.1.10 In locations where people congregate, ¹⁴ a programme to actively provide and enhance shade, is developed.
7.1.11 Provide drinking fountains at primary and secondary entry points. ¹⁵ Phase out other drinking fountain provision within the Park.	
7.1.12 Consider providing AEDs at key access points including Rifle Range and Redwood Street (Sutherland Stream) carparks.	

¹¹ Refer to Appendix 3 – Standards (3.1 Park Entrance Locations, Features and Levels of Service).

¹² Refer NZS 4121:2001 Design for Access and Mobility.

¹³ Refer to Appendix 3 for key relevant standards.

¹⁴ Such as Park entrances, picnic areas, play areas, pump track etc.

¹⁵ Retain drinking fountains at Mountainbike, Rifle Range and Quail Stream entrances. Install drinking fountain at Redwood Street carpark.

Visitor infrastructure and experience

- 7.1.13 Ensure that the progressively rural/remote experience of the Park for users is protected and that all proposed new facility provision is assessed against this key management approach, which aligns with visitor needs.
- 7.1.14 Clear and consistent information signage is provided at entrance points and other key locations within the Park to provide visitors with all necessary information to support their visit.
- 7.1.15 Wayfinding signage shall be provided throughout the Park with information regarding permitted mode (bike or foot), distance, duration, difficulty, and required direction of travel (if relevant).
- 7.1.16 Education and interpretation signs about the natural landscape, culture and history of the Park shall be reviewed and enhanced in conjunction with manawhenua, technical specialists and community groups.
- 7.1.17 Park signs shall be designed and located to avoid adversely affecting amenity values.
- 7.1.18 Advertising signage may be approved within the Park subject to written authorisation at the discretion of Council. Consideration shall be given to:
- (a) Whether signs are permanent or temporary
 - (b) Size, shape colour and placement and the effect on amenity values
 - (c) The financial benefit that accrues to Council, or one of its partners, from the sponsorship sign.
- 7.1.19 Well distributed, easy to access seating with features to support those with limited mobility¹⁶, located to provide shade and pleasant views of the Park to enhance visitor experience.
- 7.1.20 Formal play facilities shall be restricted to the Rifle Range entrance.
- 7.1.21 A concession opportunity for a suitable relocatable food and beverage vendor at the Rifle Range entrance will be made available.
- 7.1.22 Ensure trees and planting that will enhance visitor experience is including within the Planting and Vegetation Management Master Plan to be developed. Priorities to include:
- (a) Further development of exotic woodland on lower slopes
 - (b) Enhancement and expansion of native habitats (As identified in Section 10)

Environmental protection

- 7.1.23 Responsible environmental management practices by visitors shall be promoted through the following actions:
- (a) Active use of the 'Environmental Care Code' and 'Tiaki Promise' on Park signage and through other information channels
 - (b) User responsibility for removal of rubbish through the existing 'pack it in pack it out' policy¹⁷
 - (c) Toilets to be provided at primary and secondary entry points¹⁸.

¹⁶ Including arm and back support, paved surface from the path and to the side of the seating for wheelchair/mobility scooter/child stroller access.

¹⁷ Ongoing effectiveness of the policy to be monitored and adjustments made, or enforcement action taken.

¹⁸ Refer Appendix 3.1 for entrance locations

7.1.24 Motorised equipment such as generators is not permitted unless required for management purposes, or for special events authorised by the Council.

Development

7.1.25 New or replacement facilities and infrastructure shall be provided only where there is an identified need that enhances public use and enjoyment of the Park.

7.1.26 Any proposed recreational facility development shall thoroughly consider any potential effects on soil conservation objectives, amenity values, visitor remote experience, safety and other Park outcome areas.

7.1.27 Where possible design and construction of new facilities shall retain a rustic/natural design theme that fits within the surrounding landscape.

7.1.28 Legal or nationally accepted best practice standards or guidelines for development of new tracks and facilities shall be followed¹⁹.

7.1.29 Plaques recognising the contribution by individuals or groups towards the development of the Park may be considered at the discretion of Council.

Walking and running

Objective

7.2 To provide a range of walking and running options for visitors with different abilities, available time and accessing the Park from different entry points.

Issues

The primary consideration in providing for walking and running, is to ensure that there is a range of options available from each Park entry point that meet the needs of visitors of different abilities, available time and experience sought.

The other main issues are to ensure that walkers and runners have all the information and facilities that they require and that there are no safety issues, conflict with other users, or adverse effects on Park and farm operations from walking and running.

Options

To identify any gaps in ensuring adequate options are available from each entry point, a simple analysis of current availability against several different track standards is needed. While there are significant limitations from a soil conservation point view to the formation of new tracks, there are also significant ridgelines and farm tracks that are not currently identified for public use. In some cases, some minor adjustments to existing tracks or the creation of short links will relatively easily improve the current provision.

From analysis undertaken, various improvement options will be determined with a choice as to which should be implemented and what the priority for each is.

To manage potential conflicts between walking/running and biking, there are currently two approaches used within the Park. These include:

- Separating biking and walking by either zoning different activities that may be incompatible into different areas of the Park, or by providing and designating separate tracks for each activity
- Where suitable,²⁰ providing for shared use tracks and encouraging responsible use – such as through the Mountainbikers Code²¹.

¹⁹ Refer to Appendix 3 for key relevant standards.

²⁰ Lower speed, higher visibility, and wider tracks with resilient surfaces

²¹ Mountainbike NZ: <https://www.mtbnz.org.nz/file-share/f04e9399-d2a8-4047-bda9-d7a78f6a8ca2>

These are also the choices available when considering walking/biking compatibility with other recreation activities or farming operations (i.e. separate the activities or permit activities in the same place with behaviour protocols).

Feedback	<p>A range of different feedback was received around several key themes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to ensure there are adequate well graded walking tracks to suit users with less mobility as well as those with pushchairs, buggies, wheelchairs etc • Concern regarding mixing biking and walking tracks and the safety risks created, particularly at intersections and crossings • Replacing 'climb over' styles on fence lines to sprung pedestrian gates where necessary, such as on 'short walks' or 'walking tracks' that require greater accessibility, or in locations where farm gates being left open has been problematic in the past.
----------	---

Discussion	<p>Further detailed analysis is clearly required to identify locations where enhancements to existing tracks or the creation or identification of new tracks or routes would be beneficial. As part of this process, classifying the current standard of each walking track and the desired future standard would assist in identifying gaps.</p> <p>The monitoring of any issues arising from the existing contact points between biking in the Mountainbike Park and the recently developed trails in the Gentle Annie area, and walking and running activity in the same areas, will guide any changes to track use allocation, intersection design, or new tracks required.</p>
------------	---

Policies	<p>7.2.1 Seek to provide access to high, mid, and low-level return loop walking options of different lengths and standards, from each entry point by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Undertaking analysis of the existing location and standard of dedicated walking tracks and shared bike/walking tracks (b) Assessing connectivity and any new tracks or change in the standard of existing tracks required (c) Using this information to develop a detailed capital development and maintenance plan. <p>7.2.2 Where necessary, any expansion needs for the track network will consider utilising existing formed tracks before undertaking new earthworks.</p>
----------	--

Biking

Objective	7.3 To provide a range of biking options for users with different abilities and available time.
-----------	--

Issues	<p>The Wither Hills Mountainbike Park is the most extensive off road cycling destination within the district, providing a range of experiences for riders. However, there is also an opportunity to make significant further improvements to the current network and supporting facilities.</p> <p>At present the trails within the Park do not fully reflect the gradings identified by the Council on signs and in other public information. In a recent report commissioned by the Council, a significant undergrading was confirmed²² (i.e. trails being of greater riding difficulty than signs and information channels suggest). The issue is that riders may attempt trails outside of their competency level with</p>
--------	---

²² Envisage NZ – 2023

resulting satisfaction and potential safety implications. Common impediments for less able riders were also noted, including “the gates at the Park’s entry, the cattle stops and the need for turn radii on accessible trails to be much wider, at all grades”.

Nationwide, there is ongoing demand from the mountainbiking community to continue improving and enhancing provision.

‘Working bees’ to establish and enhance trails have become a core part of mountainbike club and enthusiast activity. While this is a great form of partnership with users, controls are required to ensure development does not compromise soil conservation and is orderly to achieve a coherent and functional network. Work must be undertaken safely, without adversely affecting other uses or key outcomes sought for the Park. Unauthorised trail construction also regularly occurs and is of particular concern.

Control of grass and other fuels to manage fire risk has been an ongoing issue for the Mountainbike Park area. For most of the Park, grazing is used to manage pasture and grass areas. However, grazing within the Mountainbike Park has been limited in the past due to a concern regarding damage to trails and perceived safety issues. This has resulted in long grassland and weed issues in this area and a corresponding increase in fire risk.

E-bikers are now a large portion of trail users. Adjustments to existing trail provision may be required to better suit this increasing use. This may include adjustments to the range, grade, and length of trails.

The other key issues are to ensure that bikers have all the information and facilities that they require, and that there is no conflict with other users or adverse effects on Park and farm operations.

Options

Options to resolve the trail grading inconsistency include either re grading an existing trail to the higher grade or undertaking works to bring the trail to the grading sought. While re grading the trails is the easiest option, it can result in a less than optimal number of entry level and beginner level trails being available.

Usually, a mix of both options is needed. Recommendations for specific actions to form the basis of an improvement programme for trail gradings and barriers are available in the Envisage NZ report.

These recommendations, along with wider development direction identified through the Plan, could form the basis of a maintenance and development plan developed in conjunction with the Mountainbike Club.

Responsibilities between the Club and the Council as landowner and manager (and its maintenance contractor acting on its behalf) require better formal definition. This could be achieved through a management or maintenance agreement, licence to occupy or permit (rather than an MOU). Any actions proposed or contemplated outside of such an authority and not provided for within the Plan would require separate approval by Council.²³

Potential conflicts between bikes and other users can be managed by separating uses (such as dedicated biking and walking tracks) or where suitable²⁴ providing for shared use tracks and encouraging responsible use – such as through the Mountainbikers Code.²⁵

Feedback

The Mountainbike Club has expressed a strong desire for participation in the development of a multiyear maintenance and development plan. This desire has arisen from a current lack of confidence in the expertise, performance and quality

²³ Note: Actions not provided for within the Plan would require a separate approval from any management agreement with the Mountainbike Club or other third party.

²⁴ Lower speed, higher visibility, and wider tracks with resilient surfaces

²⁵ Mountainbike NZ: <https://www.mtbnz.org.nz/file-share/f04e9399-d2a8-4047-bda9-d7a78f6a8ca2>

of maintenance undertaken by Council. It was considered that such a joint planning exercise would further partnerships objectives expressed in the Plan.

Suggestions for specific improvement in provision from feedback included:

- Ensuring all grids/cattle stops meet necessary safety standards for both riders and grazing stock
- Further expansion of the track network with mid slope options
- An uphill only single track in the bush on the true left of Quail Stream to the Junction and then shared pathway on upper Quail Stream
- Recategorising existing tracks that can be used by bikes to climb up to the upper tracks into shared use tracks (Sutherland Stream Track, Reserve Ridge Track, Lower Quail Stream, and Upper Quail Stream)
- Reopen Middle Track
- Less technical and longer tracks for e-bike users (such as a Grade 3 perimeter trail/route)
- A separate area close to the pump track where young children (under 7 years) can play to avoid safety risks at the pump track
- Construction of a jumps track
- Expansion of the “designated area” for bike trail building
- Introducing footwear and bike cleaning stations at all entry points to manage movement of pest plants
- Provision of charging stations for e-bikes.

The recent approved development of additional trails between the Gentle Annie and Rotary Lookout Track has received positive feedback in its recent use for the 2023 Secondary School Nationals. There is also anecdotal feedback regarding conflict and safety issues arising from a significant increase of bikes using walking tracks in this area.

Discussion

The development of a work programme to identify further development and improvements to mountainbiking opportunities within the Park is clearly needed. This work programme must fit within the wider Plan objectives, particularly soil conservation, fire risk management and impacts/overlap with other recreational use and development. As far as possible, it should seek alignment and support from the Mountainbike Club.

Resources to provide input to this work programme include:

- Plan direction and suggestions received
- Recommendations from the Envisage report
- Experience and expertise from Council staff, contractors, and Club members.

In addition, clearly defined management agreements (or similar) need to be in place for any authorised management activity or works within the Park by the Club or any other third party.

An active programme to manage known unauthorised track building activity and its resulting safety implications is also required. This is likely to primarily focus on communications through appropriate channels but in serious cases could include surveillance and enforcement action.

The track and trail network for walkers/runners and mountainbiking outside of the Mountainbike Park can be reviewed to determine which should:

- remain as they currently are or
- be reallocated as 'shared use' based on the physical suitability of the track, safety and the connectivity needs for each user group.

