

# Natural environments

Hamilton's natural character is made up of a diverse ecosystem that includes the Waikato River, lakes, wetlands and gully networks that shape and define much of our city.

We want to ensure that Hamilton's indigenous biodiversity and the character it provides is promoted, protected and enhanced. We want to ensure:

- > Environmentally sensitive urban growth
- > Healthy ecosystems
- > Resource conservation.

## Natural Character

Natural character is established by the integration of natural features in our urban environment. These include established trees and other natural elements in the built environment.

Our parks, the Waikato River, our gully networks, and dedicated natural areas collectively help establish our identity.

### Outcome

To ensure that the city's natural character is protected, restored and enhanced; and that future development recognises natural, visual, cultural, wildlife and recreational values.

### The plan response

The District Plan enables us to enhance the natural character of Hamilton by protecting our natural features through controls on how we develop and use the land

surrounding them.

### Option 1

The current approach of the District Plan whereby development is enabled around natural features with consideration to the preservation of the natural character.

Current rules enable significant development to happen within areas subject to Environmental Protection Overlays (EPOs).

### Option 2

Update our EPOs to ensure inclusion of all qualifying areas. Remove areas without ecological value, strengthen rules including protection of ridgelines and restrict the type of activities that can take place within areas subject to EPOs.

### Option 3

Develop good practice guidelines to inform the design of development within and next to natural features.



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## What we are thinking so far

A combination of Options 2 and 3 would best meet the desired outcomes.

Implementing design guides that are linked to rules is more likely to have a positive effect on natural features and therefore the natural character of the area, whilst enabling appropriate development to occur on neighbouring land.

## Biodiversity

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The rich, diverse and interrelated ecosystems that make up Hamilton's unique biodiversity are essential in defining and sustaining the city's natural environments.

Due to the way ecosystems are interrelated, protecting one small colony of indigenous plants or animal species does little to protect the system's long-term viability. The consequences of, for example earthworks or gully filling or threats to indigenous biodiversity (flora and fauna) from pest plant competition (resulting from vegetation dumping), can be wide reaching and significant.

A holistic approach to biodiversity protection is essential if we are to sustain Hamilton's complex and interrelated ecosystems.

### Outcome

To ensure that Hamilton's indigenous biodiversity and the character it provides is promoted, protected and enhanced particularly on the banks of the Waikato River, and in Hamilton's gullies, peat lakes and wetlands.

### The plan response

Our District Plan has not been effective in protecting our biodiversity. Current rules do not help identify and protect viable ecological networks.

### Option 1

The current approach of the District Plan, which discourages removal of indigenous plants and soil from gullies, river banks, lakes and wetlands through rules under the Environmental Protection Overlay (EPO).

### Option 2

Strengthen the existing approach to require development to avoid degrading biodiversity by establishing a three tier system to manage it in our rivers, gullies, lakes and wetlands. Also introduce design guides for neighbouring sites to help neighbours develop in a way that protects important sites. The three levels of control would provide for a spectrum from full protection down to a more permissive approach to development where values for protection are not so high.

## What we are thinking so far

Option 2 whereby Council establishes a three tier system to manage biodiversity in

our rivers, gullies, lakes and wetlands would more effectively allow the promotion, protection and enhancement of our ecological networks.

Updating Council's map within the District Plan to include wider significant areas of high biodiversity and natural character values would mean that development would not normally be permitted in areas of current high biodiversity value.

For areas with high potential for linking biodiversity areas within the EPO development would be permitted subject to meeting standards, including appropriate restoration plans.

A relatively permissive approach would only be followed in areas within the EPO that already been highly modified or that had low potential/low current biodiversity and ecosystem functionality. This approach would include implementing design guides for the surrounding areas that are linked to the rules.

This approach is most likely to have a positive effect for both development and natural character giving security to both the wider community and those who chose to develop by areas of high natural character values that these will be protected.

## Urban Trees

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Hamilton's urban trees play a significant role in defining and enhancing the character, heritage, cultural and amenity values of the city.

Urban trees are a key feature of some of our most valued neighbourhoods, streets and parkland reserves. A number of incidents involving the removal of trees on private land have attracted considerable public interest and disapproval.

### Outcome

To ensure that urban trees are valued and protected as an integral part of the city, particularly in character areas. We want the role of urban trees to be recognised and planned for in all new developments.

### The plan response

Hamilton's District Plan provides some protection for our urban trees but is relatively ineffective in the protection of trees on private land or in encouraging the planting of trees in new developments.

### Option 1

The current approach of the District Plan whereby significant trees are protected only with the approval of the landowner.

### Option 2

Support the current approach with incentives for those who choose to protect their trees in the District Plan. Incentives might include help with consents and tree maintenance or development offsets that encourage tree preservations in new developments.

### Option 3

Revise the current rules to ensure the protection of significant trees supported by relevant incentives. Significant trees on public and private land would be assessed for size, position, rarity, role in setting, life expectancy, form; and scientific, historic, cultural, functional and ecological value; and whether they form part of an important stand. Trees that meet a qualifying score are listed and protected under the District Plan.

## What we are thinking so far

Option 3 which would see the assessment of all the city's trees and protection of the significant ones is favoured. Effectively it is the only means of achieving a substantial improvement over the current situation.

The potential impact on landowners will be minimised if the assessment of significance is stringent, and according to industry standard criteria. Having this recognised standard and understanding of the assessment criteria will ensure those trees of undoubted value are the trees that are protected.

## Find out more

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To tell us what you think or for more in the series of Fast Forward Factsheets visit [www.fastforwardhamilton.co.nz](http://www.fastforwardhamilton.co.nz)

The period for public comments closes on 29 October 2010.



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The logo for Hamilton City Council, featuring a stylized 'H' icon to the left of the text 'Hamilton City Council' and 'Te kaunihera o Kiriitiroa' below it.

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