

Our Environment Today^{vi}

Christchurch was an extensive wetland area and a good source of mahinga kai (food and other resources) for Maori. The early Europeans' impression of the original settlement site was of "heavy wet land" and "rank swamp grasses"^{vii}

Introduction

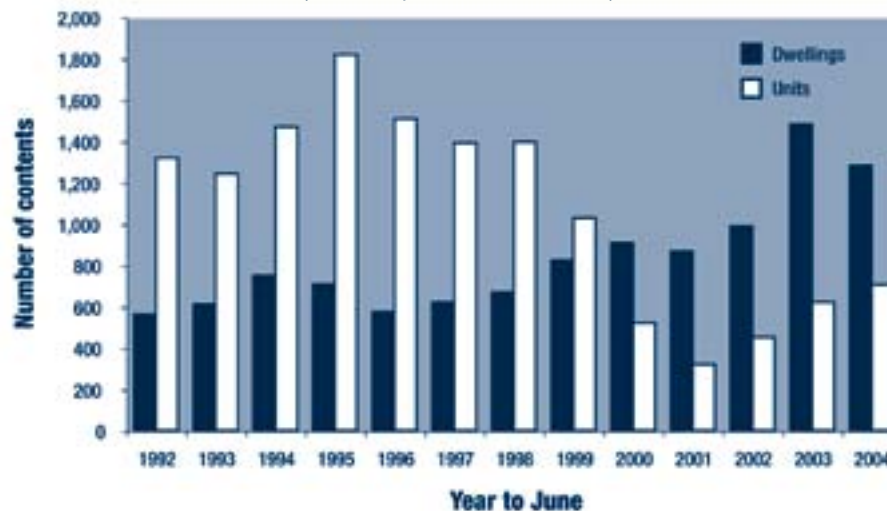
Much of the city's natural habitat was modified by the European settlers. They drained the wetlands and cleared bush, scrub and tussock. Riccarton Bush (Putaringamotu) is all that remains of the wetland podocarp forest in Christchurch. The changes made by the settlers reduced the number of natural sites available for indigenous fish, bird and invertebrates. This caused a significant decline (and, in some cases, extinction) of some plant and animal species.

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- Christchurch City Council covers an area of 152,837 hectares. Of this, 44,223 hectares (29%) are in urban use and 108,614 hectares (71%) in non-urban use. The majority of the land in non-urban use is located on Banks Peninsula.
- The city's boundaries are the Waimakariri River to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the east and Banks Peninsula to the south. To the west, the city's boundary includes McLeans Island, Templeton, Islington, Halswell West and Kennedy's Bush area units. It does not include Prebbleton.
- Christchurch is within the Canterbury region. The region extends from the Clarence River in the north to the Waitaki River in the south. The Main Divide (Southern Alps) forms the western boundary and the region extends 12 nautical miles into the Pacific Ocean to the east.
- Significant geographical features of the city include the Avon-Heathcote estuary, the characteristic volcanic peaks of the Port Hills and Banks Peninsula and the coastline and dry plains to the north-west.
- The city has an average annual rainfall of 650mm and an average of 2,100 sunshine hours a year. The average daily temperature during summer is 21°C and during winter it is 10°C.

- Within Christchurch (the area excluding Banks Peninsula), 70% of the land is zoned for housing, 13% for industrial and commercial activity, and the remainder for a variety of uses such as schools and open spaces. Within the Banks Peninsula area, 1% is zoned residential with 88% of the land zoned rural. About 3% of the land on Banks Peninsula is zoned conservation.
- The number of residential building consents has remained around 2,000 a year between 1992 and 2004, except for the period between 2000 and 2001 where the number of residential building consents dropped to below 1,500 per year (excludes consents issued in Banks Peninsula).
- Since 2000, building consent trends have reversed, with consents for dwellings outnumbering consents for units^{viii}. This may reflect a trend away from infill housing (because there are fewer sub-divisible properties) and the increased supply of residential land on the outskirts of the city's urban fringe, due to amendments to the City Plan in 1999.