Policies	<p>7.3.1 Develop a work programme to identify further development and improvements to mountainbiking opportunities within the Park. This work plan must ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The overall objective for biking with the Park is met (b) Sufficient resourcing is in place to maintain existing trails before new trail development is considered (c) Development meets nationally recognised standards and best practice (d) An analysis of the existing location and standard of dedicated mountainbike tracks and shared bike/walking tracks outside of the Mountainbike Park is also undertaken (e) Programmed actions do not adversely affect wider Plan objectives, particularly soil conservation, fire risk management and other recreational use and development (f) The views, preferences and expertise of the Council, its contractors, the Mountainbike Club and other users are considered. <p>7.3.2 Ensure that clearly defined management agreements (or similar) are in place for any authorised activity or works within the Park by the Mountainbike Club or any other third party.</p> <p>7.3.3 Discourage unauthorised trail construction or other works through an active communication programme and, where necessary, enforcement action.</p> <p>7.3.4 Undertake regular condition and performance assessments on the trail network, monitor feedback and adjust the work programme as required.</p>
----------	---

Dog walking

Objective	7.4 Ensuring adequate dog exercising opportunities are available beyond the boundaries of the Park.
Issues	<p>Dog ownership in Blenheim and the wider district has increased significantly since 2003. This trend has continued in recent years. This has resulted in an increased demand for locations to exercise dogs.</p> <p>While all areas of public land should be considered for their suitability for use for dog walking these should be restricted as required to protect safety and experience of other users and the environment. Dogs can also detract from the visitor experience or create safety concerns for non-dog owners wishing to have places to not have to interact with dogs.</p> <p>For the Wither Hills, there are ongoing challenges with operating a working farm immediately adjacent on the urban area of Blenheim. Of particular concern is the chasing, injuring, and killing of livestock by dogs.</p>
Options	The primary tool to manage dogs is the Dog Control Act (1996). In 2020, the Council went through a thorough process of reviewing its Bylaw and policy under this Act. The primary focus of the review was to address safety issues associated

with dogs within the district, while also considering the exercise and recreational needs of dogs and their owners.

The new Bylaw (2021) reconfirmed a dog prohibition for the Wither Hills Farm Park including the Mountain Bike Tracks and Taylor Pass Road car park. However, it did provide for dogs off lead in the several nearby locations including:

- Sutherland Stream Reserve - south of Whitehead Park to the Wither Hills Redwood Street carpark
- Harling Park - including the walkway to Elmwood Ave but excluding the Japanese Gardens
- Taylor River - along the true right bank of the Taylor River from the Taylor Dam to the Burleigh Bridge and along the true left bank of the river from Meadowbank Road to the Doctors Creek Bridge.

In addition, it provides for dogs on lead within most other nearby neighbourhood reserves.²⁶ A fenced dog park is also proposed within the Taylor River Reserve close to the Wither Hills.

The options available through this Plan process is to accept the work undertaken and outcomes of the recent Dog Control Bylaw review process, (involving extensive public consultation), or to promote a variation to the existing bylaw, or suggest a change at its next required review by 2026.

Feedback

A few of the submissions received through the 2020 review of the Dog Control Bylaw suggested that access for dogs on lead be provided along the base of the Wither Hills that links Taylor River Reserve, Harling Park and Sutherland Stream. Others referred to the Wither Hills as a location where walkers/bikers can recreate without dogs (to support their objection to a change to the Taylor River Reserve to an 'on lead' area)²⁷. This proposal dominated much of the Dog Bylaw debate with little focus on any options within the Park.

Feedback to the Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan review included 15 submissions in support of providing for dog walking within the Park, with 4 of these specifically seeking a location to include hillwalking, which is difficult to access elsewhere.

Several people strongly did not want the current dog prohibited status for the Park to change, and only one person requested an off lead area.

A suggestion was also made regarding some form of 'open day' for dog walking – if an area of the Park during the year was stock free as part of normal farming operations.

Discussion

The Council has undertaken an extensive process with its review of the Dog Control Bylaw implemented in 2021.

As described, there has been feedback requesting Council reconsider access for dogs on a lead along the lower margins of the Park. The Port Hills reserves in Christchurch, and parts of some of the regional parks in Auckland have been provided as examples where farming and dog walking can occur together. However, other farm parks such as Battle Hill in Wellington, do not provide for dog walking within the farmed Regional Park.

Dog ownership and dog walking can play a positive role in society by providing for the use and enjoyment of the reserves network for individuals and families with associated exercise health benefits. While a blanket prohibition may be easiest to

²⁶ Except within 3m of a children's playground.

²⁷ A total of 17/678 submissions with comments referred to the Wither Hills <https://data.marlborough.govt.nz/MDCDogsBylawSubmissions2020>

manage from an enforcement point of view, other examples from around the country indicate limited access to a farm park may still be manageable.

Access for dog walking within the Park should therefore remain under active consideration with any restriction or prohibition requirement being based on evidence from actual or likely adverse effects, including adverse effects on non-dog owners.

It is not considered necessary or cost effective to revisit the 2021 Dog Control Bylaw for just one site. However, reassessing whether some form of access is appropriate as part of the next review of the Bylaw, may be worthwhile.

Access for dog walking on hills as suggested by some, is currently available to a limited extent at Harling Park. More extensive hill dog walking access is considered too difficult to achieve without other adverse effects.

Policies	<p>7.4.1 Promote the existing 2021 Dog Control bylaw dog prohibition within the Wither Hills Park through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Information provided on signs and other information channels (b) Enforcement actions as necessary.
----------	--

Motorised vehicles

Objective	<p>7.5 Access by motorised vehicles is controlled to prevent adverse effects on soil conservation, farm operations or other Park users.</p>
Issues	<p>The popularity of motorised recreational vehicles, such as four wheel drive vehicles, motorbikes and quad motorbikes, has increased significantly over recent years. This has generated further demand for more locations to be made available to use these vehicles. It has also created safety and environmental damage issues where they have been used in inappropriate locations around the district.</p> <p>Motorised vehicles do enable however, access to locations that might be challenging or impossible for people to access and enjoy in any other way, such as the aged or disabled.</p>
Options	<p>Recreational vehicle use of the Park can be prohibited, provided for as one off organised events by permit, or provided for on an ongoing or seasonal basis in any suitable locations.</p> <p>To date the management approach has been to prohibit vehicle access within the Park without authorisation.</p> <p>Most farm roads are extensively used by others or are not sufficiently resilient to accommodate an increase in vehicle use. Exceptions to this may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road to the reservoir from Grigg Drive • Road to the reservoir from Weld St • Cob Cottage Track as far as the airstrip and viewpoint.
Feedback	<p>Several submissions received supported some form of permanent vehicle access to a viewing point for less able bodied members of the community. Others suggested that access for organised 4WD groups to lookout areas could be made available from time to time by permit.</p> <p>Several commercial tourism operators also enthusiastically supported access for their operations.</p>

In contrast, other feedback wished to ensure that motorised vehicles continue to be not permitted within the Park, given the potential effects on others and the environment.

Discussion

While there is an extensive network of farm roads and tracks across the Park, these are of variable quality and may present safety risks to wider use by motorised vehicles. In addition, vehicle and machinery use has been identified as a significant potential vector for the spread of Chilean needle grass with associated stringent hygiene measures required for vehicles and equipment leaving the Park.

Greater use of farm tracks also leads to damage and higher maintenance costs.

Motorised vehicles usually also generate significant noise, move relatively quickly, generate fumes potentially creating a safety risk and detract from the experience of other users. They can also be a fire risk in dry grassland.

Of the possible options described above, limited access up the Cob Cottage Track formed road as far as the airstrip and viewpoint may be possible. As it is accessed via an easement across private land and that it is shared with telecommunications utility providers, general recreational vehicle access is considered inappropriate. However, controlled access by permit for organised groups or tourism concessionaires, that can demonstrate necessary health and safety systems are in place, could be considered.

As well as providing a controlled means to access for this type of activity, revenue generated through any commercial recreation concessions can be utilised to undertake further development of the Park.

Policies

7.5.1 Recreational motorised vehicle access, (excluding e-bikes as defined by regulation or notice under the Land Transport Act 1998²⁸) within the Park shall not be permitted without authorisation.

7.5.2 Limited vehicle access on Cob Cottage Track from Cob Cottage Road to the airstrip/lookout by permit for one off events by organised groups or seasonal use by recreation concessionaires may be permitted subject to:

- (a) Confirmation that existing easements provide for this activity
- (b) Controls to the number and type of vehicles, timing of visits and frequency of use
- (c) Necessary health and safety systems being in place and actively managed
- (d) The ability to cancel any permit or recreation concession in the periods of elevated fire risk, or if unacceptable adverse effects on other Park outcomes or other utility providers' result
- (e) Any other terms and conditions considered necessary.

Horse riding

Objective

7.6 Opportunities for horse riding are considered within the context of ensuring soil conservation, biosecurity and wider Park outcomes can be met.

Issues

Horse riding is currently not provided for within the Park, despite an extensive area of farmed land potentially suitable for this purpose and active community demand for greater access.

²⁸ Power-assisted Cycles (Declaration not to be Motor Vehicles) Notice 2013.

However, horses are potential vectors of spread of pests such as Chilean needle grass both through picking up unwanted seed in hooves or hair and returning to environmental where spread may occur.

Options

There are a variety of locations within the Park that could be appropriate for horse riding. However, these are limited by the presence of other recreation activities that may create safety issues or detract from visitor experience, and by the risks presented by horses as a vector for weeds such as Chilean needle grass (CNG).

Paddocks, or formed tracks with a grass free surface, away from other recreation sites and known CNG sites are worth consideration, provided any use does not adversely affect the existing farming operation.

Other sites available for horse riding within the district include:

- Marlborough Equestrian Park – Bothams Bend, Spring Creek
- Taylor River Floodway Reserve
- Wairau River and Diversion margins.

Feedback

Sixteen submitters to the Wither Hills Management Plan consultation document encouraged the Council to provide for a horse riding area or bridle trails within the Park.

It was expressed that alternatives in the wider area are less than satisfactory as the roads are very dangerous, very few vineyard owners grant permission for horse riding and other Council land such as river margins and the Diversion are unsafe due to motorbikes, four wheel drives and mountainbikers.

One submitter also noted that the Equestrian Park was not an option for them as mini horses are not permitted. The request sought a suitable parking area preferably on grass, maybe off Redwood Street, with a connected identified bridle trail perhaps extending around the perimeter of the Park.

Feedback considered that faeces from horses was not problematic, as horse riders generally get off and kick this off the trail. It also considered that Biosecurity concerns are no different than that from bikes, walkers or runners that could also transport CNG or other weed seeds.

Discussion

While the number of horse riders wishing to use the Park relative to other existing users may be low, it is considered worthwhile investigating what access is possible, taking into account existing biosecurity, farming and other recreational user constraints.

The Marlborough Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) limits movement of domestic animals or farmed livestock from a property containing a known infestation of CNG if it is carrying seed or plant parts.

While the known locations of CNG are well mapped and could be avoided, there remains uncertainty whether other infestations occur elsewhere within the Park. The movement of machinery and grazed livestock remain the primary vector concerns, however the movement of horses are also a considered significantly higher risk than walkers/runners or bikes. This is due to horses favouring grass areas which is suitable CNG habitat, both within the Park and to where they return. Bikers and walkers in contrast, more often use a hard parked or gravel surface and return to an urban setting less susceptible to CNG establishment.

CNG seeding is concentrated between the months of October – January, therefore any allocated use of the Park for horse riding could avoid this period. Locations where there is potential for conflict with existing recreational uses could also be avoided.

Open access for horse riding, even in designated locations presents a risk from a CNG management point of view. However, annual or designated one off days of access is considered more manageable.

Policies	<p>7.6.1 Council will consider providing for horse riding access on an annual, one-off event, or set frequency basis subject to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Ensuring that any allocated area is not within a known recorded Chilean needle grass site and that the event is held outside of the main seeding period²⁹ (b) Controls to the number of horses and timing of event (c) Controls to ensure farm operations are not adversely affected (d) Necessary health and safety systems in are place and are actively managed (e) Compliance with the rules of the Council’s RPMP (f) The ability to cancel any such event in a period of elevated fire risk or if unacceptable adverse effects on other outcome objectives for the Park (g) Any other terms and conditions considered necessary.
----------	--

Recreational use of aircraft (paragliding, hang gliding, drones, helicopters)

Objective

7.7 To control the use of aircraft to protect the peaceful rural values of the Park and minimise impacts on farming operations.

Issues	<p>Hang gliding/paragliding has been provided for within the 2003 Plan, however the activity has rarely occurred, primarily due to access being more challenging and that the site is within controlled airspace due to its proximity to the Omaka and Woodborne airfields.</p> <p>The use of helicopters for transport of people to highpoints as a feature of events such as significant birthday, wedding or to transport walkers or mountainbikers has become more common in recent years. A policy regarding one-off helicopter landings is therefore required.</p> <p>Similarly, the use of drones has become increasingly popular in recent years. While drones provide much entertainment and photo opportunities for users, they can be a safety risk to other aircraft and users, may have implications for stock as well as detracting from the visitor experience. The CAA is the primary agency responsible for managing the use of drones, permission from Council as owner and manager of the Park is required for any drone use in this area (in addition to any CAA/Airways Corporation approvals).</p>
Options	<p>Council can provide for any of these uses and set any conditions that it deems necessary. It can also prohibit any of these activities if it considers they are inappropriate and do not contribute towards this objective or wider outcomes sought for the Park.</p> <p>An existing policy is in place for the use for drones used from or over Council controlled land. This policy specifically requires an approval from Council for use within the Wither Hills and can be cross referenced within this Plan.</p>
Feedback	<p>The Marlborough Paragliding and Hang Gliding Club supports the retention of policies that provide for the use of the Wither Hills for this purpose. While rarely</p>

²⁹ Usually October – January

used in recent years this could change in the future, and they would like to retain this option.

