



# Open and Green Spaces

## *What is this?*

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Open spaces are areas of land such as parks that are protected from development and set aside for recreation or public health benefit, or to help protect the natural landscape. This can include green space (parks) and blue space (waterways and coastline).

## *Why is it important?*

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Open space plays a vital role in meeting people's recreational needs in both formal and informal roles. Access to open spaces and thus recreational activities is integral to sustaining quality of life.<sup>1</sup> Open spaces in urban environments offer peace and tranquillity, enable fun, family times, exercise, and sport, and encourage a healthy outdoor lifestyle. They are inspiring and pleasant places to exercise and contribute to physical and mental wellbeing. They are also venues for community sporting activities and places to meet and celebrate with family and friends. The green spaces in urban areas break up reflected heat from hard surfaces to cool the surrounding area. Parks also protect cultural and heritage sites that reflect the history of the area.

Blue spaces are equally important, as approximately two thirds of the New Zealand population live within 5 kilometres of the sea<sup>2</sup>. Large local and regional parks play a vital role in keeping air and water clean and offering a refuge for threatened species and buffers against climate change.<sup>3</sup> Access to attractive open spaces is associated with higher levels of physical activity and mental wellbeing<sup>4,5,6</sup>

## *Data*

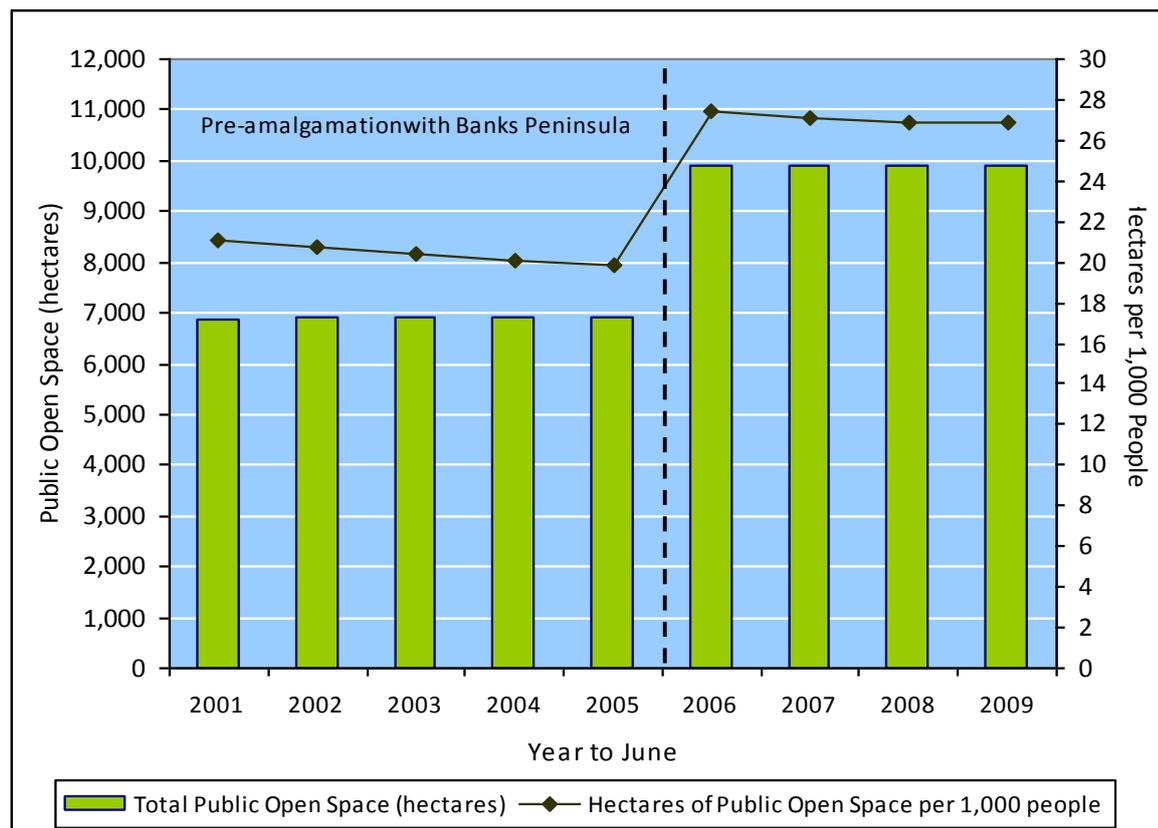
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Christchurch City has many parks and green spaces, ranging from small playgrounds for children to large regional parks. There are around 580 small neighbourhood parks that provide places for informal recreation and small scale community events and facilities. There are also about 50 garden and heritage parks, around 70 regional parks, 120 sports parks, and about 326 outdoor children's playgrounds.<sup>7</sup> The regional parks are large open spaces, mostly on the urban fringe, that protect and enhance scenic, cultural and environmental values. The sports parks are large green areas for organised sport but which also allow space for people to participate in other forms of recreation. There are also many walkways and cycleways that add to the variety of recreational facilities available.