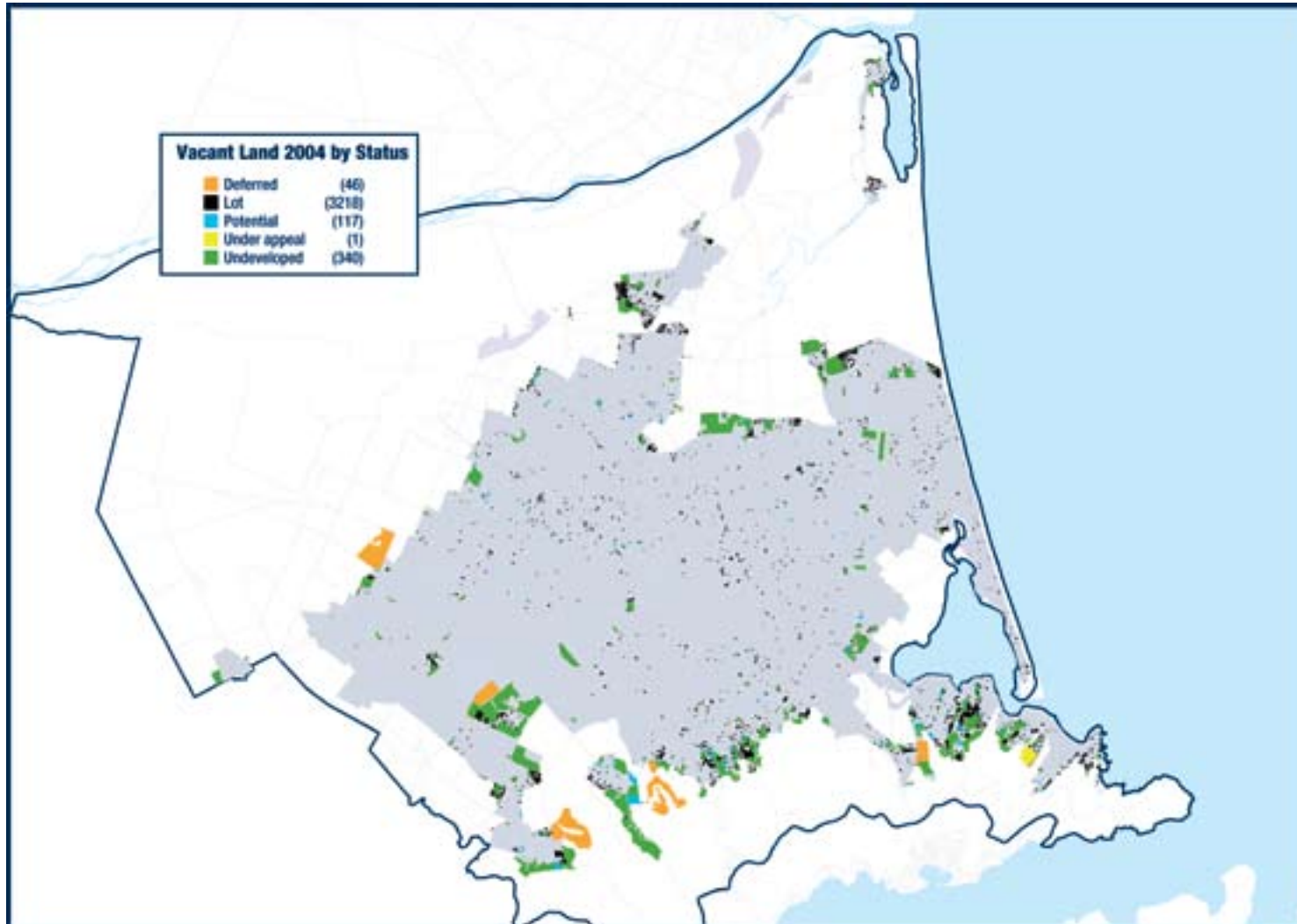
New Residential Development
(Excludes figures for Banks Peninsula)



- There were 1,462 hectares of vacant residential land ready to be either built on or developed in June 2004.

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Vacant Residential Land 2004



Source: Christchurch City Council, Vacant Land Register 2004

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- The City deserves its reputation as “The Garden City”. There are over 3,000 hectares of parkland in Christchurch (not including Banks Peninsula), with 13 major metropolitan parks (including the Botanic Gardens and Hagley Park), 89 major district parks and about 300 local and neighbourhood reserves. Banks Peninsula also has a significant number of parks and conservation reserves, equating to about 3,000 hectares also.
- Almost 800 buildings, places or objects have been identified as having heritage value worth protecting in the city.
- Christchurch is a centre for wading birds and sea birds. Both the Avon-Heathcote Estuary and Te Waihora (Lake Ellesmere) are of international importance as they support a large and varied wildlife population. The estuary and oxidation ponds regularly support over 1% of the world’s population of at least 17 species or sub-species of wetland birds.
- There are 395 native plant species growing in the city. Of these, 31 have been identified as threatened.
- Christchurch has over one-third of New Zealand’s 35 indigenous freshwater fish species.
- During winter, the Christchurch metropolitan area experiences poor air quality. On an average of 28 days each winter, the level of pollution (smog) exceeds the guideline set by the Ministry for the Environment.
- The growth and changing lifestyles of Christchurch’s population is creating pressures on the city’s infrastructure and natural environment. A growing population, increasing urban development, the growth of private motor car use and sustainability issues, such as energy and resource consumption and waste generation, provide many challenges for the protection and enhancement of the environment.

^{vi} Information in this section is from the Christchurch City Council, Christchurch City Draft Environmental Trends Report, 2003: <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/reports/2003/environmentalTrendsReport/>

^{vii} Christchurch City Council, Draft Citywide Planting Strategy.

^{viii} Unit development falls into three major categories: two or more units built on a new site, two or more units built on a site where a house may have been demolished (i.e. redevelopment), and units added to a section with an existing house (i.e. infill).