Within wider feedback received regarding during the review, a desire to not permit drones within the Park was expressed, primary due to the disturbance and loss of privacy that they create.

Discussion

The continued availability of the Park for hang gliding and parapenting is considered reasonable provided Council sets any necessary terms and conditions. These may relate to timing, location, vehicles access, management of health and safety etc.

While the use of helicopters can be disruptive to users and can present safety issues at landing sites, one off permissions or longer term concessions limiting the location, frequency and timing of any landings, are also considered acceptable. This is due to the relatively short amount of time any negative effects are possible to others and the likely infrequent use for this purpose. Helicopters are also another means for someone less able to experience the environment and views from the upper ridgeline of the Park.

Drones, in contrast are more common, generate a persistent noise and can be more irritating to Park users. They are also not necessary to obtain an elevated vantage point for photography given the hilly environment of the Park. The current Council policy for drones provides for this activity subject to 'special permission'.

For the above reasons it is considered that drone use be limited to exceptional circumstances unless required for management purposes for the Park or adjacent properties.

Policies

7.7.1 The use of paragliders, hang gliders and helicopter landings in the Park may be permitted with approval subject to:

- (a) Compliance with relevant safety standards and any other legislative requirements relating to their activity
- (b) Controls to the location of take-off and landing areas, timing, and frequency of use to avoid or minimise impact other users and livestock
- (c) The ability to cancel any permit or recreation concession in the periods of elevated fire risk, or if unacceptable adverse effects on other Park outcomes result
- (d) Any other terms and conditions considered necessary.

7.7.2 The use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (drones) shall be provided for in the Wither Hills by special permission in accordance with the existing Council policy. Safety, privacy, disturbance effects on others as well as compliance with other necessary statutory requirements³⁰ will be considered prior to any permission being granted.

Hunting

Objective

7.8 The suitability of the Park for recreational hunting is considered in the context of other land use and management needs.

Issues

Hunting has historically not been permitted within the Park, therefore there have been few issues with the use of firearms. Similarly trapping or poisoning of game animals has been limited to Council as manager of the Park.

³⁰ CAANZ Rule Parts 101 and 102, Privacy Act 1993.

Options	<p>Council can either retain the existing prohibition on hunting and the use of firearms unless authorised, move to more open access or establish a firmer prohibition.</p> <p>As described elsewhere, the Park has significantly higher levels of public use, including activity any time of the day or night. This results in fewer viable or safe options available for the use of firearms (or other recreational pest control methods) within the Park.</p>
Feedback	No feedback has been received regarding recreational hunting, however the use of firearms as a tool for management of invasive species such as rabbits has been highlighted by some.
Discussion	<p>Given the widespread public use of the Park, the existing prohibition on recreational hunting is considered appropriate.</p> <p>While professional hunters are more likely to be engaged for any hunting required for invasive species management purposes, retaining the option for the Council to utilise organised groups to support pest control operations, is also worth retaining.</p> <p>For example, this could be in the form of support from members of the NZ Deerstalkers Association or NZ Fish and Game etc. for a specific pest management activity.</p>
Policies	7.8.1 Hunting of any kind or the use of firearms or other weapons is not permitted within the Farm Park, unless authorised by Council for management purposes.

8. Te tāmi momo rāwaho / Invasive species control

Objective	8.1 Landowner obligations under the RPMP are met and other invasive species are controlled to enable Plan objectives to be achieved.
Issues	<p>There are obligations contained within the Regional Pest Management Plan (RPMP) for species that occur with the Wither Hills. The Council, as landowner and manager, needs to ensure compliance with these rules and preferably also to role model best biosecurity practice to the wider community.</p> <p>Species of note where rules apply include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasella tussock • Chilean needle grass • Broom (Good neighbour rule) • Gorse (Good neighbour rule) • Rabbits. <p>Other invasive species also threaten the ability for wider Plan outcomes to be achieved. These include threats to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grazed grassland environment – affecting soil conservation and fire outcomes (broom, gorse, rabbits, and various pasture weeds) • Woodland and native restoration areas affecting native restoration and landscape outcomes (Old Mans Beard, and other climbing weeds, Himalayan honeysuckle, tree weed species including planted Corsican pine, Scots pine, Radiata pine, wattle, crack willow, grey willow, spindleberry, barberry, boxthorn, elderberry, briar, cotoneaster, pampas and exotic grass affecting natural regeneration). In addition, animal pests including rabbits, possums, mustelids (stoats, weasels, ferrets), rats and cats either browse establishing native vegetation or predate native wildlife.

Other species such as magpies are an increasing problem, affecting both public safety as well as native wildlife. Unlike in some areas, introduced wasps are not currently a major issue. Hares, deer, and pigs do occur from time to time but are also not currently a significant threat.

Options

As described, there are many invasive species that to varying degrees threaten outcomes sought for the Park.

Decisions are required regarding the current and future impact that each species could have and if required, an appropriate and sustainable control programme can be put in place.

Biosecurity work occurring outside of the RPMP requirements can either be structured as stand-alone work programmes or be included within the Farm Plan or Planting and Vegetation Management Plan depending on which outcomes the control work is directly contributing towards.

Feedback

Strong support was expressed for weed and pest control within the Park and the current work being undertaken. Some supported the development of a pest control plan to provide a framework for future work.

Many species currently occurring within the Park were supported for either requiring active management or monitoring. The need to maintain vigilance for the potential arrival of new pests was also raised.

Views differed as to whether some plant species such as gorse and kānuka were weeds that required control or were overall beneficial. While they adversely affect pastoral farming and increase fire risk, they are also a useful nursery plant, and in the case of kānuka, a desired natural Marlborough ecosystem type.

The Council's Biosecurity team also considered that the CNG work programme could benefit from an additional surveillance and control survey through the Park (from 2 per year to 3 per year). Additionally, the need to ensure that entities authorised by Council to access the Park with machinery, follow required weed vector hygiene requirements was highlighted.

The disease toxoplasmosis, carried by cats also was raised as a threat to sheep by the farm manager, however it was accepted that there are no easy or practical management options.

Discussion

For RPMP species such as CNG and nasella Tussock, a well-developed work programme is currently in place, and good liaison is occurring between Council regulatory and landowner sections. Some changes to the existing programme for CNG have been suggested and should be considered within the future review of the work programme.

For other invasive species, it is considered important to link any management actions to outcomes sought, so that any control programme is clear on what it is trying to achieve (and that some form of outcome monitoring confirms this). For example, the current possum and rat/stoat control trapping programme within the Park, does not appear to have such targets.

For this reason, it is considered useful to link any invasive species work to the programmes aimed to protect either pasture and the farming operation or the establishment of native plantings and ecosystems.

Planting and vegetation management priorities to manage invasive species, also need to be integrated with actions to further other outcome areas within the Park.

Policies

8.1.1 Maintain and annually review the work programme for nasella tussock and Chilean needle grass in conjunction with Council Biosecurity staff that meets statutory and biosecurity best practice.

- 8.1.2 Provide information for a Farm Plan to be developed in conjunction with the Farm leaseholder including:
 - (a) Key invasive species that threaten grazed grassland
 - (b) The relative threat they present, and options to undertake control if required
 - (c) RPMP land occupier/stock movement controls in place
 - (c) Responsibility between Council as landowner/manager, and the leaseholder to undertake required work (considering the existing lease provisions).
- 8.1.3 Provide information for a Planting and Vegetation Management Plan to be developed including:
 - (a) Key invasive species that threaten existing or establishing native revegetation³¹ or exotic woodland areas
 - (b) The relative threat they present and options to undertake control if required
 - (c) Existing planted tree species that should be removed³² and not be used in any future planting programme as they present a weed threat.
- 8.1.4 Continue or consider commencing control of other pest species that may present wider public safety concerns such as magpies or introduced wasps.
- 8.1.5 Ensure necessary hygiene processes and systems are in place to prevent exacerbating the negative effects from invasive species including:
 - (a) Ensuring contracts, leases, licences, and management agreements contain hygiene measures such as the RPMP requirement for vehicle and machinery cleaning and inspection
 - (b) Ensuring appropriate signs are in place at entrances communicating any key biosecurity messages
 - (c) Considering installation of bike/footwear cleaning stations at key entrance points such as Rifle Range and the Mountainbike Park carpark

9. Te whakaora i ngā taiao māori / Restoration of native habitats

Objective

9.1 Opportunities are taken in suitable locations to progressively restore natural habitats and enhance the mauri/life force.

Issues

There is a strong desire from manawhenua and the wider community to enhance and expand the currently limited areas of native biodiversity restoration. This is an opportunity to further this objective while also satisfying necessary soil conservation and fire risk management objectives.

Kānuka as a key primary coloniser and succession species is a key to restoration in this area. When distributed within paddocks, kānuka can also be beneficial in positively influencing green dry pasture production compared to open pasture positions³³. However it also presents a higher fire risk than other native species

³¹ Including the Sutherland Stream QEII Covenant

³² Such as Corsican Pine

³³ McKay Smith, Burkitt, Lopez, Reid. Massey University Occasional Report No 34, 2022

and should be supported to transition to less flammable broadleaf forest as quickly as possible.

The approach to planting and restoration for the Park will need to consider these and other dynamics in species selection.

Restoration areas such as the Sutherland Stream QEII covenant have faced a variety of pressures over many years including:

- Significant damage by the Boxing Day 2000 fire
- Pasture grasses over sown to stabilise areas of erosion but also restricting natural regeneration of kānuka and other native species
- Stock accessing and grazing regenerating or planted areas.

As far as possible, the management of future pressures will need be incorporated into restoration planning.

Options

There are many options available to further restore native habitats while also meeting soil conservation and fire risk management needs. This can be achieved by selecting the best locations for planting, choosing suitable species and using appropriate methodologies (including direct planting or encouraging natural regeneration). The location of stockproof fencing and control of weeds and pests that threaten any establishing plants or wildlife, are also crucial decisions.

The work can be delivered by contractors on behalf of the Council, however there is also considerable scope for volunteer support particularly for planting, releasing and pest control activities.

Feedback

As described, strong support exists to increase areas of native biodiversity restoration within the Park.

Manawhenua taiao advisors supported the development of biodiversity corridors up the valleys from the urban area to return the mauri to the area. Species selection duplicating what was naturally occurring in the areas such as on the Ned was proposed. The use of riparian planting was also requested to support Iwi aspirations to improve the water quality in the culturally significant Ōhine-anau-mate³⁴ (Co-op drain).

There was a range of opinions regarding the best locations for expansion of native restoration areas although many supported valley floor and flanks – particularly Sutherland Stream and Quail Steam valleys and the QEII covenant area.

Emergency management accepted that it is possible we may have to accept a short term higher fire fuel risk for a transition period if areas are retired from grazing and planted with less flammable native species. For these locations or in kānuka dominated areas, public access restrictions may need to be increased during periods of high fire risk.

Concern was expressed by the Farm Manager on fencing off areas too far from the sides of valleys, given the importance of mid slope grazing areas for the viability of the farming operation.

In contrast, other feedback suggested that the long term vision for the Park should be for the whole area to ultimately return to native ecosystems and that any master planning or long term vision should reflect this.

Discussion

There are a range of options for improving the biodiversity values of the Park through the expansion of native ecosystem restoration areas. In addition, it is crucial to ensure that soil conservation, fire risk management, landscape preservation and the control of invasive species outcomes, are also met. To

³⁴ One of many canals in the area, hand dug by early Māori to improve transportation links and food gathering effectiveness.

achieve these objectives comprehensively, a well-thought-out planting and restoration plan is considered the optimal mechanism.

Key considerations from a restoration of native habitats perspective include:

- Focussing on locations that become less dry over summer months and where plant establishment is likely to be easier (valley floors, site adjacent to streams and south and east facing slopes)
- Enlarging and linking native ecosystems through corridors or 'stepping stones'
- Retaining existing exotic tree species to provide shelter until plants are established
- Where possible encouraging natural regeneration of kānuka or other species (with the support of tree lucerne or gorse and broom if appropriate)
- Ensuring stock are unable to access sites and weeds and pests that threatened plantings are controlled (including pasture grasses).

The recently completed Fire Risk Management Analysis has developed maps of current and possible future vegetation scenarios for Park that was used in fire behaviour modelling. These will be valuable to form the basis for a Planting and Vegetation Plan. Additional resources are also available within the Native Vegetation Planting Guide for South Marlborough³⁵ and in the expertise, knowledge and experience of staff and local ecologists.

Policies

9.1.1 Provide information for a Planting and Vegetation Management Plan to be developed that identifies:

- (a) Existing native habitats and areas of restoration plantings requiring further protection and enhancement or expansion
- (b) New areas, such as incised valleys, riparian margins, S and SE facing flanks, suitable for transitioning from exotic woodland or farmland to native habitat restoration area.

Actions recommended may include:

- (c) Utilising sites that link native ecosystems through corridors or 'stepping stones'
- (d) Increasing the size of protected areas by moving/upgrading fences to prevent stock access (Infrastructure Plan)
- (e) Retaining existing exotic tree cover to maintain soil stability, provide shelter and suppress weed growth, until plants are established
- (f) Where possible, encouraging natural regeneration of kānuka or other native species (with fencing and with the support of tree lucerne or the release spraying of pasture grass if appropriate) and fencing
- (g) Infilling of gaps and over time replacing exotic trees with appropriate indigenous species
- (h) Mulching tree debris arising from fire risk reduction maintenance to provide nutrients for the plants and more rapid decomposition of potential wildfire fuel
- (i) Commencement of, or increased pest and weed control, to

³⁵ Native Vegetation for South Marlborough – A Planting Guide (2004) Marlborough District Council, Department of Conservation, QEII National Trust.

ensure survival of establishing plants and returning wildlife.