In addition to the parks in the city there are large areas of open space on Banks Peninsula and the coastline with many walking and cycling tracks. Banks Peninsula, because of its largely natural character with only small pockets of built environment, retains its significance to Ngāi Tahu as a cultural landscape and there are many places of significance from a heritage and contemporary perspective. For every 1,000 residents in the Christchurch City Council area, there is approximately 25 hectares of public open space<sup>8</sup>.

Figure 1. Number of hectares of public open space in the Christchurch City Council area, in total and per 1,000 population, 2001-2009



In 2007, the majority of Christchurch residents lived within 400 metres of public open space. In the 2009 Residents' Survey, 88% of those surveyed stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the city's parks.

### *Impact on inequities*

Access to parks and open spaces has been found in some studies overseas to be inequitably distributed so that those worse off and without private transport have fewer opportunities to enjoy the benefits that open and green spaces bring. However, in New Zealand<sup>9</sup> it was found that parks and other community resources were not unevenly distributed, and that travel time to these resources (except beaches) was shorter in more disadvantaged areas. However, this study looked only at proximity to parks and community resources rather than their quality. In a



study in Auckland<sup>10</sup>, public open spaces in less well-off areas were found to have more safety features and activities, but poorer environmental quality than spaces in better-off areas. A master's thesis from a study in Christchurch found that older adults were not well catered for and there was a need for attractive and safe recreational facilities, particularly in disadvantaged areas, where older adults could have the opportunity to boost their physical activity and so help reduce the loss of functional ability.<sup>11</sup>

Walking is an inexpensive and pleasurable way of getting exercise and is accessible to all socioeconomic groups without investing in special training or equipment. Geographic proximity, attractiveness, quality of facilities and connectedness to other resources are important, as well as equitable distribution throughout the city and consideration of users of all abilities.<sup>12</sup>

The Christchurch City Council approved a Smokefree Public Places policy in 2009<sup>5</sup> for parks, playgrounds, sports grounds, and Council run events. It is a voluntary policy supported by Smokefree signage and promotion. The policy intends to create smokefree environments for the community as well as providing positive role modelling for youth, who are particularly vulnerable to taking up smoking

## *Solutions*

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Supporting continued, equitable provision and maintenance of parks and open spaces, including walkways and cycleways, is likely to have benefits for both individuals and overall public health. Some of the green spaces around and within cities could also be used for growing food, providing both amenity value as well as enhancing food security by providing improved access to fresh fruit and vegetables.<sup>13</sup>

Waimakariri District Council produced the Residential Red Zone Recovery Plan<sup>14</sup> which outlines development plans for 100 hectares of land. It is proposed that a large proportion of this land will remain as open space including sports fields, neighbourhood parks, and possible food forests. As of September 2016, Christchurch City Council has not developed its Residential Red Zone Recovery Plan.

As a result of the earthquakes, Christchurch City lost one of its biggest sports hubs "Queen Elizabeth II" (QEII). A smaller QEII Recreation and Sports Centre will be built on the same site beginning in October 2016 and this will serve the north east section of Christchurch. In addition, Nga Puna Wai Sports Hub will be developed on 32 hectares of land near Wigram.

The recently completed Great Christchurch Urban Development Strategy update<sup>15</sup> includes open spaces and public spaces within its vision for Greater Christchurch. The implementation of this, and other documents such as Resilient Greater Christchurch<sup>16</sup>, will support the achievements of good quality, accessible open spaces in the region.



Christchurch is fortunate in having many developed walkways, many with flat paths that allow people of varying abilities and parents with children in pushchairs to use them. Natural spaces such as these walkways and waterways promote physical activity and have value as destinations for families and groups that build social capital. It has been suggested that the more equitable distribution of community resources in New Zealand compared to that found in studies overseas was likely to be preventing even wider disparities in inequalities in the city<sup>17</sup>.

### ***Data limitations***

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The data in Figure 1 is the most recent available (updated to 2009) on the Christchurch City Council website.

### ***Connections with other issues***

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Activity Levels and Exercise, Active Transport, Air Quality, Mental Health, Food Security, Age Friendly City, Urban Design and Planning.

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Prepared by Community and Public Health, a division of the Canterbury District Health Board.

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## References

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Read about the Te Pae Mahutonga Māori Health Model at  
<http://www.hauora.co.nz/resources/tepaemahutongatxtvers.pdf>

