

BOX 8.5 WELLINGTON



Wellington's Park Rangers

Wellington (population 175,000), New Zealand's capital, was covered in forest until the Europeans settled in 1840. Although large tracts of open space remain, partly due to the Town Belt, they are under development pressure.

Asset management

During the early 1990s, the condition of many of the city's open spaces was deteriorating due to long-term deferred maintenance, but long-term budgeting and asset management plans introduced in the late 1990s improved the situation. Wellington's Parks and Gardens Unit use asset management software to programme maintenance, inspections, replacements and funding. Standard life expectancies cannot be applied due to unpredictable factors (differing site conditions, political demands and public complaints) therefore all assets are

inspected, their condition assessed, asset management plans are prepared and priorities set.

These asset-management plans have proved useful in providing documented justification for securing funding. Another useful outcome has been an improved ability to recognise trends in terms of depreciation and maintenance needs. The advent of ten-year financial planning also allows for commitment to long-term works.

Inner city greening

Although Wellington has 200m²/person of open space, its historic development resulted in a serious deficiency within the city centre. However, the council can increase provision in the inner city through powers under the 1991 Resource Management Act, which requires developers to set aside land as reserve contributions or pay into an acquisition fund.

During the 1980s to early 1990s when high-rise development replaced older buildings, the council negotiated open space provision through development control, allowing increased building height in return for on-site open space. However, public tenure of the open space was not secured at the time of negotiation and some of the sites were not suitable. Consequently, several of these spaces have been built over and negotiated rights are out of favour. Given the high cost of city centre land, Wellington has had to revisit mechanisms to improve the distribution and quality of inner city open spaces.

More recent projects such as the waterfront development are leading the way towards the next phase. Two decades ago Wellington's port activities relocated, and the waterfront adjacent to the city centre opened up to the public. When it came up for redevelopment, the controversy surrounding the proposed plans raised the issue of balance between buildings and public open spaces. In the late 1990s, the original proposal was replaced by a Waterfront Development Framework. The lessons were that the amount of development needed for the operation to be self-funding was unacceptable to the community and that only additional public funding could ensure open space provision and reassure the community about its continued vested interest in the area.