9.1.2 In accordance with the 1997 Sutherland Stream Open Space Covenant (Wither Hills Farm Park) Management Statement, the Covenant area shall be managed to ensure:

- (a) All indigenous vegetation is protected
- (b) The natural regeneration of native species will be allowed to continue
- (c) Any new plantings are of native species from locally sourced stock³⁶
- (d) Weed control (including introduced pasture grasses) is undertaken where necessary to encourage natural regeneration
- (e) Fencing is maintained to a stock proof condition and that stock are not able to access the site
- (e) Animal pest control is undertaken where values are threatened and a sustainable programme is possible.

10. Te tiaki horanuku / Landscape protection

Objective

10.1 The iconic and valued rural pastoral landscape is maintained while moving slowly towards a long-term vision of returning the Park to a dryland forest landscape.

Issues

The Wither Hills are a well-known iconic landscape feature that dominates the skyline of Blenheim and the surrounding Wairau Valley. Land use activities are highly visible and affect the resulting landscape values that the Park provides. There is the need to maintain the current landscape vista valued by so many residents while at the same time providing for a slow transition towards the restoration of the original dryland forest cover and over the long term, a different landscape.

The Park also provides for visitors to enjoy the various landscapes within the Park, which while dominated by farmed hill country, also includes exotic forest woodland, sites for native restoration and various tree plantations. Getting the mix of these various land uses right to meet a range of outcomes and satisfy visitors and the wider community, is a key challenge.

Views from the Park to the surrounding area and beyond to the Marlborough Sounds, Cloudy Bay and the North Island are also highly valued and need to be maintained.

Options

The Park is included within the High Amenity Landscapes area within the MEP and therefore has several existing controls to ensure landscape protection.

There are several types of land use change that can adversely affect landscape values. These could be further controlled by policies within the Plan, such as for:

- Planted vegetation – avoiding further tree plantations with ‘hard edges’, concentrating development of woodlands or native forest restoration areas to lower slopes, valley floors and lower flanks (rather than ridges and high elevations).
- Built Environment – locating infrastructure discretely away from highly visible sites or limit significant developments to locations where existing built features exist.

³⁶ From within the Wairau Ecological Region

Landscape considerations are also easily included with the proposed Planting and Vegetation Management Plan described in other sections.

While at present widespread views from the Park to surrounding areas are available, over time some existing vantage points may have views obscured by establishing vegetation. An option is available to provide policy to protect view shafts at key vantage points.

Feedback	<p>Opinions were divided on the visual effect that additional native plantings and a long-term transition to forest would have on the landscape. Most considered a gradual change in this direction, particularly with a focus on restoring valleys and gullies leaving ridgelines clear in the short to medium term, would be acceptable.</p> <p>It was pointed out by several submitters that the hills were originally covered in dryland forest and the grass covered hills we see today are a symbol of our damage to the natural environment, rather than anything to be celebrated.</p>
Discussion	<p>Given the landscape significance of the Wither Hills, it is considered worthwhile for Plan policies to provide direction regarding development activities that can adversely affect landscape values (in addition to MEP controls).</p> <p>The Planting and Vegetation Management Plan will also need to reflect the objective for landscape values and the need to maintain view shafts at key vantage points.</p>
Policies	<p>10.1.1 Ensure effects on landscape values are considered prior to any of the following development activities occurring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Planted vegetation – avoiding further tree plantations with ‘hard edges’, concentrating development of woodlands or native forest restoration areas to lower slopes, valley floors and lower flanks (rather than ridges and high elevations) (b) Built Environment – locating infrastructure discretely away from highly visible sites or limit significant developments to locations where existing built features exist. <p>10.1.2 Ensure landscape effects of planting exotic or native vegetation are considered in the development of a Planting and Vegetation Management Plan.</p>

11. Te tiaki i ngā taonga tuku iho / Cultural heritage protection

Objective	11.1 To protect known sites of importance and share the whakapapa for the area.
Issues	The wider Wairau catchment, including the Wither Hills, are of cultural, spiritual, historical and traditional importance to several Te Taihū Iwi including Rangitāne, Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Toa Rangatira. While most sites of significance occur below the Park (such as the Ōhine-anau-mate canal and wider Wairau Lagoon area) there are also several recorded pits within the Park boundaries that are not well known to Park managers or the wider community.
Options	Depending on the wishes of manawhenua, these sites could be better identified to both ensure they are not damaged and to increase understanding and awareness of these to users.
Feedback	Manawhenua have communicated the presence of the two pits that occur within the Park, however further discussion regarding how these sites should be best managed or identified has not yet occurred.

Discussion

Ensuring that these two pits are not inadvertently damaged is important. This will require the location of these being more widely available with the Council GIS system and known to managers.

Further dialogue with manawhenua will determine the extent to which these are identified and interpreted.

Policies

- 11.1.1 Ensure the historic pit locations are well known to Council staff and the farm manager, so that these are not damaged through any Park management or development activities.
- 11.1.2 Work with manawhenua to determine whether wider identification of the historic pits and any known whakapapa is communicated to visitors by appropriate signage.

Other Areas

12. Te tūāhanga / Infrastructure

Objective

12.1 To ensure that sufficient and appropriate infrastructure is in place, and maintained over time, to support the achievement of objectives and Plan outcomes.

Issues

There are several issues associated with Park infrastructure. Most of these are historical due to somewhat ad hoc management practices, poor or non-existent asset management processes, damage from fire as well as outside effects from the subdivision and urbanisation of the surrounding area.

Infrastructure specifically managed for recreation purposes has less of these described issues and has been considered within the recreation section of this plan.

Park infrastructure

Water supplies

The primary water supply for the Park is from the Blenheim town supply. While this is adequate for day to day use, it is not assessed as sufficient if irrigation of a summer greens buffer strip or similar, was a preferred option for the urban rural boundary.

A connection to the Southern Valleys irrigation scheme³⁷ is available, however this would require a connection to be made with the pipeline located on the west side of the Taylor River.

A water supply from the Bluegums landfill has also been reconnected, which has allowed grazing to recommence on the upper flanks of the landfill property.

The other water supply source for the Park is the Cob Cottage/Wither Hills Water Supply. This supply was originally established in the 1970s to support the management of soil conservation and grazing of the Wither Hills. However, it has increasingly been used by subdivided lifestyle block properties (both formally and informally) resulting in a loss of supply for Park locations more remote from the pump.

The supply was also damaged in the Kaikoura earthquake with the supply currently being fed from the nearby town supply. There are also issues associated with the resource consent for this water take, easements required for access, new water quality standards for domestic supplies, and the implementation of a cost distribution model for users³⁸. The scheme is currently under review by the Council.

Within the Park a functioning water supply network does exist, however the inventory of components is incomplete, condition assessments are not undertaken with repairs and maintenance undertaken solely on a reactive basis. Further improvements to the current network will also be needed and require identification within work programmes.

Buildings and structures

The maintenance responsibility for buildings falls with the farm lessee, however the Council has recently done some upgrade work on the farm manager's residence. This has provided a much needed improvement in the condition of the house, however further maintenance is likely be required in the future.

Most farm buildings are in good condition except for the woolshed, which is in very poor condition and needs replacing if sheep grazing remains a core element of the

³⁷ The allocation available is 18m³/Ha/day for properties within the scheme.

³⁸ The supply is currently funded through general rates despite installed water meters.

farming operation. Any new facility would need to have a drenching and drafting facility underneath, however covered yards would not be required.

Fencing

There is a huge amount of fencing maintenance required within the Park as well as some reinstatement of new fencing as a result of historic fire damage. There are also several fencing improvements that would allow for an improvement in the way that the land is farmed. In addition, as areas are retired for biodiversity and planting expansion, new fences will also be required.

The fence inventory is incomplete, and it lacks current condition information. This makes it difficult to effectively prioritise maintenance and replacement needs.

Management and farm access/roading

In general terms these assets are well known and adequately managed. Given the potential effect that these assets can have on soil conservation by concentrating water flow through water tables and culverts, it is important that the inventory and condition assessments for this asset group are kept up to date. There are also improvements that can be made to ensure easier access by emergency service vehicles, both in terms of the physical condition of roads and available information for first responders.

Fire infrastructure (ponds, hydrants, dedicated tanks, fire breaks etc.)

This infrastructure has historically not been inventoried or been subject to condition assessments, however as recommended by the recent Fire Risk management report, this is important.

Soil conservation infrastructure (dams, water control structures, stop banks)

Soil conservation assets have historically not been inventoried or been subject to condition assessments. This crucial information will help to ensure assets that fulfil an important soil conservation function, are adequately maintained and replaced when necessary, so they continue to operate effectively.

River management infrastructure (intake structures)

Several stream/stormwater intake structures occur within the lower slopes of the Park. These are included within the Council's GIS and Asset Management System and are maintained by the Rivers Section.

Other wider community infrastructure

This infrastructure is managed as part of wider Council networks:

- Water Supply – 3 reservoir tanks plus a small pump station)
- Wastewater – pipe from the landfill around towards the Mountainbike Park taking leachate back to the Blenheim wastewater system
- Stormwater – Harling Park detention area and stormwater intake, and swale western side of Redwood Street
- Telecommunications sites – various sites up Cob Cottage track

Implications for Park management include the need to ensure access is available and not restricted due to surrounding land use, and that other activities within the Park do not damage these assets.

As Blenheim continues to grow, demand for additional facilities will inevitably arise and will need careful consideration against Plan objectives.

Options

The main option is to move from the current management practice to one with a greater emphasis on good asset management practice. This will involve thorough inventory and condition assessment informing maintenance and renewal

programmes for existing assets and target levels of service to identify the need for new assets in the future.

Significant investment decisions, such as connecting to the Southern Valleys water scheme, would be assessed against the costs and benefits and contribution towards Park levels of service that would result.

Feedback	<p>Most feedback regarding Park infrastructure has been received from Council staff and the Farm Manager who have a higher awareness regarding infrastructure issues and needs.</p> <p>While funding for the work required has been a common theme, the issues described above reflect the feedback received.</p>
Discussion	<p>Improvements to the management of Park infrastructure are clearly required. This can be achieved through management policies and a commitment to develop an Infrastructure Plan from which to inventory assets and develop capital, renewal and maintenance programmes.</p> <p>Clarifying responsibilities between the different departments of Council as well as the lessee is also of importance.</p> <p>For other new infrastructure proposals not related to directly supporting the Park, some guiding assessment criteria to limit this type of expansion would also be of value.</p>
Policies	<p>12.1.1 Asset management practices will be introduced to the management of Park infrastructure to ensure necessary assets are in place to support the achievement of Plan outcomes. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Assessment of desired levels of service(b) A complete inventory of assets (and a process to update this)(c) Regular condition assessments. <p>12.1.2 An Infrastructure Plan/Work Programme will be developed to identify a thorough and effective Capital, Renewals and Maintenance programme for a variety of Park assets including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Water supply assets (pipes, tanks, troughs, pumps)(b) Buildings and structures (houses, sheds, farm buildings)(c) Fencing assets (fences, walls, retaining walls)(d) Roading assets (roads, drains, culverts, bridges)(e) Fire assets (ponds, firebreaks, tanks hydrants, helipads, fire signs)(f) Soil conservation assets (dams, water control structures, stop banks)(g) Stormwater assets (intake structures). <p>12.1.3 Proposals for additional community infrastructure, (such as telecommunications sites or reservoirs etc) will be considered, taking into account the effects on other outcomes, including on the protection of landscape values.</p>

13. Ngā rohe tauārai o te pāka /Park boundaries

Objective **13.1 Ensure that the interface between the Park and surrounding private land is located and managed in a way to support Plan outcomes being achieved and to reduce negative cross boundary effects.**

Issues Much of the northern and western sections of the Park boundary directly adjoin residential areas. This creates ‘reverse sensitivity’³⁹ issues between the preexisting rural land use and the more recent residential development. Such issues can occur in either direction:

Residential areas

- Noise disturbance from mowing or other machinery use
- Landowner health concerns regarding effects from fertiliser, lime, or herbicide applications adjacent

Park

- Source of fire from backyard burning/barbeques, fireworks etc.
- Source of weeds from garden escapes
- Access from uncontrolled dogs or cats carrying toxoplasmosis (that can be passed on to livestock)

The review of existing mechanisms, to minimise reverse cross boundary effects, and the consideration of any new actions is required.

One such existing tool has been the construction of a Park fence located within the Park, rather than on the legal boundary, to create a buffer strip. These are of different widths⁴⁰ as they were established at different times. Various property owners have inappropriately utilised this Council owned strip as their own, locating buildings, structures, and vegetation along this margin. Most of these encroachment issues have been addressed over recent years, however they continue to arise from time to time and need to follow a clear process to resolve.

The Bluegums landfill also directly adjoins the Park. The land comprising the landfill currently includes both operational and non-operational areas with final closure scheduled for 2047⁴¹. This boundary creates its own risks and opportunities between these land uses. These need to be considered and included within policies within this Plan and those that apply to the landfill site. Specific issues to address include:

- The active management of fire risk at the landfill site such as fire breaks, immediately available firefighting resources and ease of access for FENZ on arrival
- The need for planting and revegetation planning and work undertaken at the landfill site to align with Park objectives for fire risk management, soil conservation, restoration of native habitats as well as landscape protection
- The opportunity for additional public access (and emergency egress) through the landfill site.

While the overall perimeter of the Park and its boundary is well established, there are several locations where this boundary could be improved by further land purchase. Undertaking the process to identify such areas in advance of any opportunities arising, is also considered worthwhile.

³⁹ ‘Reverse sensitivity’ – the sensitivity of an established activity to objection from new sensitive land uses nearby.

⁴⁰ Up to 10m on the northern boundary and 1m on the western boundary

⁴¹ Resource consent renewal is also required in 2030.

Options

Tools available to reduce cross boundary effects include buffer strips and/or controls on activities that can be undertaken on adjacent properties. Within each of these approaches there various options as to how these could be implemented:

- Buffer strips – width, fence type/size, vegetation type (grass/ fire resistant trees)
- Land use controls – limiting noise, discharges, grazing regime within the Park, advocating for implementation of private property controls through the RMA (including possible controls over planting, boundary clearance, open fires, pets etc).

Management of encroachment onto buffer strips can be either actively managed and enforced or tolerated without any action taken.

The cross boundary effects from the Bluegums landfill can easily be considered by this Plan within the context of each outcome area affected (such as fire, soil conservation, restoration of native habitats, landscape protection and recreation).

Strategic land purchase opportunities can be considered as they arise, or proactive contact made with property owners.

Feedback

Most of the feedback regarding Park boundaries has been received from Council staff and the farm manager. Most of the concern relates to actual and potential complaints arising from adjacent landowners to necessary management activities undertaken at or close to the Park boundary (such as lime application and grass over sowing).

There was little specific community feedback identifying Park boundary issues. However, there is clearly a sensitivity that is communicated to Council when certain activities occur.

The Council's solid waste manager also provided useful feedback regarding the current management, risks, opportunities, and future plans for the Bluegums site.

Discussion

The continued use of buffer strips to 'soften' cross boundary effects is considered worthwhile, however defining an aligned approach to how these are managed is needed (including active management of encroachment).

Consideration as to cross boundary effects when making management decisions for Park land adjacent to the boundary is also needed as well as strong advocacy with immediate neighbours on actions that they can take to support the Park.

Continued close liaison with the Bluegums Landfill management to ensure cross boundary issues are minimised is also recommended.

Seeking to acquire land where this may assist in achieving Park outcomes should be actively considered.

Policies

13.1.1 Continue to activity manage urban interface buffers by:

- (a) Maintaining the existing fenceline located within the Park boundary
- (b) Maintaining a mowing strip between the fenceline and property boundary
- (c) In conjunction with property owners ensuring this strip remains clear of structures and flammable vegetation
- (d) Aligning width of buffer strip to a minimum of 3 metres

13.1.2 Actively monitor and respond to Park encroachment as it arises by:

- (a) Giving notice to the party requesting removal of any encroachment and the reinstatement of the area to the satisfaction of the Council within a specified period at the owners cost
- (b) Where removal and reinstatement does not occur, then the Council undertake this work and seek to recover costs

- 13.1.3 Ensure other departments of Council managing land adjacent to the Park (such as Solid Waste) are included in any decision making processes that have cross boundary effects between the Park and Bluegums landfill.
- 13.1.4 Council actively consider where strategic land acquisition opportunities exist and that these are actively pursued by purchase or by entering into 'Right of First Refusal' agreements.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of first round of feedback

Appendix 2 – Land ownership background

Appendix 3 – Values and constraints maps

Appendix 1 – Summary of first round of feedback



Reviewing the management plan for the Wither Hills Farm Park

Summary of first round of feedback June 2023



A discussion document on the upcoming review of the Wither Hills Farm Park Management Plan was published on the 23rd of March with written feedback invited until the 27th of April. This period was extended until 15th May to provide further opportunity for input from the community. There were 94 submissions received in total.

The feedback received clearly indicates the value that the Wither Hills play in the quality of life for the residents of Blenheim and the wider Marlborough community. Submissions were positive of the progress to date over many years in erosion control, planting and in providing for a variety of recreational activities, however they also identified a range of opportunities to further improve and enhance the park into the future.

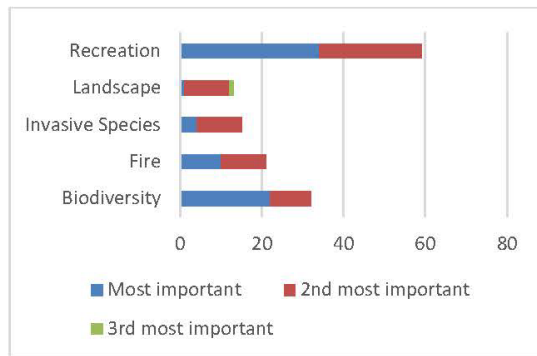
A copy of all feedback received is available on the Council's website at <https://www.marlborough.govt.nz/recreation/parks-and-open-spaces/parks-and-open-spaces-plans-and-reports/wither-hills-farm-park-management-plan>.

The suggestions made in the submissions will be considered as the management plan is developed through its various stages.

Overall Management Objectives

After soil conservation, what do you think are the next two most important objectives for managing the Farm Park into the future?

As expected, the community recognises the importance of a range of management objectives for the park with recreation and biodiversity restoration considered the most important after soil conservation.



Themes from comments:

- The importance of the Wither Hills in the visual, recreation and cultural identity of the community and the need for a long-term vision for the park.
- Strong support for changing the planting strategy to a greater use of natives to achieve erosion control, manage fire risk and restore biodiversity.
- That further effort should be directed towards restoring the dryland forest ecosystem within the QEII covenant and surrounding areas.
- Some support for further Oak/exotic hardwood woodlands on lower slopes.
- The Council has a responsibility to showcase good land management and farming practice.
- The opportunity that the park provides for the community to come together and participate in shared restoration and development activities.
- That effective fire risk management and pest control are critical elements to ensure all other objectives are possible.
- The need for the further development of recreational opportunities as the area becomes more popular.

Farming as a management tool



Do you have any views on the farming activity in the Farm Park?

Significant interest in the farming operation was expressed with just over three quarters of respondents providing feedback regarding this area.

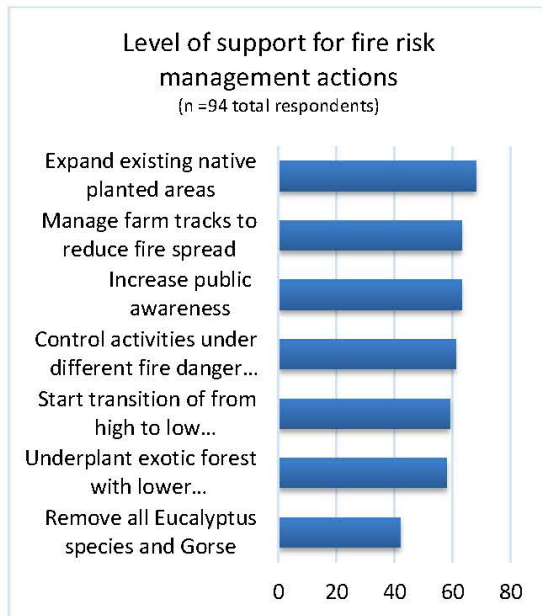
Themes from comments:

- The value of being able to see and experience a working farm for urban residents.
- Farming should be seen as a management tool to support other objectives, rather than an objective itself and it should be accepted that this may reduce the suitability of a commercial lease.
- The need to provide for the removal of grazing in some areas to allow for outcomes such as forest/biodiversity restoration, erosion control etc.
- The opportunity that farming presents as a learning resource for schools and other educational institutions, providing opportunities for students to learn about agricultural practices, sustainability, and other related topics.
- The need for upgraded farm infrastructure (fencing, yards, woolshed, water supplies).
- Best practice technical support through a farm advisory committee or other suitable dryland farming specialists is necessary.
- Concern regarding the compatibility of cattle in terms of land damage and mountain biker and walker safety.
- A few submissions also wished to see farming activity cease altogether.

Fire Risk Management

Do you agree with the suggested following actions to manage fire risk?

Most respondents completing the questionnaire supported all or most of the fire risk management options provided.



Themes from comments:

- Whether it is necessary to remove gorse given its function as a nursery crop, or eucalyptus - which is attractive to birds (removal of low branches instead).
- Focus should be on long grass as the primary threat for fire spread rather than isolated areas of other vegetation.

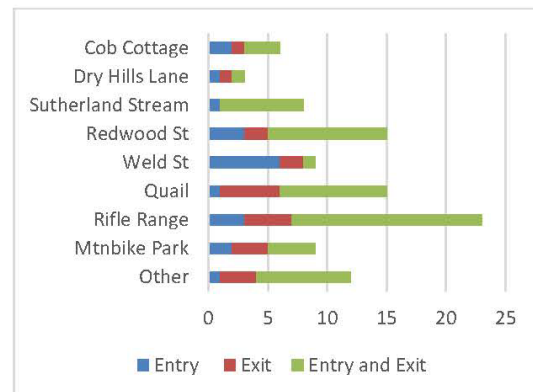


- Concern regarding the effectiveness of farm tracks as fire breaks and the erosion risk that would result by widening these with machinery.

- Support for active risk management activities to be undertaken to allow for the park not to be closed as much over dry summer months.
- Suggested improvements to water storage on the western side of the park and to enlarge the existing dam in Sutherland Stream (for fire control and livestock drinking water).

Community Access and Use

What is your primary entry and exit point to the Farm Park?



*Other access comprises entry or exit via Grigg Drive or from Harling Park/Howick Road.

The responses regarding the use of the access points to the park are consistent with existing use data reinforcing that:

- The Rifle Range (and NW side of the park more generally) is the highest use area.
- The Redwood St entrance and Sutherland Stream is the second most significant entry point.

Recreation Facilities



What improvements to existing facilities within the Farm Park do you think are necessary?

Themes from comments:

- Need to further differentiate biking and walking tracks with clear signage.
- Expansion of well graded biking and walking tracks to suit users with less mobility as well as those with pushchairs, buggies, wheelchairs etc.
- Improvement to the maintenance standard of tracks is needed through a well prescribed maintenance plan.
- Provision for use of the park by horses including bridle trails.
- Both support and opposition expressed regarding the proposed the new skills area for mountain bikes.
- Identify suitable areas to walk dogs on a lead (or conversely have an annual dog friendly day in a specified area).
- Changing 'climb over' styles to gates to improve access for a wider range of users.

Do you think there are any additional facilities for Farm Park users that may be needed?

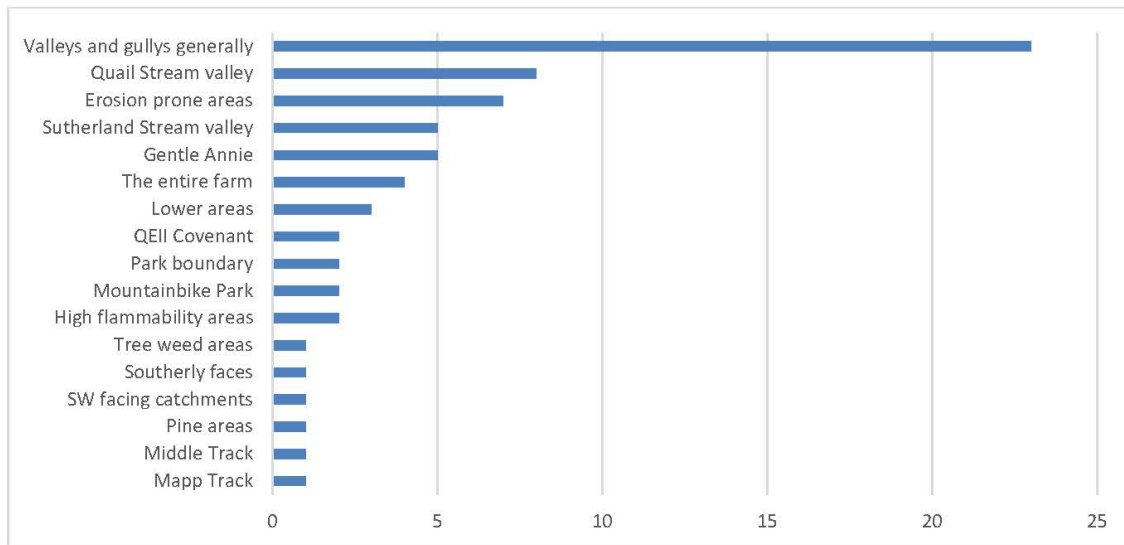
Themes from comments:

- New toilet at Sutherland Stream/Redwood St carpark.
- Play area sunshade.
- Fully fenced dog park.
- Additional seating at key locations that meets the needs of older and disabled people.
- Provision of drinking fountains at key locations.
- Additional education panels or QR code markers that provide interesting information regarding the history of the park.
- Additional bike cattle stops.
- Wayfinding signage from surrounding suburbs to direct visitors to the park entrances.
- Some support for permanent vehicle access to a viewing point, or alternatively provide for organised 4WD access to lookout areas from time to time for non-walkers.



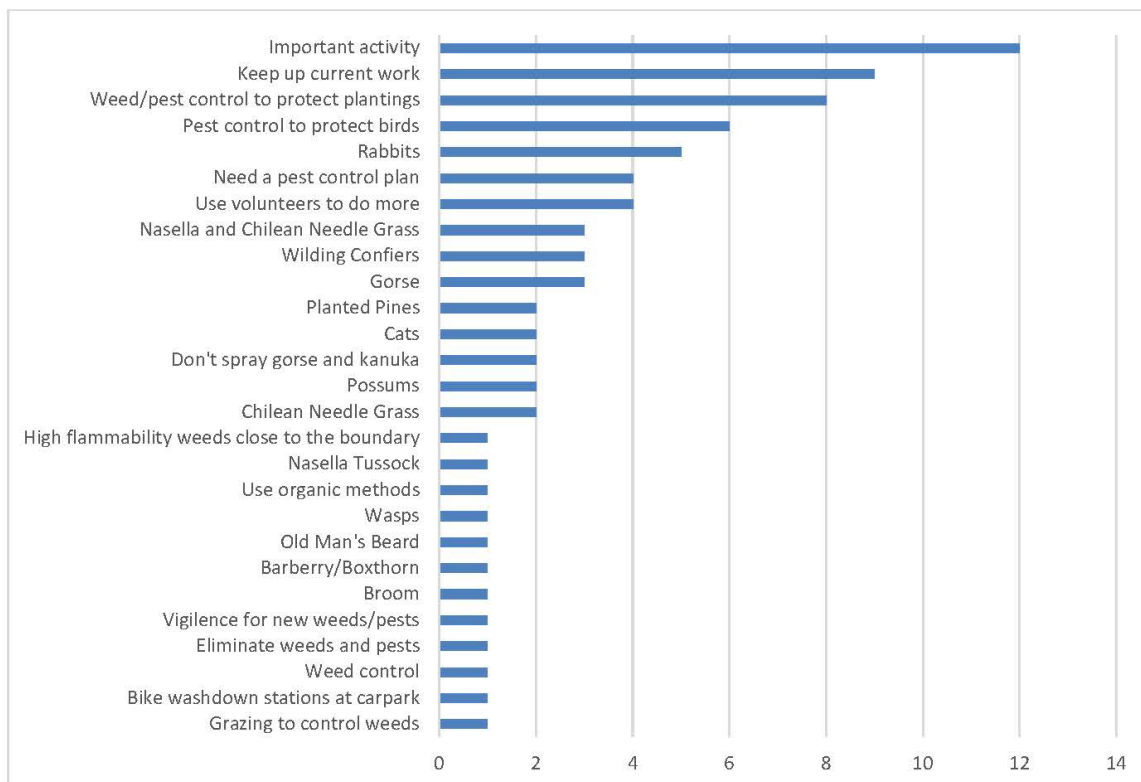
Restoration of native habitats

Where do you think the focus should be for native restoration planting on the Wither Hills?



Weed and Pest Control

What is your view of the management priorities for invasive species (weeds and pests)?



Landscape protection



How important is maintaining the current landscape of the Wither Hills to you?

65% of respondents considered maintaining the current landscape as being important.

There was a predominant view that the current view of the hills behind Blenheim and surrounding vineyards is iconic to Marlborough.

Themes from comments:

- Buildings, structures, roads, and exotic plantings detract from the landscape.
- Opinions were divided on the visual effect that additional native plantings and a long-term transition to forest would have on the landscape. Most considered a gradual change in this direction - particularly with a focus on restoring valleys and gullies leaving ridgelines clear, would be acceptable.
- It was pointed out by several submitters that the hills were originally covered in dryland forest and the grass covered hills we see today are a symbol of our damage to the natural environment, rather than anything to be celebrated.

Commercial Facilities and Activities

Do you think there is a role for recreation concessions or hospitality services within the park?

63% of respondents considered that there is a role for recreation concessions or hospitality services within the park.

Themes from comments:

- Support for simple 'coffee cart' or 'ice cream van' type opportunities at the Rifle Range and/or Redwood St entrance points.



- A lower level of support for the development of buildings and other facilities to accommodate a café or restaurant, with some active opposition to this type of development.
- There was an expressed lack of clarity regarding what comprised a 'recreation concession', however there was strong overall support for a range of recreational activities to be provided for.

Other Feedback

Do you have any other feedback on matters you would like to see addressed through the management plan review?

- Support for the management plan review and the refocusing of future development direction for this important area.
- Suggested planting of edible trees on lower slopes adjoining the urban area (fruit and nuts).
- Care is needed to ensure that the landfill does not adversely affect park values.
- Important to actively manage and maintain water courses and stormwater intakes to protect the urban area.
- Greater opportunities for community partnerships are needed.
- Controls are needed on motorised vehicles/vehicles given the greater range of offroad equipment that exists today.
- The 'permitted', 'discretionary' and 'prohibited' categories that are attached to the four zones in the current plan have

resulted in the management of the park becoming too regimented – the new plan needs to be more flexible.

- Need to engage with youth regarding plan development.
- Need to use and promote the *Environmental Care Code* and *Tiaki Promise*.

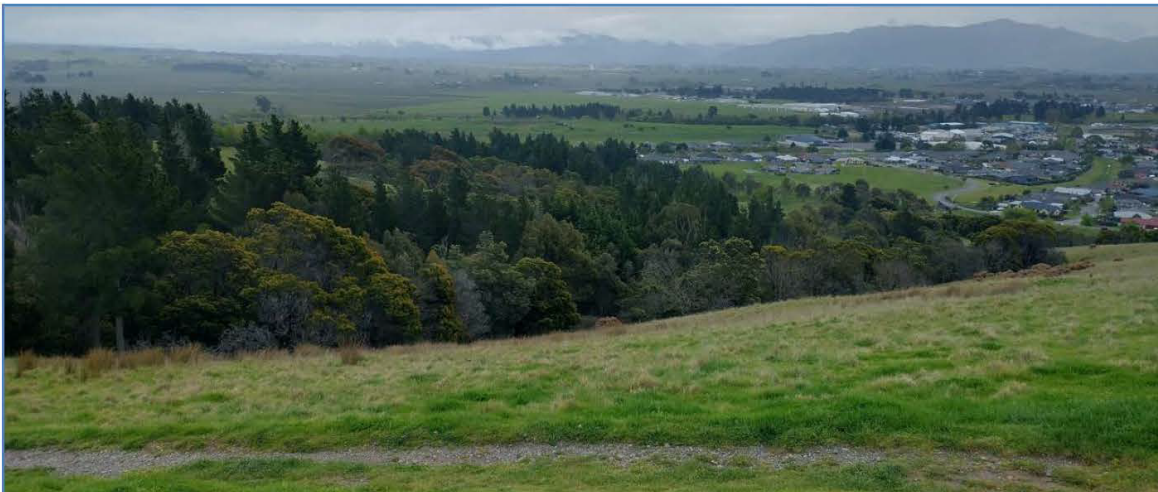
- No use of drones should be permitted within the park.
- Enable nighttime access rather than discourage it.
- The management plan should provide more detailed standards regarding track development.

Next Steps

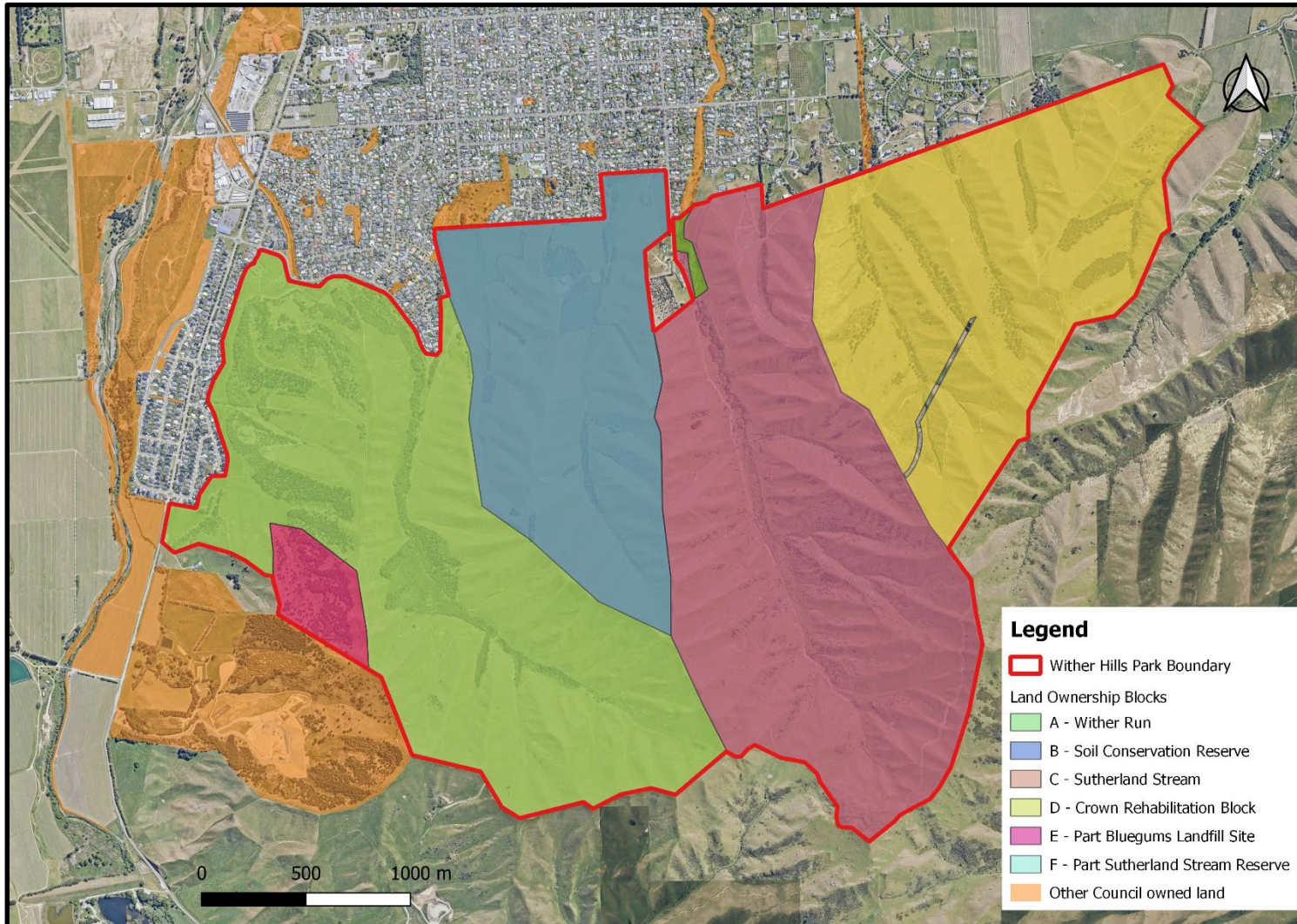
The suggestions made in these submissions will be considered as the management plan is developed.

Once a draft management plan has been completed, this will be considered by the Council prior to being approved for release for a further round of submissions by the community.

If you wish to speak with someone about the review please contact Linda Craighead at the Council on 03 520 7400 or by email at witherhills.planreview@marlborough.govt.nz.



Appendix 2 – Land ownership background



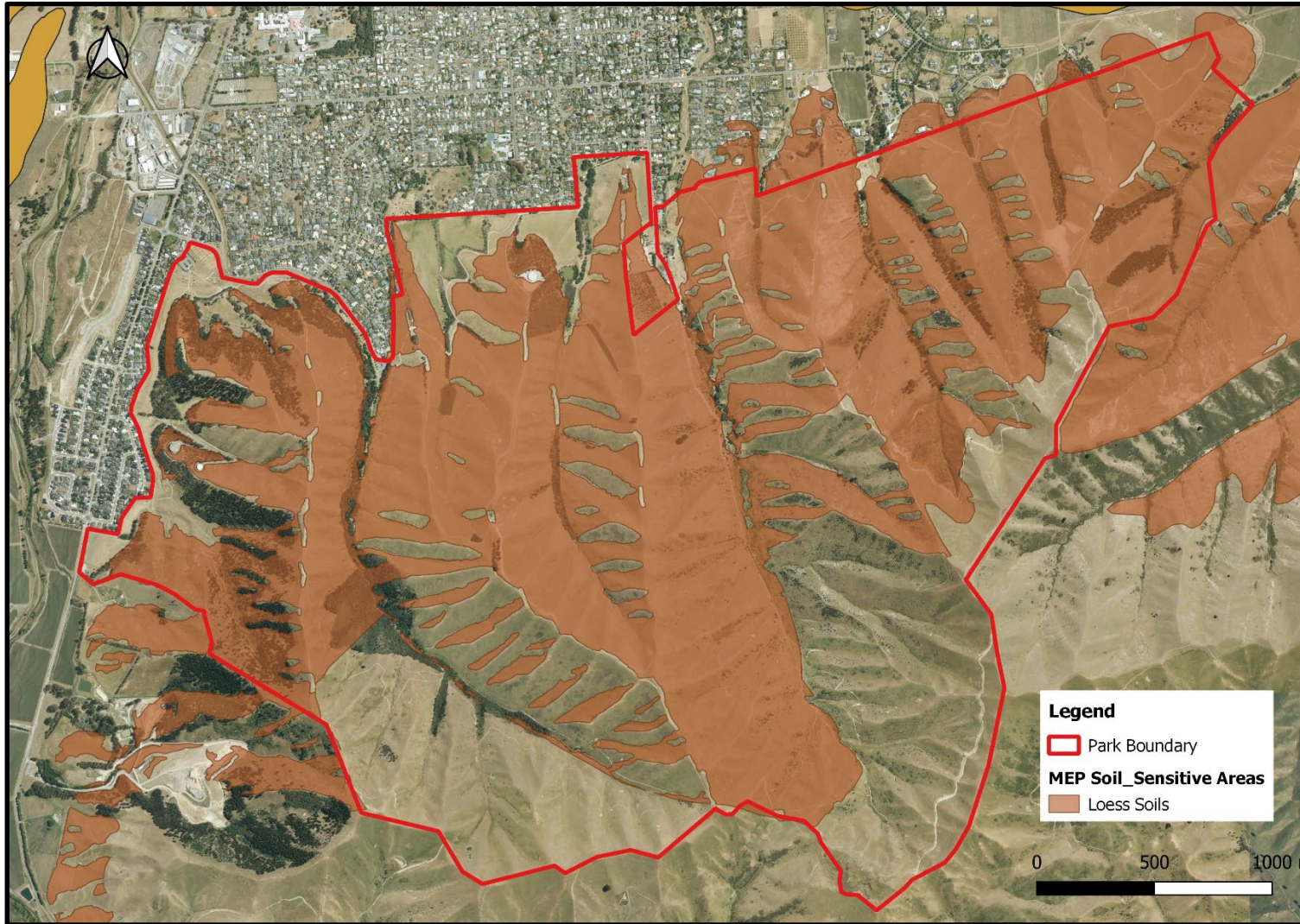
Map 1: Land ownership origins+

Commonly known as	Background	Land status	Area (ha)
<p>Block A: Wither Run</p> <p>Part sec 2, sec 8 SO 3776 Blk IV Taylor Pass SD</p> <p>Lot 609, 615 DP 409373 and Lot 630 DP 466163</p>	<p>Originally known as the Borough Farm, this block was purchased by the Blenheim Borough Council in 1973. The purpose of the purchase was to enable better soil and water conservation management of the land and to better manage further urban development and subdivision. Since the purchase in 1973 considerable residential and industrial development has occurred in the area. The Borough Farm was managed as a separate unit until the late 1970s when the adjoining Reserve Block (Block B) was integrated into the overall soil management programme.</p> <p>In conjunction with, a further portion of the Wither Run was acquired by the Blenheim Borough Council for the purpose of residential subdivision. This block was surrendered from the Wither Run farm under separate title in 1976. In 1997, Resource Consent was granted for the Forest Hills subdivision. As part of this subdivision two previously approved residential allotments; totaling approximately 9290 square metres on the upper section of ridgeline known as Harling Rise were surrendered from the subdivision in 2002 for re-amalgamation into the Farm Park.</p> <p>An additional area of land in the Forest Hills Drive area, formerly the Vernon Rifle Range but revoked for this purpose in 1979 was acquired by Marlborough Harbour Board from the Crown in 1984. The Blenheim Borough Council subsequently acquired the land in 1985 before it passed to Marlborough District Council as freehold title in 1989.</p>	Freehold	478
<p>Block B: Soil Conservation Reserve</p> <p>Section 2 of 8 Blk IV, Taylor Pass Survey District.</p>	<p>Previously subject to a lease under the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Act 1915, the Crown, through the Soil Conservation and Rivers' Control, Council acquired the block in 1944 to deal with the major erosion problems occurring at the time. When the block was taken over, farming was no longer considered viable. Erosion from the catchments in the reserve area was causing major problems and downstream effects of flooding and debris flows were being experienced in Blenheim. A substantial programme of soil conservation works including contour ploughing, revegetation and replanting was instituted in 1944 and has resulted in a dramatic improvement in the erosion problem. The block was subsequently able to be farmed as a productive unit and was managed in conjunction with the Borough Farm.</p> <p>Gazetted in 1946 as a Soil Conservation Reserve pursuant to the Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act 1941, the block remains in the ownership of the Crown, however control and management responsibility was vested with the then Marlborough Catchment Board in 1977 and later passed to Marlborough District Council in 1989.</p>	Crown owned Control and management vested in Council	164
<p>Block C: Sutherland Stream</p> <p>Lot 1 DP 8914 and</p>	<p>Marlborough District Council purchased the block in 1993 to allow continuous soil and water conservation management objectives to be applied to all the critical catchments of the Wither Hills and to promote recreational opportunities.</p>	Freehold	302

Commonly known as	Background	Land status	Area (ha)
DP 10763	<p>The Wither Hills QEII Open Space Covenant was created in 1994 to provide protection over forty-one hectares of dryland forest remnant and riparian habitat. The Boxing Day 2000 fire devastated the native vegetation in the Covenant area, with almost all the kānuka dry land forest being destroyed. The fenced extent of the covenant was subsequently reduced in 2002, due to a lack of native recovery being evident in some areas, and the need to control the significant weed growth more actively through intensive grazing and spray application.</p> <p>In 1997, a further 9.32 ha was purchased for addition to the Farm Park. Located immediately east of the Redwood Street carpark and extending up the ridgeline towards the Mt Vernon lookout, the acquisition was undertaken to significantly improve public and farming access around the base of the hills from the Cob Cottage Road to the Redwood Street entrance.</p>		
Block D: Crown Rehabilitation Block Lot 1 DP10763, Lot 1 DP2833	<p>Previously in private ownership and managed as part of the Wither Hills Catchment Control Scheme, the Crown acquired the block in 1984 and vested its management with the Marlborough Catchment Board and later the Nelson Marlborough Regional Council for soil conservation and river control purposes. Grazing was leased to an adjoining occupier. With the abolition of the Nelson Marlborough Regional Council in 1992, management was passed to Marlborough District Council.</p>	Crown owned Control and management vested in Council	226
Block E: Part Bluegums Landfill Site Part Lot 2 DP9569	<p>The original block, comprising 139.81 ha and comprising three separate titles, was purchased for the purpose of developing the present Bluegums landfill site.</p> <p>While initially managed in total as part of the Wither Run farm most of this Block is managed separately through the Council's Solid Waste Department with 20 Ha of the Block falling within the core Wither Hills Farm Park area.</p>	Freehold	20
Block F: Part Sutherland Stream Reserve Part Lot 12 DP 10374 Lot 1 DP 11209	<p>The southern portion of the Sutherland Stream Reserve, including the Redwood Street carpark and beyond is located within the management boundaries of the Wither Hills Farm Park.</p>	Local Purpose Reserve (Esplanade) subject to the Reserves Act 77	2

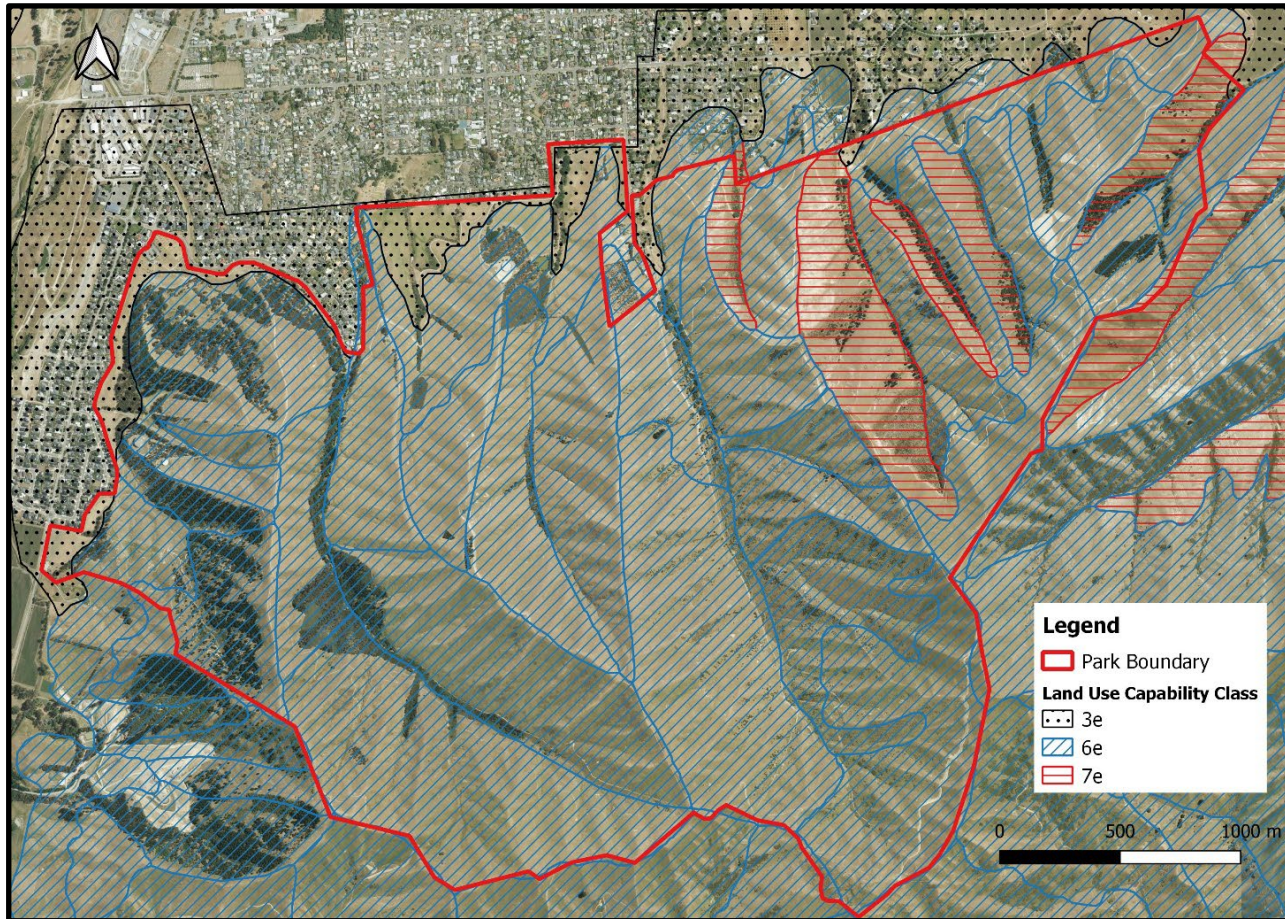
Appendix 3 – Values and constraints maps

Soils



Map 2: Sensitive soils (MEP)

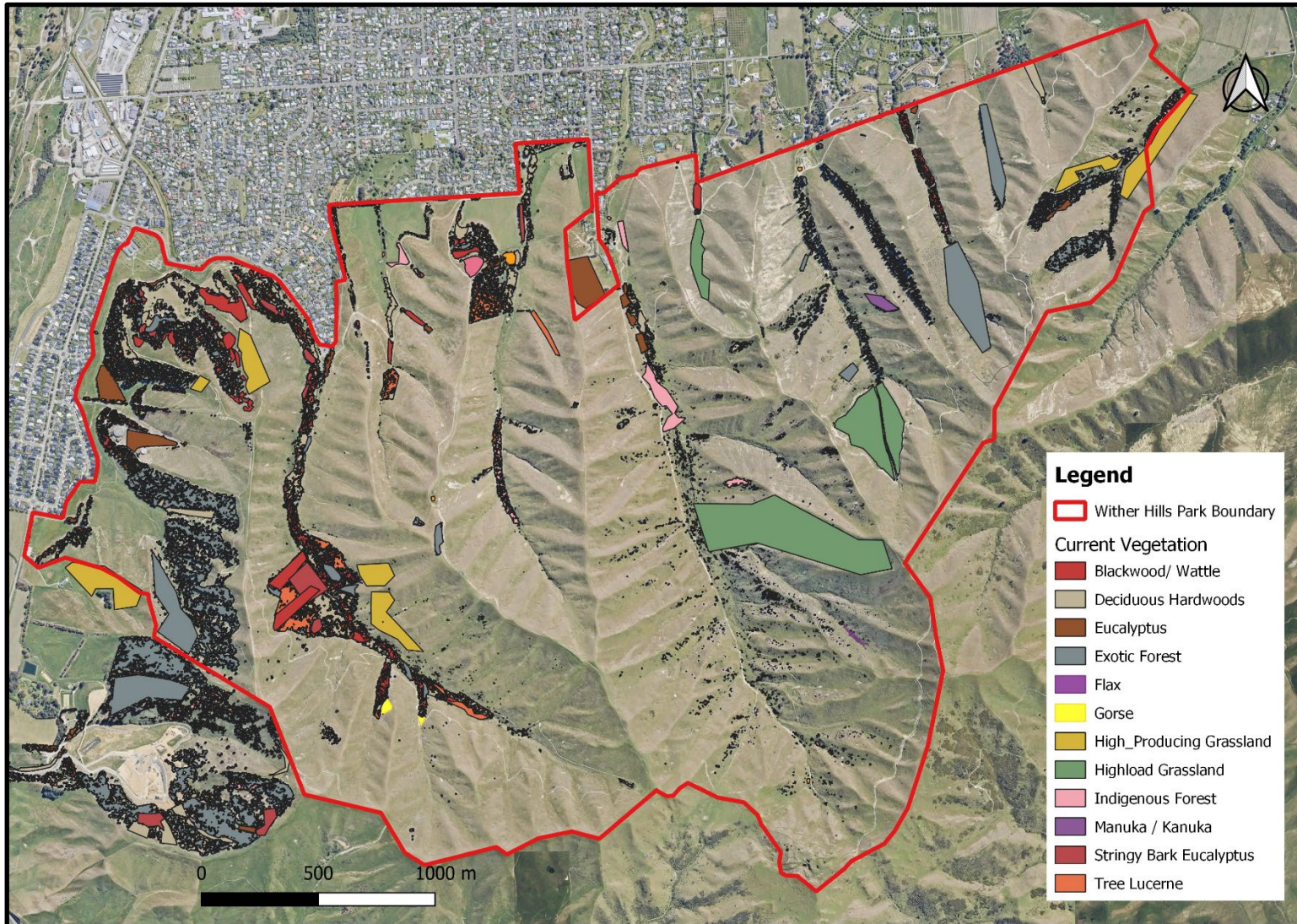
Land Use Capability



LUC Class code	Description
3	Land with moderate limitations for arable use, but suitable for cultivated crops, pasture, or forestry
6	Non-arable land with moderate limitations for use under perennial vegetation such as pasture or forest
7	Non-arable land with severe limitations to use under perennial vegetation such as pasture or forest
LUC subclass modifier	Description
e	Erosion susceptibility, deposition, or the effects of past erosion damage first limits production

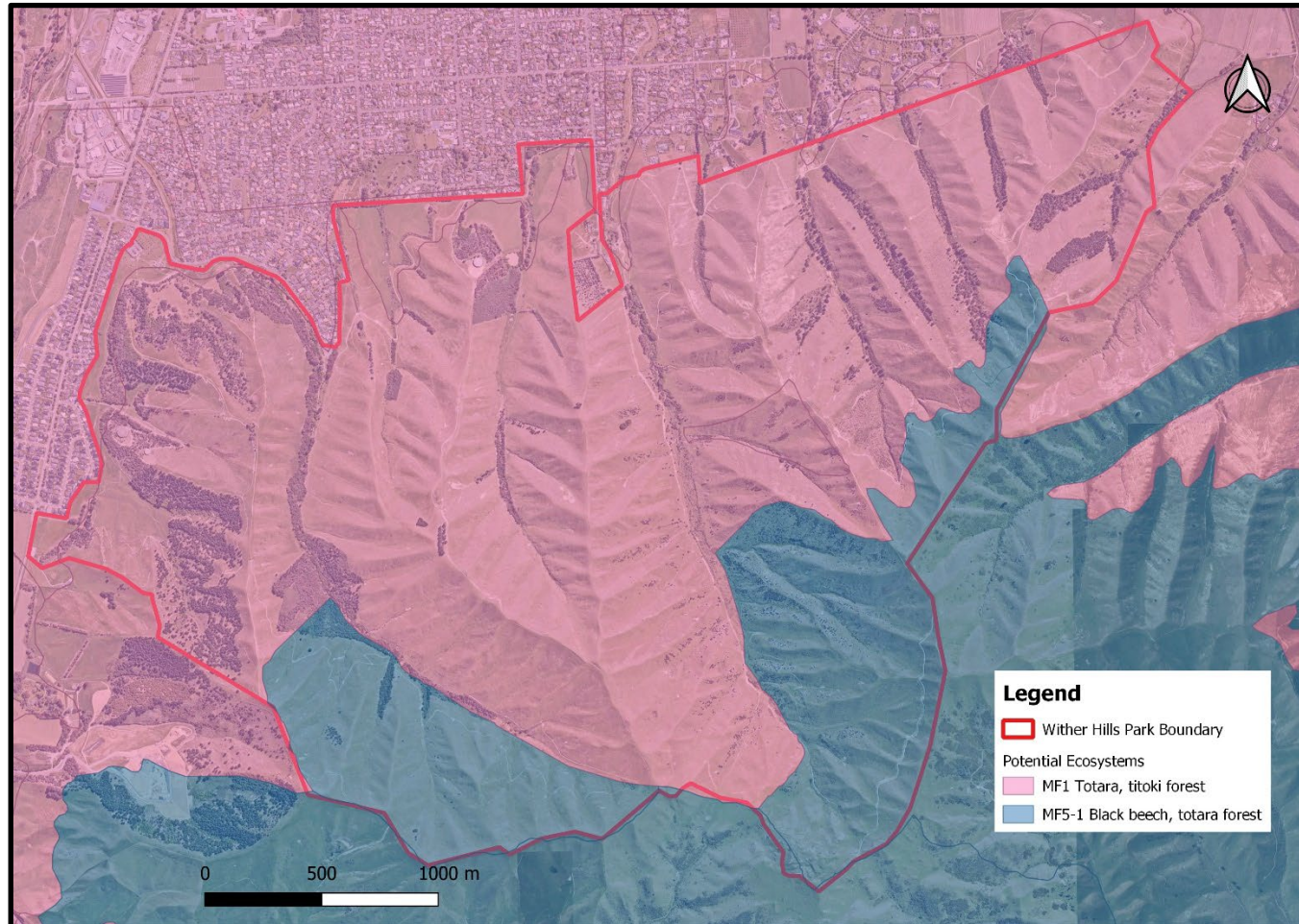
Map 3: Land use capability classes

Vegetation



Map 4: Current vegetation cover (Wildfire Risk Management Analysis, Integrated Consultancy 2023)

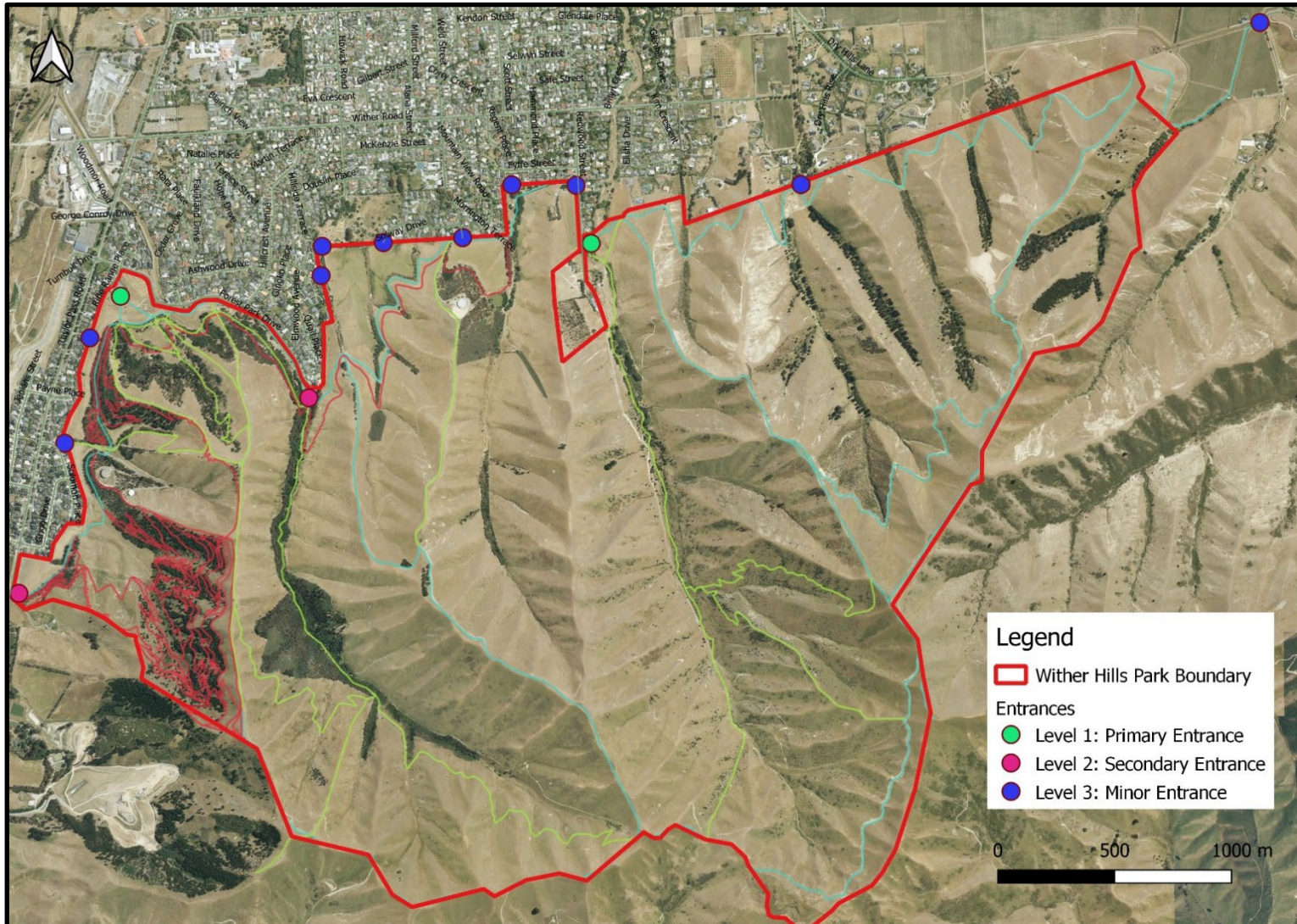
Potential Ecosystems



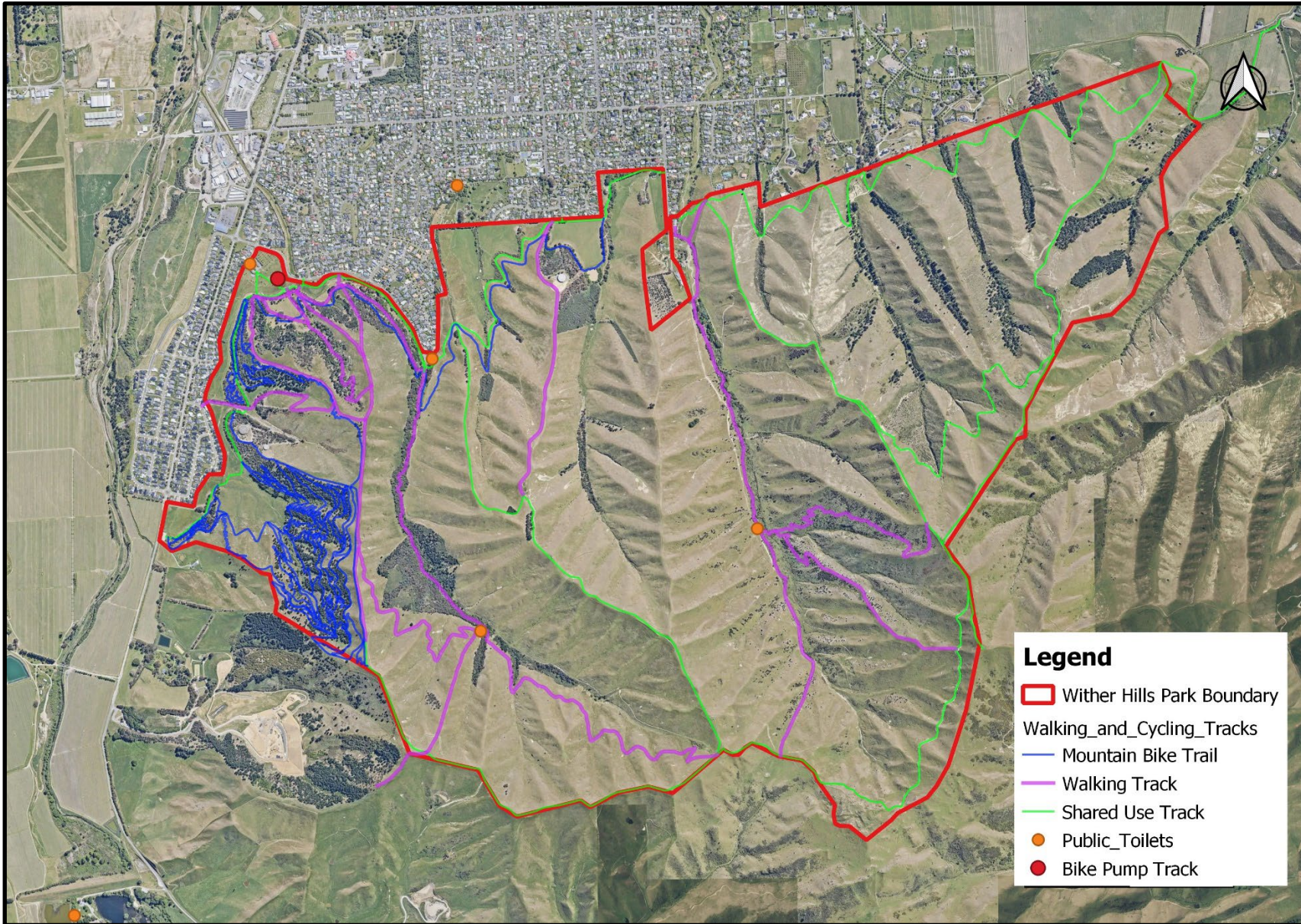
Map 5: Potential ecosystems (Singers 2017)

Developed as tool by the Department of Conservation to assist with ecosystem management and restoration. (Singers and Rogers 2014) It utilises a range of previous classification systems to present the natural or potential state these areas may have been in if humans arrived today in New Zealand. It provides a perspective of the extent of modification of the Park from a landscape perspective and broad guidance for future planting and restoration effort.

Recreation



Map 6: Park entrances



Map 7: Recreation facilities